

Why is the reality of Prime Minister's political capital veiled!

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The editorial titled 'Draw the Line' in 'Indian Express' (August 2, 2023), the first one to be written in the context of communal violence in Haryana's Nuh town and killings in the passenger compartment of Jaipur-Mumbai Central Superfast Express, is noteworthy. The title of the editorial 'Draw the Line' reads like a directive and warning. The sub-headline of the editorial says that the 'Murders on a train and on Haryana streets are unrelated. But both point to a cycle of hate, impunity - and official silence.' The key word is 'cycle', and it underlines the long silence of the government on such incidents. Therefore, the imperative tone of title and editorial which seeks a conclusive end to this 'cycle' as well as the silence.

The editorial appeals to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene in order to stoy this cycle at once. "Over his nearly two terms in power so far, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has built a formidable cache of political capital that the Opposition evidently feels unable to take on singly - it has united to forge a front, INDIA, to fight the BJP. PM Modi must throw his political weight behind the much-needed signal, to his own party and government, and to the people, that in the "New India" he envisages, those seeking to stoke fears and deepen insecurities, and upend the rule of law, will have a price to pay ."

The editorial is an urgent appeal made to the Prime Minister who is at the helm of power seeking his immediate intervention in putting an end to this chain of incidents involving hatred, violence and murder. The newspaper has certainly done just that. But an apparent contradiction can be seen in its editorial. Is the Prime Minister estranged from his party and government? He, for once, may be considered separate from the party, but can he be considered separate from the government he runs? The government silence that has been referred to in the sub-headline of the editorial, does it mean a government other than the Prime Minister's government? Which 'government' has given assurance of impunity to those running the business of communal hatred and violence for the last so many years?

Some gentle journalists and columnists working or writing in newspapers and news magazines are found repeatedly appealing to the Prime Minister during the last ten years to put a stop to this continuous cycle of communal hatred and violence. The Supreme Court itself has made this appeal several times. Many concerned citizens, scholars and civil society organizations too keep appealing to the Prime Minister in this regard by citing the Constitution and the cause of humanity. A number of times even global institutions/organizations have made this appeal. But despite such repeated efforts from these varied quarters, the Prime Minister does not listen.

The reason for the Prime Minister's silence on the continuous occurrence of incidents of hatred and violence, has not been clearly explained in the mainstream media till date. This situation has remained constant for the last ten years. One does not know when the time will come to "draw the line" on the prolonged silence of the Prime Minister. When someone will clearly say that the Prime Minister's formidable cache of political capital is built and feeds upon the very path of communal hatred and violence!

It would have been better if the newspaper, through its editorial, had appealed to some of the more sensitive leaders in the government and the party instead of the Prime Minister, requesting them to use their influence to persuade him so that the business of hatred and violence is checked from producing more havoc. Common citizens and distinguished people who too are engaged in spreading feeling of hatred and violence, could also be appealed to, requesting them to rethink for a while, in the interest of the entire fabric of society. To widen the empathy circle, one could reach out to the owners and personnel of electronic media, business houses, non-resident Indians settled in America-Europe and many others, to play a positive and constructive role in preventing the spread of communal hatred and violence. An appeal can also be made to the leaders of the opposition parties not to indulge in the vicious cycle of communal politics. Secularists can be asked to introspect that in many ways they too are responsible for the present crisis because instead of simply cursing the RSS/BJP day and night, they should play a more constructive role in solving the crisis. The people who have become the foot-soldiers in the politics of communal hatred and violence can be told how they are actually themselves the victims of communal politics, that which has taken center stage in Indian political discourse and activities. There is a need to communicate with, and explain to them, instead of just berating or just demeaning them.

Further, an appeal can also be made to those who insist on a "pure" Islam that their idea of "purity" could become another name for bigotry. A liberal and resilient stream and interpretation of religion will always continue to provide a right direction and meaning to life. In this way a healthy enrichment of religion and life goes on. I happened to discuss the issue with Faizal Khan of Khudai Khidmatgar, a colleague involved in the work of religious harmony, and asked whether any particular organization or plan existed behind the people who threw stones at the procession, attacked people with weapons, and setting vehicles and properties on fire in Nuh? He said that it was perhaps their insecurity and hasty reaction to the abusive language and provocative slogans aired before and at the time of the procession.

I have had a little experience with Meo Muslims (Muslims of Mewat were called Meo in my village) since my childhood. They were later converts and follow the stream of moderate Islam. It is believed that the Meo Muslims stayed back in India especially on Gandhi's insistence at the time of partition. In Bhagwan Das Morwal's famous Hindi novel 'Kala Pahar', this fact has been depicted in a sensitive, fictional perspective. I believe that the Meos, if they had some respect for Gandhi, should have checked themselves from reacting violently to verbal abuse. The attacking Meos should have resisted being provoked by abusive words. In old India, there were many people who used to teach a wisdom that abusive words come only on the person who utters them. Taking the help of this wisdom, the attacking Meos should not have sacrificed their dignity by getting excited by bad words. If even one person/group had made a mistake, then it should have been rectified immediately through a collective wisdom. But by doing so they have not only committed a criminal act as per law of the land but they have also done great harm to the social and cultural milieu of Mewat region. Furthermore, they have posed a major risk for the Muslim community residing in the adjoining areas of Nuh. Gurgaon sees exodus of street vendors, small traders, domestic helps and artisans. Even many middle class professionals have shifted to other locations due to atmosphere of fear and threat. Unfortunately, and unlawfully, village panchayats in Gurugram, Rewari, Mahendragarh and Jhujjar have openly passed formal official resolutions of boycott of Muslims.

A wider area of appeal could be made to the women of the country. Their conscious and active role can perhaps be most effective in eradicating this menace. All the people/organizations of the society should try to stop communal hatred and violence, only then maybe Narendra Modi and his team will be ready to think and understand positively on this subject. Obviously, in the interest of society, country and humanity.

Finally, I would like to add one more point. In the editorial, an appeal has been made to the Prime Minister to intervene by giving a concern about his "New India". That means there should be no place for hatred and violence in a "heaven" like New India. Considering New India as a new name for heaven, there is almost a consensus among the ruling class of the country. This issue cannot be discussed in detail here. It would be sufficient to say that New India is a problematic concept and project which has a direct link to communal hatred and violence. New India means an implicit and perennial source of multi-layered economic disparity and unemployment in the country and it leads to the propaganda of communal hatred and violence to divert attention from this stark reality. The "cycle" of communal violence is bound to be an endless one if the concept and project of New India is not discussed threadbare and pondered upon seriously and honestly.

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