



A thought for today

Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare, And beauty draws us with a single hair

ALEXANDER POPE, The Rape of the Lock

Hairy Tales

Mass delusions are symptoms of social stress, which really do need remedying

It would be funny if it wasn't both a symptom and cause of very real misery. Over the last two months women from across Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab have reported that somebody cut off their hair - without their consent.

Collective insecurities have long provided fertile ground for collective hallucinations. On a much-storied Halloween Eve of 1938 for example, a US radio drama based on The War of the Worlds by HG Wells led to panic about a Martian attack.

Mass hallucinations in modern India, including the 2001 sightings of Monkey Man, likewise betray the collective anxieties of being convulsed by extreme social and economic change.

In villages traditional livelihoods and relationships are rapidly coming to grief. In the overcrowded urban clusters where villagers go to start new lives, both infrastructure and security are woefully short.

In many of the 'choti katna' cases, investigators believe the women have been cutting their own hair to "draw attention". These are selfie-obsessed times, where social media not only sets canards ablaze but also plays host to macabre forms of exhibitionism - like the live streaming of suicide.

A Common Solution

A centralised test will solve a shared national problem of finding good judges for lower courts

The objections raised by some high courts and state governments against the conduct of an all India district judges recruitment examination (DJRE) are without merit. Such an examination can raise quality of district judges and dispel perceptions of nepotism and favouritism.

AIJS failed because states enjoy autonomy in lower judiciary appointments and are hesitant to give it up. Many states are touchy about language, domicile, reservation criteria, and understanding of local culture. AIJS was modeled on UPSC exams which draw proficient candidates because of a unified and rigorous test process.

A concept note on DJRE prepared for SC by senior advocate Arvind Datar notes that approximately 4,800 of 21,000 judicial and magisterial positions are lying vacant. He has proposed a four-paper written examination which tests candidates on legal aptitude and local laws, languages and customs.

General is 79

No he doesn't want a party, he isn't happy about fielding birthday messages all day either

Bikram Vohra



So I call my relative who is a retired general and I begin to sing 'eppybirdaytooyoo' in that falsetto tone we all use to denote unbridled joy and warmth and he says, not you too, please stop right this instant, don't even think of continuing...

You'd be grumpy too, he says, if you were 79 and the whole day was spent fielding calls and messages and stupid 'guess who's' from horribly cheerful people. One well wisher gave me three guesses, they say pointless things like it's your birthday, I know it's my birthday, you don't have to remind me.

Now he is really on a roll. WhatsApp started its cheeping at 5am and woke me up, he says, then the phone started ringing incessantly, now I have an SMS from a PC Gulati wishing me and I don't know any PC Gulati, I don't want to know one either and I don't understand why people cannot mind their own business, why do they have to interfere in mine?

Ha, then there are who are the rest of the year and it doesn't stop there, they aren't happy filling in Facebook and LinkedIn and all that stuff, they drop in to wish me personally and I have had to entertain them and I didn't even get my afternoon nap and now there's you wanting a party, why should I give you a party, do you know what it costs, at my age you should give me a party, a whole horde of them trotting in and messing up the day and my place, no thank you very much.

His misery is further compounded by the silly questions people ask. It is your birthday, isn't it? Well if you have to ask why the heck are you calling? Silly jokes, like you are as young as you feel (misplaced profundity).

Patently false statements: you look so young for your age (yes, but I don't feel it, please go away).

Curiosity that's bad manners: so, what did you get for your birthday (why should I tell you, give me one good reason why what the family gave me should be public knowledge).

Then the sledgehammer: wow, it's your big 80 next year (incandescent brilliance, you figured it out by yourself?).

And you know the worst of it, he means, now I have to thank everyone and be gracious and do you realise how exhausting that is?

Don't forget PC Gulati, I say, otherwise he won't wish you next year.

Junk Today's Secularism

India needs a reinvented secularism 2.0 rooted in separation of religion and state

Bhanu Dhamija



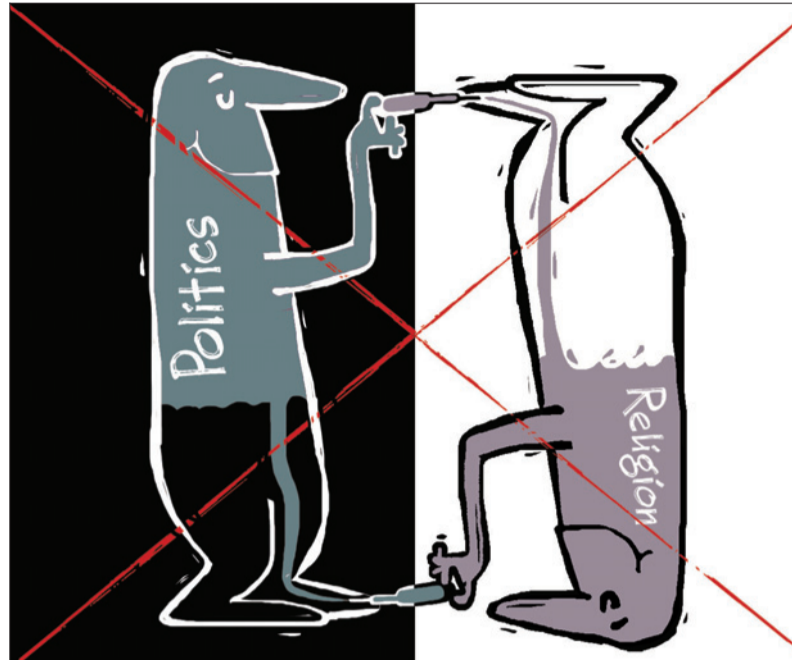
India's ambitious experiment with freedom of religion has failed. Our insipid brand of secularism, based on states' active engagement amid stated religious neutrality, has led to the appeasement of a few, but empowers none and brings injustice for all.

The Hindu majority has now risen against years of over-accommodation of the Muslim minority. This puts the country at risk of losing its tolerant and pluralistic democracy. India today desperately needs a new definition of secularism, one based on freedom of religion, equality before law, and separation of religion and state.

All of these requirements are essential for secularism to work in any country. Indian secularism fails because it allows governments to grant religious freedoms, but not to treat religions equally. The biggest failure in this regard began in the early years of the republic, when the government codified Hindu social customs into law but allowed Muslims to continue practising Sharia law.

This lack of separation of religion and state has eaten away at India's religious amity. Governments engage in all sorts of religious activities and play favourites. They own and operate places of worship, fund religious schools, grant tax exemptions to religious outfits, award them government contracts, allot them public lands, and take people on religious pilgrimages.

Many of India's founding fathers opposed such government involvement. They wanted to place separation of religion and state provisions in the Constitution, but were ignored. HV



lest the pendulum swing too far, and allow Hindu chauvinism to take over India's democracy.

But this time we must adopt genuine secularism, with all three essential ingredients: freedom, equality and separation. Freedom of religion is already enshrined in India's Constitution. Work is needed on the other two, and they must be enacted through legislation.

For religious equality before law, we must pass a uniform civil code. India can make progress by persuading the Muslim minority in two ways. First, ensure that all government benefits (subsidies, aid, welfare, etc) are distributed under uniform rules.

Second, repeal all religious privileges granted under the Criminal Procedures Code of the country. This would ensure that states' police powers and assistance are applied on a uniform basis.

As for the separation of religion and state, India should pass a constitutional amendment along the lines of the First Amendment of the US Constitution: that Parliament "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Religion is surely a personal matter, in which politicians, legislators, and bureaucrats do not belong. Our current variety of insipid secularism has only led to abuse by our politicians, violence on our streets, and mischief in our courts.

The writer is Chairman, Divya Himachal Prakashan

Our current variety of insipid secularism has only led to abuse by our politicians, violence on our streets, and mischief in our courts

not properly secular." Granville Austin, famous chronicler of India's Constitution, wrote, "Nehru's inclusive definitions of 'communalism', and of 'secularism' as its remedy, were widely shared, which made their semantic trap all the more insidious. They created more difficulties than they resolved."

Today, the Modi wave among the Hindu majority has shattered the Nehruvian concept of secularism. And for good reasons; Nehru's approach was impractical in its denial of all communal identities, and it was open to abuse by governments. Now the majority is flexing its muscle and taking revenge for years of minority appeasement. This makes it all the more necessary that India adopt real secularism,

Where Javadekar errs: Research must be promoted for both teachers and students from college level itself

Lalit Kumar



Union HRD minister Prakash Javadekar has announced, at a higher education conference, that research would soon be optional for college teachers. This announcement threatens to blow the culture of research and teaching in India to smithereens.

It is well known that research both in colleges and universities is already in a shambles. The existing mandatory research clause for promotion of college and university teachers has contributed only to the mushrooming of dubious academic journals and overnight publishing houses. As academics were left with the option of 'publish or perish', many came up with the solution of 'pay and publish'.

The goddess of fortune smiled on sycophants with little academic credentials, and those allergic to libraries and books got enough publications to become professors, principals and vice-chancellors. Consequently, research increasingly became a term of abuse and the international rankings of our universities dipped further.

The solution to this academic malady does not lie in separating research from teaching at the undergraduate level and reducing it to a matter of choice, but in putting into place certain regulatory and quality control mechanisms. UGC approved list of journals is one such recent step towards weeding out the spurious publications.

A good starting point to initiate, nurture and improve

If thoughtful research will not be incentivised and linked to promotion and salary increment, the day is not far off when a teacher will no longer have probing answers to the simplest of questions

the culture of research in colleges both for faculty and students would be to ask some fundamental questions, such as, what are the objectives of research; how does good research contribute to classroom teaching? Until we answer these rudimentary questions, we cannot appreciate the invaluable role that research plays in teaching and thus see it as an added frill, a tendency



exemplified in the minister's recent announcement.

To illustrate the inextricable relation between research and classroom teaching, my experience of teaching Homer's Iliad in a Delhi University college can serve as an example.

The Iliad was supposedly composed in the 8th century BC when Greeks reinvented alphabet, forgotten a couple of centuries ago. Prior to this, the songs of Homer's tour de force were circulated orally. To grasp the overwhelming phenomenon of transition from orality to writing, and its outcome on any culture, I read a wide range of books such as Milman Parry's The Making of Homeric Verse, Walter J Ong's Orality and Literacy, and various others during my doctoral research on

Maithili print culture at Delhi University's English department. I was able to help students appreciate what appeared merely redundant and repetitive in Homer as essential components of an oral culture.

If thoughtful research will not be incentivised and linked to promotion and adequate salary increment, the day is not far off when a teacher will no longer be able to come up with probing answers to the simplest of questions. The aim of education in general and research in particular is to cultivate a spirit of enquiry in students, to enable them to ask pertinent and uncomfortable questions related to their discipline, society, identity and nation.

Good research offers a solution to a problem, an answer

to a good question and contributes to our knowledge of the world. As liberal spaces, universities and colleges must inculcate the spirit of questioning in young minds, and the job of good teachers-cum-researchers should be to provide gratifying answers.

The culture of enquiry, the ability to frame questions, cannot develop overnight once a student leaves college and joins the university. If we will not orient our students towards research and original ideas during graduate and post-graduate levels and suddenly exhort them to come up with new ideas and perspectives for their MPhil and PhD, they are bound to fail miserably.

The need of the hour, therefore, is to promote research both for students and teachers from the college level itself so as to orient them gradually towards knowledge production. In the absence of orientation to research and enquiry, we may well just have netizens keen to imitate and reproduce without creative and critical impulses. And, who will care about quest for knowledge and speaking truth to power then?

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Sacred space

The Sole Motive

In all that you do, let love be the sole motive. Let action be out of love. If love becomes the grounding principle of all deeds, then most of the ills of the world will vanish.

Chandrasekharendra Saraswati

Secret Behind The Good Effects Of Good Action

Shri Shri Anandamurti

If you have performed a good action, you will reap the consequences of that action after death. But the mind can experience its good consequences, if and only if, it has a body. One experiences joy and agony, pleasure and pain, only if one has a brain, nerve cells and nerve fibres. If there is no physical body, how can there be any experience? So the thought of experiencing that pleasure in heaven is nothing but sheer fantasy. There is no logic behind it. That is why, in Ananda Sutram, it is said, Na svargo na rasatala - There is neither heaven nor hell.

Where is the question of pleasure and pain in the absence of the physical body? So, the fantasy of heaven is completely erroneous. You have to come to the world again so that past

samskaras attain fruition. One has to perform actions in order to restore the mind to its normal state from vikriti, the distortions caused by previous actions. What does a wise person do, then?

In the Mahabharata, when the five Pandavas were in exile, they were spending their days in great suffering during their exile in the forest, even though Yudhishthira, as king, had performed great acts of charity. Then, Draupadi caustically remarked to Yudhishthira, "Very well, very well."

So what did Yudhishthira say, then? "I do not expect anything in return whenever I do anything good. I desire no result. I want to offer the good results of my good actions to the Lord, and I should reap the bad consequences

of my bad actions. I will not give those to the Lord. I should not come to this world to reap the consequences of good actions that are done through me. Whenever I do anything, I offer it to the Lord - 'O Lord, take the consequences of this auspicious action.' I also say, 'Let me have for myself the inauspicious consequences of my inauspicious actions.'"

This is indeed the path of a pure, saintly and truthful person. This is the secret behind escaping from the good consequences of a good action.

One may say that it is nice to undergo the good consequences of one's righteous actions. But this is not the way things are. There is no real good gained by this. While experiencing the good consequences of one's righteous actions one may commit

three or four wrong acts. Thus one has to then come again to reap the consequences of such unrighteous acts. One has to transcend the cycle of actions and reactions. One must desist from wrong actions. "I will restrain myself from unrighteous actions. I shall not do anything unjust, come what may. I shall fight against evil. I shall fold my hands before a righteous person."

This is the lifestyle of a righteous person. "I shall be vociferous against injustice and shall remain humble before a righteous individual. I shall commit no evil. I shall do as much good as possible, and while doing so, I shall tell Parama Purusha at every step, that I desire no reward and want nothing auspicious, in return for my good deeds. Let these be Yours."

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