

## Silencing reason

Journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh, [who was shot dead at point-blank range](#), was a critic of the establishment. While there is no proof of who actually killed her, we know the people who were most disturbed by her work, just as we know who gained most from the murders of rationalists Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, and M.M. Kalburgi. The rationalist, Narendra Nayak, rightly pointed out that “the elimination of voices of reason by silencing them through murder was the hallmark of those cowardly dunces who have no arguments to counter those put forward by us.”

Those “cowardly dunces” are none other than the real-life versions of the vicious trolls and “orcs” who populate the Internet, subsumed by the ideology of majoritarian exclusivism, religious conservatism, and patriarchy. These are not fringe elements but vital foot soldiers in a cultural project that seeks to destroy its veritable threats of rationalism and progressivism.

Under the shadow of threats, it's no country for rationalists

Lankesh's *Weltanschauung*, a left-liberal world view, questioned the orthodoxy of caste hierarchy and strove to expose the unholy nexus of religious conservatism, political Hindutva, and crony capitalism that has featured starkly in Karnataka in recent years. Her work in *Gauri Lankesh Patrike* took those forces representing this nexus head-on. This is why many suspect that she paid a price. That said, as some have rightly argued, Lankesh may have lost her life for expressing her world view in Kannada, for being able to reach out and shape the opinions of many more readers. Her death is a reminder of the scores of journalists and stringers — in the regional press — who have lost their lives over the years.

Rationalists, unlike liberals and other modernists, go a step further in exposing the roots of conservatism and fundamentalism — they take on uncomfortable issues that bother not just collective subjects in a political project (such as voters) but individuals in “deep society”. Their work is the forerunner of social change rather than just political or economic change; it is an outcome that threatens the forces of conservatism the most. While liberals argue for modern values and abstract freedoms, their work does not touch “deep society” the way the work by rationalists does. Rationalists question core beliefs and take on sacred cows; they strike right at the edifice of legitimacy accorded to the status quoists and religious conservatives. This is exactly why they are seen as the greater and most immediate enemy by the enemies of ‘progress’, and so the attacks on Kalburgi, Dabholkar, Pansare, and Lankesh.

Historian Romila Thapar recently pointed out that today's diminished pool of public intellectuals continues a tradition of unorthodoxy and critical dissent championed by the adherents of the Lokayata philosophy and Buddhists in ancient India. They are the heirs of the philosophers who questioned the Church in Europe; they are like Emile Zola and the band of “intellectuals” who secured justice for an innocent victim in the “Dreyfus affair.”

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

## Divisive integration

The recently passed Jharkhand Freedom of Religion Bill, 2017, that is touted as a check on religious conversion, should steer our focus towards the broader question of identity politics among the tribals in the state. Notably, this bill follows from a series of calculated moves by the government, such as the draconian cow slaughter law and recent amendments to the Land Act, which deviously dilute the distinctiveness of tribal identity in Jharkhand.

Tribals constitute around 27 per cent of Jharkhand's population. Among them, 4.3 per cent are Christians, about 13 per cent Sarnas (animistic believers) and the rest are largely Hindu tribals. Thus, a homogeneous tribal identity is a misnomer. Identity is not a static construction: It evolves with confronting situations. Tribals are no exception.

Through centuries of cultural contact with both Hinduism and Christianity, tribals in Jharkhand have dynamically syncretised their traditional belief system of nature worship with exotic elements borrowed from other religions. Despite such conversions, tribals have followed their indigenous festivals, worshipped trees, and believed in totemism. However, the BJP and sangh parivar's outlook towards tribals has centred around the belief that tribes are "backward" Hindus. This derisive outlook encourages them to homogenise the sui-generis tribal identity under the "Hindu" umbrella.

The tribes of Jharkhand significantly differ from each other yet their indigenous identity, comprised of a unique cultural value system, is extolled for its symbiotic connection with nature that is distinct from other religions. Such an identity has evolved over centuries by selectively imbibing the beliefs and practices of other religions. For example, many Oraons of Chota Nagpur who have converted to Christianity still believe in supernatural powers like darha, gujar, etc. even though witchcraft is not accepted in Christianity. Similarly, when tribals convert to Hinduism they incorporate many of its elements, such as worship of Hindu deities. For Oraons, their revered deities - Devi Mai and Mahadev - are Hindu gods, whereas Barndo Pachcho, a household deity, has a Munda origin.

Syncretism, therefore, is a fundamental feature of the tribal belief system. It is this continuous process of construction and re-construction which imparts distinctiveness to the indigenous tribal identity that has been jeopardised time and again by its divisive politicisation by majoritarian forces.

Christian missionaries have been active in Jharkhand for centuries. Motivated by material considerations, many tribals have converted to Christianity, although never completely giving up on their original practices. Census data (2011) indicates a high rate of growth among the Christians (29.7 per cent). However, the missionaries have allegedly disapproved of many animist Sarna tribals who have resisted complete conversion.

The right-wing has carefully escalated its influence in Jharkhand by tapping into the deep wells of alienation within the tribal community festered by Christian conversions. The RSS has attempted to make the Sarna worshippers as their base in the region by striving to assimilate them into the fold of Hinduism, while simultaneously vilifying anything that remotely suggests any influence of Christianity. In effect, this has further engendered communal divisions between the "Christian" and "non-Christian" tribals. Checking Christian religious conversion has been at the forefront of the Hindutva political agenda.

In such an atmosphere of disruptive politics of identity, an anti-conversion bill will only act as another tool that would encourage divisions within the tribal community. Notably, Jharkhand is the seventh state after Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Himachal

Pradesh to enact such a law. Many of these laws, including the one proposed in Jharkhand, define "conversion" as "renouncing one's own religion and adopting another". The majoritarian view perceives tribal as Hindus. Hence, tribal conversion to Hinduism or re-conversion of Christian tribals into Hinduism does not draw the attention of the state. In principle, then, re-conversion of "Hindu tribals" from Christianity seems acceptable, even favoured.

Since the 1990s, the RSS has been operating Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams, Vanbandhu Parishad, etc. in Jharkhand; "re-converting" tribals back to Hinduism and celebrating it as ghar wapasi. Sangh parivar outfits like the Bajrang Dal are noted for their aggressive propagation of Hindutva sentiments, even through the use of violence. This kind of politicisation and communalisation of social relations has disrupted harmony by pitting one group against the other. These efforts have not only created a wedge among the tribals but have also cultivated hatred towards Muslims, Christians, and Christian tribals.

The present government has successfully capitalised on the rhetoric of a threatening "other" to foster a Hindu utopia, so to speak. The BJP denies any difference between the Hindu religion and indigenous tribal religion. Such a ruthless processes of acculturation denies a syncretic tribal identity. The recent beef politics in Jharkhand is a case in point. The draconian cow slaughter law has inadvertently tried to force an unwanted Hindu custom on the tribals, although beef has been traditionally a part of their diet. For example, cattle sacrifice is part of the indigenous Doson festival of the Santhals, who have incorporated Hindu customs without giving up on their traditions.

Draconian state-laws and the politicisation of socio-religious identity of the tribals have festered communal and casteist divisions in Jharkhand. Playing politics with issues of conversion in the garb of protecting religious freedom harbours an imperfect agenda of tribal integration and only weakens the collective and individual agency of tribals.

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

© **Zuccess App** by [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

**Media should avoid sensationalism and maintain its credibility while disseminating news: Vice President****Media should avoid sensationalism and maintain its credibility while disseminating news: Vice President****Presents 14th Shailikaar Prabhakar Samman Award**

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that the media has to avoid sensationalism and maintain its credibility while disseminating news. He was addressing the gathering after presenting the 14<sup>th</sup> Shailikaar Prabhakar Samman Award to eminent journalist Smt. Anuradha Prasad, here today. The award was instituted in memory of well-known Hindi writer, journalist and freedom fighter, Pt. Kanhaiya Lal Misra 'Prabhakar'. The Union Minister for Human Resource Development, Shri Prakash Javadekar and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that the credibility was the most important thing in journalism and said, "Information with confirmation is more than ammunition". He further said that any content that offends the sensibilities of the people was a matter of concern and self-regulation was the best way to address such a problem.

Recalling the pioneering role of journalism in freeing India from colonial rule and subsequently in strengthening democracy in post-Independent India, the Vice President said that a vibrant electronic and print media were continuing to play an important role in moulding public opinion. He further said that news values appear to have changed over the years. What would not have been considered to be even a filler in the past was becoming 'Breaking News' today and many a time, an off-the-cuff remark becomes a screaming headline, he added.

Asserting that he was not advocating any censorship, the Vice President pointed out that the media because of its reach and impact has a huge responsibility in ensuring that the people were not swayed or agitated by controversies which are best ignored. He further said that the cinema too must avoid obscenity, vulgarity, violence and double meaning dialogues. Of late there was a tendency of mixing news and views, he added.

Referring to freedom of expression, the Vice President said that it is best utilized when the value of such freedom was fully appreciated. He called upon newspapers and channels to refocus on developmental journalism so that different social and economic issues affecting the people and the country get highlighted and even bring about policy changes at the highest level. Development journalism was all the more relevant in a country like India to unravel various complexities and put things in the right perspective, he added.

The Vice President said that we need to accord importance to mother tongue, while pursuing English as the link language. Describing various Indian languages including Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Assamese, Oriya and Gujarati as national languages, he said that proficiency in the mother tongue was vital before learning other languages.

\*\*\*

KSD/BK

END

crackIAS.com  
crackIAS.com