

The Modi Model

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In a relatively short time Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, has become one of the most widely discussed political figures in India. Although the discussion around him is mostly in the context of his collusion in the communal massacre in Gujarat in 2002, there have also been laudatory references to efficient administration facilitating high rates of growth. It is therefore useful to see what exactly constitutes 'the Modi Model' of governance and development.

If one has to identify one predominant, defining characteristic of the 'Modi Model', then surely it is 'aggressiveness'—aggressiveness against minorities, aggressiveness against people's movements and human rights organisations, aggressiveness against the central government, aggressiveness against opposition parties, aggressiveness against colleagues in his own political party—in fact, an aggressiveness so pervasive that it enters even into close relationships involving colleagues and those closest to him.

Even though it became well-known early enough that the most unspeakable cruelty including highly cruel rapes had taken place, from day one the Modi government tried its best to cover-up the truth. Towards this end, people were tortured to give false evidence, people involved in violence or those close to them were given a leading role in investigating the crime. In fact, the entire legal process was so faulty that the Supreme Court ordered 2000 cases to be reopened. It also became clear from *Tehelka* tapes (*Tehelka* is an Indian weekly magazine) and other sources that those who led the violent mobs considered Modi to be their saviour and protector. They said Modi took several steps, even ensured that judges were changed to secure their release despite the evidence of most serious crimes against them. It was also revealed that the leaders of this massacre had earlier been identifying potential targets of violence, collecting weapons, making bombs, diverting dynamite meant for mining.

In view of this reality, it is not surprising that the Modi regime had to launch one of the most persistent, relentless, large-scale cover-up campaigns ever associated with a state government. In fact, the most important task for the Modi government in recent years has been to cover up the truth of communal violence. Can a government so persistently occupied with covering up the truth ever be expected to be transparent in its dealings? This cover-up is in fact seen in the context of a host of other issues including the killing of the government's own revenue minister Mr Haren Pandya, encounter killings, farmers' suicides etc.

How can a government so utterly devoid of transparency be credited with good, efficient administration. Efficiency in what? Efficiency in protecting mass murderers? Efficiency in subverting truth? Efficiency in dismantling relief camps even before the minimum relief had been provided to the victims of violence?

The stigma of the crimes of communal violence could have been reduced to some extent if at least sincere efforts were made to provide relief and rehabilitation to the victims of violence and the resulting displacement. But the Modi government behaved as if it did not care for the victims, providing the minimum relief at its camps and then dismantling these camps all too soon.

This reveals how aggressive the Modi mindset is towards minorities - an aggressiveness that prevents any amends being made even for the worst wrongs.

This aggressiveness towards significant sections of the population makes Modi a threat to democracy. A similar aggressiveness is seen while promoting regional interests, at times leading to aggressiveness against central government and at times against people's movements. This can also be very dangerous for democracy. When the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save Narmada Movement) raised the issue of displaced people and tried to argue that without sacrificing Gujarat's interests many people can still be saved from displacement, Modi became extremely aggressive and his tantrums created a situation where a free debate based on facts could not take place. But the same Modi government could not get ready the canal infrastructure in time to use the available water properly. The same Modi government actually snatched away the share of Gujarat's water-starved villagers to allocate more water to big industries and cities.

This aggressiveness is so widely pervasive that it even alienates Modi's colleagues within the government, the ruling party with its sister organisations. Haren Pandya, his revenue minister, had pleaded with journalists not to name him as the source of information which indicted Modi for his role in communal violence fearing that he would be killed if his role in providing this information became known. Nonetheless, he was eventually killed. Ultimately, this all-pervading aggressiveness has even alienated those who were closest to Modi in his professional and personal life.

So what is the society that the 'Modi Model' seeks to create? In the *Tehelka* tapes one of the perpetrators of the year 2002 carnage speaks in boastful details, right in front of his wife, about a woman he raped. Such are the people who are called the defenders of faith in Modi raj. There cannot be any doubt that the 'Modi Model' is not only a very divisive one - it is also a society in which the worst hypocrisy is practised as shocking injustice, violence and discrimination are allowed under the garb of protecting faith and promoting religion.

When hypocrisy rules, is it any wonder that inconvenient data is shoved aside and other data is given new interpretations to create a false impression; of prosperity in a situation of increasing farmers' suicides, indebtedness and displacement. At a time when in terms of narrow GDP indicators, the entire national economy is recording fast growth, it is only to be expected that a coastal state always known for its lead in trade and entrepreneurship will record somewhat higher than national growth. But the 'Modi Model' cannot run away from the reality of increasing malnutrition, displacement, farmers' crisis, indebtedness and threats to food security. Industries introduced rapidly without consideration of their environmental and social costs may inflate investment figures today, but can prove costly tomorrow.

Stable, sustainable, balanced development is likely to take place when creative energies of diverse people can be harnessed for the common goals of achieving welfare of all. But when aggressiveness at various levels of society spreads alienation and hostility, the inflow of outside funds alone cannot create the conditions for balanced development. The cause of development is not helped when peace and harmony are deliberately violated. The 'Modi Model' cannot provide sustainable development which needs conditions of peace and

harmony as well as concerns for environment and livelihoods protection and safety. □