

KASHMIR
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K O V I E W

India, Pak should talk

As has been the case since 1990, Pakistan observed Kashmir Solidarity Day on February 5. This year, Pakistan government tried to turn the observance of the day into a mega event in an effort to draw the world's attention towards Kashmir. Day was marked by the protest rallies and the solidarity speeches in the country.

Ever since the revocation of Article 370 on August 5, Islamabad has tried to use every diplomatic means available to somehow get the word involved in Kashmir but the effort hasn't so far been successful. The country's efforts to internationalize Kashmir have hardly borne any fruit. World doesn't seem to care much about what is happening in the state. New Delhi effectively controls the way the world looks at Kashmir. In fact, the world is now more partial towards India's point of view on the erstwhile state. Kashmir is still largely seen more as an issue between India and Pakistan than a movement led by the people of the Union Territory. India, however, did face a stringent scrutiny of its revocation of Article 370 in international media. The drift of the news stories and the Op-ed pieces was predominantly against India's point of view on J&K. But that makes little difference unless the governments too share a similar opinion and it informs their policy action too. The major powers other than China have maintained a largely neutral stand. So, Pakistan can expect little Kashmir-related action and New Delhi has all the reasons to feel satisfied about its Kashmir diplomacy so far. The major powers have reserved their criticism largely for the communication clampdown in the UT and overlooked the August 5 action.

Six months after withdrawal of Article 370, the international focus on Kashmir is winding down. The world has moved on but the situation in Kashmir and between India and Pakistan hasn't changed. The two countries have become more estranged, a state of affairs that is fraught with a potential for further violence in future.

This depressing state of affairs has led to perpetuation of the bloodshed in Kashmir and undermined chances of a settlement in the foreseeable future. Only ray of hope is for India and Pakistan to talk and sort the issue between themselves. Here's hoping that in near future the two countries take credible steps towards rapprochement and work together to find solution to the issues dividing them. This alone will guarantee a durable peace in the region.

OTHER OPINION

The protest test

Finally, the Prime Minister of India broke his silence on the ongoing protests against a discriminatory citizenship law at ShaheenBagh among other places but only to sound off key.

It is no "sanyog (coincidence)" that protesters have gathered at Seelampur, Jamia or ShaheenBagh, PM Narendra Modi said, but a "prayog (experiment)" — "iskepecherajneetikaekaisa design hai jo rashtrakasahardkokhanditkarnekeiraaderakhtahai", there is a design that aims to destroy amity in the country. That statement is problematic because it seeks to frame the democratic expression of opposition to a law passed by government as something sinister.

It also appears to underline that the unseemly and downright inflammatory campaigning by the BJP ahead of the Delhi elections in the last few days and weeks is sanctioned and even encouraged by the party's very top. If the prime minister, no less, frames the election as one between the BJP and conspirators against the nation, then Messrs Anurag Thakur, Yogi Adityanath, and Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, who was fielded in Parliament by his party soon after being banned from campaigning for hate speech by the Election Commission, must not be seen as transgressors. They are loyal footsoldiers in a concerted assault on the norms of political civility.

The BJP has fought nasty election campaigns before and even the PM himself has gone low in the past. In the Haryana campaign last year in October, he spoke of the main political opponent's "chemistry" with Pakistan. In the Gujarat assembly election in 2017, he had alleged that a conspiracy was hatched with Pakistan, involving former PM Manmohan Singh, to defeat the BJP.

And yet, the labelling and vilification of the protests against the CAA in the course of the campaign for Delhi is different, and worse. Here, the BJP and the PM are not just aiming barbs at their political rivals but also, and more, at the people. The anti-CAA protests that have erupted in Delhi and across the country and that are overwhelmingly peaceful and evidently leader-less are being relentlessly baited and targeted by the ruling party — instead of being listened to or engaged with. By painting ShaheenBagh as the den of "pro-Pakistan" "anti-nationals", "jihadis" and "urban Naxals", the BJP and its government are not just breaching democratic etiquette but also denying agency to all those who have questions about a law that has stoked widespread concerns that go to the heart of Indian identity, equality and citizenship.

It may be that the BJP's rhetoric will lose its harsh edge once Delhi has been won and lost. It may be that the moderating impulse that compelled the PM to take a step back from a nation-wide NRC in another speech that launched the BJP's Delhi campaign will return. Meanwhile, this systematic trashing of the protest raises questions on the government's willingness and ability to talk to its own people without calling them names. It is not the protests that threaten amity, it is their demonisation which does that.

The Indian Express

Send your write ups and feedback at
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Bring Ambedkar & Gandhi together

RAMACHANDRA GUHA

In an interview that he gave last year, the Kannada writer (and activist), Devanur Mahadeva, urged democrats not to view Ambedkar and Gandhi as rivals and adversaries. In the journey towards true equality, he said, they should rather be seen as colleagues and co-workers. Thus, as Mahadeva remarked: "Ambedkar had to awaken the sleeping Dalits and then make the journey. Gandhi had to make the immense effort of uplifting, correcting, changing those who were drowned in Hindu caste religion, in caste wells, to take a step forward. When you see all this, maybe Gandhi would not have traversed far without the presence of Ambedkar. Similarly, I feel that without the liberal tolerant atmosphere created by Gandhi in the wells of Hindu caste religion, then this cruel Savarna society may not have tolerated Ambedkar as much as it did then."

Mahadeva continued: "If it is our understanding that it is the Savarnas who need to change if India has to liberate itself from caste, then Gandhi is necessary. In the fight for Dalit civil rights, Ambedkar is absolutely necessary. Hence, I say that both should be brought together."

Mahadeva further observed: "Gandhi calls untouchability a 'sin'. Ambedkar calls it a 'crime'. Why are we seeing these as opposites? It is wise to understand both of these as necessary." (Mahadeva's words have been translated into English by Rashmi Munikempanna).

I recalled Devanur Mahadeva's remarks when seeing posters of Ambedkar and Gandhi being displayed together at student protests in Delhi. This was rare, if not unprecedented. For it is much more common to see Gandhi and Ambedkar being celebrated separately. Indeed quite often they are placed in opposition to one another.

In the past, it was usually admirers of Gandhi who saw these two great Indians in adversarial terms. In the 1930s and 1940s, Ambedkar had often used polemic language to attack Gandhi and his ideas. This outraged Congressmen, who could not countenance any criticism of their beloved Bapu. They responded by characterizing Ambedkar as an apologist for British rule, damned him for serving on the Viceroy's Executive Council during the Quit India movement of 1942 and so on.

In recent decades, it has more often been Ambedkarites who have critiqued Gandhi. They have



seen his attempts at reforming the caste system as weak-kneed and half-hearted. They have charged him with patronizing their hero (during the Poona Pact and after), and criticized Gandhi's political heir, Jawaharlal Nehru, for not using Ambedkar's talents and abilities adequately in the years that the two served together in the first cabinet of free India.

In states such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, attacks on Gandhi by Dalit intellectuals have been intense and unrelenting. In Karnataka, however, subaltern writers have taken a broader view. In his superb book, *The Flaming Feet*, the late D.R. Nagaraj urged us to see the work of Ambedkar and Gandhi as complementary. The work of undermining the caste system and of delegitimizing untouchability required both pressure from Dalits themselves — which Ambedkar provided — and from upper-caste reformers — which is what Gandhi represented. Nagaraj was a friend of Devanur Mahadeva's, and the two must surely have exercised a reciprocal influence on one another.

Whether or not they know of their work, the students of Jamia and the women of Shaheen Bagh substantiate the large-hearted analysis of Nagaraj and Devanur Mahadeva. Like those two thinkers of Karnataka, these brave protesters of Delhi admirably urge us not to posit Ambedkar and Gandhi as rivals. Rather, they urge us to view them instead as colleagues, whose legacies need to be brought together in the struggle for democracy and pluralism.

After a recent visit to Shaheen Bagh, the Delhi-based writer, Omair Ahmad, noted, in a long and most interesting Twitter thread, that among the reasons that there were more posters of Ambedkar than Gandhi on display was that, as he put it, "people have moved from thanking a leader for win-

ning freedom, to thanking a leader who gave them tools to assert their own rights as free citizens."

On reading this, I wrote to Omair Ahmad saying: "I agree (and retweeted) but with one caveat, that when it came to the promotion of Hindu-Muslim harmony, no Indian (not even Nehru) matched Gandhi. But that is a point of detail. More broadly, it is wonderful to see Ambedkar and Gandhi invoked together, rather (as we have become accustomed to seeing) than being placed in opposition."

To this Ahmad responded: "I very much agree, and deliberately phrased it in that way not only to contrast the contributions, but also to show that they were complementary."

Ahmad further observed: "The leaders of that time had their differences (and failings), and it's okay for people to choose which appeals more to them personally, but this necessity to pull down one in order to praise another doesn't appeal to me very much."

The countrywide protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act have been impressive in many ways, not least in the mass participation and leadership role of women. In this respect, too, the invocation of both Ambedkar and Gandhi, together, is apposite. Ambedkar in particular had a thoroughgoing commitment to gender equality, as reflected not just in the Constitution whose drafting he oversaw, but also in the reform of Hindu personal laws that he pursued so vigorously. While in private life — as in the treatment of his wife — Gandhi could be a traditional Indian patriarch, in the public sphere he contributed substantially to the emancipation of women. Thus Gandhi was instrumental in Sarojini Naidu being made president of the Indian National Congress in 1925, at a time when it was not remotely conceivable that a major political

party in the supposedly advanced democracies of the West could have a female leader. And among the women activists inspired by Gandhi were such exemplary figures as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Usha Mehta, Mridula Sarabhai, Anis Kidwai, Subhadra Joshi, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Hansa Mehta.

Ambedkar famously asked oppressed Indians to "educate, organize, and agitate". The agency and courage which students and women have displayed in the protests against the CAA is entirely in the spirit of Ambedkar's call. Meanwhile, the defence of democracy and pluralism against Hindu majoritarianism resonates strongly with Gandhi's lifelong struggle for inter-religious harmony.

That the threat posed by Hindutva compels us to bring Ambedkar and Gandhi together is also underlined by Devanur Mahadeva. Thus, in his interview Mahadeva had remarked: "We should also listen to the words of Varanasi's 16-year-old boy: 'I will stand with Gandhi in Godse's country.' Otherwise, any kind of fundamentalism will first pluck out the eyes of one's own, making them blind. After that, brains are ripped out depriving one of any rationality. Later, the heart is taken out making one monstrous. And then a sacrifice will be asked for. This is increasing today. We have to save our children's eyes, their hearts and their brains from the jaws of fundamentalism immediately. It is better if young Dalit women take Gandhi to task after the wandering Gandhi-killer Godse's ghost has achieved moksha. If this awareness is not there, I worry that the danger will hit at the very roots of the Dalits."

To be sure, neither Ambedkar nor Gandhi were infallible. They made mistakes, harboured animosities and prejudices. One must not invoke them mechanically, nor follow them blindly. We live in a radically different world from the one they inhabited. The political and technological challenges of the third decade of the 21st century are very different from the political and technological challenges of the middle decades of the 20th century. However, the moral and social challenges remain broadly the same. The battle for caste and gender equality is unfinished. The struggle for inter-faith harmony remains vital and urgent. To overcome the massed, malign, forces of Hindutva, we need Ambedkar and Gandhi on the same side.

The Telegraph

When Drones Control Society, People Will Be Mere Pawns

PETER APPS

Sometime last week, a small group of Chinese residents were sitting outside in the town of Chengdu. A small drone approached them, hovered nearby and began to speak.

"Playing mahjong outside is banned during the epidemic," said a voice from the drone. "You have been spotted. Stop playing and leave the site as soon as possible."

"Don't look at the drone, child," it continued. "Ask your father to leave immediately."

For many in the rest of the world, what China's *Global Times* described as a "creative use" of drones to tackle its coronavirus outbreak may still sound like a scene from a futuristic dystopia. Those in power in Beijing, however, clearly view it as something to be proud of. The video was shared widely on Chinese social media platforms such as Weibo and showcased in its English-language media for consumption abroad.

It was, perhaps, an indicator of two important things. Firstly, not only is China keen to use all means at its disposal to contain the coronavirus outbreak, but it may well use it to harden, strengthen, and demonstrate the growing capabilities of the most sophisticated surveillance state the world has ever known.

Secondly, of course, it demonstrates the proliferation of sophisticated, smaller unmanned vehicles and platforms as a tool for mass surveillance — as well as outright social

control. That's a trend likely to be seen well beyond the world's more authoritarian states, and it is one that democracies will need to have a much more public and accessible conversation about than they have managed so far.

Law enforcement

The uses for often already overstretched law enforcement and other security services are obvious. On Sunday, two people were stabbed in London by a recently released extremist, raising questions about the ability of authorities to keep track of individuals deemed risky. Automated technology solutions such as facial recognition software make that easier, but clearly also unsettle many.

In the United States, several towns and cities including Oakland and Berkeley in California and Cambridge, Massachusetts, have outright banned the use of facial recognition technology by law enforcement. Other states and locations are considering tighter controls — but across much of the rest of the United States and Western world, surveillance technology continues to be rolled out, sometimes largely unnoticed and unchallenged.

The next revolution, however, looks to involve much smaller drones that while less lethal, can also be a much more intrusive presence.

In August last year, the US Defense Advanced Research Project Agency demonstrated a drone swarm at Fort Benning, Georgia, that used largely off-the-shelf tech-

nology to autonomously locate, find, and monitor a specified object in a particular building — a city hall — in a US military training complex. The aim is for swarms of up to 250 devices to be able to operate largely independently or controlled by a single operator, providing a level of mobile surveillance and coordination not previously available.

Drone technology

For now, the Chinese example demonstrates the limitations of that technology. Beijing has been pouring resources into drone and surveillance technology for decades. In 2018, the South China Morning Post reported that such technology included developing flocks of unmanned aircraft designed to resemble birds such as doves in both appearance and movement. Such devices, it said, have already seen service along China's borders and in its north-western Xinjiang province, where a crackdown on Muslim minority ethnic Uighurs has long been a testbed for Beijing's surveillance state.

These devices, it said, have proved convincing enough that they can be flown over flocks of sheep — normally very sensitive to aircraft — without the animals determining their true nature. In the long run, Beijing almost certainly wants to match that technology with its other surveillance tools — widespread static cameras, and a colossal facial identification database the state has been building since 2015. Other tools reportedly developed by China include systems to identify people by

their distinctive walking gaits.

The surveillance drones in the *Global Times* videos, however, are clearly under the control of individual human operators, their voices broadcast by loudspeaker. Another video from Jiangsu province, eastern China, showed a policeman using a drone to check passengers at a crossing wearing masks. "The handsome guy who is on the phone, where is your mask? Put it on please," she said through its loudspeaker. "The girls who were eating food while walking, put on your masks please. You can eat when you arrive at home."

It's a reminder that for all its investment in technology, like previous mass surveillance states such as East Germany, China remains dependent on using humans to watch other humans. That, however, is changing very quickly. Artificial intelligence algorithms, combined with the colossal larger data trails humans already leave, has already proved a game changer when it comes to targeted advertising. Number plate recognition cameras mean most vehicles in most countries have their locations recorded sometimes dozens of times a day.

According to the *Global Times*, China's citizens viewed the Chengdu footage as useful entertainment while they stayed inside following the cancellation of Lunar New Year festivities. Whether that is true is another question — but it's an issue the rest of the world may also find itself grappling with sooner than it thinks.

Reuters