

Modi is no Gandhi

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THE agony and ecstasy over Prime Minister Modi's visit to Bangladesh is now gone. Dust is settling over the commotion and hype generated by the two-day visit. The agony before the visit stemmed from concerns about what Modi would say, what Bangladesh would achieve from his visit, and above all, how our people would receive him. The ecstasy was due to the charm offensive that he launched from the hour he landed, his impeccable appearance—handcrafted beard with matching outfits, and his crowd pleasing oration. But now is the time for reckoning from the visit—reality check.

Modi received the welcome he deserved from a nation that has a thousand reasons to show its appreciation to India and its leader. But underneath it all was also a curiosity about a leader who, for reasons good or bad, had built a reputation that has been associated with conservatism, the religious-right, alleged support for communal rift, and controversy from his term as Chief Minister of Gujarat.

The biggest objective of his visit was not the winning of hearts and minds in Bangladesh, but to plant an image of him as a leader who could be trusted in fostering strong India-Bangladesh bilateral relations. He was more interested in developing a future with Bangladesh based on mutual respect and support—the message that he carried earlier to other small neighbours in the region. In a sense, Modi was cultivating a constituency that he thinks would help build his image as a regional leader not hunkered down to a narrow cause of nationalist and faith based ideology as has been depicted before. In his carefully crafted and aptly delivered public speeches, Modi came out as a politician of a different breed from those who preceded him. People claim they become mesmerised by his speech, and they



come away from the audience convinced that the speaker is genuine and will deliver.

It may be too soon to comment on the success of Modi's endeavour to establish the role he wants for himself in the region, but the bundle of goods he apparently delivered during this visit to Bangladesh made good on the promises that India had made on many subjects, if not all. The Land Boundary Agreement of course tops the list among other key agreements on land and marine connectivity. On Teesta we have to depend on his rather poetic phrasing of comparing

life with water.

For us in Bangladesh, the delivery is not just what happened in the last few days or what is likely to happen in the coming days. For us the real delivery is the building of trust and mutual respect that are the basis of relationship between two sovereign nations. Modi gave us a feeling that we can look towards him for that relationship, but are his assurances enough?

Bangladesh-India relationship has gone through patchy periods of wariness, misgivings, and suspicion. Leaders in both

countries have attempted over the years to overcome the trust deficit but it still remains. To this an added complication has been the rise of politics that encouraged aggressive nationalism and religious schism in both countries.

Modi's rise in India was on the shoulders of a political party that is more wedded to religious and economic conservatism than to the secular ideals of the party that founded India and dominated the politics of the country for much of its existence. But Modi is politically astute enough to know that what

catapulted him from Chief Minister of a state to Prime Minister of India is not simply the strength of his party, but the choice of a much wider constituency that went beyond his own state. People who listened to him were not only charmed by his words but also the image he presented of himself—that of a leader who could be trusted. As a national leader he has a bigger constituency to win and sustain that covers all states, communities, and economic levels. He is also looking to expand his acceptance and that of India in the region.

Narendra Modi did not come to Bangladesh only to sign the agreements; he came to show the people of Bangladesh that he is a leader that can be trusted. He did what he could without politically jeopardising his political interests and relationship with other Indian states. Mahatma Gandhi is believed to have gone on a fast when the new Indian Government led by Nehru withheld transfer of cash from Reserve Bank of India to Pakistan. Modi may have Gandhi as one of his political ideals (besides both their home state is Gujarat), but he is not one to sacrifice his political ambitions to placate a neighbour.

He could have made a grand declaration about water-sharing, to prove a point to the Chief Minister of West Bengal with whom he has an amicable relationship. He did nothing of the sort because he did not want to add any more thorns in his relationship with West Bengal. By letting Banerjee lead the Teesta issue, Modi doesn't stand to lose anything. What he lacked in action he covered by oration and assurances. He did not want to spoil his stake in India by delivering something that would not please his political adversary. Modi knows that he is in for a long haul in the Indian political horizon. For now, we have to believe that he will eventually deliver his promises to Bangladesh by carrying Banerjee on the Teesta issue.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

Violence: An individual problem or a systemic problem?



without, with malintent or just following scripts learned from others. Maybe if individuals knew the consequences of violence they would stop, and that's why I write about it; that is why a large chunk of my own research is on this topic. Because I believe that human beings are inherently good; no one is born a bigot or a killer; no one is born with a will to hurt other people.

Bangladesh is a country of primarily poor people in which approximately 40 percent live on less than \$1.25 a day and about 70 percent live on less than \$2 a day. Given the high rate of poverty and the pervasive use of violence, many are quick to argue that everyday violence is a problem of the poor. That's only partly true; violence is not created by poor people, violence is created by the rich, by those who are in power, and it is used against poor people. At the same time the societal structure is organised in a way that violence between groups and within groups is inevitable. Violence is both cause and consequence of inequality – income, gender, social (whatever have you); violence is the cornerstone of a larger malaise of systemic inequality where individuals bear the brunt of said inequality. It is what ties the structural issues to individual ones, creating the idea that changing individual behaviours will change the system (it will not). And, because people in power use violence, violence has become the currency of power, the shortcut to

gaining control in both social and relational contexts.

Violence against individuals, including intimate partners, regardless of gender, arise from a need to "gain control or retribution and to promote or defend self image" (Felson, 2002). But, we tend to write more about violence against women, not because violence against men do not exist, but because violence against women often takes more insidious forms that have deadly consequences, quite literally. While violence against men is less likely to lead to homicide and physical danger (in intimate partner relationships – not in combat zones where men are exposed to and experience physical and sexual violence at high rates) the effect of violence (including intimate partner violence) on men, similar to women, include compromised mental health and physical health outcomes (e.g. anxiety and

which has increased potential to affect mental health outcomes. This is because verbal abuse is highly correlated with emotional abuse (and include needling and belittling), which in turn is likely to be emasculating and psychologically jarring for men. Feeling emasculated or weak, on the other hand, is associated with increased use of violence by men who assert machismo, masculinity, and control by using violence.

Some, however, argue that when there is violence in a relationship it is often because the couple dynamic is conflictual and each person responds to relational conflict by using violence as a tool for conflict resolution (barring situations where the perpetrator is a sociopath or a psychopath or has other mental health issues of which aggression is a symptom). In the absence of healthy communication skills and self-soothing tactics, as well as normalisation of violence, violence

become omnipresent, and if we look around us we are likely to see that is all around us.

And once we open our eyes, we are likely to see that individuals with disabilities are more likely to be abused than their "able-bodied" counterparts. Homosexual men and women are more likely to be abused than heterosexual men and women. Men and women from minority groups are more likely

others. We need to think about intersectionality and how group membership in multiple categories of identity increases the potential for harm. And then we need to think about who gains from such a system.

And then we must see how violence is systematically created by the system to oppress certain groups, while others are merely collateral damage. Individuals in this

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depression and heart diseases are much more likely among men who experience violence in their lives than men who do not).

That said, physical and sexual violence against men by intimate partners in a heterosexual relationship is still less than that experienced by women (Tjaden&Thoennes, 2000). The most common type of violence against men by women takes verbal forms,

has become a pervasive social problem that directly or indirectly affects everyone, for different reasons. Violence affects not only those who experience (or even perpetrate) violence but those who are exposed to it – children, community members, society at large. Be it physical violence, violent language, or sexual harassment – it has the potential to permeate social and economic barriers to

to be abused than men and women who are members of the majority population. While, women are more likely to be abused than men; disabled, homosexual, minority women are more likely to be abused than heterosexual able-bodied women. We need to recognise the hetero-normative patriarchal system that we are living in which heterosexual men have privilege over all

system have to work to change individual behaviours as well as the system that allows and maintains violence to come to an end. This should not only be up to activists and rights groups, but all citizens who stand to benefit from the eradication of violence.

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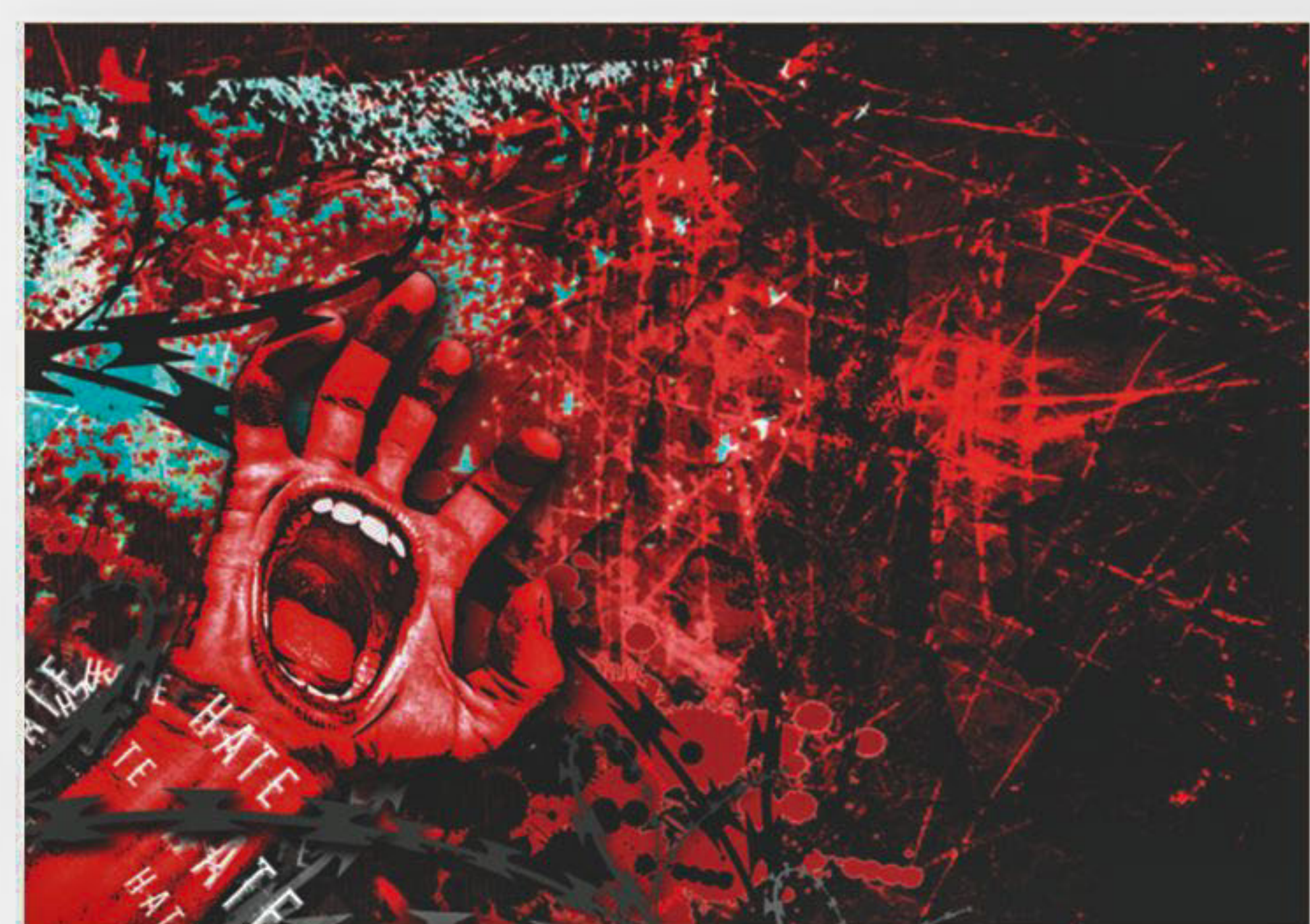


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