



Why do liberal intellectuals hate Narendra Modi?

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If the admirers of democracy were honest, they would have rejoiced when a tea-seller becomes the Prime Minister. If they were consistent, they would have considered this the logical end result of democratic politics. But, they do not. The liberal intellectuals and journalists still treat Narendra Modi like a pariah.

It is perhaps true, as they say, that Narendra Modi is a philistine whose understanding of the world is limited to his narrow experiences. But, they do not realise that the same tribute could be paid to almost any voter. Why is this considered a virtue in the voter- a sign of his incorruptibility - and a vice in Narendra Modi?

I suspect that much of the hate heaped on Narendra Modi is justified. But, aren't all successful politicians habitual sinners against the light? This need not always be visible to the naked eye, but virtually every successful politician is a mass murderer in one way or the other. Why are intellectuals and journalists unusually biased against Modi? Is it even plausible that liberal intellectuals hate mass murderers?

When Barack Obama was elected, the Nobel-winning economist Paul Krugman told Americans that there is something wrong with them if this does not stir them, leave them teary-eyed, and proud of their own country. Obama is a mass murderer like all successful American politicians, but this did not stop the Nobel Committee from awarding him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009.

Krugman still remains an admirer which is typical. The liberal elite across the world love Obama, and his effect over them is comparable to that of Britney Spears and Paris Hilton over their admirers. This is true, even of Indian intellectuals. They do not treat Obama like a pariah. The image of Obama does not evoke words to the effect, "Oh, the horror." They would think twice before calling Obama "stupid". If anything, they are fawning. Then, why do they consider Modi the worst plague that has befallen India?

The reason is that intellectuals, especially Indian intellectuals, are unusually likely to be liberal. It is hard to think of many right-wing intellectuals of the same stature of the best leftist intellectuals like Amartya Sen and Paul Krugman. Even though there is not much substantive difference between the Hindu nationalists and the politicians of other persuasions, they all have

decided that Hindu nationalists are evil--and beyond redemption. They would have hated a right-wing politician like Modi anyway.

Now, it is perhaps true that Modi could have taken reasonable steps to prevent or control the 2002 Gujarat riots which led to the death of 2000 innocent people. But isn't this true of all of us who could have taken reasonable steps to prevent folly and disaster?

The Indian public and the politicians who ruled India for decades could have easily taken reasonable steps to avoid the starvation level subsistence that characterized the Indian economy. There is nothing unusual about the ideas that guided the economic reforms. Every economist worth his weight in salt has known these principles since the time of Adam Smith, or even before. The Indian politicians and the prominent liberal intellectuals who were educated in the west cannot claim ignorance. In 1947, their socialistic views were neither explicable nor justifiable

A 2009 paper of the Cato Institute estimated that if the economic reforms in India had begun in 1971, "14.5 million more children would have survived, 261 million more Indians would have become literate, and 109 million more people would have risen above the poverty line". If the 2002 Gujarat riots were a disaster, this is disaster of a much greater magnitude. It is important to remember that the economic growth in the 1970's was lower than that of Sub-Saharan African countries. It is not clear why the liberal intellectuals do not hold the politicians of the pre-reform era up for similar scrutiny---and denunciation. But, they are often excused as demigods who did not know better or were, at worst, doing what was necessary in that particular 'phase of development.'

For liberal intellectuals, it is very tempting to blame Modi for the "politics of hatred". But, is there any good reason to assume that the vast ethnic massacres, ethnic cleansing and forced sterilisations that underscored post-Independence India like a long trail of blood has nothing to do with the "politics of hatred"?

The philosophy of anti-capitalism too targets "convenient scapegoats" like the foreigners, the corporations and the rich. In practice, though, it ruins the man at the bottom of the income pyramid. It does not occur to liberal intellectuals and journalists that it does not take great virtue or insight to damn a politician who condoned riots. But, if they genuinely cared about social justice, their hearts would have been bleeding for such "convenient scapegoats" too, and not just for the riot victims.

But then, it is worse than a waste of time to blame politicians. Without pandering to popular prejudices, they would not have been elected to power. But, the common man could have easily taken reasonable steps to avoid political ignorance. After all, he has nothing to lose. The liberal intellectuals themselves could have read an elementary text on Economics. They too have nothing to lose, except their friends and those positions of power and influence.