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India

# Modi: itinerary of a man from the extreme right in India

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**Former "chai walli" (tea seller), son of a small shopkeeper, from a middle caste in Gujarat, Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister and leader of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian People's Party) likes to highlight his modest origins which contrast with those of most other leaders of the Indian extreme right, most of whom come from the traditional high castes.**

Modi owes his political ascent entirely to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Volunteer Association), which he joined in the mid-1970s. The RSS is a very old Hindu nationalist movement, founded in 1925. A member of this movement assassinated Gandhi in 1948. It defends a racial conception of the Indian people, the Hindutva: only Hindus can be really Indians, and the party organises both schools and a "medical" branch which claims to help Hindu couples to obtain children who are "perfect, tall and fair-skinned" and have "the desired IQ". [1] The RSS is also distinguished by its militias, which violently attack Christians, communists and above all Muslims, against whom they have carried out real pogroms. The most famous coup of this movement was the destruction in 1992 of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, in order to build a temple in Rama, under the pretext that it had been built on the site of an ancient Hindu temple... in 1527!

## Massacre in Gujarat

Modi earned his first stripes in the SSR during the state of emergency (1975-1977), when the head of government Indira Gandhi exercised dictatorial powers and banned many political organisations, including the SSR. It was within the underground apparatus of the SSR that Modi was able to prove himself as an organizer to his superiors.

In 1980, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was founded by groups representing the different components of Indian nationalism. The purpose of this new party was to legally challenge the power of the Congress Party. It was immediately overwhelmed by the SSR, which sent many cadres, including Narendra Modi, to the party. Modi then continued his career as a bureaucrat in the BJP, patiently moving up the ranks during the 1990s. In 2001, as a result of internal intrigues and political scandals in the BJP leadership in Gujarat, Narendra Modi was chosen to replace the Prime Minister of Gujarat.

On 27 February 2002, only a few months after he came to power in Gujarat, incidents broke out between Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya and the population of a Muslim neighbourhood. The train carrying the pilgrims was set on fire (although it is not known to this day whether this was deliberate or an accident), resulting in the deaths of around 50 people. This drama was immediately exploited by the Indian extreme right, which unleashed its militias against the Muslim population of Gujarat. Nearly 2,000 people were killed during the anti-Muslim pogroms that multiplied over the following months. More than 100,000 people had to flee their homes to escape the massacres. The Gujarat police, under Modi's orders, not only did nothing to prevent them but blocked any serious investigation. And with good reason: many of the people in power were directly involved in the organization of the massacres, including Amit Shah, the current federal interior minister and Modi's right-hand man. The massacre, which put Modi out of international relations for years to come, has made him immensely popular among the Hindu population, which has been rendered white-hot by years of communal hatred. [2]

## Prime Minister in 2014

Re-elected twice, Modi joined forces with the great capitalist families of the region - often among the greatest Indian fortunes such as the Ambanis, Birla, Godrej - to make Gujarat a showcase for Indian ultra-liberalism. Pollution scandals multiplied, inequalities increased and the state continued to be low ranked for poverty, lack of education and malnutrition, far behind other states with a more modest GDP. [3]

From the mid-2000s onwards, Narendra Modi was increasingly seen as the man for the job by many Indian capitalists and politicians who were working to rehabilitate him.

On becoming Prime Minister in 2014, he applied the recipes developed in the Gujarati laboratory. His policy was based on two main lines: on the one hand, strengthening political centralization by weakening as much as possible the weight of the federated states and autonomous powers; on the other hand, deregulating the economy at all costs by massively privatizing public services and by widely opening up economic sectors that were until then relatively protected - such as the agricultural market - to investments by large national or foreign groups. This ultra-liberal policy, applied by forced march, as met with a lot of resistance, especially from peasants who opposed the requisition of land necessary for its policy of major works (expropriation of tribal populations by the army in order to build dams...) even if the mobilizations were not then on the scale of those which are currently taking place. More than 1,800 peasant demonstrations took place in 2016. In 2018, a march brought together 50,000 tribal peasants over 200 km to demand land titles on the land they have lived on for generations. [4]

## Re-election in 2019

Despite the resistance he encountered, Modi managed to gain the support of a relatively large section of the population sensitive to his chauvinistic and anti-Muslim rhetoric and his promises of economic development, enabling him to be re-elected in 2019. He owes this victory both to the heterogeneous coalition of regional, nationalist and caste parties, whose opportunism no longer needs explicating, but also to the fact that on the ideological level Narendra Modi embodies a certain evolution in the Hindutva current. In fact, unlike the traditional Hinduist extreme right, which is stubbornly defending the privileges of the high castes, Modi emphasises belonging to Hinduism as the only determining identity, including a number of other religious currents (Jain, Sikhs, Parsi, Buddhists...), while violently rejecting the Christian and Muslim minorities. The latter (14.2% of the population) is the target of repeated attacks by the Modi government. For example, in Kashmir, the only predominantly Muslim state, it enforces a military curfew of rare violence and had all telephone and internet lines to the outside world cut for several weeks during army operations in March 2019. A year later, its militias orchestrated anti-Muslim pogroms in the heart of the capital. For the rest of the population, he holds out the prospect of access to education or work through caste quotas, opposing any social policy.

## Mass repression

Modi now has both the state police and military apparatus and militant groups and extreme right-wing militias ready to use terror against his opponents.

Political activists, intellectuals and well-known figures are subjected to trials, arrests and even political murders. For example, journalist Rana Ayyub has been the victim of a campaign of harassment, calls for rape and murder by pro-Hindutva activists. In 2017, journalist Gauri Lankesh, a critic of Hindu nationalism, was shot dead outside her home. In 2020, 67 journalists were arrested or imprisoned. [5]

As for the working classes, especially the most discriminated fringes, such as Muslims, tribal populations and dalits (“untouchables”, individuals considered to be out of caste), they are subjected to indiscriminate violence, covered up by the authorities when they do not encourage it. Dalits are murdered every day, and women are subjected to sexual violence (21 Dalit women are raped and 13 Dalits are murdered every week) without the police looking for the slightest culprit. [6] Until now, its nationalist policy, in a state of cold war with Pakistan and in constant search for domestic scapegoats, had thus allowed

## Modified to divide the working classes.

The support of the Indian bourgeoisie has been acquired on the basis of an antisocial policy and the promise of new future opportunities for business, in agriculture as well as in industry. [7]

Internationally, he recently announced his agreement with Trump. Even today he buys enough fighter planes from Macron to be able to invite him to the Taj Mahal, far away from noises of boots on the ground of the real war going on in Kashmir. Whatever the diatribes and nationalist violence, no leader seems to find his company unprofitable. Some humanitarian associations, NGOs funded by rich donors like Bill Gates, work hand in hand with the extreme right-wing government and its leader. To get rid of Modi and his clique, the Indian people will have to rely on their own forces.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).*

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[1] See *A l'Encontre* “[Inde. Modi rêve d'une race supérieure](#)”.

[2] Human Rights Watch 2002 “[WE HAVE NO ORDERS TO SAVE YOU](#)” *State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*”.

[3] [rediff.com](#), 2 April 2015 “[Gujarat model of development: More hype than substance](#)”.

[4] Ashok Dhawale et al, *The Kisan Long March in Maharashtra*, LeftWord Books, New Delhi, 2018.

[5] Many examples can be found on this site [Free Speech Collective](#).

[6] Source [National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights \(NCDHR\)](#).

[7] See Arundhati Roy *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014.