

India's Tryst with Democracy, Pluralism, Harmony

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The incidents of communal violence (Mumbai, Gujarat, Kandhamal) have shaken the country. The tragic loss of thousands of lives, the social wealth of over thousands of crores, and the attack on inter-communal amity, communal harmony has deeply affected our conscience. The life of violence victims is very tragic, life in refugee camps, failure of proper rehabilitation leaves them helpless and humiliated.

Communal Violence:

This type of violence which is plaguing our society since the partition times has been a major cause of increasing the divide between the two major communities of the sub continent. It is tragic to note that those dying in the communal violence are generally innocents, their only crime being that they have faith in one or the other religion. Also women and poor are the major victims of communal violence. One also painfully notes that followers of all religions have to suffer the violence in this that or the other country. We have noted that in Pakistan Hindus and Christians have been victimized, in India mainly Muslims and Christians have suffered due to violence, and in Bangla Desh Hindus are the major victims of these inhuman acts. The perpetrators of the crimes during the carnage go unpunished. Why some of our brethren and sisters become as inhuman as to target the innocents just because their religion is different?

As such moral values of religion don't clash with each other, they as a matter of fact can act as supplements in evolving better human values e.g. VasudhaivKutumbkam (Hinduism), Love thy neighbor (Christianity), take care of your community's needs (Islam) etc.

The hate ideology: Doctored Mass consciousness: Myths about minorities

This type of violence is possible against the minorities due to various factors. The starting point is that many a myths are spread against these sections of society. These are built upon some aspect of truth and then it is blown up by mixing it with falsehood to project that those belonging to other religions as, 'the other', 'the enemies' and so 'deserving' this brutality against them. These myths and stereotypes project as if the people belonging to one religion are all of the same type. As such there are different types of people in all the communities. Are all Hindus or Muslims having similar mode of worship, type of work-employment, income level, clothes, food, language, number of children? Do poor and rich Hindus and Muslims think alike about all the aspects of society and religion?

Myths against Minorities:

As in Pakistan and Bangla Desh myths prevail against Hindus and Christians, In India major myths prevail against Muslims and Christians. How many of us think slightly deeply into the ideas we hold about 'the other'? Many of us believe that Muslims marry four numbers of times, produce more children, and are more loyal to Pakistan, Islam spread on the point of sword and the Muslims Kings destroyed Hindu temples to humiliate Hindus! These misconceptions becomes the point of difference and keeping aloof from them and finally it becomes the point to hate them so much so that when the innocents from that community are killed, many of us silently approve it.

Temple Destructions:

Why did Kings destroy temples and mosques? Was it for religious purpose? Was it for humiliating other's religion or can there be some other reason? Kalhan, a 11th century poet, in his book Rajtarangini writes that King Harshdev appointed an officer called as *DevottapatanNayak*(An officer who uproots the idols of gods) during his regime. Aurangzeb got the mosque of Golconda dug up when the local NawabTanashah did not pay him tribute for three years. Maratha armies destroyed

the temple of Shrirangpatanam to humiliate Tipu, whom they could not defeat and Tipu got the temple repaired to respect the feelings of his Hindu subjects. Gazani plundered Somnath for the immense wealth which was there in that temple. If he had just to destroy idols he could very well have destroyed the Bamiyan Buddha and many a temples on way to Somnath. One third of his army was constituted by Hindu soldiers and 5 of his 12 Sipahsalar were Hindus. So what does all this mean?

Shivaji and Rana Pratap

Both these Kings fought bravely against some Muslim rulers. But these battles were not on the basis of religion. In Rana Pratap's army, there were Pathan soldiers (1/3rd) and his main associate was Hakim Khan Sur. This battle was for the status which Rana Pratap wanted and which Akbar did not give. Later Jehangir offered this higher status to Rana Pratap's son Amar Singh and they both became allies.

Shivaji had high regard for other religions. He respected a Muslim Sufi saint Hazarat Baba and a Christian saint Fr. Ambrose Pinto. He had instructed his armies that during their plunder campaigns if they come across holy books of others religion they should respectfully give it to followers of that religion. He got a mosque built alongside a temple in front of his fort. And when his army brought along the beautiful daughter in law of Nawab of Kalyan he became angry and asked his army not to indulge in such an dishonor of women to which so ever religion they belong.

Sycretic Traditions

The communal view of history totally sidetracks the syncretic, mixed traditions of Indian culture. There was a great development of Ganga Jamanitahjib (the culture and life style that emerged due to interaction of Hindus and Muslims). It has become part of all aspects of our life; food, language, music and architecture etc. The Hindu Bhakti and Muslim Sufi saints tried to bridge both the communities by their non-orthodox approach, which appealed to the hearts of the people to spread the message of love. Many a Sufi saints contributed a lot in the development of local languages, like Baba Farid to the Punjabi poetry. These saints worked a great deal for the unity of the people, especially the ordinary people and more so the poor. In most of the

cities we will find that the temples of Bhakti saints and Dargahs of Sufi saints are frequented by people of both the religions.

Saint Kabir had followers amongst both Hindus and Muslims, he emphasized on love between the people as the central aspect of religions. Similarly Guru Nanak appreciated the humanistic teachings of both the religions. Granth Sahib, the holy book draws heavily from Hindu traditions and also from the Koran. So he could appeal Hindus on one side and Muslims on the other that. Hindus and Muslims both regarded him as their own saint/pir. People of all religions visit the dargahas of Sufi saints. We have saints who are revered by Hindus and Muslims both, Ramdeo baba Pir, Satya Pir and NizamuddinAuliya are some examples. People of all religions go to the Churches of Mother Mary of Velinkini and the Mahim Church in Mumbai for their faith in these places.

Islam and Sword:

Can we win people's hearts by force? Generally since religion is a matter of faith it has to appeal to the heart. Conversions were not the aim of Kings (except Ashoka) The main conversions came from the poor low caste untouchables, who despite being the formal part of Hindu fold were under the severe oppression and repression of upper caste. To quote Vivekanand "Why amongst the poor of India so many are Mohammedans? It is nonsense to say that they were converted by the sword. It was to gain liberty from Zamindars and Priests....."(Collected Works-Volume 8-Page330). Majority of conversions did not take place due to the swords of the kings but due to the humanistic approach of Sufi saints. Low caste shudras have converted to different religions, Buddhism, Islam, and Sikhism in the hope of getting social justice.

Conversions to Christianity

Currently it is being asserted that Christian missionaries are converting the people by force and fraud. We notice that the percentage of Christian population has been declining over a period of years, 1971-2.60, 1981-2.44, 1991-2.32 and 2001- 2.30 (census figures). The harassment of missionaries is taking place especially in Adivasi areas while in cities the Christian mission educational institutions are well respected.

Wadhwa Commission report which went into Pastor Stains burning concluded that there is no conversion activity in the areas where the Pastor was working and also that Pastor Stains was not involved in the act of conversions.

Four Wives, Twenty Children

In India there are 932 females for every 1000 Males (Census Figures). So is it possible to have four wives for the Muslims? The family structure amongst Muslims in different parts of the country and in different social economic layers is not similar. In Kerala the Muslim families are small. Amongst educated Muslims again the size of families is smaller. While amongst the poor, amongst Dalits the number of children per family is very large. Basically number of children per family depends on the socio-economic levels and the education levels not on religion. Polygamy was permitted on some grounds in Islam. The population of Indian Muslims was 12.4% at the time of partition today it is around 13.4% (2001 census). The major reason for the rise is poverty and lack of education amongst Muslim community. Similarly the population of Adivasis was 7.5% at the time of partition and today it is 8.5%. Poor people-uneducated people have more children, it has no relation to religion.

India-Nation in the Making

British came here to plunder the raw materials and to set up the markets for their industrial goods. The industrialization began here during 19th century and along with that new section of Industrialists, Educated Intelligentsia and Workers came into being. The process of social reform saw the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy (abolishing *Sati*), Jotiba Phule (education for low caste *shudras*, untouchables), Savitribai Phule (education for women), Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (demand for social justice), Bhagat Singh (demand for (rights of workers, Peasants).

The National movement aimed at curtailing the rights of Landlords, providing facilities for industrial development and equal citizenship for all. This freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi was the biggest mass movement of twentieth century. It was an anti-colonial struggle, the inner dynamics of which was formation of India into a Modern Nation, based on the principles of Liberty Equality and

Fraternity (community). It aimed at Secular Democracy. All these principles were the democratic aspirations of the pole of India and got enshrined in Indian constitution. These represented the values of India: A Nation in the making.

British Policy of Divide and Rule

In contrast to the majority of the people of India, the old time Rajas and Nawabs, Jamindars and Jagirdars opposed the process of national movement. They resorted to the religion based politics. They pointed out that the struggle against British is against our Religion which teaches us Raj Bhakti, loyalty to the King, i.e. loyalty to the Queen Victoria. Both Hindu and Muslim kings were together on this point. In due course British sowed the seeds of division amongst this group and this led to the formation of Muslim League (Islam Based Nation state) and Hindu Mahasabha (Hindu Rashtra, Hinduism based Nation state). Communal riots also began from this time on. These communal riots were manifestation of communal politics, which in turn was opposed to the process of social change in the condition of women and Dalits. The British policy of divide-and-rule assisted by the pulls of Muslim Communalism, Hindu Communalism resulted in the partition tragedy.

Terrorism

Terrorism is due to many factors like the international politics to have control over the resources of oil, the issue of Kashmir and the rising communalism. Terrorists have nothing to do with religion. They have come from all the religions, LTTE, ULFA (Hindus) Irish Republican Army, Timothy McVeigh (Christians), Groups from Thailand (Buddhists) Khalistanis (Sikhs). Al Qaeda was promoted by US to throw away the USSR army from Russia. US had given Osama 8000 million dollars and 7000 tons of armaments for this purpose. After defeating USSR armies some of them came and joined the terrorists in Kashmir. After severe atrocities on some communities some young people of those community do resort to the path of terror. Dhanu was a LTTE member who strapped herself as a live bomb. Leila Khalid was a Palestine girl who resorted to path of terror when 14 Lakh Palestinians had to leave their home and hearth. Today we see on one hand terrorists like Osama bin

Laden and on the other SadhviPragya Singh Thakur but some people cleverly try to link terrorism with Religion, which is wrong.

Threats to Indian Constitution, Democracy

The communal violence is a violation of constitutional norms. The real issue is not between Hindus and Muslims or Hindus and Christians. It is a battle between democracy and the concept of realign based nation. Pakistan which was formed on the ground of religion broke in to Pakistan and Bangla Desh. Religion cannot be the basis of state. Politics in the name of religion wants to abolish the democratic rights, which affects the poorer and weaker sections of society. Our constitution drafted by Dr.Ambedkar emphasizes on Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The countries where religion (Pakistan) or race based politics (Germany) has come generally break down.

Need for Unity on the basis of democracy

The efforts of communal organizations are a threat to democratic values and freedom of the country. We need to recall the syncretic tradition, the ones of Bhakti and Sufi, the ones of Christian mystics. We need to give emphasis to the rights of dalits (Mahatma JotibaPhule, Dr.Ambedkar) for women (SavitribaiPhule, Periyar), to economic justice (Bhagat Singh), to truth and non violence (Gandhi). We need to celebrate our diversity and work for empowerment of weaker sections of society so that we can march towards peace and harmony. The principles of Indian Constitution, the one's of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity should be the basis of social and political life.

Say No to Communal Hatred and Communal Violence

Eradicate the cause due to which terrorism comes up

Reiterate Democracy and Pluralism

Stand for Peace, Non Violence and Harmony

Lets believe in Democracy, Dialogue and Diversity.