

# Mr. Modi: Deliberately Appearing Dionysian

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper argues that contemporary India is Dionysian in many ways. This means that it worships the irrational, chaotic and passionate and seeks to affirm life. The incumbent Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Damodardas Modi seeks to come across as a 'Dionysian' when he wants to construct his symbolism as a doer. Mr. Modi does so three means. (1) By denying his 'Doer' symbolism an essence. (2) By symbolically taking people who live in the Dionysian world along with him. (3) By earning symbolic capital and legitimacy by being Dionysian. Only time will tell if he will succeed in keeping his 'Doer Symbolism' in the hearts of the people.*

**Keywords:** *Dionysian, Symbolism, Mr. Narendra Damodardas Modi, India*

Dionysus was a Greek God who is classed as the 'Raving God whose presence makes man mad and incites him to savagery and even to lust for blood. Dionysus was the god of the most blessed ecstasy and the most enraptured love. Dionysus was (also) the persecuted god, the suffering and dying god', says (Otto, 1995). Life and death, joy and suffering, wildness and goodness co-exist in the paradoxical Dionysus. Perhaps, the triumph of life amidst its travails is Dionysian. 'The saying 'Yes' to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life, that is what I call Dionysian' says (Nietzsche, 1997)

As (Mishra, 2016) points out, today's India is quite Dionysian. Today's India is increasingly, if not largely, confused, irrational and angry. All over India, there is a drive towards crossing the boundaries, for prosperity amidst churning socio-economic changes. These '*feelings and moods change the world by turning into potent political forces*', including making people '*vulnerable to a despotic ruler*'. Perhaps, the rural poor, the unemployed, the middle class and unorganized sector workers alike are angry with a sense of being left out, in an India that is increasingly Dionysian, irrational, chaotic and passionate.

Clearly, there is a sense of affirmation of life amidst this chaos. That affirmation of life amidst the sense of loss could be said to be incarnate in the figure of incumbent Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Damodardas Modi. Mr. Modi draws upon the irrational, chaotic and passionate. He turns these feelings into a 'potent political force'. This paper argues that while drawing upon passionate emotions, Mr. Modi tries to deliberately appear Dionysian when giving himself the symbolism of a 'Doer'. Perhaps, 'deliberately appearing Dionysian' needs some clarification.

The researcher's doctoral thesis argues that Mr. Modi uses 'Semiotic Strategies' in order to build a symbolism of his own. How a semiotic strategy constructs his symbolism defines a semiotic strategy. One of his semiotic strategies is to project himself as a doer, and try and come across life affirming, irrational and chaotic while doing so. He becomes a Dionysian doer in three ways. (1) By denying his 'Doer' symbolism an essence. (2) By symbolically taking people who live in the Dionysian world along with him. (3) By earning symbolic capital and legitimacy by being Dionysian. Let us discuss these facets.

## 1. Denying 'Doer' an 'Essence'

Above all, Mr. Modi tries to come across as a 'Doer'. He says that he will bring the 'Good Days' for the public at large and will ensure 'Everyone's Co-Operation, Everyone's Development'. He says that he will be 'Watchman' and actively work in the nation's interest and the interest of the public. This may indicate that he is *really* concerned about the nation and people; to judge the same is not our aim. In trying to come across as a 'Doer', however, he denies any real essence to his symbolism. The section below shows how.

In building himself as a Doer, he creates meaning for himself. Meaning is manufactured, a 'Doer' symbol is manufactured. Post-Modernity (Butler, 1999, Baudrillard, 1983) is a way of denying that symbols have an essence which is integral to the symbolism. In this view, there is no real, essential meaning to the symbol of Mr. Modi. One cannot say if he symbolizes a messianic view for the poor or a sweet tooth for the rich. Perhaps, his symbolism is both. This gives his symbol irrationality and chaos.

The trick behind Mr. Modi's symbolism may be to '*not*' have an essence. Mr. Modi, we have assumed, deliberately constructs himself as a 'Doer'. He has to do things, however, for everyone. For corporations, he symbolizes 'Corporate Government Responsibility'. He appeals to people who work for corporations, ensures them that the corrupt will lose all their wealth in demonetization. He has to talk of 'Minimum

Government, Maximum Governance’ and yet launch government schemes involving government expenditure worth millions of rupees. This may point out an inconsistency and irrationality of his policy approach.

Another way in which ‘Doer’ symbol is built is through giving the symbolism greater internal conflict. This is achieved by saying that ‘Doer’ is not solely responsible for running the country. The ‘Doer’ does not aspire to do everything all by himself but wants to take everyone along. The man who said ‘This Time, Modi Government’ appeals and appreciates people’s power. The symbol looses any essence, assuming it had one, and is manufactured in and by taking everyone along. The symbolism of Mr. Modi is a part of the hyper-real, of images coming in and out of consciousness. He has many shades in the electronic, print and social media. The presence may not be rooted in an essence but may be quite ephemeral.

*‘Rupees are useful is going ahead, but the country moves forward with people’s power, the attitude of people’s power, the vows of people’s power, the work of people’s power, the dreams of people’s power, the sacrifice of people’s power<sup>1</sup>’* says he (2016). He is at once a worshipper of people’s power and a symbol under which people’s power is united. The will of the people is a force to be reckoned with and admired, in his symbolic existence.

The will of the people is not just a force; it is a power unto its own. He (2016) borrows a phrase from Atal Bihari Vajpey’s solution for Kashmir ‘Insaniyat, Kashmiriyat, Jamhuriyat<sup>2</sup>’, which means ‘Humanity, Kashmir-ism, Democracy’. He says that *‘we are the people who walk on this path’*. People’s power not only directs, it can also be directed if it goes awry. If people’s power is misguided, he can appeal to it. *‘Come let’s take off the gun, pick up the plough in the field, this red earth will become green<sup>3</sup>’* says he (2016).

The change agent is one who wants to unite India in spite of all its divisions and diversities. *‘From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Himanchal this country as one used to sacrifice for the dreams of independence’* says he. The collective is being educated to learn from the collective unity of the past. Collective unity will be brought to life by him by his popular appeal. *‘We have to live in the nation with one dream, one vow, one path....<sup>4</sup>’* says he (2016). The variety of cognition, dreams, ways have to be sacrificed in order to be united in one giant sweep, in his symbolism. He constructs himself into one who unites India. He will use symbols in order to change disunity into unity. ‘Tiranga Yatra’ or ‘Tricolor Journey’ will unite India. *‘This tricolor unites us all.... reminds us of the courageous sacrifice....inspires us to change the country’s fortunes<sup>5</sup>’* says he (2016).

## 2. Taking People Along in Dionysian World

Mr. Modi’s magic, however, is created not just from the imaginations of a crazed genius but one who digs deep into the depths of India’s collective social psychology, especially its subaltern irrational, Dionysian psychology. *‘People are not satisfied with the announcement’*; says he. Not Satisfied. In saying so, he tries to become a spokesperson of subaltern psychology, speaks on behalf of the people who are not satisfied. Mr. Modi is *not* satisfied too!

If capitalism draws upon the forces of the nether world; Mr. Modi draws heavily upon the collective angst of the men on the street. Dissatisfaction, hoping and having hopes vanish, the joy of a better life, the tinge of poverty, are all what are characterized as life-world and are drawn upon from. He draws upon life-world (Habermas, 1987) and connects the world of the ‘system’ with that of the life-world. The ‘collective’ can be understood not only as ‘Life-World’ but also through Durkheim’s concept of social fact.

He recognizes collective ways of acting, thinking, feeling (Durkheim, 1895/1966) to his great advantage. He seemingly has an intuitive grasp of these ways and he uses these ways to project himself as a Doer. He will do things in ways which are in tune with the collective ways. If the collective thinks in a way of being not satisfied with the government’s performance; Mr. Modi takes along the collective thinking with him in two ways, when he wants to come across as a ‘Doer’.

One, he talks in a language which recognizes the collective ways of *‘thinking, feeling and acting’*. The collective ways are often either critical of some phenomenon or appreciative of other phenomenon. Two,

<sup>1</sup> He said so on August 9, 2016 in Alirajpur, Madhya Pradesh. He was speaking at a public meeting to mark the launch of 70<sup>th</sup> Freedom Year Celebrations. He spoke at the August Revolution Day, when Mahatma Gandhi launched Quit India Movement.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

consciously or unconsciously, wittingly or un-wittingly, he says things appreciated by collective ways and critiques things critical by collective ways, as understood by him. Importantly, when looking at semiotic strategies used by Mr. Modi; we are not focusing on what he actually does. Instead, we are looking at how he deliberately gives himself a symbolism. And so, what he says becomes of paramount importance, as far as semiotic strategies are concerned.

He (2016) desires to bring change to keep pace with the increasing expectations of the people, in his symbolic existence. People are '*not satisfied with the announcement, they are not satisfied by seeing a plan, if a budget provision is made, it is not ready to accept this*<sup>6</sup>'. People are happy only when '*things get implemented on ground*<sup>7</sup>'. He (2016) recognizes that '*we have to speed up our work*<sup>8</sup>'. The national change agent constructs, in his symbolism, an image such that he gets things done on the ground and in a timely manner.

His self portrait is being smarter and faster than his predecessors in his symbolic existence. He uses the devices of previous governments, like Aadhar Identity Cards and Direct Benefit Transfer, much more extensively. He says that instead of four crore, he has linked 70 crore people to government schemes via Aadhaar. He has been faster in giving away LPG connections. While 14 crore gas connections were given in past sixty years of Independence, he has given 4 crore in sixty weeks. '*Please compare the two figures- 14 crore in sixty years and 4 crore in sixty weeks*<sup>9</sup>', says he (2016). His symbolism is one of competence.

Things happening on the ground include building of rural roads which are being built at 100 K.M. a day (which was 70-75 Km a day previously), wind and solar energy. He claims having laid electricity transmission lines and railway lines faster than previous governments. Doing things faster and extensively helps satisfy the hopes of a younger and demanding India, also standing to the test of public expectation.

He gives himself a symbolic existence of a person who sets wrongs right. A lot of India is left in darkness because electricity has not reached many Indian villages. This is unfair in his symbolic existence. He would act in all fairness with people. '*What could have happened in the past 70 years, has not happened, we are suffering because of it. I have to take the country out of this*<sup>10</sup>' says he (2016). People are not only 'objects' on which he would have an influence, but people are inhered with power.

The collective ways of 'acting, thinking and feeling', says Durkheim '*act on the individual as an external constraint*'. The researcher, however, has set the collective ways, which are denoted, understood and used by Mr. Modi to build his symbolism as a doer. Meaning can also exist in the world in which Mr. Modi operates; 'Network of shared meanings' has been called life-world, an ocean of meanings from which symbolism is carved.

Mr. Modi's India is an increasingly demanding India. Ideas about how his symbol will relate to a demanding India's life-world gives us clues about how he constructs himself as a doer. The shared meanings in India may include an aspiration from one who will do it all. Someone who will take us away from the chaos in which we imagine we have found ourselves. We need a savior, a 'Doer'.

He constructs his symbolic existence as an achiever and as an unforgiving task master, someone who gets things done. He says that he has a project called 'Progress' in which he sits and reviews all government projects. He wants all government projects to be completed on time and has shortened the approval time for building railways. He says he will ensure 'last man delivery', claims to have settled almost all claims of sugarcane farmers of Uttar Pradesh and distributed LPG connections under Ujjawala Scheme. His symbolism displays his honesty and efficiency as he sings praises of the Aadhaar Scheme which he uses to deposit money directly into beneficiaries' accounts, eliminating middlemen and fake beneficiaries.

He constructs himself as a balancing force between the wants of poor and wants of rich, between the real world and dream world. He says that he balances between bio toilets and bullet train, between 'Soil Health Card' and satellite and space technology. His symbolic existence stands as a bridge between such binaries. His symbolism has space both for the rural poor and the urban middle class which eyes at travelling in bullet trains. The Dionysian dreams of all get a space in his magical sweep.

<sup>6</sup> He said so on Independence Day, August 15, 2016 at New Delhi from the Red Fort.

<sup>7</sup> He said so on Independence Day, August 15, 2016 at New Delhi from the Red Fort.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> He said so on August 9, 2016 in Alirajpur, Madhya Pradesh. He was speaking at a public meeting to mark the launch of 70<sup>th</sup> Freedom Year Celebrations. He spoke at the August Revolution Day, when Mahatma Gandhi launched Quit India Movement.

### 3. Social Capital by Appearing Dionysian

The 'Doer' symbolism is one that has continued to work and not work. The emphasis in the 'Doer' symbolism is on earning 'Symbolic Capital': 'Honor, Reputation, Charisma' (Appelrouth & Edles, 2008). Whether he has symbolic capital and legitimacy in the eyes of the people is a question which will not be answered here (He Does!). He does a lot to earn an appealing symbolism, including trying to come across as a 'Heart of a Heartless World'.

He has included 21 crore persons under 'Jan Dhan Yojna', which means 'People's Money Scheme' and two crore toilets have been built in rural areas. He constructs a symbol of inclusiveness in his symbolic existence. People are included into his giant embrace. He constructs himself as 'heart of the heartless world'. He constructs himself as a benevolent change agent who will touch lives of the poor and take away their problems and pain, in his symbolic existence.

*'Whatever best I can do, I shall do that and keep the price of poor man's meal under check<sup>11</sup>*, says he (2016). Poverty, in his symbolic existence, is fated to change into a phenomenon of the past. Poverty and want (like the lack of electricity) are the gifts of past governments. *'Eighteen thousand villages.... were forced to live in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>*', says he (2016). He says that he has brought electricity to ten thousand villages.

He also constructs himself as a fighter for farmers, who fights the battle with smart ideas. He coated fertilizer with the juice of 'Neem' Tree so that it becomes useless for the industrialists who used to black market fertilizer. This ensured that fertilizer reaches the farmer. Another smart idea is to use cows as a source for fertilizers so that cows do not have to be killed even when the cows stop giving milk. In this way, he constructs himself as a protector of cows and yet someone who is modern and smart in his approach to traditional issues (he also speaks against cow vigilantism).

His policies strike at the root of people's problems. Policies include insuring farmers, building warehouses and attracting investment in agro based industries. He turns himself in a juggernaut which is unstoppable as it continues to garner public support. 'Reform, Perform, Transform' says he. He wants people to be special type of objects, bringing benefits to the marginalized. He says that eighty percent of all beneficiaries in Mudra Yojna were from SC/ST/OBC communities, he has increased the remuneration of women in textile.

### Conclusion

This paper argues that current India is Dionysian in many respects. India is irrational, chaotic and passionate and affirms life in the midst of all the chaos. Mr. Modi uses semiotic strategies, which are a way of deliberately building a symbolism of their own, in order to come across as a doer. As a doer, he tries to appear Dionysian through three ways. (1) By denying his 'Doer' symbolism an essence. (2) By symbolically taking people who live in the Dionysian world along with him. (3) By earning symbolic capital and legitimacy by being Dionysian. Only time will tell if his Dionysian symbol will remain successful.

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<sup>11</sup> He said so on August 15, 2016 in his Independence Day speech from Red Fort, New Delhi.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid