

The perils of ideological certitude

There seems an order of priorities in place for much of the electorate instead of the bread and butter governance issues



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Trend, fashions or ideas float in all societies. When does a trend become an ideology? What motivates an individual to commit itself to it?

An ideology is understood to mean a system of ideas that aspires to explain the world, and at times change it. Some call it the science of ideas aimed at serving people, ridding them of prejudice, preparing them for the sovereignty of a preferred idea.

Regulating behaviour

This would seem to be obvious ever since humans indulged in deductive and inductive reasoning for sheer survival in daily life. This process matured with time and experience down the ages. When simple explanations were not discernable, the phenomena were attributed to superhuman or divine forces. Each of these sought justice between human beings living together. Hence, the dictum that justice is the first law of human institutions. Evidence of it is available in the ancient codes of China, Mesopotamia, India and elsewhere. Overtime, these became religious codes and were duly sanctified. They all held out visions of an apogee of rectitude that humankind should endeavour to attain.

In all cases the purpose was to

regulate human behaviour in societies. The unstated premise in most was that the average member of a social group living together was too busy or simplistic or both to discern the full meaning or implications and was, for the purposes of these laws almost mindless in the sense of acting without particular reason, ready and willing to observe the dicta and the accompanying suggestion of punishment in case of disobedience. Obedience was sought to become habitual.

Quest for social order

The political atmospherics of the 19th and 20th centuries, particularly in Europe, sought to imbibe ideologies with their focus on change with greater meaning to the public. Hence, the assertion in Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*: The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.

The 20th century had a surfeit of these, each addressing an intended audience ranging from local and regional to global and premised on an idealised social order. Each also portrayed a demonology premised on social class or ethnic specificity, from whose tyranny salvation was promised. Thus, communism, with its vision of a classless communist society promising to 'each according to his/her need', made sense to the disposed. Similarly, and apart from various versions of anarchism in European worker movements, national socialism in Germany and Italy tantalised its votaries with the focus on the nation and the



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fatherland. All of these found emulators in colonial lands in India, China and in some parts of western Asia. They were all characterised by what Eric Hobsbawm depicted as 'ruthless, brutal and command' versions of socialism.

Freedom, communal ideas

In India, the germination of ideas of 'communal consciousness' (in cases with political overtones) on a societal scale alongside the urge for freedom from foreign rule surfaced in a segment of society in the closing decades of the 19th century. The effort by Mahatma Gandhi and his like-minded supporters was countered by many among Hindus and Muslims who deluded themselves as belonging to separate 'nations'. The rest was done by the Mountbatten Plan in 1947 and the death and destruction that accompanied it.

The past three decades have witnessed the ease with which the Bharatiya Janata Party's political approach and tactics have made headway in the public mind. Electoral data in recent decades indicates the shift in its vote share, diligently and successfully built upon

on exclusive identity in adversarial contrasts to what is dubbed non-Indic, meaning, principally, adherents of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam but politically focused on the latter two. Why and how has this order of priorities been put in place for a good segment of the electorate instead of the bread and butter governance issues? In State elections from 2014 to 2019, its vote share reached or crossed the 50% mark in Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Delhi, etc. Political commentators attribute this and its subsequent spectacular success essentially to successful advocacy of majoritarianism.

Agenda of artificial lines

This despite the dispersal of the minority population in most parts of India and the fact that in daily life, all sections of people, majority and minorities, live in the same or adjacent neighbourhoods, and in daily life work together. Despite it, artificial lines are sought to be drawn for laying the foundations of a majoritarian agenda by categorisation of faiths on the basis of their places of origin. How far back in history can one go when confronted with M.S. Golwalkar's observation that "Iran is nothing but the base of Aryabhumi" and part of "grand picture of our motherland"? So were the Aryans, and their faith and philosophy. Was it Indic or non-Indic?

It considered convenient to recall Swami Vivekanand's letter of June 1898 in which he said, "I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam theories of

Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind", adding that "for our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam – Vedanta brain and Islam body – is the only hope."

Also lost in the stated parameters of Hindutva is the constitutional imperative of fraternity.

Core issues

The Hindutva agenda of viewing matters through the prism of faith has perhaps disrupted or weakened the post-Mandal equations and brought electoral gains; so has the intoxicating impact of the success of the Ram Mandir movement. It, however, cannot explain away the policy and its implementation challenges posed by the ongoing protests against the farm laws, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, National Population Register, widespread unemployment and a host of other measures resulting in dire distress in most segments of society.

Does this 'ideological certitude' explain away the public distress and its widespread publicity within the country and in credible foreign media? Can it be attributed to a mindlessness of its supporters who are deluded by an uncritical ideological conviction? Would it reflect, public indoctrination notwithstanding, in the forthcoming State elections, and beyond it? Would the lord of Hindutva neither slumber nor sleep?

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