

GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS OF VIOLATING MINORITIES

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The US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the congressional body, in its annual report for 2015 has placed India amid more than 30 countries that meet a 'systematic, ongoing and egregious' standard for failing to protect religious freedoms. The Commission has retained India's status as a 'two-tier country of concern' on religious freedom, which it has been since 2009. 'Hindu nationalist groups for programmes of forced conversion (ghar waapsee), attacks on churches and hate campaigns against Muslim minorities' are the collective criterion of the above assessment of the Commission (The Hindu, New Delhi, 01 May 2015, p.1).

Two instances could be taken as the background to the above assessment. Firstly, in a stinging personalized addition, it (report) says, 'the statement is notable given the longstanding allegations that as Chief Minister of Gujarat, Mr Modi was complicit in anti-Muslim riots in the state', referring to his visa revocation in 2005 by the state department as 'the only person known to have been denied based on this provision' (The Hindu, New Delhi, 01 May 2015, p.10). Secondly, 'targeting the Ford Foundation, which has worked in India since 1952' (The Hindu, New Delhi, 01 May 2015, p.10), by keeping it on the watch list of the government of India, is a matter of added concern for the US. Curtailing funding to some 9000 NGOs, though in the pretext of national interest and security, seems to have been interpreted by the US Commission as smacking of communal overtones, as well.

Besides, more importantly, the Commission presented two recommendations to the US government. They read thus, 'the US government should integrate concern for religious freedom into bilateral contacts with India'; and 'US must urge the Indian government to publically rebuke officials and religious leaders making derogatory statements about religious communities' (The Hindu, New Delhi, 01 May 2015, p.1). These recommendations place on record the gravity with which the Commission has analyzed the predicament of the country concerned. No doubt, if the US government would act on the recommendations of the Commission, it will turn out to be a major setback both for India-US relations as well as for the very future of the present day Indian government. At any rate, if the government of India is mature enough to take the comment in its content value and act on it, India is sure to ascend the rungs of being truly incredible!

But unfortunately, the Ministry of External Affairs of the government of India ruled out the report of the US Commission stating that the report was based on a 'limited understanding of India, its Constitution and its Society' and that 'we take no cognizance of this report' (The Hindu, New Delhi, 01 May 2015, p.1). Obviously, this response is a statutory and strategic one, intended to evade and ignore the remarks of the US Commission as insignificant. All the same, the counter-argument presented by the government of India is that the US Commission is unaware of the Constitution of India as well as its society stands neither to any sound logic nor to the stark realities of the present day India that is increasingly becoming a matter of global concern today. The ignominy of being a 'two-tier country of concern' attributed to India cannot be argued out in terms of any prejudice or ignorance. The report of the Commission is a studied one and requires an honest probe into factors that have contributed to the making of an India that is transparently seen through the world outside India as insubstantial.

The world we live in today is a global village. This phenomenon has its merits and demerits. On the one hand, all countries and communities have technological knowhow and gadgets at their disposal, whether they have been produced in a particular country or community. On the other hand, no country or

community can hide its social realities, even those that are not presentable to others. The social media has never been so active and vocal as today. Earlier times, one could keep under cover disgraceful things, along with even those that would bring fame to one. Today, hide and seek doesn't work. Pieces of information, good or bad, travel instantly to the other end of the world. Transparency, as in sitting in a glass house, is the characteristic mark of the modern culture of the world. In such a situation, violations of all sorts, that too, of a communal nature, cannot escape the visibility of any nation or community in the world. Besides, the shadow under the lamp could be better seen from a distance, perhaps more clearly by others. To close the eyes against one's ugly face, while face-to-face with the mirror, wouldn't be a responsible response to the dismal communal picture of the present day India pointed out by the US Commission.

Violating minorities is a major crime in any country. The concept of minority and majority is often based on number. Number is not the only criterion for assessing the strength of a community. In addition, the idea of minority and majority even according to number is relative. One community that is minority in one place may be a majority elsewhere and vice versa. Therefore, discriminating a community because its numerical strength is low doesn't stand to any logic or ethics. The qualitative worth of communities, in terms of their contribution as well as their traditions, ideologies, cultures, values and ethos, is beyond the scope of being compared. Each of them has a dignity, uniqueness and integrity, which is its own and which cannot be substituted. For that matter, no community, small or big, has to be violated in any manner. Violating the other, individual or community, beyond doubt, is a crime against humanity. It is the duty of the government to ensure that such violations do not take place.

Moreover, as a matter of fact, violating a minority community, even in a small measure, is a sign of cowardice as well as smallness. When it is done by the majority community, it defeats all logic. Making the vulnerable a victim in any way is inhuman and it betrays all sense of culture, religion, ethics and spirituality. India, with all its ancient and incredible wisdom, should stand above such a weakness, so blatantly reflected in violating the minorities. Still further, taking a valid lesson from the US Commission for International Religious Freedom, India should emerge as a protector, well-wisher, friend and companion of the minority communities and their all-round wellbeing. The author, as deeply committed to inter-community relations and social harmony, looks forward to that day when India will receive a standing ovation from the nations of the world, for living the culture of 'unity in diversity' as the sublime beauty of life and 'vasudhiavkutumbakam' as the spirit of harmonious living, in its true sense. The ball is in the court of the present day government of India. Will its stakeholders play a winning game?

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