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NUH-MEWAT — OLD TEMPLATE, NEW BATTLEGROUND

Relevant for: Security Related Matters | Topic: Challenges to internal security through Communication Networks

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August 07, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 01:01 am IST

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'Nuh, and the Mewat region more generally, are an unlikely terrain for this display of aggression' | Photo Credit: The Hindu

The recent [violence in Nuh district of Haryana](#), not far from the national capital, has followed a familiar template. Religious events may once have been occasion for affirming a sense of community through shared piety. They are now incomplete without a brazen display of aggression.

Early this year, a group of independent professionals published a report with a self-explanatory title, "Routes of Wrath, Weaponising Religious Processions". With a wealth of documentation, it put in context the violence that spread across nine States like a contagion during Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti last year. Neither the first spark, nor the means through which the flames were fanned, were obscure.

Indeed, as senior advocate Chander Uday Singh put it, the "catalysts" of the violence were the same across the geography of India: "religious processions ... followed by targeted attacks on Muslim-owned properties, businesses and places of worship."

"Culpable amnesia" is the term of art invoked, derived from a judicial commission of inquiry into the Bhagalpur riots which claimed up to a thousand lives in 1989. What is different now is that incompetence is not required as alibi. Where "plausible deniability" was once maintained, local administrations are now in open collusion with riotous mobs.

Violence is the overt intent as processionists carry exposed weapons, and march to the accompaniment of high-decibel music and provocative slogans. Yet, violence is not inevitable since extreme restraint is usually maintained by the other side.

Two incident-free years have passed in Nuh, which has witnessed the birth of an entirely novel religious observance called the Brajmandal Jalabhishek Yatra. This year was different because of the declared participation of a notorious cow vigilante, wanted in neighbouring Rajasthan since February for the murder of two cattle-traders, but moving around with impunity under the active protection of Haryana's police.

In May 1924, close to a century ago, Mahatma Gandhi wrote a pamphlet on Hindu-Muslim

tensions, an issue that for him was gaining almost obsessive importance. He was focused as always on inner essences, but devoted great attention to their overt expressions. Just as cow slaughter had become something of a “sore point” for Hindus, music before mosques had become one for Muslims. Neither side could reasonably expect to coerce the other into compliance, though deliberate provocations could cease. “I have heard,” he continued, “that in some places, Hindus purposely, and with the deliberate intention of irritating Mussalmans, perform arati just when the Mussalman prayers commence.”

The nature of that cycle of mutual provocation has since changed dramatically. A cow slaughter ban is now a legislative fait accompli in most States. In States ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), these laws are enforced mainly by vigilantes granted the licence to kill on mere suspicion. And to underline the utter disempowerment of the religious minority, their places of worship are becoming focal points for a newly aggressive display of cultural disdain.

Nuh, and the Mewat region more generally, are an unlikely terrain for this display of aggression. Muslims in the region, referred to as the Meo, are a community that draws heavily from the lore of the Brindavan region, with traditions of veneration of a heterodox pantheon of gods. As India's Independence approached last century and bitter communal antagonisms flared elsewhere, the Meo remained ecumenical in their identity and indifferent to the effort at mobilising numbers behind each faith. Dairying is a way of life for the Meo and cattle a revered source of livelihood.

Also read | [FIR against AAP leader in Nuh clashes; demolition drive continues](#)

Administratively, the Mewat region was once part of the princely States of Alwar and Bharatpur, and became during the 1930s, the focus of the Congress party's “Muslim mass contact” programme. Jawaharlal Nehru and his associates within the left-wing of the Congress sought a strategy to deal with the embitterment between faiths, by creating identities of shared material interests between peasants, workers and the poor.

Editorial | [Making a riot: On the communal clashes in Haryana](#)

Numerous other demands surfaced in this atmosphere of ferment, including better representation for the Meo in the administration, equity in land ownership, and decentralised governance. Though far from the epicentres of Partition, the Meo region witnessed a harsh retribution from its rulers, little else than a “mass extermination campaign”, as the social scientist Shail Mayaram has documented.

The statistics about these campaigns have long since sunk into the memory hole. In her book, *Resisting Regimes*, Professor Mayaram attempts a retrieval and finds numbers that are staggering, though the greater significance is in the suppression of memories themselves. The consolidation of a nationalist sentiment required a sense of “sociability” and after violence on the scale the Meo witnessed, it imposed “silences from the victim”.

Mewat lies in an arc southwards of the national capital, though the spillovers of modernity halt at its borders. Millennium city was the appellation that Gurgaon bestowed upon itself when both the millennium and the India growth story were relative novelties. In 2007, Gurgaon rid itself of an unwanted appendage with the formation of Mewat district, subsequently renamed Nuh. Since then, Gurgaon has flourished from a real estate boom, while Nuh has stagnated.

The fifth round of the National Family Health Survey, carried out 2019-21, presents the essential figures. To take just two rather telling indicators: of the female population above age six, only 51.2% in Nuh district have ever been to school, against 80.9% in Gurgaon and 73.8% in the State as a whole. Female literacy in Mewat is 41.9% of the relevant age group of 15 to 49 years,

against 85.4% in Gurgaon and 79.7% in the State.

Nuh is Haryana's only Muslim-majority district, with close to 80% of its 1.08 million population in 2011 identifying with the faith. Perhaps that is sufficient reason why it is likely to languish forever in the backwaters of official inattention.

Why would such unpromising terrain become the battleground of faiths today? Partly because the emboldened Hindutva forces think they can do what they want. Even where numbers are not in their favour, it is about establishing the authority of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), as spearhead of Hindutva, to legislate on religious practice all over the country. If the VHP should now pronounce it an essential element of Hindu belief that Nuh is where Lord Krishna grazed his cows, that the region is home to three Shaivite shrines from the Mahabharata era, all others in the Hindu Rashtra have no option but to accept these as undisputed truth.

Hindutva as ideology expresses its expansionist intent in the religious procession, adorned with a symbolism that is under constant invention. State power is now an accessory to its programme, rather than a countervailing force that upholds constitutional principles.

Vigilantism in the scholarly understanding is an ensemble of coercive practices that seek to impose a moral order, an alternate system of legitimacy. This could work in defiance of the writ of the state, but the situation in India is ominously different. Hindutva vigilantism here appropriates and subverts the state's monopoly of legitimate coercion. And in that lies great danger for the constitutional order.

Sukumar Muralidharan is an independent writer and researcher based in the Delhi region

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EVERY ACT OF SILENCE AMPLIFIES THE HORRORS IN MANIPUR

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At a tribute in Churachandpur, for Kuki tribals | Photo Credit: AFP

The images and graphic accounts of the [Kuki-Zo women who were stripped, paraded, and harmed by mobs](#) and thugs have swept across the country and the world. They make us not only deeply ashamed but also angry about the fact that such terrible incidents continue to happen in India, for our leaders spare no moment to inform us of India's world power aspirations, its presidency of the G-20 and growing economy. We are [reminded by politicians](#) that sexual violence occurs across the country. Does that make it acceptable? Nothing of the sort.

Ordinary people have joined protests against the incidents, from Goa to Guwahati and Delhi to Shillong, demanding justice, holding placards, lighting candles, singing 'We shall overcome someday', the anthem of the American civil rights movement which fought for racial equality. These may seem small, helpless gestures but they matter; every action for restorative justice matters just as every silence amplifies the harm and horror.

Take Chumukedima, on the edge of the bustling commercial town of Dimapur in Nagaland, where the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) brought together Meiteis and Kukis living in the State in an open field to hold hands and urge peace. That may seem symbolic but it is far more than that when you dig deeper. The FNR has worked for peace and reconciliation along with other Naga civil society leaders over two decades to bring peace and mutual respect among the bitterly divided factions.

There has been much bloodshed in fratricidal conflicts among the latter in addition to their battles with the security forces. Whether this will percolate across the border is not sure but what is clear is that the Kukis and Meiteis in Nagaland have been assured of safety by the political leadership. But ultimately, resolution of such issues must involve the key players perhaps with a little help from their friends. That is a long way away.

Of course there are setbacks, such as the flight of Meiteis from Mizoram after a group of former Mizo insurgents issued a statement warning them of local anger and suggesting that they go home. The State government said the call by the group was consequently withdrawn, but the damage had been done. In this acutely sensitive region, where ethnic fault lines are deep and go back over long years of simmering distrust and unrest, it takes little to kindle a fire. Mizoram

says that over 12,000 persons from the Kuki and Zomi tribes, which have ethnic kinship with the Mizos, have taken shelter in the State. This small State is struggling as it hosts another 40,000 plus Chin refugees from neighbouring Myanmar who have fled a brutal military crackdown and fighting between insurgent groups and the Myanmar army.

But let us return to the key issue of accountability for the specific incidence of sexual violence. More such cases have emerged as women have courageously spoken to reporters. The Chief Minister of Manipur, N. Biren Singh, who is now seen as having consolidated his hold over the Meitei majority in the Imphal valley, says he saw the horrific videos only on the day that they emerged in the public domain last week. He later told a television anchor, “You have to see the ground reality. There are hundreds of similar cases and that is the reason why the internet is shut off in the state.” That is a stark and revealing statement although in the same interview he had said that many had been killed and “there are more than a thousand FIRs [first information reports] lodged”.

That is one clarification that the Chief Minister needs to make: was he referring to cases of sexual abuse or the many FIRs that have been filed over death, arson, looting and intimidation?

The Judicial Commission to fix accountability for the situation was announced two months ago but is yet to start its work. It should take up the case of sexual abuse as one which mirrors many of the issues relating to the failure of the administration to uphold law and order and protect the vulnerable.

There are a few key questions that need review: first, what did the officers do after the incident? Are there records of the action they took such as calls, short messaging services, wireless messages, and minutes of meetings with other police officials?

The incident, as one media account said, took place approximately a kilometre away from Nongpok Sekmai, which was ranked by the central government as the best police station of the country in 2020. The second is how and when did this information reach the heads of the police, the civil service and the political leadership? What we do know is that the FIR on the incident was lodged on May 17 and the first arrest was announced at the Chief Minister’s press conference, two months later.

There is the issue of the chairperson of the National Commission for Women who has confirmed receiving detailed complaints of these and other attacks. She says she sent requests to the State authorities and got no reply. She should have gone herself to the State, demanded explanations and asked the State Commission for Women to join her. Another opportunity was missed.

These issues are connected to the State’s future. There is virtually no talk about efforts to meet Manipur’s aspirations through the ‘Act East Policy’ which is to connect the North East to South East Asia. Manipur was to be a pivot of that approach. But one wonders now, with supply lines disrupted, the conflict in the State, a situation awash with weapons, and allegations of rebels and drugs slipping across the border, if and how this dream can be recovered.

Sanjoy Hazarika is a commentator who works on the North East and its neighbourhood, and the author of three books on the North East

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NAXALISM IN THE COUNTRY

Relevant for: Security Related Matters | Topic: Linkages between development and spread of extremism incl. Naxalism

As per Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, subjects of Police and Public Order are with the State Governments. However, to address Left Wing Extremism (LWE) menace holistically, Government of India (GoI) approved 'National Policy and Action Plan to address LWE' in 2015 envisaging a multi-pronged strategy involving security related measures, development interventions, ensuring rights and entitlements of local communities etc. Steadfast implementation of this policy has resulted in consistent decline in LWE related violence and its geographical spread.

GoI has enacted the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act) for children in distress situation including children in conflict with law (CCL) and children in need of care and protection (CNCP). As per provisions of JJ Act, a child who is victim of or affected by any armed conflict, civil unrest or natural calamity, is included as a "child in need of care and protection", among others. The Act mandates a safety net of service delivery structures including institutional and non institutional care mechanisms, to ensure the best interest of children.

As per the JJ Act, any non-state, self-styled militant group or outfit declared as such by the GoI, if recruits or uses any child for any purpose, shall be liable for criminal prosecution.

Ministry of Women and Child Development is implementing a centrally sponsored Child Protection Services (CPS) scheme, for supporting the States/Union Territories (UTs) in providing a framework for care and protection of children in distress conditions. Under the scheme, institutional care is available for CNCP and CCL, including provisions for boarding, lodging and holistic development of children. The scheme also provides for non-institutional care wherein support is extended for adoption, foster care and sponsorship. The primary responsibility of implementation of the scheme rests with the States/UTs.

During the period from 2018 to 2023 (till 15 July 23) there were 3,544 LWE related incidents and 949 deaths. Year-wise details are as under: -

Year/Parameter

Incidents

Deaths

2018

833

240

2019

670

202

2020

665

183

2021

509

147

2022

413*

118**

98

2023

(till 15 July 23)

273*

63**

79

* Incidents perpetrated by Left Wing Extremists

** Incidents initiated by Security Forces

Since 2022, data is maintained separately for number of incidents perpetrated by Left Wing Extremists and incidents initiated by Security Forces.

This was stated by the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shri Nityanand Rai in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha.

RK/AY/SM/AKS/RR/2297

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SCARCE NEWS, FAKE NEWS

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A placard is pictured at the site of a protest in Manipur's Churachandpur district on July 22, 2023. | Photo Credit: Reuters

The legwork for every ground report involves a fair deal of planning by the reporter in coordination with the local chauffeur. However, in the middle of a civil war in Manipur, one had to be extra cautious with the planning — every commute between the hills and the valley had to happen during daytime to ensure that the press/media tag on the car was visible from afar.

Discussing the next day's plan after wrapping up reporting the developments in Churachandpur, my Kuki-Zo driver said we will not be able to start early the next day. On enquiring, he said his Internet was no longer working. He had to travel for two hours to 'store some Internet'.

Shocked and intrigued in equal parts, I asked him how, even during an Internet ban, he was able to access the Internet. He then explained that every few days, his family and friends would travel in the car for two hours to the Manipur-Mizoram border. They would switch off their locations, turn on the data in their smartphones and access the Internet.

Before heading back they would spend a considerable amount of time browsing the Internet and downloading videos of the protests and atrocities.

These videos would then be sent through Bluetooth or transferred while accessing the Wi-Fi from the camps of the leaders. This would happen on both sides. In the valley, common folks could be seen visiting the locations of Meitei leaders or centres where the Wi-Fi was working. They would download videos from there, go back to camps, and share them with others. In both relief camps, displaced Meiteis and Kuki-Zos had access to videos of violence, but very few had access to non-partisan sources of news.

While speaking to these groups about the events that followed the May 3 violence, they showed pictures of deformed bodies and videos of houses being burnt. But none of these were captured by them. They would often struggle to point out the sources of these videos.

Some of these videos and photographs were later proved to be fake by media outlets outside the State.

Noises from smartphones would only convey partisan updates. For example, a displaced Meitei

in Imphal Valley pointed to the news of Meitei women who were assaulted at the Churachandpur Medical College. The fact that this turned out to be fake news never reached him.

There has been very little choice in terms of what news people have had access to since a blanket ban on the Internet came into effect. The common man is privy to information that is shared with him by the higher-ups. The reality is that news and updates of events were often distorted. Information was distributed by those in positions of power, to shape a narrative that suited their convenience.

A Kuki student, who I met at one of the camps as I was filing my story, was watching a video of a Meitei influencer saying that there will be fireworks in August. The student, who had to set aside his books to monitor social media since the start of the violence, was visibly stressed. He spoke of how such videos from the opposing camp helped his community understand the possible places and time frames of attacks.

Between downloading the online versions of his college text and monitoring social media, the Kuki student expressed concerns about his academic future. The 21-year-old, who wanted to pursue his Masters degree from one of the universities in Delhi, had missed the deadline because of the ethnic clashes followed by the Statewide Internet ban.

If people continue to spread videos of violence — sometimes that of real events and many times fabricated ones, what purpose does an Internet ban really serve in the State?

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