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Tracing the origins of conflicting ideas on India

In the thick of the anti-British movement, discourse over the concept of nationalism emerged, with Gandhi's secular nationalism triumphing over Savarkar's ethnic nationalism. However, this debate has been renewed of late and clamour for the latter has grown shriller now than before

Thanmaya Prakash

The controversy over Vir Das's Two Indias, or the ongoing debate over the idea of India between the secular liberalists and the Hindu nationalists, if anything, has only pointed out that India, which is known for its diversity and multiculturalism is shedding its rich heritage and has turned into a breeding ground for narrow sectarian ideologies.

While a few groups strive to maintain religious pluralism, the other groups have been aiming to create a division based on religion. The diverging thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and V D Savarkar on Nationalism can be the leading light in understanding the idea of two Indias.

Savarkar was arguably the first person to propose the theory of two nations, way back in 1937. While addressing the 19th session of Hindu Mahasabha in Ahmedabad,

Savarkar said that there are two "antagonistic nations living side by side in India". He strongly declared that India cannot be assumed as a "unitarian and homogenous nation" and there are "two nations in the main: The Hindus and the

Muslims." Savarkar later stated that he has "no quarrel with Jinnah's two-nation theory."

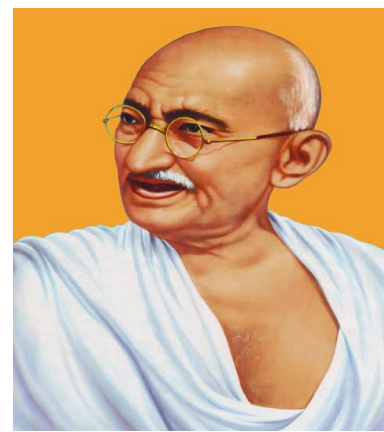
Refuting the two-nation theory, Gandhi advocated for cultural unification between Hindus and Muslims, despite religious differences. In 1940 he wrote, "A Bengali Muslim speaks the same tongue that a Bengali Hindu does, eats the same food, has the same amusements as his Hindu neighbour. They dress alike. I have often found it difficult to distinguish by outward sign between a Bengali Hindu and a Bengali Muslim."

In Young India, Gandhi emphatically stated that Indian civilisation was a synthesis of different cultures and that this represented India's "unique spirit." In contrast, Savarkar's vision of India radiated the principle of 'Hindu Rashtra'. He said, "Hindus are bound by the tie of the common homage we pay to our great civilisation—our Hindu culture." He claimed that the 'Indian nation has to be necessarily a Hindu nation' and the 'Hindus alone are the true sons of the soil'.

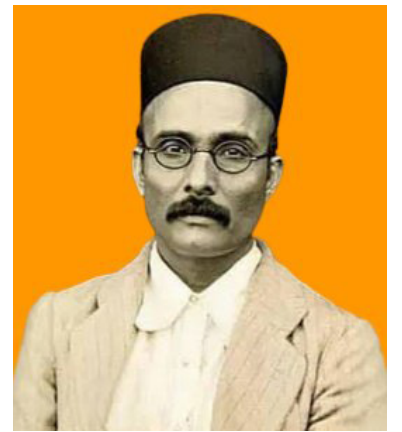
Rohan Anirudh Singh Hans, a historian said, as per the Hindutva

Ideology, Savarkar has defined a Hindu as the one whose motherland (Mathru-Bhoomi), land of ancestors (Pithra-Bhoomi) and holy land (Punya-Bhoomi) are all in India. He further said that Savarkar missed out on Indian Muslims and Christians who also have a love for the motherland in their DNA. "George Harrison was the lead guitarist of the Beatles, a Hindu, and also a British. So, would it make sense for the British to disown him because his holy land was in India? Famous Poet Dr Rahat Indori said during the Emergency of 1975-77, 'Sabhi ka khoon shaamil hain yahaan ki mitti mein' (Indian soil is soaked with the blood of all). So, the concept of the holy land to be located in India, in order to be considered, 'culturally' an Indian, needs to be re-looked at, and re-interpreted keeping the 21st Century in mind," he added.

These diverging ideas on India have led to contradictory perceptions of the idea of nationalism. While Gandhi believed in secular nationalism, Savarkar strongly propagated ethnic nationalism. The ethnic nationalism propagated



Mahatma Gandhi



Vinayak Damodar Savarkar

by Savarkar on religious grounds has been translated into Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism is more pronounced after the right-wing political party guided by the ideology of Savarkar came into power in 2014. The National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act seeks the reconstitution of Indian nationhood on the lines of Savarkar.

Gandhi emphasised there should be no differences based on religion. He stressed the fact that nationalism is placing nation before religion, "Nationalism is greater than sectarianism. And in that sense,

we are Indians first and Hindus, Musalmans, Parsis and Christians after," he said.

"Gandhiji is called Father of this nation for a reason! He had his fingers on the pulse of our nation. Unlike a majority of nations in the world, India has a lot of diversity. Not just religious but ethnic, linguistic, and regional to say the least. Just like in meditation, in order to gather your power of concentration you have to focus on your breath, similarly, in order to gather the Indian Society, Gandhiji recommended us all to focus on Indian Nationalism," said Hans.

Two ways of framing religion

One framed it as altruistic, other envisioned it as hegemonic



Representational Image

RSS Blogspot

India's unemployment rate was the highest in the last four decades according to the survey conducted by National Sample Survey Office in 2017-18. Before the pandemic hit the country, the GDP fell to 8 per cent in FY 17 and later it plummeted to 4 per cent in the coming years. After the first lockdown, India was hit by a recession. In FY 20-21, the GDP further dipped to a staggering 6.6 per cent.

While the GDP and employment

rate are on a steep decline in the country, the latest data on 'Crime on India' released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) records an ever-upward trend in the number of communal riots cases.

Though Gandhi and Savarkar were proud of their Hindu identity, they had conflicting opinions on Hinduism. On 21 November 1947, Gandhi said, Hinduism "embraces all religions and is very tolerant". However, Savarkar was not quite

happy with the term 'Hinduism'. By making clear distinctions between the words "Hindutva" and "Hinduism", in his book, 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?' (1923), he said, 'Hinduism' is not comprehensive enough to encompass the 'Hindu' religion. Rather, Savarkar said that Hindutva "embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole being of our Hindu race".

Kingshuk Chatterjee, Profes-

sor of History, University of Calcutta said that Savarkar was the proponent of an overarching "Hindu" identity. "Savarkar's idea of Hinduism was in its most mature phase, modelled on the Zionist idea and in its intermediate phase, as evinced in the works of Benjamin Netanyahu," he added. Gandhi said the very word Islam means peace. Savarkar in his book 'Six Glorious Epochs of India History', writes "Islam directs Muslims to conquer the kafir, rape royal Hindu ladies, enslave men and women and to massacre, burn others, devastate and demolish Hindu capital cities, their temples, the idols of Gods and to burn their libraries."

In line with Savarkar's ideas, a few leaders and legislators have been making incendiary speeches. Pushing the narrative of Muslims being 'invaders', the religious leader Yati Narsinghanand at "Dharam Sansad" at Haridwar allegedly issued an open call for genocide against them.

Savarkar condemned the 'shameless religious fanaticism' by the 'aggressive Muslims', but ironically, he later uses rape as a tool in ethnical conflicts and further writes, "Let those Sultans and their peers take a fright that in

the event of a Hindu victory, our molestation and the detestable lot shall be avenged on the Muslim women. Once they are haunted with this dreadful apprehension, that the Muslim women, too, stand in the same predicament in case the Hindus win, the future Muslim conquerors will never dare to think of such molestation of Hindu women." In Post-independent India, raping and sexually assaulting a woman, became a characteristic of communal riots. "No amount of logic and reasoning can justify an act like raping women. And definitely not taking revenge like that. In my opinion, I would definitely not support that as it would create more problems than bringing a solution," said Kanu Sharma, a historian at JNU.

Continued on Page 3

All great religions of the world inculcate equality and brotherhood of mankind and the virtue of tolerance
- Mahatma Gandhi

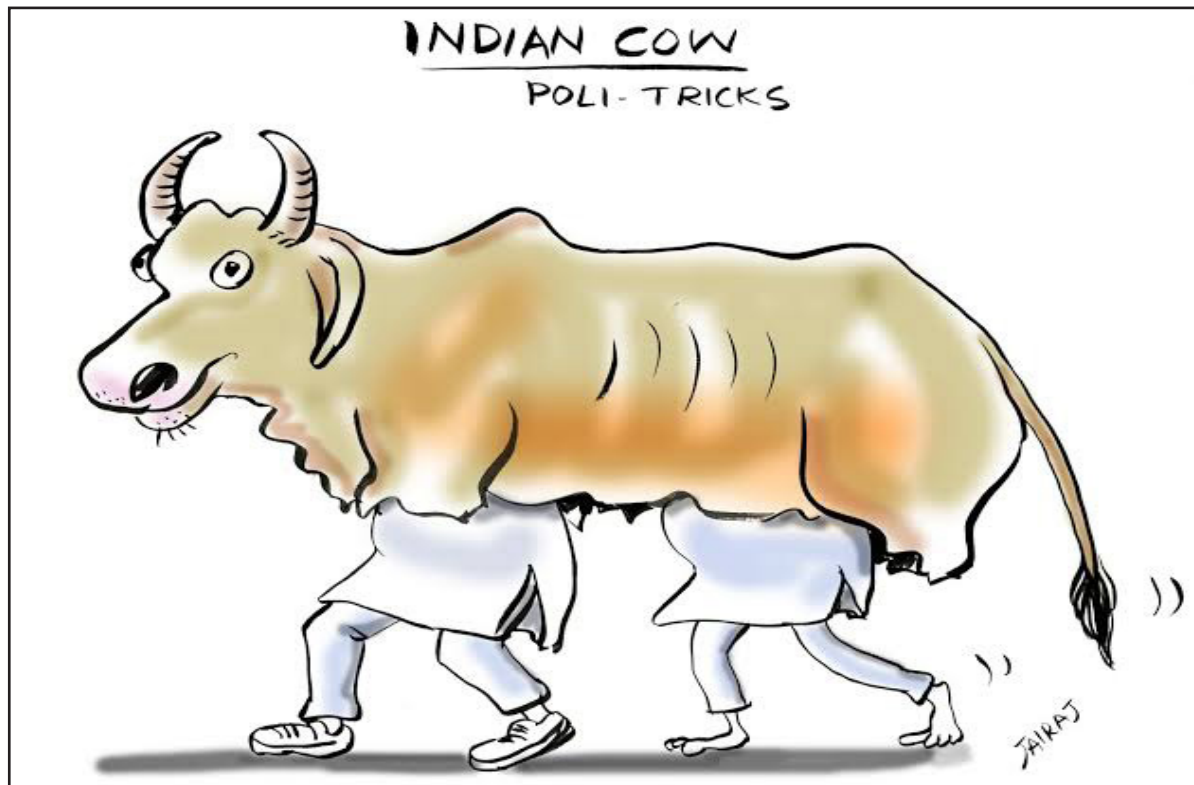
When food turns a staple for politics

About twenty one states in India have restrictions on slaughtering cows and selling beef

Siddhant Garud

India's rank in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) survey dipped from 94 in 2020 to 101 in 2021, raising questions about the accessibility of food to the people of India. The National Nutrition Survey of 2016-18 reported that 35 per cent of children under five are stunted in India. One would assume that the government is doing something about this dire situation. Instead, the citizens are subjected to new laws that purportedly restrict access and choice of food.

In 2021, the Karnataka government passed the Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Protection of Cattle Act, which prohibited any farmer from selling or killing a cow which is under 13 years of age. In addition to that, around 21 states in India have some kind of restriction on the slaughter of cows, and by extension, selling beef.



Jairajtg.blogspot.com

The cow in history

In 2015, a mob of villagers accused 52-year-old Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri, UP, of slaughtering a cow and consuming it on Eid. The mob then marched towards his house late at night dragging Akhlaq and his son Danish outside and beating them both, eventually killing the father and badly injuring the son. Contrasting this scenario of lynching people over their food choices with that of ancient Indian thought, Vinith Rao, a professor of Gandhian Studies at MGM College Udipi said, "The Indian traditional thought also upholds the concept of affordable, accessible, tasty and nutritious food. Food is the natural, God-given right of the living beings that cannot be denied. 'Food is God' say the Upanishads." The Hindu scriptures did not restrict the food choices of people, he said.

KC Raghu, a food expert talks about the spiritual significance of beef, pork, and chicken to the people, emphasising that there is no restriction in holy texts on people's food choices.

Gowalkar, the chief ideologue of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) says that beef-eating was introduced by Muslims in India and actually has no basis in the supposed Indian identity. However, research into the shastras and Upanishads have debunked this claim numerous times. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who regularly preached cow protection was vehemently against segregating food based on religion. "Gandhi's vegetarianism was just his personal choice and was just for supporting vegetarians, he did not implore the people of the country to give up their traditional food habits," said Rao. There is a growing tendency to Brahminise Indian culture by building a homogenous identity and it is being tried out in the realm of food currently, he added.

Holy cow, not so holy economy



Representational Image of mob lynching

timesofindia.com

According to a report released at a convention of dairy farmers in Chikkabalapur, Indian milk production stands at 300 million tonnes. On the flip side, Bayyaredy, a member of All India Kisan Sabha said that there is an increase in the cost of cow fodder burdening dairy farmers. There is already an 'informal' sector around the cow, which is now being taken over by corporates.

He spoke about how the law on cow slaughter has affected the dairy economy. "Earlier a farmer used to get around 20 to 25 thousand rupees for a cow or buffalo, but after this new law a farmer barely gets five thousand rupees." The law prohibits any farmer from killing a cow under the age of 13 even if the cow is injured, which raises the cost of caring for cows significantly. Salman, who owns a food shop in Shantinagar for the past 2 years explains his predicament with the ever-increasing cost of meat.

"Since I have started this stall, the price of acquiring meat has gone up by more than 250 rupees per kg of meat." He added, "When people go to these five-star hotels and

posh places, why is beef available there? The government should do something about it, if they are serious about protecting cattle. We can take care of ourselves with seafood, but if you want to ban it, do it first in the five-star hotels."

This phenomenon of 'corporatising' the cow is being witnessed for a few years now and farmers are losing the right to sell their own food and property, opine the experts. Not many farmers have the equipment to slaughter cattle, and with the new regulation in place, only corporations who can afford to invest in such machinery could engage in the venture.

As an alternative, there have been gaushalas (cow shelters) popping up all over the country with land being given freely to priests to maintain cows. KC Raghu, a food expert points out, "After the cow is dead, gelatine companies like India Gelatine gather the bones of cows and then make that into gelatin, as making vegetarian jellies is really expensive." He also explains how these gaushalas have helped the gelatine companies to get a good supply.

KC Raghu said that when farmers raise their voices then the government will have no choice but to listen to the demands of the people, "In a farmer protest in Freedom Park, as I was invited to speak there, I asked them all, why are you not speaking up more? Your silence is deafening, if you speak up you are the majority, the government will listen."



K C Raghu

"When people go to these five-star hotels and posh places, why is beef available there? The government should do something about it if they are serious about protecting cattle."

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Revisiting Shaheed-E-Azam's Sampradayik Dange Aur Unka Ilaj

Niharika Bajaj

Multiple cities across the country have reported incidents of communal tensions for a long time now. It would offer a sense of wisdom to peek into the thoughts of Bhagat Singh, one of the most advanced revolutionary intellectuals that the pre-independent India had seen. Almost 90 years since his martyrdom, his ideas are more relevant than ever. Warning of the ill effects of blind faith, he had written, "Mere faith and blind faith are dangerous: They dull the brain and make a man reactionary. A man who claims to be a realist has to challenge the whole of the ancient faith. If it does

not stand the onslaught of reason, it crumbles down."

In April 1928, during the formation of Naujawan Bharat Sabha (NBS), Bhagat Singh declared that those belonging to communal organisations had no place in their group. Two of the six rules of the NBS drafted by Bhagat Singh were, "To have nothing to do with communal bodies or other parties which disseminate communal ideas" and "to create the spirit of general toleration among the public considering religion as a matter of personal belief of man and to act upon the same...."

In June 1928, in an issue of the magazine Kirti, Bhagat Singh wrote an article titled 'Sampradayik

Dange Aur Unka Ilaj' (Communal riots and their solutions) reading which one could draw a parallel to the present-day situation. The four key problems with communalism that Bhagat Singh highlighted during the freedom struggle stand the test of time said Prof. S. Irfaan Habib in an exclusive interview with *The Communique*. Prof. Habib, an eminent historian and the author of *Inquilab: Bhagat Singh on Religion and Revolution*, said, "Hyper-nationalist perspective is shaping the political discourse of India, today. In challenging times like these, one has to understand Bhagat Singh's intellect and the real solutions he poses to the social evil of communalism."



Shaheed-E-Azam Bhagat Singh

Distorting Martyr's thoughts

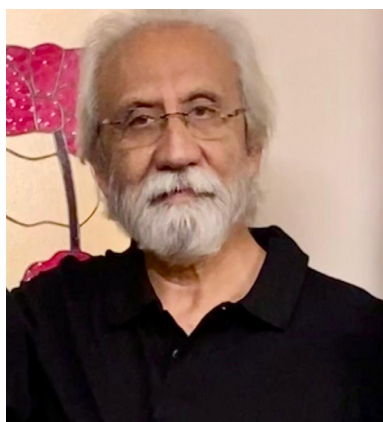
Chaman Lal in his book *Bhagat Singh The Jail Notebook and Other Writings*, writes about how a sharp distinction arose between the nationalist and the fundamentalist forces and manifested even in the content of the slogans raised. "Inquilab Zindabad became a common slogan for those who dreamt of a free and independent India. The only forces that didn't adopt the slogan were the communal fundamentalists, like Hindu Mahasabha and RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) with some other Muslim fundamentalist organisations."

The book talks about how RSS and its affiliates spread rumours about Bhagat Singh, claiming the revolutionary was a 'devotee of Bharat Mata'. Chaman Lal refutes the claim that Singh sought the blessing of RSS chief Hedgewar before he bombed the assembly. "There is no possible evidence of this claim...(They do this) in the hope that over time the rumour becomes a fact."

Commenting on how consistent was Singh's stance on communalism, Prof. Habib said, "Bhagat Singh deeply respected Lala Lajpat Rai and avenged his death at the hands of the colonial police

but when Lajpat Rai turned to communal politics and started showing his support to Hindu extremists, Bhagat criticised it eventually."

"Inquilab Zindabad became a common slogan for those who dreamt of a free and independent India."



Prof. S. Irfaan Habib

Shed herd mentality

Bhagat Singh, in his celebrated work, written a few days before he was to be hanged, 'Why I am an Atheist', questions those who are intolerant towards criticism of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. His commitment to rationalism and critical thinking is relevant in present times. He wrote, "Criticism and independent thinking are the two indispensable qualities of a revolutionary. There cannot be, therefore, an uncritical exaltation of either religion, culture, leader or anything else in the name of the nation."

Elaborating on this, Prof. Habib said, "His nationalism was carved in the idea of progress where there is scope for criticism and the capacity to question the old faith. He perceived this hero-worship as a herd mentality and symptomatic of an unhealthy, regressive politics. We need to build a society that is liberal and open to all schools of thought."

Economy dictates politics

In his article "Communal Riots and Its Solution" in June 1928, Bhagat Singh wrote, "The root cause of communal violence is probably economy". Describing this idea of Singh, Prof. Habib said, "When we observe today the hotspots of communal riots, for example, the recent Jhangirpuri incident that took place in Delhi, one can map how riots are spread easily in the areas where people are poor and struggling to make their ends meet." Accordingly, Bhagat Singh advocated for a solution. "So, if there is any solution to communal riots, it can only be achieved through improvement of economic condition in India. Actually, the economic condition of a common man in India is so bad that anyone can give a quarter of a rupee to another person and offend a third person. When struggling through hunger and suffering, and given an option between doing or dying, people often keep their principles aside and why wouldn't they?"

A closer look at historical mistakes can help avoid them in the future.

Humans deserve more attention than 'sacred beasts'

Religion shouldn't limit people's ability to question. Unquestioning submission, a characteristic of religion was in Bhagat Singh's opinion, weakening the individuals and diminishing their self-confidence; and some leaders and parties play with these sentiments for their vote bank politics.

Expounding on this he wrote, "A branch of peepal tree is cut and religious feelings of the Hindus are injured. A corner of a paper idol, the tazia of the idol-breaker Mohammedans is broken, and 'Allah' gets enraged, who cannot be satisfied with anything less than the

blood of the infidel Hindus. Man should receive more attention than the beasts and yet, in India, people break their heads in the name of sacred beasts."

Prof. Habib opines that these ideas are relevant even after a century, "Today, the followers of one religion have become sworn enemies of the followers of the other religion. So much so, that to belong to one particular religion is reason enough for becoming an enemy of the other religion. This hate can be seen in the speeches and mass rallies and often contribute to the communal riots."

Continued from Page 1

Religions must bind, not divide



Gandhi during Champaran Satyagraha

indiatimes.com

Thanmaya Prakash

Indian society widely known for its religious plurality in the past has now been subjected to ethnic rivalries and communal strife. The democratic and secular fabric of the country is being ripped apart because of growing fanaticism. Gandhi strived for Hindu-Muslim unity all his life. He upheld communal harmony as he believed in Sarvadharmasama-bhava. "Religions are not for separating men from one another, they are meant to bind them. Unfortunately, today they are so distorted that they have become a potent cause of strife and mutual slaughter," Gandhi said.

He also said that 'breach of communal peace should make us and our government hang our heads in shame'. He emphasised that the 'key to the solution of the tangle lies in everyone following

the best in his own religion and entertaining equal regard for the other religion and its followers'.

Vinith Rao, HOD of Gandhian studies, Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Research Centre, Udipi said, "Gandhi had always stressed communal harmony and unity, not just among Hindus and Muslims, but among all religions. But, the question of Hindu-Muslim unity always came to the forefront as the issue was always at the forefront, making the situation extremely fragile, inflammable, and volatile! At the time, Hindu-Muslim harmony was crucial to the implementation of Swaraj." He further said that Gandhi's idea of Swaraj would be possible only by communal harmony.

There is no way to peace, peace is the way
- Mahatma Gandhi



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Viral 'truth' and communal virus

When fundamentalists assume the role of gatekeepers

Bincy Joseph

The foundations of Indian society—secularism and religious tolerance—have been challenged by the rise of communalism in the country. Be it the Assam riots, Muzaffarnagar violence, Baduria riots or the Delhi riots, social media has played a significant role in spreading communal hatred. The use of social media platforms has created a psychological hegemony among the individuals, say the experts.

Ethnic tensions between Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims escalated into a riot in Kokrajhar (Assam) fuelled by fake news on social media platforms. Preliminary enquiry of the incident revealed that a well-planned campaign stoked the conflict.

A local conflict in a remote area could now easily be escalated into the national sphere. A research report titled 'Communal Conflict in India', found that inflammatory

messages on Facebook during the Jahangirpuri violence rose by 300 percent; this surpassed the levels witnessed during the Delhi riots after the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) protests. This sudden rise in hate messages is one of the contributing factors to polarisation, says the report.

Most of these social media posts targeted the minorities, holding them responsible for the spread of the pandemic and manipulating Hindu women for marriage. The study also found that most of the content posted by RSS was never flagged because Facebook does not have systems to detect vernacular languages; out of 22 recognised languages in India, Facebook has AI (Artificial Intelligence) systems for only five.

Dr P J John, a Senior Psychiatrist at Medical Trust Hospital, explained how social media has already created a psychological hegemony that can trigger people to believe, share and participate in communal violence. He narrated this through a story from a Panchatantra tale where a brahmin is outsmarted by three rogues. "The content creators from the right and left political parties deliberately fool people by spreading misinformation. There is agenda setting behind these well-planned communal messages which can manipulate the public consciousness. Even those who were passive listeners at a certain point

started trusting these narratives especially when it involves hate components. More than positive messages, it is the negative ones that take more prominence in cyberspace, because they create a higher adrenaline rush".

Describing the effect of 'repetition' in spreading communal messages he said, "When different portals repeat the same narratives, it gets trusted by the masses and in conscious and subconscious minds, hatred gets deeply rooted. The media managers of various political parties use these tactics effectively the same which they use for political branding. A common man doesn't really have the patience to carefully analyse the merits and demerits of fake messages. Generally, the masses are inclined to accept stereotype messages. All of us have passing doubts in our minds about a particular group or race which is different from them and we carry forward such talks with our trusted group of friends," he added.

Social media not only creates psychological dominance but it attracts and convinces users through use of cuss words. Various studies explain swearing and usage of cuss words are connected to raw emotions and people generally regard them as honest.

Rahul Humble Sanal a social activist and blogger said, "These inflammatory videos become popular because of cuss words. In the past,



A screenshot of fake news on Love Jihad

humans have been using swearing as a means of communication. From the era of Shakespeare to courtroom testimonies, it was looked at as a statement of truth. If you want to be believed by people, swearing is possibly the most effective tool. To a certain extent, we all use cuss words as a means to release stress. Any sensitive issue related to religion, or moral values that hurt a certain individual, actuates him/her to share it within their personal social media groups. Hate speech and defamation start from family WhatsApp groups as people are comfortable in sharing their emotions with their own kin."

Dr John offers some practical

tips on curbing the spread of hate. Timely interventions by the law and regulatory framework by the intermediaries to identify the repeated keywords of hate might help.

The second way could be counter conversations by creating ethical groups which can educate people about their vulnerabilities. He observes that well-mannered, emotionally stable people were less reactive and vulnerable to communal messages and they had higher tolerance to differences. Therefore, awareness about the workings of these platforms & strong regulations is required.

"When different portals repeat the same narratives, it gets trusted by the masses and in conscious and subconscious minds, hatred gets deeply rooted."

When fanaticism pervades digital space ...



Misinformation is a part of political warfare

theweek.in

Social media is a very powerful means of exercising one's freedom of speech, and it has democratised communication. The same medium is increasingly misused by IT cells of political parties to spread fake messages resulting in communal divisions.

Purportedly, a fake video widely shared resulted in the riot in Muzaffarnagar in 2013. Social media posts created panic among a large number of northeast students and workers who left Bengaluru in 2015. A video of violence in Burma

sparked riots in Ahmedabad in 2012.

Thanuja S Bhattathiri a well-known writer, speaking on the social media outlets being used as a source for spreading communal hatred said, "With the advent of the internet, it was thought that this would democratise communication. It was hoped that the technology would bring about an innovative world in which anyone could express their views freely, especially the weaker sections, negating the gatekeeping role of mainstream media. But at the same time, scholars like Noam

Chomsky were sceptical. It has been said that the internet will only allow freedom until capitalism makes it uncomfortable. That is exactly what is happening today. The world's dominant powers have taken control of the Internet."

Beyond influencing the voting choices of the electorate, government wants to have a psychological dominance over the mind space of people. They want to interfere in what people wear, what they eat, and what they think. "Today, nobody thinks that social media is free in India. One reason is the campaigns on social media by thousands of paid workers (which is) challenging our democracy. Secondly, all social media platforms fear the government and the advertising agencies. Their algorithms and direct controls are meant to please the government and advertisers. In India, all media outlets operate under the threat of communalism now. There is no media with the courage to question communal forces. Yet, the biggest communal campaign happens through social media."

Measures to mitigate this challenge through legal, political and ethical means have their own limitations. Legally presenting a strong piece of evidence to prosecute the offenders is a challenge. Bindu Ammini, a lawyer and an activist who attempted to enter the Sabrimala Temple, spoke about the loopholes in the

system. She said, "For years, Indian law enforcement had demanded the internet platforms to adhere to Indian law. The platforms like Facebook and Google are based in the United States. This has caused friction between successive Indian governments and internet companies, and has frequently prevented law enforcement officials

from executing Indian laws governing social media content. If Law enforcement agencies have to remove specific content, they have to follow the MLAT (Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty). Also, we have the IT act to punish culprits who spread communal messages but the offenders escape through the loopholes of the law."

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Religion at odds with the idea of liberty, equality and fraternity: Babasaheb

A. S. Mandira

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs data, between 2016 and 2020, there were around 3400 communal riots. The emergence of politics that thrives on polarising the masses based on various identities has added fuel to the communal fire.

In this wake, it's essential to understand the idea of Dr BR Ambedkar, the Father of the Indian Constitution, on religion.

Born in the Dalit caste of Mahar, Dr Ambedkar faced caste oppression throughout his childhood. Even after earning a doctorate in Economics and Law from Columbia University, he experienced discrimination.

In a research paper titled 'Arrant Nonsense: Ambedkar on Communalism', Bhupendra Yadav mentions that Ambedkar believed that as long as there is caste, there will always be an outcast. In many of his writings like the 'Riddles in Hinduism', Ambedkar came up with

hard-hitting questions on Hinduism and Islam as well.

In Ambedkar's book, 'Pakistan, or partition of India', he stated that Hindu Raj must be avoided at all costs since Hinduism was a threat to liberty, equality and fraternity – the three main principles of social democracy and hence is incompatible with the democracy. He was also dissatisfied with the Muslim politics, which had nothing to do with secular categories such as rich or poor, labourer or capitalist, because the only distinction it acknowledged was if an individual was a Hindu or Muslim.

Elaborating on the significance of agitation against caste prejudice in a speech at the Mahad Satyagraha, he stated, "It (agitation) is not simply for drinking water; drinking the water will not give us much. It is not even a matter of only our human rights, though we fight to establish the right to drink water.

But our goal is no less than that of the French Revolution. This was fought for the reconstruction of the society, for eradication of the old society based on feudal inequality and the establishment of a new society based on liberty, equality and fraternity."

This Satyagraha was led by Dr Ambedkar to allow untouchables access to a public water tank in Mahad, Maharashtra.

Bhupendra Yadav further describes that Dr Ambedkar defended people belonging to the lower caste in order to bring them on the same level of treatment just as Christians, Sikhs and Muslims.

He believed that there were two approaches to counter communalism. One way is to enforce the approach used in Europe, where communal political parties were prohibited and the other was to form mixed political parties of Hindus and Muslims.



Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar



The Mahad Satyagraha

feminisminIndia.com

Morality should govern religion

Meena Bardia in her work, 'Dr Ambedkar: His Ideas About Religion and Conversion to Buddhism', quotes Ambedkar, "What good things I have in me or whatever have been the benefits of my education to the society, I owe to the religious feelings in me. I want religion, but I do not want hypocrisy in the name of religion."

Dr Ambedkar believed that religion is a force that progressively spreads through each individual's life, shaping his character, directing his actions or emotions, and deciding his likes and dislike.

"It is not enough for religion to consist of moral code, but its code must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty equality, and fraternity," Ambedkar opined. He believed that no other standard would have any meaning if religion

is held to be necessary and good for the well-being of the people. He felt that religion should have no bearing on a person's life, actions, decisions, character, likes and dislikes. His conception of religion was that it should be primarily a question of principles.

He saw Hinduism as an "oppressive religion." Critiquing Islam, he said, "a close corporation, and the separation that it makes between Muslims and non-Muslims is a very real, very positive, and extremely alienating distinction." As a result, he began to consider converting to another religion. It was on 14th October 1956, Dr Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in Nagpur along with his more than five lakh followers. For him, Buddhism was based on ethics and the Buddha acted as a guide and not as God; it

also instructed people on how to behave and treat one another and described a man's duty, in relation to God in the light of liberty, equality and fraternity. "I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of being Untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power," Ambedkar had opined.

Bardia writes that Dr Ambedkar favoured Buddhism because it provides three principles in combination that no other religion does. Buddhism teaches Prajna (understanding) as opposed to superstitions and supernaturalism, Karuna (love), and Samata (equality). In his opinion, this is what a man desires for a good and happy existence, and neither god nor soul can deliver him from the hell he has created.

Religion must mainly be a matter of principles only. It cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules, it ceases to be a religion, as it kills responsibility which is an essence of the true religious act
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

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It's high time to stand up for the stand-ups

By (mis)using sedition law, government is throttling satirists

Moksha Garg

Be it a film, a comedy set or a painting, art forms are a way of expression. However, in a country where expressing oneself is considered a right, freedom of speech and expression is continuously subjected to vitriol and censorship in one way or another. In the last few years, multiple high-profile comedians, as well as movies have been targeted for their alleged controversial and religiously-offending content, both by authorities and audiences. Comedians like Munawar Faruqui and movies like Kashmir Files have been constantly attacked for stimulating clashes between the religious communities.

"If someone believes in ideologies, they would also believe that we live in a democratic country. We all have the freedom of speech to put across our beliefs. If one expects to be heard and their opinions respected, they too would have to do the same. It's going to be a give and take situation," said Parth Hans, actor and former Assistant Art Director in House Arrest, a Netflix film.

There have been various instances where complaints were filed - which have also resulted in arrests - against stand-up comedians in India. In addition to being berated and threatened by the government for doing their jobs, this increasing attack on freedom of speech is

making their job hard.

Cancelling shows and burning venues is a way of promoting violence and by doing this you're creating chaos
- Jijeesh K Jaimon

Whatever they (comedians) say it's to make the audience laugh and not to offend someone
- Pravit Arora



Pravit Arora performing at a show in Delhi

Special Arrangement

Political comedy and comedian's tragedy



Jijeesh K Jaimon performing at Campus Catch Up

Special Arrangement

According to a Pew survey between late 2019 and early 2020, anti-Muslim sentiments have been growing across India, with 64 per cent of Hindus believing that being Hindu is necessary to be "truly Indian". The controversies on halal meat and citizenship and the erupting clashes between the communities are making particularly the Muslim comedians' life harder. In 2021, stand-up comedian, Munawar Faruqui was held for allegedly making obscene remarks about Hindu gods and goddesses during one of his stand-up routines in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. After he was released on bail, over a dozen of his shows were cancelled, following which the comedian hinted at quitting comedy, "Nafrat jeet gayi, artist haar gaya (hate has won, the artist has lost). I'm done, goodbye. Injustice," he had written. He was put in jail for a joke he never cracked. Jijeesh K Jaimon, a budding comedian and president of Brunel open club, United Kingdom says, "In a country like India, secularism is

just on our constitution and not in the minds of the masses. Religion was made by humans and it is used against humanity. Every religion teaches you to be in harmony and maintain peace but some people will go to any extent to prove otherwise."

Speaking about the intentions behind comic sets and banning of 'offending shows', Pravit Arora, a stand-up comedian based in Delhi said, "It is very evident that the entertainment industry has been used to divert attention from real issues. Talking about comedy is subjective to the audience and the comedian both. It's up to a comedian what he/she wants to joke about and how much they can pull off with the laugh, but whatever they say it's to make the audience laugh and not to offend someone." Banning or cancelling shows of comedians like Munawar Faruqui will not help anyone as we are living in a digital space where one can perform live too. Freedom of speech is now a grey area, and using it smartly would be the right

way to go forward, he added.

According to the census data, there are about 79 per cent Hindus, 18 per cent Muslims, 2 per cent Christians and about 1 per cent others. "Calling others, anti-Hindu or asking them to go to Pakistan.. I mean why? Why do we say it is a democratic country? Cancelling shows, and burning venues is a way of promoting violence and by doing this you're creating chaos, hurting businesses and making common people suffer. I strongly believe that these acts of violence will just kill the talent and the market. India is a great market for any business and the future for stand-ups in India has started booming and it will expand because there's so much talent and potential. The reason why western comedy is so successful is that it's old and it's in their culture. Since comedy is new in India it has grown rapidly and there's a lot of new comedians coming to the circuit which is a great opportunity to put India on the map in the field of comedy," said Jijeesh K Jaimon.

Nation not in a mood to be shown a mirror?

In November last year, famous Indian comedian Vir Das made news with a stirring monologue Two Indias that was both a love letter and a scathing critique of Indian society. "I come from an India where the [Air Quality Index] is 9,000, but we still sleep on the roof and look up at the stars," he said. "I come from an India where we worship women during the day and gang rape them at night. I come from an India where every time we get information, we are always available to care for the PM but we can't seem to get information on PM CARES." These comments, which are a snapshot of his monologue, earned him applause in the US but back in India, he was subjected to criticism, legal trouble and social media invective. Senior Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi criticised Das for "vilifying the nation"; actor Kangana Ranaut demanded strict action against the comedian and Madhya Pradesh Home Minister Narottam Mishra banned him from performing in the state.

"I understand sometimes the content that is broadcasted is shameful and irrelevant to society but we shall also understand that it's okay to not consume the things you don't like. Not every joke is funny and not every Muslim is a terrorist. People should avoid consuming content that makes them itch and if something is created only for entertainment purposes, it should be treated as leisure. The makers should always provide disclaimers and people must be civilised enough to read the disclaimer and understand it rather than taking an offence," opines Jaimon.

These forms of attacks are not restricted to only comedy, but movies like Kashmir Files and Black Friday too were condemned by the political party adherents. Depicting the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus in the 1990s, Kashmir Files polarised the audience. When one section of the audience praised the movie saying it has shown the real plight of the Kashmiri Pundits,

some others believed that the movie might cause communal disturbance and demanded a ban on its screening.

"We have a diverse population of 1.38 billion people, so it is not easy to satisfy each one of them. And when a movie like Kashmir Files is released, even though it struck a chord with the Hindu population, it offended the Muslim population and they tagged it as a propaganda film," said Abhinav Garg, an employee at SG Dream Media. "Even though there was a disagreement between the two communities, restricting the freedom of speech or banning the film might weaken the integrity of the country. It destroys the artistic freedom of a filmmaker or any artist for that matter. If some people do not like a film, if it hurts their religious sentiments, they should not watch it," he added.

There will always be a discussion about whether a joke was funny or not or if a movie had hurt someone's religious sentiments. There is content everywhere and everyone processes it differently. Movies and comedy sets break the taboo of stereotypes and harsh reality.

They aim at entertaining, educating and informing people about issues that are often not talked about yet. Is it acceptable to let the intolerant minds dictate the entertainment content all around us and even if someone wants to speak the truth they cannot because the society cannot handle it? Is art a form of expression or turning into a means to invite repression?

"People should avoid consuming content that makes them itch and if something is created only for entertainment purposes, it should be treated as leisure."

Pre-British India was largely harmonious

Arushi Srivastava and
Mukesh N

India has witnessed communal violence for a long time. From the Britisher's 'Divide and Rule' policy to present-day political parties' majoritarian agenda, religious discord has been in the air, albeit being subdued most of the time.

However, Medieval India witnessed cultural pluralism as different cultures and traditions were accepted. Instances such as Muslim emperors building temples and Hindu emperors granting lands to Muslims are not uncommon. Akbar abolished the Jizya tax and was the harbinger of the ideas of Din-i-Ilahi (Oneness of God) and Ibadat Khana (House of Worship). The communal strife between Hindus and Muslims is said to have begun after the advent of British Raj in India.

The attempts to divide Indians based on religion can be seen during the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. With the introduction of the Enfield rifle, a rumour was spread among the sepoys that the grease used to lubricate the cartridges was a mixture of pigs' and cows' fat, thus to have oral contact with it was considered an insult to both Muslims and Hindus.



1947 Amritsar communal riots

File Photo

bbc.com



1946 Calcutta riots

File Photo

nytimes.com

Brief timeline of communal riots from past to present

- Mumbai communal riot, 1893
- Partition of India, 1947
- Ahmedabad riots, 1969
- Jamshedpur and Aligarh riot, 1979
- Moradabad communal riot, 1980
- Anti-Sikh riots, 1984
- Meerut communal riots, 1987
- Ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Hindu Pandits, 1989
- Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya, 1992
- Gujarat riots, 2002
- Assam communal violence, 2012
- Muzaffarnagar violence, 2013
- Violence rocked Delhi post CAA- NRC movement, 2020
- Violence in Jahangirpuri 2022
- Violence during Hijab ban, 2022
- Khargone, (Madhya Pradesh) communal riot, 2022

In the new millennium, age-old animosity gets fuelled



2002 Gujarat riots

File Photo

indianexpress.com

In 2002, India witnessed one of the brutal communal riots; While the Sabarmati express was returning from Ayodhya to Godhra, it was set on fire allegedly by Muslims in which several Kar-Sevaks were killed. In the bloody violence that followed, more than 1,000 innocents lost their lives.

Bhasha Singh, a senior journalist, writer, and documentary filmmaker said, "If we look at the post-2002 political scene, hatred has become organised and is growing because of political patronage. The way minorities are targeted, lynched, and deprived of justice shows that our democratic structure and our constitution are under a severe threat; be it the Muzaffarnagar riots (2013), Delhi violence (2019), and the most recent one in Khargone (Madhya Pradesh) and Jahangirpuri-Delhi clashes."

She further added, "We can openly see the role of ruling parties in inciting or giving patronage to perpetrators. That's why no real culprit is punished. The victims are being targeted and are being punished. Fringe groups have started believing that they are

above the law. This mindset leads to a more violent, unequal, and unscientific society."

"There is a way to control communal violence, majority of them have to come together, especially the youth of the country, and say they cannot tolerate the communal hatred being spread. Supreme Court has to play a proactive role to stop communal discord in the country. It is the moral, social and religious duty of youth of this county to stand firm and united," she added.

India noticed 3399 cases of communal violence from 2016 to 2020. As per the National Crime Records Bureau, 857 cases of communal violence were registered in 2020, 438 in 2019, 512 in 2018, 723 in 2017 and 869 in 2016.

Professor Rakesh Katarey,

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Dayanand Sagar University speaking about the chances of communal politics taking over India said, "India has a government which never had more than 40 per cent of the total Indian vote. At best, it is a five-year contract between the government and the elected people who will serve, protect and act within the scope of the constitution. Therefore, any group that wishes to sow the seeds of division, with or without using force on the majority of Indians, can never succeed in seeing their agenda through... The very fact that they (fanatic forces) have to scream and shout is because they are very well aware that they don't have a public endorsement for their divisive acts."

"It is the moral, social and religious duty of youth of this country to stand firm and united."

Is Christianophobia on the rise in India?

The horrific incident of burning to death of Graham Stuart Staines, an Australian Christian missionary along with his two sons in January 1999 in Odisha is still fresh in our memories. The members of Bajrang Dal who were purportedly behind this act claimed that the Staines was forcefully converting the local tribes to Christianity. With the recent Anti-Conversion bill that was passed in Karnataka,

Christians have become once again the target of hate. According to a recent report by a Christian rights protection organisation, the number of reported violent offences against members of the Christian community in India increased by about 75% from 279 in 2020 to 486 in 2021. The year 2021 has been a perilous year for Christians since 2014, according to the report published by The United Christian Forum.



Christian missionaries protesting

File Photo

bbc.com

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When communalism and patriarchy coincide, brutality is unbound

Sutapa Dhara

"The tale of women's bodies becoming convenient sites for men to wage their wars, is not a new one, in fiction or reality."

An excerpt from the novel 'The Burning' by Megha Majumdar.

Depriving womenfolk of equal rights is an age-old practice of communal forces in India. Rape and domestic violence are what women had to face for centuries in the name of religion. It hasn't been long since Muslim women were up for "auction" to online bidders. The fundamentalist groups have become more assertive and aggressive in projecting their religious views seeking to dominate the other gender and enforce orthodox principles.

Mariya Salim, a women's rights activist and researcher says, "Muslim women are facing violence everywhere. Hate speech, Islamophobia, and violence against



Representational Image: Is 'many cultures, one India' under threat?

Sirf News

the minority community have become the new normal. Terms like Love Jihad, Land Jihad, and economic Jihad repeatedly used by mainstream media and on every platform only exacerbate this hate and violence."

What makes this communal psychology predominant? The

article Woman's Question in Communal Ideologies in India, explains the ideological roots of such acts. It lies in the misplaced sense of protecting religion and tradition. "They interpret, and limit, history, according to their ideological purpose, which aims to mobilise people in defence of a communal

or religious identity, and the social order which protects and upholds that identity. Such organisations and ideologies tend to become more active in a transitional phase, i.e., in times of rapid social change, partly in response and partly in resistance to the forces of change, which are viewed as threats to the

"When will women be released from this all-pervasive, unsolicited burden? The answer is, never."

communal and religious identity."

Such instances give ample evidence of women's bodies becoming places for the assertion of political agendas.

Vara Raturi a writer and a researcher says, "It is bad enough that men have created war and war-like situations. It is bad enough that they use brutality to sort conflicts and consider it justified. It is bad enough that they have created tyrannical structures. And it is disheartening that they want to continue to stick to these ways. Further, women have been made the centre of these battles and the sites of these violent acts since time immemorial. When will women be released from this all-pervasive, unsolicited burden? The answer is, never."

Women are an easy target in any communal conflict



Representational Image

feminisinindia.com

Zara Ismail, a researcher, writes in the article titled, Women's Bodies as Repositories of Communal Honour, "When women are reduced to keepers of communal honour—their bodies: the battlefields upon which party and communal politics play out—justice is put out of reach". She argues that the policing on communal lines through the logic

of izzat also results in a very peculiar construct of the concept of 'rapist' in times of communal violence, resulting in a distinction between 'men who rape' and 'men who are rapists'.

Nikita Choudary, a freelance journalist said, "Women have always been utilised as pawns in the pursuit of power and hegemony. We appear to be easier prey

for men who want to flaunt their machismo and toxicity. I recall how Bilkis Bano, a pregnant woman was raped by a bunch of Hindu supremacists. Because the lady is the izzat of a community, rapping her would represent a community's victory over another, as well as the ridicule of the other community."

Describing the violence on women prompted by their caste status, she said, "Take a peek at the caste system in India. Women from lower castes have been viewed as objects for showing hegemony," she said.

As other Indians were celebrating the New Year on January 1, 2022, Muslim women in India were confronting the threat, trauma, and indignity that had been targeted at them through an app hosted on Github offering, Muslim women from India, as auction items.

"For those who may not be aware, 'Bulli/Sulli' are Islamophobic

slurs referring to Muslim women, alterations of the term 'Mulli' are often used by the right-wing to troll Muslim women. In 2021, a similar app called 'Sulli Deals', which was also hosted on Github had listed hundreds of Muslim women for "auction" with their photographs doctored and sourced without their permission. For many women, they were listed for the second time in the 'Bulli Bai' app," writes Mariya Salim in her article 'Bulli Bai', 'Sulli Deals': On Being Put Up for 'Auction' as an Indian Muslim Woman.

"As a Muslim woman in India, I am not new to Islamophobia or anti-Muslim narratives and hate. From outrightly being denied houses on rent because of my religious identity to workplace Islamophobia and hate, I have had my fair share. But this was a new low," she writes.

"It is not easy today to live a

'normal' life without fear, hate, threat, or discrimination in one form or another for those belonging to marginalised communities in India – be it the Dalit or Adivasi community, Muslims, Christians or those from the LGBTQIA+ community. But we have learned to fight for our rights. The Indian constitution is our biggest strength, and our demands for equality and dignity begin and end with it. Muslim women will continue to live with dignity. We will continue to speak for ourselves and for justice, demanding our fundamental rights as equal citizens of India," writes Salim.

"As a muslim woman in India, I am not new to Islamophobia or anti-muslim narratives and hate."

A passive audience and a hyper-active(ist) media

Trupti Khillare

During the demolitions at Jahangirpuri last April, a top journalist from Aaj Tak, Anjana Om Kashyap was seen riding on a bulldozer, which was on its way to demolish properties as the Municipal Corporation of Delhi had raised concern about 'illegal rioter constructions'. Anjana Om Kashyap on the bulldozer was seen asking the driver blunt questions

like, "Why did you stop after demolishing the roof of the juice corner, (but) did not demolish the whole building?"

Furthermore, when the bulldozer headed towards a mosque, Kashyap overzealously said, "The bulldozer has become a symbol of strict legal action against illegal constructions." The statements made by the anchor clearly showed the intentions of the news channel.

Another journalist, Arnab

Goswami, Editor-in-chief of Republic TV was issued a show-cause notice by Mumbai police over communally charged comments during his show last year. "His comments could create communal disharmony and hatred between Hindus and Muslims, and the show evoked strong reactions on YouTube.

Continued on page 12

Why did you stop after demolishing the roof of the juice corner, (but) did not demolish the whole building, asked the journalist to the driver of the bulldozer.

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Complicit in crime: Media in the trade of manufacturing a carnage

Trupti Khillare

Incidents such as the portrayal of minorities in the Tablighi Jamaat case and media coverage during the Jahangirpuri shop demolitions have raised a question about the standards of Indian media in reporting such sensitive issues. Well-known journalists are involved in spreading communal

hatred, fake news, conspiracy theories, and misinformation.

During the pandemic, many journalists misreported the issue of Tablighi Jamaat intending to spread communal hatred and create a clash between the communities. "In today's Bindaas Bol, I bring you a very serious issue and appeal to the Narendra Modi government that the Tablighi Jamaat be banned. If India's mosques are posing a

threat to Indians, and human bombs carrying coronavirus are roaming around freely, wouldn't you call it 'corona jihad'? We should keenly monitor these jihadis and the jihadis should be strictly punished under the law," said Suresh Chavhanke, the head of Sudarshan News, in his show Bindaas Bol. Comments such as these sow seeds of the communal divide in the minds of the citizens.

Dr Ram Puniyani, a well-known intellectual, writer, and public speaker said, "Indian media started becoming more pro-establishment since 2003 or so, once Modi strengthened his powers as CM and started giving blank cheques to corporates, who in turn gave the right-wing tilt to the news. In due course, the media cell of the BJP stepped in with big influence, and fake news also became the order of the day. These processes gradually increased in intensity, more so after 2014."

Similarly, the spreading of fake news has been rampant too. During the pandemic, India TV broadcasted a video showing a maulana continuously spitting to spread covid. But later it was found that the video had no context with the virus. Even Dainik Jagran accused Tablighi Jamaat, without a shred of evidence, of being involved in attacks on various temples in 1992-93. Prof. Rakesh SK, Dayanand



Demolition drive in Jahangirpuri

news18.com

"In due course, the media cell of the BJP stepped in with big influence, and fake news also became the order of the day. These processes gradually increased in intensity, more so after 2014."

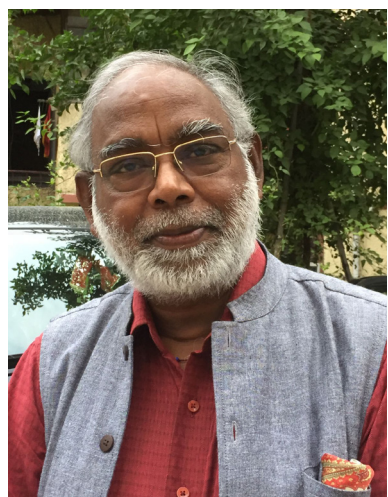


Dr Ram Puniyani

Sagar University, Bengaluru, said that the famous journalists link Muslims to every attack that has happened. "False claims are the means through which people can be blinded. As long as these issues get traction, hypercompetitive media will milk them for TRPs."

Dr Puniyani finds the denigration of minorities in the media very

disturbing. "Initially after Shah Bano and Babri Masjid issue, A large section of Muslims responded emotionally, which gave a further edge to the agenda of the ruling party," he said. "Since last few years their response is becoming more restrained and a large section is in favour of accepting what the courts rule," he added.



John Dayal

Continued from page 10

Only because of the coronavirus pandemic there was no communal violence but the comments posed a threat to communal integrity and law and order. So as a preventive action, the police had now started the process of taking an undertaking for good behaviour from Goswami under section 108 (1) (A)," the notice read.

Over the years, the media's

increased targeted communal messaging has resulted in further polarisation. Today in India, journalists such as Rajat Sharma (India TV), Sudhir Chaudhary (Zee News), Amish Devgan (News18), Rubika Liaquat (ABP News), Arnab Goswami (Republic TV), Anjana Om Kashyap (Aaj Tak) are criticised for earning TRPs from spreading hate as content.

John Dayal, a former editor for Mid-Day, and a human rights activist, said that communalism is not a new thing for India and it has been here for many years now. "What we are experiencing now, will be experienced by future generations. The passive audience, including young kids, get into the trap of believing anything and everything and don't have the knowledge or medium to fact-check the information," he said.

What do the audiences learn by witnessing such hateful events around them, questioned Dayal. Religious polarisation is evil in itself, as bad as ethnic or racial

polarisation. "Today, the nation-states are multi-racial and multi-religious. Migrations, new jobs, and technology have made people travel everywhere," Dayal said. Awareness can teach how to spot fake news, opined Dayal. "The exception is when you want to believe in the false news even when you know it to be false. But perhaps it suits your political beliefs or religious beliefs, or your sense of patriotism," he added.

"Today, the nation-states are multi-racial and multi-religious. Migrations, new jobs, and technology have made people travel everywhere."

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