

# **COMMENTARAO' IN "THE TELEGRAPH" OF MARCH 18 2013** **"THE TRIP THAT NEVER WAS**

- If allegations prove guilt, Modi alone is not in the dock" **by S L Rao**

**The "dis-invitation" of a University of Pennsylvania invitation to Narendra Modi to deliver a keynote address at an annual conference on India at Wharton is now an old story. It still needs comment. It was ugly and insulting. The "disinvitation" Modi was initiated by a petty publicity-seeking Indian origin Assistant Professor of social sciences at the university, with two other more reticent followers. On Indian television channels this Assistant Professor was given time to explain his position. The university rescinded the invitation after receiving a letter, co-signed by the two others.**

**Modi is a politician with boundless ambition. He seeks a national and international reputation and role. Such invitations help to bolster his image as a major political figure. His basic image was made in Gujarat and India, and does not depend on speaking at a few overseas universities, including Ivy League ones in the USA. But they spread his name. Given the Indian penchant for foreign praise, it will help in fund-raising from overseas Indians.**

**It is strange that the University of Pennsylvania decided to invite him in the first place without the usual checks. This Assistant Professor was too low down the pole to have been consulted then. Many others must have persuaded the university to invite Modi.**

**The university must also have done some checking of its own and decided that the three times elected Chief Minister of Gujarat was a fit person to address the conference. What were the fresh arguments (as detailed by the Assistant Professor, on Indian media) for withdrawing the invitation?**

**One was the allegation of Modi's responsibility in the killing of over 2000 Muslims in the Gujarat riots of 2002. The other was that his**

**model of development in Gujarat was mostly media hype and that the reality was much inferior to the claims.**

**No Court has yet ruled against Modi for any role in the Gujarat riots. He was the Chief Minister at the time. The allegations were that he instructed Ministers and top policemen to let the killings continue. No credible evidence that this was so has been submitted in the numerous enquiries and Court hearings. If we accept that allegations are facts, Rajiv Gandhi can be accused of allowing the killings of many thousand Sikhs in Delhi to continue for three days. Had he instructed the police to allow this? His Home Minister P V Narasimha Rao was incommunicado during the killings. Can he be held responsible? The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) published a leaflet titled "Who are the Guilty" that described what happened and named the ring leaders who led the targeted killings of Sikhs. No one has so far been punished. Indeed, Jagdish Tytler, who was, was made a Union Cabinet Minister. He and Sajjan Kumar who was also named, enjoy Z plus security at the nation's cost. They were charged but the cases have been allowed to drag on for years.**

**Balasaheb Thackeray was reported to have instigated his followers to kill many Muslims during the post-Ayodhya demolition riots in Bombay. No Shiv Senaite was charged. Nor was the then Congress Chief Minister for allowing the riots to take such a toll.**

**The Akali government in Punjab has been honouring Bindranwale, (who died during his armed occupation of the Akal Thakht), the (hanged) security guards who killed Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and the still in jail killer of the Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh. All of them were established as murderers. Should the Punjab government not be charged for their possible collaboration in the crimes committed earlier by these men, since the Punjab government is now condoning their crimes?**

**In contrast, Gujarat has had an active civil movement to bring the killers of Muslims in 2002 to book. It has succeeded in charging, trying and convicting some of them. Modi does not figure in this list.**

**The civil libertarians who tried to charge the leaders of the killers of Sikhs in Delhi were hindered at every stage by Congress governments. Should not top Congress leaders of the time be ostracized and investigated? Instead, many held or continue to hold high office.**

**I hold **no** brief for Mr Modi. I consider him a deeply divisive and arrogant person. He has administrative, oratorical and media handling skills beyond that of any other Indian politician today. He is not a consultative person who acts after building a consensus. He has certainly used Hinduism like L K Advani did with his rath yatra earlier, to win mass support, and elections. Now he is changing tack, as he sees the need to appeal to the larger national electorate and not merely that of Gujarat.**

**Modi's claims that the Gujarat development model is a good one for India's development must be debated. Many do not agree. There is data that it is not inclusive of women, children, lower castes and tribes, and Muslims. He is said to have attracted massive investments into Gujarat. But Gujarat has always had a business friendly government-irrespective of political party. He has used his administrative skills to simplify bureaucratic procedures and made land acquisition and other clearances easy and speedy. Starting a new industry is easier in Gujarat than anywhere else in India.**

**Corruption in Gujarat under Modi is claimed to have reduced. Modi's administrative skills have led to his separating agricultural feeders for electricity from other supplies. This has enabled Gujarat to ensure 24x7 power for households and industry and a few hours of guaranteed power for agriculture. He has used the boon of the Narmada waters to supply piped drinking water to many lakhs of rural households. He has actually spent (not stolen as in many other states) central funds to build good roads and other infrastructure, and deliver benefits to the poor. By paying the electricity bills of suppliers on time (unlike many other state governments), he has attracted investment in power. But Gujarat has a long way to go before it reaches the human development status of Tamilnadu or Kerala.**

**There is no magic wand for India's development. The Prime Minister claims that the Congress has ensured higher growth of GDP**

**than the BJP when in power at the Centre. But he must also take discredit for the many other ills of our society-in human development indicators, exploitation of women, theft of subsidies and loan waivers to farmers, corruption in sale of national assets in telecom, coal, etc, and massive theft of government funds claimed to be spent on programmes to improve peoples' lives.**

**In these circumstances, will the Wharton gang who got yhe University to disinvite Modi be consistent if they invite Manmohan Singh, Sonia/Rahul Gandhi, or other top Congressmen to speak at their forums? If Modi is guilty of muslim deaths and uneven development, so are they. These people carry the blot of the Sikh killings in Delhi and the uneven, non inclusive, unequal, and poor development of India.**

**The U Pen reaction was immature and unworthy of a great American university. It brings discredit to the university and the gang who made this happen, not to Modi. He did not deserve the insult of being invited and then having it withdrawn on the plea of a confused and attention-seeking junior teacher.**

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