

Leaning on facts for an appraisal

A group of scholars assesses the Modi government on different parameters

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When the National Democratic Alliance was voted to power in May 2014, it was a difficult moment in our history. The ruling coalition government (UPA) had been stricken by policy paralysis and the country was steeped in corruption in major sectors in the midst of an economic malaise.

Narendra Modi rose to power like a charismatic leader, promising voters the moon.

Now, many feel that the voter has been shortchanged – the unemployment level is high, there's an unprecedented farm crisis, exports have shrunk, banking is in a mess, the manufacturing sector is in slowdown mode and so forth.

Things gone bad

While releasing the Hindi translation of his book *An Uncertain Glory: The Contradictions of Modern India* in July, 2018, Dr. Amartya Sen said, "Things have gone pretty badly wrong.... It has taken a quantum leap in the wrong direction since 2014." The government appears to live in denial, and critics



Tough times Critics point out that demonetisation, touted to be a notable achievement of the Modi government, did take a toll on the old and the underprivileged. NAGARA GOPAL

point out that it manipulates data to prove its performance.

The book under review is a welcome addition to the debates on Modinomics. It is a collection of essays by a group of young scholars. The title is an adaptation from Prof. Sen's critique referred to earlier. The papers are divided into three parts: economy; socio-economic indicators, and

governance. Each chapter is devoted to different policies and initiatives of the government. The endeavour is to move away from partisan debates that border on propaganda.

The authors rely on an assessment of available official data and other information to let the facts speak for themselves.

It is a daunting task and the

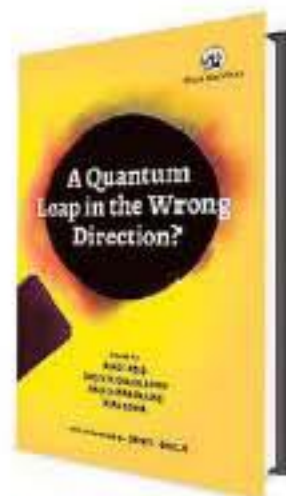
authors have greatly, if not wholly, succeeded in it. Some of the chapters are more argumentative than analytical. Demonetisation and the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax are touted to be the notable achievements of this government, but critics have pointed at the toll these have taken on the poor, and deserved separate chapters.

Private sphere

Many chapters highlight the reliance of Modinomics on neoliberalism and how sectors which have been traditionally with the government are being shifted to the private sector, like health and education.

The chapter on Aadhaar draws heavily on the current writings on the issue and questions its reliability and also its efficacy to ensure justice or remove corruption from the public distribution system. The essay on Foreign Policy and Security is incisive and draws attention to the shift away from the earlier (Nehruvian) policy with an emphasis on aggression and political Hinduism. India has lost space to China in Asia as also the friendly relations of neighbours, it argues.

The last chapter narrates the dark side of Hindutva on issues such as cow protection or vigilantism, the Citizenship Act in Assam and rising Hindu nationalist violence. The authors are committed and passionate in their approach. They have done well in culling out data from available sources to build their case.



A Quantum Leap in the Wrong Direction?

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Orient BlackSwan
₹495