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Book Review: The Paradoxical Prime Minister

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INTRODUCTION

The Paradoxical Prime Minister is a political biography written by one of the best English speakers, writers, and a prominent political figure of the Indian National Congress- Shashi Tharoor, criticizing current Indian PM Narendra Modi's government's modus operandi and policies with examples. Through this book, Mr. Tharoor has analyzed and pointed out the flaws in several schemes and the decisions of the Modi government. According to him, the current regime is best capable of rhetoric and grandiloquence instead of delivering its promises and that is the need of the hour. Since the inception of PM Modi's regime Indian economy got tumbled, religious amity got dismantled to political opprobrium.

As per Mr. Tharoor,¹ BJP portrayed and used Mr. Modi as the messiah. Stories during his childhood as a fable in a comic book called Balnarendra were published, praising his disciplinary and self-controlled life which makes Mr. Modi a stellar.² Mr. Tharoor further criticized the stance of Mr. Modi on the growing hostility and oppression of minorities by the

¹ 'Shashi Tharoor' (*Britannica*) <<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Shashi-Tharoor>> accessed 01 December 2021

² *Ibid*

so-called Gaurakshaks. The book emphasizes growing hardcore Hinduism and hatred towards other religions so undermining the liberal and inclusive image of India. Further Mr. Tharoor explains about Moditva which according to him is the new form of Hindutva supported and practiced by Mr. Modi.³ Mr. Tharoor further talked and criticized several policies like Demonetization, GST, and many others. According to Mr. Tharoor all economic policies of the Modi government - Demonetization, GST was a total failure and proves to be counterproductive due to its poor execution.⁴

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Paradoxical Prime Minister: Narendra Modi and His India is a non-fiction book authored by a prominent political figure, writer, and leader of the Indian National Congress, Shashi Tharoor, centered around the current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi. The book is published in English language, published by the Aleph Book company, and released just before the 2019 general elections.⁵ A first, after reading this book we get to know that the book name is one of the possibilities and so the correct one could be THE PARADOXES IN INDIAN POLITICS.

Mr. Tharoor, in this book, examines and puts a question mark on the tenure of the Modi government. According to Mr. Tharoor, his criticisms are based on “facts and figures” along with the help of examples. Mr. Tharoor further states that he questions “the foreign policy, relationship in the neighborhood, the priorities, the episodic nature of much of our foreign policy conduct and inconsistent and bitter relationship with Pakistan, China, etc.” of Modi government tenure.⁶ Mr. Tharoor’s inability to be non-partisan highlights the paradoxes in his personality and politics and several times in this book he rejects his wise prescription by slamming just about every aspect of the Modi government. Through the book, Mr. Tharoor speaks his heart out while talking about political issues concerning contemporary India and

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Sumeet Naik, ‘The Paradoxical Prime Minister by Shashi Tharoor: Review’ (*The Free Press Journal*, 29 May 2019) <<https://www.freepressjournal.in/book-reviews/the-paradoxical-prime-minister-by-shashi-tharoor>> accessed 01 December 2021

the book serves as a critique of the current Modi government and thus it is called “The Paradoxical Prime Minister”.⁷

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

Through his latest book *The Paradoxical Prime Minister*, Tharoor in his above the rest style has attempted to nudge at Modi government. The author has criticized several policies and decisions by the Modi government and further says that the policies have proven to be counterproductive. Mr. Tharoor has cited his encounters with Mr. Modi over the years, right from his Gujarat Chief Minister days to the present, has undoubtedly helped the author to quote and write some previously unheard or reported instances.⁸ He has targeted the so-called Hindutva and criticized the Gorakshak and called them goons by giving several examples to support his hypothesis and further expressed his unhappiness with the current government’s politics of hatred towards minorities. According to him this government’s several policies like GST and Demonetization has been a total mess and failure and further adds that many citizens of India have died due to the long waiting in line at the banks and ATMs to exchange their old notes, the economy hampered due to this unplanned and unwise policy.⁹ He further proves that how a policy like demonetization has proven to be counterproductive by giving examples, he says that the ordinary citizen of India has to face the repercussions of these planned policies most as they have to wait in line for several hours and still they were not able to exchange their notes at banks due to middlemen, according to author several managers of the bank and middlemen agreed and without the help of middlemen ordinary citizen cannot exchange their notes as they were said about the unavailability of cash and thus they were forced to approach the middlemen who take illegal commission which he divides between himself and the manager, thus the author says that demonetization has been proven to be counterproductive. He appreciated the commencement of programs like ‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan’ and expressed his happiness to be inducted as one of the ten ambassadors for the Swachh Bharat Mission, but later expressed his unhappiness and fears that Swachh Bharat will again be reduced to one of

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*

those empty ritual, a label without content. According to him “if that happens it will be far worse than if Mr. Modi had never devised Swachh Bharat in the first place.¹⁰ Nothing corrodes a nation’s spirit more than empty cynicism – but raising hopes without taking the basic step to fulfill them – but raising hopes without taking the basic steps to fulfill them produces the most cynicism of all”.¹¹

According to the author, the Prime Minister has spoken more in foreign countries than the Lok Sabha and further alleged that Mr. Modi doesn’t value the Lok Sabha. Foreign relationship with our neighbors has deteriorated further due to the policies of the present government and the further gives some examples to prove his words. He says that Mr. Modi has several times made whimsical and impulsive choices in the case of foreign policy and criticized the Prime Minister for that by giving an example of an incident that led to Mr. Modi reaching Lahore by just a cuts invitation by the Pakistani counterpart.¹² At last, adds about India that we seek and says that “We must remain faithful to his founding values of the twentieth century if we are to conquer the challenges of the twenty-first and build the New India that we seek. Our New India will shine. But it must shine for all.”¹³

REVIEW OF THE BOOK

After reading this book, I understand what is meant by “a pen is mightier than a sword”. Mr. Tharoor has spoken his heart out while discussing political issues concerning contemporary India. The book serves as a critique of the current Modi government thus it is called “The Paradoxical Prime Minister”. This book will make the reader question the functioning of the present (2014-2019) government from almost all sides of the prism when reading with political neutrality and without any biasedness.¹⁴ The content of this book is well structured, depicting the background of the Prime Minister and swiftly browsing through his paradoxical ways and policies of heading the country. As a reader, one might have various perceptions and thoughts

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*

related to Mr. but as a part of the electorate, one has to make her/his mind about the efficiency of the Prime Minister. Interestingly, the author in this book accepts of being at the receiving end of the condemnation by many of his party men for appreciating some of the policies and initiatives are undertaken by the current government. But, swiftly goes on to add that it did not last for long and it all came crashing down and his respect for Mr. Modi was out of respect for the electorate.

Fifty chapters might seem way too much for highlighting the paradoxical nature of a person but the writer understands that it is no common person he is opposing and writing about and understanding Modi's growth and stature, they seem very well justified. The author has made a full attempt to make every chapter an interesting one with a lot of behind the scene drama and on-and-off conversations. Mr. Tharoor's *The Paradoxical Prime Minister* is no doubt intellectual fodder to those who not only understand politics or study it as a subject matter but also for those who participate actively in it to support Moditva or oppose it.¹⁵ In the attempt to present a fairly politically neutral account of the paradoxical nature of the present government, is visible and looks honest. However, as only sages can maintain neutrality, political or moral he does steer away from this neutrality by hailing the congress here and there and trying to establish a higher ground for his party.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Mr. Tharoor has rightly criticized the Modi government for its several initiatives and policies. While he tries to maintain a sense of neutrality and political unbiasedness in criticizing the Modi government, at times it was clear that his thought and words are biased and are making high grounds for his party. He talked about the economic aspect related to banning beef and said he doesn't see any harm in the slaughtering of old cows without mulching, as it would be economically better, but as cows are considered mother in Hindu religion and worshipped, by these words Mr. Tharoor hurts the feeling of Hindus. One comparison that can be made between the moral and economic aspects of slaughtering cow would be "for whole life our

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ *Ibid*

parents have worked hard for us, they have given us good education and everything, now they are old and unable to work, should we see economic aspect here?" It seemed by reading this book, that the politician Tharoor has overshadowed the writer Tharoor while writing this book. Nevertheless, this book is a must-read for those interested in politics.