

MODI'S INVINCIBILITY IS FINALLY SHATTERED

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When Narendra Modi swept to power May 2014, it was not just incredible, but quite stunning. No single party had won with such a huge majority in thirty years since 1984. The Congress that had won 404 seats in 1984 soon after the assassination of India Gandhi, was down to its lowest ever — just 42 seats. Modi defied poll predictions and had more than doubled the BJP's earlier tally, to win 282 seats. He had a very impressive 31 percent of the total votes polled and even a section of the Muslims had voted for him. Both the stock markets rose and so did the Indian rupee — in acknowledgement. There is no doubt that the Indian media played a very important hand in building up Modi's claim and image as the man that India must have. Over a period of two years, it went on a relentless mission, attacking the ruling Congress-UPA government in the severest of terms. After all, 5000 crore rupees that was reportedly spent on the media blitz in favour of Modi and the BJP is surely a lot of money. The corporate sector was clearly on his side as he had hard-sold his image as a business-friendly chief minister for over a dozen years. He turned the social media into his Brahmastra and he used it to full advantage, especially among the youth who were clamouring for a change and for jobs.

What followed thereafter has been described as 'disappointing' by numerous simple Indians who had voted for change and development, and 'traumatic' by those who saw the secular constitution and its cherished values of plurality and freedom being trampled upon mercilessly. Though the BJP had avoided issues of Hindu nationalism and direct references to Hindutva in the election campaign, once it was in power, it unleashed a viscous form of right-wing storm-trooping that India had never seen before. After all, the BJP had been in power before, under Vajpayee, but it had not revealed the ugly face of Hindu majoritarianism in this manner. A systematic campaign was undertaken to overwhelm the minorities that was carried through with appropriate excesses, from physical violence to downright manslaughter. What was more disturbing was the impunity with which the perpetrators got away, without retribution. The plot soon became clear that this was 'state sponsored', 'outsourced violence'. Equally distressing were the instant glorification of such unabashed crimes and an eerie total silence from India's most talkative PM.

While most of the mainstream media went on mute mode, in the world of social media, rabid trolls and fake news manufacturers captured WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter, eulogising every act of their infallible leader. Calculated poison was spread about Nehru, Indira and 'the dynasty' and this well-financed industry of hate avoided the mainstream media because their claims would be exposed and even legal action could be taken. A CM like Yogi Adityanath, with a long history of criminal

cases, spewed more venom and publicly honoured murderous cow vigilante gangs and lumpen kanwariyas. The result was a series of calculated violence and local riots — these keep the cauldron boiling.

At the national level, it was a one-man show that India had never seen before and narcissism became part of the national policy. Every ministry appeared to be run by the PM and all great benefits to the people were delivered by him alone, as huge public hoardings carrying his smiling face proclaimed. In May this year, an RTI query revealed tht Modi's government has spent 4,346 crores on upfront publicity and no one can ever guess how much more was wasted by public sector units and public funded organisations to build up on Modi. He appeared on Akashvani once a month to explain to the nation why it was lucky to have him as the PM — and all other radio and TV channels were 'persuaded' to carry his memorable speeches.

This public-funded personality cult was reinforced by the iron-handed grip of the Modi-Amit Shah duo on the party and the organisation. The unequivocal message was that Modi was invincible, so every one may as well fall in line. Millions actually believed this till very recently. Along with this, all critics, big and small, tasted the quick wrath and brutal raids of the CBI and Income Tax. This sent the second message that Modi was dangerous as Gujarat had found out and so it was best not to contradict or oppose him. Four years have been a terrible period when people actually spoke in hushed whispers, when they dared to speak at all. Every national public institution was packed with his supporters and cheer leaders, and India came the closest to a fascist rule in its 70 years. But then, a democracy of 130 crore people just cannot function without debate and dissent and some brave-hearts rose to the occasion — despite viscous vilification and dire threats, overt and covert. But what mattered more was Modi's own hubris and it was the sheer arrogance of power that became Modi's undoing.

Without the benefit of genuine advice, he embarked on the biggest economic blunder made by any PM since Independence and his most-cherished goal to be remembered for ever will surely come true. With his devastating 'Demonetisation', Modi has gone down in history not as a glorious statesman but as the second Muhammad Bin Tughlaq. Small industries and self-earners suffered the most, as did farmers — who voiced their frustration against Modi, even as the better-off classes cowered and dithered. Then Modi announced his rushed-through GST in Parliament at midnight on 1st July 2017 with all his theatrics but it was a poor and pathetic imitation of Nehru's 'Tryst With Destiny' speech that he delivered on the eve of our Independence. GST tied up trade and industry in avoidable knots and tangles that took several months to unscramble, leaving the economy was mauled. The people then retaliated and sent a message to Modi, whose party lost by-election after by-election to Parliament. Yet, Modi learnt nothing. Even after the BJP just managed to scraped through the assembly elections in Modi's own Gujarat, thanks largely due to his hand-picked chief election commissioner, he learnt little. Then, he lost the major state of Karnataka despite relentless campaigning, but his haughtiness grew even more. In

lieu of real economic growth, he tampered with GDP figures, and even tried fixing employment figures when he realised that he could not produce the many jobs he had promised

It is only after he lost the Hindi-belt states of Chattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, that he has uttered the words “I accept with humility”. We know that he is certainly not sincere and we know that he has sworn to rid India of the main opposition party, but those who are try wedded to democracy can never wish for a ‘BJP-mukt Bharat’. All we want is that India’s most intolerant PM imbibes just a whiff of democracy in the remaining six months, and that he tries to fulfil even a small part of what he had promised India in 2014.