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comment

## At 70, show some maturity

The State must stop all attempts to create patriots by coercion

**P**atriotism appears to be the flavour of the Independence Day week. Predictably, governments at the Centre and in the states are creating a nationalist frenzy among citizens by way of instructions on hoisting the Tricolour and singing patriotic songs. But as the nation

turns 70, a disturbing new trend is asking minority educational institutions

to flaunt their patriotism and furnish evidence of the same. Last week, the Yogi Adityanath government instructed 8,000 madrasas to organise programmes on August 15 that pay a tribute to freedom fighters. The circular stated that officers should ensure shooting of videos at madrasas and keep these as video evidence. Last week, a Muslim preacher from Mumbai asked madrasas to fly the Tricolour on Independence Day. Also the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation made the singing of Vande Mataram compulsory in civic schools. On Sunday, Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray demanded that the Centre enact a law making the singing of Vande Mataram mandatory.

The idea has sparked discontent among Muslims since the lyrics deify the Motherland. Community leaders argue that Islam prescribes worship only for Allah. Even when India became independent, Vande Mataram was among the songs considered for the status of national anthem but the idea was discarded when a large section of Muslims perceived it as inappropriate. Making Vande Mataram mandatory isn't just odious but also unconstitutional. In February, observing that the Constitution didn't have provision for the concept of a national song, the Supreme Court had refused to entertain a plea that directed the Centre to frame a national policy to promote Vande Mataram. A bench headed by Justice Dipak Misra said Article 51A (fundamental duties) of the Constitution required the promotion only of the National Anthem and the Tricolour.

States such as West Bengal have resisted the heavy-handed diktats of the government on celebrating Independence Day in the manner that New Delhi deems fit. Why should the voluntary expression of patriotism through singing Vande Mataram become a mandatory act? Also, why do Muslims have to express their nationalism more loudly than the majority community and furnish proof of their patriotism on a day to day basis? This doesn't agree with the ideals of freedom or secularism that India set out with in 1947.

## The anti-dowry law is a shield, not a 'weapon'

It is not wise to assume that all complaints come from 'disgruntled' women

**I**ndia outlawed the dowry tradition in 1961 but it continues to be as much a social reality as it was five decades ago. According to Delhi Police statistics, dowry harassment allegations, filed under Section 498A almost doubled in five years, going from 2,046 new cases in 2012 to 3,877 last year. This is in contrast to the trend in other crimes such as murder, robbery, rape or dacoity, which decreased every year since 2012 or only had a marginal increase.

The number of unreported cases of dowry harassment could be sizeable too. Hindustan Times pored over all the 1,330 first investigation reports (FIRs) filed for such cases in the first six months of this year, and found that the tradition cuts across demographics. The common items demanded, according to the complaints, included gold jewellery (543 cases), refrigerators (566 cases), sofa sets (217 cases), LED television sets (26 cases), flats and land assets.

Last month, the Supreme Court restricted automatic arrests under the anti-dowry law and in 2014, a separate apex court bench called Section 498A "a weapon, not a shield used by disgruntled wives". While this could be possibly true in a few cases, Hindustan Times' analysis of Delhi Police's data proves again that it would not be wise to assume that all complaints come from 'disgruntled' women. It would be prudent to be careful before assuming that every woman complaining about an abusive family or dowry harassment is "disgruntled" or wishes to exact revenge.

incidentally

GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI



## We're witnessing a second Partition

Thanks to Rightwing politics, what is happening today is a division of the Indian mind

**T**he 15th of August is, in a very special day, the prime minister's day. The Red Fort's rampart waits for him, sees him unfurl the Tricolour from its sandstone majesty and then address his fellow citizens. And we must, on Independence Day, greet our prime minister with a 'Jai Hind!'

But the Tricolour's story atop the Red Fort started with one who never was prime minister but gave us something that outlasts all prime ministerships: 'The greeting 'Jai Hind!' He had all that is needed in a leader, in a prime minister, but did not, could not, become prime minister. He has remained an unfulfilled aspiration, an unrequited promise - Netaji.

He stays indelibly etched in the popular imagination, all these seven decades and more since he was last seen, seven decades this year, this month and date, since the Tricolour was hoisted there, on that spot, by our first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

But even before he did that, Nehru had become another link between Bose and the Red Fort. The INA personnel were tried in 1945 by court-martial, four leading lawyers defending the accused - Bhulabhai Desai, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Jawaharlal Nehru and Kailashnath Katju - Desai leading the defence skilfully on the basis of international law, and

Nehru clearly shining in the proceedings. And there were three accused - Prem Sahgal, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon and Shah Nawaz Khan, one Hindu, one Sikh, one Muslim. There was a nationwide surge of support for the three as symbols of braveheart patriotism and brave-mind secularism. The national chorus fluxed into the cry: 'Lal Qile se aayee aawaaz, Sahgal, Dhillon, Shahnawaz'. Sugata Bose, in his new book 'The Nation as Mother describes this passage in our history compellingly.

The INA's motto - Itihad, Itmad, Qurbani - meaning Unity, Faith and Sacrifice shot through the country like a bolt of lightning. It bespoke, collectively, India's future in unity.

Gandhi, Bose and Nehru were tough on the colonial power and on the communal virus. They did not 'defend' secularism. They proclaimed its criticality to India. India un-free is not India, India un-secular is not India.

The Raj could not mess with their nationalism. The bigot could not mess with their secularism. For the reason they were ready, with the innocents who did die as a result of Partition, to give their lives for it.

The Two Nations Theory says it all. The Muslim 'Two Nationists', helped along with diehard Hindus taunting it, would have nothing to do with secularism. It wanted Partition. It succeeded in leveraging the departing Raj to



A worker puts up the Tricolour in New Delhi, August 9 RAVI CHOUDHARY/HT

give it what it wanted, Pakistan.

The Two Nations Theory, we must now remind ourselves, had Muslim and Hindu adherents. Pakistan slaked the thirst of the first. That of the second is now wandering over the Indian countryside looking for, thirsting for, disembodying the Indian earth for, the aquifers of hate.

The Hindu 'Two Nationists', helped along with Islamic fundamentalists, will have nothing to do with secularism now. They want in India a partition of the mind within the parti-

tioned nation. Dogged in their aim, they seek to leverage an India traumatised by terrorism, into what it wants, a Hindu Rashtra.

And as this Partition of the Indian mind, as between Hindu and non-Hindu, is being assiduously advanced, what secularists miss is the strategic toughness and philosophic anchorage of a Gandhi, Bose and Nehru in the cause.

Indian pluralism is not just about Sufi music, Iftar embraces and kebabs. It is about being tough. 'Lal Qile se aayi aawaaz...'

A formidable condemnation of Two Nationist divisiveness came from our former vice president Hamid Ansari in his convocation address at the National Law School University in Bengaluru. Speaking on the eve of demitting office he warned, in words that were made of steely resolve, that the "illiberal form of nationalism" which we are witnessing "promotes intolerance and an arrogant patriotism". His own ancestor, MA Ansari would have been proud.

What followed? Studied efforts at sarcasm and even rudeness aimed at Ansari when gratitude should have been offered, respect shown to his person, his office. So much for propriety, basic human decency.

Hamid Ansari should have become President of India. Even as Dara Shukoh should have been emperor of Hindustan. But then...

Whom does history honour? That never-say-die prince of secularism or the bigotry that ruled from the Red Fort awhile?

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The views expressed by the author are personal

CRISIS MANAGEMENT



Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath with Union health minister JP Nadda in Gorakhpur, August 13 AP

## Show zero tolerance for deaths in State hospitals

To avoid another Gorakhpur-like tragedy, Yogi Adityanath must ask for regular data collection and medical audits



SHAILAJA CHANDRA

**T**he deaths of more than threescore children at the BRD Medical College Hospital in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh has horrified people across India. Not because other tragedies are less disturbing - but because children's vulnerability calls for the highest standards of protection. Within that healthcare tops the list.

The BRD hospital is a tertiary level public health facility. It is said to be the only facility with wherewithal to treat encephalitis within a 300 km stretch. Given all this one would have expected the highest levels of emergency preparedness and response. Instead, so many defenceless children had to die. Why?

Because a concern about healthcare does not bring active public endorsement, the way investment in infrastructure does. If a handful of hospital deaths are treated as normal, the administration becomes careless.

No chief minister or health minister, least of all in a state the size of UP, can possibly keep track of trends, warning signals, shortages of manpower, equipment; which is why they must administer by exception. This calls for data management to take stock of warning signals and to respond to those.

The emergency services at BRD were une-

quipped to handle the crises. If they succumbed because of mismanagement of oxygen supply, it was atrocious; and, if it was because of delayed payments, it cannot be dismissed by holding one or two responsible.

Why weren't there checklists for oxygen supply as a top commodity in a hospital's inventory? A medical college hospital should have performed better - not worse.

Indeed it is paradoxical that the prices of tomatoes or onions can bring governments to their knees but not so the deaths of defenceless children. A lesson will only be learnt if the chief minister shows zero tolerance for needless mortality in government hospitals. He must direct district hospitals and medical colleges to publish monthly data on in-patient admissions and look at monthly reports of mortality trends by hospital-related causes and share this data publicly. Only systemic changes will work; but for that continuous data collection and medical audits are a must.

This Independence Day one would like to hear the PM and all CM's commit themselves to giving top priority to public health and hospital management. Through a commitment that hospital data of mortality would be declared by all district hospitals and uploaded every month along with the outcome of reviews conducted by third party peer review committees. If the CM shows no lenience towards medical or administrative apathy by simply glancing through the exception reports and peer reviews of hospital deaths, things could still change dramatically.

Shailaja Chandra is former chief secretary, Delhi  
The views expressed are personal

## Tribals are not heritage toys or museum pieces

By banning Hansda S Shekhar's book, Jharkhand has missed the relationship between creativity and politics



SANJAY SRIVASTAVA

**T**he Adivasi Will Not Dance by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar has been banned by the Jharkhand government on the grounds that it is offensive to the dignity of Santal women. Some also allege that it is pornographic. What does this episode tell us about social and political life in the 70th year of the Republic?

The story that has caused the greatest offence is entitled 'November is the Month of Migrations'. A brief-but-powerful tale of power and powerlessness, it tells of a pennurious Santal family on its annual work-related migration from Jharkhand to West Bengal. The family is waiting for a train to take them away from their local misery to a distant one. Talamai, one of the daughters, is beckoned by a man - a non-Santal policeman - who holds a bread pakoda in his hands. Talamai is hungry and her family has no food to offer. The policeman offers food in exchange for sex. Talamai endures the encounter as she has earlier learned to do. She eats the pakodas, tucks away a Rs 50 note that the policeman gives her and returns to join her family. A routine affair conditioned by the circumstances of power and powerlessness.

The longer 'The Adivasi will not dance' is about why 60-year old Mangal Murmu refuses to dance at a government function. When the indigent Murmu first receives an invitation to perform, he is pleased. He soon learns that the occasion is the inauguration of construction activity for a privately funded thermal plant by the president of India. The land on which the plant is to be built is part of a village whose residents have been evicted through official diktat. Murmu's daughter and her family is part of the evictee group and has been forced to move to her father's house. "You are making us Santal's dance in Pakur," Mangal

**THE STORIES ARE POWERFUL NARRATIVES OF MULTIPLE FORMS OF VIOLENCE TOWARDS ADVASIS: DISPOSSESSION FROM LAND, THE VENALITY OF NETAS, AND THE HOLLOWNESS OF MIDDLE-CLASS SYMPATHIES**

Murmu wants to say to the officials who are organising the ceremony, 'and you are displacing Santals from their villages in Godda. Isn't your VIP going to see that?... Doesn't your VIP read the papers or watch news on TV?'

"If coal merchants have taken a part of our lands, the other part", Mangal Murmu says, "has been taken over by stone merchants, all Diku - Marwari, Sindhi, Mandal, Bhagat, Muslim. They turn our land upside down, inside out, with their heavy machines. They sell the stones they mine from our earth in faraway places - Dilli, Noida, Punjab". Mangal Murmu continues: "What do we Santals get in return? Tatters to wear. Barely enough food. Such diseases that we can't breathe properly. We cough blood and forever remain bare bones". And this is why, Mangal Murmu - addressing the president - announces that the Adivasi will not dance anymore.

Shekhar's stories are powerful narratives of multiple forms of violence towards Advasis: Dispossession from land and helplessness against the might of mining companies; the venality of politicians; the whimsy of missionaries and the hollowness of middle-class sympathies. They speak of Adivasis being treated as heritage-toys who perform for tourists to show the 'rich' diversity of India, but are meant to forever stay as museum pieces, unable to access good education and health.

But the stories are not only earnest renderings of power and powerlessness. That would make for boring fiction. They also speak of love, intimacy and loss in the crucible of desperate economic and social circumstances: They are marked by the bracing touch of collapsed infrastructure, rapacious private interests and the erratic paternalism of the State. But, nevertheless, hopes, desires, aspirations and yearnings to escape an oppressive present break free from the fetsam and jetsam of what modernity has wrought for indigenous populations. It is this remarkable combination of creative and political sensibilities that make the collection worthy of admiration.

These stories of Santal lives are unsentimental renderings of quotidian struggles and aspirations, as opposed to representations of Disneyfied noble savages, infantilised adults and promiscuous strumpets that populate the non-indigenous imagination. To ban such a book on the grounds of promoting 'immoral' and 'pornographic' images of Santal identity is to completely miss the relationship between creativity and politics. The Republic at 70 deserves better.

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The views expressed are personal

**innervoice**  
TAKING A ROAD LESS TRAVELLED WILL GIVE YOUR LIFE A NEW REALITY

PP Wangchuk

Last week I was travelling in the Himalayas and beyond, interacting with the general public. Journalists and scholars in my bid to get a better sense of the vision of life. Not a day passed when the journey of life went off by staying within the comforts of home. It was all out in the open, amidst the scorching sun, rain, dust-storm as well as the bounties of nature.

I told myself that I was on a 'footloose nirvana' that could not have happened but

depending on the surroundings I am blessed with, any given time.

But then there are fundamental ideas of a good life: Keeping yourself rooted to the realities of the earth and nature, never going off the true nature of your personality like loving and being kind. You will see that the whole world stands by you.

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers)  
The views expressed are personal  
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