

# How Modi is beginning to change face of India



Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay

The media is awash with surveys that indicate a majority of people are satisfied with the performance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government. Their expectations, they told pollsters, have been surpassed. Three years after the watershed mandate, both the government and the ruling party have worked as per my expectations too. This may seem odd to readers who kept track of this writer's views, but there is a reason for this high score on the "satisfaction" index. I feel no disappointment as the script unfolded exactly as envisaged.

To appreciate this, one must go back to 2013-14, to the people who decided that Mr Modi and his party — or its allies — was their choice. These people, constituting around 37 of Indians who voted, opted for Mr Modi for two reasons: the first lot thought he had put the ghosts of Godhra, the Gujarat riots and encounter deaths behind him and had reinvented himself as the "Development Man". In Mr Modi, they saw a transformative leader, who could extricate the nation from the morass it slipped in during Dr Manmohan Singh's second term. The second lot, who were under no illusions, felt a Hindu "Hriday Samrat" is always true to his core beliefs. They were sure everything else was a smokescreen, the proverbial add-on to an existing pizza base. This section felt that Mr Modi's election was a historical necessity to seek revenge for the "subjugation" of Hindus in the medieval past.

Even among the first group, there were two

categories, one of which endorsed hardline Hindutva in subconscious minds but were too timid to admit this and publicly articulate support for majoritarianism. But it was the second category, well-meaning right-wing liberals, who bore the most risk as they staked belief and commitment to humanitarianism and took Mr Modi's utterances at face value. They were politically naive and hoped Mr Modi would be nothing but Atal Behari Vajpayee with 282 Lok Sabha MPs.

In recent weeks, there have been several instances of these "liberals" feeling unsure about their choice. For many, Yogi Adityanath becoming Uttar Pradesh chief minister was the last straw, a move that could no longer prevent them from confronting their inner selves. These "liberals" had deluded themselves when in 2014 Mr Modi mocked Rahul Gandhi, calling him "shehzade", not assigning a more Hindi/Hindu moniker of *yuvaraj* or *rajakumar*. These "liberals" also didn't read the writing on the wall when the then UPA government was repeatedly parodied as the *Dilli sultanate* and not *samrajya*; *rajya* or *rajatva*. Clearly, the BJP campaign was intended to run with the hare and hunt with the hound.

There are three areas in which Mr Modi's performance must be assessed — social impact, effect on public institutions and democratic processes and, finally, government policies and initiatives. While the slide downhill in the first two sectors is ominous but on expected lines, the performance on the final parameter is a shade disappointing.

The social strategy was evident within weeks when Yogi Adityanath was given charge of handling the bypolls in UP. Thereafter, there has been no relenting on the strategy to maximise support from among the proverbial 85 per cent comprising Hindus and what Sangh Parivar labels as Indian Religionists. There is no disappointment as Mr Modi's government was not expected to work to integrate Juhapura, the largest ghetto in Asia with an all-Muslim populace, that exists on the fringes of Ahmedabad, as a testimony to the community's social exclusion. There is no disenchantment with this government because it was expected it would work towards the creation of many more Juhapuras. If the 2014 verdict made Muslims realise they were rendered redundant in the electoral process, that the BJP can win elections without even paying lip-service to them, developments since then has increased their social isolation. As the recent UP elections has demonstrated, a grand narrative has been created with the intention of deepening prejudice against Muslims. Slaughterhouses have to be shut down as mainly Muslims own and work in these. Moreover, this industry proliferated due to the "appeasement" policies of previous governments. Owners and workers have benefited and became rich overnight. As this is an industry where work is "over" by mid-morning, Muslim youth have all the time to loiter around women's colleges and seduce Hindu

girls. The meat ban, *gau raksha* and "anti-Romeo squads" are part of a grand strategy to hit back after Hindus were at the receiving end under "pseudo secular rule"! But then, these developments are also on expected lines.

After declaring Parliament as a temple of democracy, the BJP refused to confer Leader of the Opposition status to the Congress' nominee. If that showed how democratic institutions would be treated, the strategy to dub "problematic" laws as money bills is the latest instance of scant respect for institutions and tradition. Frequent run-ins with the judiciary and attacks on educational institutions also underline the growing devaluation of healthy precedents. Insofar as government policies and governance tactics are concerned, there is little change from the Gujarat model of micro-management and lofty ideas without adequate spade work. Because nothing can be consistently inadequate, several schemes made steady progress, but core areas remain untended. Finding jobs for people and addressing growing livelihood concerns remains the biggest areas of worry. However much the government may like to pat itself on the back for the pace of converting to LED use or expanding the DBT network, the people's key concern remains finding adequate resources.

The regime's political consolidation too is on expected lines. Three years into Mr Modi's tenure, the picture on the ground is turning out exactly as foreseen. There was an outside chance in 2014 that India would change Mr Modi. But he has clearly been smarter and appears to be succeeding in altering the face of the nation.

The writer is the author of *Narendra Modi: The Man, the Times and Sikhs: The Untold*

**There was an outside chance in 2014 that India would change Modi. But he has clearly been smarter and appears to be succeeding in altering the face of the nation.**