

BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY

# Gilding An Image

**A**LL GOOD Hindus hope to reincarnate as better Hindus, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will be celebrating its second birthday on April 5 with the conviction that it is well on the way to establishing itself as a "national alternative". More than anything else, a strident section in the party is anxious to shed its old ideological and doctrinaire fat, and to convince people that it has changed a lot from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh.

The BJP is therefore trying to metamorphose into a coolly professional electoral organisation, and it has embarked on an ambitious three-pronged campaign to re-

now become available to the press, and provide a rare insight into the BJP's reorganisation plans. The central strategy document, written by an anonymous author, 'D.N.', homes in on the imperatives of electoral success—the corner-stone of the party's plans. "A myth was built up," says D.N., "that the only honest politician is one who does not seek power. This myth grew and it has reached a stage where many BJP politicians believe that renunciation is the only sure sign of sincerity."

INDIA TODAY has learnt that this keynote paper was prepared at the Deen Dayal Research Institute in Delhi, which has emer-

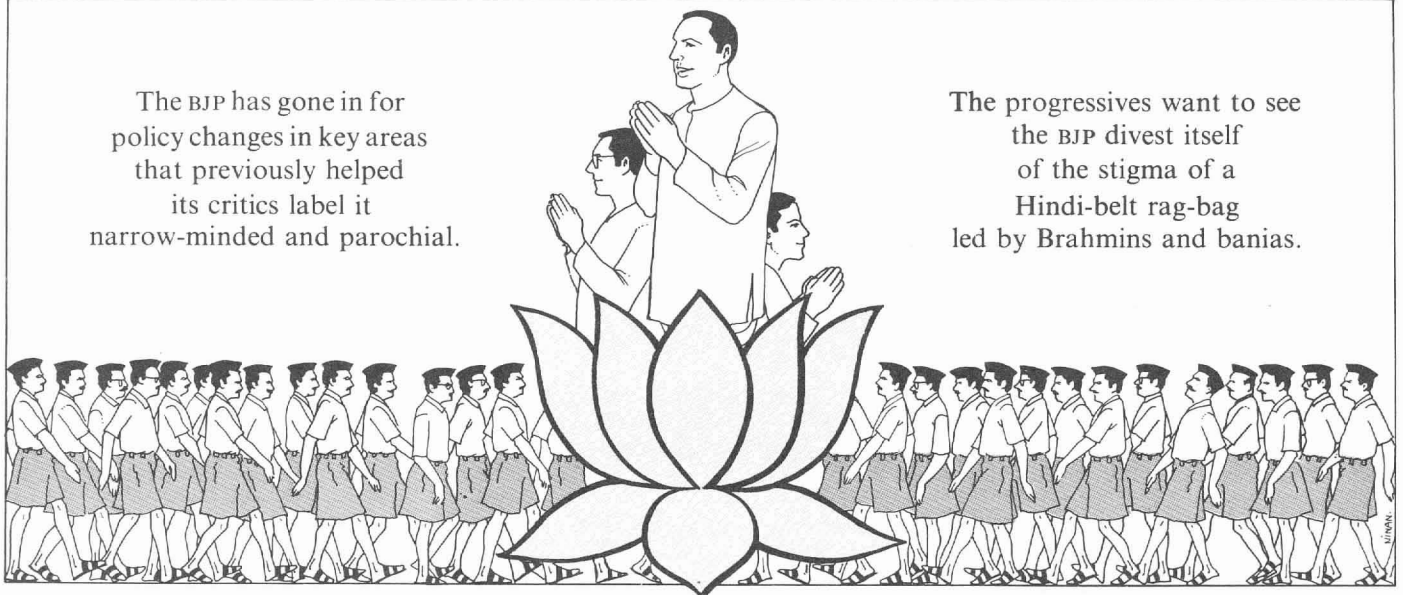
between this and the Integral Humanism that Deen Dayal Upadhyay formulated."

**Surprising Shift:** The second major shift is in foreign policy. The BJP, in its recent policy statements, has come out strongly in favour of friendship with Pakistan, and rapprochement with China. "You could say we sound almost pro-Pakistan," says Vice-President Ram Jethmalani. "But this is because of Atalji's influence. Our perceptions underwent a change when we were in power, for as foreign minister Atalji dealt with the Pakistan issue on a wider plane." This is surprising, because the Jana Sangh was, throughout its 25-year existence, vociferously anti-Pakistan. But partymen now hasten to clarify that the Jana Sangh was formed barely five years after Partition, when the wounds were still fresh.

The third major shift is on the question of nuclear weapons. "In our Jana Sangh days," says party Chief Whip in the Rajya Sabha Jagdish Prasad Mathur, "we were strongly in favour of India's possessing an atom bomb. Now we don't. Call it dilution of our policy, or compromise, or what you will." Jethmalani adds that the BJP has now realised the value of friendship with Pakistan and the fact that India's defence budget is "stunting economic progress".

There has been a change on the Kashmir question, too. Party ideologue Sunder Singh Bhandari says: "There was a time when we were agitating for the repeal of

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bish its image and 'modernize' its approach. Electorally, its strategy is to establish dominance over all other opposition parties, even in areas where the Jana Sangh never gained a foothold. It has launched a public relations blitz aimed at convincing both the public and a sceptical press that it is a high-profile party that considers activism its forte and secularism its credo. And organisationally, the BJP is overhauling its entire infrastructure

**Select Gathering:** These changes were mooted in documents given to participants at the party's first National Study Camp, held at Vrindavan, Mathura, from September 19-22 last year. Circulated among a select gathering of 200 delegates, the documents chalk out every component of the party's strategy for the future. They have only just

ged as a sort of BJP ideological think-tank under the stewardship of former party general secretary Nanaji Deshmukh. Together, the Vrindavan papers read more like a management course's term-papers, and are very candid in their examinations of the party's internal dynamics—and weaknesses.

What is most significant is that the BJP has gone in for policy changes in key areas that previously helped its critics label it narrow-minded and parochial. For instance, it has adopted 'Gandhian Socialism' as its political philosophy. But its spokesmen are quick to point out that socialism does not mean the "faceless centralisation of a Communist-style regime". Says party President Atal Behari Vajpayee: "We are carrying on an intensive campaign to educate our workers and to tell them that there is no difference

ferously anti-Pakistan. But partymen now hasten to clarify that the Jana Sangh was formed barely five years after Partition, when the wounds were still fresh.

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There has been a change on the Kashmir question, too. Party ideologue Sunder Singh Bhandari says: "There was a time when we were agitating for the repeal of

Article 370, which gives special status to Kashmir. Now we are not." There are few explanations for these major policy changes except for the argument that the BJP has "matured", but Jethmalani says: "I think it is the influence of the people who joined the BJP after 1980, and who were neither in the Jana Sangh nor the Rashtriya Swyamsewak Sangh (RSS)." Another leader says the BJP's framework of perceptions, except for its economic policy, are modelled primarily on the Janata Party manifesto of 1977.

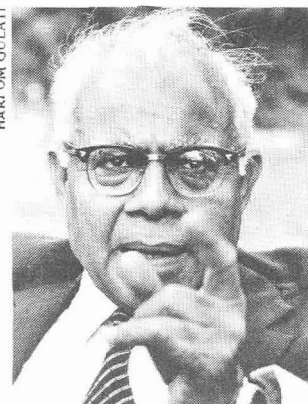
**Action Fronts:** Many of the policies formulated at Vrindavan were endorsed by the party's National Executive when it met at Bhubaneswar from February 13 to 15, and action has already been launched on various fronts. Although the Jana Sangh had conducted similar study camps, their proceedings remained secret. The decision to give the press access to the Vrindavan papers came from Vajpayee. By last fortnight, the party had set up cells to handle propaganda and publicity, its anti-corruption drive, and the minorities. It is shortly going to set up an economic cell headed by Satish Agarwal, who is currently chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament.

But these changes cannot exert much impact unless the BJP convinces the country that it is in fact evolving. Its most important thrust, therefore, is in the field of propaganda. Mathur is in charge of this prestigious cell, and has enthusiastically set out to capture the hearts and minds of his countrymen. His Vrindavan paper spells out in painstaking detail the wooing of the Fourth Estate (see box). An integral part of the media blitz is the proposed launch of two fortnightlies, in English and Hindi, "to serve as documentation of party activity and ideological pronouncements". The Hindi magazine, says Mathur, should be out by April 15.

**A**LL this effort is aimed at projecting the party as the alternative to the Congress(I). Since its formation in 1980, the BJP has gained considerable leeway

in Kerala, and is "successfully carving out a niche" for itself in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. "My meetings in the south are heavily attended," says Vajpayee. "Two years back this was unthinkable. But organisationally we are not strong in the south, we need to channelise people's enthusiasm."

Vajpayee expects the party to sweep Himachal Pradesh and do well in Haryana at the Assembly polls this summer and present a challenge to the Congress(I) in the 1985 general elections. Convinced that the BJP is the only disciplined and cadre-based party in the country apart from the CPI-M the Vrindavan strategy paper harangues party workers into positive vote-gathering attitudes. "We as an organisation suffer from mental blocks," it says. "Our workers have the makings of organisers and not



HARI OM GULATI



PRAMOD PISHKARNA

Jethmalani and (right) Gupta: pushing for change

activists."

Coupled with some very realistic assessments of other opposition parties, and the realisation that the BJP cannot hope to dislodge strong regional parties like the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu, the Akali Dal in Punjab and the National Conference in Kashmir, is the cynical and cold-blooded decision to "channelise discontent prevailing in different sections so as to win their support, and to cut

ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE

## The Struggle Within

**T**HE TROUBLE with Atal Behari Vajpayee, 55, is that he is too transparent. A rotund, dhoti-clad orator given to overheated rhetoric, Vajpayee's misfortune is that he heads a party consisting in large part of hard core adherents of the Rashtriya Swyamsewak Sangh (RSS), and he cannot conceal the fact that the RSS bit chafes. Ever since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was formed

on April 5, 1980, Vajpayee, its president, has been playing out a battle of wits with his opponents within the party. The battle will have no winners or losers—such is the character of the BJP and the men who make up its ranks. But its highs and lows have ruffled the party's facade of solidarity.

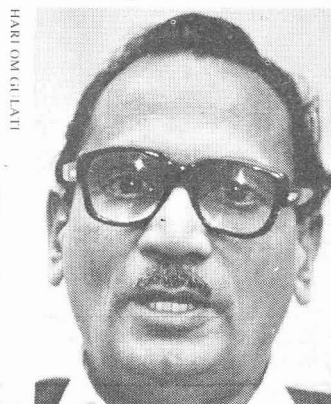
Vajpayee's differences, particularly with a powerful section of leadership led by General Secretary Lal Krishna

Advani and Vice-Presidents Vijaya Raje Scindia and S.S. Bhandari, surface with almost predictable regularity. Last fortnight he drew fire from his critics when he told a meeting in Andhra Pradesh's Telengana region that his party was prepared to cooperate with the Congress(I) Government if it came out with "viable programmes" for solving "burning problems" like unemployment.

**Opposing Renomination:** If that bordered on heresy, Vajpayee could hardly have endeared himself to the BJP's hardcore RSS files when the party was last month finalising candidates for the Rajya Sabha elections. Sources say that Vajpayee did not want Advani, who is projected as an alternative leader of the party, to get a ticket. According to these sources, Vajpayee opposed Advani's renomination for a third term on the ground that Pitamber Das, an ex-president of the Jana Sangh, was denied a third term in the Rajya Sabha in 1974. Ultimately, of course, Advani did obtain renomination, but the differences were once again out in the open.

Vajpayee himself denies that any rift

From left to right: Advani, Bhandari and Mathur: the old guard



HARI OM GULATI

separates him from other BJP leaders. "We are all like a family," he says, "and there is bound to be a little dissent in a democratic party. But we don't hush this up, and once a decision is reached by consensus, it is adhered to." Perhaps, but that is clearly much too convenient a way of explaining away the controversy which has dogged Vajpayee. Such as:

► At the party's first plenary session in December 1980, it took all of Vajpayee's persuasive powers to persuade Scindia to withdraw a memorandum she circulated opposing his proposal to adopt "Gandhian socialism".

► Nine months later, Advani and Vajpayee were on opposite sides of the fence when Vajpayee, advocating coalition government, admitted in a New York speech that no single party could form an alternative government in New Delhi. Advani and other hard liners believe it would be suicidal to try to make up with parties who in the past fought the party on the issue of "dual membership" of the BJP and RSS.

► At the BJP's national study camp for 200 select leaders at Vrindavan last year, Vajpayee's supporter Kanwarlal Gupta circulated a paper differing with Advani on the issue of cooperating with the Opposition.

► After the Sadhupur massacre, Vajpayee went on a much publicised *padayatra* from Dehuli to Sadhupur, asking Lok Dal leader Charan Singh to join him.

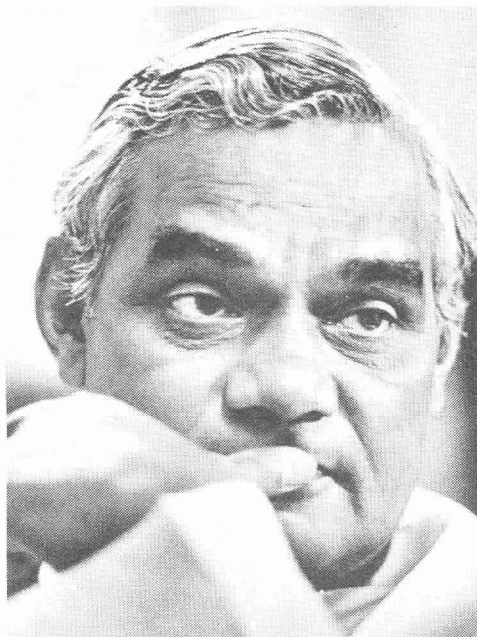
► Vajpayee shocked his BJP colleagues last year by suspending Dina Nath Pandey, a Bihar MLA of the BJP, after he was indicted by the Jitendra Narain commission looking into the Jamshedpur riots of April 1979. The suspension was revoked against Vajpayee's wishes after a three-member investigating team led by Ram Jethmalani decided that the commission report was false and biased.

Vajpayee retorts that he suspended Pandey "in order to respect the institution of enquiry commissions. I also wanted to signal to BJP workers that if they went astray they would be in for stern action."

**Criticism:** Vajpayee has erred, in his opponents' eyes, by not rejecting other opposition parties' unity moves outright. In December last year, he even allowed himself to be persuaded to host a dinner meeting with Lok Dal Chairman Charan Singh. At its last National Executive Committee meeting in Bhubaneswar on February 13, the party indirectly rebuked Vajpayee's proclivities by resolving to "retain its separate identity". It did fa-

vour "concerted action" by opposition parties inside and outside legislatures on specific issues, but went only so far as to endorse "electoral arrangements" with other parties.

Deep inside, however, Vajpayee represents the looming shadow of the RSS over the BJP. Privately, he has often argued that the BJP ought to have an independent political entity, with the RSS remaining discreetly in the background. His plight has been worsened by the animosity of two powerful men in the RSS leadership—Nanaji Deshmukh and Dattopant Thengadi. Deshmukh, who had himself



Vajpayee: battle of wits

fallen briefly out of favour with RSS bosses last year over his manner of operation as chairman of the Deen Dayal Research Institute, is reportedly back in the good books, and was invited to the annual meeting of the RSS Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha in Nagpur last week.

Nor is the RSS overly pleased with the minor personality cult growing around Vajpayee. He is peerless in the party in his crowd-gathering abilities. The strategy document of the BJP discussed at Vrindavan waxes eloquent over "Atalji's personal magnetism," and calls him "a charismatic leader whose popularity cuts across party, community and regional limits." Of late Vajpayee's public meetings have attracted crowds in lakhs in such diverse parts of the country as Bangalore and Varanasi. Paradoxically, the hard liners in the party—to say noth-

ing of the RSS—are not impressed. They would much rather see the BJP grow as a cadre-based outfit where the individual subserves ideology and organisation and not the other way around. In plain words, Vajpayee's public profile is too bold for their liking.

Yet Vajpayee's political survival depends totally on the BJP and its cadres. "That is why he will never quit the party," says a hard liner, "and will only make occasionally dissenting noises, much like the ineffectual rebellion of a Hindu wife against her tyrannical husband."

**Stern Disapproval:** These fissures in the BJP's leadership are nevertheless being viewed with stern disapproval by the chiefs of the RSS, more so because they are widening at a time when elections to at least half-a-dozen state Assemblies are in the offing. There is loud concern about the BJP's loss of ideological moorings. Critics in the RSS insist that after death of theoretician Deen Dayal Upadhyay, Vajpayee has frittered away much of the party's ideological base. The Vrindavan policy paper sums this up succinctly. "It must be admitted," it says, "that our principles and programmes do not generate high hopes. We have also suffered a setback on the ideological plane. The ideological temper which gave a sense of unity, a zeal to work, cohesion, commitment, devotion and sacrifice, we partly lost during the Janata period."

BJP propaganda chief Jagdish Prasad Mathur reinforces this prevailing feeling in the party when he says: "Advani and Bhandari are the only leaders of stature in our party now who play the role that Deen Dayalji used to fulfill. Vajpayee may not be in a position to do so—he may be a leader, but he cannot fill Deen Dayalji's shoes."

Currently, however, the BJP is riding a wave of optimism. Of the 12 Lok Sabha and 58 state Assembly by-elections it contested in 1980 and 1981, it won the prestigious Sagar Lok Sabha seat, and nine Assembly seats.

It is quite clear, therefore, that Vajpayee might dare to rock the BJP boat, but when the crunch comes he will never jump overboard. He cannot discard a system that gave birth to, and nurtured, his own political career. That is his predicament.

—CHAITANYA KALBAG

BHAVAN SINGH



them away from opponents”.

**Estimates:** Specifically, the BJP is now projecting itself as “an alternative party” in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi, “number two” in Gujarat, “fast coming up” in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, “damaged” because of the Janata experiment in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, “a complementary force” in Haryana, Kashmir and Punjab, “blessed with a large fund of goodwill” in Assam and Kerala, but “not even a number three force” in West Bengal and Orissa.

“There are various indicators which prove beyond doubt that we are the rising

force,” the strategy paper says, and goes on to give a state-wise breakdown of the number of Lok Sabha seats it can fight today, and the number of candidates it can hope to put up by 1985. In what closely resembles a flight of fancy, the strategy paper says the BJP would win 195 Lok Sabha seats if an election were held now, and by 1985 be in a position to win as many as 243 seats.

The strategists do not mention that the BJP's present strength in the Lok Sabha is 15. This is in sharp contrast to the Jana Sangh's high-water mark in the 1967 general elections, when it polled 9.41 per cent of the votes and gained 35 Lok Sabha

seats. In 1971 this dropped to 7.35 per cent and 22 seats. In 1980, the Janata (of which the Jana Sangh was still a constituent) polled 18.93 per cent of the votes.

**Optimistic Claims:** On this basis, the party projects its performance in 1985 at a percentage between 25 and 40. The strategists insist that “the ruling party is at best a stagnant party. The Left is confined in some areas and in their own struggles. The other forces are either under fear of total eclipse or striving for a mere existence”.

The Assembly elections, therefore, will serve the BJP as an important dress rehearsal for the big fight for Central power 34 months

## STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

# Pearls Of Wisdom

**T**HE Vrindavan papers make fascinating reading, especially for students of India's muddy political waters. Hectoring in tone at some places, cajoling at others, elucidating some point here or enunciating a point of dogma there, the papers make up a political primer that would qualify to rest on bookshelves alongside Muammar Qaddafi's Green Book and Mao Zedong's Red Book. Some excerpts from The Thoughts Of The Bharatiya Janata Party:

### On itself:

We are the only national alternative. Only our programme and policies can save this country; only our leaders are tested and trusted, only ours is a nationwide party. We work only up to 25 per cent of our capacity. What is needed is skill and ability and not merely numbers; power-oriented single-mindedness and determination to save the country.

We have reached the stage where our meetings are just comparable to the stage-managed meetings of Mrs Gandhi. We have to adopt a mixed strategy of building the power structure from the grass roots or constituency level, supplemented by machinations at the top.

Our action, propaganda, organisation, politics, programmes, agitation, ideas, symbols—everything should work in conformity with consolidating the strength of a national imperative, its image and its atmosphere.

### On other opposition parties:

Chandrajit Yadav, Jagjivan Ram and H.N. Bahuguna are individuals who style themselves as parties. They are poor imitations of Indira, as unscrupulous as she is but without any mass support.

The Janata Party too is a party of leaders only and it has no significant hold in any state, except to some extent in Gujarat.

The Lok Dal, of course, has four important state units, but backward class combination is waning.

There is besides us just one political group in the country—small in size and with a totally unacceptable ideology—who show adherence to political morality.

Extremist Naxalite groups are actively experimenting with (the concept of

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**national alternative...**

**We work only up to 25**

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a watchdog body) in remote corners of the country. The response that they get is unbelievable. People see in them honesty and morality.

### On propaganda:

Over 12 centuries ago a famous Latin (sic) philosopher, Lucretius, said: “Now then learn, how tenuous is the nature of an image.”

Keep up-to-date information about every important journalist in the area and cultivate intimate relations with each one. Even those who happen to be pronouncedly hostile should not be neglected.

Sub-editors working at the desk are

often left out of touch. They need to be assiduously cultivated.

A small cell should be set up at every press centre so as to utilise capabilities (of sympathetic journalists) by way of advice, collecting information and material. Existence of such a cell need not be made known to all and sundry.

If you... leak out a part of the total news and withhold the rest, it should be cleverly done to generate curiosity and heat in the press circles. The next instalment is likely to sell like hot cakes.

### On foreign policy:

India has to view with concern (the arms that Pakistan will receive), more so in view of the regrettable history of our past experiences.

China's innate suspicion of Soviet intentions, its aspirations towards a global power status and the regrettable history of its border conflicts with us have now to be seen in the changed light of its commitment to ‘modernize’ and the reduction, by a quarter, of its defence spending.

### On defence:

The BJP demands the institution of an in-house study with a view to modernizing our army.

While loath to commit India to a path of nuclear armament, the BJP reserves the right, however, to review this stand at any time in the light of changing world situations.

Recently a private survey conducted by a PR (public relations) individual of the Services shows that the party is liked by the Services for its discipline and that Atalji is the most popular leader in the eyes of the Services, next only to Mrs Gandhi.

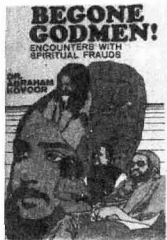
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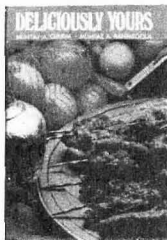


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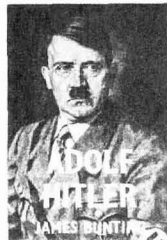
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## SPECIAL REPORT



(From left) Bakht, Scindia, Vajpayee, Jethmalani, Joshi at Bhubaneswar: in a tussle with old-time hardliners, the progressives lose out

hence. Already, it has set up constituency-level task forces in the states going to the polls, and Madhya Pradesh leader and old Jana Sangh hand K.S. Thakre has been given charge of the crucial planning in Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. Workers' meetings are being organised at tehsil levels, and the selection of candidates has already begun.

All this planning has been infused with a sense of urgency, after the Bhubaneswar session categorically decided not to unite with other parties and to enter only into "electoral adjustments". Its higher councils also realise that the party has not performed as well in the Assembly elections in mid-1980 as its proponents make out. Of a total of 2,377 seats in 10 states, the BJP contested 1,427, but won only 148—and its candidates lost their security deposits in as many as 731 constituencies.

**Janata Stigma:** Bhandari has his own explanation for the 1980 performance. "We were branded as Janata people in those elections," he says, "and could not rid ourselves of that stigma." General Secretary Lal Krishna Advani says this stigma is a continuation of the problems faced by the Jana Sanghites in the Janata combine. "The Janata experiment," he says, "failed because the Jana Sangh constituent outstripped the others in its original strength. Immediately, therefore, the others raised the bogey of dual membership. This is why we are all the more resolutely opposed to unity."

It is becoming clearer, however, that the propulsion towards a change in the party's policies came mainly from a 'progressive' group, headed by Vajpayee and comprising

mostly of post-Janata recruits. But this group is engaged in a tussle with the old-time hardliners (see box). The progressives' initial attempts at promoting unity with other opposition parties were shot down once and for all at Bhubaneswar, but not without acrimonious debate.

Vajpayee supporter Kanwarlal Gupta voices the progressives' viewpoint when he says: "Minorities, labour, Harijans, even to some extent farmers, do not support us much. It is only middle class traders and the intelligentsia who continue to be our main supporters." The progressives are vehement about one point—they want to see the BJP divest itself of the stigma of a Hindi-belt rag-bag led by Brahmins and banias.

**Slow Change:** For the moment, at least, that is no easy task, nor one that can be taken for granted. A second study camp is planned for later this year, after the summer's Assembly elections, to take the process further. The effort has not been without success. The party has managed to maintain a sheen of morality in a milieu where every politician is seen to be venal.

Its strategy has been mapped out, and is being communicated in a new language, an idiom that is terse, confident and contemporary. But the progressives are in a minority. Ultimately, the BJP is not the kind of party where change springs suddenly, exploding outward and upsetting rhythms. It is more like a rheumatic chameleon on a moss-covered rock slowly trying to change its colour, seeking a grip on slippery ground for its journey onward.

—CHAITANYA KALBAG