

Chapter VI

General Elections (2004-2014) and the Indian Party System:

Popularity and Populism, Performance and Positivism

The chapter tries to sketch the revival of the Congress Party along with discussing the various corrective measures that it had adopted to revive itself from the state of decline. The chapter also includes the manifesto of the 2004 and 2009 election of the Congress party that had played a significant role for the party to create a “pro-people” image for the party. The chapter has also focused on the electoral performance of the party in the 14th and the 15th Lok Sabha and the state assembly elections simultaneously tracing out some of the probable reasons for its resurgence. Through the chapter attempts has been made to see the immediate reasons for the electoral debacle of Congress-led UPA government and see how parameters like populism, personality (popularity), performance and ability to raise hope of the electorates by a political party for a better tomorrow (positivity) has determined the outcome of the General Election of 2014. Besides, it deals with the most important strategies adopted by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to come to power with the 2014 Lok Sabha election. The chapter deals with General Election 2014 and the performance of the different political parties in the 16th Lok Sabha polls. It also tries to study the impact of the outcome of the election on the nature of the party system.

The Indian party system and subsequently Indian politics has not only witnessed sea changes and reconfiguration but produces surprising results as well. James Manor, in his article, ‘*Parties and the Party System*’, 2002, has identified various factors such as defection, increase in mass consciousness, people’s urge for development and the performance of a ruling government on the Indian party system and the subsequent changes in it due to these factors. Prakash Sarangi (2002) in his article entitled “*Economic Reforms and Changes in the Party System*” highlights the fact that socio-economic development and the economic reforms that have been undertaken has a direct bearing on the nature of the party system and the voting pattern of the electorate. The changes that has occurred in the role and attitude of the Indian National Congress and the transformation that the Indian National Congress has

undergone has introduced significant changes in the nature of the party system in the country. Its demise from the uninterrupted hegemonic position has brought significant changes in the nature of the party system at both the national and state level. Besides, undying pangs of hunger for development or growth has been a determining factor that has led to transitional shifts and transformation of the Indian party system. Since election is a very significant component of a democratic political structure therefore with the aid of these electoral results an attempt has been made to show the reconfigurations that has taken place in the party system.

Political Parties exercises the function of interest aggregation and articulation. People of underdeveloped or developing countries prefer to move ahead or rather aspire for progress in their standard of living. Hence parties that deliver and perform, keep a balance between proclamations and actions when in power finds support among the common masses. It is then when performance of the ruling government becomes the sole factor.

The Indian Party System Manifests *Aspirations* of the Electorates

The underdeveloped and developing societies were burdened with a long history of feudal, foreign, bureaucratic and authoritarian rule. India too witnessed a similar phenomenon when the Indian National Congress which emerged as pressure group to oppose the British rule in India gradually got transformed into a mass movement to lead the nationalist movement in the country. It eventually got transformed into a mass political party and subsequently enjoyed undisputable hegemony for a considerable time since independence. Parties that were formed in hurry or out of political exigencies or as a result of factionalism were often unable to sustain themselves in the long run. Janata Party and Janata Dal are two such most suitable examples. In recent times the electoral logic of the Indian electorate irrespective of any class, caste, community and language has been mostly guided by their judgment on the records of parity between ‘as promised’ and ‘as delivered’. The present electoral logic defies the claim of Lipset and Rokkan (1967)¹ that cleavages and

¹ Party system will reflect principal cleavages and conflicts in the society. According to, Lipset and Rokkan cleavage manifest in several forms along the socio-economic, religious, ethnicity and urban–rural parameters. See Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, “*Cleavage, Structure, Party Systems*

conflicts influence the trajectory of the party system of a nation. On the contrary, besides cleavages and conflicts, “*aspirations*” (for growth, development, social justice and equity) of the populace translates into the party system and determines the trajectory of the party system at both the levels. The Indian population desires to rise above and shed the status of being citizen of an underdeveloped or developing country. It wishes to tread the path of development or growth along with equity through various social welfare schemes. Thus, Indian politics and the Indian party system at both the levels in my opinion are in the present era driven by four **Ps** *Popularity and Populism, Performance and Positivism*. The general election of 1971, 2004, 2009 and 2015, the 2016 state assembly elections of Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Bihar amply testifies the fact.

This trend consolidated more particularly since 2004 general election² when BJP’s pro-rich policies, the issue of rising unemployment and the catastrophic impact of its fanatic Hindutva campaign prepared its graveyard for burial. Hence, BJP-led NDA was ousted from power with the 2004 Lok Sabha election.

The 2004 Lok Sabha Election

With the 14th Lok Sabha election, Congress was back at the centre leading a coalition under the banner of United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) failed to emerge victorious, although it was presumed that it would enjoy a comfortable re-election. There was a dramatic shift in the mandate of the people of India. The Congress was able to shed off its complacent attitude towards coalition politics and by its dedicated endeavour it was able to come back to power at the centre in 2004.

The pro-rich policies, growing unemployment, frequent communal infightings, the fanatic campaign of the ideals of Hindutva and its forceful implementation are some of the gross reasons for the rejection of the BJP-led government in the 2004 election (Hasan, 2007, p.71). It is the performance of the government which determines its ability to come back to power. This has been the guiding factor for determining the

and Voter Alignments: An Introduction” in “Party System and Voter Alignments: Cross National Perspectives”, Free Press, New York, 1967.

² Earlier the “*garibi hatao*” (remove poverty) slogan and her various adopted socialist policies of Indira Gandhi did wonder for the dwindling Congress party in 1971 lok sabha election.

mandate of the people in India since 1967. The case was similar even for the 2004 election. However, Congress then was already in a state of decline for well over a decade. In the 1999 election, the Congress registered its lowest ever number of seats in the Lok Sabha with 114 MPs (Bhambri, 2007, p.200). BJP emerged as the single largest party though was not able to secure an absolute majority. By 1999 the Indian party system has entered into a predominantly bipolar system with Congress and the BJP as main contenders for power, more particularly at the Centre. Meanwhile, the Congress was already in a state of perplex. It found itself alienated from the Muslims, dalits, advasis and the backward castes. In fact the Congress suffered electoral reverses in many parts of the country like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Orissa. In these states, caste-based parties and non-Congress alternatives had made inroads. Bharatiya Lok Dal, Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Janata Dal (United) in Bihar to name some of them. The debacle of the Congress subsequently led to the fragmentation of the party system whereby the smaller parties seemed to have bigger roles to play in the Indian political system. Regional appeals, deprivations, appeals in the name of caste, class and identities were appearing to dominate politics since the late 1960s and more pronouncedly from late 1980s. In fact, the national parties were allying with these regional or caste-based parties. They were gradually becoming powerful and strong and were coming to hold power in their respective states too.

There was rise of the BJP and regional as well as caste based anti-Congress parties. Hence emergence of regional parties and the rise of a non-Congress alternative, viz., the BJP have actually led to the absolute downfall of the “Congress System”. Since 1996 there was an emergence of a binodal system, largely polarized between the Congress and the BJP and marked by a region based multiparty system. During this period the Congress suffered a significant decline in political support. Congress was striving hard for survival. The Congress during the Rao-led tenure was seeping more into the state of decline and was attacked with charges of corruption and for its inability to prevent Babri Masjid demolition.

Sitaram Kesari failed to display the necessary political acumen required to revive the Congress Party from its state of decline. Sitaram Kesari failed to emerge as an efficient Congress President. A vacuum was created in the leadership position. After repeated pleas and persuasion Sonia Gandhi took up the reign of control of the party

in her hands. Sitaram Kesari was not willing to relinquish his post. Pressure mounted from all quarters and the Congress Working Committee by exercising special power removed him from the office of the President of the Party on 14th March, 1998 and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi succeeded him (Jai & Jai, 1999, p.24). Hence, Sonia Gandhi succeeded to the post of Congress President and had formidable task to accomplish so as to revive the Congress Party from the state of decline. She had to restore back the traditional social constituencies, win back elections in States like UP, Bihar where Congress has been marginalized, project and make herself acceptable as the leader for the Congress party. Hence she pledged to take up some drastic useful steps to bring back the electoral credibility of the Congress Party.

Strategies for Rejuvenation: Popularity

Within few months after Sonia Gandhi assumed the position of the Congress President in September 1998, she convened a meeting of the Congress Party in Pachmari to formulate some of the probable strategies for the rejuvenation of the Congress party. In the brainstorming session at Pachmari, Sonia Gandhi while addressing the session declared that the Congress Party will remain committed to its pledge to provide stability to the nation. She even accepted that Congress was in a state of decline. Congress would accept the coalitional form of government but also expressed her faith and determination to bring back the Congress with full force at the Centre in the long run.³

During the Pachmari session efforts were also made to identify the major weaknesses which dwelled in the Congress organization and it was asserted that there was a need to restructure it to facilitate revival of the Congress Party from its state of decline. Through the Pachmari session, Congress resolved to fight the communal forces in the country and remain whole heartedly committed to the secular ideals which forms the bedrock of our society. Congress also felt the need to successfully accommodate the aspirations of the dalits, adivasis (Tribals) and the backward people, particularly in the northern part of the country to revive itself in the states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and devise effective strategies to marginalize parties like Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, and Rashtriya Janata Dal. Congress even decided to take adequate

³ Earlier the Congress party had reservations about accepting the coalitional form of politics.

measures to ensure full representation to these sections of the society and provide policies and programmes to ameliorate the position of these sections in the society.

Besides, adopting these resolutions the party took up several other strategies to rejuvenate its image.

- 1) The erosion of base among the poor was one of the prime reasons for its debacle. Hence the party in its manifesto decided to incorporate special packages for the minorities, for people below the poverty line and for the small farmers. The Congress Party even in its manifesto decided to accommodate intensive populist programmes for the poor and the marginalized.
- 2) Besides, the strategies also involved the “politics of apology” for the Operation Bluestar,⁴ the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and apology for not being able to prevent the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992.
- 3) Moreover, in order to express its repentance for the anti-Sikh riot in 1984 it denied tickets to H. K. L. Bhagat, Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar from Delhi.
- 4) To woo the sentiments of the Muslim voters the Congress party denied ticket to the veteran leader and former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. He was castigated for not being able to adopt stern measures and prevent the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992. During this period Congress was at power in the Centre.
- 5) To instil the essence of ‘positivity’ and ‘popularity’ the party devised policies and made efforts to bring in new and young faces within its fold so as to create a hope in the party and also to create a base among the young generation (Roy, 1999, p.49-50).

In the Pachmari session, the Congress Party expressed its intention to expand the ideological framework of the party to include ‘stability’ as its bedrock, besides reposing its faith on secularism, socialism, socio-economic justice and economic self-reliance. The Congress vociferously attacked all the unstable non-Congress governments. Further, to consolidate the position of the Congress Party, Sonia Gandhi

⁴ It was put into operation during the Indira Gandhi era when the Indian Army stormed inside the Golden Temple in Amritsar to fight some separatists and also took into possession a pile of arms and ammunition. It is being said that it had hurt the religious sentiments of the Sikhs.

even decided to make changes in the organization of the party at various levels at an AICC session on 18th December, 1998. Even at the Pachmari Session decision was taken to revive and revitalize the party organization. Sonia Gandhi even appointed P. A. Sangma as head of a high level party task force to suggest ways and means to revitalize the organization at various levels.

Despite of its numerous efforts to revive the organization and to bring ideological clarity Congress did not achieve much success. The hectic campaign by Sonia Gandhi to win back the lost grounds also did not bring much dividend for the party. On the contrary, it was seen that the Congress lost the 1999 general election to the then rising BJP. It in fact, won the lowest number of seats (114 MPs only). Hence, the electoral fate of the Congress Party suffered severe reverses. Congress could retain power in states like Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra following the assembly elections in 1999. Thus, the immediate need was to restore the lost credibility and popularity of the party. The most important parameter upon which the future of the party in fact depended upon was restoring the esprit de corps among the organizational workers. The need was to instil a feeling of involvement and attachment among the workers at the grassroots level. The A. K. Anthony Committee Report, 2000 suggested to go for sufficient amount of federalization and introduce inner party democracy so as to make the state and central leadership and decisions acceptable among the grassroots workers.

However, all these strategies and campaigns did not yield any benefit for the party which became more evident with its defeat in Gujarat 2002 Assembly election and 2003 Madhya Pradesh State election. Hence, the Congress Party realized that there was a need for some radical political and strategic approach.

The More Radical Strategies for Rejuvenation: Positivity and Populism

The Congress Party in order to adopt some more radical and effective measures organized a ‘Vichar Manthan Shivir’ at Shimla on 7th, 8th and 9th July, 2003 and adopted the “Shimla Sankalp”(Shimla Resolution) which was a fourteen point political charter in order to resurrect its position. The foremost strategy the Congress Party adopted was to vociferously attack the ideology of cultural nationalism of BJP

and expose the myth that BJP was spreading with regard to its proclaimed economic reforms as well as reveal to the people how through its communal campaign BJP was trying to destroy the secular fabric of India. To accomplish it the Congress party decided through the Shimla Sankalp to launch a ‘Jan Jagran Abhiyan’ (People’s Awareness Campaign) to expose the failures of the BJP led government.⁵

The Congress reemphasized its determination and commitment to fight all kinds of religious fundamentalism and protect the secular fabric of India from the onslaughts of the BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal. It pledged to protect all the great religion and faiths of the country.

With the adoption of the Shimla Sankalp the Congress rededicated itself to strengthen the forces of nationalism and strive hard towards preventing the communalization of education (which was being initiated by the BJP led government). Following the *shivir* (session) at Shimla, the first and foremost task that was adopted to successfully accomplish the mammoth task of coming back to power was to give voice, respect and position to the party cadres across the country and use their committed service to ensure the victory for the Congress party. Through the ‘Sankalp’ (Resolution) the Congress resolved to devise effective strategy to deal with cross border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir region and deal with heavy hand with the various insurgent groups that are into operation in the North-Eastern part of the country. It accused and expressed its determination to expose the dangerous and nefarious political game that the BJP-led NDA government was playing with these groups in these regions.

The Sankalp laid greater emphasis on social and economic issues in keeping with beacon “Congress Ka Haath, Garib Ke Saath”(Congress is with the Poor). Hence, it assured:

- i) To enact national and rural employment guarantee by law;
- ii) To launch major programmes for the economic advancement, social empowerment, political representation and legal equality of dalits, adivasis, OBCs and minorities.

⁵ The ‘Jan Jagran Abhiyan’ was launched to make the people aware about the weaknesses of the BJP-led NDA government and its inadequacies. To the Congress the BJP- led coalitional government was not able to achieve what it had promised.

- iii) Ensure food and nutrition security for all, most particularly for the destitute and vulnerable sections of the society and for the poor and backward regions of the country;
- iv) Introduce social insurance and other schemes for the welfare of all workers, mostly for the workers at the unorganized sector;
- v) To devolve funds, functions and functionaries to empower panchayats, and nagarपालikas;
- vi) To sincerely implement land reform measures and initiate reform in land laws and records of rights;
- vii) Reliable power, cheaper credit, better seeds, assured irrigation and remunerative prices to 'kisans' across the country;
- viii) Time-bound implementation of Mahila Sashaktikaran Sankalp;
- ix) To take initiative to ensure representation of the social diversity in the private sector through reservation and fiscal incentives and by promoting entrepreneurship among dalits and adivasis.
- x) To ensure maximum political, social and economic support to realize their aspirations in education, employment and entrepreneurship.
- xi) Introduce liberal loans and scholarship schemes for weaker sections of the society.
- xii) To deeper fiscal and other economic reforms to make Indian agriculture, industry and services productive and competitive and increase public investment in irrigation, power, education and health.
- xiii) To introduce administrative, police and judicial reforms to make administration transparent, responsive and accountable (AICC, 2003).

The Sankalp also enlisted its resolve to establish a National Training Institute so that every Congress men and women can go through an annual orientation course on contemporary social, political and economic issues and constructive works. With the adoption of the Shimla Sankalp Congress expressed its decision to shed off its reservation on the issue of political alliances under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi (AICC, 2003). By adopting the Shimla Sankalp under the stewardship of Sonia

Gandhi, Congress displayed its determination to come back to the centre stage by plugging off its loopholes.⁶

The ‘Popular’ Initiatives of the Congress Party to Revive itself

Meanwhile, since 1999 by dislodging the Rao-led Congress (I) government the BJP-led NDA government was able to pull on for a little over four years in power. It was then Atal Behari Vajpayee, the then Prime Minister of NDA government announced the holding of a fresh election much before the expiry of the term of his government. The victory in Gujarat 2002 Assembly election, even after the infamous Godhra carnage, instilled gallon of confidence among several partners in the ruling coalition which led to the announcement of the early polls. The BJP-led NDA was certain about its return to power.⁷

On the eve of the 2004 election the endeavour on the part of the Indian National Congress to portray itself as the party of the ‘aam admi’ was a indication that Congress was head bound to restore itself back to power. The Shimla Sankalp and the campaign for the 2004 Lok Sabha election manifested the real transformation of the political approach of the Congress Party. As discernible, Sonia Gandhi made every effort to revive the Congress Party from its state of decline. The strategy of ‘aam admi’ or its pro-poor policies was posited against the pro-rich policies of the NDA and the insensitive, irrelevant ‘India Shining’ campaign of the NDA.

To ensure that the Congress can increase its popularity among the masses, Sonia Gandhi campaigned vigorously to spread the messages of the party across the length and breadth of the country. This was one of the most striking features of the 2004 election campaign. She had emerged had campaigned hard for the election accompanied by her son, Rahul Gandhi and daughter Priyanka Gandhi. She had covered almost the whole country. She had toured in some prime states such as Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Haryana, Chattishgarh and Andhra Pradesh.

Through her Jan Sampark (mass contact) programme she had propagated the aims, principles and programmes of the Congress party, reached out to the people,

⁶ Initially Mrs. Sonia Gandhi too was reluctant about joining politics but ultimately she accepted the position of the party President.

⁷ It is often being held that pressure was mounted on Vajpayee to prepone the 2004 election although he was of not the similar opinion. The BJP combine was self assured of its victory in the polls.

established contacts, heard their grievances and problems.⁸ It was this grassroots contact which enabled her to emerge as the leader of the people and enhance her popularity. Sonia Gandhi's mass contact programme reaped dual benefit for the Congress Party. It enabled her and the party to establish contact with the people and give Congress an image of people's party. On the other, it enthused the Congress workers and revived the esprit de corps among its cadres. This dynamic initiative in the name of "Jan Sampark Programme" had generated large scale support for the party. Her visit into some prime constituencies which involved wading into crowds had actually led to restore and reaffirm faith of the common people and had enabled themselves to identify with the party. She was in fact able to circulate the message clearly that the Congress is committed towards continuing the economic reforms instilled with a strong component of social welfare and justice and programmes to alleviate poverty (Sharma, 2004, pp.10-12).

It was the three pronged approach of the Congress to rejuvenate itself actually paid dividends for the party which included reaffirming its commitment towards secularism, pluralism and composite nationhood and by enhancing the essence of democracy by ensuring well being for all the sections of society (Hasan, 2007, p.92).

The 'Populist' 2004 Lok Sabha Election Manifesto

The 2004 manifesto was laced with numerous populist programmes which were primarily designed to ensure enhanced public services for the poor, the marginalized, downtrodden, the deprived, the tribals, dalits, the adivasis and the disadvantaged. The manifesto included provisions that would produce a government of the "aam admi" (common man). Thus the context of the 2004 Election manifesto was different from the 1999 manifesto of Congress where the prime focus was providing the nation with a stable and able government which will sustain secularism and maintain social harmony. The thrust of the 2004 election manifesto was different from that of the liberalization agenda initiated by the Congress in the early 1990s. The shift reflected the conscious decision of the leadership of the Congress Party to restore their lost support bases and revive themselves as the ruling party at the centre. With the 2004

⁸ Through it efforts was also made to establish contacts and communication with the women section of the population. They would unfold their grievances to their leader.

Lok Sabha election, Congress appeared more determined to defeat the BJP-led NDA combine. Hence, in the manifesto for the 2004 Lok Sabha election the Congress was seen to be very critical about the performance of the 1999-2004 BJP-led NDA coalitional government. To Congress, the NDA government had massively increased unemployment by its economic policies as well as destabilized and lowered growth rates. Besides, the national security came repeatedly under threats during its tenure. The Congress Party in its manifesto even condemned it for inciting and sponsoring communal infightings and thereby hampering the social harmony of the nation. To authenticate their standpoint Congress even referred to the Godhra massacre in Gujarat in its manifesto and rhetoric, blamed the government for instigating violence against the missionaries and exposed communal organizations like Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad for unleashing violence against the minorities. The most blatant blow to the credibility of the NDA government came with the Kandahar hijack case when three terrorists were released who were in fact escorted by the then External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. The Congress Party also referred to the Babri Masjid demolition issue that further tarnished the image of the NDA government. Later on the attack on the Parliament in December 13, 2001 further jeopardized its credibility. During its tenure the number of suicides by the farmers across the country had increased, alleged the Congress party in its manifesto along with growing destitutions of the 'khet mazdoors'. Hence to arrest all these loopholes of the then ruling government the Congress came forward with some solemn resolutions as contained in its 2004 manifesto known as the 'Six Basics' for governance. Thus the 'six basics' were:

- i) To ensure social cohesion and harmony by taking stringent measures against those who promote hatred and bigotry;
- ii) To increase income of the middle class;
- iii) To provide equality in terms of opportunities in all the spheres of life for the dalits, Other Backward Classes and for the religious and linguistic minorities;
- iv) To secure productive and secure employment opportunities;
- v) To empower women politically, economically, legally, socially and educationally; and

- vi) To ensure improve in the income and condition of the Kisan's and Khet Mazdoors (AICC, 2004, p.16).

The 2004 election manifesto incorporated some other populist promises as well. The Indian National Congress expressed its intention to alleviate poverty and create new jobs and thus the party promised to enact a national employment guarantee Act. This was designed to provide a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of employment on creating durable community assets through public works programme. Through the manifesto thrust was provided upon establishing labour-intensive industries. The issue of employment was accorded a very special position in the 2004 Lok Sabha Congress election manifesto. The Congress Party focused on devising ways to accelerate the rate of employment and create employment opportunities. Hence, it emphasized that the immediate need would be to revive economic growth and sustain it at the rate of 8 to 10 percent per year. The Congress Party identified certain areas where employment opportunities will be expanded and new jobs will be created. This included the organized sector, the agricultural sector, and horticulture, and aquaculture, afforestation, dairy and agro-processing. The Congress even decided to revamp the functioning of Khadi and Village Industries Commission, the coir industry, handlooms, power looms, handicrafts, sericulture, etc (AICC: 2004).

Health and Education

The Congress in its manifesto vowed to raise public spending on health by 2 to 3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product in the 2004 manifesto with focus on primary health care. The welfare of the Disabled in all the respects also remained as one of the focus of the party. In the pronouncement the Congress declared its intention to introduce a national cooked nutrition mid-day meal scheme in primary and secondary schools across the country and universalize the Integrated Child Development Services for a functional Anganwadi in every settlement. The Congress even pledged to raise public spending on education and set up National Commission on Education. The Congress was seen to be committed to make provisions to provide education for all, including the poor. Education at all stages would be free in all respect for boys and girls belonging to the dalit and adivasi communities (AICC: 2004).

Minorities

The 2004 Congress manifesto found reference of the minorities (religious and linguistic). To arrest the present upsurge in communal violence the Congress had promised to take up measures to promote and maintain communal peace and harmony in the nation and devise law on social violence amounting to payment of compensation, investigation by central agency and prosecution by special court. The party had expressed its desire to establish commission for Minority Educational Institutions. On the issue of Ayodhya the Congress announced with great affirmation that it would abide by the verdict of the courts. The Congress reiterated its commitment to adopt the policy of reservation for the social and educationally backward sections among the Muslims and other religious minorities on a national scale. The Congress had also promised to extend reservations for the economically deprived people (AICC: 2004).

Dalits and Adivasis

The pronouncement saw the Congress concerned about providing jobs for the dalits and adivasis (tribals) in the private sector and promoting a culture of entrepreneurship among them. The Congress had also put emphasis on more effective systems for relief and rehabilitation for the displaced tribals due to developmental projects. State Governments were asked to evolve ways to confer ownership rights to the adivasis (tribals) on the minor forest produce, particularly for those who work in forest. The Congress had even promised to provide fresh look at the developmental strategies for the tribal areas (AICC: 2004).

Kisan and Khet Mazdoors

The Congress in the 2004 Lok Sabha election manifesto had announced that immediate steps would be taken to ease the burden of debt and high interest rates on farm loans so as to provide some solace to the farmers. The flow of agricultural credit would also be accelerated to make things comfortable for the farmers. The Congress had also promised that the farmers all over the country will receive fair and remunerative prices and insurance schemes for both cattle and crop will be

implemented. Profit in agriculture will be the prime concern to improve the condition of the tiller of the soil. Moreover, public investment in irrigation, electrification, research, and marketing would be stepped up. Hence we saw that Congress allotted a special position to the farmers and the labourer's in the rural areas in their election manifesto as a step to revamp their position (AICC: 2004).

Women and Children

Women and children, two very delicate section of the society also acquired a space in the 2004 election manifesto. The first promise it had made was to reserve one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha for the women through constitutional amendment. 30 percent of the funds flowing to the local government will be kept for development of women and children. Stern measures would also be taken up for preventing atrocities on women through framing up anti-sati and anti-dowry law; marriage registration will be made mandatory. There will be a major expansion in the schemes for micro-finance for tribal women, women belonging to scheduled castes, for rural women, for women below the poverty lines and women in distress (AICC: 2004).

Food and Nutrition Security

Food and nutrition are the two core issues for millions of Indians. Hence Congress came up with well thought ways for extending food security to the people of India. It had vowed to strengthen the Public distribution system particularly in the poorest and backward blocks of the country with prime focus on families below poverty line. Special schemes to reach food grains to the destitute and infirm through panchayats was one of the agendum for the Congress party promised in the manifesto along with programmes for introducing Antyodaya Cards for all households at risk of hunger. Nutrition programmes for new born babies, especially for the girl child were taken up through the 2004 election manifesto (AICC: 2004).

Regional Development

As always the Congress had promised to work for balanced regional development with emphasis on the North- East and take initiative to ease inter-State disparities through fiscal and other policies to improve in terms of social development and economic growth. To facilitate these initiatives the Congress had decided to set up a System Reform Commission (AICC: 2004).

Panchayati Raj

The Panchayati Raj Institutions got materialized due to the inexorable vision and relentless efforts of Rajiv Gandhi. It should be revamped, insisted the Congress party in the 2004 manifesto, with greater devolution of funds and empowerment of Gram Sabha. Funds for poverty alleviation and rural development programmes will be allotted diligently as and when required, assured the party (AICC: 2004).

Informal and Unorganised Sector

This sector was the thrust area for the Congress for the 2004 election as almost 93 percent of the workforce in our country is in the unorganized sector. Hence Congress had promised to ensure the well-being and welfare of all the workers in this sector, with focus on social insurance and health support. It had promised that special social security schemes already in operation will be expanded to protect the workers against the risks of ill-health, unemployment and old age (AICC: 2004).

Fiscal Policy and Industry

To march ahead in the path of development Congress reiterated with firm commitment to eliminate the revenue deficit of the Central Government in five years so as to spend more on infrastructural development. It even appeared dedicated to revive industrial growth once brought back to power through incentives for boosting private investment accelerating foreign direct investments (AICC: 2004).

Administrative Reforms

The Right to Information Act was made more progressive, responsive, meaningful and useful with increased provisions so as to ensure greater accessibility as well as make the administration more responsive and responsible. The Act was redesigned to make it more participatory. Promises were made to plug the loopholes relating to the inadequacies such as delays, illegal denials to the supply of information. It had even promised to set up another Administrative Reforms Commission to revamp the public administration so as to make it more performance-oriented and accountable. The Congress had reiterated its commitment to unleash electoral and judicial reforms and curb the root causes of corruption with heavy hands (AICC: 2004).

To express its commitment and seriousness to accomplish the promises as made in the Manifesto of 2004 the Congress had announced its decision to present to the people of India a 'Jan Dastavejh' on the progress and success of the implementation of the manifesto (AICC, 2004, pp.17-30). Hence it can be seen that it left no leaf unturned to woo the heart of the common people of India. The provisions in the manifesto and the major accomplishments that have been achieved as claimed by the party are all of pro-people nature which shows the inclination of the party to offer service to the people.

2004 Lok Sabha Election: Revival of INC

With the 14th Lok Sabha Election, 2004 Indian National Congress (INC) emerged as the largest party and assumed power in the centre as the leading party of a coalitional government. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), confident of coming back to power, promised to expand and deepen the economic reforms based on self-reliant approach, sustain and in fact bring a surge in the economic growth rate (Gross Domestic Product), eradicate unemployment and poverty completely. It also vowed to end regional and social disparities and bridge the urban-rural divide (Kumar, 2007, p.62). Its confidence was however shattered by the electoral verdict of the nation. The verdict relegated Vajpayee and his associates to the position of the opposition in the 14th Lok Sabha. A new coalition known as the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) with Congress (I) as the leading party came to acquire the position of the ruling party at the centre along with the outside support of the Leftist parties and with Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party by its side.

The 2004 election empirically showed that the legitimacy of the government in power declines due to its inability to deliver as promised, and as Roy and Wallace puts it, “due to stark mismatch between the electoral promises and new economic policies (Kumar, 2007, p.63). The BJP-led NDA government could not match with the expectation of the people of India and failed to perform or deliver as promised during the 1999 electoral campaign. It could not give due respect to the mandate of the people which contributed to its poor electoral performance in the 2004 parliamentary elections. Bharatiya Janata Party bagged 138 seats out of 364 seats with 22.16 percent of votes. On the other hand, the Indian National Congress surpassed the BJP by only 7 seats by securing 145 seats out of the 417 seats with 26.53 percent of votes in the 2004 Lok Sabha election (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Congress and its allies together could accumulate 219 seats (Sharma, 2004, pp.192-193). Hence, INC-led coalition government came to power and replaced the BJP-led coalition government. The party system at the national level exhibited a competitive multiparty nature and the coalition era remained unaltered.

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS SINCE 2004

With the State Assembly Election following the 1999 Lok Sabha election we saw that Congress emerged victorious in many of the states like Punjab (2002 Assembly election), Karnataka (1999 Assembly election), Kerala, Maharashtra. Even the North-eastern states like Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. Even in 2004 Assembly Election to the State of Andhra Pradesh, Congress emerged victorious by winning 185 seats out of 234 seats with 38.56 percent of votes. Telegu Desam Party, the state based party could bag just 47 seats out of the 267 seats that it had contested for, polling 37.59 percent of votes whereas BJP secured only two seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

In 2004 State Election to the State Legislature of Karnataka, Indian National Congress could secure 65 seats out of 224 seats with 35.27 percent of votes whereas BJP won the election by securing 79 seats out of 198 seats polling 28.33 percent of votes. In Kerala we saw that with the 2006 State Assembly election CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front coalition government was coming back to power with 61 seats in comparison to the 23 seats with 30.45 percent of votes. INC failed to win the election

for 2006. In 2001 assembly election it emerged victorious with 62 seats in comparison to the 24 seats in 2006 polling 24.09 percent of votes. BJP, however, drew a blank. In Tamil Nadu too DMK emerged victorious with 96 seats out of the 132 seats that it had contested for with 26.46 percent of votes whereas INC won only 34 seats with 8.38 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

Hence in the Southern part of the country the Indian National Congress could emerge victorious only in Andhra Pradesh by opposing the economic reforms of the Telegu Desam Party under the leadership of Chandrababu Naidu. On the contrary Congress made pro-poor electoral promises like free electricity, subsidized crop loans, relief packages to the families of suicide victims, 2.5 lakh jobs for the youth by lifting the ban on recruitment in government services, subsidized cloth scheme, etc. (Kumar, 2007, pp.63-64).

With the State Assembly Election 2007 in the State of Uttar Pradesh, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) emerged victorious by defeating the then ruling Samajwadi Party (SP) with 206 seats out of 403 contested seats polling 30.43 percent of votes. In 2002 Assembly election SP had secured 143 seats. INC could bag just 22 seats in 2006 assembly polls. In Punjab, INC got replaced by Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) by four seats. SAD won 48 seats with 37.09 percent of votes. INC secured 44 seats with 40.90 percent of votes. BJP could win just 19 seats. In 2002 assembly election INC had defeated all the other parties by winning 62 seats whereas SAD had won only 41 seats. In Haryana 2005 Assembly election Congress emerged victorious with 67 assembly seats out of the 90 seats that it had contested for. BJP could secure just 2 seats and Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) bagged come 9 seats only. 10 seats were won by Independent candidate (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

In Bihar JD (U) kept hold of the reign of control by winning 88 seats with 20.46 percent of votes in October 2005 Assembly polls by displacing RJD which had won 75 seats earlier in the February, 2005 Assembly election. INC stood nowhere in the scenario as it had secured only 10 seats, whereas BJP secured 55 seats in October 2005 assembly polls. The BJP won 18 more seats, earlier in February in had won 37 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Therefore, in the North we saw that Indian National Congress was totally wiped out by the state-based parties.

In the West too Congress got marginalized with the subsequent assembly polls following the 2004 general election. In Maharashtra INC could secure 69 seats with 21.06 percent of votes in the 2004 assembly election. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) secured the highest number of seats 71 with 18.75 percent of votes and Shiv Sena, the state based party won 62 seats with 19.97 percent of votes whereas BJP secured 54 seats only. However the NCP – Congress combine formed a coalition government to rule the state. In the 2007 State Assembly election to the state of Gujarat BJP swept the polls by securing 117 seats out of the 182 seats polling 49.12 percent of votes. INC won 59 seats out of 173 seats with 38.00 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In the west, too, presence of Congress was not overwhelming.

In the state of West Bengal the CPI (M) swept the polls with 176 seats, polling 37.13 percent of votes. With 2006 state assembly polls INC won only 21 seats and BJP drew a blank. In the 2004 Assembly Election to the State of Orissa (now Odisha) too INC failed to win the state election. It secured 38 seats polling 34.82 percent of votes whereas the BJP secured 32 seats. It was the Biju Janata Dal, the state based party of Navin Patnaik which emerged victorious with 61 seats out of the 84 seats polling 27.36 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

In the Eastern part of the country too Congress had failed to cast its impact. However, in 2006 Assembly Election which was held against a relatively peaceful atmosphere with repeated talks with United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) militants. Congress emerged victorious by winning 53 seats out of the 120 seats that it had contested for with 31.08 percent of votes whereas BJP secured only 10 seats and AGP, the state based party bagged only 24 seats out of 100 seats with 20.39 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Congress had drawn massive support from the Muslims of the Char region. However, it is being said that for Congress the formation of All India United Democratic Front (AUDF) can be a big challenge for 2012 Assembly election. For AUDF is gradually taking over the Congress's Muslim vote bank.

In Arunachal Pradesh too the Congress emerged victorious in the 2004 assembly polls by winning 34 seats out of the 60 contested seats with 44.41 percent of votes. BJP could win just 9 seats whereas Arunachal Congress could win just 2 seats. In the State Assembly Election 2007 to the Legislative Assembly of Manipur Congress won 30 seats out of the 59 seats that it had contested for. CPI won 4 seats and NCP bagged 5 seats. 10 seats were secured by Independent candidates (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Hence

it was again Congress which swept the assembly polls in Manipur. Thus the Congress could not emerge victorious in majority of the states. It is the state-based parties which has emerged victorious in majority of the states.

Congress however could restore back itself to power at the Centre by dethroning the BJP-led NDA government. The comeback of the Congress was not absolute. The people's verdict was just in favour of a Congress-led secular combine. It is pretty well discernible that the Congress would require a lot to do and deliver governance to the people to revive itself in the major states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala and Punjab and in the remaining states. Thus, although the centre was marked by the Congress-led government but the majority of the states had non-Congress governments. Hence the trend of fragmentation of the Indian Party System remained unaltered. Hence the Congress restoration was not comprehensive. Whatsoever the Indian National Congress was able to rejuvenate itself to the position of the largest party, although it could not manage to secure an absolute majority. Congress was the leading partner in the 2004 coalition government at the centre. Hence, this marks only an early sign of its rejuvenation. The 2004 Lok Sabha and the subsequent assembly elections led to the emergence of fragmented competitive multi-party Indian Party System with resurgence of the Indian National Congress as the largest party at the centre.

The Populist Measures UPA I Adopted to Sustain its Credibility

Manmohan Singh assumed the august post of the Prime Minister with the 14th Lok Sabha on 22nd May, 2004 after Sonia Gandhi, the Congress President declined the post. The UPA government adopted a Common Minimum Programme (CMP). The CMP included setting up of a target for economic growth at the rate of 7 to 8 percent per year, ensuring legal guarantee of 100 days work, revitalizing the labour laws, strengthening the public distribution system, passing the bill of one-third reservation of seats for women in Assemblies and Lok Sabha, cess on central taxes, introduction of value Added Tax, bill to give women, equal rights on ownership of assets, a model comprehensive law to deal with communal violence, amending labour laws, immediate implementation of National Employment Guarantee Act, establishing Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, introducing and getting passed a

bill on curbing domestic violence and gender discrimination, enhancing energy security along with a integrated energy policy etc. (Sharma, 2004, pp.233-234). Hence, the Common Minimum Programme became the basis of governance of the coalition. This comeback for the Congress party was very significant and crucial. Hence, to respect the May 2004 mandate Congress led UPA combine had to deliver sincerely and perform diligently. The accomplishment of the Congress-led UPA government since May 2004 was substantially visible and palpable. At the end of five year tenure of the Congress-led UPA government claimed that they were able to translate to a great extent their electoral promises into reality unlike the 1999 BJP-led NDA government.

The Congress' Proclaimed Major Accomplishments (2004-2009)

Within a year after assumption of power the government made a historic legislation by passing the Right to Information Act on 15th June, 2005. This Act ensures greater disclosures. It empowered citizens in towns, cities and villages to demand information on policies, projects and programmes of the government that are implemented in the name of public interest. It enabled the citizens to demand responsiveness and accountability from public official and government at all levels. It sought to make the administration transparent and humane ever before. It was a bold step to reduce corruption at all levels and promote public good (AICC, 2009, pp.2-7). In their bid to fulfil a promise made in the Manifesto 2004 it enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to ensure social justice and equity and as a drive to alleviate poverty of the rural poor. It was enacted to provide in all districts 100 days of legally guaranteed work to each rural household in every financial year in public works programme. The essence of the Act is to enhance livelihood security to lakhs of poor rural families and simultaneously enable creation of durable community asses. Every household was able to demand 100 days work from the government through this Act. The NREGA Scheme was different from earlier wage programme as it provided legally guaranteed employment to the rural poor with greater transparency and accountability. Hence it was portrayed as a path-breaking achievement by the 2004-2009 Congress-led UPA government. The scheme also maintained that one-third of the workforce should be women with no wage discrimination between men

and women (AICC, 2009, pp.2-16). The Congress Party claimed that the scheme has provided employment to 2.10 Crore rural households, made the rural women economic independent and enabled them to break their shackles, provided employment to rural poor belonging to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. With the implementation of the scheme the land productivity is also said to have improved (AICC, 2009). It announced through the 2009 manifesto that it was able to implement its 'Bharat Nirman' programme and achieve considerable progress in transforming rural India by expanding and providing better irrigation facilities, all weather roads, houses for the poor, drinking water, electricity for all poor families, phone connectivity, opening up of more schools, health-centres in all villages (AICC, 2009, p.8).

The Congress has promised in its Manifesto to provide solace to crores of farmers by easing debt burden in its 2004 Manifesto. As a part of it, the Congress-led UPA government claimed that it had brought comfort and security to crores of farmers and their families by announcing

- (i) by waiving loans up to Rs.65,000 Crore complete waiver of all loans for marginal farmers;
- (ii) by extending irrigation facilities
- (iii) Increase in the procurement prices;
- (iv) by increasing three-fold credit from banks and reducing interest rates on crop loans (AICC, 2009, p.8).

It claimed to launch the National Rural Health Mission so as to make a positive impact by improving the quality and accessibility of primary health care in villages, along with availability of trained health professionals (AICC, 2009, p.8). The government made efforts to empower the disadvantaged sections of the society and provided Scheduled Tribes and traditional forest dwellers rights over land they cultivate in forest areas. It even provided 27 percent reservations for Other Backward Class students in all professional institutions and enhanced scholarships for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minorities and other backward classes to pursue higher education (AICC, 2009, pp.8-9).It also claimed that during its reign in the interest of the women, the Domestic Violence Act, 2005 to protect women from domestic violence was enacted. It also through a legislation accorded equal rights upon women

to inherit property (AICC, 2009, p.9). The Congress claimed that it had increased investment in higher education and opened up many more colleges, institutes of technology and management. It had during its tenure taken initiative to strengthen the ‘Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan’ and introduced a cooked mid-day meal scheme in all primary schools which in turn has increased the rate of school-goers in the rural as well as urban areas (AICC, 2009, p.9). It had even claimed to have delivered record economic growth of 8.5 percent during the five year tenure and increased spending in agriculture, infrastructural building, municipal services, education and health. Due to economic growth, the Congress-led UPA government was able to introduce ‘Aam Admi Bima Yojana’ for landless households and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana for six crore unorganized sector workers (AICC, 2009, p.9). Family welfare projects were also undertaken in unorganized and semi-organized sector. National commission for Enterprises in the unorganized sector was set up in 2004 to examine the problems of the workers in the sector and to suggest measures to overcome them as well as review the social security schemes available to them. Unorganized Sector Workers’ Social Security Bill, 2005 and unorganized sector Workers’ (Condition of work and livelihood Protection Bill), 2005 were also drafted during the UPA tenure. It has taken initiative to allocate financial resources from the Centre to the State Government at a scale never known before. Besides it has also upgraded resource allocation for upgrading infrastructure and basic services for urban poor along with construction of 14 lakh houses for the poor (AICC, 2009, pp.9-10). The UPA government also claimed to have provided India a stature as global power by entering into civil nuclear agreements on their terms solely and provides India with energy security. Besides, efforts have been taken to meet with external and internal security challenges by raising the capability of the combating forces (AICC, 2009, p.10).⁹

The UPA government had to face a crisis on the verge of the expiry of its tenure when the leftist parties withdrew their outside support from the ruling government due to differences in opinion regarding the nuclear deal with United States of America. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India was able to make his government somehow survive the non-confidence motion with the support of Samajwadi Party. Hence the government was able to complete its tenure and Manmohan Singh could

⁹ The Congress has been able to enact and implement many of these plans of actions into operation although an impartial assessment and findings can tell whether these initiatives were actually able to reap the desired objectives.

complete his tenure as the Prime Minister of the country. Consequently the nation was able to have a stable government under the aegis of the Congress Party.

With the dawn of the 15th Lok Sabha election the Indian National Congress sought a renewed mandate from the people so that it can carry forward all its progressive work, programmes, missions and schemes that had been launched during 2004-2009 tenure. When the general election to the 15th Lok Sabha was declared the Congress decided to contest the election alone at the national level and make alliances with comfortable regional parties only at the state level (Kailash, 2009, pp.52-53).

2009 Congress's Populist and Positivist Lok Sabha Election Manifesto

The Indian National Congress announced its work programmes for the period of 2009-2014, rededicating itself to the service of the people and strengthening the foundations of India. The work programmes contained some affirmative promises to the people of India. Hence it gave the call "*Aam Admi Ke Badhte Kadam Har Kadam Par Bharat Buland*" (AICC, 2009). The Indian National Congress promised to continue with the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and vowed to ensure guaranteed 100 days work and increase wage to Rs.100 a day for every one falling under the Act. The Congress party pledged to enact a Right to Food law that will guarantee access to sufficient food for all people and 25 Kilogram of rice or wheat per month at 3 per kg for people living below poverty line. It even tried to formulate subsidized community and proposed to provide kitchens in all cities for houseless and migrants with the aid of the central government. The Congress promised to provide security to each and every citizen and adopt zero tolerance towards terrorism. To ensure transparency the Congress announced that it would take measures to provide every Indian with a unique identity card. For the rural poor the Congress in the 2009 manifesto further promised to provide health security for all and assured to cover over the next years every family living below the poverty line by the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana introduced by the Congress led UPA government during its first tenure 2004-2009 (AICC: 2009).

The 2009 election manifesto included provisions to ensure greater facilities for the disadvantaged and deprived sections of the society and hence the party through its

pronouncement had assured for a comprehensive social security to urban homeless, disabled and elderly people, released bonded workers, to the members of primitive tribal groups and to the members of designated “most backward” dalit communities as well as to single women headed households (AICC: 2009).

The empowerment of weaker sections of the society found a very important position in the 2009 manifesto. The Congress reiterated its faith to protect the interest of this section of the society comprising of women, dalit, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, minorities and OBCs. Education at all stages for boys and girls will be free. There will be a surge in the recruitment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for filling up 53,000 vacancies along with protection of these section in the private sector jobs too (AICC: 2009).

It had even reiterated its commitment to provide quality education to all and expand higher education with focus on excellence and provide scholarship or educational loan. It had even promised to ensure quality education for school children and improve the physical environment in schools and impart training to teachers. To improve skill of the youth a National Skill Development Mission was initiated during its 2004-2009 tenure. The party had promised in 2009 manifesto to move ahead with the scheme and in fact increase the fund allocation over it. Besides, continuing and implementing all the programmes, the Congress had vowed to provide access to bank credit to all the small and marginal farmers at lower interest rates. It had even made a new announcement to provide interest relief to all farmers who repay loans on schedule and ensure that farming become a profitable occupation (AICC: 2009).

To respect the sentiments of the Muslims a separate Ministry for Minority Affairs was created in May 2004 and implementation of the recommendations of the Sachar Committee has been initiated to ameliorate the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community. The Congress had also promised to reserve one-third of all central government jobs for women and pass a bill for reserving 33 percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislatures in the 15th Lok Sabha (AICC: 2009).

The Congress in its manifesto provided sharp focus on the issue of needs of the children and the issue of girl child. A National Commission for Protection of Child Rights was established in 2006 to ensure that the welfare of the children is protected

and promoted. New laws to prohibit child labour and child marriage has been passed and will be abided by religiously New Schemes to improve nutritional status of children, especially girl child and to educate them has been passed and will be continued sincerely assured the Indian National Congress. It even assured to universalize the ICDS by March 2012 and promised to introduce special incentives for the girl child which will include monetary incentive for education till the higher secondary level. The Congress reiterated in the 2009 manifesto its commitment of devolving more functions, funds and functionaries to the panchayats and upgrade them with technical capabilities to enhance their effectiveness (AICC: 2009).

In the wake of atrocities on the dalits and women the INC resolved to combat communalism of all kinds and deal with heavy hands with the perpetrators. It had even promised for right to compensation and rehabilitations for all victims of communal and ethnic violence. It even pledged to connect every villages to a broadband network in three years time and give new look to urban governance and strive to maintain the path of high growth with fiscal prudence and low inflation as well as continue with efforts to give support to public sector to grow and survive along with emphasis on privatization (AICC: 2009).

The Indian National Congress even reposed its confidence in the youth who comprises the majority of our population and have time and again inducted young men and women into the party and entrusted them with responsibilities. Congress through its manifesto also committed itself by proposing numerous measures to preserve and promote our heritage and natural environment and ensure energy security for our country. Rural electrification, oil and gas exploration was accorded priority (AICC, 2009, pp.13-29). Hence, all the grassroots issues which found space in 2004 manifesto and were implemented during 2004-2009 tenure of Congress-led UPA government was again incorporated in the 2009 manifesto with additional provisions and facilities.

Popularity and 2009 Lok Sabha Election

The Indian National Congress not only unleashed sound economic policies and framed prospective populist electoral promises but also adopted numerous correct political manoeuvrings. Earlier Sonia Gandhi had campaigned aggressively to resurge

the popularity and the lost glory of the party and saved the Congress Party from slipping down into a complete oblivion. Then after 11 years with the 2009 Lok Sabha polls Rahul Gandhi followed her footsteps and campaigned extensively to sustain the popularity of the party. Rahul Gandhi emerged as the star campaigner for the party during the election campaign of 2009. He campaigned extensively for reviving the lost bases in the state of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Gujarat. The Congress general secretary had covered 230 constituencies and had held extensive rallies to revive the lost bases of the Congress. Restructuring the party structure and introduction of inner democracy in the youth wings of the Congress yielded dividends for the party. He was able to induce enthusiasm and encouragement among the young Congress workers and the new young voters.

Thus the general election to the 15th Lok Sabha held during April-May 2009 saw a comprehensive victory for the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) with Congress as its leading partner. In fact, it was for the first time in the last twenty five years a government that had completed its full term got re-elected. Besides, for the first time there was a change in equation within the system of coalitional form of government. The return of the ruling UPA to office in 2009 was due to the resounding popular mandate which reflected a distinct undercurrent support for it. Consequently, the Advani-led NDA was made to bite the dust and the left-led 'third front' was wiped out completely who had build castles in the air to form a non-Congress, non-BJP government at the Centre. There was no "wave" as such in the country against or in favour of any particular party but certainly there was a subdued and invisible "surge" and support for the Congress Party.

2009 Lok Sabha Election: A 'more' Resurged Congress

Congress for the first time since 1991 was able to cross the two hundred mark and secured 206 seats out of the 440 seats that it had contested for, polling 28.56 percent of votes (www.eci.nic.in). The UPA comprised of Trinamool Congress, Nationalist Congress Party, Dravida Munnetra Khazhagam, the National Conference, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, Republican Party of India, Indian Union Muslim League (MUL), Kerala Congress (Mani), etc. apart from the Indian National Congress. The UPA captured 262 seats, just 11 seats short of absolute majority polling 36.46 percent of

votes. With the 2009 Lok Sabha election the UPA was able to secure some 86 more seats than it had secured in the 2004 election (Rai, 2009, p.203). NDA stood distant second with 159 seats. BJP secured only 116 seats with 18.80 percent of votes (www.eci.nic.in). The Third Front could bag just 80 seats. The Fourth Front (which was formed suddenly prior to the election) could manage to score just 27 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The country voted in favour of a Congress led secular combine and against the Advani-led NDA alliance and the people also uprooted the “Third force” that was there to somehow capture power.¹⁰ The electorate indisputably voted for a ‘stable’ and ‘able’ government at the centre. Thus, the present decade did provide stability and continuity to the party system. However, the era of coalition politics remained unaltered and undisturbed. However, the Indian National (INC) played a more assertive role as a coalitional maker, having more control over the bargaining process during the formation of the government for 2009-2014.

One of the significant features of this election was the comeback of the Congress party in the state of Uttar Pradesh where it had secured 21 seats, two seats less than the Samajwadi Party and one seat more than the BSP (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).¹¹ The Congress decided to fight the general election alone after the Samajwadi Party refused to ally with it. A large segment of the Muslims voted for Congress this time across the state. Even a substantial chunk of Brahmins, Dalit and Extremely Backward Caste communities in select constituencies voted in favour of the party which contributed towards its revival in the state. The high pitched campaign by Rahul Gandhi and his initiative to run up the organization at the grassroot paid dividends for the party. The Indian National Congress performed well in almost all the states. It performed well in Rajasthan (2004- 4 seats/ 2009- 20seats), Haryana (2004- 9seats/ 2009- 9 seats), Arunachal Pradesh (2004- no seats/ 2009- 2 seats), Andhra Pradesh (2004- 29 seats/ 2009- 33seats), Manipur(2004- 1 seat/ 2009- 2seats), Delhi (2004- 6 seats/ 2009- 7 seats), Chandigarh (2004- 1 seats/ 2009- 1seat), Punjab(2004- 2 seats/ 2009- 8 seats), and Uttarakhand (2004- 1 seats/ 2009- 1 seat). It improved its performance in Madhya Pradesh (2004- 4seats/ 2009- 12 seats), Orissa (2004- 2 seats/ 2009- 6 seats),

¹⁰ Strong government and decisive leadership was the two major plank on the basis of which the BJP wanted to cast its spell among the masses. The party had nothing in content with regard to good governance. It neither could offer any sound and appealing policies on development or livelihood issues. See “Saffron Intact”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIV, No.7, p.5.

¹¹ Many of them voted in favour of Congress and hence the UPA because of the waiver in farm loan and secondly for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme. See Gupta, ‘The Congress’ Surprise in Uttar Pradesh’ *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIV, No. 22, May 30, 2009, p.19.

recovered its lost ground in Kerala (2004- 0 seats/ 2009- 13 seats), excelled with its allies in Maharashtra (2004- 13 seats/ 2009- 17 seats).¹².

The principal opposition party the BJP lost ground in Rajasthan (2004- 21 seats/ 2009- 4seats). It could not do even much in Maharashtra despite of its alliance with Shiv Sena (2004-13 seats/ 2009- 9 seats). Though it had achieved success in Gujarat (2004- 14 seats/ 2009- 15 seats), Chhattisgarh (2004-10seats/ 2009-10seats), Jharkhand (20041seat/ 20098seats), Himachal Pradesh (2004-1seat/ 2009 3seats) and Karnataka (2004-18seats/ 2009-19seats) but could not do much in Bihar (2004-5seats/ 2009-12seats) or in the other states in south. Neither was it able to make its presence felt in Andhra Pradesh despite of allying with Telegu Deasam Party nor could do much in Tamil Nadu.¹³ The left-led Third front also gave a dismal performance. With the 2009 Lok Sabha election it was relegated to the eighth position in the newly elected Lok Sabha from the position of the third largest front in the outgoing Lok Sabha (2004-2009).

Hence the bottom line of the general election 2009 was the “Resurgence of the Indian National Congress” because of its more responsible, more future oriented visions and pro-people image. The common people of India was also unable to grasp the intellectual projections made by the left despite of its efforts to make the 2004-2009 UPA government abide by the Common Minimum Programme. The key to the success of the Congress party lies in its projection as an advocate of democratic socialism. Moreover, the NREGA, the flagship scheme of the party and the waiving of farm loan yielded positive for the Congress Party.¹⁴ Its emphasis on egalitarianism and its appealing slogan of “AAM ADMI” was rewarded accurately. It was able to highlight a pro-people image and cut a niche in people’s mind. Besides, the Congress Party was able to adopt correct manners, strategies and make effective alliance partners which paid off manifold. Alliance with Trinamool Congress and DMK brought considerable success for the party in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

¹²See Statewise seats won by Congress and BJP in the 2004 Lok Sabha election http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/LS_2004/Vol_I_LS_2004.pdf Also See Statewise seats won by Congress and BJP in the 2009 Lok Sabha election http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/archiveofge2009/Stats/VOLII/STATE_PARTYWISESEATWONANDVOTES_LokSabha2009_24012014.pdf

¹³ The party’s polarizing ideology led to loss of bases in many states and also kept it bereft of any prospective alliance partner.

¹⁴ NREGA has been a step to reach the poor. But it has been alleged that due to the implementation of the scheme through the bureaucracy the PRIs has been undermined and surpassed.

BJP on the contrary could not provide any alternative leader after Vajpayee's retirement.¹⁵ A vacuum was created in the leadership position of the party which no one could fulfil. On the contrary the Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Manmohan Singh and Rahul Gandhi appeared to be the next election leaders. The RJD leader, Lalu Prasad Yadav was defeated in Patliputra and could not win from Saran. His party gave a dismal performance. The Lok Jan Shakti Party as well performed miserably in Bihar and its leader Ram Vilas Paswan was defeated in his own constituency. This election yielded results for those who performed and preferred for governance and development. Thus, Congress was paid off in many areas. Such as in Andhra Pradesh, the Congress and its members continuously monitored the implementation of NREGA projects, provided emergency services and implemented cheap rice project, free electricity for agriculture, etc. The charm of 'Hindutva' has become stale in all forms and incarnations. The voters rejected the negative and self-motivated policies of the left and the caste based divisive agenda of Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samajwadi Party or of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

At the state level too the Congress was improving its performance. With State Assembly Election, 2009 the State of Andhra Pradesh was seen to give Congress the mandate to rule the State. Chief Minister Y.S. Rajashekhara Reddy steered the Congress to victory in Andhra Pradesh. In both the election, Lok Sabha as well as State Assembly, the people of Andhra Pradesh voted in favour of the Congress. The Congress won 33 out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats and won 157 out of 294 seats in 2009 Assembly election (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

There was no viable alternative for Congress in the state. Disarray in opposition and inability among the opposition parties to emerge as the potential alternative worked in advantage for the Congress in both the elections. BJP is almost non-existent in the state. Praja Rajyam Party (PRP) of 'cine-star' K. Chiranjeevi won 18 Assembly seats and drew a blank in Lok Sabha election. It had managed to spoil Telegu Desam Party's (TDP) chances of wresting power from Congress by eroding its vote bank. Telegu Desam Party contested in 225 seats and won only 92 seats in the assembly election. BJP won 2 seats and Lok Satta Party (LSP) of Jay Prakash Narayan, a bureaucrat turned politician won only 1 seat (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

¹⁵ The party had very few young leaders to project before a large chunk of young voters.

The spell of Telegu Desam party was on the wane in the state. Reddy had initiated many developmental and welfare programmes in the state which included a new irrigation project, provision of old age pensions, subsidized housing schemes, supply of rice at Rs. 2/- a kilogram to the poor, the novel health insurance scheme, 'Rajiv Arogyasri' ensured that the votes of Congress remained un-eroded. Caste factor played a very insignificant role in the election to the state this time. (Frontline, 2009, Vol. 20, Issue 11).

Haryana went for its assembly polls in October 13, 2009. The electorate of the state of Haryana gave a mixed verdict with no clear majority for any party. Although the ruling Congress remained the single largest party by winning 40 out of the 90 assembly seats. Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) of Chautala gained only 31 seats. Haryana Janhit Congress bagged only 6 seats. BJP could secure just 4 seats. Bahujan Samaj Party and Shiromani Akali Dal both secured just one seat each. 7 were bagged by Independent candidates in the 2009 assembly polls (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Congress was short of five seats from majority. The Congress actually benefitted from fragmented opposition in the state (The Hindu, Oct. 23, 2009).

The Indian National Congress was even able to sweep the polls in the state of Arunachal Pradesh in 2009. The Congress came to power for a second consecutive term under the stewardship of Dorjee Khandu. Out of the total 60 seats the Congress had bagged 42 seats. The performance of the party had in fact improved in the state as in the 2004 assembly polls the party had won 34 seats. The National Congress Party (NCP) won 5 seats in comparison to its 2 seats in 2004 assembly polls. Trinamool Congress made its debut in the state and won five seats. BJP won only 3 seats out of the 18 seats that it had contested for the 2009 assembly polls. The People's Party of Arunachal (PDA) the lone regional party won just 4 seats while 1 seat was bagged by an Independent candidate (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). In Sikkim, Sikkim Democratic Front emerged victorious with 32 seats and polling 65.9 percent of votes whereas INC drew a blank.

In the House of 288, the Congress party had secured 82 seats and was in the position to form the government with decade old ally NCP in Maharashtra with the 2009 assembly polls. The ruling combine had in fact improved its performance in the state and returned to power for the third time consecutively. NCP bagged 62 seats in 2009. Although in 2005 assembly polls it had secured 71 seats. Congress had in fact

improved its performance in the state as it secured 82 seats as against its 69 seats in 2005 assembly polls. Congress emerged as the largest party in the state surpassing all the other political forces such as the BJP, the Shiv Sena and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), the political novice in the state. BJP could secure just 46 seats as against its 54 seats in 2005. Shiv Sena secured 44 seats as against 62 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Meanwhile Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) a new force which had emerged in the state under the stewardship of Raj Thackeray which proclaimed that it identifies with the cause of the middle class maharashtrians, their anxieties and needs and also claimed that the party is embedded in maharashtrian ethos and interests with a modern outlook. He even took up the cause of unemployment and portrayed himself as a strong leader who will protect maharashtrian interests from the outsiders. He used a conservative populism to expand the base of the party in the state. (<http://manase.org/#>).

The party could not do much in the 2009 assembly polls and secured just 13 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). MNS had in fact destabilized Shiv Sena in the state. Shiv Sena had put up a very poor performance in the assembly polls. The MNS eroded its votes to a great extent which had in fact sealed off the electoral fate of BJP–Shiv Sena combine. The votes got divided between the Shiv Sena and the MNS and this produced a split verdict which led to the victory of the Congress–NCP led alliance. The Congress – NCP coalition came to power and touched the half way mark of 144 out of 288 assembly seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

Even the State of Jharkhand had conducted its assembly polls for the year 2009. The Jharkhand Assembly election had thrown up a hung house with no party or alliance near the half-way mark of 42. It is a house of 81 members. Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) won 16 seats one seat short of that it had won in 2005. Congress won 13 seats. The Jharkhand Vikash Morcha (Prajanatrik) bagged only 9 seats. The performance of BJP suffered a setback in the state. It won 18 seats in comparison to the 30 seats that it had secured in 2005 Assembly polls. JD (K) its ally in the state won only 2 seats as against its 6 seats it had won in 2005. AJSU won only 5 seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The Congress did not emerge victorious in the state with the 2009 polls. In Orissa Biju Janata Dal (BJD) emerged victorious with 103 seats polling 38.86 percent of seats. INC could bag 27 seats with 27.10 percent of votes and BJP could win 6 seats <http://www.eci.nic.in>).

Hence, all these indicate that the Congress was able to rejuvenate itself from the state of decline¹⁶ and was able to revive itself in lot many states either by improving its performance or by retaining its bases (although it could not secure absolute majority on its own). The 2009 Lok Sabha polls clearly marked the ‘resurgence’ of the Congress Party in the Indian political system.¹⁷ The Indian party retained its competitive multi-party nature and the trend of fragmentation as well coalition politics remained unchanged. However, with the presence of diversity in regional aspirations, culture and demands the quantitative and qualitative growth of regional parties will remain an indispensable phenomenon of the Indian political system. The UPA has been the handiwork of the Congress party. In many states it was seen that it was able to win back its credibility. Caste based politics also had no more meaning for the present generation of people. Hence, the future-oriented visions and the progressive attitude of the Congress party actually paid large dividends for the party. The pro-people image and its projection as the party of the ‘aam admi’ was another factor which helped in its resurrection. Hence the four parameters such as popularity, populism, positivism and performance largely determined the trajectory of the party system at both the levels.

General Election to the 16th Lok Sabha

The General Election to the 16th Lok Sabha held during April- May 2014 saw a comprehensive victory for the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with a very pronounced verdict. Such a victory is bound to invite some interpretations as BJP is not dependent on any of its pre-poll allies to form the government at the Union level. The 2014 Lok Sabha election establishes the fact that the country craves and stands for ‘development’ and aspires for ‘good governance.’¹⁸ The strategy of alluring the electorate with the ‘Gujarat development model’ reaped benefits for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The series of corruption charges and scams, the issue of rising prices of essential commodities hurting the ordinary people, spiralling inflation,

¹⁶ Though the extent of dominance was not similar to that which existed during the fifties and the early sixties. Congress then had secured absolute majority and had formed the government on its own and was the ‘Majority Party’ in the Indian Party System.

¹⁷ The word resurgence means rising or arising again; tending to rise again, Sykes, ‘The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English’, 1982, p.889.

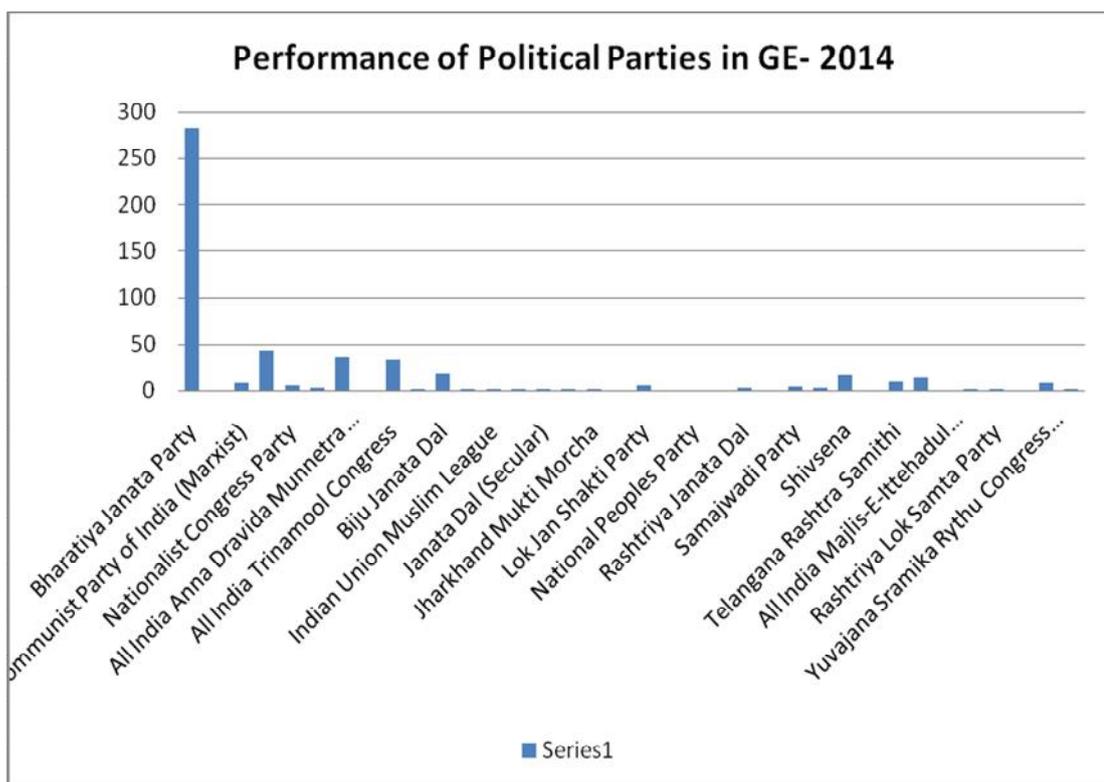
¹⁸ “Only NDA can bring about change in India: Narendra Modi”, www.ndtv.com, May 11, 2014 (accessed on May 20, 2014 at 10:45 am).

faltering growth, weakening currency, rising fiscal deficit, falling sensex, rising cases of crimes against women etc. wrested the chances of Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government from coming to power for the third consecutive time.

Interpreting the General Elections 2014

The election to the 16th Lok Sabha produced a mandate that installed a ‘party’ at the central level with absolute majority that is otherwise marked for its indulgence in fanatic Hindu fundamentalism to rule a country that pledges in the name of secularism. Unprecedented popularity earned through rigorous media advertising, undying hope and unparalleled electoral campaign of Narendra Modi saw the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerging as the largest party by securing an absolute majority on its own with 282 seats polling 31.34 percent of votes and 22.85 percent of seats. BJP along with its allies secured 336 seats and Congress with its allies secured only 59 seats. Left Front has secured 11 seats only (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The nation has offered Modi and his government a chance to deliver growth and governance without any hurdles by reposing their faith in him and thereby bestowing him with maximum number of seats.

Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was forced to bite the dust. Indian National Congress (INC) secured 44 seats polling 19.52 percent of votes and 9.52 percent of seats. INC was reduced to double digits for the first time in the general election. In 2009 Lok Sabha election INC individually had secured 206 seats. It secured 162 less seats in this election in comparison to 2009 Lok Sabha election. This is BJP’s best ever performance in a general election since its inception in 1980. It has bagged 166 seats more than 2009 general election (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).



Source: Figures available from Election Commission of India website <http://eciresults.nic.in/>

2014 Lok Sabha Polls: Popularity and Populism, Performance and Positivism

The BJP resorted to its sole trump card Narendra Modi (who had been chosen consecutively thrice as the chief minister of Gujarat) and his well professed ‘Gujarat model’¹⁹ of development for winning the 2014 election. The recent assembly elections of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat resurged gallons of confidence within the Bharatiya Janata Party. BJP benefitted immensely from the fallouts of Congress-led UPA government which was voted back to power for the second time for its pro-people agenda. The second tenure has been a watershed for UPA II as it got riddled with series of corruption charges such as 2G spectrum scam, Commonwealth Games scam, Adarsh Housing society scam, Augusta Westland chopper scam, Railway bribery and coal mine scam that maligned its pro-people image based on which it had revived itself to the centre stage with the 14th general election. These cases of corruption caused huge losses amounting to crores of rupees to the national exchequer

¹⁹ For understanding of ‘Gujarat Model’ See <http://www.narendramodi.in/>

and this antagonized the common man. Rising cases of crimes against women questioned the administrative credibility of the UPA II government.

The pangs of hunger for development and better governance compelled the Indian electorate to vote for a change in government from Congress-led UPA to a BJP-led government²⁰. The crux for survival for any government in power in a developing country like India which is always yearning for progress and massive development in all the parameters is to 'perform' and translate rhetoric into intent. The corrupt image of the Congress and DMK have contributed negatively towards the electoral fortune of the Congress led UPA coalition and had produced serious repercussions that solely contributed positively towards the electoral fate of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The projection of Narendra Modi, the sculpted icon of development, aroused hope (positivity) among the people of the country that they can now taste development. Assurance of rural growth and generation of rural jobs, pro-active, pro-people good governance along with emphasis upon inclusive and sustainable development worked wonder for the party²¹. In Modi people saw hope and credibility because he has been voted thrice back to power by the people of Gujarat²².

The Reasons why BJP emerged as the 'new' *Majority Party*

Highly strategized and calculated campaign by BJP reaped benefits for the party. Emphasizing on core issues like development, good governance and covertly gliding with its core ideology of Hindutva politics or politics based on religion to consolidate its base when required then quickly shifting its campaigning strategy towards caste-based politics by wooing Dalits, OBCs to form new and enhanced support bases produced wonder for the party. Hence it has touched all the basic issues of concern as politics in India revolves around issues like religion, caste, development and aspiration for good governance. The repeated insistence of good days lying ahead (*acche din aane wale hain*) if Modi is voted to power was also able to catch the fancies of the development starving nation. It used every possible medium to spread the aura of Modi and resorted to emphatic and effective slogans like '*aab ki baar*

²⁰ "Leadership factor in 2014 polls", The Hindu, May 28, 2014.

²¹ BJPElectionManifesto(2014):http://www.bjp.org/images/pdf_2014/full_manifesto_english_07.04.2014.pdf

²² "India has won! Good days ahead: Modi", The Hindu, May 16, 2014.

Modi Sarkar’ (this time it should be Modi-led government), *‘Sabka saath, sabka vikas’* (collective efforts inclusive growth) to highlight its willingness to adhere to an all inclusive policy and eschew its majoritarian policy²³. Its majoritarian and fundamentalist attitude was its biggest loophole that has prevented the Bharatiya Janata Party to have greater mass appeal in this secular country. The minorities and the disadvantageous section of the society have since the Bombay and Gujarat riot have perceived BJP with scepticism, fear and disdain.

Moreover, placing Amit Shah in charge of election campaign in Uttar Pradesh played dividends for the party. Shah is credited to have crafted a very well planned election campaign in the state of Uttar Pradesh (U.P) by meticulously preparing a consortium of diligent cadres, striking every chord correctly with regard to caste calculations as well as simultaneously pursuing its traditional *hindutva* politics by wooing its core support base of the upper caste Hindus. BJP retained its hard line Hindu credentials. During the 1980s the communal agenda of BJP centered on issues like Babri mosque, construction of Ram temple and the city of Ayodhya. Earlier it mobilized Hindu voters through anti-cow slaughter movement during the 1966-67 and insisted and protested in front of the Parliament to pass law for prohibiting it. In the 2014 electoral campaign apart from issues like development, eradication of corruption, good governance, mobilization in the name of ‘identity’ was also pursued as BJP had opted the city of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, the most religiously significant Hindu city on the bank of sacred river Ganges, as its citadel and subtly remained associated with its pro-Hindutva strategy to attract its vote from its traditional bases such as upper-caste, urban Hindus, small and middle businessmen and Hindu traders, cultivators, etc.(Hansen & Jaffrelot, p.4, 1996). Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state that sends eighty Member of Parliament to Lok Sabha. Since the presence of the party was not much impressive in the north-east and down south therefore winning maximum number of seats from the most populous Hindi heartland state²⁴ was imperative for the party to capture power at the centre. Therefore, to rekindle the feeling of ‘being Hindu’ and to popularize Modi, its prime ministerial candidate for Lok sabha election

²³

BJPElectionManifesto(2014):http://www.bjp.org/images/pdf_2014/full_manifesto_english_07.04.2014.pdf

²⁴ Census 2001 data on Population by Religious community. Out of 166197921 people from all religious communities in U.P 133979263 Hindus resided in Uttar Pradesh in comparison to 30740158 Muslims. (NSSO National Data Bank For Socio-Religious Categories).

2014, for bigger electoral gains in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) the BJP leadership very intelligently opted for the most sacred city of the Hindus, the Varanasi, which is primarily an ancient Hindu holy site and prudently abandoning the much controversial site Ayodhya which has left unhealing bruises in the memory of the people of India. This step yielded the desired benefit for the party and eventually BJP could garner as much as 73 seats in the state of UP following the 2014 general election (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Google plus came to the rescue of the party that made its campaign more approachable and kept the party connected with millions of voters. The extensive use of the social media reaped benefits for the party significantly²⁵.

BJP made significant inroads in Bihar, Maharashtra besides Uttar Pradesh and retained its outstanding performances in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Choosing Modi as the prime ministerial candidate despite of opposition from the old vanguards paid dividends for the party as well. On the contrary, despite of every odd the party has tried to put up a united picture among the upper rung leaders in front of the nation to win their faith and confidence²⁶. The party refurbished its line of leadership by discreetly sidelining the leaders like Murli Manohar Joshi, L.K.Advani, Sushma Swaraj, Arun Shourie, Jaswant Singh, Yaswant Sinha and displacing them with a new team of leaders like Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Narendra Modi, Nitin Gadkari.

Modi's electrifying campaign across the nation created a wave of support for the party. Modi enthused energy in the electoral campaign and emerged as the star campaigner of the 2014 general election. The positive image of the prime ministerial candidate worked in favour of the party in whom people saw the leader of the nation who can steer them out of poverty, unemployment and some such other problems. He

²⁵ "How BJP's Online Campaign Proved Vital For Success", www.ndtv.com, May 20, 2014 (accessed on May 22, 2014 at 02:10 pm).

²⁶ The futile future of the Bharatiya Janata Party therefore depends in its ability to perform as well as maintain cohesion and cordiality among its cadres. The party's linkages with the militant organisation like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is still seen with apprehension. On various occasions these organisations have regulated the functioning of the BJP. RSS is a militant Hindu nationalist organisation and VHP, a Hindu revivalist organisation that favours adopting a militant Hindu stand on political and social issues (Malik and Singh, 1994). The RSS under the stewardship of Mohan Bhagat have negotiated to bring unanimity among the rank and file of the BJP leadership to endorse Modi's candidature for Prime Ministership for the 2014 Lok Sabha election. There was considerable opposition from the top leadership of BJP over the possible choice of Modi as the prime ministerial candidate. Sushma Swaraj and L.K Advani have firmly opposed to his candidature. RSS and VHP through their cadre is said to have extensively supported BJP in the ongoing general election campaign and rallies.

in order to effectively identify and connect himself with the common *masses* and create a greater appeal referred to his humble origin of a poor, simple ‘*chaiwala*’ (tea vendor) in his early life who has now dared to challenge the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty²⁷.

The Reasons for Congress Debacle

The Congress party could not raise hope and sell vision for a better tomorrow among the masses. It appeared as though they were overburdened with their own under performance, inefficiency and stains of corruption. They failed to assess people’s mood which yearned for development, performance, enhanced services, good life, strong, decisive leadership and a stable and an ‘able’ government. On the contrary the Congress during its election campaign got engaged in dirty blame game and had no such significant achievements to bolster up on²⁸. Rahul Gandhi lacked the enigma and energy and could not emerge ‘one’ among the many²⁹. Their last minute alliance with Lalu Prasad’s RJD was seen with scepticism by the common masses as he himself was behind the bars for his alleged involvement in the fodder scam. With time it was seen the valour and confidence of Congress-led UPA government faded away. Large investment in social sector, a surge in the investment in infrastructure building, rapid increase in rural consumption pattern, increasing per capita income for three times during the last decade, making attempts to bring transparency through Right To Information Act (RTI), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MNREGA) programme, food security bill, pension reform bill, land acquisition bill, direct transfer schemes and some such other legislations were some of the achievements of the Congress-led UPA government over the last ten years. Yet efforts like MNREGA were found to be riddled with ineptitude and corruption. The land acquisition bill³⁰ that took long span of time to come up was said to be full of flaws and not well enacted as some section of the industry felt that the process of land acquisition from the farmers was long and cumbersome and involved exorbitant

²⁷ “*Modi-chaiwala to dream merchant*”, The Hindu, May 17, 2014.

²⁸ Sonal Bhadoria, “*Toffee Model: Rahul Mocks Modi’s Gujarat Model*”, www.indiatimes.com, April 14, 2014 (accessed on May 20, 2014 at 12:05 pm). Also See “*Rahul Gandhi Attacks Narendra Modi in Varanasi*”, www.ndtv.com, May 10, 2014 (accessed on May 20, 2014 at 12:30 pm)

²⁹ “*Congress concedes Weak Campaign, Failed Media Strategy*”, www.ndtv.com, May 16, 2014 (accessed on May 23, 2014 at 11:15 am).

³⁰ The Bill will empower the rights of the farmer as according to the Bill it gives farmers’ upto four times more of the market rate for land acquired for the industry and infrastructure.

compensations³¹. Its hasty initiatives for foreign direct investment in retail and insurance sector, cutting government expenditure by introducing direct cash transfer scheme (which will indirectly reduce the burden of subsidy) invited criticism for UPA II government.

When the series of corruption scandal jolted the credibility of the pro-people image of the Congress-led UPA government they resorted to strategies like maintaining silence, giving assurances, strong denial of any wrongdoing, sacrificing allies, sending tainted leaders behind the bar etc. They could have won back the confidence of the people of India by cancelling the tainted contracts, denying and protesting in public against the quick bail of the accused, discontinuing alliance with DMK completely rather than waiting until the latter itself deserted it on the issue of the protection of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, refraining from shielding corrupt ministers which could have strengthened the stature of the office of the Prime Minister who is the leader of the nation. Rather than resisting against the corruption crusade (India against Corruption campaign under the stewardship of Anna Hazare) the Congress party should have associated itself actively through its prominent cadres to testify the fact in front of the nation that it too abhors the evil practice of corruption and could have saved the party from the worst ever downslide to a great extent. To make the matter worse for the Congress-led government the Nirbhaya rape case in Delhi (which then had Congress-led state government), the Shakti Mill Mumbai gangrape case (where too Congress-NCP duo ran the state government) corroded the validity of the government. These series of crises ultimately made difficult for the Congress party to win back the faith of the general populace of the nation. The only way the population of a democratic country can show their wrath is through the electoral verdict. The Congress-led UPA government has been severely admonished for its incompetence, inefficiency, non-performance and apathy. Therefore, INC could secure a very dreary tally of seats and scored zero in some ten states such as Rajasthan, Tripura, Gujarat, Goa, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi and performed miserably in West Bengal by securing four seats. In Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh it could bag just two seats respectively. In Karnataka it could win just 9 seats, in Kerala, it fetched for itself

³¹ “Lok Sabha Passes Land Acquisition Bill”, www.profit.ndtv.com, August 29, 2013. Also See “House Panel Decision on Land Bill to hit industry: Adi Godrej”, www.profit.ndtv.com, May 17, 2012 (accessed on May 22, 2014 at 10:45 am).

some 8 seats and in Assam and Punjab it could garner just 3 seats. In Chattisgarh and Haryana it could secure 1 seat respectively (<http://www.ei.nic.in>).

Electoral Performance of the BJP in 2014

The good showing of the BJP in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan during the 2013 assembly polls was an early sign of the probability that BJP might leave its imprint in the national election, remained unheeded by the Congress Working Committee. The BJP performed outstandingly in the North and in the West that contributed extensively towards the victory of the party in the 2014 general election in the country. Rajasthan under the leadership of Vasundhara Raje captured all of the 25 Lok Sabha seats. In Gujarat, BJP had a clean sweep over all the 26 Lok Sabha seats. Madhya Pradesh under the leadership of Shivraj Singh Chauhan fetched 27 of the 29 Lok Sabha seats and Chattisgarh too voted in favour of the right wing party by bestowing it with 10 out of the 11 Lok Sabha seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

BJP made inroads in the North–East by occupying one seat in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam as well by bagging 7 seats thereby surpassing INC and All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Although in the last assembly election BJP was drubbed by INC in Karnataka but the trend got reversed when it surpassed all the other parties by occupying 17 of the 28 Lok Sabha seats and this contributed considerably towards the overall tally of seats for the party (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Uttarakhand contributed all its 5 Lok Sabha seats in the share of BJP's total tally of seat. In Bihar too BJP had put up an outstanding performance by fetching for itself 22 of the 40 Lok Sabha seats by surpassing INC, Janata Dal-United (JD-U) and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The votes of the Yadavs, OBC and Dalits as well has drifted towards BJP due to 'NaMo' effect that claims to provide development and upliftment to all irrespective of caste, community, creed, religion through his motto '*sabka saath, sabka vikas*' (collective effort inclusive development). Delhi after its disappointment with INC and Aam Admi Party (AAP) resorted to BJP by conferring it with all the 7 Lok Sabha seats. In Uttar Pradesh, BJP gave its hallmark performance by bagging 71 seats out of the 80 Lok Sabha seats and this led to the rise in the share of the seat for the party that contributed significantly towards its success (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The magnificent

electoral campaign designed by Amit Shah, general secretary of the BJP, paid manifold. Appealing to vote for the party from the Jats to take revenge from the Muslims for the Muzaffarnagar riot in U.P led to consolidation of OBC vote behind the party that triggered its total number of seats³². Varanasi resonated with slogans like ‘*Har Har Modi*’ whereby efforts were made to equate Modi with Lord Shiva, the Hindu mythological god, so as to consolidate the votes of the Hindus and the Brahmins for the party. BJP made its presence felt in West Bengal and Punjab as well by winning 2 seats respectively. In Maharashtra, it routed out Congress-NCP duo by winning 23 seats along with 18 seats grabbed by Shiv Sena, its long time ally in the state. In Odisha, despite of any strong presence in the state BJP could manage to win 1 seat. Himachal Pradesh bestowed its entire 4 seats in the favour of BJP. The ‘NaMo wave’ also swept Haryana where it had secured 7 seats in comparison to 1 seat of INC. Even in Jammu and Kashmir, BJP could leave its imprint and could bag 3 seats whereas Nationalist Conference drew a blank (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

The Translation of *aspirations* into Party System

However, when all the states have thrown aside regional considerations and voted in favour of Brand Modi and his much hyped and celebrated ‘Gujarat model’, four states remained an aberration namely, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Odisha and Tripura. This election yielded results for those who performed and was prepared for delivering governance and development. Jayalalitha was paid off for her pro-people and development oriented policies such as providing drought relief to the farmers, rice at Rs. 2 per kg, distributing mixer and grinder and electric fan free of cost, ensuring free education along with laptop, books, bicycles, school bags to the students free of cost, etc (www.aiadmkallindia.org). All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagham (AIADMK) gave a laudable performance in the state of Tamil Nadu and bagged 37 Lok Sabha seats polling 3.3 percent of votes eliminating its prime opponent Dravida Munnetra Kazhagham (DMK) which drew a blank probably for its linkages with the 2G spectrum scam (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Similarly, Naveen Patnaik of Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Orissa too kept his record by bagging 20 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats

³² Communal passions were flared by some BJP leaders for their own electoral gains during the mahapanchayat that was held after the culmination of the Muzaffarnagar riots during September, 2013 to resolve the conflict between the Jats and the Muslims.

poling 1.7 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Patnaik is credited with efficiency and administrative efficacy and these has been considered as some of the prime reason for his excellent performance. His populist measures like subsidized rice for Rs. 1 per kg, old age pension and social security schemes, distribution of free umbrella, laptop, clothing and school uniforms to the destitute, providing houses to homeless families not included in Below Poverty Line (BPL) list and bicycles to girl students paid profusely for the party (www.bijujanatadal.net). West Bengal routed out INC and Left and maintained its adherence to Trinamool Congress. Despite of some serious challenges confronting the pro- people image of the party such as Sharada chit fund scam that involved some of its own MLAs, the haunting Park Street rape case and the subsequent forced transfer issue of Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Damini Sen, the Kamduni rape case where the family members of the victim alleged involvement of some Trinamool leaders in the incident of rape the party was still able to withhold its performance and in fact improved its number of seats from 19 to 34 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats polling 3.8 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Mamata Banerji kept her voters allured with her simplicity and catchy phrases, resorted to popular strategies such as providing financial assistance to the youth through schemes like *yuvashree* and aided girl child through schemes like *kanyashree* which assured Rs.500 per year for schooling and transferred Rs. 25000 to the family bank account when a girl turns 18, besides removing entry taxes on goods. Although Left has performed abysmally poor in the state of West Bengal but could retain its performance only in Tripura where the Communist Party of India–Marxist (CPI-M) won both the seats in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. The popularity of Manik Sarkar, the Chief Minister of Tripura, and his political acumen are some of the most significant factors that have enabled CPI (M) to retain its last bastion. Apart from this, attaining self-sufficiency in food, generating employment through several projects, ability to restore and maintain peace and harmony among the tribal indigenous population and the Bengali settlers, providing access to safe drinking water and provision of 35 kg of rice at Rs. 2 per kg for BPL families are some of the factors that contributed towards its consolidation in the state and its performance in the Lok Sabha polls (<http://www.cpim.org/documents-and-booklets>³³). Left as of now has slipped into oblivion. It stands almost eradicated In West Bengal. When it parted ways with UPA-

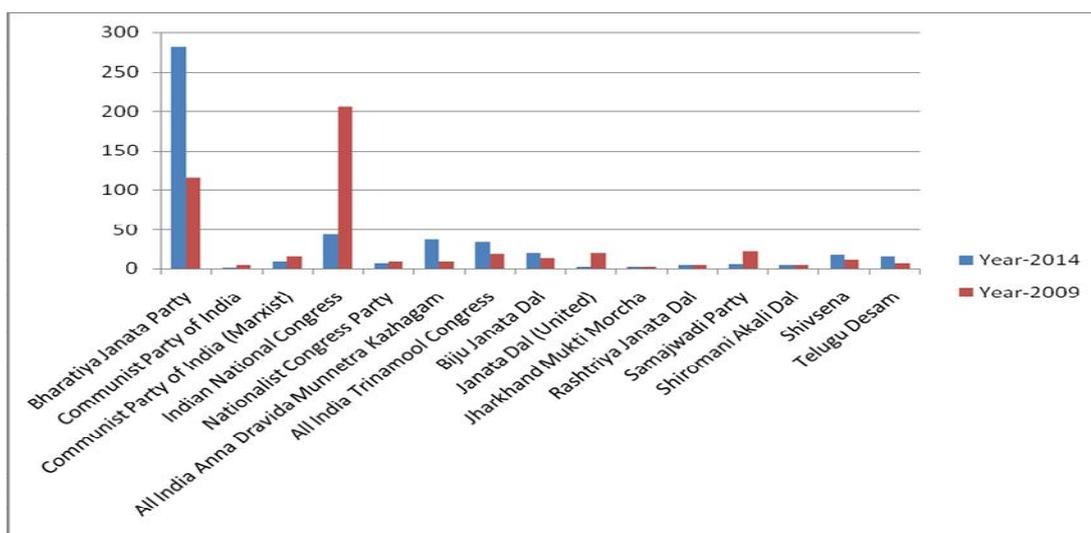
³³ Also See <http://www.cpim.org/press-briefing>.

I in 2009 over the nuclear deal in the name of ideology the general populace was unable to grasp their intellectual projections. The Left leadership stands in disarray and failed to adapt itself to the changing social and political dynamics, lacks the organisational strength which was earlier its hallmark. It lacks its presence among the backward classes. The leadership needs to be revamped, enthused with energy, zeal to work and broader vision for a nation. Moreover, it always lacked an impressive national appeal. It was mostly restricted to Kerala, West Bengal where it ruled for more than three decade and in Tripura where it still maintains its foothold. Kerala still shuffles between Left Democratic Front (LDF) and Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF).

The smaller parties that had played bigger roles have now with the 2014 general election been cut to size. Parties like Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Janata Dal (United) who have earlier played burgeoning influence in Indian politics since the late 1980s have suffered a nose dive with the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. BSP, a significant regional player representing the Dalits drew a blank whereas SP that is now in possession of the state mantle in Uttar Pradesh could bag just 5 seats polling 3.4 percent of votes (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). SP was accused of minority appeasement by its own traditional voters and this lead to the swinging away of the Yadav, Jats and OBC votes from the party. BJP by resorting to caste-based mobilization during the electoral campaign, despite being traditionally an anti-Dalit and anti-Muslim party, have cut into the share of votes of the parties representing these sections of the society. Communal polarization following the Muzaffarnagar riots in Western Uttar Pradesh between the Jats (who recently have been conferred with the category of OBC) and the Muslims went against the electoral fortune of Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) of Ajit Singh and Bahujan Samaj Party as well. The rise of BJP proved detrimental for popular regional players like RJD and Janata Dal (United) as well. Their seat tally has reduced drastically to 4 and 2 respectively (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). However, regional parties like Telegu Desam Party (TDP), Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) of Ramvilas Paswan, Akali Dal in Punjab and Shiv Sena (SS) gained immensely in the 2014 lok sabha election by forging their opportunistic alliance with BJP. New entrant Telangana Rashtriya Samiti (TRS), a state based party, headed by Kalvakuntla Chandrashekhar Rao (KCR) too swept the Lok sabha and assembly election with thumping number of seats. TRS

bagged 11 of the 17 Lok Sabha seats polling 1.2 percent of votes and surpassed Congress, YSR Congress, TDP-BJP combine in the state assembly election by capturing 63 seats in the 119 member Telangana assembly (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). The victory for TRS was obvious as its leader was the architect of the 29th state that took birth after a relentless struggle for statehood. His arduous campaign and motivating speeches enchanted voters in its favour. Moreover, the victory was the reward for his struggle. This election has pruned most of the regional parties but the time to write an obituary has not yet come. It would be premature to conclude that regional satraps have lost their essence and relevance in the Indian politics, more particularly at the central level or that ‘issue’ based politics have replaced or sidelined identity-based politics in such a heterogeneous society.

Comparative performance of Political Parties during Lok Sabha election 2009 and 2014



Source: Figures available from Election Commission of India website http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/statistical_report.aspx and <http://eciresults.nic.in/>

Another new entrant, the Aam Admi Party (AAP) too gave a dismal performance in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. Following these cases of corruption, India witnessed a crusade against corruption under the banner of ‘India Against Corruption’ movement (which has been compared with the Jaya Prakash Narayan movement of 1974) for a Jan Lokpal Bill to cleanse the system of improper practices. Eventually the party emanating from the corruption crusade namely the Aam Admi Party (AAP) under the

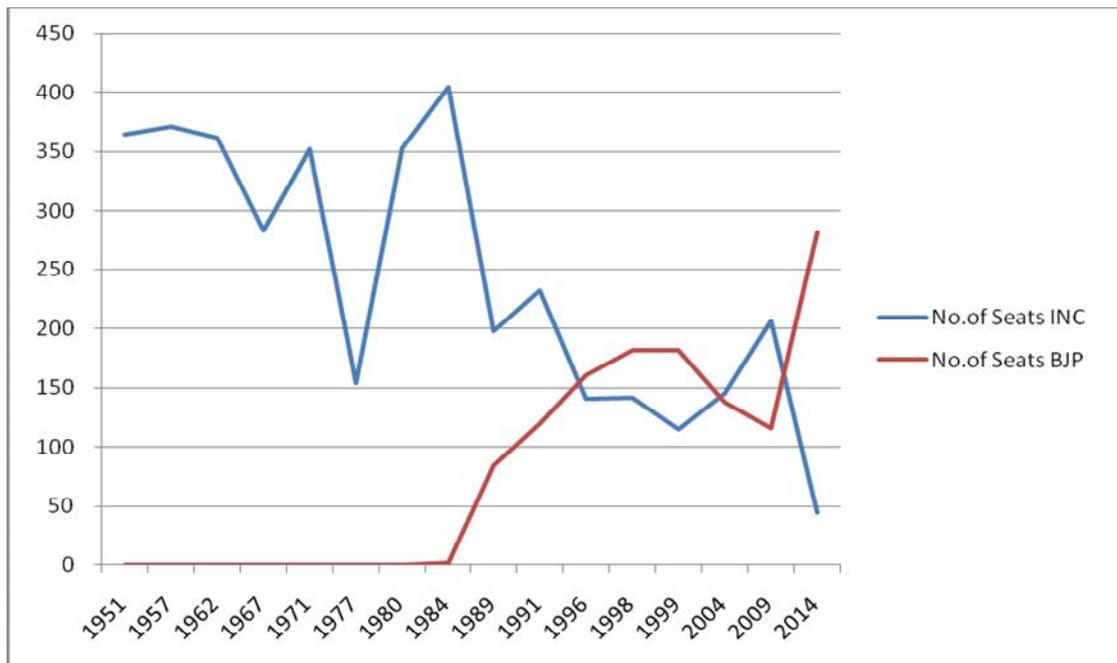
stewardship of Arvind Kejriwal, a civil society activist, was expected to play a decisive role in the 2014 election. But its 49 days tenure as a state ruler which failed to deliver as promised led to erosion of its charisma that it had spelt over the people of India with its crusade faded away. People failed to repose their faith in it as it clearly displayed its administrative ignorance and ineptitudeness while in power heading the Delhi state government. Kejriwal played an opportunistic role by forming a party thereby giving manifestation to his own political aspirations under the veil of corruption crusader. AAP is a political novice with no significant experience of running a government and this acted as a deterrent towards its electoral performance. Although it had contested 443 seats from all over the country but could win just 4 seats in Punjab only (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

The 2014 Lok Sabha Election and the Realigned Indian Party System

With the 16th Lok Sabha election the Indian party system has also witnessed sea changes. The Indian party system as it exhibits is multiparty in nature since its origin, although it keeps reconfiguring structurally with every election. The Indian party system from a competitive multi-party system with Congress predominance as the majority party till 1967 that remained fragmented as well as binodal since 1967 has presently once again transformed into a competitive multi-party system with Bharatiya Janata Party's predominance as the 'majority party'³⁴ as it had secured 282 seats polling 20.58 percent of votes and 31.34 percent of seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>).

³⁴ A majority party is one which by itself possesses more than half of the parliamentary seats. However, a dominant party is one that holds the majority over a long period of political development. See Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their organisation and Activity In Modern states*, 1955, pp.307-309.

Comparative Performance of INC and BJP since 1951-2014



Source: Figures available from Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation website http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/SYB2014/ch43.html

The trend of bipolarization, fragmentation and coalition politics has suffered a setback. Although these trends have not evaporated completely. The party system still remains bipolarized with Congress and other parties at the other pole trying to revamp them. The Indian party system has always remained in a state of flux therefore the equation might get reversed at any course of time. The Indian party system still presents a messy picture as in many states such as Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Odisha, Sikkim voted for their respective state-based parties and Tripura voted for CPI(M) thereby keeping the party system fragmented in nature. States like Telangana, Seemandhra, Odisha, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh that went to assembly polls subsequently voted for non- BJP parties such as TRS, TDP, BJD, SDF respectively retaining the fragmented nature of the party system. Arunachal Pradesh too voted for a non-BJP alternative. Congress had a clean sweep in the state by securing 39 seats of the 60 assembly berths. BJP won just 5 seats and People's Party of Arunachal has secured a lone seats. Similarly, in Odisha BJD stormed back to power by capturing 117 seats in the 147 member assembly. In the Seemandhra assembly election TDP-BJP combine secured 106 seats out of the 175 assembly seats. In Sikkim, Sikkim

Democratic Front (SDF) emerged victorious by winning 22 seats of the 32 assembly seats (<http://www.eci.nic.in>). Some stability, coherence and uniformity has been restored at the central level only as the mandate went in favour of a party that had crossed the half-way mark all by itself which breaks the spell of coalition government. BJP came back to power at the centre after more than a decade. It is the first party since 1984 to get a majority on its own at the union level as since 1989 coalition form of government had become the order of the day. Since 1989 not a single political party was able to secure absolute majority on its own at the union level. Moreover, it is credited to be the first non-Congress party to have own an absolute majority on its own. The verdict restored some essence to the lost relevance of the form of Parliamentary Democracy and also strengthened the office of the Prime Minister as the overwhelming role of the small parties was reduced as the ruling party had absolute majority on its own.

Conclusions

The crux of the 2004, 2009 and 2014 Lok Sabha election has been vote for ‘change’ and ‘comprehensive development’. The significant determining factor of the voting pattern has been people’s apathy towards the underperformance of the government in power, disparity between proclamations and action, evil practice of corruption. They want the public finance to be used for enhanced public services. The nation with mostly young population now wants to shed off the status of a developing nation and get elevated to the status of being “developed”. Hence, it is time for Modi-led BJP government to translate words into deeds and deliver perform and resort to dedicated and sincere implementation of its programmes and policies. The Modi-led Government has to now create policies that would respond to people expectations and translate promises into actions. The Central Government being now free from continuous bargaining, negotiations and messy compromises should work ardently and with great determination to resolve some of the grave problems like – corruption in the administration, financial lay off, fiscal deficits, unemployment, poverty, accelerating agricultural growth, expanding primary education, reducing gap between the rich and the poor, minimize threats to climate change, take efforts to control pollution, environmental hazards, terrorism and insurgencies, the Naxalite challenge

and others threats to internal and external security, etc. to cement its credibility so as to retain its ruling position in the country. Only its ability to adhere to the development strategies and its sincere implementation will help it to survive itself in this multi-party competitive structure. What a party in power is achieving will actually count at the end of the day.