

CHAPTER V

My Country My Life: The Growing of a Person; With a Nation

My Country My Life is the exhaustive autobiography of one of the well-known personalities in Indian politics, Lal Krishna Advani. It represents the category of ‘political autobiography’, which has its focus mainly on the political events in the author’s life rather than on the personal details. Advani himself describes the book as “not only the memoir of one person” but “essentially a political autobiography that narrates the journey of my life and my party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in the larger context of the march of modern India” (xi). The autobiography traces the defining moments of Independent India. The researcher wishes to attempt an in-depth content analysis of this book which, he feels, will acquaint the reader with its context and canvas, also enabling the researcher to make certain critical pronouncements on the text as well as on the author’s quest for identity.

At the outset, Advani reveals, at length, the rationale behind the conception of the book:

My life, in a nutshell, has been an active one. The journey from 1947 to 2007 is a very short one in a nation’s history, especially a nation as ancient as ours. But it is quite considerable in an individual’s life. In my case, independent India’s voyage subsumed my own, giving me an opportunity to both observe, and in my own humble way contribute to the many momentous developments along the way. It has been a fairly eventful life—brimming with activity and full of vicissitudes—however, in totality, highly satisfying...I believe I have something to communicate to my fellow citizens and hence the thought of writing my memoirs began crystallising in my mind some time back. I admit that I am

neither a historian nor a scholar of political science. However, as someone who has devoted all his adult life in the service of the nation and amassed a wealth of experience, I *can* claim to have the practical and contemplative understanding that comes to a dedicated, long-standing and goal-oriented practitioner of politics. I felt it was time for me to share my experiences and understanding with my fellow Indians; and also to share, especially with the youth, my dreams and concerns, my aspirations and apprehensions, about tomorrow's India (xxv).

Despite a few drawbacks, the book is worthy to be termed as a *tour de force*. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Advani's senior comrade, aptly describes it as "the remarkable journey of a sensitive human being and an outstanding leader" in his 'Foreword' (xix). True to his prophecy that "*My Country My Life* will be read widely, and with keen interest, by people from diverse backgrounds" (xix), it has crossed the sale of 100,000 copies within three years of its publication. This outstanding success of the book is not, however, the only testimony to its epithet as a literary masterpiece. There are many attributes that make it a work of high order. As Chandan Mitra, a senior columnist observes in his review of the autobiography, "to the book's serious reader, it is a remarkable document comparable only to Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India*. It is a magnificent record of the way India has evolved since Partition, made more poignant by the fact that the author was among the victims of the greatest mass migration in human history" (i). The book promises to be a faithful exploration of Advani as a person and a politician. With a few exceptions, it bears evidence to what Advani is known for in his long-lasting political career: clarity of thought and expression, strong conviction and potent articulation. Thus it provides a riveting and insightful version of Advani's early career as a political activist, his fight

for democracy during the Emergency, his Ram Ratha Yatra for the reconstruction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya that resulted in the biggest mass movement in India since Independence and catalysed a nationwide debate on the true meaning of secularism, and his peak time as India's Deputy Prime Minister as well as Home Minister in the Vajpayee-led alliance of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) between 1998 and 2004.

The bond between the author's life and his country is so close, that he does not find it necessary, perhaps, to separate the two in the title by placing a comma in between. Lata Jagatiani's suggestion, that it would be "more apt to name the book *My Country is My Life*", sounds sensible (2). Nimisha, in her analysis of the book, contends:

The book qualifies to be one of the most authoritative topical memoirs of contemporary history. The author diligently gives justice to the "Country" aspect of the book while the "Life" aspect of the book largely centres around two basic tenets of Advaniji's ideals—'Conviction' and 'Credibility'. This underlying thrust on Conviction and Credibility as the fountain-heads of moral authority of a leader and a statesman is the moral of this book (1).

Lata Jagatiani makes a considerable proposition in the following words:

Through MCML, the Indian public gets a ringside view of the man who would be the next Indian king. Thus it is his critics and enemies more than his friends and Sangh loyalists for whom the book is essential reading. Getting answers straight from the horse's mouth, detailed and non-evasive explanations at that, is something serious intellectuals demand, and they are all to be found here, and in ample measure (1).

Advani's self-appraisal of the literary work is worth quoting:

An autobiography is as much a communication with oneself as it is with the reader. I am, therefore, all too aware of my limitations and weaknesses. I am also aware of the mistakes I have committed in life. This book will make no attempt to gloss over them. Readers may agree or disagree with my perception and analyses of events and issues. It is their inalienable right. However, they will find a writer who is honest with them and with himself (xxxvii).

The narrative of *My Country My Life* is divided into five different phases as follows:

- Phase One (*About Independence and Partition*)
- Phase Two (*About Migration to India*)
- Phase Three (*About Entry into Active Politics*)
- Phase Four (*About Ayodhya Movement & the Ratha Yatra*)
- Phase Five (*About the NDA Rule, Home Ministership & Historic Visit to Pakistan*)

The first phase, entitled *Sindh and India, an unbreakable Bond*, covers a period of first twenty years in Advani's life, from 1927 to 1947. Though shortest in length, this phase is quite engaging as it narrates his childhood memories and his shaping years. Moreover, it has an undying significance in shaping the author's identity. Advani presents a pictorial account of his Karachi-days, especially highlighting its culturally varied yet symbiotic social fabric. His poignant separation from Sindh, hastened due to Partition, is aptly envisaged on the backdrop of massacre and mass migration:

There is no record of the number of Hindus killed in the Partition riots in Sindh, but the number, as widely believed, ran into thousands...In barely three months, approximately 1.25 million, constituting more than ninety percent of the total

Sindhi Hindu population, left their beloved native land. Suddenly, the cruel hand of history tore them away from the protective shelter of Sindh, which had been their home for thousands of years; which was the cradle of Indian civilization; where Hindus and Muslims had lived like brothers and evolved a uniquely syncretic culture... Suddenly, our ancestral homeland became part of an alien country for us... Uprooted from our home and escaping the flames of Partition, my family and I found protection and solace in the bosom of mother India. Though herself mutilated and truncated, she made us feel at home (11).

The agony of partition from motherland was aggravated, in Advani's case, by the untimely demise of his mother. It seems likely and reasonable that Advani, as a child of 13, transferred his affection for his mother to his motherland. His father's love and care helped him overcome this irrecoverable loss. Indeed his father cast an indelible mark on his early life. Advani acknowledges this fact thus:

The one person who had the greatest influence on my personality in my childhood was my father. He was a gentle human being who embodied simplicity, and without any overt preaching, he quietly shaped my mind with his impeccable conduct. I was extremely attached to my mother, but after she passed away, it was from my father that I received both love and gratitude (29).

Induction into the RSS is alluded to by Advani as the "life transforming event" (4). The researcher contends that the RSS left a permanent impact on Advani and helped him recover from his feeling of rootlessness as well as loss of identity. Thus, in a way, it accelerated his process of individuation. Throughout his autobiography, Advani refers to his connection with the RSS with a sense of pride. He regards it the only voluntary, *non-political* organisation "with a large

band of dedicated, selfless cadres and with enormous capacity for constructive work” and adds that “The RSS is like my *alma mater* and I am proud of my continued association with it. No calumny is going to make me disown my links with the RSS” (303). Of course, he prudently explicates the basic distinction between the BJP and the RSS as:

The RSS is a nationalist organisation whose contribution to character-building of millions and towards inculcating in them the spirit of patriotism, idealism and selfless service of the motherland has been incomparable...But the BJP as political party is accountable to the people, its performance being periodically put to test in elections. So...(it) has to function in a manner that enables it to keep its basic ideological stances intact and at the same time expand itself to reach the large sections of the people outside the layers of all ideology (942).

He precisely articulates his concern over the cold war going on between the RSS and the BJP:

...lately an impression has gained ground that no political or organisational decision (in the BJP) can be taken without the consent of the RSS functionaries. This perception...will do no good either to the party or to the RSS. The RSS too must be concerned that such a perception will dwarf its greater mission of man-making and nation-building. Both the RSS and the BJP must consciously exert to expel this impression (Ibid).

Advani puts across the most remarkable influences on his early life. Foremost among these is the stimulus he received from two persons, Rajpal Puri and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya. Interactions with these two wrought Advani’s intellectual understanding of India. He alludes to their input with a sense of pride as well as gratitude:

Soon after joining the RSS, I came in contact with Shri Rajpal Puri... His affectionate, intelligent and inspiring personality left a deep impact on me. In a quiet way, he shaped my value system and kindled the fire of patriotism in me. If anyone were to ask me about the greatest influences on my life, I would unhesitatingly name, besides my parents, two persons- Rajpal Puri and, after I migrated to this part of India, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, the philosopher, guide and leader of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh... 1948 onwards, he became the most important source of ideological, political and moral influence on my life (38).

There is a separate chapter in the book in which Advani pays tribute to his political guru, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya. He elucidates Deendayalji's long-lasting influence on his public life. As he concedes: "I deem it my good fortune that I began my own political life at the feet of this ideal leader" (139). His untimely death was a serious blow for Advani, who remarks: "I went numb with shock hearing the tragic news. Rarely in my life have I been shaken so completely as I was on that day" (143). This strong attachment with the RSS and its patrons formulated the foundation of Advani's political ideology.

The rich tradition of religious harmony in Sindh had a lot to teach to Advani as a child. The ingrained spirit of unity among the Hindus and the Sikhs had its lasting impact on Advani. He notes that these "pluralist *samskaras* which were passed on to me as a child ... have shaped my personal ethics since" (32). However, he keeps mum about the sort of relationship maintained by the Hindus and the Muslims, leaving one to ponder over the reliability of this 'plurality'. Apart from this, immense love of books in his college days contributed to his holistic enrichment. Voracious reading of books from different disciplines helped a lot to shape his character. Books such as Dale

Carneige's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, proved to be decisive in his formative years. Advani estimates his acquaintance with the Ramkrishna Mission Ashram as the second life-transforming influence on his life. It was during his frequent visits to the Ashram, when he was hypnotized by the charismatic personality of Swami Ranganathanand, who remained a guiding force his entire life. Through swamiji's preaching and his weekly discourses on the Gita, Advani got a new insight into this spiritual scripture. He began to view it not merely as a religious book, but as an example of "intense practicality" (47). He found infused in it "a philosophy that can help us build a new welfare society, based on human dignity, freedom and equality" (49). The first phase abruptly ends with Advani, leaving Sindh amidst turmoil and turbulence, "seeking shelter and a new beginning in truncated India" (51).

The second phase, *Journey from Sindh to Rajasthan*, covers a crucial period of ten years in Advani's life viz. 1947-1957. It introduces him to us in a new role, that of a full time RSS *pracharak* in Rajasthan. The life of a *pracharak*, Advani avows, is full of adversities and hardships. It is not clear, however, from the course of the narrative, if this was a willing decision, taken wholeheartedly, or a forced choice based on cruel circumstances, for a helpless refugee, without an alternative. Advani's stay in Rajasthan was virtually an ordeal, a kind of tough training for a young aspirant into politics. He had to travel extensively across the length and breadth of Rajasthan, mostly on foot or on a bicycle. Once he undertook a walkathon of 45 kilometres, from Kama to Sikri, which took him 10 hours! The callous climatic conditions in Rajasthan brought about many tormenting experiences for him. At the same time, they inculcated an indomitable fighting will and developed a comprehensive outlook in him. As he puts it:

It is experiences like these which toughened me during my ten years in Rajasthan. They made me aware of the harsh realities of life faced everyday by millions of my countrymen and also imparted a welcome discipline to my daily habits. I learnt to leave frugally... the life of a *pracharak* was tough in terms of physical comfort, but extremely rewarding by way of psychological and spiritual satisfaction (70).

Gandhi's tragic assassination on 30th January, 1948 proved to be a nightmare for the RSS. Serious accusations were made regarding the Sangh's involvement in the conspiracy of Gandhi's murder and there was a shrill demand for a ban on the RSS, to which the government yielded on 4th February, 1948. Thus the RSS was labelled as a communal organisation, and more than ten thousand *pracharaks*, including Advani were put behind bars. The RSS – Gandhi relationship has always been a controversial topic. Advani comments at length on various aspects of the debatable issue. He does his best to prove that, despite some basic differences, the Sangh “held him in high esteem” and Gandhi too “reciprocated this positive attitude” (74). He also alludes to his “deep respect” for the Mahatma and asserts that this “reverence... would only grow stronger with the passage of time” (71). But he never articulates Gandhi's influence, if any, on his thoughts and deeds.

Philippe Lejeune, one of the early critics of autobiography, proposes that there is a kind of ‘autobiographical pact’ or ‘contract’ between the author and the reader, based on ‘an intention to honour the signature’ (202). In Advani's case, there are many instances when the reader is compelled to comply with the pact. In the later part of the book, Advani repeatedly refers to Mahatma Gandhi, who had deep reverence for Ram, to justify his role in the Ayodhya movement. He touches upon Gandhiji's long-cherished dream of the *Ram Rajya*. How, one wonders, does he imply that Gandhiji would have approved of the heinous act

of forceful erection of the temple on the disputed land? As he mentions now and then, Gandhi viewed of Ram not as a Hindu deity, but as a divine force of universal brotherhood. To Advani, on the other hand, Ram is a symbol of orthodox Hindu pride. Thus it is scarcely surprising that, as a strong advocate of the Hindu cause, he makes a passionate appeal: “If Muslims are entitled to an Islamic atmosphere in Mecca, and if Christians are entitled to a Christian atmosphere in the Vatican, why is it wrong for Hindus to expect a Hindu atmosphere in Ayodhya?” (366). He goes to the extent of making a quasi-logical proposition: “Ram belongs to this country whether you call him a mythical hero or a historical personage...If the Muslims in Indonesia can feel proud about Ram and *Ramayana*, why cannot the Indian Muslims?” (857)

The formation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which later became the Bharatiya Janata Party, was truly a turning point in Advani’s life. He was asked upon to take the organizational responsibility for the newly-born party in Rajasthan. “Thus began my journey as a political activist, a journey that has continued uninterrupted for the past fifty-six years”, he observes (88). Soon afterwards, Advani’s decade-long work in Rajasthan came to a finish, bringing him to Delhi in 1957, to assist Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Entry into National Politics, which marks the third phase in Advani’s life, spreads over a span of twenty years, from 1957 to 1977. This is perhaps the most vital period in his personal and political life. Not only did it project Advani as an emerging political leader at the national level, but also promoted him to the status of a husband and a father of two. Thenceforth, he ceased to be a mere witness of the political developments in the country and became one of its key contributors. As the alternate title of the third phase, *Democracy in Shackles* connotes, the author’s special emphasis is on providing a factual account of the nineteen month eclipse of democracy in the form of Emergency.

At the same time, he also portrays the spontaneous mass struggle for the restoration of democracy in India, fathered by Jayaprakash Narayan.

The year 1957 marked a dramatic change in Advani's life. He left Rajasthan for good and shifted to Delhi, the centre of political activities in India. Initially an aide to Vajpayee, Advani jumped into active politics during the maiden corporation elections in Delhi in 1958. It was in those elections when Advani laid the foundation of alliance politics. It is quite shocking to know that the Jana Sangha's first foray into alliance politics was with the communists. Advani's was the key role in devising this strategic alliance with the communists to take on the reins of the Delhi Corporation. This experience taught him a lot. Foremost of all, he realised that "if a political leader wants to succeed in conflict prevention and resolution, he or she should develop six basic qualities: keeping one's ears to the ground through constant interaction with the masses, impartiality, sincerity, patience, fairness, and firmness" (106).

Advani's career as a journalist began at the same time. Of course, his first and only choice was *Organiser*, a journal owned by the Jana Sangha. Working as an Assistant Editor to M.K.Makhani, Advani enjoyed "full creative freedom to express (his) views on a wide variety of issues" (110). Given the fact that he was a part of a political journal devoted to the propaganda of the Sangha philosophy, the above proposition hardly holds any water. He served in the *Organiser* till 1967.

Apart from being a seasoned political leader of high repute, Advani is known as an ideal family person. One of the strongest assets of Advani's personal life is keen attachment with family. As he asserts, "My family has been my greatest source of strength in all... trials and tribulations I have faced in my life" (470). He aptly acknowledges the pivotal place of family in his life:

Family is where I have experienced boundless happiness, unfailingly and on every single day of my life. It is here that I have felt loved, anchored, protected, and cared for all through the inevitable ups and downs in politics. So much so, that when I come home after a meeting or an outstation tour, I feel that I have entered a private universe of my own, where I have no worries, no complaints, only a pure sense of contentment...my family has been my world (889).

No wonder, he dedicates this autobiography to his family, “whose limitless love and care has sustained me through all the ups and downs in life”.

Nimisha highlights the same fact thus:

‘My Country My Life’ successfully unravels the much intertwined knot of the personal and the political. The book emotively brings out the husband and father in him, and definitely a father with a softer corner for his very talented daughter. We see in the Advani’s a representative Indian family with strong emotional bonding and mutual support. It goes without saying that the family’s sacrifices and contributions, through all the testing and trying times added on to make Advani what he is today (8).

Kamla Jagtiyani entered Advani’s life in 1965 and became his lifelong companion. In fact, one can easily observe that Advani’s successful political career rests heavily on his successful married life. He regards his marriage as “one of the most precious gifts from God”, calling his son Jayant and daughter Pratibha “a source of immense joy” for him (121). Many a time in this book, Advani alludes to his wife Kamla’s remarkable contribution to the well-being of his family. As he states:

...the full credit of supporting, sustaining, and raising our family goes to her. Because of my mounting political responsibilities and frequent travels across the country, I

could not devote enough time to my family. I was totally unfamiliar with money-related matters, partly because of my temperament and partly on account of my *pracharak* background. This increased the burden on Kamla's shoulders...I have been repeatedly surprised by her quietly courageous personality, her almost limitless capacity for hard work, her meticulous handling of family finances, and, above all, her boundless love and care for me and our children. Indisputably, she has been the mainstay of our family (123).

Advani carried out the responsibility as the Presiding Officer of Delhi Municipal Council for three years. In 1970, he was elected as the member of Rajya Sabha. "With this began a phase in my life- the beginning of my parliamentary career", he notes (132).

There are many passages in this autobiography which cast light on Advani's wealth of worldly wisdom, his organic sensibility and an awareness, rarely seen among the politicians, of the difference between appearance and reality. Advani's unique maturity is reflected, perhaps at its best, in his introspective projection of life:

In the fairly long life I have lived, there is one truth I have encountered repeatedly—change is the only constant, both in nature and in life of human beings... As I grew up, I realized that ups and downs, victory and defeat, loss and renewal, are all a way of life in politics. One should be prepared to take everything in one's stride. This taught me the virtue of equanimity. When difficulties mount or when tragedy strikes—and it can befall any time and in the most unimaginable of forms—I learnt that it helps not to give in to despair. For, as the wheel of change rotates, it can bring in its wake, better days. The important thing is to develop patience, courage and self-belief, and continue doing one's work. I have experienced in my life how a situation of utter gloom

inevitably comes to an end, and with time ushers in light and hope (155-56).

His ruthless commentary on the prevailing political practices in India is thought-provoking:

Politics is the life-breath of a democracy. It is an important and necessary medium of serving the nation. However, politics can also be a pollutant. Unprincipled quest for power can be murky and confrontational, degrading both its practitioners and the society in which they operate. It frequently becomes the arena where political parties jettison the larger national interests for narrow and myopic considerations; ideals are sacrificed for the pursuit of individual ambitions; camaraderie is killed by conspiracies against one's own colleagues; and high-sounding words about public good become a camouflage for fulfilment of private greed (139).

At the same time, he also voices his dissatisfaction with some of the prevalent practices in the political set-up of India. For instance, he remarks: "It is one of the abiding disappointments of my political life that our political establishment has been unable to introduce comprehensive electoral reforms to cleanse our democratic system of its ills" (167).

The truth status of autobiographical disclosure has always been a point of debate. Critics are sharply divided in their opinions on the degree of factuality in an autobiographical narrative. John Sturrock curtly comments, "It is impossible for an autobiographer not to be autobiographical" (qtd. in Smith-Watson 13). On the other hand, Stanley Fish claims that "autobiographers cannot lie because anything they say, however mendacious, is the truth about themselves, whether they know it or not" (Ibid). Roy Pascal, one of the earliest critics on the genre, rightly points out an important fact:

All autobiographies must, like novels, have a story-structure. But it would be wrong to suppose that this imposes a regrettable limitation on their truthfulness, on their range of truthfulness. It is their mode of presenting truth. They are, like novels, cumulative structures, and we experience them as wholes, so that at any moment the earlier parts, the earlier experiences, are present in the reader's mind (187).

As Smith-Watson, the recent duo related to the domain of autobiographical criticism, opine, "...autobiographical truth is a different matter, it is an inter-subjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of life" (13). This truth, they add, lies outside a logical or juridical model of truth and falsehood. In their book *The Voice Within*, Roger Porter and H.R. Wolf state that "Truth is a highly subjective matter, and no autobiographer can represent *exactly* 'what happened back then,' any more than a historian can definitively describe the real truth of the past" (5). This, according to them, is due in part to the fact that words are not adequate to fully express memories and emotions. Bates, the earliest critic on autobiography, too deals with this topic. He contends that the author cannot describe events in a truly objective way. As a result, even the most accurate autobiographies have "fictional elements" (7). To him, "There is, in fact, no dividing line between autobiography and fiction" (9). After all, the concept of truth itself is relative. The researcher agrees with the host of critics, and wishes to add that in the case of self-referential narratives, we need to adopt a moderate approach because they are an unusual combination of self-investigation, self-approval, self-engrossment and self-love. Moreover, the "truth quotient" of '*My Country My Life*' has to be judged, keeping in mind the important fact that this book was released on the threshold of parliamentary elections, 2009, when Advani was looked upon as the next Prime Minister. Thus, the autobiography

serves many purposes and acts as a latent tool of party propaganda as well as its unproclaimed manifesto.

My Country My Life presents a substantial proof of factual analysis. Advani's realistic manner of narration makes this political autobiography a meaningful historical document. For instance, his acute apprehension with the way his party is treading and his utter helplessness to prevent moral degradation of his colleagues are discernible throughout the autobiography. Thus, while referring to the action taken against Balraj Mahdok, the former President of the Jana Sangha, for violation of discipline, Advani candidly admits:

The action against Mahdok had a salutary effect, greatly enhancing the Jana Sangha's reputation as a party that attached utmost importance to discipline. I must, however, note here with some degree of pain and concern that, in subsequent decades, the BJP has not been able to maintain the same reputation (180).

He pungently points out the degradation of the *political culture* of his party on many occasions. The following lines bear evidence to Advani's extraordinary courage to face the fact:

In the last two decades that have elapsed since, my party has certainly become bigger and stronger politically, even succeeding in forming the stable non-Congress coalition government at the Centre. But I must admit that our quantitative gain has been at the cost of a considerable qualitative loss. I am acutely aware that my party cannot today claim, as confidently as we could in 1986, that we offer 'an alternative political culture'. The BJP still has many fine attributes which I am proud of, but I would like each member of my party to introspect not only on the loss and gains but also on how to fully recover our proud tradition of cultivating a superior political culture (325).

Hardly any political leader will display the same mettle to frankly mention the “grey areas” in the party he has been so long correlated with. These remarks are quite significant on the background of the shameless compromises made by the BJP in elections at all levels, and the tremendous ‘progress’ made by some of its state governments in malpractices (Karnataka, for instance). At the same time, they reveal a bitter reality that Advani, as a leader, has failed to permeate his personal ideology into his party members and followers at large. Thus, his whole-hearted support to Anna Hazare’s campaign against corruption and his recent *yatra* to pressurise the government to disclose and claim back the black money lying in the Swiss Bank seems to be a face-saving gesture.

Advani’s scathing yet objective assessment of Indira Gandhi’s nature and character is worth reading. He analyses her victory in the mid-term elections in 1971, her cunning behaviour as well as dominating attitude which resulted in the declaration of Emergency, her dramatic resurgence in the 1980 elections and her unexpected assassination on 31st October, 1984. Indira Gandhi indeed remains a mysterious character in the Indian political drama. A number of her shocking decisions and surprising moves made her an unsolved riddle even for the political analysts. Advani attempts a retrospective evaluation of her “politically motivated pseudo-socialist economic policies” (161) such as tightening of the licence-permit-quota raj and her ‘*Garibi Hatao*’ measures, which, to him, did not have any ideological backup. In fact, they were crooked ‘weapons’ used by her “to eliminate her rivals within the party, and establish her supremacy over both the Congress organisation and the government” (161). All these decisions, Advani opines, had a deeply deleterious impact on the economy of the nation. Above all, she tended to undermine democratic way of

decision-making through consultation in favour of sycophancy and cult of personality. As Advani states:

Instead of guiding the Congress organisation to overcome the new challenges before the party and the country, and to address them unitedly, she consciously placed her own personal interests above those of the organisation...the self-image of being born to rule is the attribute of monarchy, and not democracy. And it was the driving impulse behind all that Indira Gandhi did before and after the Congress split. She triumphed in her battle against her adversaries, but, in the process, she wrote the epitaph of democracy inside the Congress Party (162).

While the nation was experiencing these momentous tribulations, Advani reached an “important milestone” in his life, first with his entry into Rajya Sabha, then with his selection as the President of Jana Sangha. This was a great honour conferred upon a homeless outsider, as a reward of his remarkable display of tireless work and selfless devotion. Advani too acknowledges the uniqueness of this gesture while lamenting upon the poor show of mean-mindedness and selfish interests in the present times:

As I look back, I am struck by the workings of the fate that made me, a young and relatively inexperienced entrant in national politics, the party President. First of all, I was touched by Atalji’s trust in me. Secondly, I was humbled by the fact that other leaders in the party... who were senior to me in both age and experience, readily agreed to my candidature. Sadly, as I recall this, I am also troubled by the fact that the spirit of camaraderie and mutual trust, idealistic and goal-oriented approach to the party work, is something that has got diluted over the years (178).

The year 1975 turned out to be a turning point in the political history of the nation. It witnessed Indira Gandhi's unjustifiable stooping to retain her supreme position, corrupting herself for her extreme lust for power, and JayaPrakash Narayan's emergence as the leading motivator and organiser of the 'second freedom struggle' against Gandhi's dictatorial regime during the Emergency. Advani spares considerable space (around fifty pages) in the book for the detailed, captivating description of this entire phenomenon. Along with other prominent leaders, Advani was imprisoned for a fairly long period of nineteen months. Like all great leaders in the global history, he converted this adversity into opportunity and utilized his leisure time for constructive purpose. He augmented his bookish as well as worldly knowledge, thereby developing himself in many ways. During his detention, Advani got acquainted with "that lesser-known reality of life—the life of criminals, including their human side" (213). He maintained a diary regarding his daily observations, reflections and conversations with fellow-prisoners. He also wrote a number of letters as writing was "the only avenue of self-expression" available for him (238). Though he faced these harsh conditions bravely, he was always apprehensive about the well-being of his family members. As he recalls, especially, "the thought of anything causing pain to my children would fill me with agony" (239). His deep affinity with his family members is displayed even in this slightest remark, "As I stepped out of prison, I was greeted by Kamala, Jayant and Pratibha. It remains one of the most unforgettable moments of my life" (261).

Political developments in the country moved at a lightning speed in the post-Emergency phase. The most dramatic aftermath was the formation of the Janata Party, a merging of four political parties. This experiment worked magically and the Janata Party recorded a clean triumph in the 1977 Lok Sabha

elections. This was indeed a historical win and the popular response it received was truly unprecedented in its enthusiasm and spontaneity. Unfortunately, the Janata government's glory proved to be short-lived and internal squabbles brought about its early demise before it could complete even half of its term. Advani rightly calls it "the betrayal of the people" (288). A separate chapter in the autobiography narrates the untimely fall of the Janata government under the leadership of Morarji Desai, Charan Singh's accession to the prime ministerial throne with the support of Indira Gandhi, the ultimate wreck of his government within six months followed by unfortunate split in the Janata Party, the announcement of mid-term elections in January 1980 and Indira Gandhi's comeback to power. Advani was a witness of the ecstasy and agony associated with the rise and fall of the Janata government. As a political analyst, he observes:

Rarely in history does a government get the kind of opportunity, and enjoy the amount of goodwill, which the Janata government did. Equally rare is the instance in history when such a government squanders the opportunity and betrays people's hopes in as reckless a manner. Thus, if the birth of the Janata government was a lesson in defending democracy, its demise was a harsh reminder about the propensity of power-hungry leaders to undo the gains of popular democratic government (287).

He also admits that it was a fault on his part that, along with Vajpayee, he had played a major role in the re-induction of Charan Singh into the government, when he had been asked to resign due to his misbehaviour and had already submitted his resignation. "Our emotional attachment to the fledgling party's unity got the better of our political judgement", he repents (290). He shows great respect for Morarji Desai which, he claims, springs from the latter's

“honesty, unimpeachable integrity and the courage with which he fought for democracy both before and during the democracy” (298). At the time, he accuses the then President Sanjiva Reddy for playing a highly controversial role in Indira Gandhi’s return to power. He states: “Reddy’s conduct during this period lacked neutrality, transparency and honesty...(He) acted in a preemptive and malafide manner. In doing so, he had betrayed the faith instilled in a person holding the country’s highest Constitutional office” (296-97).

The issue of ‘dual membership’ caused the split in the Janata Party. A brainchild of Madhu Limaye, it targeted the former Jana Sangha members like Advani who had maintained their association with the RSS. Advani defends his stance not to break the bonds with the RSS on the grounds that it was not a political party. Moreover, he regards it as a futile issue, which did not achieve anything fruitful. The decision to dispel the Jana Sangha members from the Janata Party proved fatal and ended in its miserable wreck. In retrospect, Advani looks at this whole affair as the fortunate event because it ended up in marginalising the Janata Party’s existence. More importantly, Advani concludes, “they did us a great service. For it enabled us to revive ourselves in the form of the Bharatiya Janata Party in April 1980 and thus write, in years to come, a proud new chapter in Indian politics” (305). Thus bloomed the ‘Lotus’.

After the sad expulsion from the Janata Party, the Jana Sangha leaders determined to form a new political platform. Hence was the birth of the Bharatiya Janata Party on 6th April, 1980. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was elected as its first president, while Advani was offered the responsibility of one of the General Secretaries. The party also replaced its former symbol the ‘lamp’ by the new one, the ‘lotus’. Surprisingly enough, there was a significant ideological re-projection of the newly born BJP. Along with its previous guiding philosophy of ‘Integral Humanism’, it included ‘Gandhian Socialism’ as its ideology. In

this way, every attempt was made to launch the BJP as the '*party with a difference*'.

The birth of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Advani reveals, was not devoid of its associated pangs. The party could not perform well either in the 1980 elections in the centre, nor the assembly elections in Jammu & Kashmir. It received a disastrous setback due to Indira Gandhi's astonishing assassination on 31st October, 1984. Gandhi's assassination was followed by the large-scale massacre of innocent Sikhs in Delhi and other places in the North India, as assassins of Indira Gandhi were Sikh. To reap the benefits of the 'sympathy wave' in the country, the Congress government dissolved the Lok Sabha and called for fresh elections within forty-five days. The results were extremely discouraging for the BJP, who could win only two seats in the House of 501 MPs! Unbelievably, Atal Bihari Vajpayee too had to witness a shocking defeat. Accepting the responsibility of the poor performance of the party, Vajpayee resigned from his post as the president and Advani occupied this post in 1986. "With this", he records, "began a new phase in both my party's and my own political journey" (319).

Advani's Presidential period proved beneficial for the growth and development of the party. He gave foremost importance to bring in young talent in the form of office bearers. Thus he cleverly inducted into his new team many of today's top-level leaders like Sushma Swaraj, Arun Jeitley, Narendra Modi, M Venkaiah Naidu and Rajnath Singh. Late Pramod Mahajan, too, was Advani's find. As a result, the base of the party became broader, giving it an all-inclusive visage.

Advani retells the regime of Rajiv Gandhi, the youngest Prime Minister of India, who was then at the peak of his popularity. He displays commendable candour in admitting that he had been impressed by Rajiv's "charismatic appeal

[which] transcended the barriers of caste, creed, class, region, age and gender” (326). Rajiv was looked upon as ‘Mr. Clean’ because of his proclaimed fight against the deep-rooted problem of corruption. However, the Bofors Scam, which has remained a mystery till the date, sullied the new Prime Minister’s credibility. It was estimated that an amount of fifty million dollars had been paid to the Bofors, through an Italian middleman named Ottavio Quattrocchi by corrupt means. Quattrocchi had close ties with the Prime Minister’s family, as Rajiv’s wife Sonia was an Italian by origin. Advani does not mince his words in portraying Rajiv Gandhi as the main culprit in this obnoxious dodge. He also blames Rajiv for his “surrender to minorityism in the Shah Bano matter” (331) and his “big blunder ... in sending the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka in 1987” (335). Advani further claims to evade the Prime Minister’s dismissal at the hands of the then President Zail Singh, who, he adds, was extremely dissatisfied with Rajiv’s mishandling of the violent ethnic strife in Sri Lanka. He remarks: “I ...felt that doing so would not only be patently illegal but would also precipitate a grave and unprecedented Constitutional crisis... I, therefore, called on Zail Singh in Rashtrapati Bhavan and conveyed my views on the matter in no uncertain terms” (336). The verdict of the 1989 parliamentary elections was a severe reaction against Rajiv Gandhi’s incompetent governance. The Congress managed to secure only 193 seats against their previous total of 401, while the BJP made a spectacular comeback by winning 86 seats from their past tally of 2. These results confirmed the efficiency of Advani as the national leader.

The most controversial and sensitive chapter in the autobiography is, of course, concerned with the ‘Ayodhya Movement’. This unfortunate incident is condemned as a blot on India’s unique identity as the ‘Country with Unity in Diversity’. This bleak episode in the post-independence era is believed to

illumine the ugly side of Advani's political career as he played a crucial role in the entire event. It seriously hurt his image as a thoughtful politician having a balanced outlook and placed him in the company of heartless fanatics. Advani, as a writer, seems to be well-aware of the fact that this eighty- page chapter (the longest one in the entire autobiography) would be read closely both by his supporters and opponents. He, therefore, adopts a cautious approach and takes perceptible pains to justify his position. He makes every possible attempt to prove himself innocent. He blames the central government led by Narsimha Rao for adopting an insensitive stance towards the aspirations of the peace-loving Hindus and compelling them to recourse to unlawful means. The extreme delay in the announcement of the Allahabad High Court's judgment on the disputed land, he argues, made the matter worse. Detaching himself from the actual move of the Babri Masjid destruction, he tries to win the sympathy of the Muslims. At the same time, he struggles to retain the support of the Hindus by asserting that it was a mass movement through which "India's Soul Spoke" (341). His commentary on this controversial occurrence is somewhat confusing:

I regard the Ayodhya movement as the most decisive transformational event of my political journey. As every student of India's contemporary history will attest to, its impact on our society and polity—indeed, on our sense of national identity—has been tremendous. Destiny made me perform a certain pivotal duty in this movement, in the form of the Ram Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya in 1990. I performed the duty with conviction, sincerity and to the best of my abilities and, in doing so, discovered India anew while rediscovering myself. The Ayodhya mission for me was thus both a time of intense action and intense inner reflection (342).

What does the epithets ‘decisive’ and ‘transformational’ mean for Advani? What kind of *tremendous impact* on our sense of national identity does he intend to imply? Was this movement a mere matter of ‘destiny’ or a cleverly planned product of intellect? All these questions remain unanswered through the discourse.

Advani displays a staunch belief in religion-based nationalism, though he often speaks of the ‘theme of cultural nationalism’ (XXVIII). While he laments that “the Ayodhya movement followed a course that I had not envisaged” and calls 6th December, 1992 “the saddest day of my life”, he also boasts that this movement “brought to the fore people’s revulsion for pseudo-secularism, as practised by the Congress party, communists and some other parties, and projected my party, the BJP, as a spirited champion of genuine secularism” (XXXI-XXXII). This unusual combination of pain and pride complicates his stance on this sensitive issue. As a hardcore nationalist, Advani has a staunch faith in Hinduism. His views on nationalism and nationhood are, therefore, shadowed by his religious awareness of being a Hindu. He poses to be the advocate of “cultural nationalism”. In the Prologue, he observes that there is an “age-old sense of cultural identity that binds the Indians of diverse castes, communities and religions into a natural national identity” (XXVIII). The term ‘Hindu’ in *Hindutva*, he pleads, “has a cultural, and not a religious connotation. It does not lend itself to a narrow ‘for-Hindus-only’ notion of nationhood, which stems essentially from an underlying cultural oneness” (862). As he further elucidates:

The concept of ‘cultural nationalism enjoins upon the adherents of different faiths in India to respect, and take pride in, the common unifying culture of our ancient land while celebrating its many diversities; not to have extra territorial loyalty; not to denigrate other faiths as false or inferior, but

rather to learn from the best that each faith has to offer; not to misuse freedom of religion to expand one's religious population through fraudulent conversions; and not to try to gain political dominance for the purpose of advocating separatism or establishing theocracy. It means nothing more, nothing less (867).

Ironically enough, Advani himself uses the term 'Hinduism' with a religious connotation. He also indirectly holds the superiority of Hinduism over other religions, through statements such as

The culture of any ancient nation is bound to be composite. But in our country, emphasis on the composite character of Indian culture is generally an attempt to disown its essentially Hindu content...despite the composite nature of Indian culture, Hinduism remains by far the most powerful and pervasive element in that culture...Hinduism has indeed provided the essential genius of Indian culture...A secularism that entails hostility to anything that has a Hindu tinge about it would not be acceptable to India (861-62).

He even goes to the extent of making a blatant declaration, "If India is de-Hinduised, there will be no India left anymore" (864). Thus, his version of cultural nationalism smells of fanaticism. While narrating his experiences of the Ayodhya movement, he emphatically avows:

...the Ayodhya movement opened my eyes to the deep-rooted influence of religion in the lives of Hindus of all castes and sects across the country... I realised that, if this religiosity were to be channelled in a positive direction, it could unleash tremendous energy for national reconstruction (XXXI).

As a matter of fact, this movement paved the way for tremendous destruction rather than construction and sowed the seeds of long-lasting religious hatred.

According to Advani, the Ayodhya incident was an “explosion”, brought about by the “utter disregard for the patience and tolerance of the majority community” (352). For him, it is worthy to be called a truly historic ‘movement’ because it combined “the articulation of a collective aspiration of the masses” with “the assertion of the soul of the nation” (353). He, however, does not define this ‘soul’ or disclose the secret how he perceived its existence in the ‘body’ of the nation. It is thus clear that his analysis of this serious and utterly tragic episode in the Indian history is firmly based on his religious ideology. He claims that Ram is “a unique symbol of India’s national identity, unity and integration” (355). Unfortunately, he overlooks the bitter reality that Ram is a beloved idol of the upper caste Hindus, not of the destitute masses. While deliberating upon the causes and consequences of the Ayodhya movement, he records:

the representation of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and so called backward castes far outnumbered that of the Brahmins and other upper castes...all these were people coming on their own, quite unlike the way crowds are mobilised for political rallies today. There was an unmistakable air of spontaneity, religiosity, voluntariness and high-spiritedness (399).

These statements become vague as they lack solid statistical evidence. Moreover, looked the other way, they highlight the cunning tendency of the upper classes to push the poor, ignorant lower sections to the canon’s mouth, keeping themselves unharmed. Unfortunately, Indian history attests to the sore reality that the feeling of *unity* and *integration* Advani finds among the Indian people is sham and superficial. In this connection, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s ruthless analysis of Hindu character deserves serious attention:

There is an utter lack among the Hindus of what sociologists call *consciousness of kind*. There is no Hindu consciousness of kind. In every Hindu, the consciousness that exists is the consciousness of his caste. That is the reason why the Hindus cannot be said to form a society or a nation...Similarity in habits and customs, beliefs and thoughts there is. But one cannot accept the conclusion that, therefore, the Hindus constitute a society. To do so is to misunderstand the essentials which go to make up a society (23).

Advani refers to Mahatma Gandhi, who had deep reverence for Ram, to justify his role in the Ayodhya movement. He also alludes to Gandhiji's long-cherished dream of the *Ram Rajya*. In Gandhian fashion, he relates the genesis of the Ratha Yatra to 'A voice' inside him which guided him to 'Do it' (372). How, one wonders, does he entail that Gandhiji would have approved of the heinous act of forceful erection of the temple on the disputed land? In fact, as Advani himself notes, Gandhi viewed of Ram not as a Hindu deity, but as a divine force of universal brotherhood. To Advani, on the other hand, Ram is a symbol of orthodox Hindu pride. Thus, as a strong advocate of the Hindu cause, he makes a passionate appeal: "If Muslims are entitled to an Islamic atmosphere in Mecca, and if Christians are entitled to a Christian atmosphere in the Vatican, why is it wrong for Hindus to expect a Hindu atmosphere in Ayodhya?" (366). At the same time, he strongly asserts that his campaign was "not in the least" anti-Muslim (378). He accuses his opponents, mainly the Congressmen and the Communists, for projecting him as the enemy of the Muslims. According to him:

...unnerved by the massive response to the Ratha Yatra, our political adversaries intensified this calumny against me. Their propaganda was baseless and motivated. I challenge

them to point out a single utterance in my speeches that could be construed against Muslims or Islam...

Another lie in the propaganda by our adversaries was that the Ram Ratha Yatra left a bloody trail of communal clashes. As reports show, there was not a single instance of communal violence along the route of my yatra. There were indeed riots in several parts of the country, but none at all along the Ratha Yatra trail (378-89).

The validity of Advani's arguments is a matter of debate. Nonetheless, his ability as a writer is revealed at its best in this chapter. By bringing in eminent personalities from various fields like Swami Vivekanand, Dr. Ambedkar, Sardar Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, K. M. Munshi, V. S. Naipaul and Nirad Chaudhuri, he tries hard to establish a larger intellectual credibility to this ideological debate. He seeks to imbibe the fact on the mind of his readers that it was more of his personal conviction than political compulsion that led him to embark upon this ambitious Yatra. Throughout this chapter, Advani makes a full-throated attempt to prove his innocence and stress his utter disapproval of the impulsive act of destroying the dome. He mentions that the sight of the demolition of the mosque made him "upset, distraught and helpless" (402). He was so distressed and disillusioned that, as a gesture of repentance; he immediately sent his letter of resignation from the position of the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha. With sheer candour, he states:

My role in the events of 6 December became the subject of unbridled vilification. I was accused of inciting the crowds to demolish the disputed structure. This, indeed, is the crux of the charge sheet against me. Nothing can be further from truth. All the impartial eye-witnesses of the fateful developments in Ayodhya on 6 December know that I was among those leaders who were making impassioned appeals to the unruly kar sevaks to stop the demolition (403).

To support his contention, Advani refers to an article by Jeff Penberthy, appeared in *The Asian Age*, in which he records that “the BJP leader looked distressed” when the enthusiastic mob was sprinting towards the mosque and “was pleading into his microphone, ‘Please don’t do this’, before he was hustled away” (404). Chandan Mitra, an eye-witness of this event, too echoes in his article what Advani recalls in this autobiography:

I was present, along with Swapan Dasgupta and a few other journalists, on the terrace of Ram Katha Kunj where the BJP-VHP leadership was assembled on December 6, 1992, appealing to unruly kar sevaks to descend from the structure’s domes. I vividly recall Advani in the evening after the structure had been demolished. He sat alone in a ground floor room with only a flickering candle for company. Characteristically wringing his hands in despair he bid farewell to us (2).

To certain extent, Advani succeeds in winning the sympathy and goodwill of those who had been offended by the Babri Masjid destruction. There is a note of confession in his tone:

Whatever I am, and whatever I have been able to do for my country and my party is because of the credibility I have earned in my life. It is not only my personal credibility, but also my party’s... The reason why the demolition of the disputed structure pained me was because it severely dented our credibility in the eyes of the people... we could not live by our word. The exhortations of the leaders of the temple movement were disregarded by some of the assembled *kar sevaks*... As a result, the credibility of the entire movement was undermined by those who took the law in their own hands on 6 December. It is in this sense that I felt, and I continue to feel so, that our entire movement suffered a setback on that day (408).

However, curiously enough, having said all this, he denies to accept the event of demolition of the mosque as a 'national shame'. Further, he openly supports the 'heroic' deed of the kar sevaks, calling it "their own verdict on some of the seminal questions of Indian history, both medieval and modern. Ram or Babar? Genuine secularism or pseudo-secularism? Justice for all or always appeasement of some?" (408-9). This kind of topsy-turvy argumentation, the researcher feels, seriously diminishes Advani's credibility. There is much scope for doubt regarding his claim to have achieved substantial success, "*beyond the glare of publicity*", in reaching at a "mutually acceptable solution... which would have paved the way for construction of the temple" (420) during his tenure as Home Minister. Thus, there is considerable scope to contend that Advani, with all his experience and expertise in national politics, is an ideologically confused character in the great "drama of power".

Advani describes at length the rise of militancy in Punjab, the emergence of the 'Khalisthan' movement and the tragic massacre of the Sikhs in Delhi in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination. He censures the Congress government led by Indira Gandhi for supporting Bhindranwale, the principal force behind this separatist movement, for petty interests. To him, "Indira Gandhi's wavering policy, lack of firm action, and the tendency to seek partisan political advantage aggravated the problem in Punjab" (430). At the same time, he elaborates upon the earnest efforts made by his party to bridge the gap between the Hindus and the Sikh and bring back communal harmony in the state.

The autobiography moves ahead to relate the political tribulations in Delhi in the last decade of the twentieth century, which was a period of tremendous instability in Indian politics. The minority governments led by V P Singh and Chandrashekhar proved short-lived and mid-term polls were announced in

1991. The tragic assassination of Rajiv Gandhi on 21st May created a ‘sympathy wave’ across the country and brought the Congress to win a majority. Advani regrets the shocking demise of Rajiv Gandhi, but refuses to term it as ‘martyrdom’. P. V. Narasimha Rao, the new Prime Minister, is duly acclaimed by Advani for initiating a paradigm shift in the national economic policy and making sincere efforts to end up the ‘licence-permit-quota raj’. Rao earned high esteem for himself due to his simplicity and scholarship. However, Advani blames him for “playing the minority card on the Ayodhya issue” (466).

It was at the same time when Advani had to face “one of the most challenging periods” (467) of his life because of the Havala Scandal. The CBI filed a charge-sheet against him for allegedly accepting a sizable amount of sixty lakhs as bribe as well as hatching a ‘criminal conspiracy’ in league with the two Jain brothers, who were the main culprits. As he mentions, “...to be accused of corruption was an unsettling new experience. Never in my entire political life had even my adversaries made allegations of bribery or financial fraud against me” (468). The case went on for sixteen months in the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court. Both these courts delivered their verdicts, quashing all the charges against Advani.

The mid-1990s witnessed three Prime Ministers within a brief period of two years. Advani strongly criticises the Congress and the Communists for subjecting India to the bout of destabilisation and preventing the BJP’s ascent to power. Ultimately, he claims, all these political parties got a drubbing from the voters, who chose India’s first ever BJP-led government that completed its five year term under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. A great deal of its credit goes to Advani, who prepared the platform to project the BJP as the only competent alternative to Congress, through an ambitious and well thought-out political campaign, named ‘the Swarna Jayanti Ratha Yatra’. This “patriotic

pilgrimage” was undertaken by him, overtly, to celebrate the golden jubilee of India’s independence. His political motive was very clear, to assure people of good governance, if they vote for the BJP. This historic yatra consumed a period of fifty-nine days, and covered a distance of over 15,000 kilometres. Thus it turned out to be the longest and most extensive mass contact programme undertaken by any political party in Indian history. Advani was fully successful in his aim and the BJP came to power in 1998. Thus began another phase in his life, the last one in this book, entitled *India: Strong & Self-confident*, which covers a span of ten years, from 1997 to 2007. This phase is more informative and objective than the preceding ones.

As the autobiography reveals, the 1998 elections convincingly proved that the BJP successfully coped up with the fierce propaganda of its adversaries and managed to expand its social as well as geographical base. It not only emerged as the single largest party, winning 182 seats, but also made a mark as the party having the highest number of MPs from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, along with the highest number of women MPs. At the same time, the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) came into existence, as a part of a major strategic decision. Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the new Prime Minister, while Advani took charge as the highest-ranking minister in his government, taking over the Home Ministry. Soon afterwards, he relinquished his responsibility as the President of the BJP, exemplifying in his own way, the ideal of ‘*one person, one post*’.

The thirteen-month NDA rule, Advani asserts, was quite beneficial for the far-reaching advancement of the nation. He mentions in detail the two historic accomplishments of the Vajpayee government: the Pokhran II nuclear test and the Lahore Bus Yatra. Both these feats, he claims, were equally significant from the diplomatic point of view. The Pokhran tests, in particular,

are addressed to as “our government’s greatest achievement...instilling a sense of pride, confidence and hope in Indians, both within and outside India...(They) confirmed our resolve to make India *shaktishali* (strong), *samruddha* (prosperous) and *swabhimani* (self-confident)” (541-42). Advani strongly justifies the courageous decision to conduct these tests, on the grounds that

For over a thousand years, India had been a victim of foreign rule due to the superior military power of the invaders. Therefore, when India won freedom from the British rule in 1947, national defence became the highest priority for nationalists so that the shame of defeat and enslavement was never repeated... Sadly, after Independence, the Congress party and its government under Nehru did not share this popular sentiment. His gross neglect of national defence often bordered on sanctimonious disdain. As a result, India had to pay heavy price during the Chinese aggression in 1962 (543).

Refuting the charges made by the Congress and the Communists that BJP’s adventurous policy placed India in an awkward position, “isolated internationally from its friends and the Non-Aligned community of nations (548), Advani states that “Pokhran II raised both the stature of Prime Minister Vajpayee, as also the popularity of his government, immensely” (550).

Advani describes the Lahore Bus Yatra as an honest attempt to establish lasting peace and harmonious relations between India and Pakistan. Terming this venture as “a big success” Advani pleads that “It raised the hopes across both sides of the borders for a peaceful solution to all the complicated problems between India and Pakistan” (552). Unfortunately, very soon, “the Peace Bus was hijacked and taken to Kargil” (ibid) because of which, India had to fight and win a heroic war, on the world’s highest battlefield. It was at the same juncture, when the Congress and the other parties joined hands to pull down the

Vajpayee government in the name of 'saving secularism'. To their utter disappointment, the NDA government lost the motion by the margin of one vote, and the Lok Sabha was dissolved on 26th April, 1999. This was a great setback to all the BJP leaders including Advani, who had left no stone unturned to snatch the victory in the 1998 elections from the opponents. He was bitterly crestfallen. As he bewails, "...I was filled with anguish to see how parties, especially smaller ones, were sought to split, individual MPs were poached, and money used in this entire sordid drama. These were a blot on the integrity, vitality and prestige of India's democracy" (559).

The spectacular victory in the Kargil war was, in Advani's opinion, unique in itself. It was for the first time, he remarks, that in contrast to the four previous wars, fought in 1948, 1962, 1965 and 1971, "not one inch of Indian territory was either lost in the battlefield or 'negotiated away' in the diplomatic field" (565). In his view, "victory in the Kargil War was a national accomplishment that transcended political barriers" (575). He, therefore, expresses his discontent with the approach of the Congress party, which, he charges, "did not have the magnanimity to appreciate a national success achieved during the rule of a BJP-led government" (575).

The 1999 mid-term pole brought a stupendous success to the NDA and the BJP. The NDA won a clear majority with 306 seats, while the BJP secured 182 seats. Advani regards it as a solid indication of the full faith people of India had placed in Vajpayee's dynamic leadership.

The issue of Sonia Gandhi's 'foreign origin' crops up every now and then, especially on the verge of general elections. Advani's reaction to it reflects a combination of lucidity, sensitivity and political maturity:

I strongly disapprove of certain personalised comments on Sonia Gandhi during the campaign. Such personal criticism of

a woman, and a widow at that, is clearly barred in India's cultural tradition, and nor can it have a place in democratic discourse...Like every other Indian; I have my sympathies for Sonia Gandhi for the tragedies that she has experienced in her life. I also admire the courage that she has displayed in overcoming them. Nevertheless, if there is one thing that has disappointed me the most, it is her active and irrefutable collusion in covering up the role of fellow Italian, Ottavio Quattrocchi, in the infamous Bofors scandal. It is devoid of any political morality and unbecoming of a person aspiring to hold the highest executive office in India (585-86).

Advani's concern over the image of his party and himself as 'anti-Muslim', 'anti-Minority' and 'anti-Dalit' is evident here and there in the autobiography. Keenly aware of this stigma, he takes all possible efforts to rupture that icon. He also makes a fuss of the much talked-about 'hidden agenda' of the BJP. Thus, while addressing to his party colleagues as a president in 2004, he articulated his views succinctly: "the BJP must consciously and systematically transform itself as a party embracing all sections of society and all religions of India. Every Indian, irrespective of their caste, religion, region, race and language must find the same place in our individual and collective mindscape" (541). In fact, as he himself informs, one of the foremost intentions behind his 'Pakistan Yatra' was "to convey...to everybody in Pakistan, that although my party and I are proud of Hinduism, we are not anti-Pakistan, and certainly not anti-Islam, or anti-Muslim" (786).

Advani's initiative to set up a constitutional review panel brought for him a severe censure from his political opponents. This act was interpreted as a cunning attempt to tamper with the Constitution in order to *write* a new Constitution in favour of the BJP. Calling all such allegation as "pure

hogwash”, Advani clarifies that the BJP had full faith in the competency and supremacy of the Constitution but earnestly thought it necessary to “study a half-century’s experience of the Constitution and make suitable recommendations to meet the challenges of the future” (587). He cogently avers:

Since India is not a theocratic state, the religious rights and the identities of the various faith-based communities that constitute the Great Indian Family must indeed be protected. But notions of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ should have no place in the politics...

Let me make it clear: my party is neither against minorities—Muslims or others—nor against any minority faith in India. We respect all faiths, including Islam. India belongs equally to all Indians, irrespective of their caste or creed. Our ideology of nationalism is inclusive and non-discriminatory (856).

On personal grounds, too, he poses to be a strong believer in religious equality. As he proclaims:

I cherish the fact that India is a multi-religious country in which...both Muslims and Christians have the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as others. I greatly admire the weighty contribution that they have made to enrich many facets of our national life. I hold all faiths to be worthy of respect (866).

Reading these lines, one is tempted to use the epithet, “Right Man in the Wrong Party”, popularly attached to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, for Advani too.

The issue of national security finds a pivotal position on Advani’s political agenda. He rightly regards the security of the nation as the paramount duty of the ruling government. He is sensible to realise that “national security

and national development are interdependent” (611). Influenced by the ‘*tit for tat*’ strategy of Sardar Patel, his role-model, Advani too favours aggressive foreign policy. Utterly dissatisfied with India’s perceived image as a soft state and a split society, Advani feels the dire need to project his country as a superpower. His approach towards terrorism is, however, balanced and diplomatic. As he opines,

An important lesson I learnt during my years as India’s Home Minister was that the war against terror is indeed very different from ‘war’ as is normally understood. It has to be fought on many levels, on several fronts, with diverse tools... It is natural for popular sentiments to be agitated after a terrible terrorist attack...But it is not given to mature nations to react to provocations on the basis of the anger and outrage they generate. It is the responsibility of the leadership to weigh the situation carefully and in its entirety, and then decide on a course of action that is both firm and proper (645).

Advani spares sufficient space in *My Country My Life* to relate his attainments and initiatives at the helm of the Home Ministry. He narrates in detail, his sincere endeavour to find a mutually acceptable solution to the Kashmir issue, his earnest desire to perceive the situation in the North-East with a broader approach, and his tireless efforts to create awareness about the grave threat posed by naxalism. He also comments at length on the Kandahar hijack and the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament, the two main instances of cross-border terrorism during his tenure as the Home Minister. Advani’s justification of the POTA and the rationale he provides behind the repealing of the Article 370 requires serious attention. His full-throated acclamation of Narendra Modi as “a leader with integrity, courage and competence” (760),

however, seems one-sided and partial. The way he displays unflinching faith in Modi and certifies his innocence in dealing with the communal violence in Gujrat is (760-61) also dubious.

Advani reveals that his “initial impulse” was not to join the Council of Ministers but to strengthen the party base. What compelled him to change his mind, in addition to the pressing demand of the party workers and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee himself, was “a keen desire to make a personal contribution, however modest, to the fulfilment of the promise” to ensure “safety and security of all citizens in all parts of the country” (601). An important decision taken during the NDA regime was to set up a Group of Minister (GoM) to study the national security system in its entirety and to suggest recommendations for the improvement of the internal as well as external national security. Advani views it as a momentous development in the Indian history, unprecedented since Independence. As a chairman of this group, Advani proudly claims to draft a report that constitutes “the most comprehensive blueprint ever prepared for the overhaul of India’s national security system” (611).

In a categorical manner, Advani admits his failure on three fronts. The first one is linked with the modernisation of the police forces; the second one is in relation with the centre-state and inter-state cooperation, and the third one is in connection with Dawood Ibrahim. The task of implementation of major reforms in the police forces could not meet success mainly due to the issue of VIP security, which he terms as “a major drain on police resources” (616). He conveys a shocking actuality which highlights the grave breach between appearance and reality:

I ordered a thorough review of the need and provisions of security to all the VIPs, and was startled to find that only

twenty -five percent of them genuinely needed protection. For the rest, having gun-totting policemen accompanying them everywhere was a mere status symbol. I tried to scale down or altogether remove the security of many VIPs, but had to face howls of protests. Paradoxically, some highly placed dignitaries, who had publically declared their opposition to VIP security, were the first ones to urge me to restore their security to its previous level after the ministry decided to downscale it (Ibid).

Another issue Advani tackles with is better coordination between the central and the state governments. Regarding it as the need of time, he stresses the inevitability to empower the Central Government in dealing with major threats like terrorism and communal as well as naxalite violence. It does not entail, he assures, the encroachment on the state's Constitutional rights. He puts forth his aspiration while commenting on this topic: "I fervently hope that state governments change their views, and political parties evolve a consensus in this regard so that someday soon India is able to have an effective federal law to strengthen our internal security" (619).

Despite taking consistent efforts and seeking the help of America, Advani could not succeed in securing the deportation of Dawood Ibrahim, the underworld Don, supposedly living in Karachi. Advani describes it as "one of the deepest disappointments I experienced during my stint in the Home Ministry" (648). He makes an appalling allegation that his persistent pursuit of getting Dawood back was hindered not by any outsider but by "somebody in the bureaucratic system" in India itself (654). He regrets:

I was deeply upset by this. Success on this score would have not only hugely embarrassed the rulers in Pakistan, but would also have meant a major psychological victory for India in its

prolonged campaign against cross-border terrorism. Secondly, it would have brought tremendous political dividends to the BJP and the Vajpayee government (654).

Advani's contemplation about the NDA's miserable defeat in 2004 elections and the succeeding turmoil in his party is worth reading in the original. It throws light on his ability to introspect ruthlessly and arrive at concrete conclusions. He openly admits that it was their over-confidence "buttressed by media reports and opinion polls" (762-63) that led them to go for early elections in April-May, 2004. His ambitious 'Bharat Uday Yatra', "the first one which was explicitly election-oriented" (764), too, could not save the party from its devastating defeat. Advani makes a clean breast on this frustrating downfall:

The taste of bitter defeat is by no means unfamiliar to me. Indeed, for most parts of my political life in the early decades, defeat was the norm and victory an exception. This, coupled with my innate nature of reacting to any situation with restraint and moderation, had prompted me to develop a rather philosophic attitude towards the outcomes of elections—neither to get depressed by defeats, nor to let victories breed boastfulness. Nevertheless, the results of the 2004 polls affected me more deeply than any other setback in the past (768).

Had this autobiography been written after 2009 elections, Advani would have reacted in a bitterer manner, as those elections shattered to pieces his long-cherished dream to lead the nation. His optimistic urge that "This too shall pass" and his anticipation that "the darkness of defeat will give way to a new dawn of victory for our party in the next parliamentary elections..." (846) received a fatal blow after 2009 verdict. In fact, his description of the sordid

state of the BJP after 2004 elections is sufficiently indicative of the party's destiny:

I should be candid in stating that, unlike in the past, the general state of the party morale and organisation worried me. There was some erosion of the team spirit both at the Centre and in several units. The tendency to voice inner-party differences publicly, and the temptation to use the media to settle scores, was on the rise. Most often those differences had nothing to do with principles or ideology, but were rooted in personal ambitions and animosities. The lure of power had begun to colour the behaviour of certain colleagues, and this in turn promoted groupism and individual loyalties. The ethos of struggle, sacrifice, discipline and idealism—which was the hallmark of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and later, the BJP—was weakening. Nothing pained me more than when, in contrast to our own proud projection of the BJP as ‘a party with difference’, the media pejoratively started to describe it as ‘a party with differences’ (775).

An utterly unfortunate, “unexpected and most painful episode” (782) in Advani's entire political life, which finds place towards the end of the autobiography is his Pakistan Yatra. As a ‘victim of ‘history’, he was longing to revisit his ‘motherland’. Thus trip to Pakistan had a unique significance in his life. Nimisha divulges its innate importance in the following way:

For “the man of Yatras” this was a Yatra that would mean a lot, more than even the Ram Ratha Yatra from Somnath... (It) is a nostalgic journey into his ‘self’, a search to relive the painfully separated life of innocence and youth, a poignant remembrance which would never leave his unconscious and sub-conscious mind, a journey to relieve the ‘identity’ that made him somewhere deep within ‘incomplete’, ever since it eluded him... (11).

This visit to Pakistan created controversy due to Advani's so-called approbation of Jinnah as a "secular leader", "great man" and "an Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity". No wonder, Advani calls it "the most agonising moment of my political life" (785). It proved to be extremely distressing for him than the 'Hawala' episode in 1996. What offended him most was the acute awareness that, at that time, "my party had stood solidly behind me, rejecting the charge with the contempt it deserved. In contrast, in the 2005 controversy over my Pakistan visit, several of my own party colleagues chose not to support me" (Ibid). He had to face tremendous criticism and was "hastily held guilty of committing a grave and unacceptable 'ideological deviation', of having 'betrayed Hindutva', and, in the estimation of some, even of being a '*gadhaar*' (traitor)" (Ibid). Advani employs his mastery over persuasive discourse at its best, to prove his innocence. He clarifies that the tribute he paid to the Creator of Pakistan was interpreted wrongly by the media. "I had only quoted from a largely forgotten speech of Jinnah to remind the people of Pakistan about the vision of a non-theocratic state that its own founder had articulated", he pleads (Ibid). All his efforts to validate his honest gesture, however, proved in vain. He had to pay a heavy price of his words of praise by losing his party Presidentship within a year. It was "profoundly agonising" for him and he found himself in "a dilemma", whether to remain in active politics or "to embrace the peace and comfort of a quiet family life" (829). Ironically enough, though he soon recovered from this depression, his party could not. As he himself admits, this unexpected event disturbed the cohesion within the BJP and confused millions of BJP supporters. It culminated in the subsequent defeat of the party in 2009 elections. Thus Chandan Mitra's following speculation was fully confirmed: "It will be difficult for BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate to live down the huge

controversy the visit sparked. Although he has made a valiant attempt to put the record straight...I'm afraid perceptions take long to get erased" (4).

The relationship between Advani and Vajpayee has always been a matter of curiosity as well as a point of debate both for the commoners and the political analysts. Indeed, it is an astounding instance in the world politics to find two personalities of nearly equal experience and mass support to have worked together in the same organisation, leaving aside petty ego problems, personal differences and private ambitions. Advani himself unfolds the secret behind this life-long companionship:

The relationship between Atalji and me was never competitive, much less combative...Our personalities are different and, naturally, our judgements on individuals, events and issue have differed on many occasions...However, what lent depth to our relationship were three factors. We both were strongly moored in the ideology, ideals and ethos of the Jana Sangha and the BJP, which commanded all its members to put Nation first, Party next, and Self last. We never allowed differences to undermine mutual trust and respect. But there was also a third and very important factor: I always implicitly and unquestioningly accepted Atalji to be my senior and my leader (840).

On comprehensive analysis of the book, the researcher arrives at the conclusion that it has certain inherent incongruities which spring from the author's ideological inconsistency. However, as a political autobiography, *My Country My Life* definitely succeeds in finding its place among the world's commendable illustrations of the genre. True to Nimisha's assertion, "...as the time flies by, this book will be remembered as a classic...It is, as is self-evident, more than a sum of its parts, which is why, one can be assured, it is going to be

a work long to be cherished. Indeed, the book proclaimeth the man” (12). Chandan Mitra’s critical observation is also noteworthy:

It...takes courage for a practising politician, especially someone as high profile as Advani...to reveal his side of the story. That he has been able to do so without generating fury or antagonizing too many people is truly remarkable. *My country My People* is not just a great addition to the celebrated list of political autobiographies, but a fascinating record of post-independence Indian politics (5).

Lata Jagatiani, in her commentary on this autobiography, draws a fair conclusion:

One may or may not agree with the BJP’s view of the direction that India should take in the future, but there are no two opinions, after reading the autobiography, that there are very few in Indian politics with a mettle and character of Advani. Perhaps this book will serve as an inspiration to many who are deeply for the nation but don’t know the high cost and also the high value of power (6).

My Country My Life can be looked upon as a complex cobweb netted with diverse intertextual threads. The title of the book itself is a reverberation of some of its precedent autobiographies, such as *My Life* by Bill Clinton and *My Times* by J P Kripalani. The latter one, in particular, may be credited as the major source of inspiration for Advani’s book, though he does not concede this fact. Published earlier, this 1000 paged autobiography too was penned by a Sindhi refugee who later became a highly revered politician. Though holding different ideological standpoint, Advani has high esteem for Kripalani, as is evident from the footnote on page 270 and seems to have been impressed by Kripalani’s way of writing and his manner of presentation. The title of the autobiography also echoes that of a popular Hindi movie, *Mera Gaon, Mera*

Desh (My Village, My Country). Considering Advani's love for movies, this imitation seems reasonable.

Kristeva argues that, rather than confining our attention to the structure of a text, we should study its *structuration* (how the structure came into being). This involves placing it within the 'totality of previous or synchronic texts' of which it was a 'transformation' (cited in Chandler 141). Thus, Kristeva views a text not as an individual or isolated unit but a compilation of cultural textuality. Gerard Genette's *architextuality* too represents a relationship between a text and the genre it belongs to. Architextuality mainly deals with "the reader's expectations, and thus their reception of a work" (5). These expectations include not only the generic but also the modal and the figurative. The structuration of *My Country My Life* complies with the defining features of a typical autobiography. The jacket of the book displays a photograph of its author (on the background of a tricolour, indicating his patriotic linkage); the blurb comprises of a complimentary remark by his senior colleague Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who has written the *Foreword* to this book. In keeping with the established literary codes and prevalent practices, the book includes formal *Acknowledgements* and a *Prologue*. The fly-leaf of the book shows a Mohenjo-Daro statue, which alludes to Advani's Sindh connection. A full-page picture of the 'Hindu' Bharat Mata emphatically underlines his religious underpinning. The main body of the book is followed by an *Epilogue* and *Appendices*. In addition, there are frequent footnotes that are supportive to the main body.

Intertextuality also marks its presence through translation. A multitude of words and expressions from Hindi and Sanskrit appear in the book. e.g. *shakha*, *pracharak*, *swayamsevak*, *puja*, *aarti*, *seva*, *shakti*, *samskaras*, *vikas*, *mazdoor*, *mukhiya*, *dharma*, *diksha*, *gaddar*, *Bhagwa Dhwaj*, *Kartavya Path*, *pad yatra* *akand paath*, *sampoorna kranti*, etc. Sometimes, Hindi sayings and slogans are

quoted in the original, keeping intact their authentic flavour. e.g. *Garibi Hatao; Mungerilal ke hasin sapane; Ek desh me do vidhan, do pradhan, aur do nishan, nahin challenge, nahin challenge; Kharbooja chakkoo par gire ya chhakoo kharbooje par, katega to kharbooja hi; Ek pair rail mein, ek pair rai mein; Andhere mein ek chingari, Atal Bihari, Atal Bihari, etc.*

My Country My Life is literally a magnificent mosaic of quotations and citations. Advani's wealth of reading enables him to quote and cite from a heap of references, both ancient and modern, to hold up his arguments. The opening chapter of *Phase One*, entitled 'Triumph of Freedom, Tragedy of Partition', begins with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's studied views on the "cultural unity" of India as mentioned in his book, *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (2). Advani's concept of "cultural nationalism", which he describes as "an important aspect of the *raison d'être*" of his autobiography, has its theoretical basis on these presuppositions (XXVIII). He also quotes at length from *Dr. Ambedkar, Life and Mission*, a biography by Dhanajay Kher, *India: As a Secular State*, a political treatise by Donald Eugene Smith and Rabindranath Tagore's influential book, *Nationalism*. It is evident that the reading of these books, harmonised with the ideological influence of the RSS, has shaped up his thoughts and theory.

While describing the trauma of Partition and its disastrous effects on the lives of thousands of Sindhi migrants, Advani cites the book, *Sindhi Reflections* by Lata Jagatiani, which he hails as "a heart-rending, and, at the same time, inspiring story of the lives of various refugees who served India with devotion and distinction" (12). There is also a passing reference to some important books which deal with this sensitive issue in detail, such as *Price of Partition* by Dr. Rafiq Zakaria, *Pakistan: Birth and Early Years* by Sri Prakasa, *Peeps into Pakistan* by M.S.M. Sharma and *Secular Politics Communal Agenda: A History*

of Politics in India from 1860 to 1953, a seminal work by Makkhan Lal. Advani cannot accept the label ‘outsider’ used for the Sindhi people. He quotes Jawaharlal Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* and *Pearls of Vedas: Poetic Translation in Hindi, Urdu and English*, a scholarly book by K. Talreja, to prove that there is an inseparable bond between the Sindh and the Hind.

The seeds of Advani’s lifelong passion for books germinated during his college days. It was at D.G. National College, Hyderabad when he learnt that he was “more inclined towards English literature” (35). He refers to a number of well-known English novels, such as *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Three Musketeers* which seem to have enriched his vocabulary and inculcated him the language sense. When he joined the R.S.S., he “started reading all the available literature on Indian history, especially the history of great patriotic warriors like Shivaji, Rana Pratap and Guru Govind Singh” (40-41). He once read five books, at a stretch, on Shivaji Maharaj. He mentions *The Grand Rebel: An Impression of Shivaji, the Founder of Maratha Empire* by Dennis Kincaid, which deeply influenced him. All those books brought about, Advani writes, “a strange transformation within me. The question of why and how India lost its freedom started to agitate my young mind. Simultaneously, as a teenager exposed to patriotic ideals I started to dream about India as a free nation in the future” (42). Apart from such books, Advani also came across a number of best-sellers like *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie. He calls this book “one of the five or six life-transforming books I have read so far” (43). As he further states, this book immensely helped him mould his behaviour and thereby succeed in his political life.

Chapters related to the Bofors scam, the riots in Punjab and the Ayodhya movement, in particular, are intersected with intertextual references. The Bofors

scam is described with the help of two printed evidences, namely *Bofors: The Ambassador's Evidence* by B.M. Oza and N.Ram's article, 'Know Your Bofors', published in the *Frontline*. Advani relates the brutal massacre of the Sikhs in Delhi after Indira Gandhi's assassination and the supporting role of the Congress leaders in this traumatic incident on the basis of three contemporary accounts: Khushwant Singh's *A History of the Sikhs*, Satya Pal Dang's *Terrorism in Punjab* and *Knights of Falsehood* by K.P.S. Gill. Advani's perception of the Ayodhya issue is founded on a host of references, both classical and current. He cites *Reporting Memoirs* by K.P. Krishnaunni, *Rites of Passage* by Sanjoy Hazarika, *Siva: Siva Purana Retold* by Ramesh Menon, *Somnath: The Shrine Eternal* as well as *Pilgrimage to Freedom* by K.M. Munshi and attacks P.V. Narasimha Rao's book, *Ayodhya: 6December 1992*. It is obvious that his approach to this issue is more religious than practical.

A number of textual references appear in the second half of the autobiography, which roughly begins with Advani's accession to power in the capacity of the Home minister. Thus there are quotations from *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb* by Strobe Talbott, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* by Zahid Hussain, *Introduction to the Constitution of India* by Durga Das Basu, *Iqbal: the Poet and the Politician* by Dr. Rafiq Zakaria. Advani even alludes to a Ph. D. thesis by an American scholar, Hampton Thomson, entitled *The Transformation of an Ideological Movement into an Aggressive Party: A Case Study of the Bharatiya Jana Sangha*, which traces the origin and growth of the BJP.

Advani's efforts to handle the Kashmir issue, his diplomatic moves to fight the cross-border terrorism, his Pakistan Yatra and his controversial speech on Jinah form an important element of this autobiography. This component is loaded with intertextuality. There are references to a variety of sources which

include *Jinah: Secular and Nationalist* by Dr. Ajeet Jawed, *South Asia on a Short Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament* by Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir 1947-48* by Chandrashekhar Dasgupta, *Lal Advani: The Man and His Mission* by Gulab Vazirani and Swami Vivekanand's speech-collection, *The Future of India*. In addition, there are pieces from other autobiographies such as *A Call to Honour: In Service of Emergent India* by Jaswant Singh, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* by Parvez Musharraf, *Roses in December: A Memoir* by M.C. Chagla and *Some Memoirs* by Raja of Mahamudabad. Advani mentions many newspaper articles and reports to justify or strengthen his stance, viz. Ahmed Rashid's 'EU condemns "flawed" Pakistan elections' in *Telegraph* (14 October, 2002), Anil Narendra's 'Driving home a point' in the *Pioneer* (26 July, 2001), B. Murlidhar Reddy's 'Musharraf blames it on Advani' in the *Hindu* (31 August, 2001), Ghulam Hasnain's 'Portrait of a Don' in *Newsline* (September, 2001), Harinder Baweja and Raj Chengappa's 'The War of Words' in *India Today* (9 August, 1999), Harish Khare's 'The "Don" has been grounded' in the *Hindu* (17 October, 2003), Jed Rubenfeld's 'The Interpretation of murder' in *Headline Review* (2006), Kalyan Chudhari's 'Promise of Peace' in *Frontline* (18 January, 2003), Kanchan Gupta's 'When Advani Declared Atal PM in 1995' in the *Pioneer* (11 December, 2007), Manoj Joshi's 'Nuclear Shock Wave' in *India Today* (25 May, 1998), Nirupama Subramanian's 'Musharraf "deeply hurt" by Vajpayee's denial' in the *Hindu* (13 October, 2006), Praveen Swami's 'Lashkar-e-Taiba, in Theory and Practice' in the *Hindu* (3 November, 2005), R.K.Raghvan's 'A Reverse for Police Reforms' in *Frontline* (7-20 May, 2005), Rajeev Sharma's 'Pak to hand over Dawood: Powell' in the *Tribune* (20 January, 2001), Shekhar Gupta's 'Congrats, New Delhi, Thank You, Srinagar' in the *Indian Express* (11 October, 2002), Shishir Gupta's 'Terror crackdown

Slackened in 2005' in *the Indian Express* (27 January, 2006), Shyam Bhatia's 'Advani's UK trip a diplomatic success' on Rediff.com. (17 June, 2003), Suman Guha Mozumder's 'Advani renews bond with Los Angeles' on Rediff.com. (12 June, 2003), T.V. Rajeshwar's 'Migration or Invasion?' in the *Hindustan Times* (7 February, 1996) and Vir Sanghvi's 'Two Parties, Two Faces?' in *Seminar* (2001). There are excerpts from media interviews on *India Today* (22 March, 1999 and 11 October, 2001), *Outlook* (22 October, 2001) and NDTV on 'Walk the Talk' (15 March, 2005).

In this way, the intertextual study of *My Country My Life* denotes its *inborn* interconnection and allusive relationship with a number of literary and non-literary texts. It shows the various ways in which one text leads to, evokes, is made from, and is intersected by others. It marks the structural presence of other works. There are elements of earlier works discernible in it. This analysis conforms to Thomas Greene's succinct observation: "since a literary text that draws nothing from its predecessors is inconceivable, intertextuality is a universal constant" (10).

A relatively bulky book, *My Country My Life* comprises of nearly 1000 pages (954, to be precise). Thus going through it requires a lot of patience and perseverance on the part of the reader. The researcher considers that the excessive length of the book is one of its major drawbacks. Moreover, it tends to be too informative and argumentative. Many a time criticised by the media and overlooked by the intelligentsia, Advani seems to take here an opportunity to defend his stance. Thus the book occasionally takes the form of an 'Apologie', with self-defence and self-justification as its prominent objectives. Advani makes a desperate attempt to assert his role in the Ayodhya movement. He also vindicates his controversial speech on Jinnah delivered during his Pakistan Yatra in 2005. There are separate chapters describing the persons like

Ekhnath Ranade and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya who inspired Advani a lot, shaped his political career and developed his intellectual set-up. Advani even spares a 14 paged chapter for Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in which he candidly speaks about their lifelong association. The author's humility and nobility as reflected through his writing is truly appreciable. However, he chooses to be selectively silent on a number of issues of immediate interest and importance, such as the Pokhran atomic test, the Kandahar plane hijack, the Kargil war and the Jayalalitha factor that destabilised the NDA government. Inclusion of full-length correspondences and speeches, lengthy citations and frequent footnotes damage the flow of narration. At times, the main body of the book is lost in the matrix of digressions.

All in all, Advani presents an elegant and fairly sincere “non-Marxist, non-Congress perspective of contemporary history” (Mitra 2) through this remarkable self-portrait. As Advani himself asserts, the clash between *pseudo-secularism* and *genuine secularism* forms one of the major themes of his autobiography. The book attempts to offer a holistic account of the last six decades since independence albeit through the prism of the RSS and BJP. It is an admirable combination of the personal and the political though the political aspect tends to take over the personal. It surely makes a fascinating reading because of its lively style of presentation, accuracy of details and logical arrangement. Thus, *My Country My Life* registers the defining phases in Advani's astonishing quest for identity; culminating in its successful attainment.

