

The neo liberal policies adopted by the Congress – led UPA government have led to a huge discontent amongst ordinary people. The poorer, more disadvantaged sections have especially suffered its worst consequences. This anger is paving the way for the resurgence of communal politics. While there is an obvious need for an alternative, can the Bharatiya Janata Party, backed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its ‘Hindutva’ brigade, under the leadership of Narendra Modi as its PM candidate, provide any kind of solution? The BJP ruled states are equally “models” of a neo liberal development paradigm. The women living in these states are at the receiving end of economic policies that marginalize them, and also of a reactionary, patriarchal ideology that undermines their fundamental right to equality and social justice. Concerted attempts are being made by the corporate sector and its handmaidens in certain sections of the media to whitewash these dimensions of the BJP in power.

In the current context of the 16th Lok Sabha elections, the progressive and secular women’s movement faces a number of challenges. The first is the economic policies that have placed increasing burdens on women, and the withdrawal of state from providing basic entitlements, which has enormously increased the insecurity in women’s lives. The second arises out of the increasing instances of violence that result from the strengthening of institutions and trends which espouse conservative social values. The emergence of *khaps* and the surge in moral policing by caste based and fundamentalist organizations are some instances that underline this growing menace.

Another grave challenge emanates from the strengthening of the alliance between forces of Hindu fundamentalism and these socially conservative institutions. This alliance was fully exposed in the recent communal violence in Muzzaffarnagar, where the Jat Mahapanchayat aligned with the *Sangh Parivar* to target the minorities. The attack was orchestrated on the pretext of saving women from so-called ‘love jehad’. However, this is not the first time when *Hindutva* organizations have used traditional community institutions for communal purposes. For example Muslim minorities were targeted by the Bodo tribal groups leading to violence in the Kokrajhar district of Assam in 2012. It is no secret that the BJP’s increasing influence in the area in the last decade had led to a communal polarisation within tribal groups and also between the tribals and the others. The encroachment of the market in the daily life of people associated with the capitalist growth model also indirectly strengthens the patriarchal family system and conservative moral values. Thus, the celebration and commercialization of arranged marriages, *Karva Chauth* ceremonies and other traditional festivals goes hand in hand with the profiteering ambitions of industries and new types of businesses that have emerged in the process. The stereotyping of women as good wives, mothers and daughters-in-law, who should privilege their families above their careers has fed into the neo liberal agenda. This idea is fundamentally against the conception of a modern emancipated woman. It also weakens the notion of gender equality, and the demands of women’s organizations that have been fighting for greater public investment to provide support systems that allow women to go out and realize their aspirations and contribute to the country as responsible citizens.

Hence we see that there is an intrinsic relationship between the capitalist market, social conservatism and the *Hindutva* ideology that underlines the ideology of the BJP. It is this coalition of ideas that underlines the policy perspectives on women in the BJP ruled states. It also underscores the failure of the BJP ruled states to effectively undertake inclusive gender sensitive development in their states.

The Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh and the Brahmanical Family

In a statement made on 6 January 2013, the *Sarsanghchalak* Mohan Bhagwat said that “a husband and a wife are ‘bound by a social contract’ where the wife has to take care of the household chores and the husband’s duty is to earn for the house and protect his wife”. A year later, Narendra Modi outlined the seven pillars in his “rainbow vision” within which women and tradition occupy an important space. According to him, ‘tradition’ is epitomised in the family, and the honour of the family is epitomised within the woman.

It is significant that, rather than speaking about the transformation of the family, Modi speaks of strengthening the traditional family in order to protect tradition. In other words, it signifies the affirmation of male supremacy in inheritance and household decision making processes. As the introduction to the website of the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti puts it, women are “the foundation pillars of the nation taking into account their capacity to mould the family.” An ideal woman is an enlightened mother who, in her capacity as a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother, is “strong physically, mentally, intellectually and spiritually” so that she can defend the nation and “create a deep sense of devotion and pride for nation, religion and culture.”

This understanding is carried forward by Modi in his enunciation on women where he calls the woman an epitome of wisdom and virtue. This virtue is one that needs to be inculcated through greater education, which is termed by Modi as “women’s empowerment.” It is significant that his message is for strengthening the traditional role of the woman rather than focusing on the forces that threaten her participation in modern processes. Quite obviously, Modi’s vision is not rights-based or structured around the need to understand the changing character of the modern woman. Rather the role of the woman is described in terms of a neo-traditionalist whose skills should be upgraded in order to fulfil her role as an epitome of virtue. The Madhya Pradesh BJP government has been brazenly conservative with its support to child marriage and conduct of virginity tests. Hence the hailing of the woman as an epitome of ‘purity’ and ‘virtue’ or a ‘mother’ or a ‘devi’ is nothing more than an ideological cover-up for the BJP’s reluctance to moot changes within traditional patriarchal social structures.

It is therefore not surprising that the BJP’s election campaign has focused on mobilising women through traditional symbolism and its Mahila Morcha is actively pursuing the ‘Kamal, Mehndi and Rangoli’ to mobilise the support of ‘house wives’. Such mobilisation strategies glorify the idea of tradition, promote its public display and thus encourage the reinvention of this tradition in a new context. Thus the social welfare efforts of the BJP governments are also centred around the parameters set by this ideology. The Mukhyamantri Kanyadaan Yojana, Mata Yashoda Schemes and others are aimed at making women better mothers and wives and confirm the traditional

sexual division of labour. In other words even though the BJP ruled states claim to be promoting the cause of women's emancipation, they in fact use traditional vocabulary and symbolism that stereotype women into a traditional division of labour. This stereotyping is accompanied by a conception of purity and honour that is quite akin to the conceptions of community and caste institutions. Hence the idea of '*nari sanmaan*' as promoted by the BJP campaign for the 2014 general elections is closely tied with equating the honour of women with the honour of the nation. This is seen in the emerging upper caste-*Hindutva* alliance in north India after the recent Muzzaffarnagar violence.

Caste, Women and the Anatomy of Communal Riots

Though it is well known that the *Sangh Parivar* organisations have largely been popular amongst the upper castes and the OBC petty bourgeoisie in states like Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, the 1980s has seen a conscious effort by the BJP to expand their social base amongst the adivasis and the dalits. This is particularly seen in the hegemonic influence of the *Hindutva* ideology which has spread itself by ideologically convincing the marginalised people about their vision.

Hence the Gujarat riots of 2002 saw the aggressive mobilisation of adivasis by the BJP led *Hindutva* brigades. These brigades were largely led by affiliates of the Sangh organisations that largely belong to landed dominant and OBC castes.

More significantly, the Gujarat riots also saw an unprecedented level of violence against women with the rape and physical brutalisation of women as a weapon for attacking the self esteem, confidence and the very social fabric of the people belonging to the Muslim minority. The landmark Naroda Patiya judgement has given enough evidence of this where Reshmabanu Nadimbhai Sayid (witness 142) records how her pregnant sister, Kausharbanu was pulled away by leading Bajrang Dal activists, Suresh Langda and Bhawani Singh, who took out the unborn foetus splitting her abdomen by a sword. Both were then burnt alive. Another gruesome tale is told by Naimuddin Ibrahim Shaikh (witness 148) who witnessed the gang rape of his wife Zarina. He says that the mob cut off both the hands of his wife with a sword and stripped her till she was totally naked. In another testimony, Siddiquebhai Alabaksh Mansuri (witness 236) illustrated that Maya Kodnani the Minister and MLA from the constituency led a mob that burnt women and children alive. These medieval means and methods of attack displayed a sense of helplessness of the Muslim women victims, and a sense of dominating power of the male *Hindutva* brigade. While the impact of communal riots on women has received much attention in the political discourse, a communal polarization within women has also been witnessed, which needs much more attention.

The process of using existing social structures like caste for communal mobilization is starkly evident in the Muzzaffarnagar riots. As the AIDWA fact finding report points out, Muzzaffarnagar is an area which women of all communities have been targets of sexual harassment in the past. It is also a region which is dominated by the Jat Khap Panchayats which have prescribed moral codes and also have been active in cases of honour killings, which are almost one or two in a month in the region. For example, it was in Fugana, where rapes of Muslim women in this communal attack have occurred, that a young Hindu girl was stripped and killed by her community in 2006. Hence the women of the region have not only been suppressed but also been socialized into a

conservative social code that structures their daily behavior. It is therefore not surprising that the Sangh Parivar organizations led by BJP legislators chose the issue of “honour” to create a divide between the Jats and mobilize the dominant Hindu Jats in order to perpetrate the Muzaffarnagar riots. As is well documented by AIDWA and other organisations, the main focus was on physical violence against women which was used to tarnish the ‘honour’ of the minority communities. Hence the use of the woman as a traditional symbol of honour for communal and divisive forces has come out in the open in Muzaffarnagar and reflects a reinvention of political *Hindutva* in terms of its penetration of traditional social structures. Interestingly, this philosophy and alliance is also visible in the BJP ruled state’s model of inclusive governance.

The Developmental Patterns in BJP Ruled States

The BJP’s campaign is largely concentrated on promoting the model of governance it follows in BJP-ruled states. These models, particularly the Gujarat Model, are used by them to contrast the record of the BJP-ruled states with the Congress-ruled states and the UPA II government. By doing so, the BJP wants to stake a claim to the platform of development and hide its communal agenda. However a closer analysis of the models of development promoted by the BJP shows that these states are leaders in promotion of naked capitalism and that their social welfare policies are structured to promote socially conservative values and the cause of *Hindutva*. In this sense *Hindutva* is becoming a close ally of corporate capitalism and also reinventing itself into a “model of development” that is essentially patriarchal in character and loaded against the working classes particularly the dalits and the adivasis.

That the character of the social policies of the state governments is neo-liberal is seen by the fact that the social sector spending is not leading to the improvement in the social indicators of these states. The investment patterns of these states in health and education that are vital indicators of the development of common people have been the following since 2009:

Social Sector Expenditures in BJP Ruled States, 2013-2014

Percentage of State Budgetary allocation

State	2008-9	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
EDUCATION						
Chhattisgarh	14.4	15.6	18.6	17.7	18.1	19.7
Gujarat	11.7	13.8	15.9	15.8	14.2	13.9
Madhya Pradesh	12.8	13.0	14.2	12.4	14.8	14.6
All States	14.3	15.3	16.6	16.3	16.6	16.5
HEALTH						
Chhattisgarh	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.8	4.2	4.3
Gujarat	3.1	3.8	4.2	4.2	4.7	4.9

Madhya Pradesh	3.4	3.3	3.6	3.2	4.4	4.3
All States	3.9	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.4	4.5
SOCIAL SECTOR						
Chhattisgarh	54.2	50.2	51.6	51.0	53.6	54.2
Gujarat	35.0	38.4	39.9	38.2	39.0	39.1
Madhya Pradesh	35.2	39.0	33.6	41.8	41.6	35.2
All States	37.6	38.7	39.0	38.7	40.4	40.5

Source: Reserve Bank of India, *State Finances: A Study of Budgets 2013-14*, Statements 28, 29 and 34

The table above shows that the social sector expenditures in all BJP ruled states except Chhattisgarh have been declining in the last three years. The level of expenditure is especially significant in Gujarat where it has been consistently lower than the all-India average. At the same time the levels of expenditure in Chhattisgarh are above the national average but both Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh continue to be amongst the least developed states in the country. What is even more telling is the fact that health, education and the measures to combat economic deprivation which constitute the social development index have seen a decline in these three states. Therefore the ranking of these states in the social development index has worsened in the last two years. While the ranking of Gujarat has declined by 6 places (from 7 to 13), Madhya Pradesh by 4 places (from 14 to 19) and Chhattisgarh by three places (from 13 to 16) in the comparative Social Development Index's of 2010 and 2012. The slow social development process in these states is reflective of the growing inequities within the states on the basis of individual social indicators as shown in the table below:

State Rankings on Individual Indicators of Social Development

State	Health		Education		Economic Deprivation	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Gujarat	17	18	13	18	9	15
Chhattisgarh	19	20	14	17	4	3
Madhya Pradesh	22	23	23	22	17	16

Source: India Social Development Report, 2012, p.290

The table above shows that the gap between the male and female social development is the highest in education and economic deprivation in Gujarat. As is seen Gujarat ranks 13 as far as the male education is concerned and Chhattisgarh is ranked 14 in the same parameters. But in female education Gujarat is 5 places lower at 18 whereas Chhattisgarh is 4 places lower indicating a growing inequality between men and women in education.

More significantly Gujarat shows the same or a greater level of inequity as far as economic deprivation is concerned. As far as women are concerned it is placed at number 15 in economic deprivation, but in the case of male poverty or economic deprivation it is placed 6 places higher at number 9. This indicates that women are far worse off than men in terms of economic

entitlements. This difference does not exist much in the case of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. What is more-stark is the difference between the rankings in health and education and economic deprivation. Chhattisgarh may rank higher in terms of wage rates, employment and other economic indicators, but it lags far behind in terms of education and health. Madhya Pradesh is placed very low on the scale on all the indicators.

This shows that even though BJP-ruled states may boast of high growth rates, they have failed to bring about the development of their own society in a holistic manner. The explanation for this lies in the fact that the developmental programmes of the BJP-ruled states are not geared towards transforming social structures. Rather they reaffirm casteist and patriarchal hierarchies and provide subsidies to NGOs and the private sector. The model of development is the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model where friendly corporates and NGOs largely espousing the ideology of the *Sangh Parivar* are given infrastructural support. This is especially true of the education sector where Central Schemes like the *Eklavya* model school scheme are being handed over to the private sector in states like Gujarat. In its own view, the Gujarat government believes that the management of social welfare schemes like the ICDS, Mid Day Meal and other such programmes should be government aided, but run through the NGOs. Needless to say, many of these NGOs are closely linked to the Sangh Parivar.

The best example of this model is provided by Modi's Gujarat where the impact of this PPP model has now started becoming evident. This focus on public-private partnerships in the social sector has also impacted upon the implementation of schemes that are essential to the wellbeing of the most vulnerable sections of the society, namely women, children, dalits and adivasis. A recent CAG report on the social sector in Gujarat confirms that the implementation of social welfare programmes for women and children have been implemented in a half hearted manner by the state government. In particular the supplementary nutrition and ICDS programmes have been shortchanged in their manner of implementation. As against the requirement of 75,480 Anganwadi Centres, only 52,137 centres were sanctioned by the state government. Of these only 50,225 centres were in existence (CAG Report 2013, p.45) as a result around 1.87 crore children have been denied the benefits of the ICDS programme (CAG 2013, p.48) It was further noted that the basic amenities were not available in 40% of the Anganwadi centres. The audit also revealed that Rs. 5.56 crore of expenditure of the Centres was unaccounted for between the audit of 2011-12 and 2012-13 (CAG 2013, p.52).

A similar situation is seen in the supplementary nutrition scheme under the ICDS programme. The audit report holds the Supreme Court asked the government to provide supplementary nutrition to all children (6 months to 3 years) and lactating mothers. The total population to be covered by the scheme was to be about 223.16 lakh children and mothers. But the government target was only 170.32 lakh which covers only two thirds of the population. The actual coverage during the period 2007-12 under the scheme was 159.97 lakh, denying about 63.37 lakh people benefits of the scheme. Hence the report concludes that the Gujarat government has never intended to universalise nutrition (CAG 2013, p.57). The report also indicted the government for not implementing the nutritional programme for adolescent girls in the Panchmahal district. About 40% of the girls under this district remained outside this scheme (CAG 2013, p.61). In this

situation it is not surprising that every third child in the state is malnourished and 55.3% of the women have severe anemia.

The Anti-Women, Anti-Dalit and Anti-Minority Bias of the BJP Model of Development

The PPP model not only supports the penetration of corporate capital but also strengthens the socially conservative stereotypes that support the strengthening of *Hindutva* forces. Social programmes are imbued with details that are geared to inculcate oppressive patriarchal values and reaffirm the caste system. Such an exercise is distinctly anti-women and distinctly discriminatory towards dalits who the BJP is busy trying to lure. This is clearly seen in the Gujarat state textbooks. As a recent study done by Nirantar pointed towards the manner in which the text books in Gujarat attempt to create a religious divide between Hindus and Muslims. The text books use the idea of Vedic “purity” and the motherland as the divine and pure nation. Since the nation is the motherland and pure and divine, whose honour has to be protected, the woman is also a divine mother whose honour is to be protected. The nation is ancient and therefore its origins are ‘Hindu’ and Muslims and Christians are foreigners who have violated the motherland. As Nirantar’s analysis shows, in all contemporary Gujarati text books, while women are assigned inspirational roles as nurturers and reproducers of moral values, men retain the hegemonic role in history. History is literally the saga of men – as cavemen, kings, warriors, sages, inventors, leaders, producers and consumers. Women’s empowerment is presented as a developmental ideal, but primarily restricted within the limits of their roles within the patriarchal family. (Nirantar, *Textbook Regimes*, 2009, pp.xii-xiii).

Further the Nirantar analysis also shows that the evolution of all social morality is assigned to religion in these textbooks, thereby linking social institutions to religion. This is particularly dangerous in the contemporary context because such an ideological argument forms the basis of linking all social institutions with *Hindutva*. The divine sanction provided to caste institutions is through its philosophy. Thus, *Hindutva* also ends up justifying untouchability. As Narendra Modi writes in his book *Karmayoga*, a collection of speeches to IAS officers: “I do not believe that they (the dalits) have been doing this job (manual scavenging) just to sustain their livelihood. Had this been so they would not have carried on this type of job generation after generation...At some point of time, somebody must have got the enlightenment that it is their duty to work for the happiness of the entire society and the Gods; they have to do this job bestowed upon them by the Gods and this job of cleaning up should continue as an internal spiritual activity for centuries”. This justification of untouchability is clearly reflected in the situation of dalits in Gujarat.

Caste discrimination is also seen in the working of public schemes and programmes. A survey of 1589 villages surveyed by Navsarjan (Ahemdabad) and the Robert Kennedy Centre (USA) shows that in more than half of the villages, a non-dalit midwife would not serve dalit households and at least one-third of the dalit households had no proper supply of drinking water. Such discriminatory practices also worked in the functioning of the Gram Sabhas and the mid-day meal schemes. Hence, even while caste discrimination may not be evident in some of the official figures, recent data shows that 64.5% of dalit children and 76% of the adivasi children drop out from school before completing Class X. The discrimination within the schools is seen in the fact that

more than 77% of the dalit children in schools are forced to drink tea in separate cups and are forced to sit separately.

At another level, the inter-linkages between caste and patriarchy are seen in the problems of malnutrition in Gujarat. According to the Human Development Report 2011, the overall adult malnutrition figures for 2005-06 in Gujarat (36.3% for women and 36.1% for men) are just slightly higher than the all-India average of (33% for women and 34.2% for men). In the same period, child malnutrition was 44.6%, which is much higher than the all-India average of 34.2%. However, the real story behind these figures emerges when the distribution of adult malnutrition is seen across social and religious groups. The percentage of under-nutritioned women was the same between Hindus and Muslims, but the rate of decline of malnutrition was much slower amongst the Muslims. Thus while malnutrition amongst Hindu women declined by only 1.8% between 1999 and 2006, amongst the Muslims this decline was hardly 0.3%. Further, while the SCs in the state had a malnutrition rate of 42.2% in 2005-06 (a decline of barely 3.2% since 1999), malnutrition amongst the STs went up from 55 to 61% from 1999 to 2006. Hence the Gujarat model being touted by the BJP is one that is essentially anti-women and anti-dalit and anti-advansi in its orientation. This is largely because it strengthens and preserves the existing social structures and garners the benefits for dominant and oppressive groups. It is not accidental Gujarat under Modi has been one of the States which has consistently held a very bad record in child sex ratios.

Reinventing Hindutva through the Politics of Development

The BJP campaign for elections 2014 has to be demystified in the light of the facts presented above. At present the attempt of the BJP is to sell the Gujarat Model as an inclusive and secular model for the future. Such a marketing strategy is spearheaded by their Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi and his vision of idea.

Another important aspect of the vision enunciated by Modi is his focus on the village, agriculture and participatory democracy. Selectively borrowing from Mahatma Gandhi, he states that until the village is developed, there can be no development of the nation. He spends considerable time on the changes to be brought about in agriculture and its markets and the need to use local land, water and forest resources. He says that the problems of agriculture can be solved only if real time data are collected from the farmer at the village level. This is an attempt to avert attention away from the real issues which stem from the pursuit of neo-liberal policies by BJP governments themselves. The Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh governments are leaders in corporate farming which requires real time data for forecasting production and price estimates. They also have an unusually high growth in landlessness and are examples of how farmers and agricultural workers have been displaced and exploited by companies. At the level of common property resources, Modi once again talks about the use of technology to develop and conserve them. However, once again the role and the policies of the BJP governments on these fronts show that this vision is quite compatible with corporate capital. The track record of BJP governments is that they have perceived common property resources as 'wastelands' which can be handed over to corporates at unusually throw-away prices. The Adani Mundra Port project in the coastlands of Gujarat is a good example of this; all the protests have been repressed by a coercive government. The BJP governments are known to be the leaders in the sale of forestlands and their diversion to big companies in the name of developmental projects. Thus the vision of a developed and

prospering village is nothing but a justification for the BJP led governments to legitimise the sale of local resources to meet the objectives of integrating and adapting the village economy to suit the needs of capital.

The idea of the village as the focus of development is intimately tied with Modi's notion of democracy as an entrenched system of power structures, with little space for participatory dynamics. But even here the record of BJP governments is not very encouraging. In the *Hindutva* vision of development, the space for dalits and adivasis is marginal, while the treatment of minorities has been strikingly harsh. Therefore it is not surprising that Modi does not make any mention of discrimination against dalits and adivasis or the rights of minorities in his future programme. His future strategy has no space for transforming the social structures which have been supporting the domination of conservative morality and ideologies that deligitimise democratically elected political institutions. Rather, his silence only explains that the BJP is banking on creating a common pan-national Hindu identity that is compatible with the current phase of capitalism.

Thus it is clear that Modi's 'rainbow vision' is not a vision for the people-oriented modern development and reinvents the Hindutva discourse to adapt to the contemporary neo-liberal economic scenario. It is also structured to cover up the BJP's abysmal record and the twin interests of neo-liberal capitalism and its ideological allies amongst the right wing socially conservative forces. The idea of a strong patriarchal leadership that he portrays is geared towards legitimising an anti people, anti democratic social order. Its focus is on the strengthening of a traditional value system which is anti-women, anti-SC/ST and opposed to any measures of social reforms that form the basis of a modern society. The change in political discourse from the critical need for social transformation to a seemingly value neutral conception of development poses a serious challenge for Indian democracy.

The progressive women's movement in our country along with Left and democratic forces has played a historic and important role in bringing about social transformation and democratising Indian society since Independence. They now have to meet Modi's challenge head on - by mobilising democratic sections of the working people against the authoritarian, anti-woman ethos that is represented by the BJP.

AIDWA appeals to all women to see through the masks, the tea parties, and the media blitz, and make an informed choice which will strengthen women's access to equal rights. These elections are a critical moment to express our opposition to communal politics and the neo liberal development paradigm. Let us resolve to ensure equality and dignity for all women of this country; to achieve a violence free society within and outside the home.

Let us progress towards these ideals by unseating the Congress from power, rejecting the Modi-led BJP, and supporting Left, democratic, and secular alternatives.