THE HINDU

The healing touch

Sri Lankan leaders must move to end the demonising of Muslims

The mass resignation of two Muslim governors and nine Ministers in Sri Lanka deepens a new fault line that has emerged in the island nation after the Easter Sunday blasts perpetrated by a fanatical Islamist group. Sinhala Buddhist hardliners had demanded that the Governors, Azath Salley and M.L.A.M. Hizbullah, and Cabinet Minister Rishad Bathiudeen, be removed for allegedly backing the terrorist group and interfering with the investigation. Stung by the aggressive demand at a time when investigators had not found any evidence implicating the three, all Muslim Ministers resigned in an act of solidarity. The campaign intensified mainly because of an indefinite fast by Athureliye Rathana Thero, a Buddhist monk, in Kandy. Thousands marched in his support. It is clear that the upheaval caused by the blasts, in which more than 250 people were killed in churches and luxury hotels, has caused widespread fear and mistrust across ethnicities. In a development that seemed too organised to be a spontaneous, emotional backlash, a campaign of violence and intimidation was launched against the Muslim community. This despite the fact that the National Thowheed Jamaat, the group behind the blasts, which included suicide bombers and was led by the radical preacher Zahran Hashim, has been dismantled. Hundreds have been arrested and the plot possibly inspired by Islamic State propaganda has been unravelled. It is intriguing that the government is not made accountable for the failure to act on advance intelligence on the attacks, but the community is being targeted.

Ever in need of new enemies and a blameworthy 'outsider', the majoritarian impulse in any society is likely to be awakened by an event as catastrophic as a religiously motivated attack. However, it is Sri Lanka's misfortune that anger against the perpetrators has been turned by some influential sections into fear and hatred towards Muslims. The President and the Prime Minister, who belong to the two main national parties, have not taken a firm stand against the disproportionate influence some Buddhist monks have on the political situation. Not many have called out the campaign of hatred. Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera has decried the allegation that one of his ministerial colleagues is in league with terrorists, and has boldly challenged "politicians, religious leaders and media moguls trying to incite racial and religious hatred". Last month, a wave of violence swept through some Muslim habitations. A concerted campaign is now on to demonise the community, and one extreme example is the allegation that Muslim doctors were surreptitiously rendering Sinhala women infertile. Having emerged from a destructive civil war, Sri Lanka needs to focus on rebuilding inter-ethnic trust and ushering in a new egalitarian order. It will be ill-served by a conflict between communities.

Caught napping

Kerala makes up for lost focus by acting quickly on the Nipah outbreak

A year after Kerala's prompt action quickly brought the deadly Nipah virus infection outbreak under check in two districts (Kozhikode and Malappuram), the State has once again shown alacrity in dealing with a reported case. A 23-year-old student admitted to a private hospital in Ernakulam on May 30 tested positive for the virus on June 4. But even as the government was awaiting confirmation from the National Institute of Virology, Pune, steps have been taken to prevent the spread of the disease by tracing the contacts, setting up isolation wards and public engagement. Two health-care workers who had come into contact with the patient exhibited some symptoms and are being treated. While 311 people who had come in close contact with the student are kept in isolation to prevent the spread of the disease, the numbers might be more – the student had reportedly travelled to four districts (Ernakulam, Thrissur, Kollam, and Idukki) recently. Containing the spread of the Nipah virus is important as the mortality rate was 89% last year, according to a paper in the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. The source of infection in the index case (student) remains unknown. However, transmission to 18 contacts last year and the two health-care workers this year has been only through the human-to-human route.

If Kerala was taken by surprise by the first outbreak last year, its recurrence strongly suggests that the virus is in circulation in fruit bats. After all, the virus isolated from four people and three fruit bats (*Pteropus medius*) last year from Kerala clearly indicated that the carrier of the Nipah virus which caused the outbreak was the fruit bat, according to the paper in *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. Analysing the evolutionary relationships, the study found 99.7-100% similarity between the virus in humans and bats. The confirmation of the source and the recurrence mean that Kerala must be alert to the possibility of frequent outbreaks. Even in the absence of hard evidence of the source of the virus till a few days ago, fruit bats were widely believed to be the likely candidates. That being so and considering the very high mortality rate when infected with the virus, it is shocking that Kerala had not undertaken continuous monitoring and surveillance for the virus in fruit bats. One reason for the failure could be the absence of a public health protection agency, which the government has been in the process of formulating for over five years, to track such infective agents before they strike. Not only should Kerala get this agency up and running soon, it should also equip the National Institute of Advanced Virology at Thiruvananthapuram to undertake testing of dangerous pathogens. Known for high health indicators, Kerala cannot lag behind on the infectious diseases front.

Hindi or English, comparing apples and oranges

The project to remove English from India remains misplaced and dangerous to development and integration

D. SHYAM BABU

True to their well-earned reputation, the people of Tamil Nadu have once again stood up against attempts to 'promote' Hindi in non-Hindi States. It would be a pity if we dismissed the protests as regionalism or separatism. The three-language formula (TLF) under the draft National Education Policy (NEP), now modified, stipulated mother tongue and English compulsory everywhere till class X, and Hindi in non-Hindi States and non-Hindi languages in Hindi States to be taught. The proposal was rightly seen as a Trojan horse to smuggle Hindi into non-Hindi States. History vindicates the fear.

The old TLF under the Official Language Resolution of Parliament in 1968 was never implemented either in letter or in spirit. While Hindi-speaking States never bothered to promote non-Hindi and "preferably one of the Southern languages", non-Hindi states continue to teach Hindi (Tamil Nadu obtained an exception to this irrational policy).

Is it such a crime that one part of the bargain has not been honoured? One might as well argue that the Hindi States deprived their students of learning an additional language, while non-Hindi States are better off with a third language in the toolkit of their students. But the irony of the TLF is that to be an Indian one must have fluency in two Indian languages, in addition to English which we originally wanted to disappear from the land.

By dropping the clause for compulsory teaching of Hindi, the government has merely averted the backlash from several non-Hindi States, but it is persisting with the TLF. Unless the government amends Part XVII of the Constitution (which deals with the language policy) to be in sync with the global trend of mother tongue plus English, we are bound to witness many an avoidable controversy.

Absurd policy

Our language policy is based on a honourable objective: decolonising all walks of our national life. Therefore, progressive replacement of English with Hindi was thought to be a sound beginning. But things didn't work out the way we hoped in 1950.

One, the project to remove English has become redundant. From being a language of colonialism, English transformed itself into a global language of culture, science and technology, and world politics. Its universalist claims are also backed by its capacity to absorb words from other languages.

Two, the intent to replace English with Hindi is based on an erroneous understanding that all languages are similar. All Indian languages are languages of identity and cultural expression whereas English is a language of mobility and empowerment. There is no point in comparing apples and oranges.

However, history also teaches us that primacy of a language is rather transient. There was a time the English (and even Germans) were communicating in French. One cannot now rule out the possibility of Mandarin replacing English as the global language in future.

Three, though Tamil Nadu's position is seen as 'anti-Hindi', it contains an implicit question: why on earth should students learn a third language which they, after they leave high school, are unlikely to use? There was a time Bihar opted for Telugu as the third language, just as Andhra Pradesh chose Hindi. But Bihar reneged on the TLF and Andhra Pradesh persisted with the same. How would Bihar students have benefited from Telugu being a third language on their school-leaving certificate? How are students in non-Hindi states benefiting from Hindi as a third language? Wouldn't it be sensible if the policy replaced the third language and allowed students to choose a subject or a skill?

Four, the TLF in any form is unconstitutional. A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court ruled in 2014 (in *Karnataka v. Recognised-Unaided Schools*) that imposition of even the mother tongue as the medium of instruction is violative of one's fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression [Article 19(I)(a)]. If the government cannot even force students to learn in their own mother tongue, where does it obtain the right to make language(s) teaching compulsory?

Reflecting the 'condition' that Article 344(3) imposes on the language policy that it must "have due regard to the industrial, cultural and scientific advancement of India," the Bench advanced the rationale for English: "For example, prescribing English as a medium of instruction in subjects of higher education for which only English books are available and which can only be properly taught in English may have a direct bearing and impact on the determination of standards of education."

Five, the TLF is not only irrational but impractical as well. Consider a scenario even under the revised NEP: every State is required to teach one modern Indian language, in addition to mother tongue and English. Bihar, say, re-opts for Telugu but it has hardly any teachers proficient in that language. Should it import Telugu teachers? Create an academy? How long does the venture take and how much will it cost?

Six, a case can be made that India ought to introduce English education throughout school and college education so that all Indians will be conversant in their mother tongue and English. Such a policy will be beneficial to the Hindi States. Consider the demographic trends: by 2060, non-Hindi States, especially in the south, are projected to experience demographic decline and attendant labour shortage. The situation in the north will be the opposite. Embracing English as the second language will promote mobility and economic development, especially in the north, and make India a more legible place to its citizens.

The Macaulay test

The common thread that runs through issues such as language in administration, medium of instruction and inclusion of a third language in curriculum is the project to remove English. Until the project is dismantled, the forces it unleashed through Part XVII will continue to wreak havoc with the country. The draft NEP recommends English throughout school education but it is, strictly speaking, counter to the spirit of Part XVII.

Several States have already made their respective languages the sole language of administration. As if to hurt the prospects of students from poorer sections, States stipulate mother-tongue instruction being mandatory only in government and aided schools. The well-off are free to access English medium education in private schools.

While English stands dismantled as a second/third language in administration, Hindi remains unacceptable to non-Hindi States. So, an educated person from a non-Hindi State will be clueless in a Hindi State and vice-versa. It does not matter whether he is transacting some business or attending an official meeting. Therefore, instead of promoting national integration, the official language policy has accomplished the opposite.

While firing the opening salvos in India's language war, Lord Macaulay suggested a simple test of asking people on what language they prefer. The least a government in a democracy can do is to fathom the people's will and act accordingly.

Unpack what is at stake

The non-Hindi States habitually join Tamil Nadu against any attempts to impose Hindi but they never bother to unpack what is at stake. Is it merely their cultural pride that cannot reconcile to Hindi? Sub-national aspiration can go only thus far. Instead of merely opposing Hindi imposition, they can build a better case for English as the second language throughout the country. That process will also expose their own hypocrisy. For starters, why don't they formally align their positions with Tamil Nadu and demand similar exemption that the former enjoys from the three-language formula?

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Making sense of Hindutva

The present political moment requires a renewed look at nationalism, communalism and majoritarianism

AJAY GUDAVARTHY

We are witnessing epoch-making changes to how democracy is working itself in India. It is often lamented as the new rise of cultural nationalism, majoritarianism and communalism. Earlier, historians had differed on how nationalism relates to communalism. Some felt nationalism itself was the product of colonialism and thereby the source of narrow identities. Therefore, one could not productively make a distinction between communalism and 'ethno-nationalism'. Others argued that nationalism was different from communalism: the first was about the 'making of a nation' and inclusive, while the second was divisive and caste-Hindu in its character.

Pointer to deeper changes

Today, for all effective purposes, this distinction has collapsed with the emergence and consolidation of majoritarianism. However, the framing of the recent changes and electoral outcomes cannot be fully captured through these categories as they now refer to a new sociological reality.

The unprecedented rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (BJP-RSS) combine since the 1990s, and the simultaneous and gradual decline of the Congress cannot be understood merely as the rise of communalism or majoritarianism; even as it carries these tendencies, it has become a viable project and a part of popular politics because of deeper changes in questions of identity, emotions and representation. A relevant question to ask is whether the majoritarian-Hindutva politics is also essentially about cultural subalterns who include both traditionally dominant castes as well as the subordinate castes, and classes. Would it not be right to argue that the upsurge of Hindu nationalism has paved the way for the mainstreaming of a 'way of life' and modes of thinking that lay at the margins of liberal democracy?

The complexity of the current moment in Indian politics is precisely this overlap between marginalised cultural groups that are asserting their identity but through conservative social ideology. The BJP-RSS combine, especially after the neoliberal reforms, has succeeded in combining aggressive pragmatism with regressive idealism. It is simultaneously inclusive and polarised; it provides mobility yet reinstates traditional hierarchies. Unless we unpack the irony of how contradictory processes are getting combined into a seamless process, a mere moral critique of the process would be inadequate, if not irrelevant. Unpacking

is a possible way to avoid the elitism of the liberal-secular critique of the current upsurge of cultural nationalism. The secular-liberal critique, in fact, further justifies the cultural nationalist project, enabling it to take on more majoritarian proportions.

In one sense, the political project of the Right, has subverted the binary distinction B.R. Ambedkar made between revolution and counter-revolution. He had observed that in Indian history, Buddhism was a revolution that privileged the shudras and provided them with dignity and equality, while a counter-revolution was forged by Brahminism and Vedic Hindu rituals to subjugate and marginalise the Shudras. What we are witnessing today is a counter-revolution that has the promise of being a revolution. It has managed to bring under-privileged castes and social groups to challenge the hegemony of caste Hindus/liberal elites over liberal, democratic institutions.

Inclusion of the marginalised

The wide gap that was created between tiny liberal elites and swathes of cultural subalterns due to the failure of the developmental state is being short-changed and subverted by muscular inclusion of the groups that lay at the margins. The resurgence of the 'Hindu' identity is not merely about communalism or majoritarianism but also about identities that had little hope of moving up the ladder within the limits of constitutionalism.

The BJP-RSS in this sense represent the cultural subalterns that cut across caste and class hierarchies. They are bringing with them social groups that suffered from routine inferiority and lack of mobility. The moral legitimacy of Hindutva lies in this silent change or subversion they are bringing about.

It needs to be added that this change cannot but be illiberal and is not necessarily anti-democratic as it might hold the promise of representing the majority. This change therefore cannot be captured in traditional or conventional caste and class categories; it goes beyond and cuts across the categories creating new divisions and social constituencies.

While communalism offers a sense of inclusion, majoritarianism offers a sense of mobility and the muscularity necessary to wedge open opportunities that otherwise looked closed; nationalism then offers a necessary moral antidote to exclusion and violence that are ingrained in the processes of communalism and majoritarianism. Nationalism is therefore not merely about an exalted sense of the nation, it also plays a significant and a deeper role of providing moral-emotional succour to the narrow-violent sensibility that is understood to be indispensable to set right 'historical injury'/communalism (against Muslims) and achieve mobility/majoritarianism (against the traditional elites). Violence (found in mob lynching), mediocrity (in seeking quick mobility – for instance as found in the recent recruitments to universities), and even crime and criminality (for instance, alleged accusations against Pragya Thakur) can compromise the moral legitimacy of the project.

Moral legitimacy of any political project is to be found in notions of justice and universality, and nationalism works as a conduit that precisely fills this space. Nationalism allows the self-belief that Hindutva is not about narrow interests, or not just about 'Hindus' but about restoring the glory of a 'lost civilization'. It includes everyone who resides in 'Bharat'. This higher purpose offsets guilt and inconvenient pressures of conscience. Nationalism serves the purpose of providing 'mobility with dignity'.

Unless one makes sense of the 'positive' and affirming aspect of right-wing politics, one cannot get a full sense of the surge in cultural nationalist politics.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Sorting out Chagos
The UN General Assembly vote and the ruling by the International Court of Justice against the United Kingdom do not mean anything if status quo on the U.S. military base is going to be maintained. The decision on whether or not to allow the base should be left to the people of Mauritius. If India voted for Mauritian claims of sovereignty, then it cannot mediate for the right of that sovereignty to be curtailed to serve the interests of colonial ambitions and military powers. India will do well to uphold its stature with the former colonies by taking a clear stand against the militarisation of the Indian Ocean and a complete decolonisation of remnants of colonial occupation (Editorial page, "The immediate neighbourhood", June 5).
FIROZ AHMAD,
New Delhi

Cracks in the Congress
It is unfortunate that the Grand Old Party, the Indian National Congress, is facing bad days after the results of the 2019 general election ("Desertion, discord rattle Cong. ahead of revamp", June 5). Cracks in party units in Congress-ruled States such as Rajasthan, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh should not be allowed to widen. The leaders of the party need to discuss the issues in a frank manner. The party needs to be in tune with people's aspirations, or vanish soon.
SHARADCHANDRAN S.,
New Delhi

Space for cycling
Cycling as a replacement for motoring, more so in cities, is a sound option as far as its impact on an individual's health and the environment are concerned. The recent move by the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Harsh Vardhan, to ride to work is profound, especially in terms of the ministry he heads. Officials can encourage cycling in the metro cities if, for instance, they ensure that there is extra space on buses or trains (as an extra coach). Cycle lanes in select areas could help. However, cyclists' concerns about traffic hazards and accidents must be addressed. Two days in a week should focus on cyclists and commuters using public transport.
B.N. GANGADHAR,
Bengaluru

Water security
Chennai is perhaps facing its worst water crisis in recent times. It was not so long ago that large parts of the city were under water but residents need to acknowledge the fact that most water sources are almost bone dry. Could there have been a better way to manage all this? Possibly yes. There should have been stringent measures to reduce wastage with no efforts being spared to communicate this at regular intervals to citizens and users. Chennai cannot depend on rainwater any more. Desalination plants must supplement the needs of the city, rain or shine. There have to be curbs on reducing groundwater extraction. Boring deeper may have other environmental consequences. Recycling and treating grey water at a central source must be thought of. Finally, the city may not be able to handle further growth and

planners have to think of satellite towns with good infrastructure that are not reliant on city water resources. There is a need for a water management revolution in Chennai with the full participation of all stakeholders.
C.K. MOHAN,
Chennai

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www.thehindu.com/opinion/letters/

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
A clarification on the story headlined "Scientists edit chicken genes to make them resistant to bird flu" (some editions, June 4, 2019): The penultimate paragraph had referred to a 2009 pandemic caused by H1N1. That entire paragraph on H1N1 should not have been mentioned as the story is related to bird flu (H5N1).

With reference to the "Between Wickets" column titled "India have the team to win the World Cup, so do at least three others" (May 22, 2019), a reader has pointed out that for the record, England reached only *one* final (1979) when they hosted the event (from 1975, 1979, 1983 and 1999) and not two as the column said. On two other occasions England made it to the title clash: in 1987 (Kolkata) and in 1992 (Melbourne). The reader is right.

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