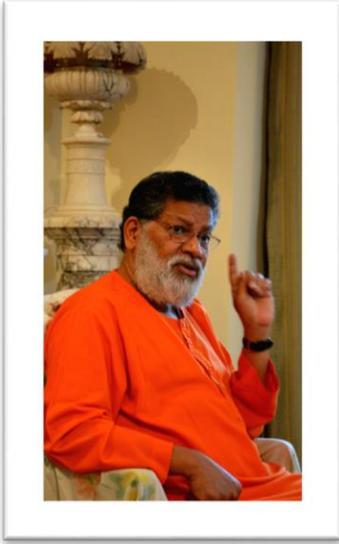


“Modi- the Prime Minister” (Thoughts on the New Prime Minister of India)

SWAMI BODHANANDA

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Narendra Modi's stunning as well as sweeping victory, in the just concluded (May 2014) general election to the 16th Parliament of India, is epochal.

It rivalled the historic victory of Barack Obama in the American presidential election of 2008. Modi's performance is in a way a continuation of the great tradition of Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel and Morarji Deasai. India and Indian politics has taken a sharp turn, never to return, for better or worse, with this election. Now it will be Narendra Modi and his brand of politics for another ten to fifteen years.

Modi will rule India for the next ten years unchallenged.

Undoubtedly Modi was building on the foundation laid by the R.S.S and the BJP. As

he puts it succinctly, 'aapne mere ko ungli pakadke chalaaya', 'aapne apna kanthe pe biddaake dikhaaya/sikhaaya' - 'I walked holding your little finger' and 'I saw and learnt sitting on your shoulders'. Those words revealed Modi's long periods of training in the Hindutva camp, encapsulating the Hindu value of respecting elders and feeling grateful to them for your successes. With those words, Modi not only disarmed all the octogenarian overambitious detractors in his own party, but also won the love and affection of millions of elderly Indians who flocked the booths to vote for him.

Modi has all the ingredients in his personal history to be a legendary leader. He was born in a dirt poor backward family, he left his home and village at a young age of seventeen in search of truth and God, wandered in the Himalayas, learnt Yoga and Sanskrit, came back after two years of wandering, wiser and determined, to become a svayam sevak in the service of Motherland. Thereafter for thirty years he lived like a sannyasi doing community work and organizing mega events at different parts of

India, eventually to become the chief Minister of Gujarat, at the ripe age of fifty one, in 2001. Though he had no prior administrative experience, Modi learnt quickly and literally changed the social profile and economic face of Gujarat, clocking 14 per cent annual growth, surpassing that of even China and winning election after election to the state assembly. 'The Gujarat Model of Growth', became the toast of the world.

Modi's command over Hindi, poetic imagination, ability to connect with the masses, pragmatic approach to problems, vast administrative experience and inherent friendliness helped him power the BJP election machine at his command, to steam roll over all other parties and win an unimaginable fairy tale victory of 282 seats, a single party majority, and a whopping 334 seats with his allies, in a parliament of 543 members.

Overnight Modi stood at par with the Everest in Indian politics, overshadowing all other politicians, reducing them to the size of insignificant pygmies.

Over a period of time, learning from the hot seat of the chief ministership of Gujarat, Modi modified himself to be a pragmatic politician, market oriented and business friendly economic manager and an efficient no-nonsense administrator. In many of his speeches delivered to business leaders and college students, Modi stressed the need for 'speed, scale and skill' in Indian economy. And he continued to expand the theme by

giving series of anecdotes from his Gujarat experience, of how he implemented those ideas successfully in his state. Listeners could immediately connect with those subtle concepts when explained in his inimitable style. (The 'Chai Pe Charcha' was a master stroke in grass-root mobilization). In another speech Modi highlighted the four D-principles that guided him: 'democracy, development, decisiveness, and determination'. He even thundered: 'we need more latrines, not temples'.

Modi indeed is a decisive leader.

Modi may be decisive, but is he not highly divisive? quips some doubting Thomases. To that Modi's response is: the divide is not between Hindus and Muslims, but between poor Hindus and Muslims on one side and poverty and the poor economic policies of vote bank politics on the other. Modi insists that the spirit of entrepreneurship and wealth creation alone can remove poverty. Politics of entitlement and economics of subsidies only perpetuate poverty.

In Modi's watch we can expect a great leap in manufacturing activities, infrastructure development, increase in the export of IT related and other high end products and jobs for the millions of skilled workforces. Though Modi will have to put his phenomenal communication skills to sell the fundamental principles of development, its long term gains and short term pains, to a generally cynical rural vote bank and the aspirational urban unemployed youth. Modi will have to develop his campaign slogan,

'Subke sath, Sabka vikas' into actionable economic policies without compromising ideals of social justice and equity.

By winning this election based on the development agenda, Modi has not only rewritten the electoral script of India, radically differing from the phony secularism of the Congress and the casteist parties like SP, RJD, BSP and various hues of Janata Dals, but surprisingly in the same stroke, he has also stolen the thunder from his own mentors like RSS, VHP and the hardliners in the BJP. (Though regional parties like AIADMK, BJD, AITMC, Shiva Sena and religion based parties like Akali Dal and Muslim League could hold their ground in this election defying the Modi wave). Modi in his triumphant march to Delhi ignored or side lined old slogans like Ram Mandir, Article 370 and Common Civil Code. They may be laudable ideas, but definitely were not the priorities and an Indian consensus has yet to be built around them. The pragmatic Modi will wait till their time come.

Modi's greatest achievement is that he could galvanize all hardliners, in the party rank and file, around the moderate and modern idea of development for all Indians - 120 crore 'desh-vasis'. (A la what Tony Blair did to Labor party in England and Bill Clinton to Democratic party in the U.S). Modi also preached the sanctity of Indian constitution and the determination to solve all issues within its framework. Falling on his knees and bowing and touching the steps to the central Hall of parliament with his forehead was a masterstroke, a symbolic act of emotionally

connecting India's ancient tradition with a modern democratic institution, which he called the 'temple of democracy'.

One question people normally ask is, why does Modi, in spite of his OBC status and poor family background, evoke such strong negative reactions from Indian and international intellectuals and academia. Deva Gowda and U.R. Anantamurthy threatened that they will not live in an India ruled by Modi as Prime Minister of the country. New York Times, The Guardian and The Economist cautioned against the divisive politics of Modi. Western intellectuals issued encyclicals against racist Modi. United States denied visa to killer Modi (which they revoked after his resounding victory in Indian elections). The leftist friends in India feel jittery about the Hindu fundamentalist Modi. They don't understand Modi's style, vocabulary and categories of thinking.

But beyond rhetoric, once acquainted with Modi's intentions, commitment and work, I feel, they all will feel comfortable and come to eat from Modi's hand. Modi is a pragmatic politician, his ideals are sublime and he is rooted in the pluralistic tradition of India. His love for India is genuine and selfless. Modi is a wok in progress in the mould of Ashoka, Akbar and Gandhi. Modi will indeed change the language of Indian discourse, drawing heavily from Indian traditions, which may upset the arm chair rootless intellectuals of Indian academia. Modi will storm the citadels of entrenched power and intellectual hegemony, demanding

a fresh look at issues from an authentic Indian perspective.

Modi's real long term challengers will be regional outfits. He may go in for a federal structure with more powers to the states to woo regional parties. But he cannot afford to compromise on India's unity and rapid economic development. Modi will have enough political capital and moral authority to reach across people over the heads of regional satraps if they refuse to see the writings on the wall.

India is becoming predominantly urban, the middle class is swelling and the aspirational youth population who couldn't care less for caste, region and religion are tipping the scales in favour of a competitive, market driven corporate economy. If Modi plays his cards well he will be able to tap into this resource to win elections and change the developmental discourse in India. Rationalizing labour and taxation laws, easing land acquisition rules, allowing FDI in retail, modernizing infrastructure and curbing corruption would be the immediate concern of Modi administration.

On the foreign front, Modi will have to confront China, tame Pakistan and solve the festering Kashmir problem, revive the dysfunctional SAARC and build trust in the South Asian region towards the creation of a common economic space. Growing Chinese

power will have to be contained by increasing economic cooperation with China and America, while continuing to build India's military might as well as defence alliances with countries bordering China.

Modi is a whole person: in him emotions, thoughts, actions and the country's interests are united.

Modi has the right aura: has abundant political capital, and if he doesn't succumb to temptations and success induced arrogance, he will go on to rule India for the next ten years. By then Modi will be 73 years old. He should train the next leader, win the third term and after two years, when he would be 75 years old, hand over power and retire as an elder statesman, to pursue his lifelong passion - spirituality. In such a scenario Modi would be hailed as the greatest post independent leader of India.

Modi's swearing in has the trappings of a coronation - some sort of a Rajasuya. Hearing of Modi's resounding victory, the neighbouring countries are sending their prime ministers and presidents to the coronation. It is a symbolic and subliminal acceptance of India's regional supremacy. A strong India with a strong leader (forget the semantics about strong versus supple) can command respect and convergence from countries that fall in the Chakravarti Kshetra, as envisaged by

