

THE ELEPHANT GATHERS MOMENTUM WITH MODI AS MAHOUT

The collection of essays on the functioning of the Modi Government in the past 3.5 years is refreshing in both its tone as well as analysis, says GAUTAM MUKHERJEE

This book gives a very readable micro-analysis of many of the important schemes introduced by the Modi Government in the past few years. But it leaves out some others, writes MUKESH KUMAR SRIVASTAVA

This book was released by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley at the Nehru Memorial Auditorium amongst functions to commemorate the 3.5 year mark of the Modi Government. That the next day's headlines spoke of a former occupant of his high office applying for a job "at eighty", was based on an incidental quip from Jaitley, and no fault whatsoever of this worthy collection. It has 18 essays written by that relatively rare breed of intellectuals from the right-of-centre, in a field generally crowded with ideological Leftists, and not just in India. It includes amongst its line-up, think-tank functionaries, journalists, bureaucrats, diplomats, and other Government officials.

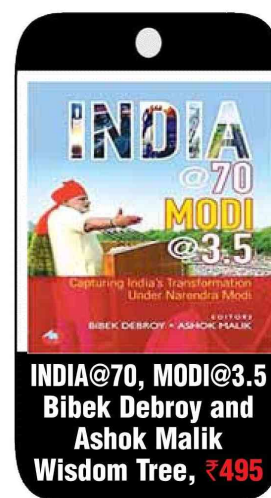
The tone of the book is confident and upbeat throughout. But perhaps Prime Minister Modi put the emergence of the BJP best. It is now at centre-stage with an electoral majority for the first time in its history, and also after 30 years nationally. He did so, in another context, that of Indo-American relations, by saying India was ready to get over "the hesitations of history". Swapna Dasgupta, now a Rajya Sabha MP, points out that the Modi-led BJP has set about expanding its political base as of 2015. This is borne out by the increase in vote shares creeping up towards 40% on average, and in isolated cases, even higher than 50%, at subsequent Assembly elections.

The engineering of it saw a new emphasis on providing succour to the rural and urban poor, and the lower middle classes. This was combined with unprecedented public spending on infrastructure in the absence of much initiative from the debt-ridden private sector. This increase in vote share, evident post demonetization, but before the advent of GST, is seen in the clutch of five states that went to the polls along with Uttar Pradesh.

It can well be contrasted with the share of the principal Opposition Congress declining from some 28% at the last General Elections in 2014 (to BJP's 31%), languishing, in some instances, into disastrous single-digits. And Dasgupta also makes the telling point that Modi's new politics, (ably aided by chief election strategist and Party President Amit Shah), shows no compunction in hopping back and forth across the Right-Left divide. He is something of a city expert from his earlier experience in Singapore, and makes the point that

India will soon become an urban majority country "within a generation". This is, of course, the glide path of emerging economies growing into developed ones. It is however a long way from MK Gandhi's "India lives in its villages". But the challenges of managing an influx of total a billion city folk will be considerable. Sanyal suggests that India will have to considerably pick up its game on "Urban Management". He sees urban poverty not as static but "dynamic flow", and says all countries which are now much better developed had tremendous slums in the urbanization phase. This includes London and New York.

He suggests facilitating the rural to urban migration process, and encouraging the dynamism that slums with "shops, mini-factories, people moving in and out," typify, at once bringing up visions of the Dharavi Slums in Mumbai, amongst the biggest in Asia. This means, keeping the organism alive and thriving through the transition, and much more than providing a roof over the migrant's head with "low-cost housing". The essays on Health, Water, Sustainable Development, Tax Reform, while well laid out and argued, leave one less enthused, because most members of the general public can't see any improvements visible on the ground. Ditto the much-publicized flop of the Swachh Bharat Mission, against a rising tide of filth, sewage, garbage and pollution. And the less said about the "Minimum Government Maximum Governance" slogan, probably the better. The Ministry of Defence remains a Tower of Babel where things are forever expected to happen but don't. The chapter on ASEAN and South East Asia by PM Heblikar is interesting because of the 11 heads of Government from the region slated to grace our Republic Day parade in January 2018. This, soon after Modi's own visit to meet all of them at the Manila Summit recently. India's attitude to South East Asia has been ambivalent and luke-warm for too long, despite policy professions of "Act East". The efforts being made now for a better political and economic engagement with the region promise to yield good dividends. Anirban Ganguly of SPMPRF flags Modi's desire to create a "New India", a self-renewal, driven by: "innovation, hard-work and creativity". Diplomat Veena Sikri



highlights the remarkable rise in India's "soft power" under Modi's determined engagement with the countries of the world, some visited by an Indian Prime Minister after decades, some for the very first time. Recent opinion polls show that the masses of India as well as the urban elite still repose great faith in Modi's leadership, at a time when the "honeymoon period" is long over. And this by itself is the main message at the end of more than 3.5 years of the Modi Government.

The reviewer is an entrepreneur and former corporate executive

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi completed three and a half years in the government, there has been much contemplation and deliberation on the achievements of his Government in terms of foreign policy and socio-economic reforms. The book *India @ 70, Modi @ 3.5: Capturing India's Transformation Under Narendra Modi*, which is under review, attempts to provide answers to such debate.

The first three chapters dwell on the philosophical, political and socio-economic underpinnings of governance under the Modi government. Through an analysis of speeches and statements made by Prime Minister Modi on different occasions and platforms, author Anirban Ganguly introduces the basic philosophical essence of "Narendra Modi's Transformative Philosophy of Governance" — an integral part of 'Modi Doctrine'. With candid explication of excerpts and initiatives, the author describes the main elements of PM Modi as embedded in Jan-Shakti, Jan Bhaagidari, Samvad, and Yuva-Shakti. Simply put, it means citizens' participation as the 'agents of change' to 'bring about an alteration of mindset of those in power and towards power' (p. 3). The most significant and conspicuous instance of Jan-Shakti and Jan Bhaagidari, cited by the author, is the support that the policy on

demonetisation received despite drawing criticisms from different quarters. In his view, PM Modi stresses on bringing synergy among the various parts of governance — political class, civil servants and the people — to 'reform, perform and transform' (p.5). In building a "New India", particular focus is given on harnessing the 'great demographic dividend' (p.6). Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the incremental changes brought by the present government in the socio-economic realm. Swapna Dasgupta observes that 'there was visible significant shift in priorities and approach' (p. 13). He adds that the government has stressed on improving investment climate as well as domestic capacities, and expanding its social base aimed at poorer sections of the population through initiatives like Ease of Doing Business, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Jan Dhan Yojana, Swachh Bharat and BHIM. In 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance', Debroy explicates initiatives — Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) and DBT — that facilitate citizens' participation.

The next three chapters focus on tax reform and LPG programmes in India. Arvind Virmani argues that while GST has been successfully implemented, there remain certain challenges to be addressed. Recognising the difficulties in removing subsidies, authors Kir

R. Smith and Hindol Sengupta, discuss the cost and the scale of implication in providing LPG through initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), while linking it to DBT. The next seven chapters analyse health and social protection schemes as well as policies at urbanisation, connectivity, water and energy security. The chapters argue that the government has taken into cognizance that there is an intrinsic link not only between economic, water and energy security, but also connectivity and urbanisation. Uttam Kumar Sinha says that 'water security is a critical enabler to economic growth' (p.109). Government initiatives like International Solar Alliance (ISA), Namami Gange and Sagaramala, alongside health security schemes like the National Health Protection Scheme, discussed in the seven chapters, are aimed at bringing synergies in different sectors for integrated and sustainable development. The other schemes targeting different groups of people in terms of health and social security include Atal Pension Yojana (APY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao', Skill India, Make in India, Startup India, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY), Smart Cities, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and such others.

The fifteenth and the eighteenth chapters portray the balanced mix of hard and soft-power elements of Modi's foreign policy. By focusing on defence procurement and modernisation, author Nitin A. Gokhale illuminates on the 'new sense of vigour and purpose in the largely moribund MoD' (p. 162) infused during Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar's stint. By referring to Kautilya's Arthashastra, Veena Sikri elucidates the soft-power discourse of Modi's foreign policy based on Panchamrit — *samman* (dignity and honour); *samvad* (greater engagement and dialogue); *samridhi* (shared prosperity); *suraksha* (regional and global security); and *sanskriti evam sabyata* (cultural and civilisational linkages) (p.184).

Promotion of soft-power through culture and civilisation has been a sine qua non of PM Modi's visit to various countries and his espousal of International

Day of Yoga. Chapters sixteenth and seventeenth discuss Modi's foreign policy towards South-east Asia and China. Expounding the conduct of relations with South East Asian region through Act East Policy, PM Heblikar draws to light the significance of the region in Modi's foreign policy. He identifies many common areas of interest where cooperation is possible between India and the region, including defence procurement, demining, disaster management, terrorism, etc. Similarly, Jayadeva Ranade evaluates PM Modi's policy positions towards China, citing references to issues ranging from People's Liberation Army (PLA) intrusion at Chumar in Ladakh to that of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and terrorism. He observes lucidly Modi's 'new policy of firmly raising issues of concern with China', particularly in the wake of its growing assertiveness. (p.180) The book endeavors to offer a balanced perspective to the reader by answering the questions pertaining to the working of the Modi government as well as highlights the gaps that need to be filled in some of the sectors for transforming India. However, the editors' note underlines, "...while there is broad appreciation, as it is to be expected, writers make subjective calls on where they see shortcomings and scope for improvement..." (p. xi). One of the limitations of the book, and as candidly expressed by the editors, is that the collection of essays discussed some sectors in an elaborate way while leaving other important sectors. Hence, the book falls short of providing a full picture of the working of the Modi government. Indeed, the readers will have to wait for the 'sequel' to this book, as indicated by the editors, for a holistic picture. Nonetheless, the novelty of the book lies in its micro-level analysis, delving into specific schemes undertaken by the government. Also, it delves deeper into the realm of nation-building, positing the Modi government and its contribution to the same. It is a good read for both scholars and practitioners who have questions regarding the accomplishments of the Modi government.

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