



A thought for today

The safety of the people shall be the highest law

CICERO

Khattar Under Fire

Political interference in policing has rendered Haryana police toothless

In a clear reference to the violence wrecked by Dera Sacha Sauda supporters last week, which ended up singeing as many as five states, Prime Minister Narendra Modi used yesterday's Mann ki Baat broadcast to send out the message that "violence in the name of faith will not be tolerated". Further he gave assurances that law would fix accountability and the guilty would be punished. But what about the accountability of chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar? Indeed the Punjab and Haryana high court has already indicted his government severely.

Holding the state's political interference in policing responsible for how dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim's followers were able to run riot after his rape conviction, the court observed: "It was political surrender just to allure the vote bank." Still BJP brass is obdurately holding on to the position that the Khattar government should get credit for how its strong measures quelled the rioting within a day. This is a preposterous claim. The plain fact is that the storming of Panchkula and then the intense clashes resulting in 36 deaths could have been avoided with basic police work. Today Haryana government faces another test - it must not fail again when the dera chief's sentencing takes place in Rohtak.

In addition to how political interference paralyses policing, this episode has highlighted the growing tendency of state governments to pass the buck onto the army or paramilitary forces. The need of the hour is to reform and strengthen policing at the local level, but states have repeatedly resisted this change. Instead of bringing the ratio of 139 policemen per lakh population up to par with the UN prescribed 222, matters have been made worse by haphazard expansion of the paramilitary. For instance, CRPF now has as many as 240 battalions - suffering from systemic problems including chaotic deployment, poor personnel management and lack of coordination with state governments (evident last week).

If the Modi government wants to improve governance it must make a big push for police reforms, beginning with the states in which it is in power. As for the Khattar administration, it is becoming infamous for law and order failures - from the inept confrontation with followers of Rampal, another sect leader, in 2014 to the Jat quota agitation in 2016. Haryana is in crying need of credible and competent stewardship.



Not My Spokesperson

All India Muslim Personal Law Board must now make way for a more representative body

Saba Naqvi



After recent events in Haryana we should not underestimate the power of men of religion. I recently had the experience of sitting next to a furious mullah in a TV studio. Don't want government money for madrasas, he hollered, don't want modern syllabus, don't want to produce doctors or engineers, just want to produce more maulanas and it's my right to do so. He was banging his fists on the table and was in quite a state as he saw his freedoms being curtailed.

Mullah saab is quite right in that like the Mormons or the Amish people in the US he has every right to do exactly what he wants and live in a separate universe - especially now that the right to privacy has been reinforced in a magnificent manner by the Supreme Court.

What the mullah should not have is the right to legally impose his views on others but actually he does have this right via the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), which has set itself up as the 'sole spokesperson' of the Muslim community. Founded in 1973, AIMPLB is a collection of clerics (with a few professionals thrown in) whose main purpose is to protect sharia law. Half its members are life members and ever since it compelled Congress to overturn the Shah Bano judgment in 1986, it's grown in clout, even as it has created the ecosystem necessary to posit the argument of 'appeasement' of a particular community.

Yes, the mullahs have been appeased, even as the people they claim to speak for head downwards on every social and economic indicator. Yet on every matter involving Muslims, including the Ayodhya case, AIMPLB is there positing its views. Now that they have been defeated in the triple talaq matter it's a good time to ask, on whose mandate does AIMPLB claim to speak for the world's third largest Muslim community? Did they descend from the heavens to represent India's unfortunate Muslims till eternity? And why can't AIMPLB be disbanded and a



more representative body created?

Although the triple talaq judgment disappoints in still upholding personal laws over fundamental rights, yet a process has begun where women can question men's rights to determine laws. All the world religions have historically discriminated against women either on the basis of religious texts or social custom (after all Eve came from Adam's rib, while virgins await men in paradise and till the last century it was acceptable in parts of India for women to burn themselves on their husband's pyres). But the whole point of modern societies is equality before law, regardless of religion, caste or gender.

We in India have in theory given all citizens equal rights but in practice personal laws (not just those applicable to Muslims) have been the backdoor route to disempowering women in matters of marriage, divorce, rights over children and inheritance. And because we were a nation born in the bloodshed and chaos of the Partition,

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those at the helm of affairs have also had a deep neurosis involving the Muslim community. Somewhere down the line, Congress, the dominant party to shape India's narrative till recently, appeared to have taken the path of auctioning out 'secularism' to clerics, naturally all men, who were then expected to deliver the Muslim 'herd' as a voter bloc.

It's as if the great votaries of secularism could not dirty their hands by directly dealing with Muslims so they brought on the mullahs. Regional parties, most notably SP, BSP and TMC have

taken this model of politics to the next level. The first two have been vanquished in the age of BJP while TMC is holding ground in Bengal - yet it is inevitable that its advocacy of conservative clerics will lead to a counter polarisation.

Although secularism actually means a separation of state and church, we have evolved something of a perversion in India where the clerics have used the cover of secularism to keep retrograde personal laws in place and thereby their own relevance intact. And it's not all motivated by divine impulses: Control over a social group also ensures control over whatever resources are available, most notably in the Waqf properties that are reservoirs of corruption instead of being a resource to serve the poor in the community. If our secularism appears to have been virtually flattened by the organised assault of right wing nationalism, it's because there was a serious structural flaw in it to begin with. Let's admit that.

A few women have now given some oxygen to the Muslim identity that was being suffocated by the relentless presence of the mullah. This identity should always have been grounded in the reality of artisans and craftsmen who make beautiful things with their hands and in the great subcontinental reservoir of poetry and literature that questioned every structure and saw the mullah as an impediment to knowledge and liberation.

Even today we live in an age of neurosis, where some accuse the women who fought the case of being pawns in a larger conspiracy scripted by BJP. To such commentators I would only say liberate your minds and regardless of whether BJP set a bait or not, equality is always worth fighting for. It is also true that personal laws may not be the most pressing matter confronting the Muslim community, although any set of rules that disempowers women should always matter.

It's good to see the self-appointed guardians of Islam put in their place. My mullah saab would still be fuming, but frankly, I don't give a damn as he believes women must live at the mercy of men.

The writer is a journalist and author

'Complete failure of state government ... half-hearted police action and political procrastination in Dera agitation'

Prakash Singh, ex-DG of BSF and former DG of UP and Assam police, headed a Haryana government commission which indicted 90 state police officials for deliberate and mala fide actions during the Jat agitation violence that claimed 30 lives in February 2016. He spoke to Sanjeev Verma on why he thinks lessons from the Jat agitation were not learnt and how the Haryana government mishandled the August 25 violence by Dera Sacha Sauda followers which claimed 36 lives:



facing the rioters firmly and squarely is a repetition of their earlier behaviour. Again there is failure at the political, administrative and police levels. There has been complete failure of the state government. There was political procrastination in handling the dera agitation, bureaucratic failure and half-hearted police action. Once the situation went out of control, then they took action. ■ Was it impossible to completely sanitise Panchkula and stop people from gathering there, as Haryana police is claiming? As per media reports, these followers did not come from forests but from roads and they were not interrupted. In fact the

prohibitory orders issued were faulty, framed so as to facilitate entry of dera followers into the city. The orders did not ban people from coming in groups to Panchkula but only said that people were not allowed to carry weapons. They say it was a clerical mistake but I don't believe that.

It was a deliberate leak to let the protesters come. I think police were told 'bhagat log hain, inko aane do' (they are believers, let them come in). Do not allow them to bring weapons and they can be handled: some such instructions appear to have been given orally. That is my suspicion, my surmise. They came in such large numbers to Panchkula with the connivance of the state government. ■ Would you have allowed such large numbers of people to gather in Panchkula? Police should not have allowed such a large congregation at Panchkula, which they did. Had they issued proper prohibitory orders and enforced them, the crowd would still have come through other routes but then the number would have been 5,000 or 6,000 and not 1.5 lakh. Police would have been able to deal with it.

■ You had pointed out various Haryana police shortcomings in your report on the Jat agitation. Were the same shortcomings responsible for what happened in Panchkula? To an extent, but not entirely. Once the will to act is not there from the top, you may

be having all the equipment and all the training but there is little that you can do.

■ You had recommended short-term and long-term measures to the Haryana government. Have the short-term measures been implemented by Haryana?

I don't really know the ground situation. I believe some process was initiated but nothing much has happened. ■ Haryana police has suspended DCP Panchkula for not imposing Section 144 in time. Are senior officers also responsible for not monitoring the situation?

The DCP has to face the music since he had issued the orders. But somebody should take him into confidence and ask him whether it was really a clerical error or a deliberate omission because he had instructions: 'Bhagat logon ko aane do. Dera ke log hain. Voter hain, aane do' (Let the followers in, they are dera folks, they are voters, let them in). Senior officers are also answerable. They should have seen what was happening. Explanation should be demanded from others.

■ Why is the state shying away from acting against those non-performing officers who were indicted in last year's Jat reservation riots?

I have great regard for Mr Khattar (Haryana CM) for being an honest man. But he doesn't have a grip over the administration. That is the problem. He is a gentleman but not cut out for ... what more can I say.

Q&A

Let Our Cities Rise

Niti Aayog provides a useful roadmap for reforms and faster urbanisation

Five year plans, which were the fulcrum of India's economic approach for close to seven decades, have been phased out this year. In their place, a long-term vision is being developed by government thinktank Niti Aayog. In moving towards this vision, the Aayog last week released an action agenda that runs over three years and aims to initiate changes that are doable within this period, providing a welcome roadmap for economic reforms.

As governments have limited bandwidth, Niti Aayog correctly emphasises selected areas which can both boost economic growth in the near future and help India realise its long-term aspirations: Urbanisation and infrastructure development in particular can simultaneously meet both objectives. Here the agenda has evolved from being driven by government investment to the private sector playing a greater part, making India one of the world's largest initiators of public private partnerships. But government needs to enhance its capacity to design frameworks for ensuring that the private sector has incentives to invest and projects run their full course. Its focus in PPPs has to be on providing a more conducive environment for projects.

Niti Aayog also underlines the regulatory changes needed to push India on the path to faster urbanisation, which will boost the economy while helping absorb surplus agricultural labour. Urbanisation has hitherto been shackled by such a poor legal framework that even as India's urban population has grown over five decades, share of rental housing in overall housing has dropped. This can be remedied within a short period by freeing up laws governing rent controls, land ceilings, the floor space index and stamp duties. Let's remove the irrational curbs on the vertical expansion of our cities.



dilbert



Dear Ganeshji ...

On Ganesh Chaturthi, a wishlist that wasn't from India's elite at a mythical VVIP Ganesh puja

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Uddhav Thackeray: Ganeshji, I'm sharing power with BJP but your puja should be for Maharashtrians, by Maharashtrians and of Maharashtrians. Why are Gujaratis from BJP taking over my turf?

Narayana Murthy: You are Mangalamurthy. I am Narayana Murthy. Now that outsider Sikka is gone, how do I get back to being Indian software's founding father?

Mamata Banerjee: Thank you Ganesh that Chaturthi is not falling on Muharram. Otherwise I'd have to stop all immersions in the Bay of Bengal.

Lalu Prasad: Ganeshji, how many modaks do I need to eat to put this wretched fodder scam behind me?

Amit Shah: Ganeshji, 125 years ago Tilak started Ganapati puja. Tilak was an original BJP member. All gods, goddesses, kings, Babasaheb, Netaji, Tilak were all part of the original BJP movement. Sab hamaare hain.

Sharad Pawar: Should I join hands with BJP or not? You have a magnificent trunk but it seems BJP's election trunk is bigger than even my war chest.

Arvind Kejriwal: Lord Ganesh, how many more defamation cases do I have to endure before I can finally end my maun vrat?

Rahul Gandhi: Hey, so cool to be here in the city of Maharashtra! Hope Ganesh pujas are being celebrated across the state of Mumbai!

Shah Rukh Khan: Oh Ganesh, what will it take for me to make another big hit?

Mayawati: Ganeshbhai, I have the patent on the haathi symbol. Please ensure all offerings at the mandals are handed over directly to BSP.

Nitish Kumar: You are a truly non-corrupt God and I will pray to you for at least one year. After that I may look for another secular deity.

Arun Jaitley: How much GST should I charge on Ganesh puja? Wait, what about Doklam? Can we have a 2-in-1 Ganesh puja, one for GST one for Doklam? Since I am a 2-in-1 minister:

Asaduddin Owaisi: Ganeshji why have I been invited? I thought I was an anti-national.

Sachin Tendulkar: Now that I've come to Ganesh Puja do I also have to compulsorily attend Parliament?

Mukesh Ambani: Ganeshji, let's think big. Can we get every single Ganesh mandal sponsored by Jio? We'll offer free live streaming.

Narendra Modi: Ganeshji, pranam. Have been wanting to ask you for so long: was it plastic surgery or not?

All in unison: Ganapati bappa morya!

Liberating Effect Of Jainism's Paryushan Parva

Dhanpal S Jain

Paryushan Parva, the annual Jain observance, is the time to uplift oneself through fasting, meditation, soul-searching, awakening, self-study, courage, compassion and forgiveness for self and for all beings. For both Shvetambars, who observe the ritual over eight days, and Digambars, for whom the festival lasts 10 days, this is a time for introspection, reflection and purification popularly known as "Chaturmas" or Varsha Yog. Chaturmas literally means "four months", the period of the monsoon, when Jain monks and nuns take a break from travelling (journeying barefoot is difficult during this time) and make themselves available to the community for instruction and guidance. Paryushan is the time when, to improve karma, adherents perform 12 kinds of austerities, including fasting. They also do svadhya or self-study. The purpose of Paryushan is to stay close to your soul, reflect on your shortcomings, seek forgive-

ness for wrongdoings, remove internal corruption and resolve to live an ethical way of life. Daily recital of scriptural verse and prayers, helps one to look within and reflect on the teachings of tirthankaras. One should daily perform practices that lead one to emancipation and liberation.

On the fourth day of Paryushan, it is customary for Murtipujak Shvetambars to read from the Kalpa Sutra, a scripture which recounts the life of Mahavira, the 24th tirthankar - the 14 dreams of his mother before his birth, followed by the story of his birth, life and liberation. It also recounts the lives of other tirthankaras and the rules of Paryushan.

Mahavira led a socio-spiritual, non-violent reform movement. He rejected superstitious practices, blind faith, caste system, gender bias, sati, bali pratha and discouraged animal sacrifice. He encouraged ahimsa, compassion and scientific temper. He practised his philosophy. He promoted a radical

economic, political and social justice movement based on complete equity.

He regarded all species of flora and fauna as integral to a composite moral community. He emphasised the concept of Jivdaya or animal care and aparigraha or non-possessiveness to protect biodiversity from human greed and butchery. The fivefold Navkar Mantra that is recited offers obeisance not to God or Creator, but to Arihants or perfected beings; siddhas, liberated souls; acharyas, masters; upadhyayas, teachers; and sadhus, renunciates. With mantra-chanting, seekers find liberation through their own efforts, and not by waiting for divine intervention.

Jainism lays great emphasis on rational, scientific, compassionate, courageous and ethical way of life based on complete equanimity and tranquility.

The first tirthankar, Rishabhdev, gave us six concepts: Asi: self-defence, civil defence; Masi: art, culture, literature and

education; Krishi: the agrarian lifestyle; Vidya: schooling, knowledge and training; Vanijya: trade and commerce, enterprise; and Shilp-kala: architecture, handicrafts and skill development.

For Shvetambars, the final day of Paryushan is Samvatsari Pratikraman or annual confession, when it is time for confession and seeking forgiveness as well as being forgiving, enabling self-liberation. The ritual of seeking forgiveness from the teacher is widened in scope to include family, friends and all living beings. The culmination of confession is receiving forgiveness from all living beings and also forgiving everyone including oneself.

This ritual of forgiveness is sometimes called the rite of universal friendship. Tirthankar Rishabhdev is said to have performed penance for one year at a stretch. During the process of penance, toxins accumulated in body cells get expelled. The body is recharged, energised and relaxed. And there is intellectual, corporeal and spiritual awakening.



Sacredspace

Starry Universe

The mind, this globe of awareness, is a starry universe that when you push off with your foot, a thousand new roads become clear, as you yourself do at dawn, sailing through the light.

Jalaluddin Rumi