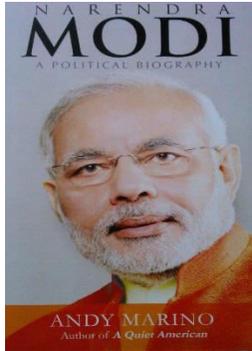


NARENDRA MODI: A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY

by ANDY MARINO [Review by Sindhu K M PGT English]



The prologue has the description of the incident mentioned on the back cover: The letter of a Ukrainian lady which Modi passed to Marino in the helipad during the election campaign. The lady had referred to the Orange Revolution in 2005 'to change the system' in Ukraine but failed; married recently to an Indian, she earnestly tells Modi 'not to fail us' after 2014 election as she says 'nobody else' can change India.

The British author and TV producer who has a PhD in English Literature had access to Narendra Modi than any other journalist as he travelled with Modi and spoke to many people associated with him. The book for the first time reveals many things about the man- childhood as a tea stall owner's son in Vadnagar in Gujarat, early association with RSS as a cadet, his 'engagement' at three years which was a topic during election, his spiritual quest to Himalayas between 17-19 years. Graduating from B. N. High School, Vadnagar before his odyssey, later he acquired a master's degree in political science through correspondence from Gujarat University.

At 19 he returned home and stayed overnight with his family, then joined R.S.S. again in Ahmedabad. Modi reckons Laxmanrao Inamdar as his mentor in R.S.S. The country was under the dictatorship of Indira Gandhi's Emergency from 25 June 1975 till March 1977. Modi worked in R.S.S.'s [which was banned] coordinating committee of resistance and proved his mettle. Marino discusses the 'KHAM' programme [electoral inducement to Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims] of Congress in 1980s which later became 'secularism'. He attributes the nearly 100 bomb explosions between 1986 and 1988 and the rise of aggressive Hindutva to KHAM.

Modi grew in R.S.S. with his innovative ideas like collecting sukris from families to distribute and moving cattle to green areas than appealing for funds from foreign during droughts. In 1989 he organised Lok Shakti Rath Yatra; the Gujarat leg of the Ayodhya Yatra led by Advani in 1990. He became one of the 17 members of the BJP's National Election Committee. The Ekta Yatra with M.M.Joshi which began in December 1991 at Kanyakumari finished with running up the national flag in Kashmir. But Vaghela refused to include Modi in the first BJP government of Gujarat. Modi prepared the 5 states-U.P., M.P., H.P., Rajasthan and Assam for assembly elections and established a secondary school Sanskardham in Ahmedabad.

Marino describes the Babri Masjid demolition times and the rift between Keshubhai and Vaghela in Gujarat. In 1996 Modi was in charge of BJP in Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh, H.P. and J&K. He visited many countries, worked with top leaders and learnt computers during this time of exile from Gujarat. He says: "Defeat: this word is not in my dictionary." Eventually the party assigned Modi the Chief Minister of Gujarat on 7 October 2001.

Marino opens the discussion on Gujarat riots with W.H. Auden's lines: "*For without a cement of blood ... no secular wall will safely stand.*" He elucidates how the Godhra incident led to riots and the Chief Minister acted promptly to control it as found by SIT; though didn't succeed completely. Due to Operation Parakram army couldn't be spared. Among the three neighbouring states under Congress rule Modi wrote for help, only Maharashtra sent some personnel: Rajasthan and Digvijay Singh of M.P. a big critic of Modi refused assistance: Marino furnishes ministerial correspondence. Narendra Modi had been witch hunted by the English Media and political rivals for more than a decade.

Marino furnishes statistics on how Gujarat developed under the 'panchamrut': Jal Shakti, Urja Shakti, Jan Shakti, Gyan Shakti, and Raksha Shakti. There was no communal strife in Gujarat in twelve years Modi was elected thrice as CM except the one started on 27 February and got under control in 2 March 2002 (4 days). Marino compares the Gujarat riots to 1984 Delhi genocide of Sikhs and other 'pogroms'.

Narendra Modi says he is lucky to serve the people. Stoic, calm, not a part of the Delhi Club, not practising rituals, a vegetarian- he told Marino he has 'an autopilot system' in his thinking process. He had had a photograph of his mother with him during his Himalaya quest in teens and she is the only family member he frequently visits, though cordial with others too. Innovative ideas are his forte. Marino poses the question whether Modi a self-made OBC man is a rebuttal to the hegemony by upper -caste elite and political dynasty in India.
