

O HERALDO

The Voice of Goa - since 1900

Winter is coming, and it will be a long one in Manipur

The unending cycle of violence in Manipur is a stark reminder that the fault lines that divide Indian society run far too deep to be set right easily. This is true for most parts of the country; but it rings the truest in the Northeast, where ethnic identities are complicated by language, religion, tribal affiliations and the broad feeling that the rest of India doesn't really understand the people of this easternmost region of the country. The sense of alienation breeds discontent; discontent leads to anger; anger sparks violence; the violence leads to more alienation... and the endless cycle continues.

The current violence can be traced back to April 2023, when a single-judge bench of the Manipur High Court passed an order telling the State government to consider the demand by the dominant Meitei community to be considered as a Scheduled Tribe. The Meiteis, who comprise just over half of the State's population, are inhabitants of the Imphal valley and are Hindu by religion. All around Imphal valley in the hills live the tribal communities of Nagas, Kukis and others, who are mostly Christian and have ST status. The court order was like a match to dry tinder. It stoked the fear within the tribal communities that the proposed ST status for the Meiteis was just a precursor to their lands and government jobs being taken away by the Hindus. The historically tense relationship between the two sides, which was held taut like a string, snapped, and the ensuing violence has destroyed villages, left families broken, and opened up wounds that will take a long time to heal.

The Meitei-Kuki tribal animosity has historical roots and can be traced back to the British Raj, when the empire used divide-and-rule to maximum effect in the Northeast, sowing the seeds of the unrest that continue to yield a bitter harvest even today. It does not help that since Independence, the Northeast has been blanked out from the consciousness of the rest of India, where derogatory stereotypes persist about the way that people from the Northeast look, their dietary habits and their cultural beliefs. In reality, the Northeast is a strikingly beautiful part of India, with a patchwork quilt of ethnic diversity that is a function of the region's history. The area lies at the crossroads of a historical highway of migrations, with peoples from Tibetan, Burmese, Chin and other stocks traversing the region for better lives and livelihoods.

The Northeast also has multiple international borders, hemmed in as it is by Myanmar, China, Bangladesh and Bhutan. There is a strong fear in the region that minor tribal identities will get swamped out by migration from other parts of India or from across international borders. This, again, has been the root cause of strife in Assam over the decades, a factor that the BJP used to great effect in its election pitch and won in that state. In Manipur, too, the BJP government has been instrumental in fanning the Meitei-Kuki strife, with the belief on the tribal side that the ruling BJP with N Biren Singh as Chief Minister will push a majoritarian agenda that will further marginalise the tribals.

The State government's scorecard over the past year and a half has done nothing to allay these fears. On the ground, the feeling persists that the CM took too long to respond to the initial flare-up and even then, the response was inadequate. After the first conflagration that gave every indication that things were getting out of hand, Biren Singh called the violence "a misunderstanding between two communities". The Centre has stayed largely mum on Manipur despite cries of protest from Congress and the other Opposition parties, and only responded after being prodded by the then Chief Justice of India, DY Chandrachud.

With this as the backdrop, it is not surprising that the State has slid back into violence, this time in Jiribam. The Centre has decided to send more CAPF forces to Manipur, while the State government has clamped a curfew on the two districts of Imphal West and East and shut schools and colleges. The latest clampdown comes after six members of a Meitei family were murdered, among them three infants, by suspected Kuki militants. If the learnings from other restive regions of India are taken into account, it would be clear that sending in the army or the paramilitary can quell the violence, but never root it out. That requires reconciliation, dialogue and a willingness to learn from past mistakes. The government has a big role to play in starting that process, but there are no indications of that currently. Winter is coming, and it's going to be a long one in Manipur.

comment



MARIAN PINHEIRO

The idea and ideals of secularism could also be derived from Article 14 of the Constitution of India, which states that all people within India are entitled to equality before the law and equal protection of the law. Article 15 prevents discrimination, based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth



Article 28 forbids the teaching of religion in any educational institution supported by out-of-state finances. Article 44 deals with Uniform Civil Code.

The idea of secularism is not new to India and has ancient origins.

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The Supreme Court of India while hearing a batch of petitions challenging the inclusion of the words "socialist" and "secular" in the Preamble to the Constitution on October 21, 2024, said secularism is an indelible and core part of the basic structure of the Constitution.

The Preamble declares India to be a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic.

The term "secular" in the Indian Constitution signifies the commitment to maintaining a State that does not favour any particular religion, ensures equal treatment for all citizens irrespective of their religious beliefs and promotes a spirit of tolerance and harmony among diverse religious communities.

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Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.

Article 16 speaks about equality of opportunities in employment, Article 19 grants freedom of speech and expression, Article 25 gives the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate religion to all citizens.

Article 26 guarantees the rights of freedom of religion subject to public order, morality, and health.

Article 27 states no one shall be compelled to pay any taxes, of which the proceeds are specifically designated for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religious denomination.

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—Ashoka, Rock Edicts XII, of 250 BC, [25][28] says "There should not be honour of one's own (religious) sect and condemnation of others without any grounds".

In this era of Knowledge, Science and Technology, India needs to shift from an archaic mindset, in social and religious matters in the context of development in science. These distinctions based on religion, caste or community have become superfluous, especially when Religion has always been voluntary and optional.

Almost all of us, by an accident of events, do embrace the religion of our parents by customs and practices. Therefore, self-determination or voluntary decision making is almost impossible, most of us get so accustomed to that particular faith that hardly anyone chooses to change, unless there are compelling circumstances.

The same may apply to caste and community as well. None of this creates any indelible distinguishing mark on a person's character or personality. There are good people and very bad and cunning people in almost all religions, so there is no sanctity or permanency in any such classifications.

Essentially, character and personality are the outcome of one's genetic structure, which are inherited.

Genetic science and DNA profiling has shown that most Indians are primarily a mixture of three ancestral populations: hunter-gatherers who lived on the land for tens of thousands of years, farmers with Iranian ancestry who arrived sometime between 4700 and 3000 BCE and herders from the central Eurasian steppe region who swept into the region sometime after 3000 BCE.

Scientists even found that the modern individuals derive 1% to 2% of their ancestry from Neanderthals and their close cousins, the Denisovans and that Indians collectively carry a stunning variety of these archaic genes, compared with other worldwide populations.

About 90% of all known Neanderthal genes that have made their way into human populations turned up in the 2700 Indian genomes.

A study employing the AM-OVA (analysis of molecular variance) test of thirty different populations showed that India's so called 'upper castes' have genetic affinities with several foreign populations and also shared their genetic heritage with several domestic 'non-upper caste' groups.

It was confirmed that the progenitors of Indians have emerged from at least 12 dif-

ferent geographic regions of the world.

Thus, 'pure Indians' never really existed. Most Indians are offspring of these mixed races, except maybe some remote tribes like the Onge's Jarawas, Sentinelese or others who had no interaction with human civilizations.

Perhaps these multiracial gene structures have made Indians intellectual geniuses, which are evident in Indian origin people, all over the world.

All human beings are descended from Africa. After the first migration, there were three more waves of major migrations into India and the new migrants mixed with the local population.

Most Indian ethnic groups shared some common ancestors because of admixture in the past. These new insights into the ancient origins of ethnic groups in the Indian sub-continent, undermines the existing theories of origins of caste and communities and makes Indians more of a multiracial country and therefore the conceptual definitions of 'secular' needs to go beyond Religion.

'Secular', therefore, should incorporate this inherent multiracial character of Indians. Genetically speaking, we Indians certainly have some ancient genetic relationships with our immediate neighbouring countries. Therefore, India should build mutual respect, trust and cooperation among its neighbours by identifying the commonness of ancestry and traits.

Claiming to be scientifically advanced, Indians, especially the governing elite, need to develop a scientific attitude. Maybe such realisation could set in motion a movement towards DNA profiling of its citizens and incorporating them into their Aadhaar card as essential information, thus eliminating communal attitudes and outlooks.

Maybe the ancient Indian concept of "Vasudeva Kutumba" may be the appropriate description of Indian secularism, after all what was ancient, so be it, in the present. (Chapter 6 of the Maha Upanishad Vi. 71-73).

The judiciary could, by invoking Art 142 of the Constitution of India ("The Supreme Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction may pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it.....") innovate creatively in a pragmatic manner, the meaning and import of "Secularism" in the Indian context.

(The writer is a Professor of Law & an education consultant)

letterstotheeditor

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hour that these agencies are vigilant and pro active to keep taboo on scams and other illegal deals.

Bhalchandra V S Priolkar, Margao

Citizens repairing roads set a wrong precedent

It must be said Goa's scenic beauty is marred by potholed roads which makes driving a back-breaking experience. The potholes do not just cause inconvenience to the road-users, but can even lead to accidents with some ending in fatalities.

The government has repeatedly promised to repair the roads but have not resolved the matter. This has forced the locals to take upon themselves to address the issue. They have turned into road repairers out of sheer frustration. The citizens may not have the necessary equipment and machinery to repair the roads but their resilience shines through.

The main road leading to Calangute near Bodgeswar temple in Mapusa is being repaired by the locals. In the village of Sancoale the locals have even started a donation drive in order to collect money from the residents and shop owners to repair the roads.

From Mapusa to Pernem people

are reportedly using their own resources to repair the roads. However the road repair work is the duty of the PWD department for which it has sufficient funds.

Citizens repairing the roads is a welcome step. It could however set a wrong precedent. It could lead to the government to think that if it does not repair the road, the people will ultimately do it.

This perception could creep in due course, which should be avoided.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

The flames are spreading

While mob mayhem continues in Manipur our PM is busy with intense electioneering in Maharashtra, promoting a divisive propaganda film on social media and gallivanting around small countries collecting meaningless awards and honours to burnish his credentials as a global statesman.

Arson, looting, murder and rapes have been continuing in ethnic conflicts in Manipur for the past 18 months but the Pradhan Sevak has no time to address the issue, neither does the Home minister who faithfully follows in his master's footsteps.

When public pressure and anger mounts the duo hold 're-

view meetings' on the security situation and 'direct' top officials to ensure peace, but it doesn't make one iota of difference on the ground. Winning elections, toppling legitimately elected non BJP governments, putting opposition leaders in jail, conducting raids on entities inimical to Sanghi ideology, spreading communal poison and other negative things is all the Prime Minister and Home Minister know and have known.

Never in the history of independent India has the nation had such a callous, non empathetic man at the helm. The fires raging in Manipur are now scorching Assam too and are threatening to engulf the whole North East but the rulers are least bothered because there are no political dividends to be reaped there as of now.

Nero fiddles while Rome burns. Shame!!

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim

Ethics and politics are contradictory

Ethics in politics serves as a classic example of an oxymoron. When ethics and politics become contradictory or when politics is regarded as dirty, it simply means that a political system has completely lost its way.

people'sedit

THRILLS ON BECOMING A GRANDFATHER

PRADEEP V KAMAT

If children are gift of God, then grandchildren are delightful bonus in today's uncertain life!

Thus when I managed successfully the tough long race to be a grandfather my joy knew no bounds. When I first heard the news I was speechless, proud with ecstatic joy to be grandfather. When I first held my grandson in my arms I was overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude, pride and emotions.

The tiny little bundle of life with curious gaze and gentle coos captivated me and transported me back to the time when my two little sons were exactly in the same boat 30 - 35 years ago.

Grandfather! I hadn't dreamt in the wildest of my imagination considering the fragility, unpredictability and uncertainties of life. Yet reaching this milestone of having three generations in a family tree was a proud moment, thrilling and exciting.

Title of grandfather is not just another chapter but a whole new book filled with stories yet untold, laughter not yet shared, the intricacies of life...It is a challenge to step into a new role without any instruction manual!

What makes this transition unique is that it is not burdened with the same pressures of parenthood. As a parent, life was stressful. I was always worried about whether I was making the right decision for a child (be it at school or college level)? Will my child grow up to be a good person...and so on.

But as a grandfather I can now bask in the joy of the baby's presence without fretting over every detail. Now the cycle is coming full circle. With his arrival, now I can enjoy with him laughter, love jokes, share simple pleasures of life and fun parts without primary responsibility.

I can now appreciate the divine creation. So abandoning my precious time of clinic hours, I am compelled to be with him. His innocent laughs and cries pure, and magical, make me forget my so called precious hours!

Having said that, pregnancy was a journey not without intricacies. Here I could give only moral support as a grandfather at each and every turn. Each trimester came with its unique set of challenges. Be it nausea, vomiting, fear of threatened abortion in first; gestational hypertension, diabetes in second and again fear of preterm labour in third trimester.

But the expectant mother (daughter in law) took great care and took all challenges in stride.

With lots of tribulations and simultaneous trepidations among all family members there came a point where a smooth passage gave to FTND, (full term normal delivery)! It was nothing less than a divine blessing.

Scientists say 'bonding with bump' can help a baby learn. This means talking to the baby in the third trimester thereby laying foundations for social and emotional development as well as language skills and memory.

Taking the cue, I have already started interacting with our new-born. Saying nursery rhymes, telling stories, songs and sound (simple humming), playful activities etc. After all, he also has to be a grandfather one day!

Be that as it may, grandfather (grandparents rather) means: embracing life's next chapter. It is an opportunity to leave behind the legacy of love, laughter, wisdom....and of course the memories of time spent together. They will linger behind long after we are gone!

Politics without ethics is dangerous for any democracy, as it produces distrust at all levels.

We all know that politics in India is famous for criminalisation and corruption, and a triad of nexus between criminals, corporates and politicians. On one hand politicians frame laws, which are supposed to be followed by citizens with full respect, but on the other framers of the law indulge in violation of law and lack ethical values.

Several recent incidents have proven that present day politicians in India utterly lack moral values and ethics, and their political attitude is grossly indifferent to the common man's woes.

However, this country has seen great political leaders like Lal Bahadur Shastri, who set high standards of ethical values in politics even in adverse circumstances such as Tashkent agreement, food crisis, war with Pakistan, etc.

Similarly, leaders like Sardar Patel, Abdul Kalam Azad, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee were examples of political integrity and probity.

It is much sad that ethics and moral values in current day Indian politics have plummeted and they can never be resuscitated as long as our ugly politicians continue to be greedy and insolent, and hardly care for the good of the common man.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai