

# MODI

LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE  
AND PERFORMANCE

Vivian Fernandes

*Foreword by Raghav Bahl | Founder & Editor, Network 18*



cattle, heifer rearing and pregnant cow care. 'We tell people to be business-minded, not to be subsidy-oriented,' he says.

Politicians may count success by the numbers of cattle distributed or amount of loan disbursed. But dairying is a slow, accretive process. It demands a discipline many tribals are not prepared for. Jobs in Gujarat's many industrial hubs are a big attraction. But they do not reckon with the collateral damage: hazardous work conditions, precarious life in slums and the neglect of schooling.



The vocational training centre at Vaghaldhara in Valsad prepares tribal youth for industrial jobs. It was set up by a senior advocate who had made it big in Surat and wanted to give back to the community he was born into. It is love's labour. The exposed red brick building with airy rooms and cool kota stone flooring was designed by founder, Ishwer J Desai's architect daughter herself. There were 282 students when I visited. They were distributed across eight courses, some of them three-years long, others of six months duration, designed with German assistance. It was a residential co-ed facility. The students slept on bunk beds and meals — frugal — were free.

Desai responded to the government's call for partnership believing if he did not step forward, bad coins would, defeating the government's purpose because 'the current national crisis is a crisis of character.' He is right because the tribal department had previously engaged such suspicious-sounding entities as Bajrang Vyayamashala for computer education. Desai contributed land as a third of the investment; the government pitched in with the remaining Rs 5 crore, which it disbursed in less than two years, to Desai's surprise. It has a target of training 3,000 students over five years. In just two years Desai said 800 had done the drill, with nearly 90 percent success in getting jobs.



Van Bandhu's vocational training scheme has gone through many changes, a testimony to the problem-solving attitude of the leadership of the tribal affairs department under Tiwari. Initially it enlisted government supported institutes like Cipet (plastic technology) and the Indo-German Tool Room. But their intake was in the low hundreds. Some well-known private computer training companies and industry chambers were roped in next. They did not live up to their reputations. The third crop of trainers was selected for their technical competence. Courses and fees payable to them (by the government) were standardized. 'Village-based training,' at doorsteps was abandoned for residential training centres, to draw tribal youth out of their family comfort zones, and prepare them for life in cities.

Kinjol Gamit of Tapi district was training to be a daughterperson at Vaghaldahara. Her father, who serves income tax notices, suggested the course on the advice of his friend. Ankit Chaudhari, also of Tapi, loves to fix things and was training to be an electrician. His father's job is to hook up homes with wire for a cable TV operator. Mahesh Kakad of Dharampur in Valsad wanted to be a welder, and self-employed.

This was perhaps their first prolonged stay away from homes.

In Dahod, the training centre was run by Gramin Vikas Trust. It provided certificate courses in plumbing and masonry from rented premises. Seventy students were supposed to be present, but only a few were seen during the visit. Technical Adviser A K Jain, said the students were much in demand from the construction industry because the courses not only taught the 'how' of a job, but also the 'why' (of say, mixing cement and sand in a particular ratio). A certificate from the centre could inflate wages 100 percent. But the courses needed to evolve because construction practices were changing. The use of pre-fabricated panels, ready-mix concrete, composite aluminum wall claddings and tower lifts to hoist material



demanded skills that the centre was eager to provide, if builders were willing to pitch in.

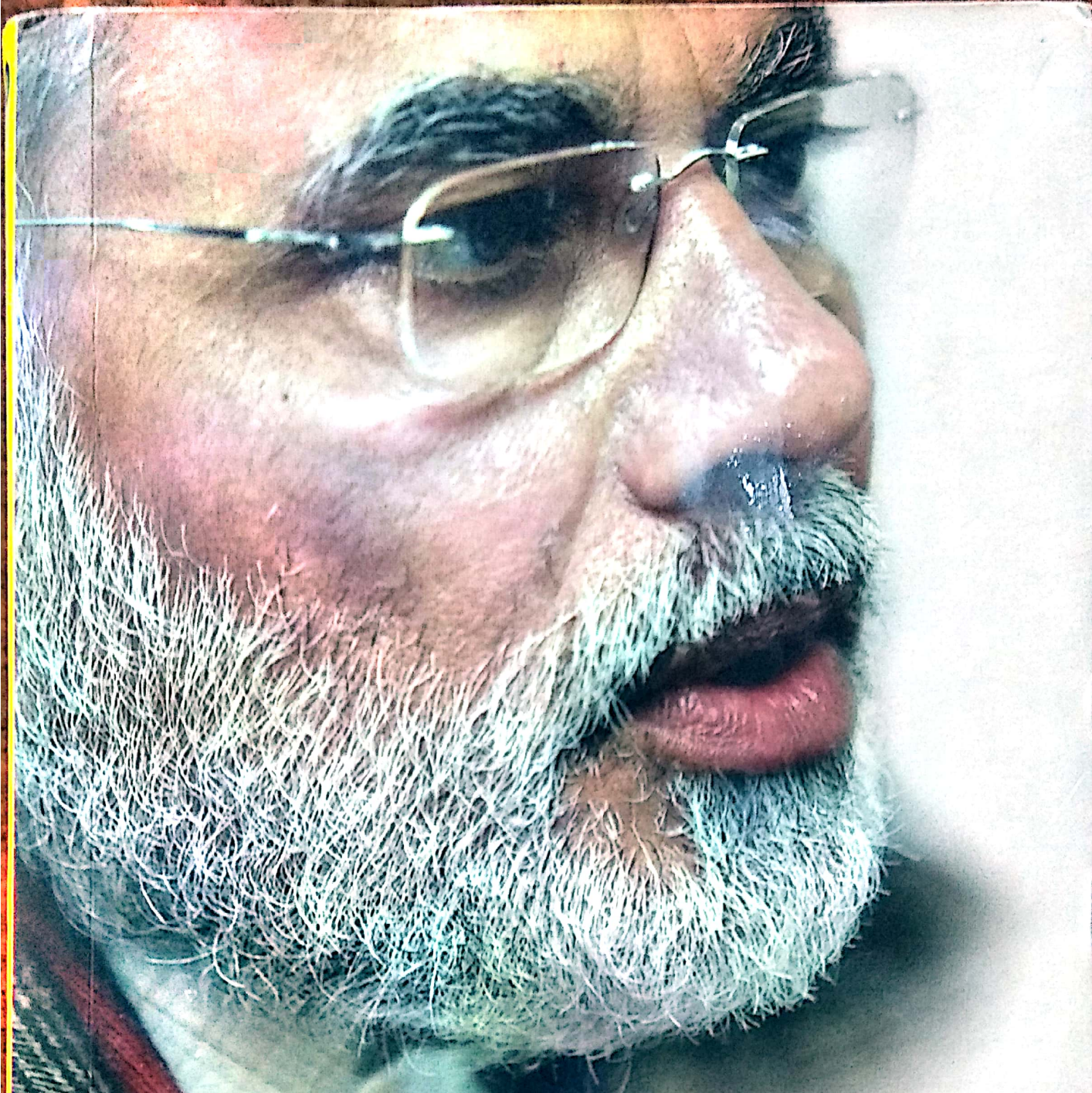
But there was a catch. The Vaghalpara institute was going through pangs of anxiety over its future. A shake up in the tribal affairs department had impeded the flow of grants. 'In the last one year, the government did not fill the post of secretary in a regular way,' says Desai.<sup>4</sup> 'There used to be people who were given additional charge of the (tribal) department. So the other responsibilities become important and we feel sometimes that we are left in the lurch.' If the government continued to be erratic in funding, the Vaghalpara centre would have to charge fees. Tribal students would lose out.

'Tough time for genuine and reputed rural development NGOs,' wrote Harnath Jagawat in the 2012 annual report of the Sadguru Foundation. The secretary who replaced Tiwari tried to go back to the old ways of getting things done departmentally. He later resigned and won on a BJP ticket from a reserved Assembly constituency in Ahmedabad. The surprise was that Modi allowed the scheme to sag for two years before correcting course with a secretary aligned to Van Bandhu's core philosophy.

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<sup>4</sup> When interviewed in April 2013.





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