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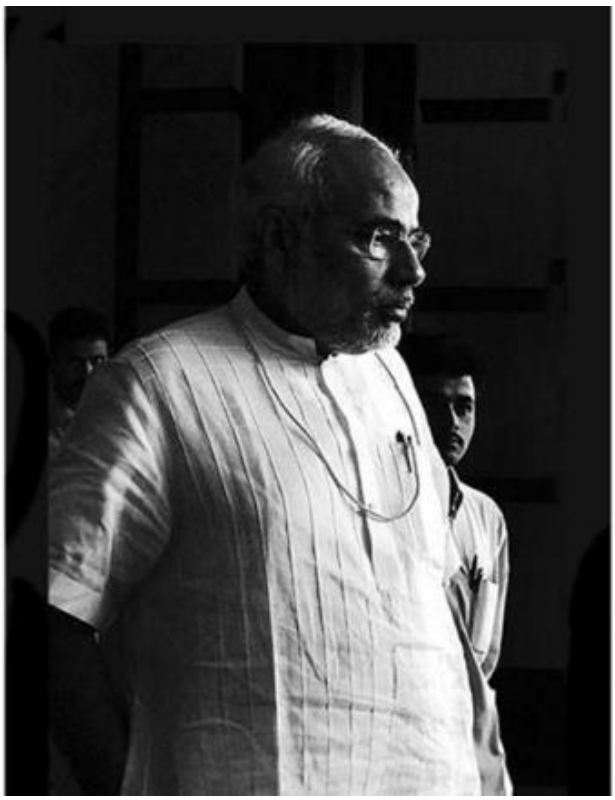
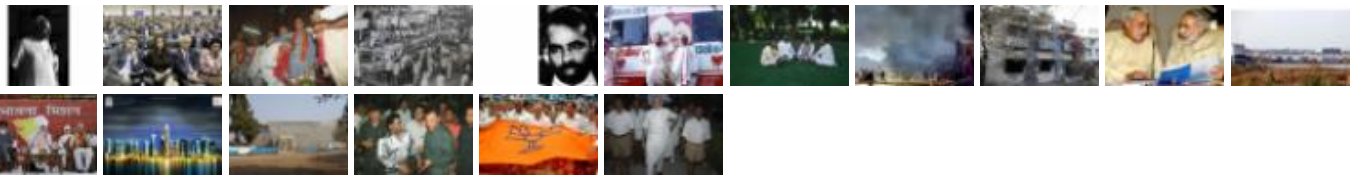
The Emperor Uncrowned

The rise of Narendra Modi

By VINOD K JOSE | March 1, 2012





ON THE AFTERNOON OF 22 APRIL 1498, a few kilometres off the shore of the East African port of Malindi, Captain-Major Vasco da Gama was a happy man. After drifting for four frustrating months up the continent's southeastern coast, from Mozambique to Mombasa, facing the hostility of local rulers and Arab and African merchants, the Portuguese captain had finally found a navigator who could take him to India.

The man who steered da Gama across the Indian Ocean to Calicut—and into the history books as the "discoverer" of the ocean route to Asia—was a Gujarati named Kanji Malam. A trader of cotton and indigo from Kutch, Malam made regular voyages to the African coast to barter his goods for gold and ivory.

That it was a Gujarati who led da Gama to India should come as no surprise. The Gujarati aptitude for navigation, seafaring and commerce was already legendary, and Gujarati merchants had established trading routes stretching from the Persian Gulf

to present-day Malaysia and Indonesia.

For two millennia before the Portuguese arrived, Gujarat had been at the junction of the world's two main trading axes: the Silk Road and the Spice Route, and it was a principal distribution hub for goods from African, Arab and Asian ports entering the subcontinent. From the coast, one inland trade route went east to Bihar; another north to Mathura; and a third south to Marathwada. Merchants from Greece, Arabia, Persia, Africa and China came to do business in Gujarat centuries before European explorers set foot in India.

I

IN THE SECOND WEEK OF JANUARY 2011, more than 10,000 businessmen from 100 countries descended on Gandhinagar for the fifth instalment of the biannual summit branded as "Vibrant Gujarat"—a marathon matchmaking ceremony of investment pledges and signings intended to bring business to Gujarat and, not incidentally, to make headlines while doing so. The 2011 mela did not disappoint on either count: by the time it was all over, the businessmen had promised investments in excess of $450 billion, the largest-ever sum for a single event in an emerging economy, and the media had obligingly trumpeted both the jaw-dropping figure and the unending chorus of corporate titans paying tribute to Gujarat and its chief minister.

On the first day of the summit—held inside the newly-constructed Mahatma Mandir, a monument to Gandhi in the unlikely form of a convention centre—the stage was preposterously crowded, in keeping with the usual tradition at Indian public events. Eighty people were seated on the dais in three rows, but all eyes were on the man at the centre, the organiser and unquestioned star of the show, Narendra Damodardas Modi. Wearing an ivory-coloured suit and his trademark rimless Bulgari glasses, with a neatly-trimmed grey beard, Modi looked every bit the serious man of action: he listened intently to every speaker, deep in concentration that was rarely broken by a smile. At his side were envoys from the two nations who had signed on as official partners for the fair, the Japanese ambassador and the Canadian high commissioner, and these men were in turn flanked by the two most prominent ambassadors from India Inc, Ratan Tata and Mukesh Ambani. Another three dozen corporate chairmen and CEOs were also on stage, smiling and satisfied, along with the prime minister of Rwanda and the president of the US-India Business Council, who announced from the stage that he wished to see the United States as a partner country at the next summit.

Vibrant Gujarat has been successfully marketed as a major global business event—so much so that Modi's American lobbying and public relations firm, APCO Worldwide, recently won two international awards for its work promoting the project. The five summits since 2003 have generated investment pledges worth $920 billion for Gujarat, but their value for Modi can't be measured by mere numbers. In fact, the figures themselves may be misleading: though Modi claims an implementation rate of greater than 60 percent for pledges made at the summits, an analysis of data from the state industry department suggests that only 25 percent of the promised investments have actually been made. While one-quarter of a trillion dollars is hardly small change, the considerable disparity between the image and the reality actually highlights the tactical genius behind the investment summits, which are the crowning achievement in one of the most extraordinary acts of reinvention in Indian politics.

Modi has turned the act of investing in what has long been one of India's most business-friendly and industrialised states into a high-profile spectacle—and amplified the disclosure of annual investment inflows into singular triumphant announcements. In other words, Modi has successfully deployed the ancient mercantile and entrepreneurial energy of Gujarat to overhaul his own image.

Ten years after the anti-Muslim pogroms that killed more than 1,200 Gujaratis, Modi has managed to bury the past and resurrect his own extinct prospects for political advancement, replacing epithets like "fascist", "mass murderer" and "Hindutva fanatic" with a title of his own choosing: *Vikaas Purush*, or Development Man. For the first families of Indian business, Modi is "the next leader of India", "a visionary", "the unstoppable horse", and "the CEO who can lead the country", to quote just a sampling of the effusive endorsements from men named Tata, Ambani and Mittal.

MODI HAD NOT GOTTEN OFF to a good start with India's leading business figures. Nine years ago, in February 2003, the

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)—the country's biggest and most important business trade association—held a special session at its auditorium in New Delhi: "Meeting with Narendra Modi, the New Chief Minister of Gujarat". The meeting was organised after a special request from Modi: he had just won a resounding victory in state elections in the wake of the riots, but he was still facing public condemnation from national business leaders and dealing with an economy reeling from the impact of the violence.

The mobs who ran wild in the streets of Gujarat did not confine their rage to local Muslims: more than 1,000 trucks were set afire, and the torching of a shipment of Opel Astra cars from a General Motors factory made international headlines. One estimate suggested that industry in Gujarat had lost R20 billion ($409 million) in the riots. The spectre of communal violence made international investors jittery—new foreign direct investment inflows had all but dried up by September 2002—while Indian industrialists openly feared further chaos in what was, even before Modi's arrival, one of the most critical states for their business operations.

In the months after the riots, some of corporate India's biggest names had publicly voiced their anger and concern. Deepak Parekh, the CEO of HDFC Bank, said that India had lost its face as a secular country, and that he was ashamed of what had happened in Gujarat. Cyrus Guzdar, the CMD of the shipping company AFL, compared the violence against Muslims in Gujarat to "a genocide". Two of Bangalore's biggest IT chieftains, Narayana Murthy of Infosys and Azim Premji of Wipro, issued strong public condemnations. At a CII national meeting in April 2002, the chairwoman of the energy major Thermax, Anu Aga, received a standing ovation after delivering an impassioned speech about the suffering of Muslims in Gujarat.

Modi knew he was under pressure. But he also knew that he had won an overwhelming electoral mandate from the voters of Gujarat—and that Gujarat, riots or no riots, was of critical importance to the chieftains of Indian business. He came to Delhi to mend his image with the captains of industry, but he would do so, as always, on his own terms.

Modi was joined on stage by the heads of two venerable business families, Jamshyd Godrej and Rahul Bajaj, as well as the director-general of the CII, Tarun Das. If Modi expected a friendly welcome from Godrej and Bajaj, he did not get it. After recounting an incident from the previous month in Mumbai, when an Oxford University professor had heckled Modi at a public event meant to celebrate his election, Godrej called on Modi to use the mandate from his victory to ensure the safety and security of all Gujaratis.

Bajaj was even more outspoken: he began by declaring that 2002 had been a "lost year" for Gujarat. Looking at Modi, he asked, "Why don't we get investment in Kashmir, the Northeast, or Uttar Pradesh and Bihar? It is not just the lack of infrastructure, but also the sense of insecurity. I hope this won't happen in Gujarat—all this comes to mind because of the unfortunate events last year."

Bajaj turned once again to Modi: "We would like to know what you believe in, what you stand for, because leadership is important," he said. "You are today the undisputed leader of your party and government in Gujarat and we want to know you better ...We are prepared to work with governments of all hues, but we also have our own views on what is good for our society and what works for it."

Modi listened patiently to the torrent of criticism, silent but furious.

"You and your pseudo-secular friends," Modi roared at the leaders of Indian industry, "can come to Gujarat if you want an answer. Talk to my people. Gujarat is the most peaceful state in the country." Tension filled the room. Modi continued, turning to Godrej and Bajaj: "Others have vested interest in maligning Gujarat. What is your interest?"

Modi carried his fury back to Gujarat, and quickly set about showing the CII who really had the upper hand. Within a few days, a group of Gujarati businessmen close to Modi—including Gautam Adani of Adani Group, Indravadan Modi of Cadila Pharmaceuticals, Karsan Patel of Nirma Group, and Anil Bakeri of Bakeri Engineers—had established a rival organisation, which they called the Resurgent Group of Gujarat (RGG), all of whose members threatened to withdraw from the CII on the

grounds that it had humiliated and insulted Modi and all Gujaratis. The RGG issued a press statement swearing by the pride of Gujaratis, and demanded that the Gujarat chapter of the CII resign for "failing to protect the interests of the state".

Faced with an open revolt from a crucial state and its powerful business community, Tarun Das had good reason to worry: more than 100 companies from Gujarat were threatening to leave the CII, which would cripple the organisation's presence in Western India; back in Delhi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government began to limit the CII's access to its ministers, jeopardising the group's core mission as a lobbying organisation.

Das reached out to the BJP leader Arun Jaitley, then the Union law minister and a close friend of Modi, seeking to make amends. Over a two-hour conversation at his house, Jaitley quizzed Das on the CII and its intentions, and then told Das that he would raise the issue with Modi, who was expected to come home for dinner one day soon.

A few days later, Jaitley told Das that the issue could be resolved: Modi wanted a formal apology from the CII. Das was eager to oblige, though not without some hesitation, as he later recounted in a long post-retirement interview with *Business Today*:

"The evening I was leaving to meet Modi [to deliver the letter of apology], my wife accosted me, 'You just can't do this....' Among our close friends are Anu Aga, Azim Premji, Jamshyd Godrej and several from the Parsi and Muslim communities. My answer was that I had two options: I could quit and say I will not do this. Else, I had to look after our members."

Das preferred to characterise his response as something less than an apology ("It was not an apology but we were sure that the media would make out it to be one," he said), but the letter he personally delivered to Modi in Ahmedabad speaks for itself: "We, in the CII, are very sorry for the hurt and pain you have felt, and I regret very much the misunderstanding that has developed since the 6th of February, the day of our meeting in New Delhi." Three months later, in a further gesture of reconciliation, the CII helped Modi organise his first international meeting with investors, in Zurich, under the aegis of the World Economic Forum.

"Over the years, one by one by one, Modi won everyone in the business community," a former senior CII officer told me. "At first, when Bajaj, Godrej and others spoke out, people noticed it was mostly the Parsis coming out against Modi. Everyone perceived it as the Parsi minority feeling insecure—that was how people interpreted the resistance against Modi. Modi realised it, and he got Ratan Tata to take an award from Vajpayee at one of the Vibrant Gujarat summits—that was it. That way Modi is very smart, very shrewd, you know. He plays his cards very slowly."

It is no secret that Modi hopes to be the BJP candidate for prime minister at the next general elections, which are due by 2014. Party insiders are already speculating that he may shift to Delhi and assume the presidency of the BJP, to sideline his rivals and position himself even more prominently on the national stage. In a poll conducted by *India Today* in January, 24 percent of respondents said they wanted Modi as the next prime minister, putting him in first place; perhaps more significantly, his numbers in the same survey had doubled in the previous six months. But 2012 marks a crucial year for Narendra Modi: along with the 10th anniversary of the Gujarat riots, his third statewide elections are due in December. Another victory at home will lift Modi's stock even higher, and a defeat, however unlikely, will cost him dearly.

II

THE STORY OF NARENDRA MODI is also the story of a series of organisations under which he was nurtured and trained; it is the story of the political rise of those organisations in the past half-century, and the rise of Modi within their ranks.

For Modi, the first and most important of these organisations—the one that did the most to shape him and his worldview, and to advance his political ambitions—was the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

In the decades following its founding in 1925, the RSS, or the Sangh, advanced a militant Hinduism that challenged the nonviolent and tolerant Hinduism represented by Gandhi. At the same time, the RSS propagated a hardline religious

nationalism that sought to define the country as a Hindu *rashtra*, in stark contrast to the secular nationalism espoused by the Indian National Congress. By the time of Independence and Partition, the hatred for Gandhi and the Congress among the Hindu right had become so intense that a former RSS man, Nathuram Godse, assassinated the Mahatma in 1948. Jawaharlal Nehru banned the organisation, and more than 20,000 RSS workers were arrested.

The Sangh was unbanned in 1949, but for decades thereafter it retained the spirit of an underground organisation. In Gujarat, its growth was steered by the quiet and studious efforts of Laxmanrao Inamdar, known within the RSS as *Vakil Saheb*. Inamdar established a diffuse network of *shakhas* (branches) across the state, patiently building an army of volunteers from the ground up. One of these volunteers, who joined a shakha in the small but mythically significant town of Vadnagar as an eight-year-old boy, was Narendra Modi.

The shakha in Vadnagar had been established in 1944 by a schoolteacher named Babubhai Nayek, one of several Sangh activists from Maharashtra who fanned out across India and enrolled themselves in public educational institutions to recruit young men into the RSS. In the period after Gandhi's assassination, Nayek kept a low profile, concentrating on his job but occasionally hosting Vakil Saheb, the state leader, to address new recruits. On Diwali day in 1958, one of the young boys who lined up to take the oath of *bal swayamsevak* (child volunteer) from Vakil Saheb was Narendra Modi.

"Narendra always wanted to do something different. Something more than what we did on a daily routine at home and school. And the RSS shakha just provided him that," Sombhai Modi, Narendra's oldest brother, told me.

Modi was the third of six children born to Damodardas Mulchand Modi and his wife, Heeraben. The family, from the low Ghanchi caste, lived deep inside the narrow and winding alleys of the medieval city of Vadnagar. The Ghanchis have traditionally been pressers and sellers of vegetable oil, but Damodardas Modi—to provide for his large family—also ran a teashop at the Vadnagar railway station, while Heeraben and the children operated the oil mill. "Narendra used to help his father in the mornings at the railway station, and when the bell rang at the school, he just crossed over the railway track to come to class," recalled Dr Sudhir Joshi, a schoolmate of Modi who now practices ayurvedic medicine in Vadnagar.

Modi attended Bhagavatacharya Narayanacharya High School, a co-ed Gujarati-medium institution situated at the entrance to the old city of Vadnagar. Prahlad Patel, who was Modi's Sanskrit teacher, told me he remembered the chief minister as "only an average student. But he showed keen interest in debates and theatre. I set up the debating club at the school, and I remember Narendra was among the regular students in the club."

"In the evening, after the classes, we used to dump our books at home and run straight to the shakha," Sudhir Joshi told me.

"Between assisting father, mother, and being at the school, it was his shakhas that he really took the most serious of all," Sombhai said. "Narendra gave up eating salt and oil, and we thought he was on a mission to become a mendicant."

For a young man in search of "something more", as his brother put it, the RSS gave Modi a sense of purpose and direction. But he remained unsure of his calling: whether to pursue the priestly life or volunteer himself towards the advancement of Hindutva. His parents had arranged him a marriage in keeping with the traditions of the Ghanchi caste in Vadnagar, which involved a three-step process that began with an engagement at age three or four, a religious ceremony (*shaadi*) by the age of 13, and cohabitation (*gauna*) around the age of 18 or 20, when the parents felt the time had come. Modi was engaged to a girl three years younger than him, Jashodaben Chimanlal, from the neighbouring town of Brahamanwada. They had completed *shaadi* when Modi was only 13, Sombhai told me. But at age 18, with a higher call beckoning him, Modi decided to set off and wander in the Himalayas, leaving his wife and two uncertain families behind.

The only source of information for Modi's travels during this time is Modi himself: even his family had no idea of his whereabouts. "Mother and all of us were very worried for him," Sombhai recalled. "We had no idea where he had disappeared to. Then, two years later, he just turned up one day. He told us he had decided to end his *sanyas* and would go to Ahmedabad and work at our uncle Babubhai's canteen."

“I remember,” one of the Modi family’s neighbours in Vadnagar told me, “before Narendra left again, his mother wanted to set him up with his wife, so they asked Jashodaben’s parents to send her here for gauna. On the day Jashodaben came for gauna, Modi fought with the family and left home again.”

In Ahmedabad, Modi helped his uncle run a canteen at the city bus stand, and then set up his own teacart on a cycle near Geeta Mandir. A senior RSS *pracharak* (propagandist) who was then in Ahmedabad—and who insisted, like many sources, that he not be named for fear of angering the chief minister—recalled that it was at this point that Modi decided to return to the RSS. “Some pracharaks used to have tea at his cart after they returned from their morning shakha,” he said. “Modi made an impression on them, given also his background in shakha in Vadnagar. Soon he wound up his teacart and moved to the RSS [state] headquarters, as an assistant.”

“There were about 12 to 15 people living together [at Hedgewar Bhavan, the RSS headquarters in Gujarat] when Vakil Saheb invited me to join them,” Modi told his authorised biographer, MV Kamath. “I was working in the Sangh office then, and decided that’s where I belonged.” His daily routine, as Modi recalled it, involved making tea and breakfast for the pracharaks in the morning, “after which I had to clean up the entire building, consisting of eight or nine rooms. I swept and mopped the whole place, and washed both Vakil Saheb’s and my clothes ... This was my routine for at least a year, and this was the time when I met many people.” Modi’s stay at Hedgewar Bhavan coincided with a crucial period for the Sangh both in Gujarat and nationwide, when it shed its image as a fanatical underground sect and emerged as a legitimate and powerful political force.

According to Tridip Suhrud, an eminent social scientist based in Ahmedabad, there were four factors that helped the RSS come “overground” in Gujarat. “First was the *Navnirman* (“New Fostering”) movement of 1974. It started primarily among engineering college students, over a hike of food bills in the hostels, but it soon snowballed into a state-wide student agitation against an increasingly corrupt and repressive government,” Suhrud said. “Second was the Emergency: the RSS played an active part in the grand coalition of socialists and Gandhians in their fight against Indira Gandhi. Third was its role in charity: the RSS mobilised its cadres in 1971, when a grave famine hit the state, and did so again in 1979, when a dam across the Machu River collapsed and killed thousands. Finally, the RSS benefited from the displeasure of the princely families in Gujarat, who had been stripped of their titles and revenues by Mrs Gandhi in 1971, and were looking for a political force opposed to her.”

Modi quickly acquired greater responsibilities within the RSS in Gujarat, including arranging reservations on buses and trains for travelling Sangh leaders, as well as opening letters sent to Hedgewar Bhavan. At around the same time, Modi went to attend the one-month officer training camp at RSS national headquarters in Nagpur, which was a prerequisite for him to take up an official position in the Sangh. “The level one training was a basic requirement to be taken seriously in the RSS, and Modi completed it when he was 22 or 23,” the senior pracharak told me. Modi was then appointed as the RSS pracharak in-charge for Gujarat of the Sangh’s student front, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), a position he held through the Emergency. The Sangh pracharak in-charge of a frontal organisation like the ABVP is supposed to function like an underground guide—to be like a vein hidden under the skin, exercising authority away from the public eye—but Modi’s personal style, which chafed at such restrictions, was already making itself evident.

“Modi had firm opinions on even smaller things, and the senior leaders thought that he was attention-seeking,” a second senior RSS pracharak, who was a member of the Gujarat ABVP in the 1970s, told me. “The Sangh leaders did not like it.”

The pracharak related an incident that took place during the Emergency: “We in the ABVP were told to organise agitations against the government, from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and one day we were holding a meeting at the Bhullabhai Char Rasta in Ahmedabad,” he said. “We were supposed to speak against the government, but in a sober tone, because that was the Sangh style, and also the police and the intelligence agencies were watching over us. But while the meeting was on, Narendrabhai passed by on a cycle. He was furious at the composed serenity in our protest. He jumped onto the stage, grabbed the mike and began giving a rabble-rousing speech, spitting abusive words, and not hiding his anger against the government.”

“The audience loved it. But that night, at Hedgewar Bhavan, the senior Sangh leaders scolded Modi for his detrimental and unwarranted act—for a nearly-underground Sangh pracharak to come out in the open. ‘Forget about speaking,’ they lectured him, ‘you shouldn’t have even gone there. Even if the meeting failed, it would be okay, but discipline and obedience to one’s role is superior to all.’”

For all his allegiance to the Sangh and its ideology, the organisation’s structure and style—placing the group above the individual, restraining one’s anger, respecting the protocols established by the leadership—did not mesh with Modi’s personality.

Shankarsinh Vaghela, who was senior to Modi in the RSS and the BJP, and later became chief minister of Gujarat and one of Modi’s bitter rivals, recalled that even as a young man Narendra chafed at the strictures of the Sangh. “Modi used to miss the morning shakha quite often by sleeping late,” Vaghela said. “He always used to do things differently from others in the group—if all of us wore long-sleeved kurtas, he used to wear short sleeves, and when all of us wore khaki shorts, he wore white shorts. And I remember one day the visiting RSS leader Golwalkar questioning Modi in public for keeping a trimmed beard.”

But Modi’s lack of discipline was overshadowed by the reputation he had earned as an efficient and dutiful organiser: if the leaders entrusted him with a task, they could be sure it would be completed. When the Sangh had to covertly publish its literature during the Emergency, the work was sent to Gujarat, and Modi eagerly and efficiently managed the printing of millions of pamphlets in multiple languages, and then dispatched them safely and secretly to branches of the Sangh across the country, the second senior pracharak told me. On another occasion, when the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), another Sangh frontal organisation, held its statewide meeting in Gujarat, Modi was responsible for planning and organising the conference—a duty that included guarding a large amount of cash. The VHP leaders were anxious about the money, but Modi devised a rustic yet practical solution: he dug a hole in the ground and laid his bed over it.

Within a few short years, Modi’s skills as an organiser and worker had made him indispensable to the RSS in Gujarat. But he recognised that more would be required to turn himself from a manager for the Sangh leaders into a leader in his own right. Many of the senior men who he assisted during the Emergency had since been elected to the state assembly or to Parliament; others had become ministers in the Janata Party government in Gujarat. Modi returned to Nagpur and completed two additional courses of training at RSS headquarters. “He was ambitious,” the first senior pracharak told me, “and he knew that without the level two and level three training, he would never make the transition to the BJP and become a big leader.”

In 1978, one year after the end of the Emergency, Modi was appointed as the RSS pracharak in-charge for six districts in central Gujarat. Only three years later, at the young age of 31, he was promoted again to become the liaison between the Sangh and all its frontal organisations across the whole of Gujarat.

III

MODI HAD RISEN QUICKLY within the RSS, but to gain real political power, he had to cross over from the purely ideological realm of the RSS into the BJP. That process began in 1987, when he was appointed as the organisation secretary for Gujarat—the person within the state RSS responsible for overseeing the BJP. Unlike the BJP state or national presidents, who are public figures, the organisation secretary is supposed to operate privately, directing the party from behind the scenes and serving as a “bridge” between the RSS and its political affiliate.

The eight years that Modi spent as organisation secretary in Gujarat coincided with an era of rapid growth for the state BJP, which went from 11 seats in the state assembly in 1985 to 121 a decade later. Though there were two very senior leaders at the helm of the state party—Keshubhai Patel and Shankarsinh Vaghela, both former Gujarat BJP presidents—Modi became a third power centre, exerting influence over the formation of alliances and the selection of candidates for state and national elections.

During this period, there were three serious episodes of communal rioting in Gujarat, each with greater death toll than the last:

208 dead in 1985, 219 in 1990 and 441 in 1992. The increasing communal friction played to the advantage of the BJP, which consolidated a growing share of the Hindu vote in the state. To capitalise on the tension, the BJP organised a series of roadshows, beginning with two statewide campaigns in which Modi played a key behind-the-scenes role: the Nyay Yatra in 1987 and the Lok Shakti Rath Yatra in 1989. In 1990, when the BJP president LK Advani began his Ayodhya Rath Yatra, which would eventually bring down the Babri Masjid, he set out from the Somnath Temple in Gujarat, and Modi facilitated the first stretch of the campaign. The following year, Modi received his first national assignment, as the organiser of an ambitious cross-country Ekta (Unity) Yatra helmed by the BJP's new president, Murli Manohar Joshi, which began at the southern tip of Tamil Nadu and culminated with the raising of the tricolour in Srinagar.

By the early 1990s, the Hindu nationalist movement had fully arrived as a formidable political force: in electoral terms, the BJP had enough seats in Parliament to decide the fate of coalition governments, and had come to power in its own right in a few states. Out on the street, it had demonstrated its capacity to mobilise huge crowds with religious fervour, as in the case of the Babri Masjid, or with militant nationalism, in the case of Joshi's long march to Kashmir.

For the duration of the Ekta Yatra, Modi planned the route and organised the events at each stop along the way. While Modi, as expected, efficiently executed the tasks at hand, a party leader who accompanied the Yatra recalled that here, again, there were signs of his inability or unwillingness to follow orders. Modi often diverged from Joshi's instructions, the party leader said, and related one anecdote: Joshi had requested that all those who travelled with the Yatra, from the biggest national leaders to the smallest local volunteers, should eat their meals together. But Modi often disappeared and went off on his own. "When the Yatra reached Bangalore, Modi went missing with Anant Kumar, another leader from Bangalore," the party leader said. "Joshi was furious when he did not find Modi eating with us. The next morning, Joshi scolded Modi in front of us, saying he should behave himself, and discipline is sacrosanct, even if he organised the Yatra."

But when Modi returned to Gujarat after the journey, he operated with even more autonomy, which brought him into conflict with Shankarsinh Vaghela. Ten years senior to Modi, Vaghela was then far more powerful within the BJP: he was the party's main fundraiser and the broker of alliances with the secular parties. Vaghela was in turn outranked by the seniormost leader in the state party, Keshubhai Patel, who was positioned to become chief minister if the BJP came into power. Modi was supposed to be the "bridge" between the RSS and the party, but his tendency to give orders and act on his own began to create friction with the BJP leaders. "He was a hard worker, but he was not used to working with a low profile, as is expected of an organisation secretary," said K Govindacharya, who was then a BJP general secretary and key party ideologue. "Modi wanted himself to be equal to Keshubhai and Shankarsinh Vaghela."

"Modi interfered in the day-to-day operations of running the BJP, when that job was mine, as the president of the party," Vaghela told me. "According to the party constitution, the organisation secretary shall give only directions to the party, but not execute things on his own."

While the BJP remained in opposition, the deepening rifts between the two political leaders and the ideological puritan were easily papered over in the service of a common goal: winning statewide elections. The BJP's cadres were still poorly trained in the fine art of voter management—maintaining voter records, arranging transportation for the sick and elderly before rival parties could lure them to the polls, and a few less savory tricks that were already well-known to experienced workers in other parties. Working together, Modi, Vaghela and Patel mobilised more than 150,000 workers from the RSS, VHP and ABVP for a training programme just before the elections in February 1995, and the effort paid off handsomely.

The BJP nearly doubled its seats in the 182-member assembly, from 67 to 121, with the Congress lagging far behind at 45. The party chose Patel as the new chief minister, and Modi began to spend more time with him, which further alienated Vaghela, who sensed the two other leaders were forming a front against him. "Modi used to sit with Keshubhai everyday over lunch and dinner, and whisper into his ears that I was planning an uprising against Keshubhai, and he should keep me and the legislators closer to me at arms' length," Vaghela told me.

But Vaghela was also ambitious and impatient. In 1995, he took half of the BJP's legislators away to a resort in Madhya Pradesh, and threatened to bring the government down unless the party removed Patel and made him chief minister. The central party leadership had to intervene, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee was sent to Gujarat to broker a peace deal: Patel was asked to step aside in favour of a third compromise candidate, Suresh Mehta. And Modi, as a punishment, was sent to Delhi to serve as a national secretary in the BJP, where he assumed responsibility for Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Jammu and Kashmir.

After Vaghela was unexpectedly defeated in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections—for which he blamed the RSS, Modi and Patel—he broke with the BJP and formed a new party with rebel MLAs. Mehta's government fell, and Vaghela, with support from the Congress, became chief minister.

For Modi, being exiled to Delhi was a blessing in disguise: at party headquarters, he had daily contact with an array of national BJP leaders. Modi took full advantage of Vaghela's defection, reminding anyone who would listen that he had been the first to warn them of Vaghela's disloyalty to the party—which indirectly and ironically bolstered Modi's own standing. In 1998, a few days after Atal Bihari Vajpayee took office as prime minister, Modi was promoted once again, and became the national party's organisation secretary: the bridge between the BJP and the RSS for all of India.

At that point in the five-decade history of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and its successor party, the BJP, there had only been three previous organisation secretaries—each one an ideologically pure Sangh stalwart. But where his predecessors had avoided the media and worked behind the scenes, Modi gravitated towards the spotlight. During the 1999 Kargil War and the subsequent failed peace talks between Vajpayee and General Pervez Musharraf, Modi held frequent press conferences and often appeared on television, demonstrating the jingoistic fervour that would become his signature. Asked during one TV debate about how to respond to provocations from Pakistan, his answer was: "Chicken biryani *nahi*, bullet *ka jawab* bomb *se diya jayega*"—we won't give them chicken biryani, we will respond to a bullet with a bomb.

Back in Gujarat, the short-lived Vaghela government had fallen after the Congress withdrew its support, and Keshubhai Patel had returned as chief minister, surrounded by a new circle of younger BJP leaders like Sanjay Joshi, Haren Pandya and Gordhan Zadaphia—while Modi, still in Delhi, was out of the picture. But when the BJP under Patel lost a series of local body elections and two by-elections in late 2001, after having failed earlier in the year to organise an adequate response to a devastating earthquake in the Kutch region, Modi began a quiet campaign at the centre against his former ally Patel.

"Modi complained to us about how Keshubhai was failing, and how he was interested only in development, but not in advancing the stated goals of Hindutva," said a former BJP leader who then occupied a senior position in the Delhi office. "Modi constantly whispered ill into the ears of party leaders about Keshubhai, the same way he had whispered ill about Vaghela into Keshubhai's ears."

Modi's own account of his appointment as chief minister presents the impression that he was surprised, and even humbled, by the unexpected assignment from Vajpayee. In an interview with his official biographer, MV Kamath, Modi said that he was attending a cremation service for a television cameraman when he received a call from Vajpayee requesting a meeting that evening. "When I met him," Modi continued,

> he said, 'You have become fat eating all that Punjabi food. You must slim down. Go away from here. Vacate Delhi.' I asked, 'Go where?' 'Go to Gujarat,' he replied, 'you have to work there.' So I said, 'Would I be in charge only of Gujarat or of some other state as well?' I did not know then that Atalji wanted me to be the chief minister of Gujarat. But then Atalji said, 'No, no, you will have to contest elections.' As I came to know that I was being marked out for chief ministership, I told Atalji, 'That is not my work. I've been away from Gujarat for six long years. I'm not familiar with the issues. What will I do there? It is not a field of my liking. I don't know anyone.' ... Five or six days passed, and finally I had to concede to what the party wanted me to do.

But Modi's version of events is contradicted by several other senior BJP leaders, who said that Modi had lobbied hard for the

job from the time he arrived in Delhi. “He knew the Gujarat BJP wouldn’t have elected him as the CM,” one BJP leader told me, “so it had to be an appointment from the centre, top-down, because the Gujarat leaders had realised how divisive and self-righteous Modi could be.” In fact, Modi was known to have presented a few news editors in Delhi with suggestions for negative stories about Patel. Vinod Mehta, the former editor-in-chief of *Outlook*, recalls one such visit in his memoirs: “When he was working at the party office in Delhi, Narendra Modi came to see me in the office. He brought along some documents which indicated the chief minister of Gujarat, Keshubhai Patel, was up to no good. The next thing I heard was that he had become the chief minister in place of Keshubhai.”

To pre-empt any resistance from the BJP legislators in the state, Modi was accompanied to Gujarat by the former national president, Kushabhau Thakre, and another senior leader, Madan Lal Khurana, whose presence ensured a safe landing for the unelected chief minister. For the RSS, Modi’s installation was a significant accomplishment: for the first time in its history, a fulltime pracharak had become a chief minister.

With state elections due in just over a year, Modi set out to telegraph his ambitious intentions from the moment he landed. “I have come here to play a one-day match,” Modi told the press upon his arrival in Gujarat. “I need fast and performing batsmen to score runs in the limited overs game.” At that point, few could have guessed that Modi’s one-day match would turn into a test series, which is still being played 11 years later.

IV

NARENDRA MODI TOOK HIS OATH as the new chief minister of Gujarat on 7 October 2001, on the very same day that the United States and its allies dropped the first bombs on Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad, less than a month after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. The world suddenly rang with alarm over the threat of Islamic jihadists, and the American president declared the dawn of a “Global War on Terrorism”, from which no territory would be excluded. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution encouraging member states to take additional legal measures to combat terrorism. For political leaders everywhere, the fight against Islamic terrorism acquired a rare rhetorical power, as an unassailable justification for any and all decisions.

Modi, newly installed in Gandhinagar, concentrated all his energy on learning the details of governance. He had never held any political office, and he was still yet to contest an election. “In most of the briefings with the officers, he was very silent. He let the officers talk, and learnt how administration worked,” a senior police officer who worked with Modi told me. “He was very attentive, and I felt like he sketched every word, every intonation, everything.” At the same time, Modi was still facing resistance from senior state BJP leaders displeased by his ascendance. “In the cabinet,” one of his former ministers recalled, “he used his authority as someone appointed from Delhi to talk down to us about what needed to be done.”

In Delhi, the BJP government saw America’s belated campaign against Islamist terror as a vindication of its own anti-Pakistan rhetoric. By the end of the year, after the 13 December attack on Parliament, a million troops were mobilised on the border with Pakistan, and the government introduced a “war tax” on imported goods to cover the cost of the military buildup. It was a time of fervid nationalism and widespread anti-Muslim sentiment. For Modi, whose ideology had taken shape within the crucible of the RSS, the dominant political mood had never been so much in line with his own views.

ONE DAY IN EARLY FEBRUARY 2002, a 12-year-old girl named Anika, the daughter of a senior engineer at Larsen and Toubro in Surat, got word she would be giving a dance performance at her school’s annual day on 1 March. It was to be her first dance in costume, and Anika insisted that her grandparents, who lived in Ahmedabad, should come to Surat to see her on stage. Her grandfather assured Anika he would certainly be there to see her perform.

Two days before Anika’s performance, on 27 February, 58 people—many of them women and children—were killed on a train passing through Godhra, 160 kilometres east of Ahmedabad. The train was carrying members of the VHP and its youth wing, the Bajrang Dal, who were returning from Ayodhya after celebrating the 10th anniversary of the destruction of the Babri Masjid, and initial reports suggested that a mob of Muslims in Godhra had executed a pre-planned attack on the coach.

As word began to spread from Godhra—and pictures and video from the scene hit the airwaves—fury mounted, led by the activists of the VHP, Bajrang Dal and RSS, baying for revenge. By the evening, the VHP called for a statewide bandh the next day, which was endorsed by the ruling BJP.

That same night, Ehsan Jafri, a 72-year-old former MP for Ahmedabad, called his granddaughter Anika in Surat with some disappointing news. Ensconced in his home in Gulburg Society, a mostly Muslim upper-middle class neighbourhood in Ahmedabad, Jafri, a veteran Congress politician, already sensed it would be risky to attempt a journey to Surat the next day. On the phone, he told Anika he wouldn't be able to come. "But it's just a shutdown, and he should make it," she protested to her mother.

At around noon on 28 February, Anika called her grandfather again. "Have you not started?" she asked him. "*Beta*, the situation is not good here," Jafri answered. "There are mobs everywhere." He told her he needed to put the phone down, since he had a lot of calls to make.

A huge mob had already gathered around Gulburg Society, armed with petrol bombs, cycle chains and swords, shouting slogans like "Take revenge and slaughter the Muslims." Many of Jafri's neighbours, as well as Muslims from neighbouring slums, had come to his house seeking safety, expecting that his status as a former member of Parliament would afford them protection. "He must have made over a hundred phone calls for help," Jafri's wife, Zakia, told me. He called the Gujarat director-general of police, the Ahmedabad police commissioner, the state chief secretary and dozens of others, pleading for their intercession. A witness who survived the carnage later told a court that Jafri even called Narendra Modi: "When I asked him what Modi said, [Jafri] said there was no question of help, instead he got abuses." Word of Jafri's frantic calls for help even reached Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani in Delhi: a BJP insider close to Modi, who was with Advani on 28 February, told me that the BJP leader had even called Modi's office himself to ask about Jafri.

By 2:30 pm, the mobs had broken through the gates of the housing society, and a flood of men converged on Jafri's home. Women were raped and then burned alive; men were made to shout "Jai Shri Ram", and then cut to pieces; children were not spared. According to records later submitted in court, Jafri was stripped and paraded naked before the attackers cut off his fingers and legs and dragged his body into a burning pyre. The official police report indicates that 59 people were murdered in Gulburg Society, though independent inquiries put the number at 69 or 70. Jafri's wife, Zakia, and a few others who had locked themselves in an upstairs room survived.

To this day, Modi maintains that he had no knowledge of the events at Gulburg Society until he was briefed by police officers later that evening. But Sanjiv Bhatt, who was then the state deputy commissioner (Intelligence), says that Modi is lying. (Modi and his administration have vigorously contested Bhatt's account, as well as the testimony given by several other police and government officials.) Bhatt insists that Modi, who also served as home minister, was in regular contact with the senior police and intelligence leadership throughout the day, and well-informed of events on the ground. Bhatt told me that he spoke with Modi over the phone several times before 2 pm, and reported that a mob had circled Gulburg, and that he met Modi at his office in the afternoon to report that the situation demanded immediate intervention.

"His response was very strange," Bhatt told me. "He listened and then said, 'Sanjiv, try to find out if in the past Jafri has been in the habit of opening fire.'"

"Outside the chief minister's office, in the corridor, I bumped into the former chief minister Amarsinh Choudhary and former home minister Naresh Rawal," Bhatt continued, referring to two Congress leaders. "Naresh Rawal was my minister earlier, so we talked. They told me Gulburg Ehsanbhai has been giving frantic calls, and they came to meet Modi. I said I had briefed the CM, but you also go and tell him," Bhatt told me.

"I then got a call on my cellphone from my informer on the site at Gulburg," Bhatt continued, "telling me that Jafri had opened fire. I was surprised. And when I reached my office, a short report was lying on the table saying Jafri opened fire in self-

defence. That was when I realised that this man [Modi] knows things even before I came to know of things."

THE GUJARAT RIOTS were the first explosion of communal violence to play out in real time on live television, and across India people watched young men run amok on the streets, calling for revenge and demanding that all Muslims leave the country. For the BJP, whose national leaders had hand-picked Modi as chief minister only five months earlier, the vicious bloodshed in Gujarat opened a rift within the party. The hardliners backed Modi to the hilt, but the moderates feared that liberal Hindus who once looked to the BJP as "the party with a difference" would be alienated by the resurgent face of militant Hindutva.

When the riots continued unabated, foreign governments began to put pressure on the prime minister's office, and Vajpayee started grousing. "Modi and Vajpayee had an exasperated relationship," the BJP insider, who is close to Modi, told me. "Modi had problems with the very Brahmin character of Vajpayee—the high tastes, the poetry. And Vajpayee considered Modi too uncouth." Vajpayee was convinced Modi would not control the violence, and wanted to remove him. But he knew very well that his own deputy, Advani, and the RSS would forcefully object.

The first man from the moderate camp to challenge Modi was Shanta Kumar, a cabinet minister and former CM of Himachal Pradesh, who said he was "pained and disgusted" by the events in Gujarat. Kumar also demanded action against the VHP and Bajrang Dal, declaring that "those counting votes on dead bodies are not Hindus. Those who think of consolidating Hindutva by shedding blood in Gujarat are the enemies of Hindus.''

The RSS was furious. Kumar's remarks came only a few days before a scheduled meeting of the BJP national executive in Goa, and the Sangh leaders had no intention of letting the party's moderates terminate the tenure of their first fulltime pracharak-turned-chief minister. The BJP president, K Jana Krishnamurthi, summoned Kumar, while Advani declared that action would be taken against party members who indulged in indiscipline. Kumar was forced to tender two written apologies: one to Krishnamurthi, and another to the RSS in-charge for the VHP, retracting his statement that the actions of the VHP had sullied the entire Hindu community.

Among the moderates, there was real concern that the BJP-led coalition government would collapse if any of the secular parties in the alliance withdrew their support. But this argument cut no ice with the Sangh. According to a former BJP national secretary, the powerful RSS leader and former BJP president Kushabhao Thakre spread the word among the party's other leaders that Modi would have to be defended, even at the cost of the Vajpayee government. "There was lobbying and counterlobbying in the party," the former BJP secretary recalled. "Ultimately the camp of Thakre, Advani, Modi and Jaitley prevailed over Vajpayee."

But of the secular regional parties allied with the BJP—including the Janata Dal (United) in Bihar, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu, the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh, and the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal—none walked out of the government. By the time the BJP executive meet began on 12 April 2002, the moderates had already been defeated. Vajpayee had no desire to challenge the strength of the pro-Modi forces, and the moderate prime minister who had wished for Modi's removal a month earlier now surrendered to the RSS. In his own speech at the Goa executive, Vajpayee took up the flag of the hardliners and spoke in Modi's language:

"In Indonesia, Malaysia, wherever Muslims are living they don't want to live in harmony. They don't mix with the society. They are not interested in living in peace … We don't need lessons in secularism from anyone. India was secular even before the Muslims and Christians came."

For perhaps the first time, a prime minister fell in line behind a chief minister—and from that point onwards, Vajpayee lived in fear of Modi. In December 2002, when Modi was campaigning in his first statewide elections, he bluntly told the party that Vajpayee and the other senior leaders should come early in the process, because he did not want anyone else to take credit for his victory by claiming they provided the final push. "So fearful was Vajpayee of Modi," the BJP insider told me, "when we went for electioneering to Ahmedabad with Arun Jaitley and Uma Bharati, he told us all in the flight, 'Usually when the prime minister and the leader of the party come to a state, the chief minister would be waiting in anticipation. Here, forget about Modi

coming to receive me—my heart is throbbing wondering what the hell Modi will say at the rally.'" Everyone laughed. Vajpayee also laughed, but he was very serious.

Modi's success did not only intimidate Vajpayee. Over the course of the past decade, as Modi triumphed in two consecutive elections and the national party suffered two defeats, he became the standard for success in the BJP—and whatever space was afforded to the party's moderates shrank even further.

Earlier this year, a decade after the Goa executive, I went to meet Shanta Kumar. He too has now joined the ranks of the Modi admirers. "Whatever has happened in the past is a thing of the past," he told me. "But look at Gujarat now. I met Modiji last month in Gujarat, and I told him, we need to replicate what you've done in Gujarat all over India—the idea of combining Hindutva and progress. He has done a remarkable job. What Modi has achieved in Gujarat, one day we'll achieve all over India."

ON A SUNNY DAY THIS WINTER, I walked through the ruins of Gulburg Society. Just off a noisy street, an iron gate at the entrance hung slanted off its post, like a dead tree waiting to be cut down. Inside the abandoned colony, I passed by deserted rows of two-storey houses, all of them missing their windows and doors; the stench of urine and shit made me queasy. Jafri's house was just inside the gate, a burnt shell overgrown by wild bougainvilleas. The walls inside were stained by smoke and soot, as if the building had been painted black, and there was very little light inside. As I stepped into the living room, a bitch growled from a corner, and stood up with four little puppies that were suckling at its breast. I managed to heave my way upstairs, past the fallen bricks and the thorns of the bougainvillea, and eventually went to every room. It was a ghost house, whose wretched walls still had a residue of the fear and helplessness of a crowd about to be murdered.

The day after the killings at Gulburg Society, piles of bones and unburned corpses were taken by truck to a Muslim cemetery in Dudheshwar. The caretaker, Hajra Beevi, who is now in her 40s, recalled the day 10 years ago when a huge pit had to be dug so 179 people could be buried. "Not only from Gulburg," she told me. "That day several trucks came from several places. I remember my small son asking if there was an earthquake, and I told him—yes, there was."

V

IF THERE WAS ONE DECISIVE TURNING POINT in Modi's reinvention—the moment when his image as a militant Hindutva politician was first eclipsed by his new reputation as a pro-business development man—it arrived in October 2008, when the Tata Nano came to Gujarat.

On 3 October, Ratan Tata announced that he would shut down the factory built to manufacture his much-publicised people's car in Singur, West Bengal, after a two-year-long farmers' agitation over land compensation. Four days later, Tata declared he would bring the Nano plant—along with a tidal wave of glowing publicity—to Modi's Gujarat.

As Modi later told the story, which he liked to repeat in his speeches in Gujarat, he contacted Tata right after the decision to close the plant in West Bengal: "I sent Tata an SMS. Welcome to Gujarat. It was as simple as that."

Four states had also approached Tata seeking to host the Nano factory, but none went to the same lengths as Modi. "The chief minister of Gujarat moved very fast," Tata told *The Times of India*. "With all other states, despite all their good intentions, there were many things yet to be settled. So we decided to move forward with Gujarat and everything was put in proper place." Within 10 days, an agreement was signed.

The offer that Modi presented Tata was a generous one. According to the terms of the agreement, the company will retain the money that it owes in taxes during its first 20 years of operation as a loan, which will only begin to be repaid—at an interest rate of 0.1 percent—after the 20-year period comes to an end. Though Tata's anticipated tax bill can't be calculated in advance, the company's savings from the favourable loan arrangement will almost certainly be several times the value of its initial R22 billion investment.

Tata was offered a choice between two plots of land, both of which were already owned by the Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC). But the plot they selected, in Sanand, was separated from the nearby highway by a strip of farmland, and Tata Motors asked the government to buy out the farmers. This was routine business for Modi, who knew that Gujarat wasn't West Bengal and that he could negotiate more tactfully than West Bengal's Communist ministers. But given the circumstances, any public uproar from the affected farmers would be a major embarrassment, and he knew he had to proceed with care.

Ravubha Vaghela, who held the largest parcel of land along the highway and negotiated on behalf of the other farmers, was also a local Congress party leader, and could easily have scuttled the deal. "Even the day before Modi and Tata were to make their joint announcement," Vaghela told me, "we were locked up in intense negotiations with the secretary of the GIDC. We could not agree on a price."

"They didn't tell us that the land negotiated was for Tata," Vaghela said. "The CM's office had forbidden them from telling us." The talks dragged on into the night, until the GIDC secretary, Maheshwar Sahu, played his trump card. "By 10 pm, when we were in a deadlock, Sahuji told us that Ratan Tata was going to be in Ahmedabad the next day, and that this was for the Nano plant and asked not to give them any trouble," Vaghela said. "All of us were thrilled with joy. As Gujaratis that's the difference between us and others. We are not emotionally attached to the land so much, and our calculations work differently. We thought of the benefits we could get for our adjoining properties if we sold this particular land. Within an hour we agreed for one of the best prices and signed the agreement."

Sahu, Modi's troubleshooter for industrial projects, explained his tactics to me. "The first thing is, you tell the price to the farmers so they understand the benefit of selling the land," he said. "Then we give recognition to people like Vaghela. Then things fall into line."

Soon after Vaghela sold the 30 acres of land adjacent to the Tata Motors site, he was invited to Modi's office. On the day of their meeting, the local edition of *The Times of India* published a story about Vaghela, under the headline 'Wealthiest Man in Sanand Just Got Richer'.

"Modibhai got up from his chair and greeted me jubilantly, saying 'Ravubhabhai, *aapki* Lakshmi *mujhe de dijiye*' (Please give me your goddess of prosperity)," Vaghela told me. "Modiji said, 'My sights have fallen on Sanand. And we should make it something huge, something magnificent. Let the whole world come and see it.'"

The deal to bring the Nano factory to Sanand attracted worldwide attention, and within weeks of the plant's inauguration in June 2010, both Ford and Peugeot approached Gujarat, seeking plots to build their own factories. The GIDC had acquired a total of 2,200 acres, and handed over sizable plots to Ford and Peugeot (along with a substantial package of financial incentives, similar to what Tata was offered). The initial resistance from the farmers around Sanand quickly crumbled as the proposed compensation grew. Landholders were paid more than 10 times the market value for their property. Before Tata arrived, the price for one acre was only R300,000; the GIDC paid at least R3 million per acre, and issued cheques to the sellers within a week.

In Hirapur, one of the villages whose land was acquired, I met Bikkubhai Barod, a lean 71-year-old, who had sold about 40 acres of his land. With the profits from the sale, he bought 80 acres of cheaper land nearby, two bungalows in the city and three cars. "Who can stay in a flat?" he said. "That's like a chicken nest—no ventilation. So I bought bungalows for my sons in the city." I asked him about the Tata Nano, which I had seen rolling off the production line on my way to Hirapur. "When we can afford Audi, why should we buy Nano? Nano is a very cheap car," he said. "Even if they're produced from our own farms."

MODI'S SANAND SUCCESS STORY further burnished his reputation as a master of development, and it soon became a staple of his speeches to both voters and businessmen. But not every state-sponsored industrial project in Gujarat has gone smoothly: in Mahuva, a small town near the coast in Bhavnagar district, Modi's renowned ability to sweep aside obstacles to development has earned him more than a few enemies.

In 2003, the government allotted 700 acres of public land in Mahuva to one of Gujarat's largest industrial companies, Nirma, for a cement plant. (Karsan Patel, Nirma's founder and chairman, was one of the leaders of the Resurgent Group of Gujarat, which rallied behind Modi against the CII that same year.) But the plot granted to Nirma included some 300 acres of wetlands and reservoirs, which were used by more than 50,000 local farmers for irrigation and animal husbandry. The farmers objected to the deal. The company ignored the complaints, and the Modi government did the same. But the protest gathered momentum and publicity when Dr Kanubhai Kalsaria, the BJP MLA for Mahuva, led an agitation against his own chief minister. More than 11,000 farmers signed a letter opposing the land deal with their own blood, and 5,000 people walked more than 400 kilometres to Ahmedabad in protest.

Nirma and the state of Gujarat claimed that the affected area was a wasteland, but after the farmers appealed to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, it ruled in their favour and cancelled the plant's environmental clearance. The farmers hailed it as a rare victory against the state's top-down development agenda. Kalsaria, a three-time BJP MLA, was suspended from the party for indiscipline, and even attacked by unidentified goons. But he has become a spokesman for Gujarati farmers who accuse Modi's government of lavishing money and land on corporates at the expense of citizens.

In the wake of the 2002 riots, Modi skillfully painted any criticism of his government's misdeeds as an attack on Gujarat and Gujaratis. Over the past few years, and with considerably more subtlety, he has achieved the same thing with the story of the state's development miracle. The government has relentlessly provided the media with positive stories of efficient administration, rapid construction and economic growth.

Modi likes to flaunt the fact that Gujarat is a power-excess state, and almost every big-picture story about the "Gujarat miracle", from *Business Today* to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, highlights this fact. But farmers, led by the Sangh's own farmers' union, have been protesting for almost a decade that their electricity needs aren't being met, and government statistics show that the share of power diverted to agriculture has fallen from 43 percent to 21 percent between 2000 and 2010. More than 375,000 farmers are still waiting for electricity connections for their irrigation pumps.

Even the headline figures for Gujarat's economic expansion in the past decade diminish under closer examination. The state's GDP growth has only slightly outpaced India as a whole over the past decade. But this is to be expected: Gujarat has long been an industrialised state—and in fact, growth rates under Modi are not significantly higher than they were in the prior two decades. Though Modi has presented Gujarat as the clear leader among Indian states in attracting foreign direct investment, it ranked fourth among states on this measure between 2000 and 2009, and in 2011 fell to sixth place, after Maharashtra, the National Capital Region, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh; Maharashtra has foreign direct investment inflows almost nine times greater than Gujarat.

Data from the Planning Commission, meanwhile, show that in spite of Gujarat's economic growth, the state lags behind even Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh in rates of poverty reduction. According to the 2011 India Human Development Report, Gujarat also scores poorly in several social indicators, with 44 percent of children under five suffering from malnutrition, worse than Uttar Pradesh.

By themselves, these statistics hardly constitute an indictment of Modi's record. They merely suggest that his carefully constructed image as an economic miracle-worker has been the result of a well-managed public relations campaign whose false premise is that Gujarat stands head and shoulders above every other Indian state in growth and development—and that anyone who presents data to challenge this narrative is only twisting the truth in order to malign Modi and every Gujarati.

VI

ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2011, Modi signed into his Twitter account to broadcast a jubilant three-word message: "God is great!" The Supreme Court had instructed the Special Investigation Team that had initially been set up to probe 9 major carnage cases to also look into Modi's culpability in the murder of Ehsan Jafri and file its final report with a lower court in Gujarat that will determine whether charges can be filed against the chief minister. It was not exactly an exoneration, but Modi had feared a

harsher order from the Supreme Court, which could have issued comments—as it had in 2003, calling him a “modern-day Nero”—or, even worse, shifted the case out of Gujarat and listed him as the first accused.

As his triumphant tweet suggested, Modi sensed the right moment had arrived to unveil a new campaign. Five days later, on his birthday, he began a three-day fast in Ahmedabad under the banner of *Sadbhavana*—“goodwill”—which attracted massive media attention, as Modi knew it would. Ten thousand people were mobilised to attend, and Modi seized the opportunity to compel almost every top BJP leader, whether allies or rivals, to join him on stage in Gujarat. On the first day of the fast, Modi took out full-page advertisements in major newspapers all across the country. That morning, his smiling picture greeted voters in every state, accompanied by a message of goodwill in their mother tongue: there were ads in Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Urdu, Assamese, and Oriya. The entire undertaking was billed to the state of Gujarat.

At the conclusion of the Ahmedabad fast, Modi announced that he would fast for a single day in each of the state’s 26 districts, combining the Sadbhavana roadshow with the start of his campaign for the assembly elections later this year. Near the end of November 2011, I went to see Modi’s tour when it stopped a few kilometres outside of Songadh, a sleepy hill town with a majority-tribal population near the Maharashtra border.

The fast was held on a stretch of barren farmland that had freshly been ploughed and levelled in anticipation of Modi’s arrival. From a distance, the site resembled a carnival ground. In the parking area, there were more than 100 state transport corporation buses, which had ferried attendees here from across the district. Several trucks parked nearby were surrounded by crowds: state employees were distributing free saplings of guava, strawberry and mango trees.

More than 10,000 people had gathered under a huge white tent to watch Modi fast on stage, and plasma television screens were mounted throughout the crowd to bring his face closer to the audience. Flanked on the massive stage by at least 60 other figures, Modi sat in a fixed posture, like a statue of a philosopher in a contemplative pose, touching one hand to his head, with his chin resting on his thumb. From the morning until the evening, he listened solemnly as the other politicians and religious leaders on stage gave speeches praising his deeds. It was clear from the close-up shot of Modi’s face on every television screen that he was concentrating intently, while he carefully scanned the assembled crowd. After sitting at the back for a while, I stood up and walked all the way to the front row—a distance of about 100 metres—and I felt sure Modi’s eyes were following me.

For Modi, whose efficient but absolute control of the state extends to personally calling low-level local officials to give orders or make inquiries, keeping track of journalists comes naturally. In May 2002, when word first began to spread among local reporters that Modi was not actually unmarried, an *Indian Express* journalist in Gandhinagar, Darshan Desai, managed to locate the chief minister’s wife in her village near Vadnagar. He set out early one morning for the village, Brahamanwada, and met Jashodaben, her brother and the headmaster of a primary school where she was teaching. None of them would agree to an interview, fearing retribution, and several local BJP men made it clear his questions were unwelcome and insisted he leave.

“I remember I had just reached home and removed my shoes when I got a call on my cell phone,” Desai told me. “The voice on the phone said in Gujarati, ‘The chief minister wants to speak with you.’ Soon, Modi came on the line. He said ‘Namaskar’, and then he asked: ‘So what is the agenda?’

“I said, ‘I didn’t quite get you.’ And he said, ‘You have written against me. Your newspaper even started Modi Meter,’ referring to a column my paper ran during the riots. I just kept quiet, and he said, ‘I’m aware what you’ve been up to today. What you’ve done today goes much beyond. That’s why I want to know what your agenda is.’ I wasn’t scared, but I remember being a little nervous, and I said, ‘I have no agenda. You can contact my editor.’ He just said, ‘Okay. Think it over,’ and hung up the phone.”

Over the previous few months, I had written several letters to Modi’s office requesting an interview. There was no reply, but I had spoken to his public relations officer, Jagdish Thakkar, who told me, “You know, it is very hard to get Modiji’s appointment. He picks and chooses who he wants to meet.” Still, I persisted in my efforts with Thakkar: I called him when Modi was in China,

leading a business delegation, and again when Modi was in Porbandar, fasting at Mahatma Gandhi's birthplace. "I promptly communicate every message to Modiji," Thakkar reassured me. "He knows you are trying, and has read your letters. But he hasn't said anything to me." Before coming to Songadh, I called Thakkar one more time to tell him I would be attending the fast and ask if Modi could find half an hour to speak to me.

Other journalists had confirmed my impression that Modi rarely spoke to reporters from newspapers or magazines. He seemed to prefer giving interviews, when necessary, to television channels. Karan Thapar, who conducted a famously contentious interview with Modi on his CNN-IBN programme in 2007, told me that he spent more than 18 months trying to convince Modi to meet him. "I remember writing him letters almost every week," Thapar said. "He never responded, and finally I went to Arun Jaitley, a friend of Modi, who finally convinced him."

Thapar's scheduled 30-minute interview with Modi lasted three minutes. Thapar began his first question by citing the lavish praise Modi had received for his skills as an administrator. "And yet, despite that," Thapar asked, "people still call you in your face a mass murderer, and they accuse you of being prejudiced against Muslims. Do you have an image problem?"

Modi's face stiffened and reddened, and he answered with a few halting sentences. He was visibly angry, and after a few more minutes he asked to take a break, removed the lapel mic from under his kurta, declared he was ending the interview, and walked out. "You came here, made friendship," he told Thapar. "You have your ideas, and you go on repeating them."

CNN-IBN ran the footage of the aborted interview as a news item—Modi walked out of interview. They repeated it 33 times, and the following day, Thapar said, he got a call from Modi: "He asked me, 'Are you firing by resting your gun on my shoulder?' and I said, 'Didn't I tell you it was better to complete the interview?' He was okay by then, it seemed. He said when he came to Delhi next, we would have dinner together. And he would give me another interview. At some point he also said, 'I love you.'" For the past five years, Thapar told me, he has sent Modi a letter every six weeks, and never gotten a response.

Up on stage, BJP ministers and legislators stood up in turn to recite the number of ration cards, government playschools and bore wells that Modi had brought to the district. The crowd, which was also fasting, seemed listless, and occasionally the announcer shouted "*Bharat maata ki jai*! Gujarat *ki jai*. Narendrabhai Modi *ki jai*!" and the crowd chanted back in chorus. From the stage, a few middle-aged men and women sang a lousy howling song in Modi's honour, which began: "Let's beat the drums, let's beat the drums for harmony, let's beat the drum for the chief minister." When it was finally over, the announcer said, "This beautiful song was written, composed and played for you by none other than the district collector, RJ Patel." The audience clapped. Modi betrayed no reaction, and kept up his thoughtful stare.

After a few hours of sycophancy from his fellow partymen, which had no apparent effect on the chief minister, Modi stood up to receive a line of people, all of them brimming with enthusiasm and many carrying gifts. Some had shawls or bouquets; one man carried a portrait he had drawn of Modi, while two other women gave Modi an embroidered picture of himself—the admiration and awe Modi received was overwhelming.

When it became clear Modi would not speak until he broke his fast at 5 pm, I decided to go visit a competing fast being held at the Songadh bus stand by the Congress. As I stood up from the front row to leave, Modi raised his hand and waved in my direction. Was he pointing at me? He waved again, as if to say yes, and then he motioned for Thakkar, who walked onto the stage and knelt with his ear next to Modi's mouth. After a minute or two, Thakkar, who is in his early 70s, came running toward me, shaking along the way. I feared for a moment he might lose his balance, but he clasped my hand, still panting, and said, "Modiji says he will meet you and give you the interview. But today it isn't possible—he has to sit on the stage, fasting. How about the coming Friday at his office in Gandhinagar?" I looked up at Modi on the stage. He gave me a nod, and lifted his hand again.

THE CONGRESS PARTY'S COUNTER-FAST was a rather less grand affair: there were fewer than 2,000 participants, packed shoulder to shoulder, sweating in a much smaller and shabbier tent. Close to 40 party leaders were jammed onto a small stage. The man at the centre was Tushar Choudhary, a minister of state in the Union cabinet and the son of a former Gujarat chief

minister, Amarsinh Choudhary. When I spoke to him after he came off the stage, I asked why he and his party were imitating Modi by holding a fast—was there no other way to reach the people?

“We aren’t mimicking Modi,” he said. “We’re using this opportunity to spread awareness that there’s no sadbhavana in Modi. For example, in Songadh only, where the tribal population is very large, we have a killer disease called sickle cell anaemia. And 160 people died in the last few weeks. Modi did nothing. Two weeks ago, there was a minor earthquake in Nepal, and 30 people were killed. Modi immediately announced that Gujarat government would send money to Nepal. Such stark contradictions are part of Modi’s governance, so we are spreading that message.”

Choudhary argued that the Congress could defeat Modi if the party stayed united. But there was very little sign of that. At the back of the tent, I talked to a Congress worker who walked me through the competing factions represented on the tiny stage: that fellow is the man in Songadh for the son of former chief minister Solanki; that one is Shankarsinh Vaghela’s man; the bald guy is the man of Shaktisinh Gohil, the Congress opposition leader in the assembly; the next one is the man of Ahmed Patel, the political secretary to Sonia Gandhi; and on and on.

When I returned for Modi’s speech, the contrast was even more dramatic: there was complete order and precision. The ministers gave praise; the religious leaders gave blessings; and Modi, at last, stood up to deliver his speech, looking only to the future.

Modi held three small pieces of paper, which listed the developments he had planned for Songadh: “Two hundred crore rupees for the district!” he bellowed, and then enumerated each project: a new bridge, roads through the forest, a reservoir. When that was over, he began a chant: “*Vikas*. Vikaaas. Vikaaaaaas.”

“When the world asks for development, they find Gujarat,” he continued. “When they ask for Gujarat, they find development. Vikas! Gujarat! Gujarat! Vikas!” Modi threw his hands from left to right, and then from right to left, in time with the words. “Gujarat—Vikas! Vikaaaas—Gujarat!”

On stage before an adoring audience, Modi has a sure command of the theatrical. He was loud, firm and confident: the kind of leader who makes his followers sure that everything will be taken care of. He described his latest trip to China, sounding every bit the statesman; he said that the brinjal grown on Gujarati farms was now exported to Europe, appealing to the state’s trader-and-merchant sensibility; he said the world’s top car manufacturers had filled his desk with requests to set up their plants in the state; he insisted that if there was anything wrong in Gujarat, it was the fault of the Congress-led government in Delhi, which refused to cooperate with him. He spoke extemporaneously and flawlessly, his eyes constantly fixed on the audience before him. The tent fell completely silent while he was speaking: no one played with their mobile phones; there was no rustling of plastic bags. Many people had their mouths wide open.

IF THE SADBHAVANA FASTS—with their adoring audiences and nationwide publicity campaign—represent the vastness of Modi’s future political ambitions, the scale of the massive architectural projects he is building in Gujarat suggests an equally grand desire to erect monuments to his legacy. I spoke to more than 20 top officials, architects, managers and planners involved in Modi’s construction spree, all of whom insisted on anonymity, as they continue to interact with him on a regular basis. “He can really screw me if he comes to know that I spoke with you,” one told me. “So keep me off the record.” Some of the designers and planners working under Modi are Indians returned from abroad; others come from Chinese construction companies; some are government engineers. But in Gujarat, there is only one architect, and his word always carries the day.

In the weeks prior to the 2007 Vibrant Gujarat summit, Modi decided that he wanted to showcase the plans for a massive urban renewal programme in Ahmedabad, the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project. The Sabarmati divides the city in half, and the proposed redevelopment will remove at least 10,000 people who live in slums on either side of the river, reclaim 500 acres of riverbed for 12 km along the shore, and build parks, promenades, markets, offices and business hubs. The riverfront redevelopment was not Modi’s idea: it was first proposed by a French architect 50 years ago, inspired by the example of great river-straddling cities like London and Paris. It had been mothballed for decades, and only moved past the drawing board in the

1990s, before being cast aside once again after the deadly earthquake that struck Gujarat in 2001, which helped drain the state's coffers. But in the wake of the 2002 violence, Modi saw an opportunity. "The Riverfront was one of the first projects Modi embraced after the riots, as a way to show he was a pro-development man," an official associated with the project told me.

At the time of the 2007 investment summit, the scope of the redevelopment was still not widely known, and Modi asked the project officials for a big visual depiction that could be displayed for the legions of visiting businessmen. "From the architects, we got a rendering on a huge canvas," the project official told me. "It was 12 metres long and four metres high, and it took two dozen people to carry it."

"On the eve of the summit," the project official said, "Modi arrived to inspect the prototype. It wasn't a literal model—it was like an architect's drawing in black and white, with the river highlighted in blue. Everyone who saw it was jubilant, but Modi stood there, unsatisfied. He grumbled, and told us, 'Your drawing looks like a barren widow. Make it colourful. Paint it.'"

"The architects were furious—they were like, 'Does he even understand what architectural drawings are?' But I said, 'He's the boss. Let's get it done.' That night we brought down the massive canvas, and over 40 artists worked on it, throwing up paints everywhere. By the next day, we had Modi's barren widow dressed up like a Gujarati bride."

"The man knows what he wants," the project official continued. "And if an architect in front of him realises the stupidity of one of his suggestions, even a world-renowned designer will just be shutting up and delivering what's asked."

ABOUT 30 KM OUTSIDE OF AHMEDABAD, on barren plains of dusty grassland, Modi's most monumental construction project is taking shape: an entirely new and singularly massive financial capital—India's own version of Shanghai, built from the ground up. Bearing the anodyne moniker Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (or "GIFT City"), the plans call for 124 skyscrapers nestled into an 886-acre plot, with more than 75 million square feet of office space, more than the financial districts of Shanghai, Tokyo and London put together. Modi's goal is to lure the financial companies now headquartered in Mumbai to shift their operations to Gujarat by 2017. Between the capital markets, trading desks, hedge funds, software developers, and back-end operations of banks and insurance companies, India is expected to generate 11 million jobs and $425 billion in growth by 2020, and Modi's plans for GIFT City are aimed at securing a large slice of that pie.

To build his own Shanghai, Modi has recruited his architects right from the source: the city is being designed by the East China Architectural Design and Research Institute, the designers of much of modern Shanghai. "Every bit of the drawing comes from China," an architect who has worked on several of Modi's projects told me. "Mr Modi trusts them—because he's clear on what he wants, because he has been to China and is in awe of Shanghai. He wants a copy, an estate of glass boxes."

The GIFT City project is currently in its second phase, a manager at the building site told me. The land has been leveled, and the first two towers are under construction, intended to provide some 2 million square feet of office space for computer and technology firms. "The tax incentives for the IT companies are coming to an end in 2013," another project manager said. "So Mr Modi wants to lure the IT guys from Bangalore and Hyderabad before he builds the infrastructure for the financial companies." When the final phase begins in 2013, more than a million workers will relocate to the site, making it the largest urbanisation project in Indian history. That's also when most of Modi's supersized glass boxes will go up—including the centrepiece Diamond Tower, an 80-plus story skyscraper designed to resemble the facets of a cut diamond, and the Naga Tower, so named because it resembles a coiled serpent.

"I was extremely shocked when I saw the design at one of the Vibrant Gujarat summits," the architect continued. "It seemed to me like an awfully alien idea. I felt like it was the King asking, 'Go and build a new kingdom for me'—and someone just executing it."

Another architect who works for Modi put it even more dramatically: "I don't know if I'm Albert Speer or Robert Moses. I hope it's the latter." Moses did more than any one man to shape the city of New York, though he rammed through a series of mega-projects that earned him the enmity of many New Yorkers. Speer, on the other hand, was Hitler's architect.

WHILE MOST OF MODI'S ARCHITECTURAL projects stake his claims on the future, the Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar suggests an attempt to assert ownership of the past. Modi has described the building complex as a tribute to Gandhi. But even apart from the strange sight of an RSS ideologue appropriating the icon of a secular nationalism that the Sangh has always detested, the Mahatma Mandir reflects almost nothing of Gandhi. Yes, there is a huge concrete charka, and a statue of the Mahatma adjacent to a heap of sand. ("Soon we will also have some photo exhibitions and books on Gandhi," one building manager explained.) But the mostly windowless grey concrete structure, which is still partially under construction, resembles an enormous soapbox. Inside, one finds a series of conference halls and soundproof auditoriums, venues for dealmaking business summits like Vibrant Gujarat, which was held here last year. During my two trips to the complex, the only people I saw were businessmen, pacing rapidly carrying files here and there, and policemen and security forces, guarding either the building or some dignitaries within.

While I was in Gandhinagar, the time for my appointment with Modi had arrived. I contacted Modi's man, Jagdish Thakkar, a day in advance. A few hours later, he called me and said, "Sorry, Modiji said he can't meet you. Extremely sorry, not possible." For the next few months, I followed up with additional requests: letters, text messages, phone calls. But there was no response, and no indication of what had led Modi to change his mind.

"If he had really meant to meet you in Songadh," a senior journalist in Gujarat told me, "and then backed out, then it must be because there was too much intelligence gathered on the kind of people you interviewed here. Did you by any chance meet people like Gordhan Zadaphia?" the journalist asked. Yes, I said. "Ok, that would have definitely irritated him. Did you do 'riot-tourism'?" If you mean visiting the neighbourhoods destroyed in 2002, I said, then yes, I did visit them.

"If you're planning to write about Modi, you just go to him, and you write what he wants you to write," the journalist said, acidly. "You don't hang around in Gujarat meeting all kinds of people. He knows, of course, that you're a pseudo-secularist with a prejudice against him—so why should he meet you?"

VII

AT THE TIME OF THE 2002 RIOTS, Gordhan Zadaphia was Gujarat's minister of state for home affairs—junior to Modi, who also held the home portfolio—and like Modi, he stands accused of complicity in the violence. A VHP leader in Gujarat for 15 years, Zadaphia joined the BJP in the early 1990s. "The RSS told me to work in the BJP, and I became a general secretary for the party in Gujarat," Zadaphia explained.

He is also one of three prominent leaders in the Gujarat BJP—all of them with impeccable Sangh credentials—who spoke out against Modi's autocratic style within the party. The first, Haren Pandya, who had served as Modi's revenue minister, was murdered in mysterious circumstances in 2003. The second, Sanjay Joshi, who had become a general secretary in the national BJP, was forced to resign when a CD containing pictures of him with naked women—later determined to be fake—was anonymously circulated to top BJP leaders. And Zadaphia, the third, was pushed out of the cabinet by the end of 2002, and subsequently ejected from the party.

"Modi understands only one alphabet, and that is capital I," Zadaphia told me. "I was threatened with death by Modi himself."

"It was in February 2005," Zadaphia continued. "I noticed an intelligence man from the state police following me, and when I confronted him, he told me he was instructed by the home minister's office to shadow me." A few days later, Zadaphia said, there was a meeting of BJP legislators with the chief minister. "I asked Modi in the meeting, 'Narendrabhai, what kind of spy activities are you doing against your own party legislators?' I asked, why is an intelligence man following me? Then Vajubhai Vala, a senior minister, took the microphone and said 'Okay Gordhanbhai, cool down. We will look into it, but this is not a question to be asked now.' Modi didn't speak at all, but I got a note from his secretary that said 'Please meet the CM.'"

"I met him at his chamber after the meeting. [Deputy home minister] Amit Shah was sitting there. Modi asked me, 'Why are you asking these kinds of questions in public?' I said, 'What shall I do? It is not a private matter.' Then he looked sternly into my

eyes and said, '*Khatam ho jaoge* Govardhanbhai…'—You're going to get finished.'"

"I asked him, what kind of finishing? Physically or politically?"

"He said, 'You complained against me to LK Advani and Om Mathur in Delhi.'"

"I said, of course. There's no option for me other than to complain to the people in Delhi. But if you're saying you will finish me off, let me tell you, I'll die when my time comes. Don't try to threaten me again."

Zadaphia moves around with a police escort and a dozen armed security men; as a former deputy home minister—and a controversial one at that—he was offered protection by the government after the riots. Pandya, however, did not have security guards. "Haren was bold," Zadaphia said. "He thought nothing would happen to him. That was a mistake."

A tall and handsome Brahmin with a fine RSS pedigree and excellent connections in the media, Pandya was a formidable political rival for Modi within the state BJP. The two clashed publicly for the first time in 2001, when Modi was in search of a safe assembly seat to contest after his appointment as CM. He wanted to run from Pandya's constituency, Ellisbridge in Ahmedabad—a very safe seat for the BJP. But Pandya refused to yield to Modi's wishes. As a state BJP functionary recalled, "Haren said, 'Ask me to vacate my seat for a young man in the BJP—I'll do it. But not for that fellow.'"

In May 2002, three months after the start of the riots, Pandya secretly gave a deposition to an independent fact-finding panel led by Justice VR Krishna Iyer. Modi could not have known what Pandya said, but written records show that Modi's principal secretary, PK Mishra, instructed the director-general of state intelligence to track Pandya's movements, and in particular those related to the fact-finding panel. The intelligence director took down the instructions in a register—the entry for 7 June 2002 reads as follows: "Dr PK Mishra added that Shri Harenbhai Pandya, minister for revenue is suspected to be the minister involved in the matter. Thereafter, he gave one mobile number 9824030629 and asked for getting call details."

Five days later, on 12 June 2002, there is another entry in the register: "Informed Dr PK Mishra that the minister who is suspected to have met the private inquiry commission (Justice VR Krishna Iyer) is known to be Mr Haren Pandya. I also informed that the matter cannot be given in writing as this issue is quite sensitive and not connected with the charter of duties given to State intelligence Bureau vide Bombay Police Manual. It is learnt that the telephone number 9824030629 is the mobile phone of Shri Harenbhai Pandya."

News reports soon revealed that an unnamed minister in Modi's cabinet had deposed before the Iyer commission, and described for the first time the meeting at Modi's residence on the night of the train burning, at which Modi allegedly told his top police and intelligence officers that there would be justice for Godhra the next day, and ordered the police not to stand in the way of the "Hindu backlash".

The leak provided sufficient evidence for Modi to press a case of indiscipline against Pandya within the BJP, and two months later Pandya was forced to resign from the cabinet. But Modi was not finished. The state elections were due in December 2002, and Modi saw an opportunity to deny Pandya the Ellisbridge seat that he had refused to vacate a year earlier. "Modi never forgets, and never forgives," the BJP insider close to the chief minister told me. "It doesn't help a politician to have such longterm vengeance."

And so Modi denied Pandya the constituency he had represented for 15 years. The leadership of both the RSS and the BJP objected and asked Modi to relent, but he refused. Near the end of November, RSS leader Madan Das Devi went to meet Modi at his residence, carrying a message from the RSS supremo KS Sudarshan, his deputy Mohan Bhagawat, LK Advani and AB Vajpayee: Stop arguing, don't create division before the elections, and give Pandya his seat. Devi stayed late into the night, but Modi held his ground, the state party functionary said: "He knew he would start getting phone calls from [RSS headquarters] Nagpur and Delhi, since he did not listen to Devi. So that night, by 3 am, he got himself admitted into the Gandhinagar Civil Hospital for exhaustion and fatigue."

Pandya, according to the party functionary, charged to the hospital to confront Modi. “Haren told him, ‘Don’t sleep like a coward. Have the guts to say no to me.’” Modi refused to budge, and the RSS and BJP leaders finally gave in. Modi left the hospital after two days, and handed Pandya’s seat to a newcomer. And in December, he came back to power riding the post-Godhra wave of communal polarisation.

Pandya, for his part, started to meet with every top leader in the BJP and RSS—in Delhi and in Nagpur—telling them that Modi would destroy the party and the Sangh for his own personal gain. Senior BJP figures, who still regarded Pandya as a valuable asset to the party, decided to transfer him to headquarters in Delhi as a member of the national executive or a party spokesman. “Modi even tried to scuttle that,” Zadaphia told me. “Pandya going to Delhi was going to be harmful for Modi in the long run.”

Three months later, in March 2003, on the day after Pandya received a fax from the party president ordering his shift to Delhi, he was murdered in Ahmedabad. The Gujarat police and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) announced that Pandya had been assassinated in a joint operation between Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and the Dubai-based underworld don Dawood Ibrahim. Twelve men were arrested and charged with Pandya’s murder, but eight years later, in September 2011, the Gujarat High Court acquitted every single one and rubbished the entire case. “The investigation has all throughout been botched up and blinkered,” the judge said. “The investigating officers concerned ought to be held accountable for their ineptitude resulting into injustice, huge harassment of many persons concerned and enormous waste of public resources and public time of the courts.”

Pandya’s father, Vithalbhai, has publicly accused Modi of ordering his son’s killing, and moved a petition in the Supreme Court calling for the chief minister to be investigated, though the court dismissed it, citing a lack of evidence.

RB Sreekumar, who headed the state intelligence for a year soon after the riot, told me that he had been asked by the chief minister’s office to regularly give details about the movements and activities of Haren Pandya.

“I’m not saying Modi got Haren Pandya killed. I have no evidence. But the fact remains—anyone who speaks against Modi from inside the BJP gets finished either physically or politically,” Zadaphia told me.

For the first few months after Pandya’s murder, the investigation was handled by the Gujarat police crime branch. The officer in charge was DG Vanzara, who is now in jail for the “fake encounter” of a gangster, Sohrabuddin Sheikh, and his wife; Vanzara is also under investigation for his role in another half-dozen extra-judicial assassinations. When the Pandya case was transferred to the CBI, one of Vanzara’s colleagues, Abhay Chudasama—now also jailed in the Sohrabuddin killing—was sent on deputation to the bureau to help manage the investigation. Both of the corrupt officers who ran the Pandya investigation were also part of the extortion racket allegedly run by Amit Shah, Modi’s deputy home minister. Shah, one of Modi’s favourites, was arrested on charges of extortion and conspiracy in the fake encounter killings and is now out on bail, though the Supreme Court has denied him permission to set foot in Gujarat; he currently lives in room number two at Gujarat Bhavan in Delhi.

IN NOVEMBER 2011, the Gujarat High Court issued its judgment in one fake encounter—the killing in 2004 of a teenaged girl named Ishrat Jahan and three other young men. The police declared the four were terrorists linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba on a mission to kill Narendra Modi; the families of the dead insisted they were innocent, and filed a case challenging the allegations.

The courtroom was packed with lawyers, police, politicians and local journalists, and I stood by the second row, behind the defence and prosecution lawyers. There was complete silence as the two judges entered and addressed Kamal Trivedi, the advocate general for the state of Gujarat. Justice Jayant Patel delivered the verdict: “The encounter is not found to be genuine. It is a unanimous judgment from both of us. A fresh case has to be filed, prosecuting those who are accused.”

Patel then addressed Trivedi and the lawyer representing the victims, Mukul Sinha, and said, “Now the court would like to hear from the counsels, which agency would you prefer to investigate the matter?”

Trivedi requested that the case remain inside the state: “Gujarat police should be given one more chance. Please allow them to investigate the matter.”

Sinha spoke next. “It is Gujarat police who are the accused,” he said, “so the investigation should be carried out by one of the central agencies. In the past there has been political opposition to the central agencies from the state government, but I still suggest it has to be either NIA [the National Investigation Agency] or CBI.”

Trivedi scoffed, “Mukul Sinha says there’s political opposition—” but Patel cut him off mid-sentence: “Should we not listen to him?”

A ripple of laughter broke out in the courtroom, and Trivedi raised his voice almost to a shout. “Don’t laugh out. Don’t laugh out. There is no situation of the government not respecting the law or the honorable court. I plead a fresh look be given on the case, and Gujarat police be given one more chance.”

The court did not heed Trivedi’s plea, and handed the investigation to the CBI, which will investigate the same police officers who executed the “deadly terrorists” on charges of murder. It was the latest in a series of legal setbacks for the Gujarat government, culminating in an order this January from the Supreme Court, which issued a three-month deadline for a panel of inquiry to reopen more than 20 alleged fake encounters in Gujarat between 2003 and 2006. The ongoing case against Amit Shah, who held 10 portfolios in the cabinet and was known as “Modi’s conscience keeper” in Gujarat, presents another major headache for Modi, one that will get much worse if the ongoing investigations into Shah’s extortion racket and the fake encounter cases begin to ask questions about whether the responsibility extends upward beyond the deputy home minister.

In the years before the fake encounter cases began to unravel, Modi loudly hailed his officers after the killing of each “terrorist”. At an election rally in December 2007, the chief minister all but celebrated the murder of the gangster Sohrabuddin. Modi called out his name, with each slowly enunciated syllable—“Sohrrraa-bu-deeeeen”—leaving no doubt as to his religion. “Congressmen say that Modi is indulging in encounter, telling that Modi has killed Sohrabuddin ... You tell me what to do with Sohrabuddin,” Modi asked. The crowd chanted in response. “Kill him, kill him.”

VIII

IN A FAMOUS ESSAY published in *Seminar* a few months after the riots in 2002, sociologist Ashis Nandy, one of India’s foremost public intellectuals, described having interviewed Modi more than a decade earlier, in the late 1980s, when the future chief minister was “a nobody, a small-time RSS pracharak trying to make it as a small-time BJP functionary”.

Nandy, who was trained as a clinical psychologist, recalled his impressions of Modi during their “long, rambling interview”:

> It left me in no doubt that here was a classic, clinical case of a fascist. I never use the term ‘fascist’ as a term of abuse; to me it is a diagnostic category comprising not only one’s ideological posture but also the personality traits and motivational patterns contextualising the ideology.
>
> Modi, it gives me no pleasure to tell the readers, met virtually all the criteria that psychiatrists, psycho-analysts and psychologists had set up after years of empirical work on the authoritarian personality. He had the same mix of puritanical rigidity, narrowing of emotional life, massive use of the ego defence of projection, denial and fear of his own passions combined with fantasies of violence—all set within the matrix of clear paranoid and obsessive personality traits. I still remember the cool, measured tone in which he elaborated a theory of cosmic conspiracy against India that painted every Muslim as a suspected traitor and a potential terrorist.

These days, Modi’s legions of admirers would scornfully dismiss the above as nothing more than the ranting of an anti-national “pseudo-secular” intellectual, jealous of Modi’s achievements and probably paid off by the Congress. But regardless of the accuracy of his clinical diagnosis, it is a sure sign of the success of Modi’s efforts to rehabilitate his reputation that statements

like Nandy's have been shunted beyond the boundaries of mainstream opinion.

The transformation of Modi's image has been powered by a sophisticated public relations campaign, but the embellishments rest on a foundation of genuine accomplishment. His record as an efficient and capable administrator is undeniable. He appears to prefer power to money, which is a particularly appealing proposition for voters who regard most politicians as corrupt, ineffective and weak. Since his appointment as chief minister in 2001, he has won two state elections in Gujarat, each with a two-thirds majority. In the cities, his popularity is overwhelming, and those who love him profess their adoration with an unusual intensity.

An autowallah: "Modi will rule Gujarat for the next ten years." A radio taxi driver: "God is with Modi. If Modi wants me to kill anyone, I will do it." A woman who runs a stationery shop: "Modi is the *uttam purush*—the perfect man." And a hotel waiter: "When Gujarat was under attack from terrorists, Modi saved us."

Modi stirs an equal passion in his detractors, of course, and their numbers are not small. It is a tired cliche to call him 'divisive', but in fact his lovers and haters share an essentially identical impression of the man and his personality. Both believe Modi possesses an almost absolute authority and a willingness to defy institutions and rules, as a strong and charismatic leader who "gets things done" without concern for protocol or established hierarchies.

There is little question that Modi sees himself in similar terms. The BJP insider, who is close to both Modi and Arun Jaitley, the party's establishment face, told me that Modi criticises his friend for excessive deference to the law: "Jaitley is one of the few politicians who talks freely with Modi," he said. "But Modi often complains to him, 'You speak only about the Constitution.'"

Lately, however, the law has become a bigger problem for Modi: his opponents in Gujarat have filed a series of petitions to force him to accept the appointment of a Lokayukta empowered to investigate corruption within the government—a position that Modi has deliberately kept vacant for the past eight years. The opposition believes that the Lokayukta could scrutinize the sizable concessions and tax sops Modi has offered to lure companies to Gujarat, whose details have been closely guarded. Modi's cosy relations with the corporate chiefs who sing his praises have long been one of his strongest assets, and he does not want to risk letting his pro-business tilt turn into an electoral liability. Indeed, according to the BJP insider, Modi secretly fears that he might suffer the fate of former Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu, a darling of CEOs and the business press who lost to the Congress in 2004 after 10 consecutive years in office, and never managed a comeback.

"Modi only thinks of winning—and winning all the time," a former chief minister of Gujarat told me. "Other politicians can imagine that they will someday lose, and plan accordingly. But this attitude may get him into trouble, because in the future he can only be at one of the extremes: either he will be prime minister or he will go to jail. If I live long enough, I would be surprised to see him anywhere else—it has to be one or the other."

Shortly before I left Gujarat, one RSS leader described his own feelings in a bitter sigh: "*Shivling mein bichhu baitha hai. Na usko haath se utaar sakte ho, na usko joota maar sakte ho*." A scorpion is sitting on Shivling, the holy phallus of Lord Shiva. It can neither be removed by hand nor slapped with a shoe.
