

Editorial

Friday, December 20, 2019

Tainted altruism

If the country, and by extension, the states comprising it is to steer towards the direction of progress and development, thereby putting a halt to the deteriorating economic growth which slowed to a six-and-a-half-year low in Q2 FY 2019, which ran from July to September, the burning issue of the Citizenship Amendment Act –CAA should be put to rest for good. A task easier said than done given the increasing magnitude of protests and agitations against it. The declaration of Amit Shah who is the Minister of Home Affairs that there is no question of rolling back what can arguably be described as the most controversial and contested Act in recent history only goes to show the extent to which the central government is willing to go to implement the act. On the other hand, there is an increase, both in terms of intensity and magnitude, in the opposition towards the act, with intellectuals and prominent public personalities including filmstars lending their voice to the agitation. The print as well as electronic media is still churning out opinions, discussions and editorials, and from what one can gather, almost every expressed opinion is against the act.

The ruling BJP government, meanwhile is on overdrive trying to play down the whole sordid affair as an instigated and orchestrated event. Expounding the Act as a much needed measure to provide relief to the persecuted minorities of the neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, the government is yet to provide a plausible or convincing explanation as to why only Muslim-majority countries are specifically mentioned, or that if religious prosecution is being carried out only in these countries. The expressed objectives of the Act is a noble and philanthropic one which merits applause and support, but despite its altruistic intentions, the obstinate reluctance of the centre to address the specific concerns of different regions as well as geographical variations before passing the Bill have painted a dark picture to the whole effort, and is becoming a cause for grave concern and a questionable intent. Dismissing the voice of the people in such a manner does not bode well for those at the helm of affairs, and certainly amounts to underestimating the integrity of the hundreds of thousands of the protesting voice. To state that the protests are organized by the opposing political parties is nothing short of insulting the intelligence of the dissenting public amongst which are thousands of intellectuals, academicians and even bureaucrats.

The centre needs to abstain from its long-practiced arm-twisting methods of getting things done their way. Trying to look after the welfare of the neighbours while members of the family are still reeling under poverty, unemployment and pressures of everyday life does not translate to altruism. The self-serving agenda of the central government is getting clearer with each passing day, and what is more unfortunate is that the practice of arm-twisting has been applied to its own people, as is evident from the admissions of a few nominated representatives from the state.

Even though the state is under the ILP system thereby providing a brief respite from the immediate threat of CAA, it is in no way a permanent solution or a reliable defence mechanism from the inevitable influx of illegal immigrants which is making their way to the state. It is only a matter of 'when' and not 'what if'. The state government should make necessary arrangements or else the people will be forced to find their own means to ensure their safety. And time is running out.

Name Change

I, the undersigned, Chandra Devi Bhattarai, do hereby declare that I have renounced, relinquished and abandoned the use of my old name Chandra Devi as I have assumed my new name Chandra Devi Bhattarai.

Sd/-
Chandra Devi Bhattarai
Chandraman Village

Gun Licence Lost

I, the undersigned, have lost my Gun Licence No: 3979 / DM/IE NPB Pistol Revolver. on the way between Babupara(Police Station Imphal West) to Imphal West DC Bungalow Babupara on 19/12/2019.

Finders are requested to hand over it to the undersigned.

Sd/-
Yambem Rakesh Singh
S/o Yambem Joykumar Singh
Kairang Maning Leikai
690991566

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NE: Improving journo-murder index

By a Correspondent
By : Nava Thakuram

As the year 2019 approaches the finish line, India sets to improve its journo-murder index with two casualties where as our northeastern region (NE) evades any incident of scribe's murder for the second consecutive year. Indian sub-continent has witnessed the murder of 12 journalists during the year.

With only 49 journalists killed for journalistic works around the world (95 casualties in 2018) till date, India's share has also gone down from six to two. Moreover, its neighbours namely Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Tibet (under China), and Bhutan have not reported any incident of scribe's murder this year.

Pakistan and Afghanistan topped the list of journo-murders in South Asia as both the countries have lost five journalists each to assassinations in 2019. Conflict-riddled Pakistan reported the murders of Zafar Abbas, Mirza Waseem Baig, Muhammad Bilal Khan, Ali Sher Rajpar, and Malik Amanullah Khan for journalistic activities. Afghanistan lost Javid Noori, Nader Shah Sahebzadeh, Sultan Mohammad Khairkhal, Shafiq Aria, and Rahimullah Rahmani to assassinations.

India as a whole lost six scribes in 2019, but only two murders are understood as being related to journalism related activities. Andhra Pradesh based journalist K Satyanarayana and Madhya Pradesh based journalist Chakresh Jain faced

the fate because of their works as journalists. However, four other cases are yet to be confirmed that they were targeted for media activities.

Young reporter Satyanarayana, who worked for Telugu daily 'Andhra Jyothy', was hacked to death by miscreants at Annavaram village of East Godavari district on the night of 15 October. Local scribes reported that Satyanarayana was targeted in an earlier occasion too and he informed it to the local police. Jain, a freelance journalist died of serious burn injuries on 19 June as he was involved in a quarrel with the assailant at Shahgarh locality.

Others who were killed this year include Radheyshyam Sharma from Uttar Pradesh, K Muhammad Basheer from Kerala, Anand Narayan and Nityanand Pandey from Maharashtra. Sharma was allegedly murdered on 10 October by his neighbours. Basheer lost his life as a running vehicle, driven by a senior government officer, moved down him on 3 August. A news channel contributor (Narayan) was murdered on 4 June by miscreants and a magazine editor Pandey was killed in another incident on 17 March.

A young scribe from Bihar named Pradeep Mandal was targeted by miscreants on 28 July, but he survived luckily. He contributed a number of news items against the local liquor mafia for Dainik Jagaran and invited enemies from the gangs. Meanwhile, a Guwahati based scribe named Nareesh Mitra died on 9 December after sustaining head injuries in a mysterious accident inside the city as

the soft-spoken scribe left for home in the evening hours.

India lost six journalists (Navin Nischal, Vijay Singh, Sandeep Sharma, Syed Shujaat Bukhari, Achyuta N Sahu and Chandan Tiwari) to assassinations in 2018, whereas the trouble-torn northeastern region has once again evaded murder of any journalist in two years. Often described as a disturbed zone because of relentless violence engineered by armed militants, the region (except Tripura) has avoided any incident of journalist's murder for many years.

Tripura reported the murder of five media persons in 2013 and 2017, whereas Assam and Manipur witnessed the last killing of media persons (Dwijamani Nanao Singh from Imphal and Rahnul Nayum from Dhubri) in 2012. Till the recent time, the region was a breeding ground for insurgents fighting against New Delhi with demands for self-rule to sovereignty. Both the States were once severely affected by the militancy, where over 30 separatist armed outfits went on with disruptive activities including extortion, kidnapping, and killings.

For Indian working journalists, the year 2017 is recognized as a deadliest year as 12 scribes (Hari Prakash, Brajesh Kumar Singh, Shyam Sharma, Kamlesh Jain, Surender Singh Rana, Gauri Lankesh, Shantanu Bhowmik, KJ Singh, Rajesh Mishra, Sudip Datta Bhaumik, Naveen Gupta and Rajesh Sheoran) were either murdered or killed in suspicious situations.

Among the casualties, Tripura reported two incidents of journo-murder (Shantanu and Sudip Datta). In 2016, India witnessed the targeted killings of six scribes, where as the previous year the country lost five journalists to assassinations.

A satisfactory statistics on journo-murder index was observed in 2014, when the country reported only two incidents of journo-murders. But year 2013 emerged a dangerous year for scribes with 11 casualties including three media employees (Sujit Bhattacharya, Ranjit Chowdhury and Balaram Ghosh) from Tripura.

Various international media rights bodies including Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) etc have come out separate reports that we lost around 50 journalists across the world in 2019, which is the lowest death toll in 16 years.

While defining journalists as individuals who cover news or comment on public affairs in print, radio, television, online outlets etc, those organizations maintained that incidents of abuse, assault-attacks and imprisonment of scribes by government forces, political goons, anti-social elements, etc continue everywhere as over 350 journalists were imprisoned in 2019, where China, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Vietnam, etc have taken the lead. The author is a northeast India based media activist.

An Unnatural Politics and the Madness of the Indian State

Courtesy The Wire
By : Manash Firaq Bhattacharjee

There is an anecdote in Salvador Dali's *Dary of a Genius*, where he recounts telling three men from Barcelona, nothing that occurs in the world astounds him. Upon which a well-known watchmaker among them asks Dali, if he saw the sun coming out in the middle of the night, wouldn't he be astonished? No, said Dali, it wouldn't bother him the least. The watchmaker confessed, if he witnessed such a thing, he would have thought he had gone mad. To which, Dali replied with witty assurance, "I should think it was the sun that had gone mad."

The modern counterparts of Dali's watchmaker believe there is something mad about the student protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). In fact, the madness lies elsewhere.

Muslim students, finding their place as equal subjects under the law shrinking drastically after the CAA was passed by both houses of parliament last week, have reacted sharply. Protests were spearheaded by two Muslim educational institutions, Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University. The logic of the government had reached them. But more significantly perhaps, what reached them was a sense of suffocation.

Since 2014, there has been an unprecedented attack on Muslims in social spaces. It started with the lynchings on rumours of beef eating and transporting cattle. The territorialisation of the Hindu nation had begun with that move. Muslims were asked to mind their eating habits, keeping the sentiments of the majority community in mind. There was also an additional charge of 'love jihad', a Hindu rightwing conspiracy theory of Muslim men conning Hindu women to marry them to populate their religion. That added a patriarchal barbwire to the territorial game.

When Hindu Bengalis outnumbered Muslims in failing to prove their citizenship status in the National Registrar of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, the BJP government in the state rejected the NRC. Soon after, home minister Amit Shah, announced a nationwide NRC. The idea behind the drastic move became clearer after the

government declared its intentions to pass the CAA.

The CAA has been declared as a gross violation of Article 14 of the constitution that grants equal rights to all persons and does not discriminate against anyone under the law. To concerns raised by the opposition in the Rajya Sabha on the Bill leaving out India's largest minority, the Muslims, Amit Shah wondered why the members did not appreciate the inclusion of six other communities (Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis and Jains) for this special provision. He asked a significant question: Does the inclusion of Muslims alone make a law secular? That, he said, is a very narrow idea of secularism.

The story so far reveals a step-by-step ostracisation of Muslims from the body politic of the nation. The natural habits of Muslim life were targeted first. Next on target was the natural law of belonging to the nation, either by birth or by blood. Muslims were slowly being erased from their natural relationship with the nation. It was a clearly political move to define India's new, political relationship with Muslims.

The protest against the CAA and the NRC by students of Jamia on December 15 ended in a fierce crackdown by the police. There were stone throwing incidents, and the burning of vehicles. The students were quick to publicly dissociate themselves from the violence. The men in uniform entered the university campus and beat up students in hostels, canteens and had no respect even for the library. There were unforgettable images of broken doors, broken chairs, dupattas left on the table, and blood.

The university proctor said that the police entered without orders from the authorities. Later in the evening, students were taken away with their hands over their heads. "Are we criminals?" a woman, her hands on air, asked before a television camera. After poor labourers and immigrants, it was the turn of Muslim students to bear the brunt of the new territorial game.

What is really going on? To begin with, Muslim students have refused to obey the new diktat on the erasure of their Indianhood. They shout slogans, run, raise their finger in

protest, and cry in exasperation. This is a condition that does not come naturally to students. It has been politically inflicted on them by the state.

To use Dali's obverse logic of perception, it is the state that has gone mad. Beneath the rhetoric of development and cleanliness, the political agenda of reducing the status of minorities is in full swing. The students know that. And they have the language to articulate what they know.

The madness of the state is symptomatic of the dark region between fantasy and reality. The Hindu *rashtra* imagines a nation where Muslims have no political teeth. The idea of that nation is desperate to come into being. The madness of the state is the revelation of that desperation. It is a shadowy madness. To improvise T.S Eliot's *Hollow Men*, it is the shadowy madness that falls between the idea and the reality of Hindu *rashtra*.

This madness also tends towards a politics that is not natural. Any politics that seeks to destroy the other's natural relationship with itself and the body politic is the politics of un-naturalisation. It is unnatural politics. This is the madness of fascist politics that transforms into the madness of the state. There is another crucial element to this madness. It explains the spectral violence that we see being unleashed on the Muslim labourer by the Hindu vigilante and the Muslim student by the state. It is the madness inflicted on the Muslim body. The disappearance of the JNU student in October 2016, Najeeb Ahmed, is an exception. All Muslim bodies cannot (be made to) disappear, like Najeeb. The body of the Muslim is not a natural body, seen through the prism of a certain religious idea of nationalism. The presence of the Muslim body is a contradiction to that idea. The other's body seeks and lives by another law: it is an anthropological crisis, with a sacred (and metaphysical) dimension. What to make of, what to do, with this body? The attack on JNU students in 2016 was more of an ideological attack. There was a stringent effort to criminalise their ideas. In contrast, the attack on Jamia is a physical attack, on the body of students. Defiant Hindus are an ideological problem. It

lies in what they think. Muslims are a more 'natural' problem.

The minority body must be made to accept the law of subordination. No one said it in a more chilling fashion than the Palestinian poet, Najwan Darwish, in his poem, *In Hell*: "Today's executioners are more professional: / They put the gas chambers / in their victims." Fascism in our times wants to subordinate the victim psychologically. The Muslim must live the daily subordination of his status as a citizen and a wo/man of habit. This mental subordination must reflect in the body. After all, be it the idea of superiority or inferiority, or that of a free or subordinated body, it is something that fills the mind with elation or horror. The bare bodied protest by the male students of Jamia on Monday testifies to the perception that sovereignty of the Muslim body is under attack by the state.

The students of Jamia and other universities, refused to bear this feeling of subordination. This feeling of suffocation is both real and imagined, both present and future. It anticipates the growing suffocation of the politics of subordination, the desire to create inferiorised citizens. The students' protest strikes at that madness with its own madness, the madness of resistance and hope. Students refused the diktat of un-naturalisation, this unnatural politics. The incident at Jamia evoked spontaneous protests by students from all over India, in Hyderabad, Patna, Kolkata, Lucknow, Varanasi, Mumbai and Kerala. A wave of solidarity arose from these cities to tell the Muslim students facing injury and fear that they are not alone. Protests by civil society in Delhi have also put their strength behind the students. The Jamia vice-chancellor, Najma Akhtar, publicly stood by her students and demanded a high level enquiry to allegations of police excess in the university premises.

In a protest at India Gate on December 16, students read out the preamble of the constitution to remind themselves and the people of India, how the first words of the nation ring in our ears. What they tell us. How close, or far away, we are from those words. It begins with the word, 'We'. The 'we' is being robbed from us today. We are not mad to feel us. We must recover those words. Recover us.