What Would Really Happen If the BJP Ruled India?
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Part Two

What if, we asked in the July issue, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the first party in Indian history to be elected on a platform of "Hindutva," actually managed to rule India for a while? The answers collected by our reporters across India ranged from dire predictions of a Hindu-Muslim apocalyptic clash to a nation finally and profitably returning to its proper center--Hindu spirituality. Wegot so many answers we couldn't fit them in last month and continue now with the responses to: "If the BJP government had held, what do you think would have been the impact on Hindus, Hindu institutions, the Hindu religion and interreligious relations within India

Swami Prakashanand Saraswati
International Society of Divine Love,Austin, Texas
"As far as I know, the BJP wishes to re-establish the greatness of Hindu culture in India, and that we all like. But it all depends on the cooperation of its internal administrative mechanism."

Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami
Adi Chunchunagiri Mutt, Karnataka
"Whichever government comes to power, their aim should be welfare of the poor and downtrodden."

Mr. Sudhakar Chaturbedi
103-year old Gandhian and Arya Samaji, Bangalore
"Hindu dharma professes broadmindedness and tolerance towards other religions. By shouting aloud the Hindutva slogan, they are dividing the people. They must respect everyone as Indians."

Swami Chidanand Saraswati (Muniji)
President, Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh
"I know Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and I think he is a liberal person. Whosoever rules the country must try to preserve Indian culture. The political problems of India should be solved through consensus and collective wisdom. If the nation is broken, nothing will remain together. India is there because of our unique Indian culture. We believe in unity in diversity. We must have faith in each other.

Swami Pragyanand
Pragya Mission International, New Delhi
"The BJP is purely a political party, but its roots lie in religion and spirituality. They believe in the principle 'Dharma rakshati rakshata' ['Those who protect religion, religion protects them'], so we bless them. They do not interfere in the internal policy of other religions. Religious people do not harm others. If they continue, there will be revolutionary change in India.

Mr. Venkataramiah
80, Gandhian, Bangalore
"Why should they use religion as their banner? They should not take the adharmic ways while proclaiming to practice Hindutva. The pro-Hindu banner is only a gimmick for

self-promotion. Are there not so many ways in which they can promote the religion itself? Is politics the only platform?"

Shekhar Gurera
26, Political Cartoonist
"If BJP continued to rule, I am sure gradually Hindus would get disillusioned as their expectations are not likely to be fulfilled. Even if they are in power, 'Hindu Rashtra' cannot be made. Today the top leadership of the BJP itself admits the demolition of Babri Masjid was wrong. In implementing policies that promote Hinduism they will face practical problems. When it was out of power, it toed a very hard line on the Ram temple issue. Once in power, they would not be able to take the same tough line."

Swami Shanti Swarupji Maharaj
40, saint leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Ujjain
"The BJP will strengthen Hindu religion by solving its problems. It will protect the faith and credibility of Hindus. Hindus have always had good relations with other religions, and this will be maintained."

Dr. K.C. Taneja
Social Researcher and Economic Statistician
"They will have a positive impact. The BJP is a secular party and not against any religion. At the same time, they are against the policy of appeasement of any particular religion with a view to create vote banks. The status of Hindus will be raised. Until now, they were taken for granted. The BJP is well organized, disciplined, devoted and surcharged with a missionary zeal for the upliftment of the nation."

Dr. Shashi Prabha Kumar
45, Vedic Scholar and Reader, Delhi University
"I am confident inter-religious relations would not be affected as long as Atal Bihari Vajpayee remained prime minister. They must see to it that they do not hurt the feelings and sentiments of the minority communities living in India."

Satyakam Verma
72, Vedic Scholar, Former Vice Chancellor, Gurukul Kangri Vishvavidyalaya, Delhi
"The word Hindudoes in no way denote a single sect having a monolithic structure. It is a conglomeration of more than a hundred sects. Ideologically, the BJP thinks that if these hundred and more sects can not divide the so-called Hindu society, then why cannot only four or five other sects, namely Muslims, Christians, etc., be part of that larger society? Why should they be treated or thought of differently? The BJP wants that the constitution, law and politicians should stop talking in terms of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, etc. Instead they should think in terms of one Indian society as such."

Pramod Tyagi
31, Former Spokesman, Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee
"If the BJP lasted for one year, we would see a significant decline in the Hindu fundamentalism which the party has used as a means to come to power. Hindu-Muslim relationships will also improve. If the BJP lasted for five years, then the Hindutva factor would go into the background, because you cannot keep talking about religion for years together."

Swami Kaivalyananda

Panmana Ashram, Kerala

"I observe that the poor and lower caste people are repeatedly indoctrinated by others, including Hindus, that the BJP is a party of upper castes. The BJP and upper caste Hindus should develop a feeling in the minds of these people that their fellow brethren Hindus would ensure their security, prosperity and well being. Then only the BJP would be able to win their hearts and the mass support of the lower caste people."

G.V. Rao
Economist, Delhi

"I do not think that they are going to be very different from centrists like Congress. We have seen a BJP government in several states. Did you find any difference? Vajpayee is a liberal democrat."

Dr. Rajni Tandon
Educationalist, Secretary, Temple of Understanding India, Delhi

"It is very difficult to say how they will shape up. Maybe they are very sincere. I believe in the broad, tolerant Sanatana Dharma. The change we require is very big. We expect dignity, self-respect, local self-government, etc. A common civil code is required. I think all politicians require training."

Pramod Kumar Sharma
Joint-Secretary, Uttar Pradesh Youth Congress, Meerut

"The orthodox members of the Hindu community will think that they are the owners and will try to dictate terms to others. Muslims do feel insecure."

Rajiv Jain
Media Expert
"A BJP government could incite an aggressive mode of Hindu philosophy and act as an outlet for the pent-up feelings of a large number of Hindus who often in the past had to be tolerant. However, once in power, the BJP will realize that in a truly democratic setup, no party can rule with arrogance. They would become moderate and more tolerant toward minorities."

Bharat J. Gajjar
}Retired textile consultant, Delaware, USA
"Western countries need secular government as Christians in the past persecuted the minorities. But Hindus have always respected all religions and history proves it. Hindus can't be non-secular."

P.M. Mathew
Retired college teacher, Pathanamthitta, Kerala
"Christianity and Islam came to India first and they flourished here under the care of the Hindu kings. Even churches and mosques were built by those kings for them. That is the hospitality, tolerance and generosity of the Hindus."

Sri Suresh
Salesman, Ernakulam, Kerala
"Those in Congress and other parties know very well that if the BJP is allowed to rule for five years, their propaganda will prove to be false and none of these parties would be able to return. India's majority intelligentsia is with the BJP, and hence they are more disciplined, cultured, educated and matured."

Pran Nath
70, Retired Government Servant, Member, RSS, Delhi
"The BJP rule for the first time in our country is a matter of joy and jubilation for the majority of Hindus. Hindus and their institutions will now get impetus and satisfaction of working to their best interest without any impediment from the government."

Anonymous Hindu priest
Kerala
"A BJP rule would help build the image of Hinduism and Hindus. But it has to erase the idea created in the minds of the Muslims and the Christians that the BJP is for their annihilation. It will be an uphill task and require grassroot level operations."

Interview reports by Rajiv Malik and M.P. Mohanty, New Delhi; Choodie Shivaram, Bangalore; R.G. Zawar, Bombay; Ashok Kumar Sharma, Ujjain and Vrindavanam Gopalakrishnan, Cochin.