



## Electoral performance of the Bharatiya Janata party: 1998 parliamentary election

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### Abstract

The twelfth Lok Sabha elections failed to produce a significant verdict in favor of any political party. The 1998 parliamentary elections were held in air of political uncertainty in the country (resulted with withdrawal of the Congress support from the United Front government) with the emergence of 'multiparty system'. The present work has been devoted on the electoral performance of the BJP in this election when it emerged as the largest political party on the national political scene. A detailed analysis has been carried out in terms of percent votes, seats won and seats contested by the BJP in this election. An attempt also has been made to find the reasons behind the advancements made by the BJP in this election.

**Keywords:** Lok Sabha elections, political party, 'multiparty system', BJP

### Introduction

The 1998 parliamentary elections had added some new dimensions to the Indian political party structure. One was the emergence of what Wallace had termed as "bi-modal, multiparty system" (Wallace, P. 1999) [3]. The country had now two major or national political parties maneuvering within a large vortex of small regional parties. Neither of the major parties -the BJP and the Congress- emerged close to a majority in the Lok Sabha. Two, the circumstances under which the BJP was treated as a communal party had changed a lot in 1998. Consequently, it was able to make pre and post election alliances in different parts of the country.

The twelfth Lok Sabha elections of 1998 failed to produce a decisive verdict in favor of any political party. However, the BJP with 182 seats (from 161 in 1996) and 25.59 percent vote had emerged as the largest political party on the national political scene. The Congress, on the other hand, had appeared to revitalize after a steady decline until the 1998 elections. The party seat tally improved from 140 seats in 1996 to 141 seats in 1998.

From the mid 1997, there was an air of political uncertainty in the country and withdrawal of the Congress support from the United Front government became certain. It "eventually happened in November, when it was alleged that there were links between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) and DMK party (a member of United Front coalition) around the time of assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, in which LTTE was implicated. The Congress had called for the DMK's removal from United Front, but the coalition was unwilling to accede to this request" (Abid, Mohammad, 2004) [1]. Without the Congress support, the United Front government led by I. K. Gujaral fell on November 28, 1997. The house was dissolved and fresh elections were announced by the then President of India (K. Narayanan) on December 04, 1997.

In its election manifesto for the 1998 elections, the BJP remained committed to its core demands of building a temple

at Ayodhya; the abrogation of Article 370 of the constitution; introduction of a uniform civil code; the abolition of the Minorities' Commission, and a total ban on cow slaughter and beef exports. However, it quickly moderated this impassioned statement of constructing a temple at Ayodhya by promising "consensual, legal, constitutional means to facilitate the construction of the Ram Mandir. It is also stated that it might drop some of the demands in its election manifesto once elected" (Basu, Amrita, 2000) [6]. And it did so after the elections. Just prior to taking office in March 1998, the BJP sought "to accommodate its coalition partners by publishing a national agenda" (Basu, Amrita, 2000) [6] from which controversial issues of temple, the Uniform Civil Code, and Kashmir's special constitutional status were omitted.

In the period prior to 1998 elections, the BJP leadership tried not to use its *Hindutva* platform during the campaign. Contentious issues were kept aside by senior leaders and there was an emphasis on economics issues such as *Swadeshi*. The party put forth Atal Bihari Vajpayee, perceived as the moderate face of the BJP, as its prime ministerial candidate. The party entered the fray with two major planks – better governance and stable government. 'Able Prime Minister and Stable Government' was its slogan. "The Ram Temple demand was hardly audible. Although leaders like Uma Bharti kept emphasizing such demand ... the official party position remained one for the construction of the Ram Temple through political and judicial means. Although Advani mentioned that 'Cultural Nationalism' would continue to be the party's guiding principle, in the Bhubaneswar conclave of the BJP held in December 1997, he did not even utter the word (*Hindutva*)" Ghosh, Partha S., 1999) [7]. Vajpayee himself gave speeches in major towns of Uttar Pradesh in late January, however, "he made no reference to the Ayodhya temple issue" (Pai, Sudha, 2001) [5].

The BJP's efforts to moderate its ideology after the elections were highlighted even at the time of party's April 1998 National Executive meeting in New Delhi. The party members

were asked to shelve the core idea of Hindutva in the interests of producing a stable coalition government and creating a “new softer, BJP”. It was made clear to the members that henceforth stability would be more important than any ideological issue and the national agenda, the BJP had formed with allies, would prevail over its own election manifesto. Advani’s speech changed “the party’s definition of nationalism-until now synonymous with Hindutva and building of a Hindu Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, to one of building a “Rashtra Mandir” (National temple), meaning creating a prosperous and secure country for all citizens” (Pai, Sudha, 2001)<sup>[5]</sup>.

This change in the thinking of the BJP was its realization regarding the limits of the Hindutva card and importance of alliance with strong regional parties. The party had still the memories of humiliation of being in office for only 13 days. This was because, apart from its few pre-election allies, no other party was prepared to provide support in the Lok Sabha. To avoid the recurrence, the party vigorously searched for its allies prior to 1998 elections. The party in the context of the Hindutva card had realized that “the maximum political and electoral mileage that the card could offer had been obtained which was, however, not enough to bring the party to power single handed. With this in mind, the party had entered into electoral alliances with several regionally important parties. The idea was to enter the politics of those regions where the BJP still mattered little” (Ghosh, Partha S., 1999)<sup>[7]</sup>. In South India, barring Kerala, the party made electoral alliances in all the three remaining states of Andhra Pradesh (alliance was struck after the election), Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In east, it did similar exercises in Orissa and West Bengal. In Bihar, it had already entered into an alliance with the Samata Party. In west, its alliance was with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. In north, it entered into alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab and the Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) in Haryana. The joining of Ramakrishna Hegde’s Lok Shakti Party in Karnataka with the BJP was a big boost for the latter which had already gained a foothold in the states politics. In West Bengal, after some initial problems, the party entered into an electoral alliance with the Trinamul Congress led by Mamta Banerjee. In Orissa, the BJP’s alliance partner was the BJD (Biju Janata Dal) led by Naveen Patnaik. Besides various electoral alliances the party had in this election, the party was also benefited by the split in the Janata Dal and its decline in almost every part of the country.

While in the north-eastern states on the one hand, the party tried to enter into electoral alliances with regionally strong political parties, on the other hand, it also concentrated its efforts to woo the Muslims and the dalits. “The party established contacts with Muslim leaders, decided to give more tickets to Muslim candidates and even went to extent of promising some Masjids in Andhra Pradesh” (Ghosh, Partha S., 1999)<sup>[7]</sup>. The results of the 1998 elections went the BJP way. It increased its seats tally (from 161 to 182) and votes polled (from 20.29 percent to 25.59) a gain of 21 seats and 5.3 percent vote. More importantly, “with its tactical alliances, it not only succeeded in gathering complementary support for the party but, as CSDS survey data suggests, it also consolidated its position among the voters who turned towards it in search of an alternative to the Congress. Despite Sonia

Gandhi’s influence in arresting further desertions from amongst its traditional supporter’s, i.e., Muslims, dalits and tribals, the share of the Congress vote came down from 28.8 percent in 1996 to 25.82 percent in 1998 although it got almost the same number of seats (140 in 1996 and 141 in 1998) in the Lok Sabha. This confirms the argument that the BJP made further inroads into the Congress Party’s upper caste and class support bases” (Singh, V.B., 2004)<sup>[2]</sup>.

After taking office, the BJP and its allies released a policy outline, “stressing the need for stable honest, transparent and efficient government. The Vajpayee government had maintained that it was committed to keep India a secular state and to improve its social and physical infrastructure. The Government also stressed that it would strive to secure India a role in the global arena consistent with its size and capability and that it would promote peaceful relationship with all its neighbours. India’s testing of nuclear devices was a step in that direction” (Abid, Mohammad, 2004)<sup>[1]</sup>.

The seat adjustments provided the BJP with crucial seats from its allies in regions where it formerly had no base. The party’s pre and post-election coalition alliances enabled it to achieve a majority in the Lok Sabha. “The party enjoyed 21, 30 and 6 seats from its pre-poll allies in the northern, southern and western regions respectively. Following the elections, the BJP gained the support of four regional parties- the most important being the Telegu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh led by Chandra Babu Naidu- formerly a strong constituent of the UF- and a few Independents, which added 22 seats and a slender majority in the parliament to the BJP-led coalition” (Pai, Sudha, 2001)<sup>[5]</sup>.

With increasing number of regional formations and smaller parties in the 1998 Lok Sabha, the BJP had to lead an even bigger coalition (with 18 allies) than the earlier United Front government. When the BJP and its allies assumed office “there was little to hold them together except the tenuous ‘national agenda’ for governance. So right from the first day, the alliance had been subjected to ill-concealed tensions with the coalition partners openly confronting and challenging each other. Dealing with these allies was a challenge of varying dimensions for the BJP” (Appaiah, Parvathi, 2003)<sup>[4]</sup>. One such dimension was also reflected in the party-wise representation in the 1998 ministry.

As no alliance could gain an absolute majority in the Parliament, the President invited Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the leader of the BJP, to form the government and win a vote of confidence. On 19 March 1998, Vajpayee was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India. With the support of TDP from outside, the BJP got 273 votes in favour as against the opposition’s 261 votes, which helped the Vajpayee government to sail comfortably through the confidence vote on 28 March 1998. The major aspect of the 1998 election was undoubtedly the recognition by most political parties, the importance of electoral alliances which subsequently strengthened a range of regional political formations.

#### **Seats Contested by the BJP in 1998**

In 1998, the parliamentary elections were held on 543 seats. The BJP had fielded its candidates on 388 seats and 182 were returned to their seats. In this election, the party had gained 21 more seats than the preceding election.

In this parliamentary election, the party had contested all the seats in the states and union territories of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Goa, Daman & Diu, Kerala and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Besides, it had also contested 82 seats (out of 85) in Uttar Pradesh, 38 seats (out of 42) in Andhra Pradesh, 32 seats (out of 54) in Bihar, 25 seats (out of 48) in Maharashtra, 18 seats (out of 28) in Karnataka, 14 seats (out of 42) in West Bengal, 9 seats (out of 21) in Orissa, 6 seats (out of 10) in Haryana, 5 seats (out of 39) in Tamil Nadu, 3 seats (out of 13) in Punjab and 1 seat (out of 2) in Manipur (Table 1).

The party had not contested the elections in the states and union territories of Sikkim, Nagaland, Pondicherry and Lakshadweep.

The spatial patterns of the seats contested by the party in 1998 election and its comparison with 1996 election indicates that

1. The image of the party as a real all India formation which started to build in the preceding parliamentary election of 1996 lost its vigour in this election. From 471 seats in 1996, the party contested only 388 seats in this election
2. The decrease in the number of seats contested by the party was more noticeable in southern and eastern parts of the country. In South Indian States from 124 seats (out of the total 132 seats) in 1996 election, the party had fielded its candidates only on 82 seats in 1998 election. Maximum change was noticed in the state of Tamil Nadu where the party had contested only 5 seats from 37 seats in 1996. In the Eastern States, maximum decrease in seats contested was noticed in the states of West Bengal (from 42 to 14) and Orissa (20 to 9).
3. Although this decrease in the number of seats contested by the party was mainly due to the alliances made by the party in different states (AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, the Lok

Shakti in Karnataka, the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the Biju Janata Dal in Orissa and the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal, Samata Party in Bihar and Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab) but certainly it shows the incapability of the party in terms of contesting elections on its own;

4. In addition to North-Eastern States and Andhra Pradesh in the south, a consistency is being noticed in terms of seats contested by the party in the region to the north of vindhayas, the eastern boundary of which is marked by the eastern boundaries of the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
5. Out of the total 384 seats contested by the party in 1998, 376 were those seats contested by it in 1996 election also.

#### Votes Polled by the BJP in 1998

The party had polled 25.59 percent vote in this election, and recorded a swing of 5.3 percent in its favour than the preceding elections. The states and union territories recorded maximum gains in percent vote for the party were Goa (+16.29%), Andhra Pradesh (+12.65%), Himachal Pradesh (+11.81%), Dadra & Nagar Haveli (+11.31%), Andaman & Nicobar Islands (+ 11.28%), Jammu & Kashmir (+9.6%), Assam (+8.55%) and Orissa (+7.77%) (Table 1).

The average vote for the party was 36.26 percent. There were eleven states (Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu) and four union territories (Chandigarh, Delhi, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu), where the party had polled above its national average.

In this election, among all the national political parties, the BJP ranked second in terms of votes received (marginally below than the Congress) and first in terms of seats won (Table 2).

**Table 1:** Electoral Performance of BJP, 1998 Indian Parliamentary Elections

Sr. No.	State / U.T.	Seats			Votes Polled (%)	Swing in Votes Polled (%)
		Total	Contested	Won		
1	Jammu & Kashmir	6	6	2	28.64	9.6
2	Himachal Pradesh	4	4	3	51.43	11.81
3	Punjab	13	3	3	11.67	5.19
4	Chandigarh	1	1	1	42.36	3.31
5	Haryana	10	6	1	18.89	-0.85
6	Delhi	7	7	6	50.73	1.13
7	Uttar Pradesh	85	82	57	36.49	3.05
8	Madhya Pradesh	40	40	30	45.73	4.41
9	Bihar	54	32	20	24.03	3.49
10	Orissa	21	9	7	21.19	7.77
11	West Bengal	42	14	1	10.2	3.32
12	Sikkim	1	-	-	-	-
13	Arunachal Pradesh	2	2	-	21.75	4.34
14	Assam	14	14	1	24.47	8.55
15	Meghalaya	2	2	-	9.01	-0.12
16	Nagaland	1	-	-	-	-
17	Manipur	2	1	-	12.61	7.36
18	Mizoram	1	1	-	2.94	-
19	Tripura	2	2	-	8.19	1.59
20	Rajasthan	25	25	5	41.65	-0.71
21	Gujarat	26	26	19	48.28	-0.24
22	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	1	1	1	53.73	11.31

23	Maharashtra	48	25	4	22.49	0.68
24	Goa	2	2	-	30.04	16.34
25	Daman & Diu	1	1	1	41.96	1.51
26	Karnataka	28	18	13	26.95	2.1
27	Andhra Pradesh	42	38	4	18.3	12.65
28	Kerala	20	20	-	8.02	2.41
29	Tamil Nadu	39	5	3	6.86	3.93
30	Pondicherry	1	-	-	-	-
31	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1	1	-	35.53	11.28
32	Lakshadweep	1	-	-	-	-
	All India	543	388	182	25.59	5.3

**Table 2:** Performance of National Parties in 1998 Parliamentary Elections

Party	Seats		Votes Polled (%)
	Contested	Won	
BJP	388	182	25.59
INC	477	141	25.82
CPM	71	32	5.16
SAP	57	12	1.76
CPI	58	9	1.75
JD	191	6	3.24
BSP	251	5	4.67

The state-wise percent vote data indicates, that the party had some meaningful support in the states & union territories of Dadra & Nagar Haveli (53.73%), Himachal Pradesh (51.43%), Delhi (50.73%), Gujarat (48.28%), Madhya Pradesh (45.73%), Chandigarh (42.36%), Daman & Diu (41.96%), Rajasthan (41.65%), Uttar Pradesh (36.49%) and Andaman & Nicobar Islands (35.53%). The party continues to be a marginal force in Tamil Nadu (6.86 percent) and Kerala (8.02 percent) in south; West Bengal (10.2 percent) in east, and Mizoram (2.94 percent), Tripura (8.19 percent), Meghalaya (9.01 percent) and Manipur (12.61 percent) in the north-east (Table 3).

The spatial patterns of the vote for the party clearly indicates that majority of the constituencies where it had polled 40 percent and more in 1998 elections remained consistent to the vote patterns of the party in 1996 elections. It was, however, with some additional gains for the party in Himachal Pradesh; Utrakhhand, western UP and Poorvanchal regions of Uttar Pradesh; southern Bihar; northern and western Orissa; Chhattisgarh and Vindhya Pradesh of Madhya Pradesh; eastern Rajasthan and coastal Karnataka. Majority of the constituencies where the party had polled 40 percent and more vote were from Himachal Pradesh; Uttar Pradesh (barring central UP and Rohilkhand); southern Bihar; Madhya Pradesh; Rajasthan; Gujarat; north Maharashtra and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra; northern Orissa and south-western Karnataka.

The constituency-wise analysis of vote percentage for the party shows that of the total 56 constituencies (35 in 1996) where it had polled above 50 percent, majority were from Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat (north and Saurashtra), Madhya Pradesh (Mahakoshal), Uttar Pradesh (Utrakhhand), Orissa (north and western parts) and Karnataka (coastal parts). Out of the total 124 constituencies (82 in 1996), where the party had polled between 40 to 50 percent, majority were from Chhattisgarh and western Madhya Bharat regions of Madhya

Pradesh (23), western UP and Poorvanchal regions of Uttar Pradesh (21), southern Bihar (18), Rajasthan (13), Kutch, Saurashtra and north Gujarat regions of Gujarat (10), north and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra (14) and coastal and southern Karnataka (8). Of the total 110 constituencies (109 in 1996), where the party's vote share was between 30 to 40 percent, majority were from central Uttar Pradesh (50), eastern Bihar, central West Bengal, Vindhya Pradesh of Madhya Pradesh and Vidharabha and western regions of Maharashtra (Figure 1).

There were 35 constituencies (53 in 1996) scattered here and there, where the party's vote share was between 20 to 30 percent. Of this, 7 were from Andhra Pradesh, 6 from Assam, 5 each from Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, 3 each from Bihar and Rajasthan, 2 from Karnataka and 1 each from Haryana, Gujarat, Manipur and Goa (Table 5.11). In 29 constituencies (48 in 1996), the party had polled between 10 to 20 percent. Majority of such constituencies were from Assam and Telangana and Rayelseema regions of Andhra Pradesh (Figure 1).

There were 34 constituencies (144 in 1996), where the vote for the party was below 10 percent. Interestingly no constituency from the Hindi-speaking heartland falls in this vote category. In number, 16 such constituencies were from Kerala, 10 from Andhra Pradesh, 4 from Jammu & Kashmir, 2 from Tripura and 1 each from Meghalaya and Mizoram. In addition, in the state of Kerala, the party had polled less than 10 percent in 80 percent of the constituencies (Figure 1).

In this election, the BJP had polled 9,42,66,188 votes. There was an additional gain of 2,63,15,387 from what it was in 1996 (6,79,50,851). This all had happened despite the party contesting 83 less seats in 1998 (388) than in 1996 (471). In this election, the share of the Hindi-Speaking Heartland in the total vote polled by the party was 57.21 percent. It was 61.49 percent in 1996. The share of Uttar Pradesh in 1998 in the total votes polled by the party was 21.60 percent (22.64 percent in 1996). Out side the Hindi-Speaking belt, the main supporting areas for the party were Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The states of Gujarat and Maharashtra jointly contributed 15.85 percent in the total vote share polled by the party. In overall terms, the main supporting area for the party remained the Hindi-Speaking Heartland and Western States of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

#### Seats Won by the BJP in 1998

In this parliamentary election, the party had contested 388 seats and marked victory on 182 seats with 25.29 percent vote

of the electorate. In this election the party recorded a gain of 5.3 percent vote with 21 seats than the proceeding election. The party maintained its status of being the largest political party which it got in 1996 elections. The party got 41 more seats than the second ranked the Indian National Congress.

The spatial patterns of seats won by the party indicates that in addition to some victories here and there, the party had improved its seats tally in its traditional citadel of Hindi-Speaking Heartland, Gujarat and Karnataka (Figure 2). Out of the total 182 seats won by the party in this election, 57 were

from Uttar Pradesh, 30 from Madhya Pradesh, 20 from Bihar, 19 from Gujarat, 13 from Karnataka, 7 from Orissa, 6 from N.T.C. Delhi, 5 from Rajasthan, 4 each from Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, 3 each from Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu, 2 from Jammu & Kashmir and 1 each from Haryana, Chandigarh, West Bengal, Assam, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and Daman & Diu (Table 1). Barring Haryana, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, the party had recorded positive gains in terms of seats won in all the above mentioned states and union territories.

**Table 3:** Frequency Distribution of the BJP Vote, 1998 Parliamentary Elections

Sr. No.	State / U.T.	Percent Vote and no. of constituencies						Total Seats
		Below 10	10-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50 & Above	
1	Jammu & Kashmir	4	-	-	-	2	-	6
2	Himachal Pradesh	-	-	-	-	1	3	4
3	Punjab	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
4	Chandigarh	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
5	Haryana	-	1	1	4	-	-	6
6	Delhi	-	-	-	1	2	4	7
7	Uttar Pradesh	-	1	5	50	21	5	82
8	Madhya Pradesh	-	-	-	8	23	9	40
9	Bihar	-	-	3	7	18	4	32
10	Orissa	-	-	-	1	3	5	9
11	West Bengal	-	2	5	6	-	1	14
12	Sikkim	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13	Arunachal Pradesh	-	1	-	1	-	-	2
14	Assam	-	5	6	3	-	-	14
15	Meghalaya	1	1	-	-	-	-	2
16	Nagaland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
17	Manipur	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
18	Mizoram	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
19	Tripura	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
20	Rajasthan	-	-	3	6	13	3	25
21	Gujarat	-	-	1	5	10	10	26
22	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
23	Maharashtra	-	-	-	9	14	2	25
24	Goa	-	-	1	1	-	-	2
25	Daman & Diu	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
26	Karnataka	-	1	2	2	8	5	18
27	Andhra Pradesh	10	13	7	5	3	-	38
28	Kerala	16	4	-	-	-	-	20
29	Tamil Nadu	-	-	-	-	4	1	5
30	Pondicherry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
31	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
32	Lakshadweep	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	All India	34	29	35	110	124	56	388

In this election, the party failed to win even a single seat in the states and union territory of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Goa, Pondicherry, Lakshadweep, Kerala, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Figure 2).

In this election, the party improved its tally from the last election of 1996, in the states of Punjab (nil to 3) Himachal Pradesh (from nil to 3 seats), Uttar Pradesh (52 to 57), Bihar (18 to 20), Madhya Pradesh (27 to 30), Gujarat (16 to 19), Orissa (nil to 7), Karnataka (6 to 13), Andhra Pradesh (nil to 4), Tamil Nadu (nil to 3) and West Bengal (nil to one). On the other hand, the party recorded maximum losses in the states of Haryana (from 4 to one seat), Rajasthan (12 to 5) and

Maharashtra (18 to 4).

The rise of the BJP during the 1998 general elections was real but modest. First of all, “it was not an overall phenomenon since the party lost in most of the states where it was in power for some time, alone or in coalition – Rajasthan, Haryana and Maharashtra. In the former- which it conquered first in 1990 and again in 1993—it could retain only 5 of its 12 seats, while the Congress party staged a comeback. In Maharashtra, the BJP kept 4 of its 18 seats and the Shiv Sena 6 of its 15 seats, but both parties maintained their share of votes.

Second, the progress of the BJP was substantial, but limited. Interestingly, “the BJP did not make much progress in its northern and western strong holds where it has more or less

reached its saturation point” (Hansen in Hansen, T.B. and Jaffrelot, C. (eds.), 1998). In the Hindi-belt (Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi) it has won 123 seats, as against 119 in 1996. In its more recent Western conquests (Gujarat and Maharashtra) its tally was 23 seats, as against 34 seats in 1996. This was basically due to downfall of the party in Maharashtra from 18 seats in 1996 to 4 seats only in 1998.

The party’s gains had also come from East and South India where it used to be almost non-existent. The four Southern States have given the BJP 20 seats, as against 6 (all in Karnataka) in 1996. However, it was possible only because of the new alliances. The spatial patterns of the party victories in this election indicates that majority of the seats won by the party were from five states: viz. Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Karnataka. These states constitute more than 76% of the total seats won by the party in this election. The seats won for the party were basically from Jammu region of Jammu & Kashmir, northern Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttrakhand, western and Bundelkhand regions of Uttar Pradesh, southern and eastern Bihar, north-western and central southern Madhya Pradesh, Kutch, Saurashtra and north, Gujarat, north and south-western Orissa and coastal Karnataka (Figure 2).

The map showing the BJP victories clearly indicates that the party had won majority of seats (123 seats) from Hindi-Speaking States (Figure 2). The party had also won 23 seats from Western States, and showed its remarkable presence in Southern States by winning 20 seats in this election against the 6 seats in the 1996 election. In addition, the party remained stagnant with one seat in North-Eastern States as it was the case in the preceding elections.

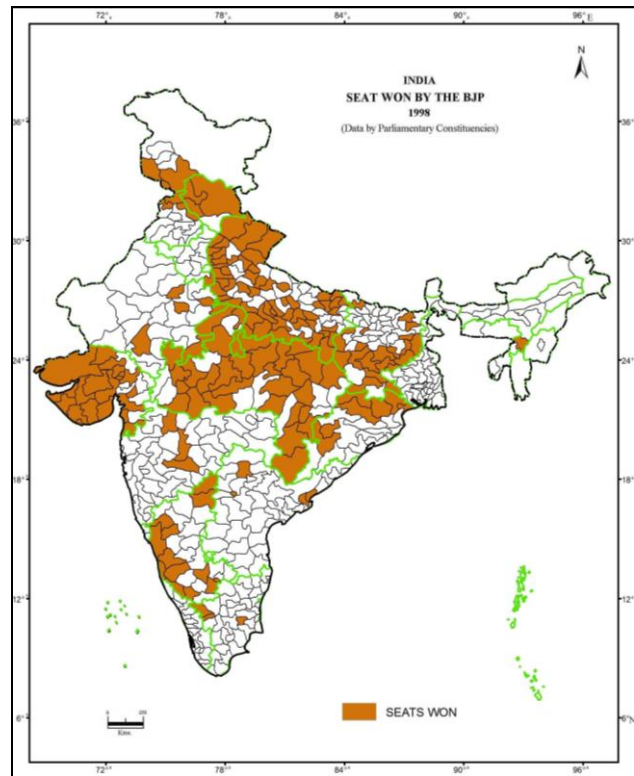


Fig 2

**Conclusion**

The 1998 elections were quite an impressive electoral show as far as the BJP was concerned. Although in this election, it had contested 83 seats less than what it was the case in 1996 but its performance in terms of percent votes polled, average vote share and seats won had advanced to a great extent. The percent vote polled by the party had increased from 20.29 percent in 1996 to 36.17 percent, which shows more vote per contested constituencies. The seats tally had also increased from 161 in 1996 to 182 in 1998. With this the BJP was not only able to maintain its position of being the largest political party but also widened the gap between it and the second ranked, the Congress. The gap between the two parties was of 21 seats in 1996 which rose to 41 seats in 1998. The BJP won 182 seats from those 376 constituencies contested by it in 1996 also. In rest of the 12 constituencies it failed to win any. In this election, there was an additional gain of 2,63,15,337 votes from what it was the case in 1996. Although attained declining trend, but the Hindi-Speaking States continues to be the hub of the party vote. The region contributed 57.21 percent of the total vote polled by the party in this election. Outside the Hindi belt, the main vote strength areas were Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka. In terms of seats won also the party won about 68 percent (123) seats from the Hindi Speaking States. In this election, however, the party by winning 20 seats had improved its position in South Indian States also. This was due to changed tactics adopted by the party in which it focused on local issues in the states and softened its stance on Hindutva. The party had gained further in the states of Gujarat.

The results have revealed that the BJP’s march on the centre stage of Indian politics had progressed. The party extended its

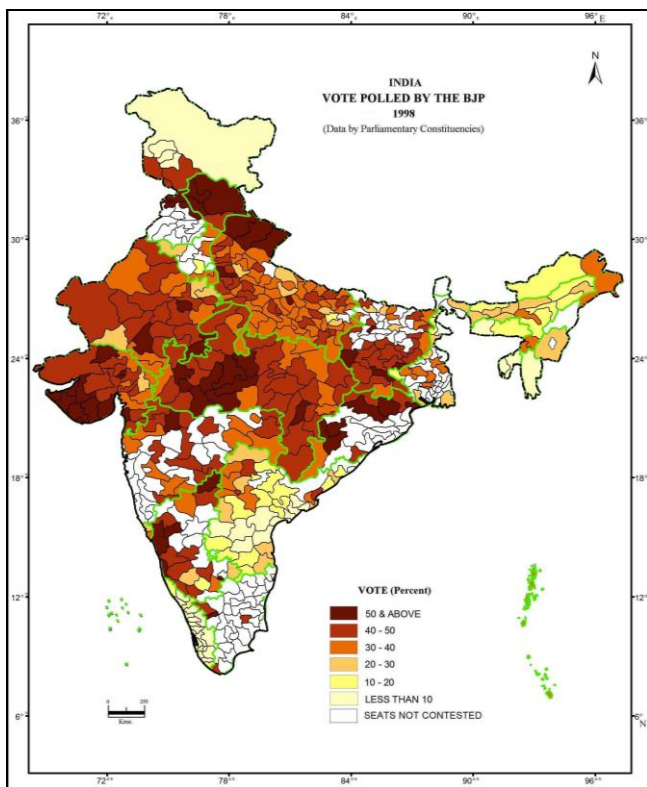


Fig 1

representation and support base with the help of its allies, convincingly “beyond the so-called cow belt and became a force to reckon with in all the four regions of India. Particularly significant was its growing presence in the politics of the eastern and southern regions” (Ghosh, Partha S., 1999) <sup>[7]</sup>. Moreover, “These shifts were paralleled by the break-up of the JD and the UF benefited the BJP particularly and to a lesser extent the INC” (Pai, Sudha, 2001) <sup>[5]</sup>.

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