

UNITY IN DIVERSITY: FRATRICIDAL ISSUES IN INDIA

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Abstract — Diversity and pluralism that exists in the Indian society is unknown to any other part of the world. Issues that arise due to intersections of pluralism, religion and nationalism have always been one of debate and contest. Discontent, dissent and opposition are integral ingredients of a flourishing democracy. Lately, any opposition to the ruling dispensations, not just in India but in many parts of the world is misinterpreted as being unpatriotic and anti-national. While mature democracies handle it with pragmatic tolerance, totalitarian states crush them with ruthless suppression.

While unity in diversity with the presence of all major religions of the world, seem to have worked for India, it is the emergence of ethnic identity politics and fratricidal conflicts that led to the breakup of Yugoslavia and conflicts based on ethnic nationalism. The creation of Slovenia, Croatia, the wars in Bosnia and the disintegration of Yugoslavia into various new states presaged the global spread of identity politics. India continues to be in the transitionary phase. It has witnessed streaks of authoritarianism in the past, populism and jingoism of strangely high levels as witnessed in the recent times. While the country has been witnessing these developments over some time, the focus now is on the working of the Constitution. Does constitutional morality have any significance? In its absence, no matter how well the constitution is written, its operation becomes unpredictable, subjective and at times whimsical. This article delves into the fratricidal issues that exists in the country, communal riots, anti-Hindi movement, insurgency in Punjab, terrorism in Jammu and

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Kashmir, issues in Assam and North East, Citizenship Bill to name a few and explores the delicate thread of unity that we as a nation are woven into.

Keywords: Diversity, Pluralism, Fratricidal, Identity, Constitution Morality

Diversity and pluralism that exists in the Indian society is unknown to any other part of the world. Issues that arise due to intersections of Pluralism, religion and nationalism have always been one of debate and contest. Pluralism is a welcome reaction against the glorification of the state. Whatever legal supremacy the state may possess, it should be subject to moral limitation.¹ Pluralists recognize the value of group life and see that this variety of our group life today has a significance which must be immediately reckoned with in a political way. Interests of the state may not always be identical with its parts. India as a nation has accommodated diversity of customs and practices to a noteworthy extent.² The room has extended to the acceptance of not only a plurality of lawful codes but also a plurality of religious beliefs. Autonomy of an individual and his freedom to choose his own life for himself and to live it in a fruitful, honourable and a dignified way is integral to liberal, social and political order.

Democracy is a way of constituting political relations such that exercise of state power receives popular authorisation. Giving popular authorisation to its fullest and most meaningful expression under conditions of social diversity and complexity is challenging. Democracy inspires us to reorganize social relations in a completely new way. The great discontent of Indian democracy is that while the practices of popular authorisations, elections and public discussions and so forth are deeply entrenched and have often chastened the exercise of power, we are far from producing modes of governance that we could freely accept.³

The term fratricidal essentially means, “relating to or denoting conflict within a single family or organization.” India is no alien to fratricidal issues. Over the years, since post-independence we have seen many such issues that the country has faced.

¹ Eddy Asirvatham and K.K. Misra, *Political Theory* 308 (S. Chand Publications, 2017).

² Andre Beteille, *Democracy and its Institutions* 141-142 (Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Burden of Democracy* 27 (Penguin Books, 2003).

I. THE LANGUAGE ISSUE

Cultural and linguistic differences were enduring and positive features of Indian society's historical development. They were not only accepted but also nurtured further. Their acceptance was a basic feature of Indian nationalism as also India's nation building effort after independence.⁴ Anti -Hindi agitation dates back to 1938. In 1918 Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha was founded by Gandhiji for the propagation of Hindi in south India. The Congress also switched its official proceedings from English to Hindi in 1925. However, it was strongly opposed by Periyar and Justice Party who saw it more as an act of subordination than nation building. They opposed Rajaji's proposal who won the 1937 elections under the Congress Party, of compulsory teaching of Hindi in schools and demanded that it should be made optional. To protest the announcement, anti-Hindi conference was organised on 4 October, 1937. Rajaji stuck to his stand and refused to yield. Periyar and Khalifullah were at the centre of the anti-Hindi agitation. Self-Respect movement and the Muslim League jointly organized a protest march in August-September 1938. The President of India in 1959 issued an order that all efforts to make Hindi the sole official language of India by January 26, 1965 be strengthened and hastened. Indian Constitution said that English would be used as a co-official language between January 26, 1950 and January 26, 1965 and Hindi would become the sole official language of India post 1965. In pursuance of this aim, the Chief Ministers of the various states, adopted in 1961, the 'three language formula', according to which both English and Hindi were to be used as link languages, and taught in schools throughout India indefinitely, while the regional language was to be used, as a medium of instruction and education in state and local administration.⁵ This meant two languages for Hindi speaking states and three for non-Hindi speaking states. Post 1965, anti-Hindi agitations saw violence, which continued till the DMK won elections in 1967. The people associated the Congress Party with the imposition of Hindi and so it was defeated; the Chief Minister, every cabinet minister and the party president all lost the election. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which people associated with opposition to Hindi imposition, won a landslide victory and formed the state government.⁶

II. THE ASSAM TURMOIL

During the entire post-colonial period, Assam experienced innumerable social and political movements mainly based on ethnicity having both peaceful

⁴ Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Contemporary India* 61 (Har-Anand Publications, 2015).

⁵ Duncan B. Forrester, "The Madras Anti-Hindi Agitation, 1965: Political Protest and its Effects on Language Policy in India", 39(1/2) *Pacific Affairs* 19 - 36 (Spring-Summer, 1966).

⁶ Thanjai Nalankilli, "History of Anti-Hindi Agitations in Tamil Nadu (including 1965)". Available at <<http://www.tamiltribune.com/03/0101-anti-hindi-agitation-history.html>> (last accessed on February 5, 2019).

political mobilization and violent manifestations. Distinctively, the nascent middle classes of various ethnic groups led these movements.

The All Assam Students Union led several movements in the Brahmaputra Valley since late sixties. Notable among them were the medium movement launched in 1972, demanding Assamese as the sole medium of instruction together with English for college education of Assam and the movement launched over foreign nationals' issue during 1979 -85. However, the secessionist movements which were alien to the Brahmaputra Valley started in late eighties only with the consolidation of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the Bodo Security Force (BSF). All these movements apparently raised fundamental issue of one's identity and assertion of such identity to wrest political power and concessions.

The Memorandum of Settlement or the Assam Accord signed in the early hours of August 15, 1985 by the Assam agitation leaders and senior officials of the central and state governments in the presence of Rajiv Gandhi promised to end a period of extreme tensions within the Assamese society. The Memorandum of Settlement, made some promises on the economy and culture of Assam however the only major concession made by the Union government was in the matter of taking back the cut-off date from March 24, 1971 to January 1, 1966; and the commitment that that segment of illegal immigrants in Assam who entered the state between these two dates will be disenfranchised for a period of ten years from the date of their detect.⁷

The unabated illegal infiltration of foreigners from Bangladesh creates a great burden and great challenge to the existence of the state's native people. Now the immigrants from Bangladesh have almost become a determinant in Assam politics, which creates a great uneasiness in the minds of the native Assamese people and a fear psychosis develops in their minds that the Assamese would soon loss their identity and self-existence because of unabated influx from Bangladesh. A scrutiny of the issues has revealed the fundamental issue of one's identity and assertion of such identity to wrest political power and concessions.⁸

“It must however be admitted that the movement also reflected assertion of the ethnic identity of the state. We also know that basically the Assam movement of 1979-85 intended to wipe out the non-Assamese, either by way of assimilating them into the fold of Assamese society or by expulsion. Several questions arise. What is this accord? By what law of the land do you disenfranchise people? And why should a bureaucrat sign an accord involving disenfranchisement of the people? What happens to the children born to people

⁷ “Assam Accord Source”, 20(33) Economic and Political Weekly 1369-1370 (Aug. 17, 1985).

⁸ Jogendra Kr., “Assam: The Post-Colonial Political Developments”, LXVI (4) The Indian Journal of Political Science 873 - 900 (Oct.-Dec. 2005).

who have come after 1971? Can I be disenfranchised even after I have voted in two elections or more because an agreement has been reached between some leaders of an agitation and a secretary to the government? What is the moral or political or even cultural basis of this agreement? How is it democratic or, more fundamentally, how is it human?"⁹

III. THE CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT

The recent Citizenship Amendment Act has added fuel to fire, particularly in the north east of the country. As per the bill, the proposed amendment, seeks to provide Indian citizenship to non-Muslims communities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The persecuted migrants will be eligible to apply for citizenship after due scrutiny and recommendation of district authorities and the State Government. The minimum residency period for citizenship is being reduced from existing 12 years under the present law to 7 years. The Bill will apply to all states and union territories of the country. The beneficiaries of Citizenship Amendment Act can reside in any state of the country. Government has given approval to move the Bill in parliament granting ST status to six communities of Assam namely Tai Ahom, Koch Rajbongshi, Chutia, Tea Tribes, Moran and Matak.

IV. THE PUNJAB INSURGENCY YEARS

During the freedom struggle, Sikh leaders wanted a separate Sikh state. Being numerically smaller in number it was nowhere close to the position that Muslim League enjoyed vis-à-vis demand for Pakistan. The desire and aspiration for a separate Sikh homeland did not fade away with the partition of Punjab at the time of independence. The movement continued, and Punjab was divided on linguistic grounds in 1966 into Punjab and Haryana. Punjab had a Sikh majority with Punjabi language and Gurumukhi script whereas Haryana had Hindi language with Devanagari script. Politically, there was always a tussle between the Congress and the Akali Dal over gaining power in Punjab. The Akali party had a very minimal following of Jat Sikhs and may be a few segments of urban Sikh population. The Congress party on the other hand commanded the support of the Hindus, SCs, and non-scheduled caste rural Sikh population. With the coming to power of the Akali Dal, in 1978, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution was passed. While it was basically a resolution dealing primarily with the economic demands of the state and the Indian federal structure, it soon began to have religious and ethnic overtones in its demands.

Religion began to dominate even genuine economic demands of the people. Bhindrawale's rise as a religious preacher in Punjab sowed the seeds of

⁹ G.P.D., "The Unwanted of Assam", 20(34) Economic and Political Weekly 1418 (Aug. 24, 1985).

Sikh fundamentalism in Punjab in 1978. Issues of the capital city of Punjab, distribution of river waters were now assuming communal colours. It was only increasing the strength of Bhindrawale's assertion of his authority vis-à-vis the state. Political leaders, policemen, people from different communities became targets of the terrorists. Violence was becoming a usual way of life in Punjab. Squads were organized to eliminate the enemies of the Sikh faith in villages of the state. 1982 to 1983 saw a rise in such attacks and violence. Bhindrawale's target was the central government and propagation of his brand of Sikhism. Bhindrawale's messages were spread through the educational institutions managed by the Sikhs, the Gurudwaras and through religious gatherings. With the imposition of the President's rule in the state and powers now going directly in the hands of the central government, Bhindrawale and his supporters took shelter in the Golden Temple. Operation 'Blue Star' followed soon after and lasted for four days between 3rd and 6th of June 1984. Resulting in large civilian and military casualties, the terrorists were eliminated from inside the temple premises. Condemnation all over the world followed once the operation was over. The operation did not just damage the holiest shrine of the Sikhs but also destroyed irreplaceable manuscripts. The attack on the Golden Temple also caused Mrs Gandhi her life, by her very own Sikh bodyguards on 31st October 1984. Delhi saw a sad turn of events with large scale anti-Sikh riots breaking out on the streets of Delhi killing over two thousand people.

Rajiv Gandhi's tenure (1984-89), began on a pacifying note, although he remained committed to pursuing a hard-line policy towards the militants resulting in the Rajeev Longowal Accord. The assault on the Golden Temple was recognised as a major error on the part of the central government even by the Congress leaders. Having gained a massive electoral victory, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was more amenable to political concessions in Punjab including a settlement with the Akalis, which was crucial for any resolution that would prevent an escalation of the growing demands for a separate Sikh state. On their part, the Akalis realised that the continued radicalisation of Sikh politics would lead to disastrous consequences for the Sikh community in India. Reiterating the importance of Hindu-Sikh amity, Sant Longowal, returned as the head of the Akali Dal in 1985, condemned the acts of violence by extremists, and declared that the Akali Dal was not in favour of Khalistan.

V. THE AYODHYA SOLUTION

Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid imbroglio is another major fratricidal issue in India. Religion has always been an important part of the lives of the common people. Communal politics and communal violence were more or less absent in pre-colonial India. There were quarrels, religious suppression. But politics of the ruling class was not organized around communal lines of Hindus vs Muslim.

A mosque was built by a governor of Babar at Ayodhya in early 16th century. Some claimed in 19th century that it was built over a site where a Ram temple had existed. Till December 1949 things were calm till idols were found inside the mosque. The magistrate declared the mosque to be a disputed territory, locked it and barred it to both Hindus and Muslims. This was accepted as a temporary solution for a period of the dispute in the court. This lasted till the early 1980's when the issue began to gain momentum. On 6 December 1992, a large crowd demolished the 16th-century Babri Mosque in the city of Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh. The demolition occurred after a political rally at the site turned violent. The case of Ayodhya forces us to confront the question of what role archaeology and archaeologists should play in a situation in which the past is used to support identity claims in the present. To put it somewhat insensitively, even if it can be argued on conventional, "scientific" grounds that a Hindu temple existed under the Babri Mosque and was destroyed by Babur, does this justify the destruction of the mosque in 1992?¹⁰ The Allahabad High Court Judgement regarding the same was given in September 2010. The final verdict was delivered by the Supreme Court on 8th November 2019.

In dealing with communalism ideologically, we must keep in mind that in a democracy we do not have a monopoly on propaganda and popular education. The ideological battle must be empirically sound and analytically logical and must deal with the real concerns of the people. The heart of any ideological campaign against communalism has to be, above all, separation of religion and politics.¹¹

VI. SON OF THE SOIL ISSUES IN INDIAN POLITY

A few incidents in the past have increased the social tensions amongst the local populace. In 2007, political leadership in Delhi made comments on the people who come from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and had migrated to Delhi and become a burden on the capital's resources. This enraged law makers from both states who went on to criticize the then Delhi Chief Minister for the unwanted comments. In September 2018, Sabarkantha district of North Gujarat saw an unfortunate incident of rape of a 14-month-old girl. Hate crimes targeting Hindi speaking people began and spread to different parts of the state. Large scale exodus of people belonging from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh began. Voices of concern were raised by the respective Chief Ministers. Remarks made by a Gujarat legislator also added to the controversy. He was quoted saying "Because of them, my Gujaratis are not getting employment. Is Gujarat for such people". Earlier, in 2019 remarks were made by people in important positions of the government for the people from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh picking

¹⁰ Reinhard Bernbeck and Susan Pollock, "Ayodhya, Archaeology, and Identity Source: Current Anthropology", 37 (1) Anthropology in Public S. 138 - 142 (Feb. 1996).

¹¹ *Supra* note 4 at 198.

up jobs in industries setup in Madhya Pradesh. This also invited criticism from political circles across political parties.

Marathi speaking Maharashtrians have long felt alienated from jobs both in private and public in their own state. The Shiv Sena was founded in 1966. Bal Thackeray, Shiv Sena's chief began publishing lists of all the non-Maharashtrians heading major companies in Mumbai in his column "Read and Rise", in the satirical Marathi weekly magazine 'Marmik' in a bid to stir popular sentiment against people from outside Maharashtra depriving Marathi speakers of jobs and opportunities.¹² It essentially began as a movement against south Indians and continued to spill over to north Indians. The public outcry against South Indians continued to be generated, backed using strong headlines and cartoons.¹³ Politicians have picked up on the emotive issue to politicize and garner votes on this issue of the pride of "Marathi Manoo". In 2008 Mumbai, Pune, Amravati, Jalna, Aurangabad, Nashik, and Latur, Beed witnessed violence against north Indians.

Such fratricidal issues are also being seen in working of Indian democracy. Sadly, in Indian democracy we see less of deliberation. Parliament is taking a step back when it comes to deliberating complex issues. Ethnification is sadly becoming a reality. People vote on the basis of caste or some other ethnic affiliation and political parties find it very difficult to transcend their respective social bases. We must ensure that elections are contested on ideas that voters can critically assess. In the words of Andre Beteille, "Indian Society has been likened to a mosaic of communities based on language, religion, sect, caste and tribe. Those who value diversity for its own sake are inclined to put this on the credit side of the Indian heritage."

¹² Aarefa Johari, "Back to the 60's: The Shiv Sena's Tradition of Violence is as Old as the Party Itself" (2015). Available at <<https://scroll.in/article/761832/back-to-the-60's-the-shiv-senas-tradition-of-violence-is-as-old-as-the-party-itself>> (last accessed on February 4, 2019).

¹³ Reetika Revathy Subramanian, "A Tale of Two Cities: Reconstructing the 'Bajao Pungi, Hatao Lungi' campaign in Bombay, and the Birth of the 'Other'" 3(2) *Journal of Emerging Research in Media and Cultural Studies* (2015). Available at <<http://subversions.tiss.edu/vol3-issue2/reetika/>> (last accessed on February 5, 2019).