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# Hindu is as Hindu does, but does Modi?

## Synopsis

This is the in-your-face avatar of the Hindu right that now seeks to dominate national discourse and drown out voices that seem moderate.



**Chaitanya Kalbag**

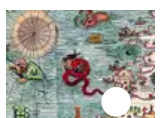
It was a very [Hindu](#) week, starting with [Raksha Bandhan](#) and ending with Janmashtami, and midway through we were treated to fireworks by Yogi Adityanath, the bold new face of the Bharatiya Janata Party. A five-time member of the Lok Sabha from Gorakhpur, he was just 26 when he won his first parliamentary seat in 1998. His popularity has grown with every election. In 2004 he won with a margin of 142,039 votes; in 2009, by 220,271 votes; and in May this year, he defeated his nearest rival by 312,783 votes. He is the successor

at the Gorakhnath Math to Mahant Avidyanath, also a four-term MP and former Hindu Mahasabha chief who played a major role in the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Adityanath is also the founder of the Hindu Yuva Vahini, a social and cultural organisation that promotes Hindutva and nationalism. He was briefly detained in connection with the 2007 Gorakhpur riots.

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Why am I introducing this shaven-headed, ochre-robed firebrand in such detail? Because on August 13 he led the BJP response in a Lok Sabha debate on rising communal violence in the country to the applause of his party.

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Hindu is as Hindu does, but does Modi?

accused unnamed political opponents of being communal, turning a blind eye to perceived violence against Hindus across the nation, of going easy on prosecutions of terrorists, and of a string of hypocrisies. He alleged that his foes were out to break up India at Pakistan's behest, adding that Hindus were coming together to resist this conspiracy of non-believers and apostates, "their faces...coloured by communal violence, by a communal agenda". Several MPs from different opposition parties stood up to protest, but Adityanath barrelled on, saying Assam's Congress government had coddled Bangladeshi infiltrators to alter the demography of the North-east. Deputy Speaker M. Thambidurai promised to expunge the more incendiary parts of Adityanath's speech, but you cannot erase it from the Internet, and the yogi's own website is replete with videos of his rabble-rousing oratory.

This is the in-your-face avatar of the Hindu right that now seeks to dominate national discourse and drown out voices that seem moderate – like that of Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#). Two days after Adityanath's tirade, Modi struck a more conciliatory note on Independence Day, speaking out against violence and intolerance. "Even after Independence, we have had to face the poison of casteism and communalism. How long will these evils continue? Whom does it benefit? We have had enough of fights, many have been killed," Modi said, pleading "let's put a moratorium on all such activities for ten years".

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Modi said several interesting things in his unscripted speech. He spoke like a man aware of the surrealism of his vast new power but also eager to put his stamp on history. He decried the self-serving politics and fiefdoms of Delhi ("It seemed as if dozens of separate governments are running at the same time in one main government") and the things that hold us back from being a great manufacturer and exporter, creating goods and skills and jobs. Instead of preaching to daughters and mothers, Modi urged parents to rein in their sons – a refreshing way to look at sexual violence from the other end of the telescope. As I [predicted six weeks ago](#), he announced that he would bury the Planning Commission and replace it with a new institution that will also seek to more actively involve state chief ministers in economic strategy. Modi has called for ideas from citizens on the mygov.in portal which has been set up to push inclusive governance, and people are responding with suggestions for a name for the new body, even some logo designs. Also as I predicted [Modi declared war on poverty](#) and launched the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana, promising a bank account and minimal insurance for every family.

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It was an uplifting speech without bulletproof glass from a man with the common touch who relishes mingling with crowds and pressing the flesh. As ever, incorrigible India responded to his call for cleanliness by leaving the Red Fort grounds littered with garbage. Twelve weeks into his term, Modi dominates debate and policymaking – witness his swift retaliation, [echoing my July 31 column](#) on a tougher foreign policy, to the Pakistani High Commissioner's meetings with Kashmir separatists.

But Modi's alma mater, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, is uneasy about the personality cult that it fears could grant the prime minister a stature that

its flat structure abhors. The BJP's new president Amit Shah ended his inaugural speech to party members on August 9 by quoting the RSS's second *Sarsanghchalak* M.S. Golwalkar as saying that if they worked together, "*vijay hi vijay hai*" (there will be nothing but victory). Shah followed this up by naming several RSS stalwarts to top BJP posts. And two days before Adityanath spoke in the Lok Sabha, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat told an audience in Bhubaneswar that the BJP had won the election because the people wanted change, not because they wanted a particular party or individual. Speaking allegorically, he warned in earthy Hindi that people who are flying high will have to come down to earth. "*Chidiya ude kitnon akash, chara hai mati ke pas* (however many skies the bird flies in, its food will be on the ground)," Bhagwat said. Whose wings does he want to clip?

*The author is former Reuters Asia Editor.*

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(Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this column are that of the writer. The facts and opinions expressed here do not reflect the views of [www.economictimes.com](http://www.economictimes.com).)

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