

# An open letter to Shri Narendra Modi

## Why I Do Not Want to Vote for Your Party

Shri Narendra Modi

Respected Prime Minister of India:

I have used the word 'respected' in accordance to our civilized Indian culture, which respects even those who may differ ideologically. Your behavior as the Chief Minister of Gujarat with the then Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, was less than dignified, embarrassing the honor of Gujaratis. But I want to be graceful.

I write this Open Letter as an Indian Citizen, who does not represent any public office. I'm well aware that I'm writing this letter before the Parliamentary elections. I am not a registered member of any political party.

I had publicly critiqued the Government of the then Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who had decided to send a seven member Parliamentary delegation led by Shri Sushil Kumar Shinde and Smt Meira Kumar (who were in Congress), and included Omar Abdullah (National Conference), a minister, to protest the inclusion of caste in the agenda of UN World Conference against Racism, though many of the delegates were Dalits. It is with the same moral position and authority that I critique you today.

As a Nation we have adopted the principle of 'secret voting' to ensure that citizens can enfranchise their voting right without fear, intimidation or allurements. But looking at recent incidents, it is apparent that our so-called political leaders have broken that cardinal principle, shredding the dignity of India.

In a way very few people seem to be honest like Madhu Srivastav (BJP MLA from Gujarat), who in utter disregard to law, has threatened to settle scores with "illegal" residents of slums if their polling booth does not return the votes for 'lotus'. In a techno-savvy world his speech is recorded on camera. The Police Commissioner of Vadodara and the collector are silent, in spite of the fact that the threat was made in the presence of the police. The CM wants to be awkwardly ignorant, less than ready to term the behavior as indiscipline of the party, pushing the ball in the court of the Election Commission. Meanwhile, several elected representatives have not thought it necessary to consult their voters before jumping to another political party in a most shameful manner, for reasons known to any common person.

Ultimately it is the voter who has to decide one's own action, just as I have my own right. The reason I want to go public relate to your acts of intimidating the poor. As citizens why should we be afraid of you, when Pakistan has not been able to scare us?

Under the British Rule, though Indians had secured the right to enfranchise in Provincial Governments, not all had the right to vote. Barely two percent Indians had the right to vote; only those who had the

required economic and educational qualifications enjoyed this right. It was Dr. Ambedkar, 100 years ago from now, who petitioned to the Southborough Commission for adult franchise. Hence for the poor, the marginalized, the Dalits, the Adivasi and the minorities, it is their Dharma to protect not only the Constitution but the history of the Constitution, which has shielded their rights.

It's a shame of the Nation that your party has been intimidating common people and you are consciously silent!

I want tell you, through this Open Letter, as to why I do not want to vote for your party. I am afraid that not doing this would amount to betrayal to the ideological inheritance of Lord Buddha, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule-Savitri Phule, St. Kabir, Sahu Maharaj and Dr. Ambedkar.

To exercise one's voting right is a serious affair. Any prudent person will decide to vote or not to vote for a party, not on the basis of pre-election propaganda marred by allurements, false promises and irrational claims. You have been the Prime Minister for a full five-year term and to me your performance would be the basis of evaluating you.

Here are some of the reasons for not voting in favor of your party.

1. In 2014, your party won 41 of the 84 Scheduled Caste (SC) reserved Parliamentary seats; this apart, your allies won 16 other SC reserved seats. Similarly, your party won 26 of the 47 Parliamentary constituencies, reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs). In the absence of the 83 SC-ST seats your party would neither have the majority, nor would you have been elevated as the Prime Minister.

This voluminous SC-ST gratitude was, unfortunately, rewarded by your Government in the form of increased atrocities on them. You will understand a comprehensive picture of atrocities these communities have been subjected to during your five-year rule in my recently-edited book, "Bhed Bharat".

2. During your 2014 election speech in Telangana, you had projected yourself as the victim of Untouchability. You had promised Dalits and Tribals: "Next 10 years are yours". You did fulfill your promise by allocating 25% more resources in the budget in comparison to the previous Government towards SC and ST sub-plan during 2014-15. However, at the end of the year it was revealed that your Government did not spend Rs. 32,979 crores (39.76%). The previous Government had underutilized 14.2% of such resources.

3. During 2014-15 your Government allocated Rs. 100 Crores for the 'Adivasi Kalyan Yojna' followed by allocation of Rs. 200 Crores for 2015-16. But the scheme was almost ended defunct, as the allocation for it dropped to Rs. 1 crore only during 2016-17.

4. The welfare of Dalits through the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP), has been in existence since 1972 with a clearly laid down policy to allocate financial resources to SCs in proportion to their population. For 2014-15, your government allocated only 8.79% resources, though SC population stood at 16.5%. The allocation grew thinner each succeeding year to only 6.55 % for 2018-19. (1 percent would average to Rs. 1860 crores in 2018).

5. The post-matric scholarship to boost education among Dalits has been there since Independence, and it was visualized by Dr. Ambedkar. During the last year of your term in office you did announce 10% reservation in jobs for the poor amongst the privileged castes, but you allocated only Rs. 3000 crores as against the requirement of Rs. 8000 crores for the post-matric scholarship scheme for the Dalits. This under-nourished financed scheme deprived 5,10,000 Dalit students from getting the scholarship. This speaks volumes about your intent.

6. Taking into consideration the fact that Dalit students were unable to find money for coaching to qualify in the 'NET' exams, the Rajiv Gandhi fellowship was instituted by the previous Government, which provided a monthly scholarship to 1000 students to pursue their PhD even if they do not clear 'NET'. This was in addition to 1200 reserved junior fellowships for Dalit students who were able to qualify 'NET'. Not only your Government ended the Rajiv Gandhi fellowship scheme, you also planned to reduce the junior fellowships for Dalit students to only 1000. Is this not a systemic bias you hold against the Dalits?

7. The whole nation is in grief because of the incident at Pulwama, where 40 CRPF Jawans were martyred. However, you have chosen to deliberately violate the Election Commission norm not to seek votes in the name of the Armed Forces. Meanwhile, you have remained completely silent on the action of the non-Dalits of a UP village, who refused cremation of a martyr, Veer Singh, whose mortal remains awaited burial, though wrapped in the National Flag. Reason: He was to them an 'Untouchable'. Veer Singh was one of the eight martyrs who had lost their life on 25th June 2016 in Kashmir.

Do you have an answer to the question raised by Daivindran, a soldier with the Indian Army, who witnessed massacre of three Dalits, including his father and scores of other Dalits recuperating in the hospital with 40 to 80 injuries on their body in his village Kanchnatham of Shivgangei District of Tamilnadu on 28th May 2018? His only crime was, he asked with anger in his eyes: 'I protect the Nation; who will protect my family?'

8. 23 Dalit children-women-men were massacred in their sleep in Shankarbigaha village of Jehanabad of Bihar in 1999. On 13th January 2015, all the accused were acquitted after 18 years. The reason for acquittal was that the police did not provide security to the witnesses. During the first year of your term, a total of 901 Dalit-Adivasis were murdered and 3158 Dalit-Adivasis women were raped as per your own figures; which means, as many as 4500 Dalit-Adivasis were murdered in one year. In all, over 15790 Dalit-Adivasi women were murdered during your rule. And even then you were silent even in your Mann ki Baat.

9. You deserve as much credit as the previous Government, as the malnutrition rate among all other children has reduced by 20% in India. However, during the past 15 years (including your five-year term), the rate of malnutrition among the tribal children has remained unchanged at 55%. India can buy multi-billion-dollar worth of fighter jets and missiles, as modern and sophisticated as the US, China or Russia can afford, but we do not have money to feed tribal children to end their malnutrition. This means that we are not a poor nation, but we do not have money for the poor in India. This is called

state-sponsored discrimination. I raise this issue at the risk of being called anti-national by your supporters.

10. Santoshi, a tribal girl of Jharkhand died, as for seven days she could not bear hunger. Unfortunately, the Durgapooja deprived her, her younger brothers and sisters and mother, who could manage little food from the mid-day meal that she used to bring home. Her family lost the ration card as it was not linked to the Aadhaar card.

A minor child was left alone, as the parents migrated in another village in search of labor. Hungry, the child traveled from village Bajwa in Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh to a neighboring village, Ambawada, to the ration shop and demanded some wheat. The shop turned down the request several times, and the child, unable to bear hunger, drank pesticide on 29th December 2018. We do not know whether the child was a boy or a girl or the age of the child, thanks to your government, which protected the child, if not from hunger, certainly from journalists.

As the MGNREGA work stopped in his village of Sarajuja district of Chhattisgarh, Sangat Ram left for a city to earn some money with his two minor sons walking behind him on foot in the jungle. After one point the children lost track of their father and could be located only after three days. Four-year-old Shivram Manjhi had died after he collapsed due to hunger. The same day a 52-year-old tribal man Jangal Singh too died in Chhattisgarh. His post-mortem report revealed that there was not even a morsel of food in his stomach.

According to the 'Global Hunger Index' for the year 2018, India ranked 103rd among 191 nations. It means that there are 102 countries where fewer percent of hungry people live than India. The only consolation for your Government is, Pakistan ranked 106th in the hunger index. The question that needs answer is: Why does so-called development coexist with hunger? In 2016 a tribal couple in Dhalai district of Tripura had sold their girl child for Rs. 650!

11. Your manifesto for 2019 elections, Sankalp Patra, does not mention abolition of Untouchability or ending atrocities on Dalits and Adivasis. It does mention the need to protect sanitation workers, but is silent on ending of manual scavenging practices. It does not mention that financial resources should be allocated in proportion to SC and ST population under SCSP and STSP, and that the money allocated would actually be spent.

Perhaps you would be aware that a 35-year-old Dalit man Sohanram was beheaded due to Untouchability on 2nd October 2016 in Karadiya villages of Uttarakhand, as he had gone to the flour mill of his neighboring village.

Sixty three Dalit laborers from Chhattisgarh, including 25 children and pregnant women, were held captive in a brick kiln unit in Naushera tehsil of Rajouri District of Jammu and Kashmir and were forced to labor in violation of all norms. They could be rescued by police after eight months of captivity on 20th May 2014.

There is a racket of trading minor tribal girls from Chhattisgarh and Odisha in the name of supplying domestic servants in Delhi under your very nose. These girls have been sexually abused.

A Dalit man was caged (a dog's cage) for being unable to immediately return the borrowed money in Bagiyadi village of Tarn Taran district of Punjab. A Dalit girl was pushed around in her school for not helping relatives of school staff to copy in the exams, and the harassment extended to her family where people buried dead dogs and people throwing waste near her home.

You decided to interact with children of the country through your TV programme 'Pariksha pe Charcha' on 21st February 2018. In a government school at Chestha village of Himachal Pradesh, Dalit children were made to sit separately from others in a place used for keeping horses; they were given a separate TV connection.

There have been numerous incidents in Rajasthan, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh, where Dalit grooms were pulled off the horse and beaten up, and womenfolk were molested, as they were moving in a procession. At some places, this happened in the presence of the police.

The Sessions Judge, K B Gangayedu of Andhra Pradesh, had to file a petition in the Supreme Court as he was discriminated due to his caste. The Judge had to struggle to get his Judicial Chair with a three-lion symbol for a year and a half.

In the name of cow protection, mobs of cow vigilantes without having any authority under the law have attacked and assaulted Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims across the country. To name a few, in Una (Gujarat: 11th June 2016); Amlapuram (Andhra Pradesh: 8th August 2016); Dalits tonsured and assaulted at Baliya (UP: 8th January 2018); Bakerwal migrants between Reasi and Kishtewar injuring many including 9-yr old girl (Jammu and Kashmir: 20 April 2017); and Koraga tribes people (Udipi in Karnataka: 24th April 2017). You had publicly said, "Shoot me if you want, but don't target my Dalit brothers", and directed state governments to prepare dossier on the cow vigilantes.

How many dossiers have you made? How many people have you punished? One of your Ministers garlanded the cow vigilantes in public after they secured bail! There are thousands of Dalits-Tribals-Muslims who have been languishing in jails without trial and without bail, something you never paid attention to, proving the proverb true: The elephant has two sets of teeth; to chew and to show.

A 28 year old bright Dalit law graduate living with her mother was raped and murdered in Kerala. As many as 38 injuries were inflicted on her, and her intestines came out. There are hundreds of such incidents where poor women have had to face sexual violence.

An MLA in Tamil Nadu ensured that for the first time in India five Dalit children under the age of nine, including a girl, were booked under POCSO. In a modern age Dalit youth are not allowed to participate in Jallikattu; during 2017, more than 25 Dalit activists, addressing the social evils, were murdered in Tamil Nadu alone.

How government officials have behaved with the poor during your rule? You were not in office in 1992 when forest-police-revenue officials raided a tribal village (Vachathi: Dist. Dharmapuri: Tamilnadu) to

hunt for sandalwood, raping 18 women, defiling their water sources with bones, animal waste (after feasting on animals) and diesel, and torturing a large number of people. The court convicted all after 21 years, yet you did not ensure that the women were paid compensation.

On 29th August last year, forest officials destroyed 50 huts of Korku tribe in Madhya Pradesh forcing them to live in open in the monsoon. Even after the tribals of Madhya Pradesh were given license to fish in the Pench reservoir, forest guards would shoot at them with pellet guns, and in one such case, they hit the boat of a tribal youth fishing with a speed boat. The youth drowned in the reservoir and died.

On 15th November 2017 Madhya Pradesh forest guards in their campaign to oust Sahariya tribe dwellers snatched away food from children's mouth and slapped them, smashed cooking pots, threw food in the dust, dragged women by their hair and kicked them in their bellies, and pulled down their roofs. All of this perhaps did not happen during the British rule. The state police raided tribals in Bhutiya village in Dhar district on the pretext of searching criminals, scaring away men and raping women.

On 16th July 2016, forest guards, under the pretext of searching, forced tribal men to strip in presence of their women; this was followed by women with babies being forced to remove clothes. A 13 year old tribal girl was taken deeper into the forest during this "search operation".

All this shows that the poor have no place in the development map that you may be wanting to draw for the country, as if they are not human beings, much less the citizens of Bharat. A Maharashtra IPS officer bragged on video on how she framed Dalits and Muslims under IPC 307 and beat them up. It will require many volumes to narrate 40,000-odd cases of violence that Dalit and Tribal are subjected to.

12. Your Government initiated 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' and Gujarat declared itself as the first Open-Defecation-Free state. Not more than Rs, 3000 have been spent on each of these toilets in place of Rs. 12,000 allocated. I have hundreds of photographs of these toilets which stand broken, dilapidated, unusable. They have no foundation. Many do not have tub or soak pit, and if they have, they are unconnected. People have supported these structures with wooden stumps to prevent them from crashing. A child had a fractured leg as the toilet under construction fell off. The entire toilet is built with a single bag of cement. You are well aware about crores of rupees that have found their way into corrupt hands. With such toilets in their homes, people have only one option: To defecate in the open.

UP has reported many cases of Dalit girls raped while defecating in open. A woman in UP for fear of sexual assault defecated in her home, and her husband threw away the feces.

13. A BSP leader in Madhya Pradesh paid the price for wearing turban; he never imagined the result: His skull skin was peeled off with knife. In Maharashtra (Vakdi: Dist. Jalgaon: 10 June 2018) Dalit children were beaten and paraded naked for swimming in a well. A tribal man was beaten and his wife groped after her clothes were torn down as their goats strayed in a Maratha farmer land (Bhangaon; Srigonda: 12 September 2018). An eight-year-old Dalit boy was beaten and forced to remove feces from a 20 bigha farm with his bare hands for defecating in a Thakur's farm. A 15-year-old Dalit boy was beaten and chased to his hut and burned alive as his goat had strayed in a non-Dalit farm. What has happened to the security you had promised to all the citizens?

14. More than 1.1 million forest dwellers were ordered to be removed from the forest land by the Supreme Court few weeks ago. Your government rushed as it was election time and prayed for an injunction order for the reason that, perhaps, the required due legal process for eviction has been not been followed. The fact is that the government had prepared the list of so-called illegal forest dwellers and submitted to it the Supreme Court without scrutiny. Your Government did bring in an Ordinance to stay the Supreme Court order with regard to the 'Atrocity Act', but it is also true that your government did not represent well before the Supreme Court, which concluded that the Act has been misused. It is doubtful you would have brought the Ordinance if so many Dalits had not given up their lives during several agitations – these lives could have been saved.

15. There are more claims of forest land under the Forest Rights Act having been rejected than those awarded the legal right during your rule. During 2014 to 2016 in UP, 95.4% claims of tribals on forest land were rejected, the highest in the country. The total area where tribals have not been able to establish their legal rights is to tune of more than 9 crore acres. Beginning from Maharashtra your Government has weakened the Forest Rights Act.

16. Your Government introduced schemes such as 'Ayushyman Bharat'. But the country has not been able to save hundreds of people dying in Andhra Pradesh due to the malaria epidemic. According to a government commission, people died due to lack of immunity rooted in malnutrition. Similar conditions prevail in Malkangiri of Odisha, where each year 1400 children die of malaria. The local administration is more worried about maintaining three separate chulhas and three separate cooks to serve mid-day meal, separately for the children of Dalits-Adivasis, OBCs and general castes – like it happened in Badoda village of Nayagaon District of Madhya Pradesh in 2016. Clearly, little attention has been placed on malnutrition.

17. Your Government invented the 'Operation Green' program with the allocation of Rs. 500 crore to help famers raise their minimum support price. While there is no denial of the pathetic living conditions of the farmers, the fact is that such schemes benefit the owners of the land who are not engaged in agriculture and does not benefit farm laborers who do not own land, but are actual cultivators. Dalits benefit the least from this scheme, as only 29% of them who are farmers, while 71% are engaged in farm labor.

18. Ashram Shalas, especially for tribal children, is an important program. However, during 2016, Maharashtra topped the list for registering maximum number of deaths in these residential schools. The Salunke Commission has noted, the main reason for the death of these children is, they are fed after a time gap of 15 hours, leading to malnutrition and stunted growth. In Amravati, Kalwva and Palghar 71, 51 and more than 80 child deaths were reported, respectively. The commission has also suspected sexual abuse of girls. There have been many cases in Odisha where minor Tribal girls have become pregnant, and have even given birth to babies in schools.

You may claim many of these as state subjects, but the fact cannot be ignored that it is the responsibility of the Central government in the end to ensure development and safety of its citizens. Besides, a little while ago in most of the states of India, it was your party that was ruling.

The word 'development' has been repeatedly heard during last five years. The country has seen you on the TV inaugurating or propagating bullet trains, metro trains, sea planes, land-to-sky missiles hitting the satellite (which is actually the result of numerous years of hard work by scientists), the Rs 3000 crores worth Statue of Sardar, and so on. Amidst all these tall claims of development, there are millions who continue to suffer from chronic poverty, hunger, exploitation and discrimination. You have ignored these realities and have refused to stand for the majority of these people. According to the vision of Gandhi-Nehru-Ambedkar-Sardar-Maulana Azad and many others who toiled to build the nation, a Prime Minister should be the one who is not communal, is not intolerant to religious and social diversity and should be the one who treats all as equal.

All these stories and more I have compiled over the last two months which are now published in Gujarati and in English in an edited book called "Bhed Bharat". For me my vote is precious, and many people look to me for guidance. I know you may not have the time to read the book, hence this letter.

In my humble opinion, you have failed the aspiration of majority of people in India. It is less perhaps due to your incompetency, but more due to your policies.

It is for these reasons that I do not want to vote for your party.

Martin Macwan