

DALITALITY: HATE POLITICS PUSHING US INTO EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

Relevant for: null | Topic: Structure of Indian Society incl. Caste system

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Among the decolonised nation-states, India had stood as a model. Its non-violent anti-colonial struggle showed to the other colonised a means of resistance. Post-independent India's Constitution, drafted by Dalit visionary B R Ambedkar, enabled the imagination of people to build an ethical and inclusive democracy. Most importantly, it showed that, if led by an ethical leadership, the State could address historic injustices. In the same vein, [Jawaharlal Nehru's](#) commitment to nation-building in terms of institutions and electoral democracy ensured India's forward march. The template worked out by the anti-colonial, anti-caste and anti-communal visionaries of the nation not only freed the country from the shackles of colonial oppression but also rebuilt it from the trauma of Partition. Like the mythical phoenix, India re-emerged as a modern, secular, democratic, socialist republic.

When, in 1975-77, the suspension of democracy through Emergency by [Indira Gandhi](#) threw the nation into an existential crisis, people fought for democracy. Ironically, it was at this juncture that the nation conceded public and political space to the Hindu right. The RSS as an originator of the two-nation theory and the producer of Nathuram Godse, the killer of M K Gandhi, had remained invisible till then. By aligning with democratic mobilisations, the RSS enhanced its agenda, it distilled and distributed its poisonous, hate politics in the name of social and educational services. It produced Hindu nationalists with military-style training similar to fascist Black Shirts. They orchestrate violence and act as extra State actors with the support of the higher echelons of power.

The post-1990s rise of Hindu nationalism has fundamentally altered Indian public life and political discourse. One, by inciting hatred towards Muslims; the worst example was the pogrom in Gujarat in 2002 under [Narendra Modi](#) as Chief Minister. RSS affiliates have simultaneously spread their influence into mainstream media and corporate houses, strengthening its money power and packaging its Hindu communal agenda as development and nationalism. As a result, after 2014, everyday violence unleashed by Hindu vigilantes against Muslims and Dalits has been normalised. This legitimisation of violence, combined with management of election with money and media, was behind the [BJP's](#) landslide victory of 2019. Doubts were also raised about the role played by EVMs.

Modi's second term, with Amit Shah as Home Minister, has seen abrogation of [Article 370](#) of the Constitution stripping J&K of its special status, the Ayodhya verdict by the Supreme Court, the [Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act](#) and the proposed [National Register of Citizens](#), all meant to legalise the persecution of Muslims.

The second venomous agenda of the RSS is delegitimisation of the idea of social justice that empowers Dalits and other oppressed sections. In the name of lack of merit, inefficiency and corruption in public institutions, the Hindu right has built a discourse against reservations. In the 1990s, parties with social justice agenda such as the BSP, SP and [Janata Dal](#) acted as an antidote, but the Hindu right's smear campaign has rendered them powerless.

Politics after the 1990s has not been on ideological ground but populism. It has provided some succour to the poor from the pain of market economy, without addressing structural problems.

However, the era of populism has also opened doors to undemocratic, authoritarian leaders, especially among regional parties.

Political parties, lacking ideology or imagination, and desperate for power, have even aligned with the Hindu right and provided legitimacy to its politics. Meanwhile, the Congress as well as regional parties from J&K (the Abdullahs and Muftis) to Tamil Nadu (the DMK) have descended into family satraps and are infused with corruption. If one looks for an alternative to Hindu right politics, all one sees is a crop of kleptocratic elites from all castes.

The Hindu right's homologous hate politics at the cost of economic development, social harmony is now pushing the nation into an existential crisis. It is high time political parties and the civil society demand closure of the hate factory in Nagpur. Functional democracies do not need organised militias to act as vigilantes enforcing a hegemonic culture against minorities and vulnerable populations.

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