

India - Assam Communal Violence: Rants of resentment

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What was witnessed in Assam is just not communal violence, but opportunities made available to be misused by anti-state elements, for which the State Government of Assam and the Central Government in New Delhi must account for. Pointing fingers exclusively at the Muslims living in Assam, as persons responsible for the violence is without basis, is xenophobic and a criminally irresponsible act to say the least. The latest debate in the Lok Sabha on the issue showcases a repeatedly demonstrated attitude in New Delhi to avoid responsibility for letting an incident of such magnitude to happen. [\[1\]](#)

Communal violence in Assam is the by-product of a combination of factors. This includes, and is not limited to, the absence of unbiased state and national polices, including that of resource allocations to enable people living in the state secure a decent living; entrenched poverty in Assam, and collectively within the region; and the complete failure of a state and national criminal justice mainframe. Alarming is the demonstrated apathy of the state and national security apparatus that failed to respond timely and decisively to contain the violence.

Communal violence in Assam is the repetition of the 2002 Gujarat carnage. The person who led the Gujarat riots is today projected as the future prime minister of the country. In projecting a person accused to be responsible for the deaths of at least a thousand persons as the future saviour of the nation and that of its people, history is preparing to repeat itself. The only difference is in the language of sloganeering, from German to Hindi.

If what happened post 2002 Gujarat were to suggest what actions of accountability and correction would follow in Assam, the criminals who engaged in unjustifiable criminal activities in Assam have nothing to fear. The country's criminal justice apparatus is inept and is not allowed to function by both the central and state governments. It is like a cymbal-banging mechanical monkey toy that works when someone winds it and let it play the cacophonous and repetitive tune that it is capable of.

Even today there are no attempts or debates in India to introspect and clinically examine as to what burned Assam. Instead, nationally the attempt is to blame 'Bangladeshis' for everything that the country has failed to guarantee to its people. Those who have arrived at this criminal, condescending and unreasonable conclusion and spared no opportunity to fan this hate among the people have no data to support their claim. Those who make such comments forget the history of the region and that of its people. It is nothing more than a calculated attempt to ostracise Muslims. Equally condemnable is the absence of response from the secular and civil society groups in the country against this hate speech.

Even for the sake of argument, if there is such influx of 'illegal immigrants' from Bangladesh into India, it only suggests the laxity of those who are tasked with guarding the country's border. Agencies like the Border Security Force (BSF) acts as if it is an organised gang of demoralised and trigger-happy criminals stationed along the country's border. Innumerable instances of crimes committed by the BSF, including cross-border smuggling, rape, extra-judicial execution, and torture committed by the BSF suggests nothing more than this. The Asian Human Rights Commission

(AHRC) along with its partner organisation MASUM has documented more than 800 cases during the past eight years that depicts this character of the BSF. Not one of the cases that were brought to the attention of the BSF as well as to the Union Home Ministry has been acted upon.

The complaints acted upon by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) were limited to mostly dismissing them after the NHRC accepting false reports sent in by the BSF. The NHRC lacks capacity and honesty to investigate complaints independently. Neither does it have a mechanism to protect complainants and witnesses. Witness protection is absent in India and it is a concept that lacks even a legislative framework. Now that an investigation is ordered into what that has happened in Assam, the absence of a witness protection framework will be one of the most serious issues that will plague investigation. So will be the absence of proper forensic facilities that would seriously hamper the investigation in Assam. None of this however is a concern in New Delhi.

In the absence of any form of protection to the complainants and witnesses, the investigation itself is a farcical exercise. An equally overlooked aspect is the basic understanding of psychological trauma the community is undergoing where the investigation has to be undertaken. Neither the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) nor the Assam State Police have the basic understanding about what psychological trauma a community would be undergoing after the communal carnage. Without this, to claim that the CBI investigation would ensure justice to the victims is fraud played upon the nation and its people. That the incident is treated in such shoddy manner speaks about state intent.

No country can escape responsibility for failing to protect lives and legitimate property of persons within its territory. The colour of passports and national, religious or racial identities must not be excuses that a country poses while undertaking such duties. That in India it is not so underlines the fact that justice is the last priority in the country. In fact what is true is that justice is a phantom limb in India.

In an environment where justice institutions are systematically destroyed so that those who occupy politically influential seats of power in New Delhi and at the state capitals could pursue their private agendas without sustainable opposition, concepts of justice, fair trial, equality and consultation are the first casualties. The unshaken concept of a Hindu state at the inner core is a *condicio sine qua non* to cement this process. A political leadership in the country that has since long alienated itself from the principles of democracy - that it today attributes no value to accountability, justice and equality as the quintessential character of administration - only makes this process a bit fast paced.

What leads New Delhi today is the philosophical 'bad faith' fuelled by self-deception. It is natural in this context for the political leadership in India to entertain resentment about accountability, concepts of justice and equality. Xenophobic statements painting Muslims as aliens and accusing others for ones own failure is an example to this. Alarming is the reality that not many in the country realises this.

Asian Human Rights Commission

Footnotes

[1] Picture courtesy: