

Narendra Modi: Will He Be PM?

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Prologue

The shrill ringing of the cell phone in his pocket startled the 5'11" tall man standing in front of a funeral pyre that had just been lit. In an atmosphere of solemn silence, the near and dear ones of the dead were waiting for the flames to leap. Because of the belief that a departed soul gets peace only if the pyre gets engulfed in flames soon after being lit, for about half-a-minute, there is always an eerie silence in the atmosphere. It was during these anxiety filled thirty seconds that the cell phone rang.

The bearded man moved slowly away from the assembly and answered the phone. Very few had his cell phone number and whosoever had called had to be someone very important.

It was 2 October 2001 and the man who moved away from the pyre to receive the incoming call was Narendra Modi. The caller was Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Prime Minister of India. Vajpayee asked Modi what he was doing and where he was at the moment. Modi told the PM that he was at a funeral. The PM gasped. Vajpayee quickly told Modi to see him in the evening and ended the conversation.

On that evening, Vajpayee told Modi that he would be the next Chief Minister of Gujarat. And history of Gujarat changed forever. The amazing story that began to unfold with Narendra Modi's swearing-in as Gujarat's Chief Minister on 7 October 2001 has taken several turns since then and now he is breathing down the neck of the so-called First Family of India and arguably a vast majority of the people expect him to be the next PM of India.

What Modi did between 7 October 2001 and 27 February 2002 went unnoticed but after Godhra and its aftermath, Modi became the favourite punching bag for one and all. He was criticised, reprimanded, pilloried, incarcerated, humiliated and declared persona non grata by the media and the intelligentsia at home, as well as abroad. Politicians of all hues, including some in his own party, started treating him like a pariah. Perhaps no other individual political leader has faced such virulent personal attacks for so long a period as Modi has.

The people of Gujarat, however, looked at Modi differently and he led his party to a handsome victory at the hustings in December 2002. After that Modi embarked upon a journey to take Gujarat to new heights of economic development and growth. Starting with sterling new concepts implemented with unprecedented efficiency and effectiveness, like Jyoti Gram and Kanya Kelvani, he moved on to Vibrant Gujarat which set new standards for the way governments can and should boost industrial investment.

In December 2007 Modi was returned to power once again by a thumping majority in the Gujarat Assembly and was rewarded with unadulterated adulation by the media in general and the pink press in particular. In January 2009 all hell broke loose after industry captains openly said they wanted to see Narendra Modi as India's PM. In 2012 the people gave him a convincing mandate yet again. The murmurs about the desirability of him going to New Delhi turned into a crescendo and now not only India but the whole world is trying to guess whether he is indeed the next Prime Minister of India.

What the outcome of the next general elections will be can be debated and discussed almost indefinitely but it is very difficult to argue against the notion that all other aspirants of the nation's top job can barely see the tail lights of the Modi bandwagon.

Presidential vs Parliamentary

The very fact that the whole nation seems to be asking the question whether Narendra Modi will be the next Prime Minister of India says that India has adopted the presidential form of government without formally amending its constitution, despite a large part of the political establishment being opposed to the concept in-principle. The people of India now want to vote for individual leaders on the basis of their respective track records.

This has happened in the past too. It was Indira Gandhi, not the Congress party, who won the 1971 elections, lost in 1977 and rode back to power in 1980. In 1984 people voted for Rajiv Gandhi, not Indian National Congress. In 1989 it was Rajiv Gandhi vs V P Singh. Thus, the people have voted for individuals (presidential form) rather than parties (parliamentary form) several times in the past too.

The debate between presidential vs parliamentary forms of government is as old as democracy itself. Those advocating the presidential form believe segregation of executive and legislature is necessary for good governance while proponents of the parliamentary form believe the executive can function more efficiently when the legislature's fortunes are tied to smooth running of the government. At the time of independence, India chose the parliamentary form of government, though at that time too there was considerable debate on whether the presidential form would be a better alternative, given the vast disparities of different kinds in the nation.

Immediately after independence, though Pt Nehru was undoubtedly the darling of the masses and the uncrowned King of India, the people had faith in the Congress as a party also.

However, when the position of the Congress weakened for the first time in post-independent India in 1967 and political horse trading became the norm, many had raised the question whether India needed the presidential system. Since then the debate has remained alive. The issue has been receiving attention every now and then but the debate has been essentially limited to academic circles. No political party has showed an inclination to move towards a presidential system.

Nevertheless, the people have had a different opinion and have followed the presidential system several times in the last six decades, as is evident from trends in elections in 1971, 1977, 1984 and 1989.

After independence, just as Nehru was the face of the Congress at the national level, there were many chief ministers who had their own mass following, Dr. Sampurnanand in U.P. and Mohanlal Sukhadia in Rajasthan being some prominent examples. However, the central leadership of the Congress (read Pt Nehru) had no appetite for tall leaders in states and several of them were removed by crises orchestrated at the behest of the centre. In 1963 the infamous Kamaraj Plan changed the structure of the polity forever. At least six senior ministers at the centre and six chief ministers of the Congress party resigned to devote themselves to the so-called revitalisation of the party. State level leaders of the Indian National Congress were decimated in a swift and cunning move.

The Kamaraj Plan was an attempt to make the system more unitary than it already was but the result, over the years, has been exactly the opposite. In 1967 Congress tally in the parliament plunged from 352 to 283 and the party lost several states. The trend of non-Congress governments in states accelerated in later years and pulled the system back toward federalism.

In 1971 Indira Gandhi recovered her personal predominance but continued to meddle in state level politics frequently. Leadership of Congress was changed in several states between 1969 and 1977 by Indira Gandhi, in blatant disregard of what the people of those states wanted. The practice was promptly adopted by the BJP after it tasted power in the last decade of the 20th century. The result is that different ideologies and ways of governance are prevailing in different parts of the country. Tamil Nadu has been toggling between DMK and AIDMK, West Bengal is shared by the communists and the TMC, Bihar was ruled by Lalu Yadav for three terms and is now shared by Nitish Kumar and BJP while UP now seems to be readying for a TN type system where Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati would be taking turns to rule the state.

The common characteristic of states where national parties have only a nominal presence is that the regional parties are headed by clearly identifiable leaders having individual popular appeal. They are party presidents when out of power and party president and chief minister when they are ruling their respective states.

Unfortunately the reasons and implications of the rise of regional political parties have been completely ignored by national parties even after the nation faced extreme political uncertainty between 1996 and 1999 when Deve Gowda and Inder Gujral became prime minister by default, though for short periods of time. After Sonia Gandhi took reins of Congress in her hands, it became a standard practice for state legislative assemblies to pass resolutions authorising her to nominate the chief minister. The BJP's approach, though less brazen, hasn't been very different. Central leaders of the party have generally assumed it their prerogative to decide who would be the chief ministers in states ruled by the party.

But in the last one decade or so the people seem to have been telling the national political parties that leaders at the state level have to be chosen by the people of individual states and not the central leadership of the national parties. Several strong leaders with their own mass following have emerged in different states and after successfully forcing the national parties to respect the wishes of people of the states, the electorate have now made it more or less clear to the nation's two largest political parties that at the national level too they have to declare their respective leaders before the elections. They want to vote for an individual, not an organisation whom they cannot hold accountable for its actions.

Ironically, it is the irrational assumption of authority on part of the central leaders of national political parties that resulted in Narendra Modi being appointed as the Chief Minister of Gujarat in October 2001. Everybody knew that the people were dissatisfied with incumbent CM Keshubhai Patel. Perhaps a majority of BJP MLAs too felt the need for a change in leadership and perhaps the majority did favour Narendra Modi but the moot point is that the central leadership of the party did not even think of asking the state unit to either express its confidence in Keshubhai or elect a new leader. The BJP authorised PM Vajpayee to nominate a new chief minister for Gujarat and he chose Narendra Modi.

As fate would have it, this appointed leader changed the way national parties treated their chief ministers. He delivered to the people what they wanted and needed the most and consolidated his mass base so quickly and so comprehensively that since December 2002 no central leader of the BJP has even dreamed of interfering in Gujarat politics. Narendra Modi's word is law in Gujarat and that's the way the people of Gujarat want it.

The independence Modi seized from the BJP's national leadership has had a salutary effect on the Congress too. Gone are the days when the party high command used to keep state units guessing about who will head the party after elections. The party now realises that resolutions authorising the high command to nominate chief ministers of states are no longer acceptable to the people. In the most recent elections in December 2012, in Himachal Pradesh, the Congress was forced to declare even the apparently tainted Vir Bhadra Singh as the chief ministerial candidate because the perception was that without an identifiable leader the people might return BJP to power despite considerable dissatisfaction with its performance. If it did not declare a leader for Gujarat that was primarily because it had no hope of winning. Congress had conceded defeat even before the election schedule was notified.

At the national level, Sonia Gandhi has ruled India by proxy for nine long years but now that the elections are round the corner, she is no longer sure if she can continue to do that. The people want to vote for or against an individual persona, be it Man Mohan Singh or Rahul Gandhi or Sonia herself. Interestingly, Congress did declare before the 2009 elections that Man Mohan Singh would continue to be the Prime Minister if it formed the next government but the people treated Sonia Gandhi as the effective PM and took their voting decisions accordingly. It was more or less a vote for the Congress party as it was, not for Man Mohan Singh.

India's parliamentary democracy wanting a presidential approach in spirit isn't a very unique or novel phenomenon. There is no denying the fact that without a charismatic, bold, decisive and confidence inspiring PM, governments in parliamentary democracies cannot work effectively. The most recent example is Japan, where the DPJ had a strength of 308 in a Diet (parliament) of 480 and yet it failed to deliver even after trying out three prime ministers (Hatoyama, Kan and Noda) because individually they weren't charismatic personalities.

Because of the people's changing approach, Congress is now clearly debating whether it should project Man Mohan Singh as the next prime minister or it should opt for Rahul Gandhi. Several alternatives are under consideration but the reality that it would have to project somebody as its prime ministerial candidate appears to have dawned upon the Congress.

It is in this backdrop that elections 2014 are widely expected to mimic the presidential form of government. The people of India will choose their prime minister directly. Both Congress

and BJP will have to declare their respective leaders and that is why the media is convinced that it will be Rahul vs Modi in 2014. Who will eventually be India's next prime minister is by itself a contentious question but to assume it will be either Rahul Gandhi or Narendra Modi will also be somewhat premature. There are too many ifs and buts and twists and turns which can turn the story upside down.

Nevertheless, presidential style elections it is most likely to be and that is the principal reason why Narendra Modi is being seen as the front runner among all contenders.

From Murmurs to Crescendo

After Narendra Modi led Gujarat BJP to victory with an impressive tally of 127 in a house of 182 in December 2002, some of his excessively enthusiastic supporters started seeing in him the future Prime Minister of India. Though in hushed tones, these talks were more widespread than what is known to the general public or even the media. By this time Modi's personal mass base had exceeded the critical threshold required for an illustrious political career.

However, PM Vajpayee and Dy PM Advani were very tall leaders. On the other hand Modi had a host of plans and ideas he wanted to implement in Gujarat. The astute politician understandably felt quite uncomfortable by all the talks of him being prime ministerial material. For several years Modi continued to feel uneasy about frequently being described as suitable for the country's top job. He knew that the notion could create enmity between him and the central leadership of his party and as later events showed, it actually did. In fact he frequently admonished his aides when any of them so much as even mentioned prime ministership. Nevertheless, much to Modi's chagrin, the low decibel murmurs continued unabated.

In May 2004 the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) lost the general elections. Many ascribed NDA's defeat to the ill-conceived campaign that tried to push an imagined sense of *déjà vu* down the throats of the people and exhorted the poor and the hungry to dance with joy, though many also said NDA had lost the elections because of Narendra Modi's alleged role in post-Godhra riots.

Results of 2004 general elections have never been analysed properly, at least in public domain. What happened in parliamentary elections in 2004 needs to be understood for a more realistic comprehension of positioning of Narendra Modi, and BJP, and the likely outcome of the next elections. In absolute terms, BJP polled 864 lakh votes in 2004 against 866 lakh in 1999 while Congress polled 1034 lakh votes in 2004 against 1031 lakh votes in 1999. Thus the two parties polled almost exactly the same number of votes as they had in 1999, implying that almost all the 182 lakh additional votes cast went in favour of other parties and independents. Yet, Congress tally rose from 114 to 145 seats while BJP's tally plunged from 182 to 138.

This change in fortunes was primarily because of changes in strategies of the two parties. While Congress contested fewer seats in 2004 (417 compared to 453 in 1999), BJP contested more seats, 364 compared to 339 in 1999. In 1999 BJP polled an average of 2.55 lakh votes in the 339 constituencies it had contested while the corresponding figure for the Congress was 2.28 lakh votes. In 2004 elections BJP's votes polled per constituency declined to 2.37 lakh whereas the figure for Congress rose to 2.47 lakh.

Thus while Congress aped BJP's 1999 strategy of concentrating on fewer seats, the BJP diluted the very strategy that had seen it through in 1999. In 1999 Congress had won only a fourth of seats it had contested while BJP had romped home in more than one half of all seats it contested. In essence, Congress tried to follow what the political pundits call coalition dharma whereas the BJP tried to reduce its dependence upon coalition partners and came croppers in the process.

But of course it wasn't a game of only numbers. Atal Behari Vajpayee is now being recognised as one of the best prime ministers India has had and his government's performance had not been unsatisfactory by any standards. Yet the voter denied NDA the benefit of incumbency because the voter wasn't impressed by the GDP numbers that had buoyed the spirits of BJP. Official statistics said the economy was growing at about 8% and agricultural growth was higher than GDP growth but these numbers were not sufficient to set off the poor economic performance, particularly in agriculture, in 1999-00 and 2000-01. In 2002-03 agricultural growth was negative.

On the other hand, the dotcom crash in 2000 had resulted in Nasdaq market value plunging 78% between 11 March 2000 and 9 October 2002, when the index dipped from 5046.86 to 1114.11. The Dow had plunged to below 10,000 and India too was affected by the global developments. Contrary to the common belief, FDI inflows between 1991 (when reforms began) and 2004 were inconsequential, if not negligible. Between 1991-92 and 1999-2000 average annual inflows were USD 1.72 bn and the figure for 2000-01 to 2004-05 was USD 2.85 bn. Compare this with the average inflows of USD 19.73 bn between 2005-06 and 2009-10 and the picture becomes quite clear.

FDI inflows in 2003-04 (elections were in April-May 2004) were less than in the preceding three years and after nearly a decade of good monsoons, rainfalls were deficient from 1999 to 2002. There was no reason for India to rejoice.

Though the world economy, as well as the Indian economy, had started looking up sometime in the second half of 2003, the trend was yet to set in. There was no reason for India to feel boisterous in the first quarter of 2004, when the BJP chose the India Shining theme. The only reason one can think of was that the triumph in assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in December 2003 had made the BJP overly boisterous.

However, the statistical mumbo-jumbo doesn't contradict the dictum that the people always manage to deliver the verdict they deem right. There was heavy churning of seats. BJP retained only 90 of the 182 it had won in 1999 while Congress performance was even poorer as it retained only 49 of 114 seats it had won in 1999, though BJP's tally plunged to 138 while that of the Congress rose to 145. Thus, the broad verdict was that both were the same and in the absence of a viable alternative, the people decided to let things be as they were. However, the significance of Congress having wrested nearly 100 seats from independents and regional parties was perhaps lost on the BJP.

The people of Gujarat gave only 14 seats to BJP, though it had won 20 in 1999. This was viewed by many as a setback for Modi and some indeed chided Modi for BJP's losses in Gujarat. However, in the aftermath of NDA losing power at the centre, instead of subsiding, hush-hush murmurs about Modi being prime ministerial material actually graduated to audible whispers.

Before and after the 2004 general elections the national media continued to keep Modi under the scanner, for one reason or another. Modi ignored the media jibes, as well as the now on and now off campaigns by dissidents within the party and continued to work on his development agenda. In 2004 he actually managed to provide uninterrupted power supply to a substantial number of rural households in Gujarat; the Jyoti Gram Yojana was completed by the end of 2005. The bi-annual Vibrant Gujarat investors meet in January of 2005 was significantly more successful than the 2003 version. 363 MOUs were signed for an aggregate investment of USD 102 billion, offering potential generation of 1.326 million jobs. The event received widespread attention from the media and the industry started looking at Gujarat seriously and Modi's stock with the people of the state rose further.

On 18 March 2005 the US government cancelled his visa and the number of cameras focussed on his persona doubled. Some rejoiced and some remained neutral but the vast majority of the people of India viewed the visa denial as an insult to the nation, not to Narendra Modi. In fact the national media too was quite divided on the issue, though nobody demanded that the Congress-led UPA take it up firmly with the US. Nevertheless, many did believe it was uncalled for arrogance on part of the US government. Modi continued to be the most talked about politician in the country. His stature started rising at the national level, closing the gap between him and the central leadership of the BJP.

Vibrant Gujarat attained critical mass in its third version in January 2007 when its success was beyond what anybody could have expected. Ratan Tata enthralled the state by saying he was a Gujarati (Ame Gujarat naaj chhiye), insisting that it would be stupid for any company not to be in Gujarat. When Reliance Chairman Mukesh Ambani said his group had not lost even a single day's output because of labour strife in Gujarat, the audience went ecstatic. The Sensex had opened at 13,827.77 in January and it closed the month at 14,090.92. The global economy had started booming and captains of Indian industry were all starry-eyed, dreaming of making it big in the big bad world. Dollars were available for the asking and many were looking forward to Dalal Street graduating to Deal Street. The industry captains unhesitatingly sang paeans in praise of Modi since for the first time a political leader was actually delivering the promised clearances and infrastructure within the agreed timeframe, without demanding his pound of flesh.

The pink press went all ga ga over Modi's performance, the politics of development started taking roots and his stature kept growing leaps and bounds. By the end of 2007, when he expectedly won assembly elections with a brute majority once again, he was being viewed as a leader of national stature. The central leadership of BJP had become so alarmed by Narendra Modi's steadily rising stature that on 9 December 2007, a day before Gujarat was to begin voting, a meeting was convened hastily in New Delhi and Lal Krishna Advani was declared the party's candidate for prime ministership for parliamentary elections that were still 16 months away.

Obviously, Modi had become a serious contender for the nation's prime ministership by now. If there was one man who had seen what was coming in 2007 itself, it was Arun Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi's old pal and viewed as India's Chanakya by many. Arun Nehru wrote in The Pioneer of 19 February 2007: "The fact that Mr Modi's brand of politics - integrity and performance - is gaining momentum and cuts across 'secular' and 'non-secular' theories propounded by political interests for vote-bank politics, is a welcome sign. Hopefully, we will have more Chief Ministers capable of independent action and free of hidden power sources based on

extra-constitutional factors. The fact is, he can go to any part of the country and the people will love to hear his views. He will attract larger crowds in the future.”

However, until this point of time, Modi’s attitude was quite ambiguous. He had a vision for Gujarat and he sort of felt torn between his home state and the nation.

There was a sudden change in attitude of the media after the December 2007 elections. The common refrain of most commentators was that he had delivered development at the door steps of the people. When he brought the Nano project to Gujarat in October 2008, his appeal outside Gujarat jumped yet again. On 26th of the same month 26/11 happened and as the nation sat glued to televisions for 60 long hours, many were wondering whether the nation needed a leader who could address the issue of terrorism effectively. In December 2008 BJP retained Madhya Pradesh but lost Rajasthan and failed to dent the Congress in Delhi. Modi’s stock in his own party, as well as with the people of India, continued to rise.

It was on 12 January 2009 that the nation became really serious about the notion of Narendra Modi being the PM. Lehman Brothers had collapsed about a 100 days ago and restaurants on Wall Street had started selling more beer than wine. In the midst of the all pervading gloom Narendra Modi was telling the world that Gujarat was as vibrant as ever. He was pushing for manufacturing and as later events showed, including China’s continued growth, heavens had indeed fallen but only for the financial services industry, not manufacturing.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the fourth version of Vibrant Gujarat 2009, Sunil Bharati Mittal of Airtel looked adoringly at Modi and said, “Gujarat has seen progress in all the fields under his leadership. Now, imagine what can happen if he leads the nation.” Thousands of entrepreneurs indicated their endorsement by a thunderous applause. At the concluding session the following day Anil Ambani repeated the proposition. And then all hell broke loose.

Modi chose not to react to Mittal’s statement immediately, fuelling gossip and speculation through out the country and abroad. He let the political bomb remain live for nearly a week by simply maintaining a stoic silence. He cleared the air only on 18 January 2009 when he declared that Advani was the unquestioned BJP candidate for prime ministership.

There was intense speculation about the purpose of the statements of Mittal and Ambani. Political circles in Gujarat and at New Delhi concluded that Sunil Mittal and Anil Ambani had described Modi as the right man for India’s prime ministership at Modi’s own prodding. But this hypothesis does not stand the test of logic. Sunil Mittal’s links with the Congress are well known. His father was a senior leader of the Congress. Anil Ambani too was thick, at that time, with Amar Singh of Samajwadi Party which had lent support to the ruling Congress party at the centre. How could Modi take the risk of asking these two to describe him as fit for prime ministership? Common sense says that Modi could not have risked being refused, even if he had indeed considered the idea. In any case the unusual stand taken by Mittal and Ambani did create fissures within BJP.

Irrespective of who and what prompted Mittal and Ambani to openly propose that Modi be the PM, the *raison d’être* behind the deafening applause that followed their statements was apparently lost on the entire system. Barely six weeks before Vibrant Gujarat 2009 near and dear ones of this very audience had seen its members running helter-skelter trying to save their lives in environments which are generally considered safe abodes even in the midst of

ongoing wars. The year 2008 had witnessed several bomb blasts in different parts of the country; 26/11 was only the latest act of terrorism. Obviously, the rich and the famous too had started feeling unsafe and like their poor brethren, they too thought only a man like Modi could administer the laws of the land effectively.

Modi's week long silence and delayed clarification leads to the inference that Modi still didn't want to hamper Advani's chances but wasn't averse to some loud thinking by others about his suitability for the top job. If Modi's intention was to stabilise the notion of him being the PM in the minds of the people before he clarified his position, the purpose was achieved admirably. The man who was known for calling a spade a spade in a high pitched voice at the slightest provocation had this time said what he wanted to say by merely remaining silent for a week. So who says Modi hasn't changed? Conversely, who says Modi has changed?

This incident did make the central leaders of BJP feel extremely uneasy. Modi was almost completely ignored by the national leadership in the run up to the general elections in April-May 2009. However, the most interesting aspect of the story is that it was an audience dominated by the rich and the powerful, Sunil Mittal and Anil Ambani were and continue to be among the richest Indians, and yet nobody said the rich wanted a friend of theirs to be the Prime Minister.

NDA lost the general elections yet again. In May 2009 Congress leaped from 145 to 206 seats in the parliament while BJP plunged from 138 to 116 in a house of 542. Why Congress improved its tally so handsomely has been viewed differently by different sections of the society but the predominant view seems to be that MNREGA and waiver of farm loans had pleased the electorate no end. Rural wages had jumped over 100% because of MNREGA. However, the seemingly surprising outcome of 2009 elections had curious effects on the two mainstream parties. While the BJP's top leadership appeared to be unfazed, despite the growing discontent among its cadres, Congress became almost as complacent as it was in the Nehru era.

Then the idea that Modi should run India was mooted yet again in October 2009 by none other than the late B K Birla when Modi inaugurated his brand new textile mill at Jhagadia (near Bharuch). When the industrialist who commanded more respect than the amount of money he had said Modi should be India's PM, Modi made no attempt to hide his satisfaction at having been endorsed by so matured and respected a person. Everybody present saw that NaMo was visibly pleased. However, even at this point of time it cannot be said with certainty whether Modi had decided to gun for the nation's top job.

As the performance of UPA-2 started deteriorating and the celebrated MNREGA scheme started generating more corruption than jobs, people's discontent started growing. Huge scandals like CWG and 2-G came to light but the government failed to move to contain the people's growing dismay at the state of affairs.

In the year 2010 scams started tumbling out of cupboards but UPA-2 was too complacent as it was only the second year after the elections. Corruption became rampant. High oil prices implied high inflation but since the government did not bother to articulate the situation, the people started attributing the rising prices almost exclusively to corruption in corridors of power.

In 2011 social activist Anna Hazare galvanised the people of India in an attempt to address the unbearable corruption India was facing and the media started asking frequently whether Narendra Modi was the answer to the nation's woes. Modi himself ignored the enormously impressive show put up by Team Anna, as well as all questions about him being the solution for the nation's woes. Even after Anna Hazare clearly demonstrated how frustrated the people had become with the arrogance and callousness of their rulers, the UPA government continued to be indifferent to the people's feelings.

The Anna Hazare movement successfully denuded the UPA government of whatever credibility it was left with but by the end of the year Team Anna itself started sliding because it had no organisation worth the name. It failed to follow-up the massive mobilisation of public sentiment in August 2011 with any convincing measures. The result was that the pieces of credibility chipped off the UPA in general and Congress in particular started agglomerating around the persona of Narendra Modi. As Team Anna repeatedly failed to build any kind of momentum, Modi's mass appeal zoomed because the people felt that only he could provide effective solutions.

In January 2012 the decade old Mood of the Nation poll by India Today magazine showed that 60% of Indians still saw Anna Hazare as their role model but 24% favoured Narendra Modi as prime minister while only 17% preferred Rahul Gandhi. Inflation remained high in 2012, scandals kept tumbling out and in December gang rape of a 23 year old physiotherapist in New Delhi had the whole nation seething with anger. While the common refrain was that this incident had thrown Modi off the media radar, the reality was that the people's yearning for a man who can enforce the law of the land without fear or favour intensified significantly.

In calendar 2012 Congress shed the bulk of its credibility and whatever was shorn off the Congress flew directly to Narendra Modi whose nationwide popular appeal seems to have grown almost in direct proportion to the decline in standing of the Indian National Congress. Modi has perhaps been the monkey who snatched the fruit from the two cats, Congress and Team Anna. It is pertinent to note that while initially Anna was indeed reluctant to criticise Modi, later he started slamming him regularly for his failure to appoint a Lokayukta in Gujarat. However, the people continue to look at Modi as the only Mr Clean among the top leaders of the nation.

For December 2012 assembly elections in Gujarat the media drew the line at 117, implying that Modi would be the victor only if he won at least the same number of seats he had won in 2004, though only 92 seats are needed to form the government in a house of 182. Modi won 115 and the media graciously lowered the limit to 115 and declared him victorious.

By this time UPA-2 had become almost completely discredited in the eyes of the people, Anna Hazare had become mute and Arvind Kejriwal's disclosures were being viewed as meaningless harangues by most. In December 2012 a large part of the people and a decisive majority of BJP cadres started yearning for Narendra Modi as the country's Prime Minister.

On 20 December 2012 when Modi addressed party workers outside BJP's Gujarat headquarters at Khanpur in Ahmedabad the chant of "PM, PM" rang the air and when he visited BJP's national headquarters at New Delhi on 27 December, the decibels were even higher. The deafening chorus (PM, PM) perceptibly altered body languages of most senior leaders of the BJP because nobody had the option to display anything but deference.

In January results of two nationwide opinion polls conducted by India Today and ABPNews showed Modi had emerged as the front runner in the race for prime ministership. The ABP (Anand Bazar Patrika managed TV news channel) poll found that if Modi leads the BJP, 49% of voters across the country would vote for BJP while only 17% said they would vote for Congress, the rest being divided among regional parties. Interestingly, without Modi, only 36% said they would vote for BJP while 18% would vote for Congress. Obviously, Rahul Gandhi's presence or absence doesn't bother the voter whereas BJP's prospects leap if it is led by Modi.

Results of the India Today poll were less severe but they too said Modi was the first choice of the nation and Rahul Gandhi was way behind, with only 10% acceptance rate, compared to Modi's 21%. About 55% expect Modi to lead the BJP in 2014.

Several Congress leaders and spokespersons argued that the poll had been held before the Jaipur conclave, which had changed the mood of the party cadres. This was not taken seriously by anybody. Rahul Gandhi delivered a speech full of punch lines and drew a lot of applause from the loyal delegates. There were tears in many eyes but the sense of déjà vu died even before it could reach New Delhi. The moment the delegates left Birla Auditorium, life became routine for most of them.

In January 2013 several senior leaders openly said Narendra Modi should be declared as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate. On 6 February 2013 Modi addressed the students of Delhi's Shri Ram College of Commerce and that speech was widely interpreted as his way of blowing the bugle. While it was widely reported in the media that more students wanted to hear Modi than Ratan Tata, what has gone almost unnoticed about this epoch making event at Delhi is that some students with no political affiliations of any kind actually exchanged fisticuffs with those protesting against Modi outside the venue.

Since then there has been no ambiguity in Modi's stand. He has clearly thrown his hat in the ring and the 1.2 billion people question is what are the chances of him being the next Prime Minister of India? While he is being viewed as the front-runner even by the most strident among his opponents, the consensus is that he has to pass through several hurdles before he gets the top job.

Sangh Parivar

Every political analyst worth his by-line believes the biggest hurdle Modi faces is within his party and even the most insignificant among Modi's supporters keep asking wistfully whether the BJP and the Sangh Parivar would let this man be the PM.

The principal reason why so many in the BJP are opposed to Narendra Modi becoming the PM is the simplest of all reasons. Too many senior leaders have been around in BJP for too long and many of them have had occasion, at one stage or another, to look at him like a bright young man who executes plans efficiently. For about a decade in the 1990s, for many of the BJP stalwarts he was a backroom boy who could be trusted to organise meetings and yatras efficiently which they could spearhead smilingly and successfully.

He held senior positions in the party and successfully pushed through several decisions that had few takers in the party, including the decision to change the regime in Himachal and to side with Chautala in Haryana. Thus Modi did play a strategic role in BJP's central

organisation between 1995 and 2000 on several occasions, he was somehow viewed more as a part of the administrative machinery than the leadership.

Yet, he was too young and the seniors who thought they were too senior continued to look at Modi as a bright and young executive assistant whom they courted not because he was a political leader of some consequence but because he was a manager and an administrator who took care of details. Advani had never had to bother about his constituency after he started contesting from Gandhinagar constituency. In 1998 when Gujarat went to polls without the assembly completing its term, Modi was sent to ensure that the party machinery functioned smoothly. He went, he ensured the BJP returned to power and then he came back to New Delhi to resume his role as a backroom boy.

However, after the big earth quake in 2001 the party was left with no option but to give him a publicly visible role by making him Chief Minister of Gujarat because only he was considered efficient enough to regain lost ground within the short time available. The young man of yesteryears was appointed as Gujarat Chief Minister and he started converting himself into a political leader at a furious pace almost instantaneously. His stock with the people of Gujarat rose too suddenly to too high a level. This was followed by his mass appeal spreading through out the country because egged on by the so-called liberals and intellectuals, the media persistently kept the arch lights focussed upon him. A decade down the road stalwarts of yesteryears are trying to figure out where and how they were overtaken.

It is only human for the BJP stalwarts to feel at least uncomfortable, if not aghast, at the prospects of reporting to a man who was of little consequence until a decade earlier. This phenomenon isn't as incomprehensible as many believe since it frequently happens even in private organisations. An entrepreneur's son can be accepted as CEO of a company but if a management trainee is appointed CEO of a billion dollar company within a few years of joining, some of the senior managers are bound to feel dismayed. Perhaps that is why Congress has stuck to its dynastic system where no bright young boy can ever spring from nowhere in particular and claim the top job over the heads of septuagenarians and octogenarians who have been around for several decades.

However, there is a bigger reason why he faces so much of opposition within his own party and this is also the reason why people around the country love him so much and have started looking at him expectantly.

Narendra Modi's problem is that he ignores nothing. It is often said that he doesn't forget and doesn't forgive and that may well be true to some extent but it is also true that he keeps abreast of all issues any organisation headed by him is supposed to address. Whatever else he may or may not be, anybody who has worked with him knows that he is a strict disciplinarian who unfailingly praises and promotes the performers and never fails to reprimand the errant and punish the rogues. Periodic evaluation of performance of his team members is a compulsive habit of Narendra Modi. He deems it an integral part of governance.

Most senior leaders of BJP know that he would behave with his ministers exactly the way Indira Gandhi did, with the added caveat that the Iron Lady wasn't as meticulous in matters of governance as Modi is. Few remember Indira Gandhi for having warned under performing ministers whereas Modi watches each ministry and department with an eagle eye. If a project is scheduled to be completed by a given day, the concerned minister and bureaucrats know that Modi is going to seek confirmation of completion on the due date. If reasons for any

delay aren't adequately convincing, he minces no words when reprimanding those responsible for completion of the work.

Obviously, ministers do not enjoy much of 'discretion' under Modi, particularly in terms of doling out favours, and this is what puts many off. It's not that Modi clears every file. He does allow a great deal of leeway but that is entirely in proportion to performance, which is unfailingly reviewed periodically.

Equally important is the fact that Modi follows certain basic rules scrupulously. He has set his own boundaries which he never fails to adhere to. Written and unwritten rules aren't meant to be flouted frequently. He displays flexibility only in the rarest of rare cases. For example, soon after taking over as CM, he told all Gujarat based industrial houses that he would back them in every sense of the word but they should never ask him to circumvent any stated policy and must not indulge in unhealthy competition with each other when dealing with the government. Nobody should try to outsmart others. Torrent Chairman Sudhir Mehta insists Modi has followed this rule in letter and spirit.

No doubt ambitions of individual leaders are also resulting in hurdles in Modi's candidacy. Perhaps there are some in BJP who would rather see UPA coming back for a third term than work under Modi or even let him be PM. But slowly, the reality that BJP has no prospects worth the name in the near future unless a mercurial persona like Narendra Modi galvanises it, is dawning home. The result is that a vast majority of middle rung leaders and even some of the senior leaders are beginning to realise that unless the party is led by Narendra Modi they would have to live in obscurity for another five years. Some believe power burdened with responsibility is better than no power at all. Either way, support for Modi within BJP is growing by the day.

Though Modi unreservedly credits the RSS for making him what he is, stories of Nagpur being wary about him being the Prime Minister aren't baseless. India Today has quoted a senior RSS official as saying "The Sangh knows that he can win the elections for BJP but his dictatorial style will make him bigger than the party and RSS itself. He will become BJP, much like how Indira Gandhi became Congress."

Apparently, except the grass root workers who keep rooting for Narendra Modi as BJP's prime ministerial candidate, most of the senior leaders seem to be reluctant, if not opposed to Modi's candidature. There is no denying the fact that opposition to Modi within the Sangh Parivar is substantial. The internal turmoil the party is facing is best illustrated by the fact that after openly endorsing Modi as the most suitable candidate for prime ministership, former finance minister Yashwant Sinha has already made a U-turn and has declared Advani as fit for the top job.

Obviously, Modi's nomination as his party's prime ministerial candidate can hardly be taken for granted at this juncture, though his caravan seems to be expanding swiftly. There are simply too many contenders for prime ministership in the BJP. Even Yashwant Sinha told a TV channel in January that he considers himself fit for being the PM, though he admitted sheepishly that he lacks the popular appeal Modi has. The official stand of the party is that it would decide its prime ministerial candidate at an appropriate time, which means still there is considerable opposition to Modi's candidature. Some even suggest that the newly elected MPs should elect their leader after the elections are over. However, a large number of BJP

leaders are beginning to realise that if Modi isn't declared the face of the party, after the polls, BJP will be electing only its own leader, not the nation's Prime Minister.

How long will the party be able to resist the temptation of riding the Modi wave to power would depend upon several factors. How the political scenario unfolds in the remaining part of the year is anybody's guess. Several major states are scheduled to go to polls before parliamentary elections are held. But as noted columnist Swapan Dasgupta says, "Modi does not have to go begging to the BJP. Pressure from below will compel the BJP to come to him." The world's most respected magazine, The Economist, recently described Modi as "the single-most popular candidate in the country to be the next leader," insisting that "if the party wants to campaign on the economy and efficient government, Mr Modi is its likeliest candidate."

NDA

Modi will not be able to get along with allies. NDA will disintegrate if Modi is declared to be the BJP's leader. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has already said so and Shiv Sena too seems to be opposed to him. This argument is being advanced by a fairly large number of political leaders, as well as analysts and the media and it cannot be brushed aside as inconsequential.

However, the crucial question is what is NDA and who are its constituents? Besides BJP, there is JDU, Shiv Sena and Shiromani Akali Dal. NDA is a concept that will come into play only after the results are out. Much will depend upon how many seats BJP wins and who has how many MPs to put on the table. The Akalis have no problems with Modi and Shiv Sena is quite likely to come around. Nitish has 20 seats at present and doesn't know how many he will win BJP walks away from the alliance in Bihar. Somehow, JDU is viewed as an entity far bigger than BJP in Bihar though BJP has 91 seats against JDU's 115 in Bihar assembly.

Acceptability to allies appears to be a superfluous question since allies committed to NDA are of little relevance at the moment. Any alliance led by BJP can be and shall be configured only after the elections, not before. For all practical purposes, BJP will have to go alone to the polls, barring some seat adjustments with Akali Dal and Shiv Sena and, if possible, with JD(U).

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is clearly in the race and has started mimicking Modi by showcasing Bihar's progress under his tutelage. The broad reality is that even Nitish Kumar himself is not sure if his party would be a part of NDA after the elections. His performance in Bihar has been undoubtedly impressive and on the whole, he does have a reasonable chance of being PM if a 1996 like situation develops and a third-front government becomes a reality. Perhaps that is the reason why he has started distancing himself from BJP.

The most important factor is that those rooting for a Modi-led BJP, and Narendra Modi himself, aren't looking forward to manage an alliance successfully. Modi expects to be in a Narasimha Rao-like situation where he may be somewhat short of a clear majority on his own but would have no need to pamper any partners. If the people are really demanding that Narendra Modi should be their next PM, they are unlikely to give him a fractured verdict. A Modi-led BJP is widely being expected to have a clear or near-clear majority in the house.

There is another angle to the issue of alliances. While the biggies, Congress and BJP, have been prone to allow themselves to be bullied by their smaller partners, Modi is likely to have none of it even before elections. Modi is quite likely to refuse to settle for a token presence in states like Tamil Nadu and West Bengal in exchange for promise of support from a Jayalalithaa or Mamata Banerjee. There are 421 parliamentary constituencies that the BJP has won at least once in the past and Modi is unlikely to cede any of them to an ally since all allies, in essence, would only be potential allies. In 1989 BJP had formed an alliance with Chimanbhai Patel in Gujarat and at that time Modi was the only one who thought BJP didn't need Patel and at least it should not have allowed Patel to be the decisively senior partner. He was over ruled at that time. When the numbers came in, Modi was proved right as BJP performed much better than Patel.

In 2014, Modi is unlikely to let anybody pressure him, from within or from without BJP. The man will go into the battle solo, contesting all seats in UP, Rajasthan, MP, Gujarat, Andhra, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Himachal, Uttarakhand and Goa and most of the urban and semi-urban seats in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Orissa. If he ignores J&K and the North Eastern states, it would be primarily to conserve resources and energy.

Any talk of Modi having or not having the ability to manage alliance partners is irrelevant and naïve. While he is open to alliances, he simply cannot be expected to manage an alliance a la Vajpayee style. He will be fair to dependable allies like the Akali Dal and Shiv Sena and deal with the rest only after the results are out, if need be.

Narendra Modi is not looking at taking BJP back to 184 seats it had won in 1999 and muster support from allies to cross the magic mark of 272 required for forming a government. He is perhaps looking at a tally of 250+ for the BJP alone, a scenario where none of the allies will be in a position to dictate terms or throw tantrums.

Obviously, the question of his ability or inability to manage alliance partners is almost meaningless. If he is unable to rule India his way, as the saying goes, he will prefer the highway. Of course everybody knows that he has the unique advantage that even if he fails to sway the nation the way he expects to, his spell over Gujarat is likely to remain undiluted.

Godhra, Minorities

Narendra Modi and Godhra are inseparable. Umpteen chief ministers with good, bad and ugly performances have come and gone. If Modi is the most discussed and debated of them all it is because of Godhra and its aftermath. He has been demonised and pilloried as the symbol of hate because of his alleged complicity in post-Godhra riots. A sizeable proportion of Indians apparently believe the minorities cannot ever trust Modi and in the event of him being the prime ministerial candidate of the BJP, they would vote en bloc for the Congress to ensure his defeat.

Modi continues to be asked to apologise for Godhra. In fact there is no dearth of those who believe the Congress apologised for 1984 riots primarily because it wanted to put Modi in an uncomfortable position. Modi himself resolved never to reply any question on Godhra after his first electoral triumph in December 2002 and has not deviated from his stand till date.

Whether Modi did look the other way while Gujarat burned is a subject that can be and has been debated endlessly but the ground reality is that he is not willing to discuss the issue at all. The question of his apologising, therefore, does not arise. Currently the scene is that the demand for an apology from Modi is about as much of an issue as his alleged complicity in post-Godhra riots. The net result is that one way or the other, Godhra continues to be an issue, though estimates of its likely impact on voting by minorities vary. While regional parties believe it would help them retain their minority support base if they keep the Godhra issue alive, the Congress perhaps is looking forward to grab minority votes even in states dominated by regional parties by telling the voters that if they do not switch back to Congress, Modi may become the PM.

Though it has never been discussed publicly by the media for reasons best known to the media barons themselves, in hush-hush tones it has been surmised by many that after coming to power in 2004 Congress thought it would be in its interest if the Godhra issue remained alive and Narendra Modi continued to be the Chief Minister of Gujarat. Its leaders in Gujarat have had this feeling ever since Sonia Gandhi called Narendra Modi the Merchant of Death on 1 December 2007 when speaking at an election rally in Gujarat. A day later Digvijay Singh talked of Hindu terrorism. The remark that stunned the entire nation was a calculated move to provoke Modi to dilute his emphasis on development and revert to Hindutva. For a day or two Modi was indeed livid with anger and went ballistic, asking his audiences pointedly whether they were Hindus and terrorists and got them to shout No at unimaginable decibels. However, he soon understood the gambit and went back to development issues on 5 December 2007.

The verdict the Gujarat voter delivered in December 2007 could not have been attributed to the communal undertones the polls had supposedly acquired just before the people cast their votes. There were some feeble murmurs to the effect that the tide turned in favour of Modi after December 1 but the assumption wasn't endorsed by the media as vociferously as was the case in December 2002. However, at least for some the simplistic conclusion of the 2007 verdict was that in 2002 BJP had added ten seats in central and south Gujarat because of the communal wave and it lost these ten additional seats in 2007, thus getting 117 instead of 127 seats.

The reality is far more complicated. Gujarat (in fact, much of the nation) has always voted more wisely than what most would like to believe. While dubbing the entire state as communally minded, political observers tend to forget that Gujarat had given one of the severest verdicts in 1980 when the Congress won 141 of 182 assembly seats. The Gujarat voter had punished the opposition for its failure to provide good governance as severely as the rest of the country. In 1985, when Rajiv's Mr Clean wave had swept the entire country, Gujarat's verdict in assembly polls was once again more severe than any other state – 149 seats for Congress in an assembly of 182. In percentage terms Congress had won more seats in Gujarat assembly than in the nation's parliament. In fact Modi himself keeps wondering why he has not been able to come anywhere close to the Congress tally of 149 in 1985. Had Gujarat indeed become entirely communal in its outlook, BJP would have won 150+ seats in Gujarat in 2002. It actually won only 127.

In 2012 elections also the feeling that the central leadership of the Congress wasn't interested in winning Gujarat persisted. The party's high command refused to name a chief ministerial candidate; Shanker Singh Vaghela was treated as the face of the Congress by the media, not by the party. Sometime in December of 2012 Kamal Farooqi of Samajwadi Party, when

participating in a panel discussion on Timesnow, propounded the theory that Congress wants Narendra Modi to be BJP's prime ministerial candidate in the next general elections so that it is able to win back the minority vote. Amazingly, India's most aggressive and never-hesitate-to-call-a-spade-a-spade anchor Arnab Goswami fell silent and the proposition was effectively shut for further discussion.

Only India Today Editor Aroon Purie has been relatively unambiguous on this issue. He wrote in a recent editorial that "The Congress, which really didn't expect to win in Gujarat, sees a silver lining in Modi's victory. Their calculation is that if Modi is projected as a national leader, his divisive image will drive minorities and all other Modi haters to the Congress fold."

On 19 January 2013 Mani Shankar Aiyar said at Jaipur that "he would like Narendra Modi to be the NDA's Prime Ministerial candidate because if a communal leader like the Gujarat Chief Minister occupies the centre stage then the Congress Party will automatically emerge victorious in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls."

However, there are two factors that deflate this notion. The first is that even without being BJP's prime ministerial candidate Modi has been centre-stage and huge efforts have been put in by some sections of the Sangh Parivar also to project him as the symbol of rising Hindutva and yet Congress stock with minorities has failed to show any signs of a significant upsurge. The impressive improvement in its tally in 2009 was evenly spread through out the country and was largely attributed to the stunning success of the MNREGA scheme, which it has itself plundered since then. Besides, had the minorities' perceived distaste for Modi been nationwide, it would have reflected in results of 2004 elections when Congress failed to increase the number of votes it polled.

Apparently the disillusionment caused because of rampant corruption and the still growing arrogance of Congress leaders at different levels has made the minorities also tick off the Congress. This was most evident in U.P. elections in January 2012 when despite the much hyped leadership of Rahul Gandhi the party's performance was non-descript, to say the least.

The second is that the regional parties have acquired strength in their respective regions over a long period of time and the people keep supporting them because national parties have failed to provide these states with strong leaders. Frequent changes in leadership of Congress as well as BJP in states ruled by regional parties have led to a situation where the people are unable to identify with the national parties. Therefore, it would be naïve to assume that the regional parties would fall by the wayside simply because there will be a certain degree of religious divide among the voters which, in any case, is already there.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to ignore the notion that if Narendra Modi leads the BJP or the NDA in 2014, there will be some degree of polarisation on religious lines, no matter how determinedly he may try to restrict his campaign to governance and development. Obviously, Congress is still hopeful of getting back its minority vote banks in UP, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Orissa where it has only a nominal presence. Should the expectations of Congress materialise even marginally, it would indeed make a huge difference to the overall scenario. Most of the regional parties would be weakened and the battle would indeed be between Modi and Congress, if not Modi and Rahul Gandhi.

Nevertheless, as far as the religious divide angle is concerned, Congress doesn't seem to be on a solid terra firma. The appeasement game has been played well by almost all regional parties, the most eloquent example being Nitish Kumar who starts ranting the moment somebody utters the name of Narendra Modi in his presence. Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati in U.P., the Left and Mamata in West Bengal and even Karunanidhi and Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu have their own committed cadres and vote banks. It is difficult to imagine the Congress succeeding in regaining support of a large part of minorities in these states by simply instilling in them a fear of Narendra Modi. Perhaps Congress would recover some parts of its lost minorities vote banks in these states but that will have to be weighed against Narendra Modi's huge popularity among the middle classes and what he likes to call the neo middle class.

While Modi can be expected to grab a large chunk of urban and semi-urban votes through out the country, including states ruled by regional parties, for Congress it may not be easy to snatch a sizeable chunk of minorities away from regional parties.

Another emerging perspective is that the minorities have started realising that they have not been discriminated against in Gujarat and most Muslims in Gujarat find themselves much more comfortable than they were a decade ago. Everybody knows that growth in kites business primarily benefits Muslims and yet he keeps promoting it with the same zeal as any other programme. Turnover of kites business in Gujarat now runs into several hundred crores and nearly 90% of production is by Muslim artisans. Similarly, schemes for facilitating sales of handicrafts have provided new sales avenues to a large number of individuals belonging to the minority community.

There is no dearth of Muslim families in Ahmedabad and Muslim artisans in areas like Kutch who silently bless Modi because business has grown manifold and has improved their standards of living perceptibly. Economic growth has changed the scenario in their homes dramatically. BJP apparently received a significant proportion of minority votes in December 2012 elections in Gujarat and the possibility of the trend expanding nationwide in 2014 cannot be ruled out. As R Jagannathan, Editor of firstpost.com said in a recent post, "Muslims have begun to outgrow the scare-mongering by some sections of the media and politicians."

The truth, often stranger than fiction, is that every time a Digvijay Singh or a Justice Katju accuses Modi of complicity in post-Godhra riots, his macho image gets strengthened and his stock with the people rises.

All said and done, no matter how loudly the Congress and its allies rake up the Godhra issue when campaigning for 2014, chances are that Narendra Modi will maintain a stoic silence and would refuse to utter the word. The simple truth of the matter is that Modi's refusal to discuss Godhra has been a major factor that has contributed significantly to his image of a strong persona capable of providing good governance to a country perceived to have a large number of ruffians and rogues.

Of course Narendra Modi and BJP, in that order, believe the people in general and minorities in particular want to forget Godhra and move on. That is neither the truth, nor a lie. There are signs indicating that the minorities too are tired of being reminded of the unfortunate incidents that took place more than a decade ago. However, the extent to which they have grasped the implications of good governance that Narendra Modi promises will be clear only

after the results of 2014 elections are out. Nobody really wants Modi to apologise because that would put an end to the issue. They are demanding an apology from Modi so stridently largely because they are confident of the consistency of his behaviour.

The Congress

Allies and potential allies are actually a smaller problem for Modi, if at all they do constitute a problem. His principal opponent will be the decisively more-Machiavellian-than-BJP Congress, which includes but is not limited to the charismatic or otherwise persona of Rahul Gandhi. The configuration of the Indian political scenario at present is such that with 206 seats also the Congress can take all decisions it would have been in a position to take in the event of it having an absolute majority on its own.

Congress is in power at New Delhi and has several options. It can continue the existing Sonia-Man Mohan structure, it can install Rahul Gandhi as PM before elections, it can have Chidambaram or Digvijay Singh or some other senior leader as PM or it can even have Sonia herself as PM. If Congress wanted to create confusion, it has succeeded admirably. Nobody knows whether Rahul is in the pipeline or not. However, chances are that the Congress itself is confused, not knowing what will ensure victory in 2014. What is clear is that all strategies being considered revolve around an image makeover, which never works, except when there is a real change in work performance also.

Leveraging the incumbency to spruce up its prospects by taking some populist measures over the next few months is also a very real option Congress has and it is likely to be used extensively, though contours of what the ruling party can or would do would be known only in due course. It has already taken or initiated a slew of measures, including hanging of Ajmal Kasab and Afzal Guru, direct cash transfer to citizens instead of indirect subsidies, food security and right to education, besides, of course, elevation of Rahul Gandhi as its Vice President.

Rahul is being propped up now and then but his attempts at projecting himself as a mature person fit to lead the nation have come croppers. He had generated some hope among Congress cadres by his speech at the Jaipur conclave but after he addressed the apex industry association CII on 4 April 2013 he has apparently lost whatever little respect he had earned at Jaipur. The reason is that at Jaipur he scrupulously restricted his speech to one-liners while at New Delhi he tried to be extempore. His speech was described disparagingly by large sections of the media, including television and print, besides the social media. A Reuters story (Rahul Gandhi bemuses with 'beehive' speech to India Inc) on 4 April 2013 said "the top trending topic on Twitter in India while Gandhi was speaking was #PappuCII. Pappu is a derogatory colloquial Hindi word meaning 'dumb kid'." The same story quoted a PhillipCapital economist Anjali Verma as saying that "He wants to change the political system and how it works which is an interesting thought. But the important part is execution about which he is vague or does not yet have answers."

Rahul Gandhi is vulnerable on too many counts. He has mocked questions he is often asked about his matrimonial plans but the nation does want to know the matrimonial status of its prime minister. He often takes off for unknown destinations in Europe and that simply cannot be accepted from the Prime Minister of India. If nothing else, there are security concerns that have to be kept in mind.

All said and done, it is difficult to imagine Congress going to polls with Man Mohan Singh as the prime minister, notwithstanding the talks of a third term for the incumbent PM. Congress would have to project a new face and that face will have to be the Prime Minister of the nation at the time of elections because then only it would have some impact on the voter. The office of the Prime Minister of India by itself adds to the aura of the individual who occupies it, at least initially. Even the likes of H D Devegowda and Inder Gujaral were looked at with a new respect by the media and the public when they accidentally landed in the country's highest office.

How Congress will try to dissociate itself from the non-performance of UPA-2 is a hugely ticklish question. Many options are available, though most of them are full of glitches. But of course in politics a year is a long time. Roadmaps can be formulated on the basis of prevailing trends and reasonable inferences can always be drawn but the possibility of something unthinkable happening always remains.

One uncertainty is global oil price. Notwithstanding the booming equities indices and firm real estate prices, consumption at the global level is declining, albeit at a pace so slow that it is going almost unnoticed. When global markets collapsed in September 2008 price of oil did plunge 35-40% and that did tame inflation in India. CPI (Consumer Price Index) remained almost unchanged between October 2008 and March 2009 and its positive fallout was accentuated because until that time rural incomes had been rising because of MNREGA. After 2009, the scheme was sort of appropriated by vested interests and it became a beehive of corruption. Similarly, Narendra Modi's Vibrant Gujarat 2009 too had got a big boost because there was too much idle money looking for parking space.

Thus the anger of the people at present has been, to some extent, fuelled by high oil prices which have distorted the structure of consumption significantly and have added to the misery the bottom 25% of the population has always faced. However, rampant corruption is equally responsible for high inflation and poor growth and this perception seems to have stabilised.

Logically speaking, the only course that can possibly return Congress to power is for Sonia herself to takeover as PM just before the next elections, though that too is going to have its own backlash since many of the fence-sitters also do not want a foreign-born person to become the nation's Prime Minister.

Nobody can say with certainty whether NaMo or the Sangh Parivar should be frightened at the prospects of facing Prime Minister Sonia Gandhi at the hustings. Being in power, Congress has too much leverage. Of course Narendra Modi too has some degree of leverage since he can take actions in Gujarat that have the potential to capture the imagination of the people nationwide. Which side would use its leverage more effectively is something only time would tell.

Since 2009 MNREGA has become steeped in corruption and loan waivers have been forgotten. The political landscape has changed completely. Today Congress faces a situation where the people believe its leaders have swallowed all that the country had earned in the last ten, if not sixty, years.

What People Want

What do people really expect from their next PM? More than anything else, they want a credible assurance of good governance. They are looking forward to a regime where a common man wouldn't be afraid of visiting government offices, including police stations. A society where young and sometimes minor sons and daughters of tycoons, bureaucrats and political leaders wouldn't be able to escape punishment for crushing innocent guys under the wheels of their BMWs. The people are looking forward to a system that will not tolerate ministers spending hundreds of crores on marriages of their children. They expect their government not to spend tax money on foreign trips of ministers and bureaucrats and their families in summer months.

They want teachers in government schools to attend to their duties diligently. They want government hospitals to treat patients like patients, not beggars. The people expect traffic on busy roads to come to a standstill less frequently because of caravans of cars bearing red beacons. In fact even Narendra Modi has been criticised for frequently bringing traffic to a halt and it goes to his credit that he has taken steps to make sure that the inconvenience faced by the common man is minimised.

They do not want an environment full of the powerful living lifestyles beyond their known sources of income. They do not want to be pushed around by security personnel of VIPs on busy roads or inside shopping malls. The people do not want to see public works getting delayed indefinitely, disrupting their lives and movement and they do not want overhead bridges that collapse during construction itself.

While the people are indeed looking for a PM who would whip the lash and make the system work, its not that they aren't bothered about economic development. In fact most know intuitively that good governance implies a great deal more than a sense of security and rule of law.

The principal premise is that the people are extremely perturbed by the ostentatious lifestyles, arrogance and indifference of those in power. Repeated incidents of terrorism and lawlessness have resulted in an average citizen developing a sense of insecurity. These feelings have been further accentuated by the growing economic inequalities and the nation has reached a stage where the poor are disenchanted as much with flashy lifestyles of the rich and the famous as their own misery. That is why the primary expectation of the people is good governance.

Modi is often accused of having an authoritarian style but the people aren't really looking for any change in his person. If the majority of people do like him, they like him as he is. At the most some may like him a little more if he smiled some more but there it ends. If he was to placate allies every now and then in a manner reminiscent of the soft-spoken Atal Behari Vajpayee, that would be the negation of his very locus standi. The purpose for which the people would elect him, if they do, will be lost and then Brand Narendra Modi will lose its sheen and shine almost instantaneously.

The people want him to play the game only by his own rules. He must not allot extra funds to a state ruled by an ally simply to keep his government in the saddle. He should never let routes of new trains be decided on the basis of whims of the railway minister. He must fire ministers who don't perform.

The India Today poll reported in early February says Vajpayee has surpassed Nehru as the most popular prime minister India has ever had. That doesn't seem implausible. He is a sweet man who has never been disliked by people and Nehru had died before half the voters were born. Undoubtedly it is Vajpayee's persona that has prompted some pundits to point out that Modi has received only admiration while Vajpayee earned affection. One cannot argue with this premise. However, tastes and preferences of people keep changing over time. Since the Iron Lady was assassinated in 1984, India has seen a number of soft prime ministers. Rajiv Gandhi was viewed as soft and supple, Narasimha Rao was considered unprovocable and Vajpayee's persuasive skills never failed to make errant allies give in to his patience. Then came the visibly meek Man Mohan Singh in 2004 who became even meeker after 2009 and has become almost a mannequin in the last two years or so.

Some may find the logic skewed but after having been ruled for 30 long years (1984-2014) by malleable, flexible and adaptable prime ministers, perhaps the nation is now looking for a He-Man who can curb the crass arrogance and corruption permeating the nation.

Credence to this comes from the fact that Narendra Modi's nationwide popularity seems to have grown dramatically since 2011 when the people started holding the politicians, their arrogance and the rampant corruption responsible for all their woes. Man Mohan Singh was always perceived as a weak prime minister and perhaps Advani had sensed the trend rightly in 2009 when he projected himself as "Lauh Purush" but he failed to make a dent largely because he had no concrete evidence to back his claim and was in fact a little ahead of the times. The people had not started equating Man Mohan's indifference with incompetence and were otherwise satisfied with performance of UPA-1.

After 2009 Sonia Gandhi became more aloof than during UPA-1 which put enormous pressure on Man Mohan. In 2011 the man on whom greatness had been thrust by History itself refused to even recognise that the scams were of magnitudes that had been unimaginable until recently. In 2012 he failed to even communicate with the people when they needed to be reassured that theirs was not a nation of rapists and murderers. The thought of him taking some action never entered anybody's mind.

It can be viewed as conjecture but the people seem to be done with the loveable and the affectionate. They aren't looking for a man with a rose in the buttonhole of his sherwani freeing white pigeons for a photo-op or one who is able to diffuse tension by reciting a poem or a couplet. The people of India are looking for a leader who would whip the lash as frequently and as firmly as may be needed to censure the culpable and the culprits and make the callous, cruel and uncaring system get to work again.

Let the liberals call it the people's fascination for fascism but they can hardly refute the reality that the roads are full of minors driving BMWs and Audis at breakneck speeds, often killing innocents sleeping on pavements. The women of India are perpetually afraid of being abducted by inhuman gangs and while high inflation is forcing millions to moderate their already meagre meals, the rich elite keeps wasting increasing quantities of foodstuff.

Narendra Modi seems to be the peg that fits the hole perfectly. He has acquired the image of a macho man and it goes far beyond that. He has come to mean different things to different sections of the society. He never talks of building a Ram Temple in Ayodhya and has even demolished illegal temples in Gandhinagar and yet for a vast majority of Hindus he is more

of a Hindu than anybody else in the Sangh Parivar. As Time magazine (16 March 2012) said, “He’s the only leader in the country who would be able to destroy a temple and get away with it, and still be called acceptable in Hindu politics,” quoting Tridip Suhrud, a social scientist based in Ahmedabad.

He has never studied economics in any college and yet he is viewed as having delivered more of economic development than the LSE educated Man Mohan Singh. He holds Vibrant Gujarat meets every alternate year at a scale that defies imagination and yet his popularity has only grown whereas Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra and Digvijay Singh of Madhya Pradesh were shown the door by the electorate for similar actions and attitudes. They too had earned laurels of the intelligentsia and the media for their ‘vision’ and progressive thinking but the voters thought differently.

Swaminathan Anklesaria Iyer wrote in Times of India of 11 May 2008: “Competition between political parties has driven rural power rates towards zero. Chandrababu Naidu’s defeat in 2004 was widely ascribed to his charging farmers for power. Narendra Modi charged farmers, cut off connections for non-payment, and yet won a big victory in 2007.” However, there is no hidden mystery behind why Modi succeeded where Naidu failed. There is a vast difference between Naidu and Modi and the two cannot really be compared since Naidu was always credited for making Hyderabad a heaven while for Modi it has been Gujarat, not Ahmedabad alone.

Modi has never been in the armed forces or even the police force and yet is considered more of a disciplinarian than any retired army general. Many in BJP think he is Machiavellian to the hilt but the people continue to look at him as a man who means what he says and says what he means. Congress leaders in Gujarat never tire of calling him a friend of industrialists and yet he continues to be perceived as incorruptible by people across the country. Modi maintained a stoic silence when young college students squatted and cried in front of Raj Bhawan after ‘Nirbhay’ was raped in a moving bus and yet their confidence in the ability of this man to make life safe actually leaped.

Even Modi’s staunchest supporters like Swapan Dasgupta believe his “biggest political failure has been his inability to unburden himself of the ‘communal’ tag he acquired after the 2002 riots.” This is an aspect of the Modi persona that has not been comprehended adequately till date. Modi has never attempted to unburden himself of any tag because he has benefitted from every tag. His approach on all issues has been consistent. He refuses to withdraw the charge of minority appeasement levelled against the Congress and insists that Gujarat’s growing prosperity is shared by all communities. Modi has never gone out of his way for what is euphemistically called “reaching out to minorities.” He has simply invited all Gujaratis to work hard and prosper.

He had declared soon after the Godhra carnage that his policy will be “Justice to all and appeasement to none.” Going by what he has said and done since then, it appears that he has followed his policy with remarkable sincerity and forthrightness. He has demanded clearance of GUJCOC in as shrill a voice as possible, he kept repeatedly demanding hanging of Afzal Guru until he was actually hanged, he has been more vocal in condemning terrorists and terrorism than any other politician in recent times and has never sought to project himself as a protector of the majority, or the minorities.

When Justice Sachar committee asked him to spell out the steps he had taken for Muslims, he said he had done nothing. And then he told the committee that he had done nothing for Hindus too. He was working for 5.5 crore Gujaratis instead. Through river-linking he had brought the Narmada waters to the Sabarmati. “Now am I going to find out which community is drinking how much of this water?”

The most important component of Modi’s strategy has been that even as he reaped the rewards of his successful steering of Gujarat on the road to progress and prosperity his Hindutva image never got diluted. As Pratap Bhanu Mehta wrote in Outlook magazine, “Narendra Modi has shown how Hindutva and development can be run together.”

He continues to criticise Congress for appeasement and he has never hidden his distaste for India’s soft stance towards Pakistan and yet the charge of being anti-minorities has only been diluted over the years.

Interestingly, this near impregnability of his image has been further strengthened by the media over the last 18 months or so precisely because of the reasons which had made the media go after his blood in 2002. Earlier negative coverage of Modi meant more eyeballs and now discussing Modi as the next PM means more eyeballs. Just as companies produce what they think the consumer wants, the media covers what the audiences want. TRP ratings of channels leap when they show Modi’s speeches live. So they telecast his speeches live. Now there are no takers for programmes blaming him for what had happened ten years ago. While the presence of the likes of Smriti Irani and Meenakshi Lekhi on the idiot boxes has leaped, Teesta Setalvad and Shabana Azmi aren’t being invited to the small screen for castigating Modi any more because that does not bring in more eyeballs. This, more than anything, suggests that a sizeable part of India does want Modi as its next PM. What remains to be determined is whether those wanting Modi outnumber those who do not.

Prospects

All said and done, whether Narendra Modi will indeed be elected the Prime Minister of India in 2014 remains an open question. Already there are too many variables and more may come into play as the elections come closer. The yearning for Modi as PM is palpable through out the length and breadth of the country but empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis is inadequate, to say the least. Besides the Mood of the Nation reports of India Today, there is little to go by. The degree to which equations of religion, caste and creed have lost relevance cannot be said with reasonable confidence. Unless Modi is able to snatch a respectable number of seats in totally regionalised states and states where BJP has a nominal presence, there is no way he can reach anywhere near the target of clear or near-clear majority.

In this context, if the huge voter turnout in Gujarat in December 2012 is indeed the beginning of a story yet to unfold, Modi’s prospects may turn out to be even stronger than what is suspected today. At present most believe Congress will have an edge in rural India and Modi will sway urban constituencies but if votes cast increase from 58-59% of eligible voters in 2009 to 65%+ in 2014, it would imply at least five crore new votes and nobody can predict the preferences of these new voters. They take no cognisance of lineage, incumbency or anti-incumbency. These “Google Shishyas” are totally unpredictable.

The world over the post-1990 generation is behaving differently and is being treated differently by marketers. Similarly, the newly emerging wannabes, whom Modi calls the neo

middle classes, aren't bothered about religion, cast, creed or lineage. As most parents would testify, the college going are now generally not aware of what their friends' families do or where they come from.

Rahul is 42 and he does come across as even younger. On the other hand, Modi is 62 and is perceived to be an experienced and seasoned leader. However, Rahul's youth may not translate into any significant advantage for Congress because he has managed to create the impression that the young indeed lack maturity. In fact this has benefitted several leaders who were hitherto being viewed as too old to continue in public life, examples being Man Mohan Singh and L K Advani. The most interesting phenomenon in this context is that while Rahul is indeed young, few seem to be looking at Modi as old.

On the other hand, the reasons why Modi is unlikely to be PM aren't all frivolous. Winning a clear or near-clear majority is going to be a daunting task for him. In five large states (AP, Kerala, Orissa, TN and WB) accounting for 164 parliamentary constituencies, BJP's presence has declined steadily, from 22 in 1999 to 7 in 2004 and then to a nominal 1 in 2009. Exclude these 164 constituencies and the reach of the BJP gets limited to 378 parliamentary constituencies. Deduct at least 28 seats for smaller states where BJP has no or nominal presence and the available field shrinks to 350. This is without counting the general expectation of some reduction in the party's strength in Karnataka because of the frequent changes in its leadership there. Obviously, expecting Modi to deliver about 250 of 350 seats sounds implausible, if not impossible.

However, these very figures tell a different story also. Even as BJP's presence has shrunk to a not-even-nominal 1 in these states, tally of the Congress has risen from 20 (1999) to 47 (2004) and then to 66 (2009). What the Congress success says is that 66 of the 164 constituencies in these five states, given good reason, are willing to ignore regional parties and try a mainstream national party. It is these 66 constituencies that Modi is likely to focus upon.

Besides, one can always argue that if Rajiv Gandhi could win 404 of 520 seats in 1984, why can't Modi win 200+ seats in parts of India that account for 350 seats and bolster this with 30-40 seats in urban areas of the five large states where BJP has only a nominal presence? In 1984 polling had jumped from 56.92% to 63.56% and few doubt that compared to 58.18% in 2009, polling in 2014 is quite likely to exceed 65% and may even touch 70%; in December 2012 elections over 70% of eligible voters cast their votes in Gujarat. Even in still largely rural Uttar Pradesh, polling percentage leaped from 45.96% in 2007 to 59.4% in 2012, indicating that the people are becoming more conscious of their duty to cast their votes.

While it would certainly be naïve to conclusively assume that Modi-led BJP would be well above the 200 mark, the target doesn't seem to be outside the realm of reality. Few seem to realise that Modi's charisma is beginning to match that of Rajiv Gandhi in 1984. What happened in 1984 doesn't appear to have been put in the right perspective. The BJP has always believed that the vote was a homage to Indira Gandhi and even Modi himself has said that the people voted for Rajiv Gandhi because of the sympathy factor.

Nothing can really be farther from the truth. It is inconceivable that 1155 lakh (number of votes polled by Congress in December 1984 elections) voters can decide to vote for a candidate just because his mother had been assassinated. Even if the effect of Indira Gandhi's assassination is counted only in terms of a swing of, say, five percent (in favour of Rajiv), it

translates into over one crore votes. It is true that elections were held barely weeks after assassination of Indira Gandhi but to assume that so many people will make the son their ruler simply because his mother had been assassinated is almost an insult to their intelligence. In this context, pertinent is the fact that Indira Gandhi had been shown the door in 1977, i.e. there was nothing sacrosanct about her holding the office of the Prime Minister of India.

If the people really voted so overwhelmingly for Rajiv Gandhi simply because his mother had been shot dead, then Rahul Gandhi should indeed keep telling the voters repeatedly that his grandmother and father were assassinated when in the service of the nation and therefore they should vote for him.

The people of India voted so overwhelmingly in favour of Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 because Rajiv-led Congress was viewed as something different from the Indira-led Congress. There may not be many takers for this view but the conditions of the economy between 1980 and 1984 need to be considered. When Indira Gandhi returned to power in January 1980, the second oil shock had already started damaging economies across the world. Global oil prices had doubled in 1979 to over USD 30 a barrel and the average price between 1980 and 1984 remained at this level. Adjusted for inflation, global oil prices in these five years were about the same as in 2013 (about USD 100 a barrel). High inflation had caused considerable consternation and the regime of the day was largely viewed as corrupt. The industrial licensing regime had been liberalised significantly by the Janata government and the process continued under Indira Gandhi but licenses were still required for most products and capacities beyond some stipulated thresholds. These licenses were available to anybody and everybody willing to pay the price.

On the other hand, even after induction in the Congress, Rajiv Gandhi's image had remained distinctly clean. One reason was that Rajiv had always earned his living by working as a pilot and wasn't known to flaunt his lineage in social circles. He had joined politics around 1982 but had remained aloof from political machinations and had acquired the image of Mr. Clean. He didn't become Mr. Clean after becoming PM. He was voted to power with a steam roller majority because he was viewed as Mr. Clean at the time of elections. The people forgave him for the Sikh massacre not because they viewed it as a justified revenge for the killing of his mother but because they were more concerned about their economic well being and thought Rajiv would wipe the slate clean and the plight of the people would improve.

Though the party headed by Rajiv Gandhi was the same as that headed by his mother, somehow the expectation was that under Rajiv it would be a whole new organisation. The Congress and the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress were two different propositions, as far as the people were concerned. Exactly the same situation is developing now. BJP and Modi-led BJP are two different propositions for the voters. The difference is that while the people were only somewhat irritated with the Indira Gandhi government, they aren't negative about the BJP at present. On the other hand, notwithstanding the enthusiasm Rahul Gandhi seems to have generated among Congress cadres, it is doubtful whether the people will treat Rahul Gandhi-led Congress or even a Sonia-led Congress as something different from UPA-2.

In 1984 the issue was corruption and its resultant impact on availability of food, clothing and shelter at affordable prices. The situation at present isn't very different. Corruption is the major grouse people have but the effects are not limited to food, clothing and shelter. Another dimension to this is the feeling of insecurity the nation seems to have developed because of

the rising crime and incidents of terrorism. Dissatisfaction with the Congress at this juncture is overbearingly strong.

Another advantage Modi may get is that the Congress can be reasonably relied upon to create a situation reminiscent of 1971: the single-point agenda of the Opposition was Indira Hatao in 1971 and the single-point agenda in 2014 is likely to be Prevent Modi From Being PM and that by itself can tilt the scales in his favour. However, in this context Modi himself also seems to be following the same track as he has started using the slogan Congress Hatao quite frequently.

Though the crime graph is rising more because of economic inequalities, reasons of which are rooted more in basic economic policies than corruption, the people believe corruption in corridors of power is the principal reason. The people's perceptions aren't entirely wrong. Many of the economic policies that have mindlessly boosted inequalities have been pushed through by vested interests. Besides, blindly following what US and EU do is nothing but intellectual corruption. Perhaps Man Mohan Singh hasn't amassed any personal wealth worth the name but he has always been willing to bend if he knows the reward will be global acclaim as an able economist. That is intellectual corruption, which is perhaps worse than corruption as it is commonly known, and actually causes greater damage.

Needless to say, the image of the present government is far worse than that of Indira Gandhi government in 1984 in the context of corruption and insult is being added to injury by the blatant display of irrational arrogance and insipid indifference by political leaders of all hues.

In the new millennium, Narendra Modi has single-handedly forced the central leadership of his own party to recognise his territory as out of bounds and made it imperative for the Congress to follow suit. Had Narendra Modi not defined his turf in unambiguous terms within his own party, telling the party's central leadership to refrain from meddling in state-level politics, perhaps Sheila Dikshit would not have survived as Delhi chief minister for so long and Ashok Gehlot would not have been appointed chief minister of Rajasthan after the Congress won the elections in 2008. Even Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik would not have earned national acclaim.

Even more important than imparting federal characteristics to internal structures of national parties is the fact that most chief ministers have started making attempts to imitate him in order to secure their long term future. Following Modi's performance in Gujarat, chief ministers of most states have realised the need for providing efficient governance and central leaderships of the Congress as well as the BJP have reconciled themselves to the stature and standing of their chief ministers. As noted writer GVL Narasimha Rao said in his regular column The Bottom Line in The Mint in September 2008, "chief ministers of states are much more popular today with their electorates than they were a few years ago for a variety of reasons. Narendra Modi is known for strong leadership and good governance and YSR, for pro-farmer and pro-poor governance. Nitish Kumar is popular as he is considered to be an able administrator, while Naveen Patnaik is known for his personal integrity. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan is perceived as a people's chief minister whom people admire for his simplicity and development agenda."

Modi has been followed by other chief ministers like nobody else in the history of free India. Full page advertisements in newspapers extolling achievements of different state governments have grown to such an extent that the Supreme Court has felt compelled to ask

governments to explain the expenses they incur on extolling the virtues of their governments. Most chief ministers have understood that the road to successful political careers goes via the development street. Much to the delight of the people, chief ministers have become relatively more accessible to them and have started talking more about people's well being than cast, creed and religion. Few, including Congress chief ministers, have failed to suppress the urge to ape and sometimes even praise Narendra Modi at one time or another. When Telugu actor Chiranjeevi floated his own Praja Rajyam party in 2008 in a bid to become Andhra's chief minister, he said, "... see what the state government there is doing. The Gujarat government is playing the role of a facilitator and not a broker in the promotion of SEZ."

Congress spokespersons often try to dismiss Modi as a regional leader and that normally invites nothing more than chuckles. They argue that the effect of the economic development Modi has delivered is limited to Gujarat. It is true that perhaps the people living in 5 lakh villages of India do not understand what the statistics that Modi is so fond of reeling at every opportunity mean but they believe Gujarat is indeed prospering under his leadership. They know the guy is different from others and is running a government that is sensitive to the people's needs and grievances. They are broadly convinced that Modi has performed better than any other chief minister and is likely to perform better than any other candidate as prime minister. When electricity trips in remote villages in UP and Bihar, people do remember Modi roaring on television about every village in Gujarat having three-phase uninterrupted round-the-clock supply of power. When the millions of migrants working in Gujarat visit their villages in Andhra and Orissa they do appreciate the difference between Gujarat and their home states.

It looks like Modi has a good chance of being the next PM but whether it is a people, a political party or an individual, the ultimate destiny is always decided by Him.

CM Modi: Pre-Godhra

The only way to draw a rough sketch of what Narendra Modi is likely to deliver as PM is to understand what he has delivered as Gujarat Chief Minister and, more importantly, what methods he has used and is using. Of course his approach, policies, programmes and priorities have changed over the last 12 years and are still changing and surely as PM he would have to reshuffle his ways and means yet again. Important is the fact that Gujarat is not a small state. It accounts for over five per cent of India's population and its overall demographic profile isn't very different from that of the country as a whole. The only major difference is that Gujarat has always been among the relatively prosperous states and has had a culture of peace on the labour front which, perhaps, has been a direct fall out of the relatively higher income levels besides, of course, its undaunted resolve to stick to prohibition.

It needs to be understood that the very efficiency and no-nonsense approach that Modi is now so well known for was the reason why Vajpayee chose to appoint him as the Gujarat CM, ignoring senior contenders like Kashiram Rana. The state seemed to be slipping from the hands of the BJP and Vajpayee knew that Modi was the only one who could restore Gujarat's confidence in the party quickly and effectively.

"Had Godhra not happened, where would Narendra Modi be today?" The common refrain of most analysts and observers is that had Godhra not happened, elections in Gujarat would

have been held in early 2003, BJP would have lost and Modi would have gone back to being a backroom boy.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The real break Modi got was not Godhra but the earthquake. As BBC (Profile: Narendra Modi, December 30, 2002) put it, “Mr Modi got his big break in the public arena when his predecessor in the state, Keshubhai Patel, was forced to step down in the fall-out from the earthquake in January 2001 that killed nearly 13,800 people.”

Modi had in fact satisfied the central leadership of the BJP by the end of January 2002 that Gujarat was firmly back to its fold.

In October 2001 the situation in Gujarat was quite dicey. A great deal of work had been done for providing relief to the quake-hit and yet an equally long and tortuous distance was yet to be covered. The destruction caused by Mother Earth had been so debilitating that there was no way one could have improved performance beyond certain limits and there were no limits to the needs of those who had suffered. The damage extended to a very large number of thinly populated villages spread over a very large area of land. Too many men and machines were required at too many places at the same time.

Partly, the situation was difficult. Partly, the government machinery was working at a speed slower than what it could have. Partly, expectations were unrealistic. Besides the havoc caused by the quake, the economy wasn't doing too well. Gujarat had faced near drought like situations in the preceding two to three years or so. A million problems needed to be solved in myriad different ways. The media had been extremely critical of Keshubhai government's handling of the post-quake situation. People's expectations needed to be met with severely limited physical resources within unrealistic time limits. Narendra Modi was sent to Gujarat to handle an almost impossible situation in a short span of 17 months.

After Modi arrived at Ahmedabad on the morning of 3 October 2001, he drove straight to the RSS office, which had been his 'home' until 1995. From there he went to meet his mother Hiraba in Sabarmati area of Ahmedabad, where she lived in a small flat with his brother. He told her of the responsibility he had been asked to shoulder by his party and sought her blessings.

His mother had always looked at her son as an ideologue who never aspired for any executive position. She had never really thought of a day when her son would occupy a visibly powerful position. The party post Modi was holding at the time, General Secretary (Organization), was by no means a small office; he was only the fourth person to hold that post in BJP's entire history. However, for a common man, party posts do not mean much because party functionaries mostly work behind-the-scenes, never mind if they often wield enough real power to nudge chief ministers. The office of a chief minister, on the other hand, is generally perceived as an office with awesome power attached to it.

The mother and the son were both emotional, and both were holding back their feelings. The atmosphere was more heavy than jubilant because the situation was quite unexpected. Narendra Modi's name had been in the air for several weeks but now the moment had actually arrived. It must have been difficult for the two of them to come to terms with the new reality – i.e. the thinker and the strategist had suddenly been put in an unimaginably powerful executive position.

She didn't know what to tell her son on that momentous occasion. Modi touched her feet to seek her blessings the traditional Indian way. She put her hand on her son's head and blurted out something quite unexpected. She said: "Dikra, laanch leto nahin."

"My son, do not take bribes" was the instruction the mother gave her son. Modi failed to hold back tears in his eyes and later kept on repeating the words of his mother as he drove from her residence to circuit house in state capital Gandhinagar.

Gujarat chief secretary Subbarao met him later in the evening to discuss the composition of the new CMO (Chief Minister's Office). Modi told him that he had no specific preferences. He wanted three IAS officers, all of whom should be IT savvy and, if possible, they should all be younger than him in age. Subbarao put forth three names, all of whom were instantly accepted by Modi. The trio worked in CMO for several years.

On Sunday, October 7, he was sworn-in as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Besides L. K. Advani, other central leaders who attended the ceremony included Arun Jaitley, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, Ved Prakash Goyal, George Fernandes, Ram Vilas Paswan, Suresh Prabhu, Kalraj Mishra and the Haryana strongman Om Prakash Chautala.

Modi was clear that he had only about 17 months before the state was due to elect its next government. Modi knew the importance of time and after arriving in Gujarat, his first major statement to the media was, "I am in a hurry to accelerate the pace of work. It is like playing a one-day cricket match where each ball and every minute counts, instead of a five day test match where the batsman has all the time."

Modi was amazed to note that daily newspapers were not made available to him until 7.00 a.m. The man had counted the time available to him (until the next elections) in hours. Accustomed to starting his day early in the morning, he didn't have a minute to waste. Arrangements were immediately made to ensure that he got newspapers at 6.00 a.m. from the very next morning onwards. In addition, arrangements were made to download and print news reports from websites of newspapers. "Sleepless Modi leaves officials bleary-eyed" was the title of a story in Times of India on 8 October 2001.

After swearing-in on 7 October 2001 Modi started work on relief and rehabilitation for the quake affected persons at a pace that made the bureaucracy gasp for breath. Affected areas were divided into 40 talukas (counties) and each was allotted to a senior bureaucrat. He told each officer to act like the chief minister of his/her allotted taluka and take spot decisions for meeting demands of the situation.

The atmosphere got electrified. Things started rolling. After being there and talking to the people themselves, bureaucrats started coming out with suggestions for changes in government rules and procedures. All officers were told to work seven days a week for a couple of months. They were asked to visit their allotted talukas on Saturdays and Sundays and report to the CM on Monday. He appealed to all ministers and MLAs not to celebrate Diwali as a homage to those who had lost their lives because of the quake.

On 10 October 2001, three days after taking over as CM, he delivered his first message to the people, assuring them a neat and clean administration with accountability and eradication of corruption being the top priority. He listed drinking water, power for the farm sector,

construction work of Narmada dam, more efficient use of natural resources as well as science and technology, education and health as his priorities.

It was exactly a month after assuming office, on Thursday, 8 November, that Modi “told his ministers to start mobilizing rural masses” and come up with meaningful feedback for gearing up the administration. He urged his ministers to come up with specific suggestions. “Don’t complain about bureaucrats not cooperating. You cannot be guided by them. You have to guide them.”

His emphasis was on speeding up work on projects which were already ongoing and ensuring that the citizens received more of what was being spent by the government. He worked until late into the night and his personal staff went along cheerfully, though after a few weeks he realised that except him, most had family responsibilities. So he reorganized his schedule in a manner that kept his own output at the same level but allowed his staff to live more normal lives.

He started changing the way the Gujarat government worked in many innovative ways. He was himself quite IT-savvy and wanted his officers to use IT in a productive manner. He had noted that the government machinery in Gandhinagar wasn’t using IT adequately. So he came up with a simple way of enforcing usage – the Chief Secretary started sending instructions to officers through email and officers down the line had no option but to start using email! As he was not used to wasting time on innuendoes, many officers and ministers were surprised at the speed with which he disposed off business on hand and ushered them out courteously.

Those calling the CM on phone too were pleasantly surprised by a refreshing new change. When one calls Modi on phone, either he takes the call instantly, or he calls back within a reasonable time. This was in sharp contrast with most politicians and senior bureaucrats as most of them consider it below their dignity to call back.

On 31 October 2001, birthday of Sardar Patel, PM Vajpayee was invited to a grand function at the historic Somnath temple. After some rather effervescent ceremonies to welcome Vajpayee, he got down to listing his demands, including release of Gujarati fishermen arrested by Pakistani authorities and broad gauge railway for Somnath town.

On 11 November 2001 he invited Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh to inaugurate a statue of Pandit Nehru and successfully sweet-talked him into committing rehabilitation of 800 families within 45 days and to agree for the construction of a bypass tunnel from the Narmada dam reservoir. Digvijay Singh eventually delivered on his promise and finally permission for raising the height came through on 17 May 2002 and the height of Narmada dam was raised to 100 metres on 15 July 2002, in spite of Godhra having happened on 27 February. The result was that Narmada waters started flowing into the Sabarmati as early as August 2002. Digvijay Singh still rues the day he allowed Modi to seduce him.

On 14 November (Diwali) Modi arrived at a village in Kutch at around 8.00 a.m. About 150-200 villagers were sitting in an open space. Modi greeted the villagers with folded hands and without uttering a word, started singing Ram dhun. The meeting got converted into a prayer session instantaneously. Everybody started singing and tears rolled freely down the cheeks of the young and the old alike, washing grief at least temporarily.

When Modi made a presentation to update senior leaders of BJP on the post-quake situation in the presence of PM Vajpayee on 25 January 2002, his party heaved a collective sigh of relief. The consensus was that Modi was on track and the party could look forward to retaining power after elections due in December 2002. A separate event was organised for making the same presentation to the world which was attended by diplomats from over 70 countries.

During this period he also started using video conferencing to interact with district collectors, announced the Samras Yojana which rewards villages which are able to elect their panchayats unanimously, took steps to ensure the state's vast IT infrastructure is used more extensively and productively, recovered 3.35 lakh sq. metres of government land that had been grabbed by unscrupulous elements, started organising Lok Kalyan Melas to ensure people do not have to run around for what is due to them from the government and launched a massive drive to check power theft in almost the entire state. In the budget for fiscal 2002-03 he hiked capital expenses for water supply and sanitation from Rs 339 crore to Rs 462 crore, for irrigation and flood control from 558 to Rs 705 crore and allocation for roads and bridges was hiked from 242 to Rs 533 crore. All other heads were left almost untouched.

Obviously, Modi had achieved a great deal before Godhra happened. The process of what the good governance he is known to have delivered during his nearly 12 year long rein had started in October 2001, immediately after his appointment. Modi had already got himself elected to the state assembly from Rajkot and he had every reason to be smug about the future but destiny had something else in store.

CM Modi: Post-Godhra Pre-Election

On 27 February 2002, at 8.03 a.m., 58 pilgrims returning from the holy town of Ayodhya were burnt alive in a rail coach at Signal Falia, close to Godhra railway station. The coach was set on flames and the passengers inside were not allowed to flee by a stone pelting mob that was at least a thousand strong. Widespread riots followed and Narendra Modi's life changed forever.

The news came to Modi at around 9.00 a.m. but the magnitude of the event became clear only a couple of hours later, after the details came in. The news spread like wildfire. News channels were showing the burnt coach and the charred bodies repeatedly on television. By 12.00 noon people in Ahmedabad had started closing their offices to head for their homes. By this time, the government and the people of Ahmedabad (and other major cities) knew there would be riots and most expected the riots to be severe and widespread.

On the afternoon of 27 February the atmosphere was indeed tense. Records of messages received by police control rooms from different parts of the state show that crowds were assembling at different places and heated discussions were on. There was a deep sense of frustration in the majority community. Burning of the train coach by a crowd of at least 1000 was an act perpetrated by a mob, not by a bunch of terrorists. It was largely viewed as an attack on the majority community by the minority community. People had assembled in large numbers in different parts of Ahmedabad and Vadodara. At these gatherings many must have talked of the need to avenge what had happened at Signal Falia. A Gujarat Bandh was announced for 28th and a Bharat Bandh on 1st March. Both were supported by the BJP as a party.

The key issue still being debated is whether the state government had indeed looked the other way while mobs torched houses and killed members of the minority community. Modi insisted his government had taken all measures to control and curb the riots while the charge against him is that he did not.

Unfortunately, because of a variety of reasons, including inadequate articulation by the Sangh-Parivar in general and BJP in particular, the right questions have been neither asked, nor answered. Of course Modi is a great communicator but what matters is the ability of the party as a whole to articulate its stand. He himself can articulate only policy issues, not detailed data. Even today one can see that BJP spokespersons participating in debates on television tend to lose temper more often than their opponents. When questioned on Godhra they end up either talking of 1984 Sikh massacre or accusing the anchor of bias, forgetting that the anchor has to provoke debate every which way possible. In the process they often fail to drive their point home to truly neutral parts of the audience.

Facts and figures related to the post-Godhra riots have been reported extensively in the media. Without going into details, what comes out clearly is that until the afternoon of 27 Feb. only stray incidents of violence had taken place. In fact 27 Feb. was so quiet that no senior journalist came to Ahmedabad from New Delhi on the morning of 28 Feb. They came in hordes on 28th evening because violence had intensified in the afternoon.

Riots started sometime in the afternoon of 28th and were intense and severe until 2nd March. In fact most of the major incidents like Naroda Patiya and Gulbarg Society (killing of former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri) took place between afternoon of 28th February and the night of 1st March, i.e. morning of 2nd March. A very large proportion of the killings that took place in Ahmedabad, Vadodara and peripheral areas was between afternoon of 28 Feb. and morning of 1 March. In more distant locations there was violence until 2 March. Reports of violence kept coming in from different parts of the state for several days but as detailed investigations revealed in due course, in remote areas too violence had started subsiding on 1st March after the army had come in and had come almost to a halt by 2nd March.

According to the final figures put on record by the Gujarat government, as well as the central government, a total of 1044 persons (790 Muslims and 254 Hindus) were killed and 223 were reported missing. This includes about 170 killed in police firing. At least three fourth of these killings had taken place before 2 March. These are figures that have at least a broad consensus and are agreed to by even those who continue to see Modi, even after ten years, as standing in front of the burnt coach at Signal Falia.

Obviously, at least 100 (if not more) of the 170 who had been killed by police firing had also been killed within the first 72 hours, i.e. by 2 March 2002. If the Gujarat police had indeed been ordered to let the Hindus kill the Muslims, how come over 100 were killed in police firing over a period of less than 48 hours? Has anybody accused Gujarat police of having killed only Muslims when firing to quell the riots? Though Teesta Setalvad says more Muslims were killed in police firing than Hindus, even she puts the proportion of Hindus among those killed in police firings at over 40%.

So where is the question of complicity? The simple fact is that in the past riots had generally remained concentrated in walled parts of cities whereas this time violence had spread to far flung areas, including villages. There is no way the Gujarat police could have controlled it

sooner than it did. Obviously, a great deal of effort was made to control the situation. In retrospect, it is always possible to argue that more could have been done and more should have been done but inadequacy of the effort can hardly justify the charge of complicity. Should that be the yardstick, no minister or bureaucrat in the country can hold office.

That the police force in every city in India lacks adequate numbers is a fact that is increasingly being recognised by the people, particularly since the Nirbhaya case in December 2012. This applied to Ahmedabad also, which had a police force of only about 6,000 at that time and most of the ghastly incidents that took place were outside municipal limits of the city. Gulbarg Society where the late Ehsan Jafri lived too was outside the city of Ahmedabad at that time. Traditionally riots in Ahmedabad had been limited to the walled city.

Kingshuk Nag, Resident Editor of Times of India at Ahmedabad said in an article (Newton Modi has a lot to answer; 2 March 2002) that Modi had justified the violence as the equal and opposite reaction to an action. What Modi had said was “Kriya aur pratikriya ka daur chal raha hai. Ham naa kriya chahte hain aur naa pratikriya.” Obviously, the translation twisted the meaning in a manner that accused Modi of justifying the violence.

Let there be no mistake. For the people at large, it was one community hitting the other, and the other hitting back with vengeance. It was indeed an eye-for-an-eye kind of event. It would be naïve to say that a large proportion of the Hindu community did not feel enraged because of burning alive of 59 pilgrims. Of course both communities had and still have active, supportive and indifferent members in proportions that vary from place to place and between different economic segments within each community.

It may not be out of place to say that one way of restoring confidence and camaraderie between the two communities is to recognise the reality and then continue dialogue until there is a broad agreement on at least some key issues. But of course few are interested in that.

Even the latest reports (16 April 2013) providing details of thousands of messages received by police control rooms in Gujarat are being interpreted as saying that contrary to the claims of the Gujarat government, the riots were not spontaneous but pre-planned. Now does spontaneous mean all those involved getting up at the same time and going out to kill? Of course there was anger and there were meetings. Some must have vent their anger and returned home. Some must have decided to retaliate and take revenge. Those who did needed to be punished and have been punished.

The economic and social factors that have kept the Godhra issue so live for so long a period also need to be looked at from the right perspective. The Media's war against Modi was a complex phenomenon. Whether rightly or wrongly, the mainstream English language media has always been instinctively supportive of minorities. The outrage against post-Godhra riots was continuation of an existing approach. However, the more important factor was that television came into its own only in the second half of 1990s and had changed, by 2002, the way news is reported. 9/11 footage got more eyeballs than any Amitabh Bachchan starrer and Godhra simply had to receive heavy coverage.

There was heavy competition among television news channels for eyeballs since several of them were still in their gestation periods. The issue had to remain live for as long as was

possible since television needed low cost footage. Anybody who was willing to say something against Modi on camera was welcome in the studios.

That is the reason why media criticism remained shrill even after the army retreated to barracks on 19 May 2002 and the supercop KPS Gill left Gujarat on 15 July 2002. Modi drew eyeballs and that was what mattered. Unlike big business, the media didn't really want Modi out. It wanted him to stay, stick to his unapologetic stance, and keep feeding the rumour mills that ensure at least eyeballs, if not advertising revenue.

This was a natural instinct and the phenomenon is replaying itself now. Once again competition has intensified and since Modi brings in eyeballs, anybody who has some standing and has something to say about Modi is welcome. The difference is that now eyeballs are available only if the coverage is at least balanced, if not tilted in favour of Modi. So those supporting Modi are equally welcome on the small screen provided, of course, they have the requisite personal stature.

The extensive castigation by media actually enhanced Modi's popularity more steeply than is realised by most. By July Modi had become the most popular CM in the country. In January 2002 he had ranked 8th.

Politicos, at least in Gujarat, knew that repeated talk of the pathetic condition of Muslims living in relief camps by the media wasn't affecting Modi's image adversely. The people, somehow, always know the truth. However, leaders of Gujarat Congress were helpless because the media wanted dramatic footage, irrespective of its impact on the people. The media was determined to keep the issue live until the next big event.

Politicians and intellectuals of all hues lapped up the opportunity. Some thought the media was concerned about the minorities while some believed the media had been offended by Modi and was now callously attacking him. But the media had its eyes focused only on the abundant eyeballs Modi provided.

Even the heavy under-reporting of the tremendous response Modi's Gaurav Yatra received in later months had a logic of its own. Many in the Sangh Parivar thought the media was paying Modi back for his arrogance but the reality was that people in different corners of the country had only limited interest in Gujarat elections, or the kind of response Modi was getting from the people in Gujarat. They already knew that Gujarat was firmly behind him and, in fact, most people in other states also held Modi in high esteem. However, a journalist looking Modi in the eye and accusing him of complicity in violence against the minorities, or even an intellectual shedding tears for the sake of the civil society, made more fascinating viewing (or reading) for most people not only outside Gujarat but also for some Gujaratis themselves.

Does the media have double standards? Does it treat the Gandhi family different from other politicians? The BJP believes that but that is going a bit too far. It is rather difficult to imagine a nexus between all top editors and writers and the Gandhi family even in 1984, leave aside its perpetuation till date. Newspapers and television channels are as much a business as a normal business, or politics, for that matter. Sonia Gandhi exposes herself to the media at a very measured and controlled pace and that ensures that her coverage results in adequate eyeballs for the media. The media doesn't delve deep into personal lives of the Gandhi family but isn't that true of all political leaders, irrespective of party affiliation?

It will be too far fetched to assume that the entire media was in cahoots with Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 and the entire media (excluding vernacular media of Gujarat) was inimical to Narendra Modi in 2002. It was a combination of a set of circumstances that resulted in Modi “being demonised in such a relentless, Goebbelsian manner” for so long a period (Ram Jethmalani, The Sunday Guardian, London, 16 April, 2013). Perhaps a Congress CM too would have received the same treatment at that time, in the aftermath of the same events. However, the ubiquitous Jethmalani is probably right in saying that perhaps no politician other than Modi would have been able to withstand such a situation with as much resilience and courage as him.

Political opposition to Modi wasn't limited to the Congress and the likes of Lalu Yadav. This was in fact an even more complex affair. Everybody knew that Modi had earned a huge mass following among a sizeable part of the majority community. It was crystal clear that the efficient manager had been transformed into a political leader of considerable consequence, with a personal mass following of his own. Many within the BJP were also aghast at the way Modi's stature was growing. Some of the more seasoned among BJP stalwarts had perhaps foreseen in 2002 that Modi would rise and claim the top job much sooner than most realised at that time.

Though his opponents within the BJP had no option but to support him, knives were out within the party, as well as the NDA. On 8 March 2002 Mamata Banerjee demanded Modi's head and on 11 March TDP supremo Chandrababu Naidu said he wanted Modi removed. So surcharged was the political atmosphere that most expected that a decision to remove Modi would be taken at Goa, where BJP's national executive was due to meet on April 12.

At the Goa meet Modi walked on the stage just before the tea break and told the assembly that he knew that some had an ambivalent attitude towards him. He urged all to shun indecisiveness and tell him whether he should continue or resign, assuring that he would follow the party's diktat without a murmur. For a while there was pin drop silence. Then it was all mayhem. The delegates shouted their no rapturously. The intensity with which delegates to the national executive meet reacted took the senior leaders by surprise. The very idea of jettisoning Modi was shunned rather hastily. Before anybody could begin a discussion, Modi's resignation had been rejected summarily. Those seeking debate managed to save face by adding the caveat that Modi should seek a fresh mandate from the people. When Modi landed at Ahmedabad the following day, there were thousands to receive him. It was a good 45 minutes before he could leave the airport for his residence.

Perhaps the most unexplained part of what happened in 2002 was accusations from big business. In March end Deepak Parekh (HDFC) demanded that Modi should go. This was followed by some strident criticism by Cyrus Guzder (Airfreight). After that several businessmen spoke out against Modi, holding him responsible for the perceived lawlessness in Gujarat. Even an Ahmedabad based industrialist said passionately that he wanted the days before 28th February to return.

The reality was that the economy, at least as far as the corporate world was concerned, was in a mess. Bigwigs of big business were still feeling the heat of bursting of the dotcom bubble at the global level towards the end of the last millennium. While the overall economy of the country wasn't exactly in distress, the corporate sector was passing through a fundamentally difficult phase. Interest rates were down, demand for real estate was non-existent and

commodities markets were largely lacklustre. Global markets were still recovering from the big technology crash which had sent Nasdaq plunging from over 5000 to below 2000.

On 28 February 2002, the day after 59 pilgrims were burnt alive at Godhra, Sensex opened at 3711, rose marginally to 3731 and closed the day at 3562. In April 2002 Sensex closed at 3338.16 and it hovered around 3000 in the ensuing ten months. Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha was replaced by Jaswant Singh in early July 2002 to placate the corporate sector but that could not have, and did not have, any impact on the macro economic scene. The Sensex again dipped below the 3000 mark on 30 July 2002. It closed calendar 2002 at 3377.28.

The big business swooped down on Modi because many of the industrialists had convinced themselves that the post-Godhra riots had hurt their balance sheets adversely. So deep rooted was this belief that even after Modi won 127 assembly seats in a house of 182 in December 2002, they continued to believe that the riots had wiped out a substantial part of potential demand for their products.

CII and FICCI welcomed the Gujarat verdict but the feeling of alienation continued. On 6 February 2003, Modi had a public spat with Rahul Bajaj at a CII meeting. Bajaj looked at Modi straight in the eye and asked him to spell out what was being done to restore normalcy. Modi lashed out at him on the spot, saying “You and your pseudo-secular friends come to Gujarat and see the reality for yourself.”

Most of the major Gujarat-based industrial houses reacted angrily to the outburst of Bajaj and threatened to dissociate themselves permanently from CII. Director General Tarun Das quickly decided to go to Gandhinagar and apologise on behalf of CII, though the damage had been done. The anger expressed by the likes of Karsanbhai (Nirma) and others proved what Modi had said before elections in December 2000 – Gujarat’s self-esteem had been hurt and needed to be restored.

The first important part of Modi’s feud with what appeared to be business at large is that it wasn’t business at large. Or even big business at large. A few businessmen gave vent to their feelings, because of a variety of reasons. While reasons of Deepak Parekh taking the lead and statements made by Cyrus Guzder are still not clear, Rahul Bajaj was agitated largely because share of geared scooters in the overall market for two-wheelers was plunging at an alarming rate – it had declined from 16% to 12.3% in 2002 and it plunged to 6.6% in 2003. To put it in perspective, in absolute numbers, sales of geared scooters in 2003 were about a third of sales in 1995. Bajaj Auto was made of scooters.

Bajaj Auto wasn’t doing badly in terms of profitability since it had already taken up motorcycles in a big way but Rahul Bajaj was sentimentally attached to scooters and Gujarat was the biggest market for scooters. He was unable to appreciate that motorcycles had stolen the march over scooters because of their significantly higher fuel efficiency. He thought disturbances in Gujarat were responsible for the plight of his scooters. Mobikes of Hero Honda sold briskly in Gujarat in 2002 also and Munjal had no grouse against Modi. Deepak Parekh and Rahul Bajaj have since not uttered a word against Modi or Gujarat at any of the industry meets, but nor have they attended any of the Vibrant Gujarat meets.

The second part of the story is that the resentment wasn’t against Modi alone. In fact the apex trade bodies were feeling disillusioned with the central government headed by the BJP because they thought the sluggishness in the economy was because of BJP’s inability to

manage it. The overall economic conditions, particularly for Corporate India, had been less than satisfactory from 2000 onwards. The rich and the famous were feeling uncomfortable because of low equities indices, sluggish commodities markets, soft demand for industrial and consumer products and relatively poor economic growth.

For inaugurating its annual session in early May 2002, CII invited Sonia Gandhi, leader of opposition in parliament. This was against the tradition of inviting the Prime Minister of the day and the purpose was to express dissatisfaction with the central government. Sonia Gandhi herself used the opportunity, a la Narendra Modi style, to wonder aloud “When a leader of the opposition is invited by the country’s leading industrialists to start off their annual get together, it is natural to speculate what sort of political winds are blowing and in what direction.” In spite of being the most seasoned politician on India’s political horizon, Vajpayee was forced to retort in his address to the session: “It does not make business sense to count one’s chickens before they are hatched.” Nevertheless, in early July, Vajpayee still ended up offering the head of his finance minister Yashwant Sinha to CII as a placatory gesture.

Official statistics released in due course showed a GDP growth of around 4% for 2002-03 but the real scenario was worse than that. Car loans were going abegging at 10% w.d.v. Going by macro data, economic growth of Gujarat was way above that of the nation as a whole in 2002-03 also, when the state GDP growth (at constant prices) of 8.14% was only marginally lower than the preceding year’s 8.41%.

Why was growth so high even in the year in which impact of the big quake was the maximum? And how did Gujarat economy maintain growth in the year following Godhra? The simple truth of the situation was that the state’s economy at large wasn’t performing badly. It was the corporate sector which was under pressure. Much money was being spent in Gujarat on post-quake rehabilitation. The monsoon was good in 2001 and was satisfactory, though somewhat erratic, in 2002. Unfortunately for the corporate part of the economy, it was unable to compensate for poor growth at the national level.

How much of what was being said about Modi was right and how much was motivated can be debated but what cannot be contested is the fact that in the year 2002 perhaps national television channels covered Narendra Modi more extensively than any other politician in the country. The media made him not only the most recognised but also the most popular chief minister in the country and he has continued to be the most admired chief minister since then.

Modi continued to be the punching bag through out 2002. The scene was actually quite amusing. How to perk up the economy? Remove Narendra Modi. How to boost tourism? Change the government in Gujarat. How to accelerate industrial growth? Do away with Modi. Somebody didn’t get the expected invite for an international conference, it was because of what Modi had done in Gujarat. Some JV deal fell through, the reason was Modi’s deeds had eroded confidence of overseas investors. If some minister was received by a relatively junior officer in a European country, the explanation was that Modi had hurt India’s image. World Bank wouldn’t give money for project XYZ, what else do you expect in a nation that tolerates the likes of Modi?

Through out 2002 the criticism in the media was so strident that though Modi knew that BJP cadres were solidly behind him, he often wondered whether he really enjoyed the confidence of the people. What really restored his confidence was his Gaurav Yatra that started on 8

September 2002 from Phagvel where 2.5 lakh persons assembled to reassure him that he was indeed their leader. The yatra travelled around 200 kms a day, covering two to three assembly constituencies every day. On some days Modi addressed as many as 15 public meetings, matching Indira Gandhi's performance in 1971 in terms of distance travelled, number of meetings addressed and the number of people who came to hear him. This part too was almost completely ignored by the national media and needs to be chronicled for posterity, if nothing else. How massive an effort it was can best be gauged from the fact that even after travelling a distance of 4,999 kms, Modi could cover only 153 of the 182 assembly constituencies.

On 12 September 2002, Pakistan President Musharraf raked up the Godhra issue while addressing the UN general assembly. That day he became Miyan Musharraf for Narendra Modi. Without mincing words, he started telling 'Miyan' Musharraf to mind his business. If nobody else considered Musharraf's reference to Gujarat an assault on India's sovereignty, particularly in view of Pakistan being a totalitarian state and its pathetically poor record in human rights, it wasn't Modi's fault! "Musharraf is now focussing on Gujarat but it will not be allowed to become another Kashmir," said Modi.

When Akshardham happened on 24 September 2002 commandos were despatched from New Delhi within minutes of the terrorists taking control of the temple complex, which is at a stone's throw from Modi's residence. The terrorists were eliminated after a battle that lasted several hours. Congress, as well as minority leaders of Gujarat condemned the terrorist attack unreservedly. Before the commandos had taken out the terrorists, banners were already up in most of the minorities dominated areas, condemning the attack on innocents.

Gujarat remained peaceful. The attack was perceived for what it was – an act of terrorism. Everybody appreciated the restraint exercised by the majority community. Eventually the election schedule was announced on 28 October 2002. Voting was scheduled for 12 December and counting for 15 December. The dates suited Modi imminently. It gave him enough time to cover almost the entire state.

Perhaps the most amazing part of Modi's life during the post-Godhra-pre-election period was that he managed to ensure that no administrative decisions got delayed unduly. He invariably returned to base for two or three days every week, worked late hours and cleared all pending files. While work on the Narmada project remained almost unaffected by political disturbances and campaigning for elections, even new initiatives received considerable attention.

In April 2002 when the Godhra controversy was at its peak, Modi personally signed an agreement with Shell for setting a LNG terminal at Hazira with Charles Watson who headed Asia and Africa operations of Shell. Charles Watson was so impressed with Modi's outlook that when Modi visited London in August 2003, he hosted a lunch for Modi and his entourage at a fancy restaurant overlooking The Thames which was attended by over 50 senior executives of financial institutions and banks. On 10 July 2002, when Modi himself wasn't entirely sure of peace having returned (he was waiting for the annual Rath Yatra to pass off peacefully), Modi met M. S. University Vice Chancellor Anil Kane who had conceived the ambitious Kalpasar project. The meeting was to last only 20 minutes but got prolonged to 45 minutes since Modi wanted to understand the concept completely. It was this meeting which eventually resulted in Modi taking up the project in right earnest.

In mid-2002 four unique schemes for ensuring involvement of the people in development work were announced in Gujarat. Under Gram Mitra, five persons were to be appointed in each village on a stipend of Rs 1,000 per month, for providing guidance to the people in different areas. Another scheme was to provide loans of up to Rs 1 lakh for youth wanting to become self-employed. The third scheme was to hire 100,000 persons at wages of Rs 50 per day (a little below the minimum wage, actually), to undertake cleanliness work. The fourth was to appoint 25,000 Green Guards, at a monthly stipend of Rs 1,000, to spread awareness about ecological concerns and issues. Though these four schemes were dubbed as a mechanism for dispensing political patronage, the basic concept of creating a mini-secretariat for each village stands the test of logic.

While Gujarat was being declared as unfit for decent human beings by some, on 14 June 2002 Planning Commission Dy Chairman K C Pant, in an official statement, described Gujarat as “a front-ranking state in economic growth and development and expressed the hope that despite natural calamities such as the drought, cyclone and earthquake, the economy of Gujarat would recover to achieve the targeted annual growth rate of 10.17 per cent in the Tenth Plan. Pant said in industrial development, Gujarat ranked second in respect of percentage share in net value added by manufacture.”

On 20 June 2002, when the whole world was after his blood, Modi asked 225 senior officers of his administration to adopt 450 villages (two from each of 450 talukas) for development as model villages. On 24 June a Lok Kalyan Mela was held in Viramgam for handing over cheques to beneficiaries of different government schemes.

On 28 August 2002 Narmada waters were successfully diverted to Sabarmati. A 5,000 plus crowd heard him with rapt attention at the function organised to mark the historic day. Modi declared confidently that Narmada waters will flow into 300 rivers, 900 ponds and 9,000 villages after completion of the project and requested his colleagues in Congress, who had boycotted the function, to persuade Congress governments in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra to speed up work on rehabilitation of oustees so that work on the project could be expedited. Modi promised that within 150 days from the day work started on increasing the dam height to 110 metres, the state would be surplus in power; all equipment for hydro power were ready at the dam site but power could be generated only after the height was raised to 110 metres.

The political situation was still fluid but Modi did not change his basic approach to put performance above politics. In September, one of his ministers had a tiff with a senior bureaucrat. Modi found the bureaucrat's performance satisfactory and refused to transfer him, completely ignoring the possible political repercussions of alienating the minister. In October, there was a big hue and cry about concessional power tariff for weavers in Surat. Modi refused to budge from his policy of not providing selective subsidies.

Work on the Science City project on the outskirts of Ahmedabad made satisfactory progress through out the year and India's first 3D IMAX theatre was inaugurated on 23 October 2002 by Advani.

Even as the world was accusing Modi of having abetted communal violence, he came out with a novel scheme under which villages which remained crime free for five years were to be accorded a special status. Modi also developed a plan for legal reforms during this period,

though it was implemented a few years later. His legal reforms plan radically changed the way justice is dispensed in Gujarat and is being replicated in many parts of the country now.

A scheme to encourage ex-servicemen to settle down in border villages was firmed up, 3,731 villages had local bodies that were elected unanimously and, in addition, 8,245 villages had elected 28,765 candidates to their local bodies unanimously.

A very important achievement was organisation of Gram Sabhas, which served several purposes. After the second round, held before the G-day, which had resulted in 17,829 meetings ending with resolution of over 80,000 petty complaints against the government, things came to a standstill. In July, the month in which the assembly was dissolved, the third round saw 17,543 meetings attended by a staggering 10.50 lakh villagers. 91.98% of the 61,418 complaints were resolved successfully.

Schemes and announcements apart, there are concrete figures to show that Gujarat's economy remained vibrant in 2002-03. In value terms, mineral output grew from Rs 503 crore to Rs 541 crore, natural gas output leaped from 2797 mcm to 3324 mcm and, most important of all, electricity generation went up more than ten percent, from 50 to over 55 billion units.

Plans were firmed up for the Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology, National Law School and Kutch University, besides according university status to the Nirma Institute. Preparations were made for a paradigm shift in primary education by teaching science and mathematics in English and several skills development projects were firmed up with an eye on future demand for manpower.

When the next budget was presented on 27 February 2003, exactly a year after Godhra happened, 71,702 gram sabhas had already been held. 350,065 petty complaints on issues ranging from availability of water and civic amenities, education, health, agriculture and law and order were discussed in these gram sabhas and 290,377 had been resolved. This was a unique feat achieved by a state government, for the first time in the history of Independent India.

In addition 3,731 villages had become Samras villages, i.e. they had elected their respective local bodies unanimously. Samras status was given only to villages which had elected the entire local body unanimously, without holding elections. There were many villages which succeeded in electing only some of their local body members unanimously. On the whole, 8,245 villages had elected 28,765 candidates unanimously.

Work on an amazingly large number of schemes and programmes had made progress during this volatile period. Plans for setting up four new universities were ready (or under implementation), besides a seismological institute, and it had been decided to include natural disaster management in school curricula. A blue print for providing information about modern agricultural techniques and practices to farmers was ready. The government had decided to hold the three important annual functions (Independence day, Republic day and Gujarat day) in different cities, in order to make the government's presence felt all over the state. The Navratri festival was to be promoted all over the world for boosting inbound tourism to Gujarat.

One can go on about what was achieved in the G-year on development front but the key fact of relevance is that administration didn't come to a standstill, as was made out by many. Nor did growth decelerate. In a year when Modi woke up practically everyday to see himself being called names by somebody or the other in newspapers, and in a year when he was sought to be cornered by almost anybody who was somebody in India, he managed spectacular growth.

The assembly elections in December 2002 were a bitterly fought contest. As many as 12 chief ministers from other states campaigned in Gujarat. Three Congress chief ministers from neighbouring states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra were allotted 60 specific assembly constituencies of Gujarat. On 10 October Sonia Gandhi personally asked them to concentrate on districts adjacent to their respective state boundaries. In addition, 36 ministers were drawn from the three neighbouring states to be assigned as divisional observers for elections in Gujarat; they were asked to submit their assessment of Congress prospects in writing and were warned that if their assessments turned out to be too much off the mark, they could lose their ministerial berths!

The number of pre-election surveys carried out for this election was perhaps the highest ever for a state election. The whole nation and, to some extent, the whole world, was focused on this election. The first pre-poll survey was commissioned in October 2002, before the schedule for elections was announced. This poll gave 120-130 seats (in an assembly of 182) to the Narendra Modi government and said that 56% of the participants were satisfied with the performance of the government and 61% were satisfied with the manner in which the Modi government had handled the post-Godhra communal violence.

Betting on outcome of Gujarat 2002 elections was perhaps the heaviest ever for a state level election. A report in TOI estimated the losses of bookies at a staggering Rs 2,000 crore, of which Mumbai bookies alone lost Rs 500 crore. One in Mumbai got a heart attack after the results were announced while another in Ahmedabad committed suicide. Going by media reports, most of them had bet on Gujarat returning a hung assembly. Overall nationwide betting volume was estimated at Rs 5,500 crore. Incidentally, in 1977 parliamentary elections, bookies had offered odds of 1:1000 on Indira Gandhi losing her Rai Barreilly seats. How much the bookies had to shell out isn't known.

Interestingly, Modi was talking development in November-December 2002 also. He was talking of bhukh aur bhrashtachar (hunger and corruption). He talked about IT (information technology) and BT (bio-technology). He said "In education alone more than 1 lakh educated have got employment. In water, we have made progress. Agriculture is going good. Employment is growing." But the elite only wanted to talk of the Godhra aftermath.

He even addressed Bohra Muslims directly once, saying they had inadequate educational facilities and the result was their youth aspired at best to become bus conductors. "Why can't they think of becoming doctors or engineers?" Modi kept on saying that Godhra was a question of humanity and not an election issue. He pleaded that Gujarat should not be judged in pre- and post-Godhra terms but in terms of long term performance of Congress and BJP governments. All this fell on deaf ears. When he talked of lowering power costs by producing hydro power from Narmada waters, inevitably, the counter question was how much of the benefit would go to Muslims. Even channelisation of Narmada waters into the Sabarmati was dubbed an experiment in Hindutva.

The voters cast their votes on December 12 and counting took place on December 15. BJP won 127 assembly seats while the Congress tally was 51. Modi was sworn-in on 23 December 2002 at a ceremony that was attended by PM Vajpayee also. It was the first instance of a PM attending swearing-in of a CM. In fact dates for BJP's National Executive meet, which had been decided before the results were out, were adjusted in order to ensure that all senior leaders could attend Modi's swearing in. After being sworn-in Modi touched feet of Vajpayee, Advani, Joshi and Keshubhai, to seek their blessings. Since then, Modi has been the uncrowned King of Gujarat.

CM Modi: First Term

A day after the election results were out Modi sent a fax to New Delhi, again offering to step down if the party thought that would be in its long term interest. The offer was, of course, turned down by the central leadership instantaneously.

After the elections, Modi was the undisputed darling of the masses. Addressing his first press conference of his second stint on 25 December 2002 Modi assured the people that he would continue to follow the basic principle of "Justice to all and appeasement of none," insisting that in case of riot cases the law will take its own course. Modi said, "It is my request to the media to bury the past and not to try to create divisions among the communities by harping on the communal divide. The minorities are safe and are living happily with the majority communities even in the villages and no one should try to rub salt into their wounds."

He reiterated his government's commitment to achieve annual growth of ten per cent, to re-prioritise work that was incomplete and ensure economic stability at the micro level. For a 21st century Gujarat, bio-technology, information technology, marine engineering, ocean technology and other modern sciences were to be given priority. Modi assured that his government was committed to ensuring that five crore Gujaratis lived their lives with dignity and self-respect.

He was invited by several state units of BJP and the party decided to use him for campaigning in far flung places like Bihar and U.P. also. On 12 January 2003 Modi was the hero of Mumbai. The huge Shivaji Park was packed with people. In Mumbai the belief used to be that except for Shiv Sena's Bal Thackeray no political leader could have the Shivaji Park overflowing with people. A magnificent stage was built under guidance of Bollywood sets designer Nitin Desai. At least two lakh people cheered Modi lustily when he descended in a floating lotus-shaped carriage. An orchestra played Vande Mataram. There were two giant screens on either side of the stage. An unimaginably heavy garland of roses was presented to him. He was also given a statue of Vivekanand and a sword.

Many similar programmes were proposed but Modi resisted the temptation as he was in a hurry to go back to the business that he was forced to put on back burner on 27 February 2002.

Modi vowed to forget Godhra for good and has till date not answered a single question on the subject since then. He got back to doing what he was doing on the morning of 27 February 2002 – putting Gujarat on the industrial map of the world.

The targets were too many. Narmada project had to be completed. An agricultural revolution had to be ushered in. Children had to be sent to school. Electricity had to be provided to the villages. Farmers had to be guided gently to practices that could enhance yields. Small industries had to be set up in villages. Harrowing fast urbanisation of Gujarat had to be slowed. The skewed sex ratio of the state had to be corrected. Government employees had to be trained. Party cadres had to be motivated. The list of pending tasks was frighteningly long. So many concepts had to be put to practice. The man wanted to score a century every month. He was still treating the game as a one day match.

Modi added diverse economic factors to derive sums with unique denominators. For example, he had added up Narmada waters in terms of megawatts of electricity consumed by the farm sector. He knew that quality energy supply to rural households would move a lot more than electric fans and refrigerators. Modi had a broad idea of economic impact of a higher literacy rate of females.

It was time to get on with Jyoti Gram, Kanya Kelvani and, of course, Narmada. He pruned the size of his ministry to 15, which was less than two third of what he was allowed. He refused to appoint politicians on boards of public sector undertakings and other government corporations. He was back to providing a clean and efficient administration and putting Gujarat on the path of progress.

Jyoti Gram Yojana (JGY) was perhaps the most ambitious and difficult of the schemes Modi had formulated just before the 2002 elections. He realised that the villagers never asked for luxuries and only wanted the basics – a tubelight or a bulb when it is dark and an electric fan in at least one room in the noon. Most of them don't use electric fans during nights even in peak summer because they sleep on the roofs or in open land in the compounds of their houses.

If 2-2.5 million rural households consumed an average of 2 to 3 units of power a day, the aggregate worked out to no more than three billion units a year, or a mere 6-7% of the power consumed in the entire state. Besides providing basic comforts to rural Gujarat, there was a deeper, long term strategy involved in the scheme. Gujarat had been India's most urbanised state and Modi had always worried about this and wanted to take the cities to the villages and reverse the trend.

Modi was convinced that quality energy supply in rural areas could transform rural economies like nothing else. Inadequate infrastructure in rural areas has been the primary factor responsible for the growing migration to the cities, despite unhealthy and unhygienic conditions prevailing in most of the large cities.

In Gujarat too villages were accustomed to power cuts and the government machinery had reconciled itself to tolerating power theft. Keeping the Gujarat Electricity Board (GEB) afloat and maintaining services at the existing level was the immediate task, as far as the system was concerned. Checking power pilferage was assumed to be a politically impossible goal. Providing more and smoother power to rural areas was sheer utopia for most policy-makers.

Almost all senior officers of GEB, as well as the top rungs of the bureaucracy, told Modi that the goal wasn't realistic, at least in the immediately foreseeable future. The rustic leader, however, refused to take the 'no'. His simple question was: "If Ahmedabad can receive uninterrupted power supply, why can't a village 50 kms away? And if the privately owned

Ahmedabad Electricity Co. could provide uninterrupted power, why couldn't the state-owned GEB?"

"Don't tell me the reasons why it can't be done. Find a way of doing it." That was the one line diktat of the chief. For Modi, the most objectionable part of the existing scenario was the official differentiation between the cities and the villages. Particularly Ahmedabad, which is less than 100 kms from his birthplace Vadnagar, was and is known all over the country for smooth supply of electricity. "There must not be any difference between treatment to cities and villages" was his repeated refrain through out the implementation of the scheme.

Meetings followed meetings and were followed by more meetings. Discussions often became stormy. Fiscal resources, technical glitches and attitudinal problems were all glaring the decision-makers in their faces. In fact Saurabh Patel, the minister-in-charge for power, and the top bureaucrats, including the GEB chairperson Manjula Subramanian, felt quite harassed because people below them were saying the task was impossible while the man directing them insisted on achieving his goal.

The method that emerged from what was perceived to be madness was devastatingly simple. Earlier, there was a single distribution system that catered to the farms, as well as the villages. Demand from the farms often exceeds availability in peak season, particularly because power is supplied for limited hours only. The result is that villages get power only when power is supplied to farms. To boot it all, farmers often switch on more motors than their feeders can handle, causing technical problems for the entire system, frequently plunging villages into darkness. The solution was to supply farm power through a separate network of cables. What the farmers do should not affect supplies to the villages, and vice-versa.

The solution seemed to be workable but the magnitude of the work frightened the whole system. "How many kilometres of new lines will be required to be set up?" asked a senior person in one of the meetings. "Multiply 18,000 villages by five" was the answer. The figure of 90,000 km of new electric lines can give the creeps to the CEO of even the largest utility company in the world.

Nevertheless, quick estimates were made and the CM was informed that making available three phase uninterrupted power supply to 18,000 villages will involve a capital expenditure of about Rs 1,500 crore. Without batting an eyelid, Modi said go ahead. It's a different matter that Modi never bats an eyelid, irrespective of whether he is saying yes or no.

JGY was announced in the budget for 2003-04, presented to the state assembly on 27 February 2003. The announcement frightened the opposition because of the sheer scale of the scheme. Amarsinh Chaudhary, a former (1986 to 1989) chief minister of Gujarat who was (he has since expired) a qualified civil engineer and was generally perceived to be a rather simple man, took the trouble of visiting Modi at his official residence that evening, to tell him that the scheme was a very difficult proposition, likely to result in more jeers than cheers. Without mincing words, Modi told him that while he appreciated Chaudhary's sincerity, the simple truth was that had the scheme been easy to implement, the Congress would have implemented it! Chaudhary returned shaking his head, thinking that the younger man had no regard for the experience of his peers.

The scheme smelled its first success much sooner than was expected by most. On 17 October 2003, uninterrupted three phase power was made available to a cluster of 36 villages in Mehsana district. Dasaj was the first village to be covered in the cluster.

Though Modi was almost gleeful while inaugurating the scheme, he wondered philosophically - "Why should treatment to your village be different from what is available to Gandhinagar? When somebody falls sick in an urban home, the air-conditioner works. When your mother falls sick, you don't have even an electric fan. Why this discrimination? This discrimination troubles me. I was born in a village and I know what 'dukh' is. I know how a student feels when there is an examination the following day and power goes off in the night. I have experienced this as a student. That's where this Jyoti Gram scheme has sprung from."

Once Manager Modi had smelled success, Politician Modi was in full form again. Modi said: "The most common stance of the sceptics has been that had it been possible, it would have been done. Congressmen ask me how could we do it when they could not do it in 50 years? I told them that the people have sent us (BJP) mainly to do what you could not do in 50 years." The crowds burst out laughing.

The purpose of the scheme wasn't merely to make lives easier for the rural folk, though that was an important issue. What difference gadgets like refrigerators and washing machines make to life is realised by most city dwellers only when there is a major power failure since they take these comforts for granted. For villagers, these ordinary comforts can actually mean a lot more. They can make better use of food products with fridges, their children can realise better educational outcomes by studying after dark, thereby improving prospects for growth in life and women can play larger roles in basically wage-earning activities such as taking care of the cattle.

Equally important was the fact that availability of power for commercial and industrial purposes can transform economies of rural areas. Availability of uninterrupted power has resulted in small industries such as diamond polishing and food processing being set up in rural areas and have transformed the scenario in rural Gujarat. Small blacksmiths are able to install small electric furnaces. Small laundry firms are able to use electric irons. Households are able to use gadgets like refrigerators and washing machines.

In a lighter vein, Modi once urged the females in the audience to insist that their men folk should buy washing machines for them at the next Diwali, sending the audience into raptures once again. Then he turned to the men and asked them not to worry since the machines would be washing only the cloths and not men; the word washing is often used for describing thrashing, mental or physical, of human beings. The massive crowd roared its approval yet again.

He went on to explain the importance of the scheme in his own inimitable way, pointing out that small flour mills, where households get their wheat ground on commission basis, often worked at inconvenient hours only, because of erratic power supply. What happens to a woman who has gone to bathe her buffaloes and the flour mill starts and stops before she is back? Obviously, uninterrupted power can provide greater flexibility to mothers, leaving them more time to tend to their cattle and pay attention to the studies of their children.

Turning to education, Modi argued that in the era of globalisation, computers had become a necessity for one and all and computers need continuous power supply. He shared his dream

of the day when the vast population of Gujaratis outside India would be able to communicate with their kith and kin in villages through the Internet. He also explained the emerging new concepts of distance learning and telemedicine.

Implementation of the JGY scheme was pushed frantically over the next three years and all the 18,065 villages of Gujarat, along with 9,681 hamlet-suburbs of large towns and cities were covered over a period of three years. The scheme eventually ended up involving 56,599 km of new transmission lines and installation of 12,621 transformers; the network, set up over a period of approximately 30 months, was equivalent to the entire existing distribution network in the state, though this new network is designed for lower loads and lower voltage.

On 11 November 2006, the then President of India Dr Abdul Kalam dedicated the scheme to the nation at a glittering function at Champaner, where a mock JGY village was erected specially for the function. Abdul Kalam was all praise for the path breaking scheme and generously complimented Modi for the zeal with which it was implemented.

Everybody is happy and the reality is reflected well in the figures – electricity consumption for agriculture in Gujarat remained steady over the following 2-3 years, addition of overall new capacity was also quite nominal (about 10%), and yet there was a sense of satisfaction among the people. Large industrial units were not an issue since it had become standard to set up captive power plants. For households, commercial establishments and small and mid-sized factories, quality supply of power became smoother than before.

JGY lit up millions of homes in remote villages, level of average employment in rural areas grew 33%, migration to cities declined perceptibly and even reverse migration (to villages) started happening in some cases. Students were able to nearly double the time they spent on their studies while rural women started spending only three fourth of the time they used to on household chores. According to a survey, performance of students from rural areas in board examinations improved dramatically between 2006 and 2008.

Several studies evaluated the impact of the scheme on rural Gujarat and the findings are impressive by any standards. The CII reported that at least 55 per cent of households it surveyed said employment opportunities had gone up in the countryside.

The most eloquent tribute to the JGY came from the central government, which launched an identical scheme at a nationwide scale on 4 April 2005. By that time, JGY had already covered about 3000 villages. Christened as Rajiv Gandhi Gramin Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY), the central scheme covered 30,562 villages between 4 April 2005 and 23 February 2007, according to the annual report (2006-07) of Ministry of Power, Government of India. The name of the central scheme is different but the methodology is identical. Modi refuses to say whether he felt bad at not having been involved in nationwide implementation of his concept but, as they say, imitation is the ultimate recognition of an idea.

Checking power theft was the boldest part of the whole gameplan. JGY was essentially a component of a wider scheme of setting the whole energy sector on an even keel. In India, no state government has dared to touch the sensitive issue of pilferage of power by the farm sector.

In budget for 2002-03 itself the state government had announced its intent to shed hesitation and make the necessary amendments in the Indian Electricity Act 1910 to control the evil of

power-theft. A campaign to check power theft had in fact already been launched in 2001. A large number of illegal connections had already been detected. The drive against power theft didn't slow down much even in 2002. From 2003 onwards, of course, it was full blast. T&D losses of GEB went down by nearly five percentage points.

During Jyoti Gram, wherever Modi went, he told his audiences that he wanted to eliminate power theft completely. While inaugurating the first Jyoti Gram at Dasaj village, he said "The GEB chairperson wants to curb power theft but I have told her that the target is not reduction but complete elimination."

Four police stations were set up at Sabarmati, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot specifically for handling power theft cases. About 13-14 lakh metres were changed as they were old and were giving lower readings. Electronic metres were installed in as many places as possible and cabling was moved from overhead to underground to the extent possible.

In another speech at Siddhpur, he told people that "daily theft of power amounted to Rs 50 lakh in Gujarat and many may consider me a good CM if I let it continue but I am not comfortable. I have talked to people and I am feeling very enthused. I am getting blessings of all. I am not going to let air conditioners be run with stolen power. I am going to send power-thieves to jail." He said the drive against power pilferage had already resulted in a demand for ten lakh new connections!

Power purchase agreements signed with China Light & Power (originally set up by Torrent) and Essar were renegotiated as interest rates had declined drastically. Gujarat government convinced them that it would be in their interest to take a more realistic view since the consumer simply wouldn't be able to bear the high cost of power. In a nation where power was viewed as a bounty for the recipient, Gujarat was telling producers to price it reasonably, lest demand declined! Annual savings of about Rs 480 crore were achieved by renegotiating power purchase agreements.

By early 2005, the whole nation had started looking at the wonder-boy of energy management with a great deal of respect. Rediff.com editor Sheela Bhatt wrote on 12 January 2005: "Modi is on the way to revolutionising sectors like electricity management and water management. His government will announce a scheme soon under which whistleblowers will receive 10 per cent of the fine amount on reporting power theft. Lakhs of farmers and small-scale industrialists who thrived on 'stolen' electricity are now upset."

Addressing the National Development Council at New Delhi on 27 June 2005, Modi told the assembly of chief ministers from almost all states that 74 installation checking squads were working under a senior IPS officer to detect power pilferage. Ex-army men had been inducted into teams set up by the GEB for checking power theft.

The magnitude of measures taken to check power theft, which have continued unabated, can best be gauged from figures for fiscal 2005-06, when "almost 13 lakh connections were sealed, over 36,000 cases filed and Rs 16 crore recovered." Having habitually tapped power illegally for decades, some of those caught unaware by the drive had to borrow heavily to pay the penalties. Recognising that justice needs to be tempered with compassion, Modi cleared a proposal in 2007 to limit the fines for power theft to a maximum of Rs 12,000. By this time 20 lakh connections had been checked and power theft to the tune of Rs 177 crore had already been detected.

At this meeting even Prime Minister Dr Man Mohan Singh was reportedly taking notes furiously. The central government had already started replicating the JGY but the fact that the Congress was incapable of gathering the requisite courage to check power theft became evident on 5 December 2007 when addressing a rally at Gandhidham, Sonia Gandhi expressed her anguish at people being “booked for electricity theft and being taken away in handcuffs.”

After the results of the 2007 elections were announced, on 23 December 2007, it was Bibek Debroy, erstwhile chief economist of Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, headed by Sonia Gandhi, who paid rich tributes to Narendra Modi (Indian Express, 27 December 2007), blasting his former boss without mincing words: “Would a Congress government have dared institute criminal cases against more than 1.5 lakh farmers for power theft? More important, how do voters trade-off assured power supply against these? Are a few farmer suicides more important than overall agricultural prosperity? Is populism necessarily popular?”

It is this drive against theft of power that ensured JGY’s success and, at the same time, turned around GEB, a behemoth of a utility with an installed capacity of over 5,000 mw that had a reputation, like electricity boards of almost all states, for inefficient working and incurring massive losses. The performance improved so dramatically that CRISIL and ICRA rated GEB as the second best performer in FY 2006, compared to the seventh position it held in FY 2003. Gujarat’s overall score was 54.46, which was second only to Andhra Pradesh’s 55.81. Interestingly, GUVNL has implemented several ERP packages for enhancing its performance and service to the consumers. When villagers complained that they often had to travel long distances to pay their energy bills, Modi came out with a rather simple solution – he tied up with post offices (virtually all villages have one) to collect payments.

In the latest round of ratings by ICRA and CARE, only the four utilities owned by Gujarat government were rated A+. A function was organised to recognise their performance but when the union minister for power realised that he shall be lauding Gujarat, the function scheduled for 20 March 2013 was cancelled.

Another important scheme started in 2003, Kanya Kelvani is designed to lift education of girl child in rural areas. On 14 June 2003, the temperature at Dediapada, a small and primarily tribal cluster of villages in western India, was in low to mid-40s Celsius. Narendra Modi was there to address a string of public meetings, expected to have an average attendance of no more than about one to two thousand each, including around a hundred five year old children who had never been inside a school. Of the approximately 50,000 persons who were to attend the twenty odd meetings over a period of three days, at least two third didn’t know how to write their names.

“That’s part of life for politicians” would be anybody’s comment but the situation was somewhat different here. Narendra Modi had been elected as Chief Minister of Gujarat less than six months ago. He had a steamroller majority in the state legislatively assembly and the next elections were four-and-a-half years away. He had no political need to sweat it out in sweltering heat in that sparsely populated area.

After having been lustily cheered by crowds of tens of thousands in hundreds of public meetings in a just ended election campaign, and after having been sworn-in as chief minister of a state of five million people in the presence of a 250,000 plus strong assembly of

cheering, flag-waving and slogan-shouting supporters, a politician can sort of get used to addressing only large meetings. For a year or so after an election, i.e. “the honeymoon period” in journalistic language, politicians are entitled to take life somewhat easy for a while.

At each meeting Modi had a five year old light the traditional lamp in front of a photograph of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, and handed over attractive school bags with the basics like notebooks, pencils and sharpeners to a few. He then made the entire assembly, with folded hands, take an oath. All those present at the meeting were asked to vow to treat the girl child as a valuable social asset and to ensure that no girl would remain illiterate in that particular village.

At one meeting, he lambasted the crowd: “Here, the mothers sitting on the left. You don’t send your daughters to school because you want them to bathe your cattle. You are more worried about your cattle than your daughters and you call yourselves mothers?” Some looked down, some nodded their heads in agreement and some raised their heads in determination to change things; none ignored him.

“I have not come here to distribute any goodies. I have come here to ask something from you. A Bhikhshuk wants to ask you for something. Do you promise to oblige? If you say yes in advance, then only I would tell you what I want from you. Raise your hands and say yes. Hmmm ... I can’t here ‘yes’ loudly enough. Raise your hands, close your palms and shout your ‘yes’ convincingly.”

Had any developed world journalists been there during those three days, perhaps most of them would have described the event as nothing more than a political circus but five years down the road, the figures were telling a different story. Drop out rate of girl students in primary schools had plunged from over 20% in 2001-02 to 3.68% in 2006-07 and further to 2.98% in 2007-08. The gap between male and female literacy had almost evaporated.

Modi wasn’t working alone. For three days, most government offices in Gandhinagar wore a deserted look. All senior officers and ministers were moving in different parts of the state, doing what Modi was doing in Dediapada. Some said this was no way of pushing education; the government had come to a standstill. Modi replied in one of his speeches: “They say the files are stuck. Here, lives are stuck.” The crowd roared cheered lustily.

“Gujarat is number one in so many things but in literacy it is 15th. In female literacy it is 21st. I feel ashamed and I want you to feel ashamed. Such a large budget. So many officers. So many cars and buildings with the government. And in literacy, such a pathetic scenario! It is a blot that has to be washed. I asked myself how could I clean this blot? Should I write to people? Should I start an awareness campaign? I found all ideas superficial and finally I decided to sweat it out myself in remote areas of the state. I have come here to share my pain with you. I want you to feel as ashamed of the situation as I do. I do not want to preach. I do not want to blame anybody. Let us work to create an environment where every village as a whole would work to ensure that nobody remains illiterate.”

“Every child resists going to school for a few days. For the first week or ten days, you create a festive atmosphere. Let the whole village take all the newly enrolled children to the school in a ceremonial manner and make sure that they remain there. The schools would be serving

them meals that are better than what you offer them at home. After a week, you would not be able to keep them at home.”

“Send the girls to school. When they start reading and writing, the boys would automatically feel inspired and demand to be sent.”

“Gandhi used to say that when a boy goes to school, life of one person improves. When a girl goes to school, life of a family improves. My belief is that when a girl goes to school, lives of two families change for the better – her own family, and the family in which she eventually gets married.”

Modi said nobody remembers when one first went to school. Now when a minister or even the chief minister holds the finger and takes a child to school, it becomes a memorable day. “This is philosophy, this is institutionalisation,” says Modi.

When he saw a particularly well maintained school, he praised its staff generously. Elsewhere, he saw a school with a large compound that was visibly uncared for. He gave a piece of his mind to the audience and those responsible for the school:

“We go to great lengths to keep our temples clean because the Gods are supposed to be living there. Yet, we are neglecting the schools, where these little children, these living Gods, are to be groomed into being fine citizens. For cleaning the school building or planting trees in its compound, you don’t need money. You only need to work.”

Nobody asked questions about attention paid to the minorities in this literacy drive because Modi’s government never counted the numbers in religious terms. Villages numbering a little more than 2,000 were identified for special attention because they had less than 20% female literacy.

On 16 June 2005, when the third campaign was on, he was barely able to contain his anger. The village he was visiting had had a school for fifty years and yet, only eight percent of females in that village were literate. “You want to live better lives. As individual land holdings decline in size, how are you going to maintain the same standard of life? You have to educate your children and ensure that they are able to get gainful employment in trade and industry. If a mother is educated, chances are that she would educate her children too. The only way to spread education is to send your daughters to school.”

“If parents of a sick child do not care for him or her, the whole village passes adverse remarks against such parents. Do villagers comment on those who do not bother to send their children to school?”

The whole exercise had so much of impact on Modi’s own mind that he personally authored a book “Kelve te Kelvani” in 2005. This is actually a collection of quotations published in the form of what is known as a coffee table book. Literally the title means “what educates is education.”

One may not be able to estimate the number of votes that the Kanya Kelvani scheme got him in December 2007 but few would argue that his sincere and straight approach must have left a deep impression on millions of minds. According to media reports, among those who voted for him in 2007 elections, women outnumbered men.

The Narmada project was among his top priorities. An interesting incident that shows how Modi works happened on Wednesday 16 March 2004. Several senior officers of Gujarat government were huddled in a room, waiting anxiously for a fax from New Delhi. When the fax was received in the afternoon at around 2.00 p.m., no time was wasted on making a photo copy. The document was re-faxed to Kevadia Colony offices of the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd in Bharuch district and within minutes of receipt of the fax, work for raising the height of the dam to 110.64 metres started and was completed by 30 June 2004. This was followed by clearance for raising the height further to 121 metres but Medha Patkar sat on a fast on 29 March 2006, demanding that work on the project be stopped. On 15 April 2006 Modi attended a meeting of four chief ministers and two central ministers in New Delhi where ongoing work for raising Narmada dam height from 110 to 121 metres was discussed but after the meeting, Union Minister of State for Water Resources Saifuddin Soz announced that as chairman of the Review Committee he had decided to halt construction.

On Sunday 16 April 2006 Modi himself sat on a hunger strike in Ahmedabad, demanding that work on the Narmada dam be allowed to continue unhindered. People had seen activists going on hunger strikes to press their demands in the past but nobody had seen an incumbent chief minister sitting on a fast. On the following day the Supreme Court announced its decision to allow the work to continue and Modi ended his fast immediately. Work on construction of the dam continued unabated after that. The dam height was raised to 121.92 metres on 31 December 2007 when Modi personally poured the last bucket of concrete on the dam's wall.

After the social and rural schemes got rolling in the first half of 2003, on 28-30 September 2003 the first Vibrant Gujarat was held. As destiny would have it, economies around the globe started recovering rapidly at around that time. Indices became buoyant, commodities started cruising and GDP data started flying.

Vibrant Gujarat 2003 was inaugurated by Dy PM Advani on 28 August 2003. Advani lauded Gujarat whole-heartedly for providing one of the best investment climates in India and for having the lowest number of strikes among all states of the country. He was particularly appreciative of Modi's success in reducing Gujarat's fiscal deficit from Rs 7000 crore to Rs 4000 crore within a period of 12 months or so. Advani declared that the sustained propaganda against Gujarat was an insult to him personally, and to India, asking the audience not to be swayed by all that had been written in the media.

The meet was attended by Mukesh Ambani, chairman of India's largest private sector company, and a host of luminaries from the world of business. The event resulted in agreements signed for aggregate investments of US\$ 7.2 billion and was a success from normal standards, but for Modi, it was only a testing of waters before diving deeper. His dreams for Gujarat were far bigger than what was achieved in Vibrant Gujarat 2003.

In his speech at the inaugural function, Modi said, "I urge you to go around Gujarat for a couple of days. Feel the serenity for yourself. Experience the vibrancy. Smell the spirit of joy. Watch the young and the old dancing with gay abandon. When you drive around at midnight, you shall find small groups of teenage girls walking around freely and fearlessly. Take a whiff of fresh air in a garden, or take a brisk walk on a dimly lit road, or play garba in a club or a party plot, you will find the rhythm friendly."

“Mr Modi has had some success in generating investors’ enthusiasm in a campaign that has been marketed very professionally and which has been accompanied by a number of impressive economic reforms,” said the Financial Times, London, of 1 October 2003.

By mid-2003 Modi was a confident man who was looking forward to a vibrant and prosperous Gujarat. However, by this time his relations with vernacular media had also worsened significantly because of a variety of reasons, including his refusal to cross the boundaries he had set for himself and his government. He often used to complain that the media was not reporting his epoch making programmes like JGY and Kanya Kelvani adequately.

On 15 October 2003 Modi administered a veritable shock to Gujarat Samachar Chairman Shreyans Jain by distributing a four page newspaper titled Satya Samachar that had a layout very similar to Gujarat Samachar. This special newspaper brought out by Gujarat government was distributed to all those who were getting Gujarat Samachar and informed readers that MOUs for investments worth Rs 66,000 crore had been signed at the Vibrant Gujarat in September. An amused Shreyans Jain said he could do absolutely nothing because there was no copyright on the layout and appearance of a newspaper. Relations between the two have never gone beyond courtesy since then largely because Jain has not been able to reconcile himself to the fact that Modi never feels in awe of anyone, not even a media magnate like Gujarat Samachar having a cash kitty running into several thousand crores.

In December 2003 BJP won assembly elections in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh handsomely. There was a sense of euphoria in the party and it decided to opt for early polls for the Lok Sabha. In September-October 2003 worldwide economic trends had started improving and there was optimism in the air. In August the Sensex had crossed 4000 and by December it was above 5000. Somehow the central leadership of BJP had managed to convince itself that its performance had started yielding results while the reality was quite different. Impact of the global meltdown in the last years of the preceding millennium when dotcoms went bust like ninepins had only been neutralised. Real growth was yet to come.

The bright idea of the India Shining campaign was mooted and implemented in an almost ostentatious manner. Whatever might have been the intentions of the strategists but the impression the voter got was that as far as the BJP was concerned, India had arrived at heaven, the people should be dancing on the streets and should put the BJP back in saddle for five years as a mark of their gratitude. Narendra Modi too got carried away by the euphoria. His public stance too was that the Indian economy had been put on track by NDA government efficiently, and India was indeed shining.

The outcome was a shocker. BJP’s tally in parliament plunged from 182 to 114 while that of the Congress leaped from 114 to 145. The Congress was able to form the government in coalition with other parties exactly the way BJP had in 1999.

A whispering campaign against Modi started almost immediately after the results were out. A senior BJP leader told a TV channel that he had lost hope of returning to power after results for Gujarat were out. Dissidents within the party became so bold that on 18 August 2005 when they went to New Delhi to put their viewpoint before the central leadership, they completely ignored Advani and called upon only on those who they thought were neutral.

Modi was seething with anger and tried to defend himself in BJP's national executive meet in Mumbai in June end but his stock was down and nobody was interested in analysing the results scientifically. As one writer put it, "The fact is the BJP is unable to diagnose its illness."

A television channel asked him whether he would try and appease dissidents in BJP. "My job is to convince and appease the people of Gujarat and I am doing that," said Modi nonchalantly. Ajay Ummat of Dainik Bhaskar recalls that when Modi was advised to take care of dissident MLAs, he said blandly that he never discussed internal politics with MLAs and was not in the business of garnering support of MLAs.

The second Vibrant Gujarat in 2005 was a significantly improved version of the 2003 event. By this time Modi had understood the investment game and global markets had moved into a high growth orbit. This event was organized at the newly set up Science City on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. Over 6,000 persons attended the inaugural ceremony, most of whom were businessmen and industrialists of some consequence. The huge pandal was packed to capacity. The summit saw an impressive tally of investment commitments worth Rs 106100 crore. 226 MOUs were signed in areas as varied as information technology, biotech, agro industries, energy, gas, petroleum, non-conventional energy, ports, port-led Industries, financial services, textiles and apparel, gems and jewellery and tourism.

The atmosphere at the second summit was gung-ho in every sense of the word. After the inaugural ceremony, many were looking for printed copies of Modi's speech. Slick brochures outlining investment opportunities available in Gujarat were made available to the delegates. Seminars on major industry segments were organized on all the three days where senior government officials patiently answered all questions from the investors.

In May 2005 a report by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation said Gujarat topped all Indian states in terms of economic freedom and it was the "Best Governed State in India." Modi went to town telling everybody that it was a foundation headed by none other than Sonia Gandhi. There was a big hue and cry inside Congress and many demanded that in future such reports be vetted by a political committee. Bibek Debroy, the Chief Economist of the foundation, refused to kow-tow to political diktats and submitted his resignation. Sonia Gandhi displayed her respect for the highly regarded economist and persuaded him to withdraw his resignation, though eventually Debroy did part company with the RGF. He held his view that Gujarat was managing its economy competently steadfastly and he became a prominent admirer of Modi.

Flush with success of the second Vibrant Gujarat, Modi told the National Development Council meeting on 27 June 2005 that of the 76 projects worth Rs 66,000 crore for which MOUs were signed in Vibrant Gujarat 2003, 61 projects worth Rs 58,922 crore were at an advanced stage of implementation, including 15 that had already commenced production.

At this meeting many chief ministers had come prepared for lengthy speeches. The PM told the chief ministers not to read out their prepared speeches since the texts had already been distributed in advance and it was assumed that everybody had read every chief minister's speech. However, most ignored the PM and insisted upon reading out their speeches, largely because they were unable to speak extempore. The PM went to the extent of interrupting some of the unusually long speeches. Several chief ministers took snoozes and some were even caught dozing on camera by the digital media.

Narendra Modi was different. Instead of delivering a speech, he “made a power-point presentation without for a moment looking at the prepared text.” In mid-2005 Gujarat had already emerged as the fastest growing state in India. A confident Modi told the PM pointedly that while the central government was in the process of scaling down growth target from 8%+ to 7%+, Gujarat had registered a GDP growth of 15% in the preceding year and expected to repeat the feat in 2005-06. The august assembly gave Modi a thunderous applause and there was a virtual stampede among chief ministers and senior officials of different states to congratulate Modi personally. As one newspaper report put it cheekily, “West Bengal's Buddhadeb Bhattacharya and his Marxist counterpart from Tripura, Manik Sarkar, came distant second and third in a straw poll among the participants.”

Results of municipal elections in Gujarat in 2005 stunned the state, as well as the nation as the BJP won 90 of 102 seats in Surat, 96 of 119 in Ahmedabad, 77 of 84 in Vadodara, 59 of 69 in Rajkot, 39 of 51 in Bhavnagar and 37 of 51 in Jamnagar. It was as clean a sweep as one could possibly expect. After that dissidence sort of evaporated from Gujarat. It has been ModiLand since then.

Agricultural extension programmes intended to provide guidance to farmers and provide information about the latest techniques have been going on for decades in India, without producing any concrete results. The basic concept is to offer information to the farmer at his doorstep and it has been tried umpteen number of times. In essence, the Krishi Mahotsav that Modi started in 2005 was the same concept. Yet, while all previous attempts have failed to yield any measurable results, agricultural output in Gujarat has started growing at a scorching pace of over 10% per annum.

The reason is that Modi launched the scheme after substantial quantities of Narmada waters had started flowing into Gujarat. He hit the road on his Rath when the time was ripe. Since farmers had already earned some good money from Bt Cotton, they were generally more willing to look at new technologies. Besides, he involved the entire government machinery. All ministers and officers fan out to the villages and strive to help the farmers plan for the coming season and solve their problems on the spot. Modi's ability to create a festive atmosphere and enthuse people worked successfully yet again.

The very first Krishi Mahotsav, from 11 May to 10 June 2005 saw thousands of government officers, agricultural experts and representatives of banks visiting every single village in the state. 228 Krishi Rathes moved all over the state for 20 days, creating a festive atmosphere wherever they went. These raths were also propagating drip irrigation, for which a provision of Rs 1,500 crore had already been made through the Gujarat Green Revolution Company Ltd.

Success of the first Krishi Mahotsav was amazing. Over 270,000 kits containing information on agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry (90,000 each) were distributed, 9.53 lakh soil health cards were distributed, 5.48 lakh soil samples were tested, 1.53 lakh Kisan credit cards were issued, 43.75 lakh animals were vaccinated, 22,126 bankable schemes were identified and a staggering 28.13 lakh farmers attended the Kisan Shibirs.

Modi had foreseen that Narmada waters would impact horticulture, floriculture and animal husbandry as much as normal farming. He successfully ignited the farmer's interest in these emerging new areas. Output in these areas too has experienced a stunning leap since then.

With average growth of over 10% in agricultural production in the last decade, Gujarat has, for all practical purposes, gone through what the nation is still talking about – the second green revolution. The farmer has water and electricity at farm and home and is being taught ways of deriving maximum benefits of both.

In 2002 Gujarat had as many as 42 lakh cases pending in different courts across the state. The number was brought down to about 28 lakh cases by 2006 by a slew of measures, including Lok Adalats, Fast Track Courts and Link Courts but the backlog was still too large. The High Court itself had more than 1 lakh pending cases before it.

On 11 March 2006 Modi mooted the concept of evening courts, which virtually called for high court judges to work overtime, at a meeting of chief ministers and chief justices of high courts with judges of the supreme court. The concept was ‘heard’ with interest by those present; nobody expected any serious action.

Modi took up the concept in right earnest and on 14 November 2006 Gujarat became the first state in the country to start evening courts for quicker disposal of cases. Supreme Court Chief Justice Y. K. Sabharwal inaugurated 27 evening courts in Gujarat.

An important aspect of Modi’s persona is that he never fails to be hyperactive in crisis situations. In August 2006 when diamond city Surat was marooned in water, he stayed there for three full days, personally supervising relief work. Millions of citizens saw their chief minister attired in a fireman’s dress, complete with a life-jacket strapped to his torso, moving around in a boat with army personnel. Even the armed forces were touched by the willingness of Modi to stay in ill-furnished accommodation and eat what everybody else was eating.

Modi’s mere presence got things going. “We are losing count of sorties or tonnage of relief sent,” Wing Commander Tarun Singha, an Air Force spokesman, said. “In fact, the entire Armed Forces are now in action out there.” The people saw the efforts that were put in to alleviate their sufferings. All attempts to blame the government for having released too much water from the Ukai Dam came to a big naught. The people, as always, were able to see the reality. Surat has been Narendra Modi’s pocket borough since then.

For promoting Vibrant Gujarat 2007 he sent delegations of industry leaders to important countries in 2006. The idea was based on the assumption that businessmen will be able to interact with potential businessmen from abroad in a better way. Co-operation extended by industrial houses was overwhelming. Reliance chairman Mukesh Ambani travelled to the U.S. to make presentations to top executives in petroleum sector. Zydus Cadila Chairman Pankaj Patel led a delegation of industrialists from the pharmaceutical industry, Gautam Adani led a team to woo investments in ports and Piruz Khambatta of Rasna went abroad to cover consumer products. On the parallel, Modi himself visited China, Singapore, Japan, South Korea and Switzerland, carrying leading industrialists with him.

At this event, besides talking of all the infrastructure that Gujarat had built-up and the atmosphere it offered to prospective investors, he also talked a great deal about good governance and his rural schemes like Jyoti Gram, Kanya Kelvani and Krishi Mahotsav, besides others like Chiranjeevi.

Modi told the audience that Gujarat had successfully combined growth with good governance and equal opportunities to all sections of the society. “Our experiments in good governance

have been recognised by international agencies like United Nations and a host of other institutions,” said Modi, adding that all efforts were directed towards welfare of the people, especially the poorest. He talked of quality of life in Gujarat. The state had experienced no controversies about land acquisition. From day one Modi had made it clear to all entrepreneurs that they would have to either locate their projects on fallow and saline land along the state’s coastline that the government could provide, or negotiate purchase of land directly with the owners.

As Chennai businessman P. B. Anandam put it in late January, after the third Vibrant, “We run the largest salt field in Gujarat and I never had to meet a politician to acquire my land, only officials.” Anandam’s Archean Group announced plans to invest Rs 1,000 crore over the next three years at this event.

After conclusion of the event, Modi described it as a landmark event in the history of Gujarat, thanking the industrialists and the government officials for putting in long hours of work to ensure the success of the meet. “The whole state is working together as a team. I can see the success of the state. Team Gujarat is my strength. And we are determined to change the future,” said Modi at the valedictory function. It was in the same month that he was dropped from the party’s parliamentary board.

However, when the time for renewal of his mandate arrived in December 2007, the voter was convinced that Modi had delivered and could be expected to continue to deliver. Jyoti Gram had lit up millions of houses, Kanya Kelvani had enthused females like never before, Chiranjeevi had provided real succour to millions of young mothers, incomes had risen across the state, terrorism had remained dormant for all of five years of his second stint as CM and he had maintained his image of an honest and upright ruler who respected the rule of law.

As in 2002, this time too Gujarat elections were a national issue. The general perception was that the outcome in Gujarat would impact national politics in a big way. There was speculation that if the Congress wins Gujarat, it would opt for early Lok Sabha polls. One analyst (Business Standard) said fate of the Indo-US nuclear deal would be known only on 23 December 2007, i.e. the day results of Gujarat elections were to be announced.

Modi was determined to focus on economic development of the state and wanted the people to give a verdict on the basis of his performance in terms of work done by his government in the preceding five years.

As the New York Times (Amelia Gentleman) put it in an article published on 11 December 2007, “Mr. Modi began his campaign this year with a speech to party workers, instructing them that he should be judged on the state’s economic achievements. He made no reference to Hindutva, and only hinted at the Tehelka report. Flanked by two new shopping malls and surrounded by images of lotus blossoms, the party symbol, he declared, “The more muck you throw at it, the more the lotus will flower.”

Even the London-based economist Lord Meghnad Desai forecast in early November that “Narendra Modi will win the election, thanks to the booming Gujarat economy and the lack of any real opposition,” adding that “Congress has no vision or strategy.”

While Modi was focused on the economy, he wasn’t averse to taking a jibe at the secularism of the Congress now and then. When the central government was trying to find an honourable

way of refusing asylum to Taslima Nasreen, a Bangladeshi writer who was “hiding from Islamic extremists,” Modi welcomed her to Gujarat, assuring her of a safe and peaceful life.

The whole election centred around the persona of Narendra Modi. Economic growth and good governance were the issues Modi talked about the most but the key question in this context was whether Modi had performed well on these two fronts. If Hindutva was indeed an issue, the core question was whether Modi had behaved and acted like a Hindu. Roads were the issue but the question was whether Modi had built roads. Water was a major concern but the root question for the voter was whether Modi had transformed the dry Sabarmati into a live river again. Narmada continued to be an emotional issue for the people of Gujarat but the question they sought to answer was whether Modi had taken the project adequately forward.

The people attached importance to electricity and wanted to rule whether Modi had managed energy well. Health, education, security and other social issues were all relevant for the voter but the key question was whether Modi had performed on these individual fronts. Corruption mattered but here too the central question was whether it had indeed declined in Modi regime. Gujarat’s ‘asmita’ too was an issue, the underlying theme once again being whether Modi had enhanced it or tarnished it.

Modi talked unabashedly about his performance. He never flinched while counting what he had delivered in the preceding five years and asked the voter to vote on the basis of his performance. As one political commentator put it in DNA, “Modi combines skills of a rock star and a star dramatist, commanding them to vote, if they were impressed by his performance.”

Modi’s simple request to the voter was that if he had performed well, he should be voted back to power. Modi continued to come up with punch lines and slogans. He successfully put his clean image to use by a simple slogan - “Khato nathi, khava deto nathi,” which roughly means a clean administration that has zero tolerance for corruption. An equally effective slogan was “Jeetega Gujarat,” which implied that Modi’s victory will be the people’s victory.

When Man Mohan Singh said in one of his election rallies that the people of Gujarat were living at the mercy of God (Bhagwan bharse), Modi replied by candidly admitting that God had indeed been generous to Gujarat as the state had had seven consecutive years of good monsoon. Then Modi went on to tell Man Mohan that he too should live Bhagwan bharse and not Sonia bharse. Needless to say, the crowds were in splits and, at the same time, Modi’s objection to Sonia’s ubiquitous role in Indian politics was communicated effectively. Elsewhere, he took a jibe at the Left Front when he asked the voters to choose whether they wanted Nandigrams or Jyotigrams.

As in 2002, pollsters came croppers this time too. Most pre-poll surveys forecast a slender margin for Modi’s victory, expecting him to win somewhere between 92 (minimum required for a majority) and 100 or so. Star News gave Modi 103 seats while NDTV played it rather safe by forecasting a very wide range of 90-110 seats.

The confusion was best illustrated by the fact that even as no pre-poll survey forecast defeat for Modi, the general refrain was that he just might make it. Some said Modi was due to face his “moment of truth” while some went on to analyse cast compositions and role of dissidents

in the elections, inevitably leading to the conclusion that it would be a close fight. One went to the extent of saying that democracy would be taking revenge on Narendra Modi.

Modi romped home with a tally of 117 seats, 10 seats less than the 127 he had won in 2002. However, despite the decline in number of seats he had won, somehow the media and the intelligentsia suddenly became positive about Gujarat and Narendra Modi.

After the elections, the Economic Times said, “But after this election, the simple but effective technique of the ‘punch dialogue’ will have a new mascot — Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi.” The same daily said in another article “Political rivals like Sonia Gandhi and Man Mohan Singh and the electronic media – which he targets repeatedly in his speech – become insignificant when compared to the response that Narendra Modi, the political leader, gets from the crowds.”

As The Economic Times of 24 December 2007 put it, “They want “economic progress” filtering into their backyards, and reciting of a litany of statistics attesting to this progress will no longer do.”

This article put its finger at the right pulse. Vibrant Gujarat and accolades from the likes of Mukesh Ambani and Ratan Tata actually had little or no impact on the voter. What weighed in the mind of the voter was the improved availability of water and power in his own backyard. What swayed the voter was that while youngsters in most parts of the nation that was growing at over 8% (or whatever growth rate the centre was claiming) were finding it hard to get gainful employment, availability of work wasn't a problem in Gujarat. In December of 2007 one could actually get water by turning the taps on in Gujarat.

What weighed with the voter was not the swanky highways but the rural roads that had connected thousands of villages to nearby towns. What swung the voter was not the number of schools that Gujarat boasted of but the fact that rural children were actually going to schools. The number of computers did not impress the voter. What impressed the voter was that birth certificates were actually being delivered within minutes of an application being made.

CM Modi: Second Term

After December 2007 elections things changed for Modi in a very curious manner. The true extent to which the media started looking at Modi differently after he was sworn in as Gujarat chief minister for the third time is very difficult to describe.

Major newspapers continued to talk about communalism in Gujarat but they now started talking as much about the train carnage as its aftermath. Front page pictures started showing the burnt coach also, though sporadically; that was taboo before 20 December 2007. Bureaucracy in New Delhi started dealing with Gujarat in a more respectful manner, though it needs to be stated unequivocally that officials of the central government have, by and large, remained fair to the state – no Gujarat politician, leave aside bureaucrats, has reported maltreatment in corridors of power in New Delhi.

“Merchants of Development” is the title Bibek Debroy, the erstwhile chief economist of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation headed by Sonia Gandhi, chose for an article published in the

Indian Express of 27 December 2007. While Debroy unreservedly complimented Modi on his achievements, the title was clearly a jeer meant for his former boss Sonia Gandhi.

What happened after Modi's victory has defied all logic. This time around, not even the motley crowd of intellectuals and the so-called secularists were condemning Gujarat for having elected Modi. Though Modi's principal election slogan was "Jeetega Gujarat," it was Modi who had won. All over the country his popularity took a giant leap. People in most other states started praising him for his good governance and corruption-free government. He became a national icon for cleanliness in public life.

Before the December elections, on 19 October 2007 Karan Thapar of CNN-IBN was interviewing Modi at his residence. After exchanging pleasantries, Thapar straight away came to the Godhra issue and hissed "Why don't you apologise and be done with the issue?" Modi told him that he had said all he had to say about Godhra and wasn't interested in discussing the subject anymore. When Thapar persistently kept repeating his question-cum-suggestion, Modi got up, saying he didn't want his personal relations with Thapar to go bad. The channel aired that three minute clip repeatedly in the following 24 hours and perhaps got more eyeballs than a full interview could ever get. On the other hand, Modi got more applause from the people for silently staring at Thapar than he could have by giving a rational reply.

Modi's ability to maintain stoic silence on camera had become something of a legend by then. His 'silent' on-camera performances have actually earned him a great deal of admiration from some unexpected quarters also. The Economic Times (24 December 2007), commenting on Modi's ability to maintain prolonged silence during a television interview, said, "The standard, weather-beaten political refrain "no comment" had never been delivered with such cockiness and authority." CEO of Future Brands, a leading marketing consultant, said: "In that sense, he has amplified the whisper of the Gujarati soul."

Madhukar Sabnavis, country head (planning and discovery) of the globally known advertising behemoth O&M called him an iron-fisted leader who had successfully combined his ideological purity with martial bombast. "In a world of globalisation where people are looking for roots, and role models in their roots, Modi, like it or not, is the new Gujarati role model," added Sabnavis in the same ET story.

The historic victory at the hustings in December 2007, in fact, started working on a large part of the English speaking elite part of the society also. The endless hurling of grossly outrageous allegations, after six long years, had become annoying and even nauseous to a large number of middle and upper-middle class voters also.

Attitudes of several sections of the society changed inexplicably. Most ambiguities made way for unhesitating acceptance. Gujarat was accepted as the role model by all states in the country, irrespective of party affiliations. Nobody was dubbing Gujaratis communal for having elected Modi. Many of those who were pouring vitriol before the polls started showering petals. All reactions were uniformly positive.

"He walks the talk. He is all tough, hard working and willing to work for the development of Gujarat, as he believes this to be his destiny."

“Here is a leader who can speak extempore and the audience just swallows what he has to say.”

“He is the man of the moment.”

Delivering a valedictory address at a CII conference, Advani said the success of the Modi government was due to his policy of zero tolerance to corruption. “Narendra Modi has let his people know about him that here is one person who will not compromise with corruption,” said Advani.

“Modi's stunning victory wins him accolades from one and all” was the title of a story in The Hindu on 23 December 2007.

Former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa's tribute was almost reverential: “Your spectacular victory has brought hope and cheer to the vast majority of people in this nation who now believe that all is not lost and that India can still be saved from the clutches of unscrupulous power mongers.”

Shiromani Akali Dal President Sukhbir Singh Badal said it was the people's rebuff to Congress's attempts to communalise polity.

When Narendra Modi described the central government's plan to allocate a part of national resources for minorities as communal budgeting in December 2007, he wasn't accused of arousing communal passions. Instead, there was silent recognition of the merits of his objection. The word appeasement was not being viewed as inflammatory any more. People became willing to talk and discuss things in a rational manner.

The media stopped using the word Hindu in disparaging tones. It became almost as respectable to be a Hindu as it had been to be a Muslim or a Christian in India. What millions of graffiti (Garv se bolo ham Hindu hain) could not do in decades suddenly became reality after Modi's decisive victory.

The suave and the sophisticated lost their sense of superiority for good. It was no more a crime to speak English with an accent. Tuxedos and ties were no more necessary for having audiences glued to PowerPoint presentations. Golf-playing club-going professionals were suddenly more receptive to hard and rustic arguments that had stood the test of logic and had shown the way to growth. And Modi became used to being treated as the megastar at all business conventions he chose to attend.

“Sudden appearance of a sterling performance on a horizon dotted with non-performers has created a stir,” said one analyst commenting on the sudden change in the air. Everybody started singing paeans to his performance in unison, much to the discomfiture of his contemporaries. Chief ministers across the country were forced to enter into a phase of introspection. Everybody wanted to compare himself or herself with Modi. For those who refused to take cognisance, the media started doing the comparison.

His persona had successfully reached out to those who believed minorities were being appeased as effectively as to those who abhor ways of the Sangh Parivar. Modi's modifications of concepts of governance were approved as much by the number crunching high-brow economists sitting in New Delhi as by the down-to-earth semi-literate small

businessmen who refuse to count the percentages handed out by the likes of Chidambaram and Ahluwalia.

On 20 January 2008 Modi repeated the performance he had put in January 2003 by addressing a fully packed Shivaji Park yet again. This time ally Shiv Sena was visibly rattled. Modi made it clear that development and good governance had to be put on the top of the agenda by all political parties and governments in the country and at the same time he unhesitatingly blasted the Congress policy of appeasement. Somebody described him as “BJP’s magic man with a Midas touch.”

Inaugurating the fourth round of Krishi Mahotsav on 7 May 2008 at Bardoli, Modi cheerfully informed the people that output of vegetables had shot up from Rs 100 crore to Rs 600 crore in Surat district alone and the Planning Commission wanted to visit Gujarat and see what had made the Krishi Mahotsav so successful.

“You can’t but admire the tenacity and perseverance of the man,” wrote Jyoti Malhotra in The Mint (financial daily of Hindustan Times) of 7 May 2008. She further said, “Narendra Modi, Gujarat chief minister, orator extraordinaire, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, Hindutva exponent and friend of business and businessmen, is the flavour of the season everywhere he goes. At the annual Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) meeting in New Delhi last week, Modi was the centre of attraction. When he cracked a joke, the audience, largely composed of businessmen and women whose companies are worth at least a few thousand crores of rupees, cackled and laughed loudly, as if they hadn’t heard a joke as good in a long time.”

On 30 May 2008 BS Yeddyurappa was sworn-in as chief minister of Karnataka. Modi went to attend Yeddyurappa’s swearing-in ceremony. The entire route from airport to the hotel was packed with cheering crowds on both sides of the roads. Those in Modi’s entourage were wondering whether it was Modi who was to be sworn in as Karnataka chief minister.

In August 2008, Modi stunned the financial markets by proposing that the six PSUs owned by Gujarat government, all of them highly profitable and all listed on the markets, would set aside 30% of their profits for social causes. Dalal Street cried foul and screamed murder, the concern being private shareholders of the companies. Some even contemplated legal action against the move. Managing Director of Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation Ltd decided to stay away from the company’s annual general meeting because she didn’t want to face angry investors and the company was indeed forced to adjourn the AGM because private shareholders were not willing to part with Rs 122 crore (30% of previous year’s profit). Shares of all the six companies took a beating at Dalal Street but Modi remained firm.

On the economic front, Modi was so confident that in the last week of August 2008 he asked his officials not to use the words ‘backward area’ in the state’s draft industrial policy for 2009-14. No special sops were to be offered for setting up industrial units in any specific areas in Gujarat since he insisted that there were no backward areas in Gujarat. It is true that 30 of Gujarat’s 225 talukas had earlier been identified as backward but Modi resolved to address the issue silently by taking concrete measures rather than offering special incentives for their development. The statement was that the period of doles for relatively poorer geographic areas was over and if a region feels deprived, it should get assistance to pull its socks, rather than sops that offer only temporary solace.

2008 was also the year of bomb blasts in India: on 13 May 2008 in Jaipur, on 25 July in Bengaluru, on 26 July in Ahmedabad and on 13 September in New Delhi. On 26 November 2008 it was Taj and Trident hotels in Mumbai which were seized by terrorists in a manner that shocked not only the entire country but the whole world.

Like Bengaluru and Jaipur, the people of Ahmedabad also did not react to bomb blasts. There was calm and grief in the air. Modi's personal reaction was statesmanlike. Modi said, "The threat of terrorism is looming over the mankind. It poses great challenges for the mankind. We have remained successful in curbing terror attacks for the last six years but cowards have backstabbed us, they have targeted hospitals, taking lives of innocent people."

He appealed to the people of Gujarat to remain calm and not let the terrorists be successful in instilling fear and followed it up with some quick work that resulted in cracking of the case within a period of three weeks. Most interesting was the fact that the minorities expressed their solidarity with the majority. The bomb blasts were unreservedly condemned. Nobody tried to justify them as revenge for 2002.

On 28 July 2009 PM Singh and Congress President Sonia Gandhi visited Ahmedabad. The mood and the atmosphere were both sombre. While Modi accorded to Singh the respect due to the Prime Minister of the country, Sonia gracefully remained in the background. Modi and Sonia were able to avoid running into each other. The PM murmured the customary words of sympathy for victims of the blasts and went back to New Delhi, without even mentioning the need for tougher laws to deal with terrorism.

Modi's response to blasts in Gujarat wasn't limited to accusing the Congress of being soft on terrorism or sanctioning compensation to the victims. He not only pushed his police force to perform and nab the culprits but also initiated long term steps, including strengthening of the state police by additional recruitment and firming up plans for setting up a university to provide education to those looking at careers in the police force. At the same time he also announced plans for formation of a University for Forensic Science, for teaching advanced methods of scientific detection of crime and use of high-technology equipments.

Few people know the extent to which Gujarat police machinery has been modernised and toned up. The Gujarat police got down to the task of hunting down the terrorists and break throughs came at a speed that stunned the centre. In fact findings of the Gujarat police were ridiculed in some sections of the press because the break-throughs were too quick. It turned out that a new organization which called itself Indian Mujahideen was behind all the terror attacks. Intelligence gathering was so swift that Modi alerted the centre about an impending attack on New Delhi also but that was, of course ignored.

When New Delhi experienced bomb blasts on 13 September 2008, the Congress maintained a studied silence but Modi said, "I don't believe in sending messages, I believe in action. You have to respond in the same language used by them. An eye-for-an-eye, tit-for-tat—that's the policy I believe in." The crowd responded with "a huge round of applause."

What happened on 26 November 2008 at Mumbai's plush Taj and Trident hotels, where over 200 were killed by terrorists while the nation watched helplessly, was perhaps the final straw. The consensus seemed to be that Congress was on its way to being history. Yet, the voter ignored the gory saga and in state level elections that were held barely days after 26/11. BJP's tally in Rajasthan plunged from 120 to 78 in a house of 200, leading to formation of a

Congress government. In Madhya Pradesh BJP retained the government but with a noticeably reduced majority. Congress too lost some base in Delhi but retained power.

Narendra Modi was busy preparing for Vibrant Gujarat 2009 where he expected to shock the nation by the sheer scale of the event. The event was eminently successful and the numbers were awe inspiring by any standards, but the real shock it delivered was that the notion of Narendra Modi being the PM entered the realm of reality. Sunil Mittal and Anil Ambani said Modi should be PM and their statements made more headlines than the event itself. The nation started evaluating Narendra Modi for prime ministership seriously. The controversy remained alive for about a week and then faded from the front pages.

Parliamentary elections were held in April-May. Voting ended on 13 May 2009. Despite having been sidelined decisively during campaigning, on 14th Modi, like most other BJP leaders, was confident of NDA wresting power from the UPA. He went to New Delhi in the morning and met senior leaders Advani, Joshi and others for what was described as post-poll and pre-government formation confabulations. So sure was the BJP (NDA) of victory that Modi was asked by the central leadership to use his closeness to Tamil Nadu's Jaya Lalithaa and ensure that she supported the NDA.

But the voter had voted differently and had decided that there was no need for a change of government. Congress polled 1191 lakh votes against 1034 lakh in 2004 while BJP polled 784 lakh compared to 864 lakh in 2004. BJP's share in total votes polled declined 3.36 percentage points to 18.80% whereas share of Congress rose 2.02 percentage points to 28.55. Congress tally leaped from 145 to 206 while BJP plunged to 116.

Opinions on why Congress was able to strengthen its presence in the parliament so hugely vary. While many believe it was the success of MNREGA scheme and waiver of farm loans amounting to Rs 60,000 crore, many believe the people thought the country was in dire straits and the government of the day needed the support of the people.

Here too, perhaps the analysts are under-estimating the voter. Congress wrested 22 seats from BJP and 39 from regional parties, without considering the seat churning. The horrific killing of over 200 rich and powerful persons in full public view (well, the cameras were outside the hotels while the killings took place inside) did not affect Congress adversely because no credible alternative was presented to the people. Neither BJP nor any of the regional parties had said that they would double the budgetary allocation for internal security. Of course it is doubtful whether the people would have believed them, even if they had, because of inadequate credibility. In the absence of any credible assurance of adequate security, the people decided to ignore the issue and wrested their decision on the remaining factors.

It can be argued that the killings at Taj and Trident hotels was ignored by the voters because the victims were the elite. That may be true to some extent but equally true is the fact that the 60 hours of terror on the television must have scared those living in remote villages also.

In Gujarat BJP's share in votes polled declined by about 0.9 percentage point and Congress too dropped about 0.5 percentage point. BJP's tally in Gujarat inched up marginally, rising from 14 to 15, in a total of 26.

As expected, impact of whatever little campaigning Modi had done was dissected extensively by political pundits of all hues. Some said he hurt the party's prospects, some said few outside Gujarat were impressed by him and some said his streetsmart lingo hurt BJP.

The simple reason for BJP tally in Gujarat rising by only one, from 14 to 15, was that the people of Gujarat had no interest in parliamentary elections. Share of BJP and Congress in votes polled remained largely unchanged from 2004 elections; BJP was down from 47.37% to 46.52% while Congress share declined from 43.86% to 43.38%. While the number of votes polled was 218 lakh in assembly elections of 2007, in parliamentary elections only 175 lakh votes were polled. In Gujarat, Modi's detractors made a few noises here and there while Modi silently got down to fine tuning his strategies for the future. He remained focused on development of Gujarat.

In the second half of 2009 Modi's focus was on evaluating the impact of schemes that he had been working on for the preceding seven years or so. On the afternoon of 23 Nov 2009, a middle-aged man in a mid-sized sedan parked his car on a rural road in Dehgam taluka and went into the fields to relieve himself. When he came back and started opening the door of his car, he noticed several Mahindra Scorpio SUVs coming from his left. Suddenly it dawned upon him that in one of them the man sitting alongside the driver, on the front seat, was Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat. His jaw dropped. He made an attempt to greet Modi but by that time Modi's car was already past him.

Modi was driving down to Dehgam taluka for paying a surprise visit to a primary school, for the specific purpose of assessing the quality of education being imparted to the students. Six Kanya Kelvani drives had already been implemented and he wanted to know what difference they had made. On that afternoon, Modi was only one of about 3,000 ministers and officers of Gujarat government visiting 8,000 different primary schools in different corners of the state, for the same purpose, over a period of three days.

The teachers were as nonchalant as the students who didn't understand what Modi had come for. Their body language showed no sense of awe. Probably they were more at ease than most bureaucrats are in Modi's presence. That is Gujarat's culture. The people are never overly concerned with the power and the position of their leaders. Rarely do people bend 90 degrees to greet powerful people the way most do in northern parts of India. Few leaders expect obeisance that India is so notorious for. Human beings are treated like human beings. Perhaps nobody addresses the CM as Narendra, or NM or NaMo but it isn't uncommon to see people addressing him as Narendrabhai. And it isn't uncommon to find the CM addressing someone as Naranbhai. Bhai (ben in case of females) is the standard suffix for each name and the rich and the powerful aren't exempt. That's Gujarat. And it goes to the credit of Modi that he has contributed to continuation of this culture. He doesn't seek obeisance and refuses to reward it.

In January 2010 India's most popular film star Amitabh Bachchan organized a special screening of his film Paa for Narendra Modi because he wanted tax exemption for the film. Modi saw the film, liked it and immediately agreed to grant tax exemption. The Big B was highly impressed with what he was told about the progress Gujarat had made under Modi's stewardship. The two clicked instantly and hugged each other.

Never to miss an opportunity to get something for his Gujarat, Modi thought of short films in which Bachchan could endorse Gujarat as a tourist destination. He convinced Bachchan to be the Brand Ambassador for Gujarat tourism without any monetary consideration. There was a

great deal of bonhomie between the two and going by the statements made directly to the media and what the two wrote in their respective blogs, their friendship quickly turned into a mutual admiration society.

Amitabh Bachchan wrote on his blog: “He (Mr Modi) lives simply and with mere basic needs and most unlike the head of a state. He speaks with affection on development and progress. He is welcoming to fresh ideas and ideals. His oft-repeated phrase of him being a CM, a common man, is not misunderstood. He does and acts as he speaks. He talks of raising the level of awareness for his state through tourism and I volunteer to participate in any activity that would help promote that.” Bachchan went to the extent of branding Modi as the Shahenshah of all ministers, saying “I do not agree with anyone who calls me Shahenshah. This title is more apt for Modi; I am nowhere close.”

“Over a light dinner during the interval he turned to me and said: ‘The main and most important assets for an actor are his face and his voice. They are the elements that attract an audience to a performer. But you have done away with both aspects in this film and still succeeded in making yourself attractive to an audience. That is remarkable! I looked around to see if I could hide under the table! It’s a job by itself, taking compliments!’”

By January end the Big B confirmed his willingness in writing. The Congress tried to pillory Bachchan by asking him to clarify his stance on 2002 Gujarat riots. An audio-visual clip featuring Abhishek Bachchan was shelved from the WWF’s Earthhour event at India Gate in New Delhi a couple of days later and his posters were removed by rampaging Congress workers. Abhishek was earlier invited to attend the Delhi function but was told not to come. Congress even castigated Maharashtra chief minister Ashok Chavan for having invited Bachchan as a special invitee at inauguration of the Bandra-Worli sealink on 25 March 2010.

Modi hit back in his blog: “These ‘Talibans of Untouchability’ have lost all their sensibilities in their pursuit of anti-Gujarat attitudes. They may well in future tell us not to eat even salt. They may even ban the eating of Amul butter and milk and order our young people not to wear denim jeans because Gujarat produces these things.” Modi went on to eulogise the star, “A great artist with legendary humility and even taller achievements like Amitabh Bachchan who has chosen to celebrate the glorious heritage of Gujarat while facing a lot of criticisms.”

However, notwithstanding his professed disdain for politics, the Big B is an old hand at handling such situations. He knew that even Ratan Tata had faced a similar situation and blissfully ignored the brouhaha. As later events proved, Bachchan turned out to be too tall for the mud thrown by the Congress to cling to his trousers. After a few days the Congress tirade died its own death and Modi organised Bachchan’s shooting with his trademark efficiency that left the star known for his meticulousness gasping. The ad films were on air by mid-2010 and for Diwali vacation in 2010 all hotels and lodges in Gir were booked well in advance.

On 27 March 2010 a Supreme Court appointed SIT (Special Investigation Team) questioned Modi for nine long hours. After the first marathon session lasting over five hours Modi left the SIT office at around 5 p.m. and then returned at around 9.00 p.m. for another session that lasted around four hours. The print media had to report the event on two consecutive days and yet it had little to report since neither Modi nor the SIT disclosed any details. All Modi said was, “Vistaar se baatcheet kee (we spoke in detail),” adding “under the Indian constitution, law is supreme. As a common man, CM, I am bound by the Indian constitution and law. No one can be above the law.”

The people of Gujarat and, to a large extent, of the country, were aghast. How could a police team hold an incumbent chief minister for nine long hours and what could possibly have been discussed for so long, particularly with a monosyllabic man like Narendra Modi? Did the SIT repeatedly ask him the same questions, treating Modi like a criminal suspected of a murder? What was the outcome of the questioning? Modi's stock with the people rose further.

On 12 June 2010, the day the BJP National Executive meet began in Patna, Nitish Kumar refused to attend an NDA rally on the following Sunday because he didn't want to share the dias with Modi. Nitish also said he would return the Rs 5 crore Gujarat had given for flood relief. However, that did not stop Modi from stealing the thunder at the public rally. He started with 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' and asked the people to say 'Jai' loudly enough for it to be heard in Gujarat. The entire crowd at Gandhi Maidan was on its feet to say Vande Mataram on Modi's prodding. Big banners asked the BJP not to fear separation from Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal and crowds repeatedly shouted Narendra Modi Zindabad. While the BJP as a party swallowed the insult nonchalantly, Modi's mass base expanded further.

Modi keeps pleading, petitioning and cajoling the government at the centre for sorting out issues related to Gujarat like no other chief minister does. On 17 June 2010 he sent a long list of pending issues to union finance minister Mukherjee, demanding that Rs 2,244 crore rebate on Central Sales Tax (CST) that had been pending for the last three years be paid at the earliest and the state be compensated for the Rs 2,000 crore loss suffered because of sudden change in norms for crude royalty (from market-driven to discounted price). Modi further pointed out that Gujarat had to buy gas at higher prices from the central government owned Petronet LNG whereas other states were able to buy cheaper gas from Reliance's KG Basin field, despite the state having laid a 1,650 km long gas pipeline network across 16 of its districts. He also demanded that the Gujarat Maritime Board be exempted from income-tax and the licence fee imposed on exports of raw cotton be withdrawn. When dealing with the centre, he single-mindedly pursues the interests of Gujarat.

The year 2011 was largely dominated by Anna Hazare's agitation demanding a strong Lokayukta Bill at the national level, as well as in all the states. Modi maintained a stoic silence on the issue. The media repeatedly asked Team Anna to clarify its stand on Modi and his failure to appoint a Lok Ayukta in Gujarat. Initially the answers were hesitant and later Team Anna was clear in its stand that Modi was guilty of not appointing a Lok Ayukta. The people realised that no member of Team Anna hurled any accusations of corruption at Modi. Till date Modi has not responded to any criticism by Team Anna on this issue and his image as an incorruptible leader has remained absolutely unaffected.

In 2012 Modi toured entire Gujarat and remained focussed upon development of his state. He had to prepare for the elections. The nation waited for results of the December 2012 elections in Gujarat with bated breath because the demand for making Modi BJP's prime ministerial candidate was expected to grow into a crescendo in the event of Modi scoring a convincing victory. Everybody knew that if Modi won the elections impressively, he would throw his hat in the ring. Modi did win the elections convincingly and he did throw his hat into the ring.

However, till date Modi continues to be as Gujarat-centric as he was in October 2001, despite his appeal now spanning the entire country and beyond and him having openly declared his candidature for the top job. As recently as 6 February 2013 he wrote a 17-page letter to the PM highlighting 16 issues that Gujarat wants resolved. A senior BJP leader once commented

that whenever Modi started eulogising PM Vajpayee in a public meeting or in private, the PM knew that the price would be some clearance or grant for Gujarat. The late Dhirubhai had famously said once that he was willing to say salaam to the lowest ranked government employee. It can be said about Modi that if the reward is a hundred crore extra for Gujarat, he would be willing to treat an Under Secretary of the central government as the Cabinet Secretary. Metaphorically speaking, he would very much like to be Gujarat Chief Minister and India's Prime Minister simultaneously!

It is possible to contest what Narendra Modi has delivered as Gujarat Chief Minister but the way the man thinks and acts and the vision he has had for Gujarat do not offer much room for debate. The overall direction is clear and that does give an inkling of what he is likely to do as Prime Minister of India, though he would have to and he would add nuances to his thinking, ways of working, addressing social, economic and political issues and even priorities.

Gujarat Model

What will Narendra Damodardas Modi do in the event of him being elected the Prime Minister of India? What kind of governance will he provide? What will be his economic, social and political priorities? Perhaps even his closest aides cannot guess that.

Unpredictability is a key characteristic of Modi, though some characteristics of his persona are now discernible. These include his legendary ability to talk the people's language, his willingness to work almost round-the-clock, his resolve to keep his administration free of corruption, his refusal to be intimidated by persons, organizations and money power and his stoic insistence upon maintaining consistency in all his pronouncements.

What characteristics have contributed how much to his success and how he would work and behave in the future is something nobody can hazard a guess on. The only thing that can be said with certainty about Narendra Modi is that the man has his own unique ways of looking at persons, organizations and situations and keeps writing his own rules to deliver growth, development and prosperity directly to people's homes.

Whatever he does will be different from what he has done in Gujarat. His handling of bureaucracy and his direct and indirect messages to the vast machinery of the central government will be different from what he did in Gandhinagar. His priorities will be different. The way the central government addresses issues of domestic and external security will change. The way India deals with the rest of the world will change. The way the centre deals with the states will change. His every approach, every action and every stance will be tailored to meet the new situation. To guess what he will do at New Delhi will be an exercise in futility.

It is intriguing, to say the least, that when Modi's critics say that the Gujarat Model will not work in the national arena, all they mean is that it is a model that does not include minorities and weaker sections of the society. He is accused of being too friendly to rich businessmen and industrialists. Beyond these allegations, there has been no analysis of the Gujarat Model. There has been no attempt to discern the inherent patterns and its significance, or the absence of it, to the national arena.

There are several clearly identifiable patterns in the way Modi has managed Gujarat. Added together, they do make a growth model that perhaps needs to be studied extensively by academics in India and abroad since it can be adapted to conditions prevailing in several LDCs (Least Developed Countries). Unfortunately, even the developed world academia seem to have failed to understand the contours of what is known as the Gujarat Model, though in all fairness it should be called The Modi Model.

Principal components of this model can be defined and explained as follows.

Trigger development at the bottom and the top of the pyramid simultaneously, assigning equal weight to both ends

Whether growth should be a top down or a bottom-up process has been debated quintessentially. There are those who believe free enterprise creates wealth and that eventually percolates down to the lower stratas. And there are those who believe growth should begin at the bottom. Modi began moving from both ends almost simultaneously. After launching a slew of social schemes designed for the bottom-up approach, the first Vibrant Gujarat was held in the same year, in September 2003. Through out the over a decade long rule of Narendra Modi the thrust at the bottom of the pyramid has remained as strong as the hype and hoopla of Vibrant Gujarat that has uplifted quality of food and ambience at events held in New Delhi also. Astonishingly and inexplicably, he has made the interests of the poor and the downtrodden converge with those of the affluent and that is the reason why even the poorest sections of the Gujarati voters have also looked benignly at his open hobnobbing with the richest Indians.

Large industries energise the upper half of the society, providing high end managerial and skilled jobs and creating demand for a host of services. Availability of water and power transform the lives of the bottom half as this results in setting up of small manufacturing as well as service units. A village, or a cluster of villages, may have the market for a laundry, an electrical repairs shop, a small guest house and catering services, etc. but these opportunities cannot be exploited without smooth availability of the basics like water and electricity. Similarly, many small and cottage industries can be set up in rural areas once the basic infrastructural facilities are available. The biggest success story in Gujarat has been small diamond polishing units as many diamond polishers working in Surat have set up small units in their villages.

Growth in agriculture and small manufacturing and service industries has put rural Gujarat, the bottom half of the pyramid, on the growth trajectory on a sustainable basis. As emerging opportunities are recognised by entrepreneurs, the scenario is getting transformed palpably.

Plan for development in different areas on an integrated basis

One of Modi's favourite statements has been that ports are no good for an area if there is no rail and road connectivity. Ship repair facilities, fuel supply systems, skilled manpower and qualified port managers are the related issues that are being addressed simultaneously. Ports are being viewed as a step towards the overall development of the economy and, therefore, plans are afoot to supplement port facilities with warehousing and other related infrastructure also.

Similarly, higher agricultural output can actually cause only grief in the long term if adequate cold storage facilities are not available and the food processing industry fails to grow. Per se this principle can be elaborated at length but that is not the subject of this book. Another example is cotton, where Gujarat has emerged as the largest producing state in the country. At present Gujarat is focused upon forward vertical integration and is trying hard to promote spinning, weaving, processing and apparel industries. This principle of looking up and down the value chain in each sector of the economy is being followed scrupulously when formulating policies.

In social sectors such as education, his attention is equally divided over primary, middle and high school, university and tertiary sectors, besides high end universities for specialised education in areas such as forensic science. Modi has stated clearly that expanding the number of universities in the state is not the goal. Gujarat has already set up a petroleum university and now plans are being drawn for a petroleum ITI because if every village has to have gas pipelines, the system will need plumbers experienced in handling gas pipelines and other skilled personnel for maintenance. As technology is changing and role of manpower in economic output is declining steadily, value addition has to move to different areas and multiskills has become a necessity. One man should be able to handle several kinds of tasks. Therefore, a family should train the two or three children it has in different skills. Some would find work in the summer while others may get employed in winters. The family as a unit should have steady income. Modi is obviously trying to offer an entirely new model of education to the whole world.

An interesting innovation has been the setting up of the Police University (actually named Raksha Shakti University) which has received so much attention from DGPs (Director Generals of Police) of other states that they have decided to change their recruitment rules and have sought admissions for students from their respective states. Arunachal and Tamil Nadu not only want to send some students but have also said they would reserve some seats in police jobs for those who study at the Police University in Gujarat.

Equal shares for agriculture, manufacturing and services in GDP

The broad premise here is that the economy should not falter when some parts suffer because of unforeseeable circumstances such as drought and market cycles. The stated principle at present is to divide the economy about equally between agriculture, manufacturing and services. Gujarat has placed almost equal emphasis upon these three areas and after hard work spread over nearly a decade, agriculture has started growing faster than manufacturing and the trend is largely being expected to continue for a few years. Gujarat is being promoted as a tourist destination by none other than the legendary Amitabh Bachchan and all available information suggests that hotels and allied businesses in areas like Gir and Ambaji are growing leaps and bounds. Gujarat has already emerged as one of the fastest growing, if not the largest, tourist destinations. Some success has been achieved in medical tourism also. The number of middle class families coming to Gujarat for medical treatment from other parts of the country has been growing steadily in the last few years.

Latest technology

Narendra Modi has always been known for his fascination for technology. When he addressed 52 meetings in different parts of Gujarat by using the 3D holographic technology,

it resulted in an additional entry in the Guinness book of records. Several industrial units in Gujarat are known to be technologically the most advanced in their respective areas which span diverse sectors such as petroleum refining, petrochemicals, railway gear, automobiles and others. In agriculture, use of technology has expanded in a very perceptible manner, one example being the fact that efforts to encourage use of sprinklers by farmers has grown exponentially in the last few years. Land under micro-irrigation has expanded from 15,000 to 800,000 hectares in less than a decade. Be it industry, agriculture or services, technology is always a major consideration when formulating policy and taking decisions. At a personal level, he is the only digital leader India's analogue polity has.

Single shot quick execution of projects

Whenever possible, large projects expected to alter lives of people in a significant way are sought to be executed in one big thrust. The JGY needed Rs 1500 crore (eventually it cost a little over Rs 1200 crore only) and Modi provided the money seamlessly, without any break. The result was that every household in Gujarat was provided with electricity for domestic usage within 30 months of launch of the scheme. Similarly, after the experiment with evening courts yielded extremely encouraging results, Modi wanted to expand the judicial infrastructure and allocated a sum of about Rs 800 crore in the budget for fiscal 2010-11 for setting up new courts. It was the Gujarat High Court that went jittery about the sheer speed with which Modi wanted to move. While Gujarat High Court and the Supreme Court were busy ensuring investigation of Modi's alleged complicity in post-Godhra riots, Modi was asking for an additional 800 judges to be appointed like yesterday and was ready to appoint the requisite number of public prosecutors on an ad hoc basis. Apparently, the judicial system didn't even try to rise to the challenge. Now when emphasis is on skills development, Modi has provided Rs 800 crore in the budget for 2013-14. The central government too has woken up to the need for skills development and has provided a sum of about Rs 1200 crore in its budget for 2013-14.

Maintain liquidity

Much has been said about Gujarat having become a highly indebted state under Modi's rule and the charge may not be entirely bereft of the truth. However, there is a pattern here too. Finances of the state are being managed in a manner that mimics the most successful among large privately owned corporations. Projects are scheduled such that availability of funds is never a problem. If some schemes are eligible for central assistance, projects under such schemes do not have to wait for funds to actually be received from the centre. This ensures that most projects are completed within schedule and their costs do not exceed estimates. Believe it or not, Gujarat maintains a cash balance equal to about a month's expenses.

Effective communication

Effective communication with all stakeholders too is an integral part of the Gujarat Model. The whole nation knows how skilled Narendra Modi is at communicating with the masses. However, less known is the finesse with which he communicates with individual stakeholders such as large prospective investors, firms competing for contracts and groups seeking special treatment. He goes to great lengths to ensure that the ground reality is appreciated by all concerned. Those who fail to get what they want also go back with a grudging acceptance of

the system's efficiency, honesty and integrity. Perhaps Modi's ability to communicate with the stakeholders in general and the masses in particular is what has caused the maximum consternation among his opponents.

Good governance

That of course is the lubricant that keeps the whole machine working smoothly. Providing an atmosphere bereft of red tape has been an element of faith for Modi and this has in fact played the most important role in luring investors from all over India and abroad. A Rs 2000 crore project in Kutch was completed within a record period of nine months, from land development to commissioning of the plant, largely because the company implementing it didn't have to halt work even on a single day in want of clearances of different hues. Modi is firmly of the view that once the government has cleared a project, there should be no hurdles at different levels of the administrative machinery.

The good governance part also spans the entire pyramid, from the very top to the bottom. As Modi stated at the India Today conclave on 30 March 2013 at New Delhi, there can be no good governance without an effective grievance redressal system. He personally scans grievances put before the government through the designated portal online and almost all grievances are sorted out within reasonable time. When it is not possible to address an issue within a reasonable time, the complainant is explained the reasons, ensuring there is no sense of dissatisfaction.

Modi's personal honesty, integrity and dedication have remained unquestioned through out his 12 year rule and that is the reason why he has been able to provide good governance at a scale that is considered impractical in most other states in India. The Gujarat Model mandates simple hard work and determination to run the government within the framework of some set rules and boundaries. The leader leads by setting examples, himself working hard and making his ministers and bureaucrats work equally hard. True accountability, duly supported by periodic evaluation of performances is an essential characteristic of the Gujarat Model.

Hard work put in by Modi has actually contributed more to Gujarat's growth than is realised by most. For example, showcasing Gujarat slickly was actually the easier part of the exercise. Persuading farmers to use technology and even switch crops was tough. The results took almost a decade to arrive. But now that the agri-boom has arrived palpably, the targets have been defined more sharply.

Consider this seemingly trivial example. Most central and state level ministers, including the prime minister and the chief ministers, treat the long overseas flights as time for relaxation and entertainment and some light banter if some journos are also on board. When Modi goes abroad, the aircraft becomes his office. A schedule is in place. On outward flights he discusses with each member of his entourage, separately, what he/she is expected to do during the trip. On the return flight each member explains what was expected to be achieved, what has been achieved, what could not be achieved and what follow-up is required to realise the maximum possible gains from the visit. Post-visit action agenda are generally ready before the aircraft lands at Ahmedabad. Very often even the senior industrialists get the feeling that they are executives of a larger industrial house, rather than owners of billion dollar empires.

It is rather difficult to identify elements of the Gujarat Model that are unlikely to work at the national level. Will the practice of planning work when travelling abroad become ineffective if Modi's entourage takes off from New Delhi instead of the Ahmedabad airport?

The difference between the model followed at New Delhi in independent India and the Gujarat Model is that leaders lecture about the need for listening to the people and then retire to their plush homes and offices. When Narendra Modi decides to implement an idea in cooperation with the people he goes out to villages in his caravan of inexpensive SUVs and gets cracking. Of course this hands on approach will have to be altered at the national level because the canvas will be wider. But surely there are ways of reaching out to the people through out the country. The prime minister of the nation can always address his people through television and electronically as often as he wishes. Prime Ministers have not done that in the past but perhaps they didn't have enough to say or they weren't sure of effectively communicating with the people.

In periods of crisis, whether it is a political crisis or a natural calamity, his government doesn't slow down its work. He clears files when flying to far flung areas for campaigning and after returning late in the night, he isn't averse to looking at a few more if they are urgent. When he was asked to campaign extensively for Karnataka assembly elections in May 2008, none of the programmes in Gujarat was allowed to suffer. "He often flew to Karnataka in the afternoon, addressed a few rallies and returned to Gandhinagar late in the night and yet nobody found him tired the next morning."

This kind of energy stems primarily from his typical ability to ignore what he perceives as inconsequential and remember what he considers important. His ability to prioritise tasks at hand is amazing and he stretches himself almost indefinitely to complete tasks he has scheduled for a given day. He is often forced to hear out ideas of limited use from important visitors but a good idea, coming from even people who are apparently of limited importance, receive his complete and undivided attention. Politicians generally prolong meetings only with their near and dear ones, without bothering about how many are waiting to see them. Modi too sometimes prolongs meetings, without bothering how many are waiting outside his chambers, but in his case this happens only when a visitor unexpectedly comes up with issues and ideas that are worthy of his attention.

He is a volcano of energy which works almost round-the-clock and puts no limits on the speed of implementation of government plans and programmes. Pace of work is limited only by technical or logistic constraints. The government machinery in Gujarat generally works faster than most private companies, particularly in case of schemes that are the focus of Modi's attention at any given point of time. That is why Mukesh Ambani publicly acknowledged at one of the Vibrant Gujarat meets that Modi runs Gujarat more efficiently than he himself runs his Reliance Industries.

Modi's Vibrant Gujarat shows have been hailed as the best managed investor meets ever held in the country but the success cannot be ascribed only to the excitement he builds so successfully every alternate year. The real reason is that whatever he promises to prospective investors is actually delivered. Investments running into hundreds of crores have been executed within one to two years because the Gujarat government ensures that no project suffers a single day's delay in want of any clearance. Good governance is the name of the game. It is often said that only a fraction of what is announced at Vibrant meets actually fructifies. For the ill-informed, the world average is around 15-20% only.

It is rather difficult to comprehend why this model, this way of working, will not work at the national level. The reality is that when critics say that the Gujarat Model will not work at the national level, they imply that the minorities are completely ignored in Gujarat. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Inclusive growth

It is clear that the term Gujarat Model is actually being used as a synonym for a partisan approach and absence of inclusive growth. The reality is that good governance is fundamentally incompatible with a partisan approach. When a government discriminates between different communities, it inevitably leads to favouritism and nepotism and eventually inefficiency creeps in. Discrimination on the basis of religion has to eventually lead to discrimination on cast and creed. An officer who discriminates between people from different religions is bound to, sooner or later, start favouring his own kith and kin and seek gratification. The kind of good governance that Gujarat has come to be known for simply cannot be achieved without adopting a non-partisan approach.

This basic notion in fact needs to be understood by the staunchest proponents of Hindutva also. If the government of the day begins to discriminate against minorities in day-to-day affairs, it cannot provide good governance to the majority community also.

If the Congress has failed to provide good governance in the past it is largely because it encouraged discrimination in favour of minorities. Its policy of appeasement has been the biggest reason of its decline. In an attempt to provide special treatment to minorities, it allowed governance to deteriorate and has eventually ended up losing support of both. While the process of appeasement had started immediately after independence, the decay in the system accelerated significantly after the Rajiv Gandhi government amended the constitution to address the Supreme Court's judgment in the Shah Bano case. Had the Congress refrained from using that opportunity for appeasement, perhaps the post-1985 history of the nation would have been very different from what it has been. The very fact that large states like UP, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Orissa are completely dominated by regional parties says that Congress does not have support from minorities in these states.

It isn't a matter of Narendra Modi seeking a secular image or maintaining his Hindu constituency. When it comes to governance, there is no choice. He can either provide good governance to all six crore Gujaratis or let the status quo prevail. If Juhapura (Muslim concentration) in Ahmedabad doesn't get sanitation, the adjoining Prahlad Nagar and Satellite areas cannot escape the stench. If roads are not built in specified areas, maintenance of roads in the rest of the city is bound to suffer. If any government organ discriminates against a certain section of the society, it cannot be fair and efficient to the rest of the people.

The choice for any society is between treating all communities equally and living with poor governance, slow economic growth and stagnant poverty. Gujarat seems to have understood this fundamental mechanism of governance and hopefully the message is spreading through out the nation.

Nothing illustrates the fact that Gujarat has almost come to terms with the reality of the basic pre-conditions for ensuring good governance is the fact that a sizeable portion of minorities voted for BJP in the last assembly elections. Initially these reports were brushed aside as false

propaganda but slowly details of the extent to which Modi has won support from the minority community have started filtering in. Minorities account for a sizeable part of the population in Bharuch district, home town of one of Sonia Gandhi's ace strategists Ahmed Patel. In the last assembly elections, four of the five seats in Bharuch district were won by BJP while one went to JDU. BJP won the Vaghra seat also where proportion of Muslims is as high as 44%. According to Asifa Khan, a bright young woman who worked for Congress for four years and has now emerged as a rising star in Gujarat BJP, an estimated 31% of Muslims in Gujarat voted for Narendra Modi. In Salaya Municipal Corporation in Jamnagar district, 24 of the 27 candidates put up by BJP were Muslims and the party won all the 27 seats. Incidentally, Salaya has benefitted handsomely from an ambitious coastal development plan implemented by the Modi government. Everybody in Salaya has prospered and so everybody voted for Modi.

So why did Modi decide not to field a single Muslim candidate in assembly elections? Neither Ram, nor Allah can answer that question. Only Narendra Modi can but he refuses to. Nevertheless, Gujarat BJP's svelte spokeswoman Asifa Khan insists that "to call Narendra Modi a popular chief minister is an understatement," insisting that he is relatively more popular among poorer sections of the society because the rich always prefer corrupt leaders. "Enough is enough. I would trust an honest Hindu more than a dishonest Muslim."

Equally important is the fact that without peace there can be no prosperity, and vice versa. If Gujarat is solidly behind him, it is largely because peace has prevailed ever since Gujarat elected him for the first time in December 2002. Since independence Gujarat has reportedly seen as many as 11,000 incidents of communal riots whereas in the last one decade or so there has not been a single incident that can be described as riots. The government has let it be known that no misdeeds will go unpunished, irrespective of which community the miscreants belong to. This peace has resulted in prosperity which, in turn, has fuelled peace.

The Man

One reason why Modi is able to put in long hours is that he is one of the few politicians in independent India to be without any kind of personal baggage. While this does partly explain the absence of corruption in his administration, perhaps the greater impact has been in terms of the sheer amount of work he puts in. The simple fact is that there are no friends or relatives to pester him for favours or even to spend time with. Those who are close to him know him well enough not to expect any innuendos. Perhaps voters around the world need to take cognisance of this fact and give some extra weightage to politicians without personal baggage.

The sheer indifference towards normal pleasures of life enables him to plan his work meticulously and keep an eagle eye on all important matters related to the working of his government. Most of Modi's visits to rural areas are planned for the last three days of the week, i.e. Friday, Saturday and Sunday. On Tuesdays he meets MLAs and MPs, who are welcome to bring delegations with them. His mail is classified in a given manner with weightage attached to each that helps him take quick decisions. His day begins early in the morning and normally ends well past 22.00 hours. What difficulties can a PM possibly face in following these practices is hard to comprehend.

There are many leaders in New Delhi and in the states who appear to be active for as many hours as Modi but there is a difference. It is very difficult to prolong a conversation with Modi. He is one of the most accessible chief ministers India has ever had and his colleagues and associates unhesitatingly concede that it is easier to pick up a phone and speak to Narendra Modi than most other ministers and bureaucrats. This is so largely because his conversations are always short and to-the-point. He listens to what the caller has to say with full concentration and gives instant decisions, shunning small talk almost completely. The result is that he always has time to receive incoming calls. Here is a typical example.

Sir, how are you?

NM: I am fine, thank you. How are you?

I am fine, Sir. I just wanted to congratulate you for yesterday's speech. It was great and had an enormous impact on the audience.

NM: Thank you very much. How are things otherwise?

Normal. Nothing unusual.

NM: Fine, then. Keep in touch.

This kind of short and crisp conversations have been experienced by anybody and everybody, including those who are somebody socially, financially or politically. Obviously, Modi's output in 15 hours is somewhat different from what others are able to do in their 15-hour days. Even when travelling in a car or a chopper he estimates the time the commute is likely to take and uses it productively by going through papers and files.

The sheer amount of work he puts in leaves the bureaucracy no option but to follow suit. Some are happy to work as hard as the boss, some try their best to put in as much as is possible, some do their work grudgingly and some seek transfers to non-descript jobs which are low on Modi's list of priorities. On the whole, at least the Gujarat cadre of central administrative services has proved that the bureaucracy isn't all bad. Given inspiring leadership, it is willing to work productively and protect the people's resources zealously. There is no reason why Modi will not be able to identify similar officers at New Delhi.

Mr Clean

What differentiates him from others is that he has set boundaries that he never crosses and there are limitations which all organs of the state must operate within. Modi thinks and acts exclusively in the interest of Gujarat and does not allow others to tinker with his core rules. Be it ministers, bureaucrats, political hangers on seeking favours or billionaire industrialists, nobody takes him for granted. There is a certain amount of hesitation when anybody goes to him for something. The question of pestering him for a decision does not arise. "Once he has said no, there is no point in trying to convince or persuade him," says a leading Gujarati industrialist who doesn't want to be named.

Narendra Modi has, through out his career, been perceived as Mr Clean. However, the difference is that while Rajiv was viewed as Mr Clean before he assumed power and lost

power because he turned out to be not-so-clean after all, Modi was perceived as a relatively clean politician when he was given the reins of Gujarat and even after more than a decade in the saddle, his image as Mr Clean has become only stronger.

Modi's clean image has remained unsullied in spite of Herculean efforts having been made to unearth some discrepancy somewhere. As noted writer Ashok Desai once put it, after the ritualistic blasting of Modi as a communally minded person, "Modi has done two things. He has reduced the leakage of government revenue that goes all over India into enrichment of politicians and bureaucrats, and diverted it to building up Gujarat's infrastructure." Repeated allegations of favouritism by his opponents, as well as the constant stream of criticism from Anna Hazare for his failure to appoint a Lokayukta in Gujarat have failed to sully his image. He handed over land to Tata Motors within 24 hours of signing the agreement and the critiques were forced to throw their hands up in the air in sheer desperation because the mud failed to cling to his stylishly cut kurtas.

A major reason why Modi has been able to maintain his Mr Clean image for so long is his spartan lifestyle. He lives in tastefully but simply furnished premises with not even a hint of ostentation and his mother lives even a simpler life. His brothers have never been seen roaming around in government offices. It is doubtful if a traffic cop in Ahmedabad would let a brother (he has two) of Narendra Modi go scot-free for jumping a red light. The man is a loner who owes nothing to nobody. His motorcade has always comprised of mid-price SUVs like Tata Safari and Mahindra Xylo. He doesn't crave for BMWs and Audis like many other chief ministers and central ministers do. He never allows himself to be surrounded by hangers on and does not allow power brokers to enter the offices of his government. So far all comments on his penchant for good living have been limited to his attire. He has not been on a single holiday in the last 12 years. He eats what the government rest houses are able to cook when touring the state, which he frequently does. He doesn't drink, doesn't smoke and doesn't even chew paan.

Modi's spartan lifestyle has in fact contributed a great deal to the relatively clean administration Gujarat is known for. It is true that Gujaratis have traditionally avoided conspicuous consumption but things have changed dramatically in the last two decades, all over the country. In Gujarat, it is unthinkable for any MLA or MP, irrespective of party affiliation, to spend a hundred crore on the marriage of a son or a daughter. Even industrialists flush with tax-paid money have to think twice before displaying any kind of ostentatiousness in their lifestyles because they know that if they did, NaMo's attitude toward them will change.

Modi has often been accused of being too authoritarian and normally reluctant to delegate authority, implying that he will find the machine called the central government too large to watch single-handedly. Noted political analyst Ramachandra Guha concedes that Mamata Banerjee, Jayalalithaa, Mayawati, Naveen Patnaik and Nitish Kumar also run their states in an overbearing manner but goes on to add that the authoritarianism of these other state leaders is erratic and capricious, not focused or dogmatic. That is absolutely right. Modi is never erratic and is rarely capricious in matters related to governance. Every organisation of his government has clearly defined goals with specified expected dates of completion. Every department and agency of the government has to submit periodic reports which are carefully browsed and those responsible have to satisfy Modi that any delays were really because of circumstances beyond their control.

Modi has often been compared with Indira Gandhi, who has frequently been described as the most manly persona among all Indian prime ministers. Even his staunchest supporters concede that he has a certain degree of authoritarianism in his attitude and quickly add that he could perhaps be compared with Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, who ruled the city-state with a firm hand and successfully put it among one of the most developed cities in the world.

The question whether Modi is a fascist at heart was answered by the noted writer Robert Kaplan in *The Atlantic Magazine* in April 2009 after he interviewed Modi at length. Kaplan said there is an element of Lee Kuan Yew in Modi but he is neither Lee Kuan Yew nor Adolf Hitler. “He is what he is, a new kind of hybrid politician—part CEO with prodigious management abilities, part rabble-rouser with a fierce ideological following—who is both impressive and disturbing in his own right.” Towards the end of the oft-quoted article, Kaplan said, “Is Modi a fascist? Although episodes in his political career and his role in the events of February 2002 suggest as much, the answer is, ultimately, no.”

The charge that Modi is too detail-oriented has some substance in it. He is indeed too aware of too many details. In fact whenever the need for focusing on a few areas of development is pointed out to him his stand is that he is equally focussed upon all. His performance has proved his ability to work on several fronts equally efficiently but equally true is the fact that the central government is indeed a much larger arena.

But then there is no doubt that he would indeed be able to put in a lot more work at the personal level than any Indian prime minister ever has. Besides, he has enough administrative experience and there is no reason why he would not be able to be more selective in personal monitoring. Gujarat isn't a tiny state where the CM can look after anything and everything. Modi has prioritised what needs to be monitored by him to what extent at the state level also. So he will have to be more selective at New Delhi than he has been in Gandhi Nagar. Let there be no confusion. Any Prime Minister of India can deliver good governance only if he goes into details in some cases. He must be able to look at a hundred things at the same time.

The Communicator

Narendra Modi clicks with the masses like few leaders can. Much to the chagrin of his opponents, audiences keep eating out of his hands. He is able to drive his points home effortlessly. His public meetings are always crowded.

Many have accused Modi of whipping up sentiments successfully. Of course he drives home his points efficiently and effectively during election campaigns but he uses the same techniques with equal effectiveness in his development campaigns also, be it spreading awareness about modern agricultural techniques or meetings held for exhorting the people to promote literacy. The style is the same and so is the effect.

His ability to talk to the people in a language they understand has rendered the media relatively irrelevant in Gujarat. Though it is generally believed that the vernacular press has been with Modi, the truth is that he has had his due share of differences with the vernacular media also. On the whole, vernacular media has not been as benign towards Modi as people outside Gujarat tend to believe.

Modi's response to media's on-and-off hostility has been to be with the people as much as he can, as often as is possible. “Having been an anathema to the media, particularly English

language media, hasn't deterred Modi at all. He has countered it by the simple technique of reaching out to the people directly. In the run-up to the December 2007 polls, he covered the entire state several times over, "travelling from daybreak to midnight, reaching out especially to vulnerable sections – women, tribals and farmers." (The Hindu, Vidya Subramaniam).

Interestingly, Modi has never hesitated in acknowledging that it was the media's hostility that put him at a plane different from all other state level leaders. He has used media to the hilt not by cohorting but by contempt. He has blissfully ignored the media's jibes, sanguine in his belief that the people would see his performance. He won his first election in December 2002 by reaching out directly to the people and hasn't given up the practice since then. He keeps addressing people on issues ranging from education, health, agriculture, infrastructure, industrial development and terrorism, providing information about whatever the media has failed to highlight adequately. In the process, opponents frequently keep falling by the wayside, making way for Modi to forge ahead with his policies and programmes.

Now why should an honest, baggage less and hard working man not be able to deliver to the nation what he has already delivered to his state? Why would hard work not produce results in New Delhi? In fact it can be argued that experience of running a large state like Gujarat for 12 years makes him one of the most suitable candidates for the prime ministership. By this yardstick Sheila Dikshit and Shivraj Singh Chouhan also qualify. True. These two names have in fact been mentioned on and off and common sense says experience of having worked as a chief minister is perhaps more relevant than having worked as finance or home minister of India.

Governors of so many states in the US have gone on to be Presidents, the most recent examples being Bill Clinton and George Bush. Reagan too was a governor of a state before he became president. There are similar examples in other countries too. If India has not seen any chief minister becoming prime minister (H D Devegowda became under exceptional circumstances and V P Singh first moved to New Delhi as a minister and then went on to be the prime minister), it only shows that the central leaders of national parties have not allowed chief ministers to grow in tune with their potential.

To put it simply, if Rahul Gandhi can create waves by eating one meal in the house of a poor villager in U.P., imagine how would the nation react when Modi would move around the country in scorchingly hot months of May-June every year, staying in normal government rest houses and eating meals normally cooked there, asking villagers to send their daughters to school and telling the farmers to prepare themselves for the coming season in advance? Of course one cannot assume that he would take exactly the same action as he did in Gujarat but his approach is likely to be similar - massive contact with the people, directly exhorting them to get on their feet and move ahead in life.

Priorities

Broadly speaking, chances are that Modi's priorities would be very similar to what he had set in 2001-02. Providing uninterrupted round-the-clock electricity to every household in the country, harnessing water to ensure availability for personal usage, agriculture, services and industry, pushing education in general and skills development in particular and restoring law and order in the context of safety of women are likely to be his four top priorities. So what's new? Which government hasn't had these priorities? The devil, as they say, lies in the details.

How these priorities are actually realised is where Modi is likely to differentiate himself from all previous governments.

One of the biggest successes of Modi has been restoration of the Gujarati pride. He has single-handedly exhorted, cajoled, persuaded and convinced the people of Gujarat to be proud of being Gujaratis. The undercurrent in all actions Modi takes will be to make Indians feel proud of being Indians. It can safely be concluded that “My 120 crore Indians” will be one of the most repeated metaphors in his speeches.

Chances are that he would order clean-up of the Yamuna the day he is sworn-in and the task would be completed within a matter of weeks, evoking memories of the way the Dal lake at Srinagar was cleaned and the way Surat was cleaned up after the flood in 2006. Work on millions of check dams around the nation is likely to be taken up almost immediately. Work on building of canals for transporting water from major rivers to deficient areas will perhaps begin before any Congress spokesman is able to ask him to spell out his plans for minorities. The Rajiv Gandhi Vidyutikaran Yojana, a verbatim copy of Jyoti Gram Yojana of Modi, was started in 2005 is still not complete and that is likely to be completed by the end of 2014, should Narendra Modi takeover as Prime Minister of India in May 2014.

A massive shake-up in the bureaucratic set up in New Delhi is almost certain. The way the central government works is likely to change completely. As somebody tweeted recently, Prime Minister Modi is unlikely to carry hundreds of journalists with him when visiting abroad at the expense of the taxpayer.

It is almost certain that Modi will come out with some way of restoring people’s faith in the ability of the nation’s government to make the citizen feel safe. Whether he will modernise and expand the police force or he will quickly move to provide for harsher punishments only time will tell. There are so many ideas he has already propounded for implementation at the national level, including efficient garbage treatment, water recycling and planned cultivation of vegetables and fruits in area peripheral to large cities.

On the external front, industry can expect him to open up arms manufacture to the private sector. Fencing of borders is likely to be taken up on a priority basis. All said and done, his first priority will be to earn the trust of the people in his ability to change their lives and that implies the highest emphasis upon law and order. Ironically, in 2002 and 2003 the intelligentsia was asking him to restore law and order in Gujarat, a problem that didn’t exist. In 2014, he would be once again asked to restore law and order in the country and this time, the problem is real and nobody would be saying it was his creation.

Challenges

It is nobody’s case that everything would be hunky-dory after Narendra Modi is elected Prime Minister of India. There is no denying the fact that given the sudden onslaught of honesty, integrity and hard work he is likely to bring in, there will be a sudden change in the scenario. If Modi is able to ensure that instead of 15, 30 paise of each Rupee the government spends reaches the man on the street, it would imply a dramatic transformation of the country. But after that, the law of diminishing returns would inevitably set in.

More than balancing his act between different kinds of societal divides, the big challenge before Narendra Modi will be to take a more realistic view of the prevailing social, economic and political conditions. His vision for Gujarat has been and is somewhat over ambitious and excessively grandiose and that has cost him some mass support also since it doesn't adequately address the issue of growing economic inequalities. Considering what he has delivered since 2003 BJP's strength in the state assembly should have risen to at least 140, rather than declining from 127 to 115.

Thus a major challenge before PM Modi will be looking at economic conditions in India more realistically and further fine-tuning his present approach. Notwithstanding what he has delivered or not delivered to the bottom 25% of the people of Gujarat, his obsession for aiming at the very top of the world is a stark reality. He doesn't really want to compete with US, EU, China or Japan. He wants to overtake them. While his ambitious outlook is viewed as inspiring by many, it does result in allocation of available resources in a less-than-optimal manner.

This may be a digression of sorts but the fact is that if the Indian economy is slowing down, the reason is not the so-called policy paralysis but the excessive economic inequalities which have resulted in growth in demand for wage goods petering out. This is a subject by itself but suffice it to say that even as consumption of luxury housing, pricey automobiles, designer furniture and top-end branded clothing is growing, demand for basics is decelerating palpably.

Besides, politicians often tend to overlook natural, broader and more powerful forces that impact destinies of individual nations and the world as a whole, largely because their view of their own contributions is often exaggerated. Dr Man Mohan Singh has been credited for transforming India's economy from July 1991 onwards at a scale that can make any policy-maker in the world feel envious but few have pointed out that the 1990s was the first occasion for independent India to experience good monsoon through an entire decade. Besides, globalisation took roots during the penultimate decade of the last millennium and investments poured into the entire developing world. If Dr Singh made the Indian economy vibrant, who was responsible for doing that in Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Brazil and Argentina? If India escaped the Asean financial crisis of 1997 it was largely because Narasimha Rao had put a leash on him by the end of 1993. That is another story.

Narendra Modi too has operated, since his first electoral triumph in December 2002 in an economic environment flush with funds. He has spent the people's money wisely, ensuring they get the maximum possible benefit, but the point is that money has been available for implementing most ideas he has put on the table. In the future, availability of financial resources cannot be taken for granted.

The Harvard brigade comprising Man Mohan Singh, Chidambaram and Ahluwalia has so far not been able to come up with any effective solutions for containing fiscal and external trade deficit. Man Mohan Singh is once again being hailed globally for having come out of the policy stupor but the economy continues to languish, notwithstanding the periodic upticks at Dalal Street. The reason is he has allowed FDI in retail but setting up stores in India should be a viable proposition for the policy to have any serious impact. Sale of stakes in some PSUs will bring in 10-20 billion but the deficit on the external front is over two billion a week. The government may open all doors for foreign investors and let them come and go as they please but there are no shares for them to buy.

There is no way a Man Mohan Singh can solve India's problems based on what he learned at the LSE. It is doubtful whether Harvard ever taught Chidambaram that under certain circumstances unofficial rates for gold can be higher than official rates, despite the tax difference. And Monty Ahluwalia can never understand that a country like India cannot afford to build a toll highway to cater to traffic that would take a decade to arrive; even after a decade the Euro Tunnel is burdened with a debt of nearly USD 5 billion while its revenue barely exceeds a billion. UK and France can afford such advance planning but India cannot.

What the nation needs is effective, not necessarily globally accepted, solutions for problems peculiar to India. Technology alone cannot expand banking, as is evident from the fact that even as mobile banking has become the rage in several African countries, in India it has not even made its debut in a serious manner.

What should be handed over to private business and what needs to be controlled by the government has to be determined in tune with Indian conditions, Indian traditions and Indian psyche. A scale of operations that is viable in China may not be suitable for India. May be India needs to divide its cement capacity between 50 manufacturers instead of 10. May be India needs to sacrifice some economies of scale for ensuring that the consumer doesn't get fleeced. May be India needs to put on hold setting up more of IITs and IIMs and focus on the newly emerging areas like forensic sciences and public safety.

Perhaps India needs to forget Wi-Fi in trains until the railways are able to maintain cleanliness on platforms. May be India needs to tax air travel more heavily than it does and wait a decade even for high speed rails.

The fact that a large part of the government machinery in New Delhi has become significantly irresponsible and irresponsive since 2009 would also constitute a big challenge. It needs to be understood and assumed that no minister can make a single Rupee of slush money without at least a part of the bureaucracy working under him getting involved or at least deciding to look the other way. Scandals like CWG, 2G and CoalGate first hurt efficiency when they are under way and work efficiency of the government takes another dive after they come tumbling out of cupboards. The inertia, the unconcern and the indifference in central government offices has reached unbelievable levels. If Narendra Modi comes to have the reins of the nation in his hands, he would perhaps face a work culture radically different from the culture prevailing in Gujarat in October 2001 when he took over as Chief Minister.

But of course the apathetic attitude of the system is the prime reason why the people want Modi at the helm! As Modi himself said at the 2013 India Today conclave, these officers, these laws, these systems and this environment is enough to deliver growth and governance. What is needed is cleanliness and efficiency at the top.

The real big challenge before Modi will be economic and not religious polarisation. Inequalities are widening steadily and the society is fast moving towards an explosive situation that just may lead to significant unrest that can derail the economy for several decades. Modi would have to understand the fundamentals of economics that the Harvard Brigade comprising Man Mohan Singh, P Chidambaram and Ahluwalia have completely failed to comprehend. They have never even tried to examine whether effects of changes in interest rates and fiscal deficits in India can be different from the developed world. Like the

developed world, they keep admiring China but still do not know how China funded its development in 1980s and 1990s.

A whole book needs to be written on this subject but suffice it to say that as dollars started pouring into India and external reserves rose, these policy-makers failed to comprehend and acknowledge that the effect on the Indian economy was the same as monetised deficit. The Reserve Bank of India showed rise in forex reserves as a source of money supply but the practice was discontinued when it was realised that this could give rise to some uncomfortable questions.

The developed world has stretched the concept of free enterprise beyond all reasonable limits. Will Modi be able to defy the so-called conventional wisdom in the context of interest rates and other monetary policies? Will he safeguard the consumer by prescribing standardised packagings for important consumer products? Will he stand up to the developed world and forbid predatory pricing by global corporations? Everybody who is somebody wants at least two palatial houses. Does that deprive the poor of the opportunity to buy houses in the future?

Consider a simple example. A middle-class family buys an air-conditioner for Rs 20,000. That forces the system to invest Rs 1 lakh in new power generation capacity and that increases the average cost of power. This means new air-conditioners actually increase the price those without air-conditioners pay for electricity. In essence, the question is whether Modi will be willing to let a part of him be what they call a socialist.

On the external front, the focus so far has been on Modi's acceptability to the developed world, particularly US and EU which have been treating him like a pariah. That isn't a terribly important issue since diplomacy is now almost completely guided by economic considerations and both US and EU have already started making overtures to him. When some US Congressmen called upon Modi on 28 March 2013, BJD MP Baijayant Jay Panda tweeted: The mountain comes to Muhammed?

Modi's real challenge on the external front will be not gaining acceptance of the developed world but making India a strong nation and taking firm stands to protect India's interests. He will be inheriting a situation where even the tiny Sri Lanka views India as a weak nation. It will take tremendous will power and diplomatic skills to start dealing firmly with the neighbours as well as the developed world. When a nation that has traditionally given in meekly to demands from all and sundry, the sudden appearance of a firm attitude can cause severe problems.

However, these challenges have always been there and India has survived without addressing these challenges also. When the nation begins to address the challenges in right earnest, solutions would automatically come flooding in. Growth in revenue receipts of the government may decline or the receipts may even decline in absolute terms but the leakages are so huge that once they are plugged, the government will be flush with funds.

Epilogue

So will Narendra Modi be PM? Once again, in politics one never knows. There are so many variables and there always is the possibility of the unseen and the unanticipated. Few can tell whether Congress is confused or is creating confusion by design. Whether the direct cash

transfer scheme would please or anger the masses hinges upon many factors that are beyond the control of the central government. Nobody knows what the magnitude of people's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with regional parties would be in 2014. There would indeed be some degree of polarisation of the electorate on religious lines but there will be other considerations that would impact voting patterns across the country. As Vinod Mehta said in Outlook magazine (22 April 2013), "To call Narendra Modi a "polarising figure" has become commonplace. That cannot be his sole disqualification for the top job. As the Modi tsunami gathers force, we can no longer pretend he is something of an enigma."

It is clear that the difference between the rural and the urban has declined to a very large extent and is continuing to diminish but the numbers aren't known. Basic aspirations are now the same. Rural areas too want smooth availability of water, electricity, roads, education, healthcare and entertainment, besides food, clothing and shelter. But it is very difficult to say the extent to which they are willing to ignore cast, creed and religion, in exchange for what.

Modi seems to be the man who would be prime minister but then nobody can know what the 50 crore plus Indians who are likely to cast their votes in 2014 are thinking or will think when casting votes. Much would depend upon what happens in the second half of 2013 and first quarter of 2014. Congress has the advantage of being in power at the centre and can influence the voter by some innovative policies and programmes. To a lesser extent, Modi too has the advantage of being in power in Gujarat. His leeway may be of a smaller magnitude but surely he too can come up with some measures that capture the imagination of the nation at large.

A bad monsoon can accentuate the problem of high food prices and a good monsoon can suddenly make the people feel good. Global economy may crash in the interim period and Indian economy may get hurt, benefit or remain unaffected. However, it would be unfair for any political party to blame the people for having unrealistic expectations. The people of India have always had a realistic outlook. They don't expect the government to open some magical taps spewing milk and honey in the nation's hinterlands. They aren't asking for more of glitzy malls or flyovers. Those living in trans-Yamuna areas are not looking forward to New Delhi becoming New York. They will be happy if basic facilities match Anna Hazare's Ralegan Siddhi and they expect potable water to flow from their taps, not from fancy plastic bottles. They want food, clothing and shelter at prices that are proportionate to their earnings. They want efficient sanitation and toilet facilities.

Perhaps what would really determine the outcome in 2014 is who puts what on the table and the credibility the candidate commands. Manifestos pointing out ills that need to be cured are likely to be ignored by the people. In fact what Narendra Modi claims to have done in Gujarat would also affect only the credibility of his proposals. He shall have to put forth a clear plan of action before the nation, spelling out precisely the steps he would take on assuming office.

The scales seem to be tilted in favour of Narendra Modi because he has a track record acceptable to people whereas the Congress shall have to create a new track record but the outcome remains uncertain because both sides are trying, and would continue to try, to refurbish their respective images and both shall falter because nothing irritates the voter more than what politicians call transformation of image. Which side trips more is likely to have a significant impact on the outcome.

What destiny has in store for this nation of 120 crore cannot be predicted with certainty. It will be decided only by Him.

