

# Western Media and Indian Democracy

POLEMICS, PREJUDICE & PSYCHOSIS



भारत नीति प्रतिष्ठान  
India Policy Foundation



# Western Media and Indian Democracy

## *Polemics, Prejudice & Psychosis*

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

India Policy Foundation has initiated a small effort in providing some insight into the different dimensions that Indian democracy faces vis-à-vis its representation by Western media. The general understanding about media is that it is supposed to narrate facts in its reportage. Several times, on the contrary, it has been indulged into giving value judgment in the matter of India in general and Bhartiya Janta Party and its Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi in particular. But the most unfortunate turn of event was when it prompted to vote for certain political formation. There might be arguments supporting it but it undoubtedly compromised the very basis of the profession. More so the case of Western media becomes all the more important for its self proclaimed objectivity that so far it has been claiming in the name of adhering democratic values, impartial assessment and objective presentation of facts of news and of course unbiased attitude. Unfortunately it also failed to live up to the expectation and the other part of the story is that it miserably failed to understand Indian ethos, democracy and liberalism by mistakenly trying to fit it into Western paradigm.

All such thing that might paint the image of the country in black were highlighted by the western media be it poverty, crime against women, violence etc however, there own records in the matters of blacks have been decimal. There were contradictions, polemics, prejudice and psychosis while reporting general elections of the country. Words like pogrom, holocaust were mindlessly used. They failed to understand diversity of India, its culture and tradition. Moreover, they were shying away from fact-based journalism and opinionated arguments were presented.

Editors of the paper have presented a valuable piece to the world. The objective analysis on facts and presentation are true reflection of research value and ethics. So they stand exposed.

I would like to thank Pankaj Jha and Vinod K Shukla for their contribution. I am also thankful to Shiv Kumar and Sudhir Kumar Singh for their relentless handwork.

July 16, 2014

**Prof. Rakesh Sinha**  
Hon. Director, India Policy Foundation



# INTRODUCTION

**W**estern developed countries have taken the mantle in spreading democratic values to the developing and under developed parts of the world. But the irony is that in most of these regions, it was the Western interference which in the name of protecting values, ended up displacing them. Like Afghanistan, that used to be a peaceful and progressive society under the Shah monarchy in the 1960s, before it was overtaken by Taliban forces prepared by Pakistan on instructions of 'liberal' USA. The pretext was to safeguard Afghanistan from the shackles of communism. The ideals underlying democracy -- such as liberty, social justice, equality, secularism and fraternity are claimed to be imparted through Western political philosophy, and it gets assumed that these are foreign values to other societies, which therefore need to be trained by Western democracies. Even today, it cannot be missed that the project of establishing democracy has been shaped more by the developed economies' own economic and geo-political considerations. Yet, in campaigning for democracy in these regions, the Western media does not interrogate its own governments' actions.

There is also thus rigidity in acknowledging the indigenous traditions of democracy of various societies by the West, including its media, and instead these values are viewed to have originated in the discourses of Western political philosophers. India follows the Westminster style of democracy, introduced by the British during its colonial rule, and later, accepted as the foundation to govern India at its turn at ruling itself. During the first decade of 1947, Western political scientists confidently predicted the demise of democracy in a country as diverse and eclectic as India, since their experience of a functional democracy was based in a completely different environment. There is neglect of India's own tradition of political thought coming from the likes of Kautilya, Lord Buddha during ancient period; and from stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B R Ambedkar during the colonial rule.

These traditions have been equally instrumental in shaping India's journey as a democracy. So, for example, the principle of equality that was established in the Constitution of India was based not just on the Western philosophical conception, but also reflected the ideas of Jyotirao Phule on the question of caste, as well as the debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar in making sense of this concept. Similarly, India shaped its own philosophy of Secularism where the State decided to pay equal respect to all religions, unlike the Western practice of keeping a wall of separation between the State and religions.

This difference in approach originates from the differing experiences of Western societies and Indian society in maintaining inter-religious harmony. There is also tendency to espouse the notion of 'Hindu Nationalism' associated to the RSS and the BJP, and then deliberately making comparisons with the Fascist and Nazist regimes of 1930s, and a dictatorial approach in negating BJP's argument for a debate between 'Hindu Nationalism' and 'Indian Nationalism'. It is therefore pertinent that Western media be continuously critiqued to uncover its political agenda in the way it eyes matters of Indian democracy.

Along with the influence of the West in dictating a prescribed form of values, Indian academia is equally to blame in its inability to convey the Indian traditions of political thought. So much so that it is only recently that we have begun reading Indian Political Thought in our academic curriculum. The covert alliance between the Western journalists and domestic pseudo-secular intellectuals has also been limiting the growth of the democratic fabric of India, and therefore needs to be highlighted.

Moreover, discussion among intellectuals in India takes highly polarised dimension and this leads a section of intellectuals, academicians and journalists to jump into propaganda against the RSS and the BJP in general and Narendra Modi in particular. Their common bondings with other intellectuals might also have influenced the western media. Another fundamental problem lies in their perception about Hindutva that they look at from the Semitic perception.

The paper also brings to light the shortcomings in the intellectual articulation of the true essence of Hindutva that has allowed the media to profess polemic, prejudice and psychosis about it. Since Hindutva is a bad word in academia, it does not get incorporated as a course of study, which limits the scope of critiquing it like we may do for any theory of nationalism. The academia refuses any debate on Hindutva, always snubbing it, and this is one major reason why there is a weak intellectual tradition in understanding and negotiating with it amongst them. In fact, this is also why there is a huge gap between what was expressed at higher level and what is mobilised at grassroot level in Hindutva itself. By refusing to interact and negotiate, media and academia are allowing the mob and bullying mentality to rise. Rather, if they keep having genuine dialogues about Hindutva, there will always be possibility of keeping a check when it slips.



## SELECTIVE PRIORITY AND AGENDA



In establishing any fruitful relations with the West, it is pertinent to look at its media's role, given that Western media exerts enormous influence in shaping its peoples opinion. Western media is a crucial source of information on pertinent issues that have been affecting people, governments and societies world over. Given the range of issues that the Western media covers, it often gets celebrated for supporting liberal values, free speech and human rights. Yet, it needs to be recalled how these ideals get misappropriated by Western media, for example, to endorse the attack on Iraq carried ahead by Mr. George W Bush II's regime in the United States in cahoots with Mr. Tony Blair's government in UK in 2004. One can decipher the overt and covert support of the Western media to the regime change agenda of Western governments. On other occasions, like in the case of blacklisting Indian pharmaceutical and IT companies, the Western media also supports the corporate agenda of multinationals that indulge in modern versions of rent-seeking through tools like Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). There is specially a tendency of the Western media to set the agenda for developing countries which could potentially harm local populace and its interests. In developing countries, Western media is looked up to, because of its vantage point of perceiving events from the ringside view, that should leave it unmarred with biases that normally affect domestic media.

Instead, its coverage of the recently held general elections in India, specifically its negative portrayal of Mr. Narendra Modi and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, the political party to which he belongs) becomes a case in point of its brazen attempt to influence electoral outcomes in a democracy by peddling polemics, prejudice and psychosis in their reportage. Barring some exceptions, the majority of the Western media fed its consumers with stories that projected Mr. Modi as a persistent danger to the ideals of liberalism, secularism and human rights.

In this paper, we reproduce reprints of such commentaries written before and after the elections pertaining to him, that help in analysing their content and purpose in its portrayal of Indian democracy.

One needs to regularly critique Western media to understand the politics of the kind of stories that are reported, and those that miss a mention. There is hypocrisy in the positions taken in reporting about minority concerns vis-a-vis the State, in developed countries, and those of developing countries. While Western media empathises with the minorities torn by conflicts in developing and underdeveloped regions, it has been less than its robust self in examining the practice of compulsive profiling of Muslim community visiting or residing in USA by the security agencies of the government post 9/11 episode. (Rather, it has been the alternate media that has been at the forefront in condemning these practices as racial, anti-humane and disrespectful.).

As if to make up for its inability to question own governments for targeting Muslims, there is also a growing tendency in Western media to dissuade stories that reflect on Islamic extremism prevalent in society or even seek a debate on the issue (unless there is a political implication involved). The Western media failed to support acclaimed human rights and women activist Ms. Ayan Hirsi Ali when she was removed from the list of honorary degree recipients from Brandeis University, Massachusetts, USA in April 2014. This was done on the insistence of an online petition of 5,800 signatories from inside and outside the university, in addition to a protest letter signed by 85 out of the 350 faculty members, simply because her 'anti-Islamic' tirade offended them.



**Ms. Ayan Hirsi Ali**



**Dr. Subramanian  
Swamy**

Somali born Ms. Ali, has been a campaigner against female genital mutilation and a staunch critic of Islam for its barbaric treatment of women. Yet, the Western media did not challenge the indictment as a violation of her entitlement to free speech and expression.

Same was the case when in December 2011 Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA distanced itself from Dr. Subramanian Swamy by dropping two courses in economics taught by him for writing a supposedly 'anti-Islam' article in Indian publication Daily News and Analysis (DNA). This was done on the insistence of the university's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. One would then assume that the Western media would remain sympathetic to the Hindu sentiments. But in stark contrast, Western media derides similar petitions by activists against 'anti-Hindu' publications and remarks, and condemns them as the fury of intolerant bigots.

## INDIAN DEMOCRACY AND WESTERN MEDIA PROPAGANDA

In covering contemporary issues of Indian democracy, Western media has been rigorously indulging in polemics, asserting its adhered point-of-views in a prejudiced manner without lending equal opportunity to the other side during the debate. Moreover, it has also been showing signs of psychosis in the way it keeps stirring panic around BJP's ideology and Mr. Modi's character, especially on a high pitch since 2001, such as when the Economist exhorted that 'India Deserves Better than Modi' in its article "*Can anyone stop Narendra Modi?*" (April 5, 2014) and urged Indians to not vote for the Hindu nationalist Mr. Modi, and instead choose the 'less disturbing' candidature of Mr. Rahul Gandhi. There is also a tendency to instigate communal fear by constantly referring to the Gujarat riots as pogroms. Like Guardian's commentator, Ms. Priyamvada Gopal categorically called Gujarat riots 'pogrom' in her piece "*Narendra Modi: Britain can't simply shrug off this Hindu extremist*" (April 14, 2014) and therefore asked "UK to sever its ties with this far-right activist." Mr. Thomas Crownley, a Delhi-based researcher whose writings paint a fascist out of Mr. Modi, also uses the word 'pogrom' to explain the events of Gujarat 2002 during an interview to Salon.com on May 24, 2014, titled "*Worse than Reagan": Meet the violent chauvinist now leading India, Narendra Modi*". What is missing in such commentaries is a proper grasp of the meaning of 'Pogrom'. This term originated in Eastern Europe where the Christian majority frequently unleashed violence on the already disenfranchised Jews. Riots, on the other hand, are instances of violence triggered by some incident, and are not premeditated. It is therefore farfetched to call Gujarat riots as pogrom, as these occurred as a repercussion to the Godhra incident, where Sabarmati train boogies S-5 and S-6 were torched that killed 59 Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya.



There is an unprecedented bias against Gujarat and Mr. Modi while reporting the riots of 2001, that takes the shape of incessant vilification. The severity of the Godhra carnage is diluted, despite inquiry reports hinting at a plan to sabotage the train. Also, these riots have been given unprecedented coverage and subjected to the harshest criticism, so much so that it gets forgotten than even more severe riots have happened in India, before and after 2002. Mr. Sanjeev Nayar, national affairs analyst, Chartered Accountant and founder [www.esamskriti.com](http://www.esamskriti.com) writes in an opinion piece in [Firstpost.com](http://Firstpost.com) “*Not just Modi: Guide to riots before 2002 and after*” (April 6, 2013) that there have been “58 major communal riots in 47 places since 1967. Ten in South India, 12 in East, 16 in West and 20 in North India. Since 1964, Ahmedabad has seen five major riots and Hyderabad four. The 1990s saw the most riots in the last five decades: 23. The 1970s saw seven riots, the 1980s 14; the 2000s have seen 13. Total toll: 12,828 (South 597, West 3,426, East 3,581 and North 5,224). In 1964, a wave of rioting in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Jamshedpur and Rourkela killed 2,500.” These states were mostly ruled by Congress party during the periods of disturbance.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Akhilesh Yadav and his party in power in Uttar Pradesh, Samajwadi Party have also escaped the kind of targeting faced by Mr. Modi despite the Muzaffarnagar riots, 2013 having displaced nearly 50,000 people, and inaction by the state government for two weeks, in contrast to Gujarat government taking action within two days of the rioting. Also, Gujarat has not seen a riot in the last 12 years, while another riot seems to be erupting in UP. One has to link the obsession of Western media specifically with Gujarat riots with its influence over policy decisions of the West. Domestic media’s fixation with the riots could possibly stem from the fact that this was the first time live feeds of the riot were provided. The Indian media also follows the agenda set by its counterpart abroad.

Coverage of the political rise of Mr. Modi by Western Media has been immensely vitriolic, and constantly espousing great fear of the man. When a renowned journalist like Mr. Peter Popham announces to the world that he can’t ‘suppress a shiver at the thought of Narendra Modi taking office and Hindu nationalism taking over the world democracy’, there is bound to be spread of panic amongst the readers. This sentiment conveys how Western media triggers polemics, prejudice and psychosis against Mr. Modi.




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<sup>1</sup> He picks up these figures from Outlook Magazine’s article, “A Beast Asleep?” by Saba Naqvi and Smruti Koppikar.

There is also incapacity to review Hindu nationalism in totality, without being shrouded in dictated norms of secularism. Facts are twisted, or half presented, like Ms. Gopal's conclusion that "For all its anti-British rhetoric, Hindu nationalism played no significant role in either the freedom struggle or in creating a secular Constitution of independent India." While speaking of RSS's role during the freedom movement, it needs to be clarified that it prides itself in being a cultural organisation that stayed away from political activities till 1952 and so played the role of a silent facilitator during the freedom struggle.

For instance, its efforts in encouraging its cadre towards participation in the second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement led by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930s; or the issuance of circular to all its shakhas to celebrate January 26, 1930 as India's Independence day to commemorate the Lahore Resolution of the Indian National Congress.

The polemics against BJP has continued after its electoral win in May 2014, where commentators, including Mr. Crowley have been dismissing Mr. Modi's appeal amongst voters on the ground that the despite taking 50% share of the seats in Parliament, it won only 30% of the votes, and implying that the majority 70% voted against it. Such analysis would have been fair had Western media discredited the outstanding electoral wins registered by other political parties of India in the past. Surely, a critique of the First Past the Post System is required, but there is a case of prejudice when this issue is picked up only now. It is also naïve, or perhaps a ploy at holding facts, to imply that 70 % votes remained anti-Modi and BJP. Seasoned researchers should be aware that there many state and regional parties in India, whose vote shares do not let any political party get the majority required to form a government on its own. The score of 282 seats out of 543 on its own should have also induced an honest analysis of the regional and demographic trends of Indian politics from these journalists that went missing.



**Mr. Peter Popham**

## PREDISPOSED AND VINDICTIVE JOURNALISM

In this section, we examine four samples of articles written in the Western media between the period of Mr. Narendra Modi's nomination as Prime Ministerial candidate of BJP in September 2013 and few days before India's General Elections, 2014 took place (Some of these articles were mentioned above. The articles have been reproduced in verbatim here, and are italicised). We also analyse the immediate attitude of this media in the event of Mr. Modi's win. Study of these samples will help in closing our argument about the polemic prejudiced and psychotic nature of Western Media.

### PRE-ELECTION VINDICTIVE AGENDA

#### 1 The Economist, "Can anyone stop Narendra Modi?", April 5, 2014.

#### "India's Election" Can anyone stop Narendra Modi?

The  
Economist



Who does not marvel at the prospect of India going to the polls? Starting on April 7th, illiterate villagers and destitute slum-dwellers will have an equal say alongside Mumbai's millionaires in picking their government. Almost 815m citizens are eligible to cast their ballots in nine phases of voting over five weeks—the largest collective democratic act in history.

But who does not also deplore the fecklessness and venality of India's politicians? The country is teeming with problems, but a decade under a coalition led by the Congress party has left it rudderless. Growth has fallen by half, to about 5%—too low to provide work for the millions of young Indians joining the job market each year. Reforms go undone, roads and electricity remain unavailable, children are left uneducated. Meanwhile, politicians and officials are reckoned to have taken bribes worth between \$4 billion and \$12 billion during Congress's tenure. The business of politics, Indians conclude, is corruption.

No wonder that the overwhelming favourite to become India's next prime minister is the Bharatiya Janata Party's Narendra Modi. He could not be more different from Rahul Gandhi, his Congress party rival. The great-grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first premier, Mr Gandhi would ascend to office as if by divine right. Mr Modi is a former tea seller propelled to the top by sheer ability. Mr Gandhi seems not to know his own mind—even whether he wants power. Mr Modi's performance as chief minister of Gujarat shows that he is set on economic development and can make it happen. Mr Gandhi's coalition is tainted by corruption. By comparison Mr Modi is clean.

So there is much to admire. Despite that, this newspaper cannot bring itself to back Mr Modi for India's highest office.

### **Modi's Odium**

The reason begins with a Hindu rampage against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, in which at least 1,000 people were slaughtered. The orgy of murder and rape in Ahmedabad and the surrounding towns and villages was revenge for the killing of 59 Hindu pilgrims on a train by Muslims.

On both counts, that is too generous. One reason why the inquiries into the riots were inconclusive is that a great deal of evidence was lost or willfully destroyed. And if the facts in 2002 are murky, so are Mr Modi's views now. He could put the pogroms behind him by explaining what happened and apologising. Yet he refuses to answer questions about them. In a rare comment last year, he said, he regretted Muslims' suffering as he would that of a puppy run over by a car. Amid the uproar, he said, he meant only that Hindus care about all life. Muslims—and chauvinist Hindus—heard a different message. Unlike other BJP leaders, Mr Modi has refused to wear a Muslim skullcap and failed to condemn riots in Uttar Pradesh in 2013 when most of the victims were Muslim.

### **The lesser of two evils**

"Dog-whistle" politics is deplorable in any country. But in India violence between Hindus and Muslims is never far from the surface. At partition, when British India fractured, about 12m people were uprooted and hundreds of thousands perished. Since 2002 communal violence has died down, but there are hundreds of incidents and scores of deaths each year. Sometimes, as in Uttar Pradesh, the violence is on an alarming scale. The spark could also come from



outside. In Mumbai in 2008, India suffered horrific attacks by terrorists from Muslim Pakistan—a nagging, nuclear-armed presence next door.

If Congress wins, which is unlikely, it must strive to renew itself and to reform India. Mr Gandhi should make a virtue of his diffidence by stepping back from politics and promoting modernisers to the fore. There are plenty of them and modernity is what Indian voters increasingly demand (see article). If, more probably, victory goes to the BJP, its coalition partners should hold out for a prime minister other than Mr Modi.

And if they still choose Mr Modi? We would wish him well, and we would be delighted for him to prove us wrong by governing India in a modern, honest and fair way.

*It urged Indians to not vote for Mr. Modi, and instead choose the ‘less disturbing’ candidature of Mr. Rahul Gandhi, because “‘Mr Modi had helped organise a march on the holy site at Ayodhya in 1990 which, two years later, led to the deaths of 1,000 in Hindu-Muslim clashes. A lifelong member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist group in whose cause he has vowed lifelong celibacy, he made speeches early in his career that shamelessly whipped up Hindus against Muslims. In 2002, Mr Modi was chief minister and he was accused of allowing or even abetting the pogrom.’”*

### **Decrypting the Agenda**

This was the lead editorial of the magazine that urged Indians not to vote for Mr. Modi. To a casual reader, the article will appear as a harmless commentary of the facts. Yet, it is the way these facts are arranged together that intends to influence the judgment of the reader. Moreover, rather than simply stating the facts, the article takes on a condescending tone, giving unsolicited advice to Indians on who to vote for in the elections that were due to begin within the next three days. (This also raises a question about the views of the magazine’s editorial team regarding competence of India’s democracy, considering that it has previously stressed on India’s inability to govern itself as a defense for its support for the British colonial. One should also not miss the sentiment with which it belittles Indian politicians as being feckless and venal.)

Even as the magazine acknowledges and praises Mr. Narendra Modi’s record of economic development in Gujarat, it declares him unsuited for the position of Prime Ministership. Rather, it wishes leadership in the hands of the ‘less

disturbing' Congress Party once again, which it admits to having become corrupt and detrimental to India's reforms. Reasons that stand out for the magazine's vote against Mr. Modi are – that he is a lifelong member of RSS that is committed to the case of Hindutva; he was chief minister of Gujarat in 2002 when riots led to the slaughter of 1000 people; he has shown no remorse for the riots and thus refuses to allay the fears of the Muslim community.

Thus, the magazine begins with the prejudice that Hindutva discriminates against religious minorities, particularly Muslims, especially when its leaders like Mr. Modi pay obeisance to Hinduism. Pride in one's religion and country's religious roots cannot be construed as lethal to the religious beliefs of the minorities. There is lack of understanding of RSS's idea of being a Hindu, which has a cultural meaning that encompasses all Indians, irrespective of their religious differences.

Instead of debating the RSS's cultural nationalism, they used 2002 Gujarat's riot as a convenient tool to slander against BJP and RSS. The riot was turned into pseudo intellectual riot by a section of activists and intelligentsia. The hidden objective had been to vilify BJP and RSS. In the past too, NGOs like Sampradayikata Virodhi Committee (SVC) led by Subhadra Joshi, former communist, published a plethora of literature against RSS accusing its involvement in communal riots. However, commissions and committees appointed by the government and the judiciary found no substance in such allegations. The fact of the days is that the motive behind such attempt has been to avoid debate on secularism and nationalism. There have been very few occasions when the country has witnessed serious debates amongst intellectual groups.

The organized propaganda against BJP-RSS's involvement in the 2002 Gujarat riots remained uncurbed and received support from both the Indian state controlled by the Congress and its allies and some of the funding agencies and influential intellectuals from abroad. They undermined the role of judiciary and painted the riot as premeditates. How could the Western media fail to understand the burning of Karsevaks in Godhra which acted as provocation leading to riots? The fact was that the bullets of the state police to deter further violence took the lives of both Hindus and Muslims? This wasn't the first time that the Gujarat was facing the riots. It had the history of riots since independence. Another fact that got lost in the pseudo intellectual noise was that the Gujarati Muslims remained least affected by the propaganda taking shape outside the state.

The dismay echoed in the Western media over Mr. Modi's remark to Reuters in an interview on July 12, 2013 that he is an emotional person who would be moved even by the deaths of puppies on being asked if he had remorse for the Muslims killed during Gujarat riots was convoluted to imply that he compared Muslims to dogs. Had an animal lover used the analogy to suggest his kind heartedness, it would not have caused an outrage. After all, someone touched by pain inflicted on animals is considered to be of sensitive nature. However, the reaction of the media was coloured in bias against him, given that they are always suspecting communalism in his statements.

## 2 The New York Times, editorial "Narendra Modi's Rise in India", October 26, 2013.



### "Narendra Modi's Rise in India"

*The New York Times*

In 2002, rioters in the western Indian state of Gujarat savagely killed nearly 1,000 people, most of whom were part of the Muslim minority. Now, barely a decade later, Narendra Modi, who was the chief minister of Gujarat at the time and still holds the office, is a leading candidate to become prime minister of India.

Mr. Modi, a star of India's main opposition party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, would become prime minister if the party won enough seats in parliamentary elections next summer with support from its political allies. His rise to power is deeply troubling to many Indians, Muslims and its many other minorities. They worry he would exacerbate sectarian tensions that have subsided somewhat in the last decade.

Supporters of Mr. Modi argue that an investigation commissioned by India's Supreme Court cleared him of wrongdoing in the riots. And they insist that Mr. Modi, who is widely admired by middle-class Indians for making Gujarat one of India's fastest-growing states, can revive the economy, which has been weakened by a decade of mismanagement by the coalition government headed by the Indian National Congress Party.

There is no question that the Congress Party has failed to capitalize on the economic growth of recent years to invest in infrastructure, education and public institutions like the judiciary. And instead of trying to revive itself with new ideas and leaders, it is likely to be led in the coming election by Rahul Gandhi, the inexperienced scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family.

But Mr. Modi's strident Hindu nationalism has fueled public outrage. When Reuters asked him earlier this year if he regretted the killings in 2002, he said, if "someone else is driving a car and we're sitting behind, even then if a puppy comes under the wheel, will it be painful or not? Of course it is." That incendiary response created a political uproar and demands for an apology.

Mr. Modi has shown no ability to work with opposition parties or tolerate dissent. And he has already alienated political partners; this summer, an important regional party broke off its 17-year alliance with the BJP because it found Mr. Modi unacceptable.

His economic record in Gujarat is not entirely admirable, either. Muslims in Gujarat, for instance, were much more likely to be poor than Muslims in India as a whole in 2009 and 2010, according to a government report, though new data has shown a big improvement in the last two years.

India is a country with multiple religions, more than a dozen major languages and numerous ethnic groups and tribes.

Mr. Modi cannot hope to lead it effectively if he inspires fear and antipathy among many of its people.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: October 28, 2013

An earlier version of this editorial relied on a 2012 Indian government report on poverty rates, which included the rate for Muslims in Gujarat in 2009 and 2010. Newer data shows that poverty among that group has declined substantially in the last two years.



### Hypocrisy and tendencies to mislead

The New York Times, along with the Washington Post, is arguably the most influential newspaper in the entire Western world. The above cited editorial argues that Mr. Modi does not deserve to be the Prime Minister of India. However, this conclusion is drawn on a set of limited and misinterpreted analysis which displays lack in foresight, considered the hallmark of good journalism.

In a case of prejudice winning over facts, the editorial impatiently cited government data of 2009 and 2010 available in 2012 to claim poverty levels of Muslims in Gujarat below the all-India levels, not only trashing Mr. Modi's economic track record without looking at the full picture, but also suggesting discrimination on his part. An alternate view has been held by economists such as Bibek Debroy and Arvind Panagariya since 2011, who had said that social and human sectors in Gujarat are bound to show improvement in a few years after 2007 as a result of serious efforts put in by the Gujarat government from that year onwards. This side of analysis was not communicated to the readers either.

A corrected editorial was again published by the newspaper within two days after 2013 data corroborated what these economists had been saying. Newer data shows that poverty among the Muslims has declined substantially in the last two years. In fact, Gujarat has among the lowest poverty ratios for Muslims and it counts among the seven states which have lower poverty than Hindus in rural as well as urban areas.

The editorial also observed that Mr. Modi cannot tolerate dissent or work with opposition parties, and that Janata Dal (U), led by Mr. Nitish Kumar exited from

the NDA, a coalition led by BJP, in protest against his communal leanings. The editorial does not give a thought to Mr. Kumar's own political calculations in moving away from Mr. Modi. Janata Dal (U), that has helmed government in Bihar since 2010 faces Legislative Assembly elections in 2015, and had hoped to seek the Muslim vote in face of rising competition from Rashtriya Janata Dal. There were also indications of its alliance with Congress party to sideline RJD in Lok Sabha, and later Legislative elections. The editorial team also remained inept in predicting the political manouverings of Mr. Modi and BJP, which attracted a large number of regional parties as allies within a few months nearing election date. Instead, it remained constrained by its own biases towards them. This was the first time in India that a national level party struck pre-poll alliance with 25 regional parties under the umbrella coalition NDA.

Moreover, the hypocrisy of The New York Times needs to be highlighted in its selective show of concern for the well-being of Muslims in India while having openly supported George Bush II's decision to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein from power in 2003. It was not moved by arguments of human rights activists that the invasion would result in the needless deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent Muslims. United Nations Security Council's refusal to legitimise the war also did not alter its editorial policy. Later, after the embarrassing public capture of Mr. Hussein, and even after his death sentence, it backed the invasion and its disastrous aftermath. When reports of systematic torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers were leaked, the newspaper remained reticent in broaching their human rights concerns.

### 3 Peter Popham in *The Independent*, "Hindu nationalism set to take over the world's biggest democracy", April 4, 2014.



**“ Hindu nationalism set to take over the world's biggest democracy”**

**INDEPENDENT**

April 4, 2014

I can't suppress a shiver at the thought of Narendra Modi taking office. The world's biggest democratic exercise gets under way on Monday. If the pundits are right, Narendra Modi, leader of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will win the Indian general election by a country mile.

For the outside world, including both the European Union and the US, Modi is the man who has turbocharged the economy of Gujarat, the state he has ruled for 12 years, and who promises to do the same for the flagging Indian economy as a whole. He has also said he will act against corruption.

According to Golwalkar, India's minorities were suspects. "They are born in this land," he wrote, "but ... are they grateful to this land? ... Do they feel it is a duty to serve her? No! Together with the change in their faith, gone is the spirit of love and devotion for the nation." The dominant theme of Hindu nationalism has been suspicion of and hostility towards minorities, Muslims in particular. The idea that Hindus enjoy an exclusive, mystical connection to "Mother India" is central.

Narendra Modi's roots in the Sangh Parivar go deep. The child of poor shopkeepers, he became a quasi-monastic member of the movement as a young man, swearing lifelong fealty and celibacy. He has done nothing else in his life but work for and within Hindu nationalism. His choice of Varanasi to be his constituency bore out the depth of his devotion: for pious Hindus it is the holiest city in the world, where the devout come to die so they can immediately escape the cycle of birth and death and attain liberation. This week he again forcibly reminded India of that identity by raising the question of the slaughter of cows for export to Bangladesh – always an emotive issue for Hindus, for whom cows are sacred.

### **Vilification by Celebrated Journalists**

Unfair comparisons between Hindutva and Fascism: Celebrated liberal journalists, like Mr. Peter Popham, invoked alarm on the prospects of BJP's win in General Elections, 2014. Much of the prejudice of the Western media has already been revealed in our earlier observations. Here, we would stress on a serious allegation that gets levied against Modi, BJP and RSS, as brought up in this piece. And that is the ease with which they are labeled fascist, by likening the violence of Gujarat riots 2002 with the pogrom unleashed by Nazi mobs against Jews in Germany in the 1930s. Such comparisons would have been dismissed as silly, were they not so dangerous. The error of interchange of terms 'riots' and pogrom' was discussed in the previous section.

Such an analysis is based on strong prejudice against the very ethos of Hinduism, and an attempt to portray Hindus as murderous majoritarians. The fact is that since ancient times, Hinduism and India have always opened borders to welcome persecuted people throughout the world, contrary to the image being created of Hindus as being inherently intolerant and bigoted. Hindu nationalism is not anti-Muslims, or anti any other of its religious minorities, as explained a few paragraphs before. Media is itself unaware or keeps its readers in dark about the Muslim Rashtriya Manch, the Muslim wing of the RSS initiated in 2002, with a current membership of around 10,00,000 cadre, and covering 300 districts in 26 States.

India is a federal country, where state governments wield enormous powers of the kind that can make life uncomfortable for minorities if misused. The country has seen numerous state governments under the control of the BJP in the last three decades. Nowhere have minority rights been trampled upon or minorities discriminated against. Similarly, track record of BJP ruled states on the issue of communal violence is better against. The track record of these states on the matter of communal violence has also been better than that of non-BJP ruled states. The media in India is so vigilant that even minor occurrences of threats to minority rights by BJP-ruled governments would have triggered outrage. With such a report card in hand, BJP does not warrant likening with fascist organizations.

Even the social scientists known for their anti RSS tirade refused to draw a parallel between RSS and Fascism / Nazism. According to Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘the RSS treats society as an organism with a secular spirit, which is implanted not so much in the race as in a socio-cultural system and which will be regenerated over the course of time by patient work at the grassroots. Finally, in contrast to both Italian fascism and Nazism the RSS does not rely on the central figure of the leader.’<sup>3</sup>



**Dr Mohan Bhagwat**  
RSS Chief

The RSS remains in charge of the BJP and its members, and the rise of Mr. Modi should not be assumed as a case of an individual superseding the organisation, but rather has to be understood for being a clever political tactic stage-managed by RSS to help brighten BJP’s chances in these elections. Achin

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<sup>3</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity building, Impantation and Mobilisation (with special reference to Central India)* (Delhi :Viking Penguin India 1996), 63-4. Cited in Kanungo, Pralay. “RSS’s tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan.” (Delhi:Manohar 2002), 19.



Vanaik also lists some dissimilarities, such as absence of an explicitly anti-liberal/anti-democratic and anti-working class themes in RSS campaigning; the absence of any verbal anti-capitalist demagoguery; or the absence of any orientation to the theme of a ‘general revolt’ and also comments that the Hindu nationalist state would not necessarily be fascist<sup>4</sup>.

Shri M S Golwalkar, who headed RSS from 1940 to 1973, has been one of the most outstanding philosopher-activists. He believed in diversity of thoughts as a pre-requisite for healthy evolution of society and culture. In an interview to *The Motherland* in 1972, he categorically stated that “nature abhors uniformity” and warned the Western world against their attempt to achieve uniformity in all walks of life. He addressed the most vital issues of the nation, and in resonance to the fathers of the Indian constitution he wanted the psychological and artificial division of majority and minority to go away. Those who accuse RSS of majoritarianism are perhaps unaware of the debate in the India’s Constituent Assembly. Tajamul Hussain, Dr H C Mookerjee (a Christian) and others belonging to minority communities asserted common citizenship and considered the concept of minority as a British creation which was harmful to India’s unity and integrity.

## 4 Gardiner Harris, *The New York Times*, “Campaign for Prime Minister in India Gets Off to Violent Start”, September 17, 2013.

### “Campaign for Prime Minister in India Gets Off to Violent Start”

Gardiner Harris  
*The New York Times*

September 17, 2013



Gardiner Harris

India’s most important election in a generation began in earnest this month the same way consequential elections nearly always start here — with a proclamation and a deadly riot. In New Delhi,

<sup>4</sup> Vanaik, Achin. “Situating Threat of Hindu Nationalism: Problems with Fascist Paradigm” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39, no. 28 (July 9, 1994), 1729-48. Cited in Kanungo, Pralay. “RSS’s tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan.” (Delhi:Manohar 2002), 20.

the Bharatiya Janata Party announced last week that it had chosen Narendra Modi, one of the most divisive politicians in India's history, as its candidate for prime minister in next spring's national elections. Mr. Modi, the chief minister of the western state of Gujarat, is an unapologetic Hindu chauvinist who has been accused of mass murder.

Mr. Modi has tempered his anti-Muslim tirades and replaced them with a message of development based on a record in Gujarat that even critics acknowledge is impressive. But critics also say he and his Hindu nationalist party have benefited from past violence between Hindus and Muslims, using it to paper over Hindus' historic differences over caste and get them to vote as a bloc along religious lines.

Not coincidentally, mass rioting broke out last week in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous and politically important state, after a legislator from Mr. Modi's party circulated a fake video of two Hindus being lynched by a Muslim mob. Forty-four people were killed and 42,000 were displaced as villages were sacked..... India may be the world's most populous democracy, but election campaigns here are often fueled by hate and soaked in blood. By choosing Mr. Modi, a fiery orator who once peppered his speeches with anti-Muslim slurs, the Bharatiya Janata Party has raised the prospect that this election could be the deadliest in decades.

Hindus make up roughly 80 per cent of India's population and Muslims 13 per cent, a share about equal to that of blacks in the United States. Sushil Kumar Shinde, India's minister of Home Affairs [former], said that there had already been 451 cases of sectarian violence this year, surpassing last year's total of 410. He warned that violence was likely to intensify as elections approached.

Among the country's vast urban youth, Mr. Modi has rock-star appeal. Half of India's population is under 25, and most have seen little more from their leaders than the soporific near-whispers of octogenarians like Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. By contrast, Mr. Modi is a charismatic preacher of a resurgent India, a vision that millions mired in a sputtering economy find intoxicating. To many Hindus, he is a revelation.

To many Muslims, though, he is an abomination...

Some witnesses claimed that Mr. Modi encouraged the violence, which he has denied. He has never been charged, but close associates of his were convicted of inciting a riot.

The riots only bolstered Mr. Modi's political standing. Months later, having consolidated the Hindu vote, he led his party to a resounding victory in state elections. Since then he has dominated Gujarat's politics, the state's largest city, Ahmedabad, remains deeply segregated and most of India's Muslims hate him.

Mr. Modi refused requests over months for an interview (he rarely speaks to Western news organizations). Jay Narayan Vyas, a leader of Mr. Modi's opposition party, said that Mr. Modi was not to blame for the 2002 riots and that his party did not demonize Muslims.

"The BJP philosophy is justice to all but appeasement to none," he said. Mr. Vyas said that as prime minister, Mr. Modi would bring wealth to India and tame its political chaos. He said India needed a strong leader who "doesn't allow democracy to be a passport to misbehave."

As a child, Mr. Modi worked in his father's tea shop, and as a young man chose politics over a life of religious devotion. He rose through the ranks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a right-wing Hindu organization associated with the BJP that espouses a muscular religious nationalism.

In a country where family ties are paramount, Mr. Modi has remained single and is rarely seen, even with close relatives. But his loner status has endeared him to many, as it suggests that he has few reasons to solicit bribes, routine in Indian politics.

While never apologizing for the 2002 riots, Mr. Modi has shifted his focus recently to development, and he is now the darling of India's business elite, who hail him for his ability to cut through the country's infamous bureaucracy and create jobs.

"The reason why Modi needs a chance to lead is that he is the first politician since Nehru who has articulated a clear economic vision," said Tavleen Singh, an author and commentator who was referring to Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, and who argued that hate crimes were so routinely incited by Indian leaders that no major party or politician was innocent.

Car plants now crowd the outskirts of Ahmedabad. Top industrialists say they have located plants in Gujarat because Mr. Modi got them land, steady electricity and a pliant work force, a rare combination in much of India. Although Gujarat has just 5 per cent of India's population, it accounts for 16 per cent of its industrial production and 22 per cent of its exports.

A drive through Mr. Modi's constituency of Maninagar in this western city demonstrates both the hopes and fears swirling around him. The neighborhood is a mostly middle-class enclave of tidy homes and handsome apartment buildings with well-paved streets, a functional sewer system and constant electricity...

### **Sidelineing Journalistic Ethics**

A reading of the first paragraph, and one would assume an opinion piece will follow. Instead the above cited sample is a news report filed by popular journalist Gardiner Harris a few days after Mr. Modi was nominated by the BJP as the party's prime ministerial candidate in September 2013.

Good journalism requires that news reports, unlike columns and opinion pieces must be based solely on observed and recorded facts, and the writer must refrain from expressing own inferences.

Moreover, points-of-view of the other side also needs to be captured in the report, to enable readers to make their own judgment on the veracity of the issues. However, Mr. Harris's news reportage flouts the rules of objectivity. The headline itself is misleading and mischievous. Signs of psychosis also seem apparent in the way this report deliberately links the candidature of Mr. Modi with violence. The first paragraph begins with a description of him as 'an unapologetic Hindu chauvinist who is accused of mass murder'. Not only does this cloud the judgment of the reader, such characterisation is also misleading, since it does not give out the information that in 2012, a year before this report was filed, Mr. Modi had been given a clean chit by the Special Investigation Team constituted by Supreme Court in the case based on the 2002 communal riots filed against them by Ms. Zakia Jafri.

Such accusations have been flung at Mr. Modi by political opponents, social activists and media commentators. Many human rights activists and political opponents of Mr. George W Bush II accused him of mass murder in Iraq. But Mr. Harris, who uses the term "mass murder" to recount Gujarat riot has remained shy of charging Mr. Bush of similar actions. It is also unclear how Mr. Modi is deduced to be a chauvinist, but he would agree that he is an unapologetic Hindu. Then again, Mr. Bush always reiterated that he is a "born again" Christian, proud of his Christian roots. Yet, Mr. Bush escapes the tag of an unapologetic Christian chauvinist in foreign press like this newspaper and

the writings of Mr. Harris. The point of contention is that Hindu nationalism gets defamed each time.

Sometimes, journalists tend to hold back certain facts to colour stories in a particular manner, as is evident here in the way Mr. Harris manages to demonise Mr. Modi and BJP.

## POST-ELECTION RAMBLINGS

### **Reluctance to accept peoples' verdict**

Much like the pieces written before the General Elections in India, the commentaries after Mr. Modi's outstanding win were again subject to prejudiced writing and attempts at spearheading polemics against him. Most of the Western Media did not take kindly to the way Indians voted, and berated them for their folly by continuously indulging in panic spreading.

### **Continuous disrepute of Mr. Modi and dismissal of policy initiatives of past and future**

In a letter written to the Director General of the BBC by UK Member of Parliament, India-born Priti Patel on May 19, 2014, she registered the widespread protest of the British Indian community, particularly those of Gujarati origin against the offensive reporting of Mr. Modi in the television coverage of the General Elections of India on BBC Newsnight on May 16, 2014. She wondered why the programme focused exclusively on Mr. Modi's character on the day he was set for an important task of governing India. She lamented the absence of analysis on his forthcoming policy plans, and the persistent recall of Gujarat riots and his personal vilification. The points raised by her become crucial, as they form the crux of the widespread attitude that was adopted in Western media on the eve of Mr. Modi's electoral win.

## CONCLUSION

The samples of reporting and commentary discussed above are only a few amongst many more news reports, stories, columns, blogs and TV shows in the Western media that viciously targeted Mr. Modi and BJP.

Three reasons have been offered by political and social analysts to explain this manifest display of polemics, prejudice and psychosis in these writings. Firstly, Western media largely supports the geo-political agenda set by its domestic regimes even while appearing to criticise them, and habitually targets people, organisations, and politicians who refuse to toe their line. In the case of Mr. Modi, his bravado in the face of boycott by USA and UK did bring him in the line of fire. Also, Mr. Modi has been quite vocal about building an India where developed countries seek special permission to enter its territory, and whose economic output surpasses that of developed economies.

Secondly, and an important matter that has come up quite often in this paper is the persistent misunderstanding of what Hinduism and Hindutva implies, and hence the prejudiced accounts of all things and people who pride in being a Hindu. Leftist-Nehruvian history writing and political studies has neglected a proper critique of Hindutva that has affected the level of intellectual articulation emerging from academia.

Finally, Western media has also become a propaganda tool for vested interests that do not want to see India as an economic and military superpower. The covert alliance between the Western journalists and domestic pseudo-secular intellectuals has limited the growth of the democratic fabric of India. It would be worthwhile, therefore, to debate these issues. As we said in the beginning of this analysis, India needs to remain engaged with the West, and its media is an excellent platform for such conversations. At the same time, this exercise should be combined with an active critique of this media to keep a check on its propensity to become polemic, prejudiced and psychotic.

The analysis of the news and views of the Western press shows their inability to understand the march of democracy in India from one side of the political spectrum to the other. Open debate, leaders' direct engagement with common masses, and media's wide coverage of election campaign have marked the distinct features of successive Indian elections. The BJP and its predecessor Bharatiya Jana Sangha, which began its journey with 3 MPs in the First Lok Sabha (Parliament) in 1952 has been facing a vociferous debate on secularism and nationalism, alongside responding to its critics, which include some of the outstanding Western authors like J A Curran (*Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A study of RSS*), Criag Baxter (*The Bhartiya Janasangha: A Biography of an Indian Political Party*), Walter K Anderson (*Brotherhood in Saffron*), and Christophe Jaffrelot (*Hindu Nationalism*). The debates and discourses are features of democracy. And BJP has emerged from a party of margin to a party of majority, passing through such democratic scanner. Much water has flown in the rivers of Mississippi and Severn but their understanding of the dynamics of political ideologies and parties in India has remained static. The Western media remained the victim of various think tanks with stale thinking. Therefore, instead of making a critical enquiry into the understanding of the transformation and transition taking place in Indian society, they took shelter of outdated theories and dogmas to comprehend, to evaluate and to know the basics of RSS, Hindu civilization, Indian secular traditions and resilience of Indian nationalism.

In brief, the Indian General Elections 2014 throws fundamental question of credible reporting and calls for self-introspection and abandonment of the Western media's false conception as world leaders in the fourth estate.





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