From the Editor’s Desk

The massive victory of BJP in UP Assembly Elections and appointment of Adityanath Yogi as the Chief Minister of UP has come as a big jolt to the plural inclusive values for which India stands. BJP achieved this victory by ‘uniting Hindu votes and dividing Muslim Votes’. The communal polarization was used extensively at grass roots. The electoral engineering and election management by BJP-RSS was close to perfect. The non communal parties have failed to learn the lesson from last General elections and the Bihar Model of alliance.

Right from the word go; Yogi the new Chief Minister ordered the closure of ‘illegal’ meat shops. In the atmosphere charged up due to the ‘RSS-BJP created Hindutva hysteria’, most of the mutton-beef shops were closed down attacked and the traders had to go on the strike. The attempt was to financially break the back of Muslim community. As one knows; so many shops of vegetables, other street shops have no valid license. In the present scenario the supporters of RSS-BJP politics have felt emboldened and that’s what has led to the murder of Pehlu Khan, a milk trader who was transporting cows with all legal papers. Tragically the concerned Rajasthan minister justified the acts of cow vigilantes in checking the cattle transport, while BJP’s Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi denied that any such event has happened. The hypocrisy of BJP is obvious as in Kerala its MP is promising good Beef, in Goa the ruling BJP Government dare not talk against beef and in North Eastern states there was a beef party organized by BJP after victory in elections there. It is purely a political issue which BJP is using to create a vote bank.

We are carrying two major interviews in this issue, one by Teesta Setalvad and another by Anand Patwardhan, both a very significant in the present worsening political scenario.

Ram Puniyani
(Editor)
MASSIVE CAMPAIGN AT COMMUNITY LEVEL
VOTER’S AWARENESS CAMPAIGN FOR PEACE, HARMONY & THEIR RIGHTS

Brief Description:
After the completion of 5 years term of Panchayatraj System in Odisha, the election process started from 11th January which will be completed by 5th March. We decided to take the opportunity to create an atmosphere among the common people to take effective participation in the election process. We also discussed about our intention with like minded social groups like ANTARANGA, Jibika Surakshya Manch & National Alliances of Women, All Odisha Anti-Liquor Campaign and other like minded organisations to aware the voters in the context of Kandhamal Violence and perspective of Constitutional Powers to Scheduled Areas. In that context we drafted and printed leaflets, small posters and banners and distributed/pasted and displayed the same in different parts of the locality to aware common people about their rights. We also organised street and community level meetings in different places about the issues of Kandhamal in particular and issues of state and nation in general. Our campaign as approach was common people to caste the vote for such candidate who has good personality, who is free from corruption, who are working for promoting of social justice and human rights, who is free from cases related with exploitations of women, child and minorities, who are promoting and supporting anti-
liquor campaign, who are not dividing common people in the basis of caste, creed and religion and not a member of such organisations as well as work for peace and harmony etc. We have started our campaign from the mid of January and accelerated the campaign from first week of February to 3rd week of February.

Theme:
'TO WHOM & WHY WE GIVE OUR VOTE?'

Rationale:
With an objective to spread the awareness among the common masses about the role of Panchayatraj and power of Gramsabha in scheduled area as well as to keep away the fundamentalist forces from the fray we designed the campaign and our campaign was proved fruitful.

Resource Person/s: Mr. Narendra Mohanty, Bijay Swain and along with Prafulla Samantara, the President of Lokshakti Abhijan, Odisha

Impact/Expected Impacts:
When the influence of fundamentalist forces are increasing day by day our campaign restricted such forces in our two Zilla Parishad (district council) zone of Daringbadi block of Kandhamal district.

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MARTYRS DAY OF SAHEED - E- AZAM BHAGAT SINGH OBSERVED

Phulbani, 23 March, 2017: Saheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh was the symbol of secularism against all religious intolerance. He was one of the

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architect who fought against British Imperialism towards a vision to build an democratic socialist country by demolishing the inequality and exploitative based society. We have to complete his dream which has yet not established after the 70 years of Independence. This was the call given by the different speakers at the Martyrs Day Observation by Campaign for Peace, Kandhamal on 23rd Mach.

Martyrs Day of Saheed - E- Azam Bhagat Singh has been observed with dignity by Campaign for Peace in the district of Kandhamal. Two event was organised at district head quarter at Phulbani and another at Government High School campus, Tikabali. The Phulbani meeting was presided by Adv. Deepak Rath and the objective of such observation has been highlighted by Ex. Prof. Tirth Jani (History) and Mr. Prasanna Biso, the Principal of VISWASS who are the Executive Body member of Campaign for Peace. The Programme was coordinated by Mr. Subramanyam Das, Mr. Jirimiya Sunamajhi and Debendra Mantry. Similarly the programme was organized at Government High School campus of Tikabali, Kandhamal where Md. Abdul Sukur, the President of the Campaign for Peace and Mr. Sanjay Digal took the leadership to organise the event. The Headmaster and Teachers were participated with the hundreds of students. The Secretary of the Campaign for Peace, Kandhamal has been expressed his gratitude to all the stake holders who worked for such successful events.
The fear of Hindu Rashtra: Should Muslims keep away from electoral politics?

Ajaz Ashraf

After Uttar Pradesh election results, Muslim community debates whether their very presence in the political arena has become problematic for Hindus.

Manan Vatsyayana/AFP

Four months before the Uttar Pradesh election results sent Muslims in India reeling in shock, former Rajya Sabha MP Mohammed Adeeb delivered a speech in Lucknow, which, in hindsight, might be called prescient.

“If Muslims don’t wish to have the status of slaves, if they don’t want India to become a Hindu rashtra, they will have to keep away from electoral politics for a while and, instead, concentrate on education,” Adeeb told an audience comprising mostly members of the Aligarh Muslim University’s Old Boys Association.
It isn’t that Adeeb wanted Muslims to keep away from voting. His aim was to have Muslim intellectuals rethink the idea of contesting elections, of disabusing them of the notion that it is they who decide which party comes to power in Uttar Pradesh.

Adeeb’s suggestion, that is contrary to popular wisdom, had his audience gasping. This prompted him to explain his suggestion in greater detail.

“We Muslims chose in 1947 not to live in the Muslim rashtra of Pakistan,” he said. “It is now the turn of Hindus to decide whether they want India to become a Hindu rashtra or remain secular. Muslims should understand that their very presence in the electoral fray leads to a communal polarisation. Why?”

Not one to mince words, Adeeb answered his question himself.

“A segment of Hindus hates the very sight of Muslims,” he said. “Their icon is Narendra Modi. But 75% of Hindus are secular. Let them fight out over the kind of India they want. Muslim candidates have become a red rag to even secular Hindus who rally behind the Bharatiya Janata Party, turning every election into a Hindu-Muslim one.”

Later in the day, Adeeb met Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, who was in Lucknow. To Adeeb, Azad asked, “Why did you deliver such a speech?”

It was now Azad’s turn to get a mouthful from Adeeb. He recalled asking Azad: “What kind of secularism is that which relies on 20% of Muslim votes? The Bahujan Samaj Party gets a percentage of it, as do the Samajwadi Party and the Congress.”

At this, Azad invited Adeeb, who was elected to the Rajya Sabha from Uttar Pradesh, to join the Congress. Adeeb
rebuffed the offer saying, “First get the secular Hindus together before asking me to join.”

Spectre of a Hindu rashtra

A day after the Uttar Pradesh election results sent a shockwave through the Muslim community, Adeeb was brimming with anger. He said, “Syed Ahmed Bukhari [the so-called Shahi Imam of Delhi’s Jama Masjid] came to me with a question: ‘Why aren’t political parties courting me for Muslim votes?’ I advised him to remain quiet, to not interfere in politics.” Nevertheless, Bukhari went on to announce that Muslims should vote the Bahujan Samaj Party.

“Look at the results,” Adeeb said angrily. “But for Jatavs, Yadavs, and a segment of Jats, most Hindus voted [for] the Bharatiya Janata Party.” His anger soon segued into grief and he began to sob, “I am an old man. I don’t want to die in a Hindu rashtra.”

Though Adeeb has been nudging Muslims to rethink their political role through articles in Urdu newspapers, the churn among them has only just begun. It is undeniably in response to the anxiety and fear gripping them at the BJP’s thumping victory in this politically crucial state.

After all, Uttar Pradesh is the site where the Hindutva pet projects of cow-vigilantism, love jihad, and ghar wapsi have been executed with utmost ferocity. All these come in the backdrop of the grisly 2013 riots of Muzaffarnagar, which further widened the Hindu-Muslim divide inherited from the Ram Janmabhoomi movement of the 1990s and even earlier, from Partition. Between these two cataclysmic events, separated by 45 years, Uttar Pradesh witnessed manifold riots, each shackling the future to the blood-soaked past.

I spoke to around 15 Muslims, not all quoted here, each of whom introspected deeply. So forbidding does the future appear to them that none even alluded to the steep decline in the number of Muslim MLAs, down from the high of 69 elected in 2012 to just 24 in the new Uttar Pradesh Assembly.

A relative holds a photograph of Mohammad Akhlaq in the village of Bisada near Delhi. Akhlaq was lynched by a mob in September 2015 after rumours that he had eaten beef. (Photo credit: AFP).

They, in their own ways, echoed Adeeb, saying that the decline in representation of Muslims was preferable to having the Sangh Parivar rule over them with the spectre of Hindutva looming.

“Muslims need to become like the Parsis or, better still, behave the way the Chinese Indians do in Kolkata,” said poet Munawwar Rana. “They focus on dentistry or [their] shoe business, go out to vote on polling day and return to work.”

He continued: “And Muslims?” They hold meetings at night, cook deghs (huge
Readers would think Adeeb, Rana and others are poor losers, not generous enough to credit the BJP’s overwhelming victory in Uttar Pradesh to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s development programme. In that case readers should listen to Sudhir Panwar, the Samajwadi Party candidate from Thana Bhawan in West Uttar Pradesh, who wrote for Scroll.in last week on the communal polarisation he experienced during his campaign.

In Thana Bhawan, there were four principal candidates – Suresh Rana, accused in the Muzaffarnagar riots, stood on the BJP ticket; Javed Rao on the Rashtriya Lok Dal’s; Abdul Rao Waris on the Bahujan Samaj Party’s, and Panwar on the Samajwadi Party’s. It was thought that the anger of Jats against the BJP would prevent voting on religious lines in an area where the Muslim-Hindu divide runs deep.

This perhaps prompted Rana to play the Hindu card, and the Muslims who were more inclined to the Rashtriya Lok Dal switched their votes to the Bahujan Samaj Party, believing that its Dalit votes would enhance the party’s heft to snatch Thana Bhawan.

Communal polarisation
Sample how different villages voted along communal lines.

In the Rajput-dominated Hiranwada, the Bahujan Samaj Party bagged 14 votes, the Rashtriya Lok Dal not a single vote, the Samajwadi Party seven, and the Bharatiya Janata Party a whopping 790.

In Bhandoda, a village where the Brahmins are landowners and also dominate its demography, followed by Dalits, the Bahujan Samaj Party secured 156 votes, the Rashtriya Lok Dal zero, the Samajwadi Party nine, and the Bharatiya Janata Party 570.

In the Muslim-dominated Jalalabad, the Bahujan Samaj Party received 453 votes, the Rashtriya Lok Dal 15, the Samajwadi Party 6 and the Bharatiya Janata Party 23.

In Pindora, where Jats are 35% and Muslims around 30% of the population, the Bahujan Samaj Party polled 33 votes, the Rashtriya Lok Dal 482, the Samajwadi Party 33, and the Bharatiya Janata Party 278, most of which is said to have come from the lower economically backward castes.

In Devipura, where the Kashyaps are numerous, the Bahujan Samaj Party got 86 votes, the Rashtriya Lok Dal 42, the Samajwadi Party 1 and the Bharatiya Janata Party 433.

In Oudri village, where the Jatavs are in the majority, the Bahujan Samaj Party bagged 343 votes, the Rashtriya Lok Dal 15, the Samajwadi Party 12, and the Bharatiya Janata Party 22.

This voting pattern was replicated in village after village. Broadly, the Jat votes split between the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Rashtriya Lok Dal, the Muslim votes consolidated behind the Bahujan Samaj Party, with the Samajwadi Party getting a slim share in it, the Jatavs stood solidly behind the Bahujan Samaj Party, and all others simply crossed over to the Bharatiya...
Janata Party. The BJP’s Suresh Rana won the election from Thana Bhawan.

“Can you call this election?” asked Panwar rhetorically. “It is Hindu-Muslim war through the EVM [Electronic Voting Machine].” Panwar went on to echo Adee: “I feel extremely sad when I say that Muslims will have to keep away from contesting elections. This seems to be the only way of ensuring that elections don’t turn into a Hindu-Muslim one.”

The Bahujan Samaj Party’s Waris differed. “Is it even practical?” he asked. “But yes, Muslims should keep a low profile.”

Indeed, those with historical perspective think Uttar Pradesh of 2017 mirrors the political ambience that existed there between 1938 and 1946 – a seemingly unbridgeable Hindu-Muslim divide, a horrifyingly communalised public discourse, and a contest for power based on mobilisation along religious lines.

Among them is Mohammad Sajjad, professor of history at Aligarh Muslim University. “The 69 MLAs in the last Assembly was bound to, and did, raise eyebrows,” he said.

But what irks Hindus even more is that Muslims constitute nearly one-third of all members in panchayats and local urban bodies. “It is they who have become a sore point with Hindus,” said Sajjad. “When they see Muslim panchayat members become examples of the rags-to-riches story, the majority community feels aggrieved. It is not that Hindu panchayat members are less corrupt. But every third panchayat member being Muslim has given credibility to the narrative that Muslims are being favoured.”

The Hindu angst against Muslim empowerment is also on account of both the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party being popularly perceived to be indifferent to the aspirations of certain subaltern social groups. For instance, it is this indifference that has led to non-Jatav Dalits and most backward castes, clubbed under the Other Backward Classes for reservations, to leave the Bahujan Samaj Party, as non-Yadav middle castes have left the Samajwadi Party. They did so in

Women in Kairana village queue to cast their vote during the first phase of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections on February 11. (Photo credit: Reuters).

Hindu anger against Muslims

For sure, Muslims feel that the binary of secularism-communalism has put them in a bind. Lawyer Mohd Shoab, who heads the Muslim Rihai Manch, pointed to the irony of it. “For 70 years, we Muslims have fought against communalism,” he said. “But it has, nevertheless, grown by 70 times.”
response to Mayawati turning hers into primarily the party of Jatavs, and the Samajwadi Party pursuing the Yadavisation of the administration.

“These aspirational Hindu groups are angry with the SP [Samajwadi Party] and the BSP [Bahujan Samaj Party],” said Sajjad. “Their anger against them also turned into anger against Muslims.” This is because it is popularly felt that the support of Muslims to the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party brings them to power, turning these parties callously indifferent to the aspirations of other groups.

It is to neutralise the efficacy of Muslim votes, and also to teach their parties of choice a lesson, that these aspirational groups have flocked to the BJP. “This is why the very presence of Muslims in the political arena has become problematic for Hindus,” Sajjad said.

So then, should Muslims take Adeeb’s cue and retreat from the political arena or at least keep a low profile?

Sajjad replied, “Go ahead and vote the party of your choice. But after that, play the role of a citizen. If people don’t get electricity, protest with others. You can’t be forgiving of those for whom you voted only because they can keep the BJP out of power. This is what angers aspirational Hindu social groups.”

Indeed, it does seem a travesty of justice and democracy that Muslims should rally behind the Samajwadi Party in Muzaffarnagar after the riots there. Or that they voted for the Bahujan Samaj Party in Thana Bhawan in such large numbers even though Mayawati didn’t even care to visit the Muslim families who suffered unduly during the riots.

**Introspection and self-criticism**

Like Sajjad’s, most narratives of Muslims have a strong element of self-criticism. Almost all vented their ire against Muslim clerics. Did they have to direct Muslims which party they should vote for? Didn’t they know their recklessness would trigger a Hindu polarisation?

Unable to fathom their irresponsible behaviour, some plump for conspiracy theories. It therefore doesn’t come as a surprise to hear Obaidullah Nasir, editor of the Urdu newspaper *Avadhnama*, say, “They take money from the Bharatiya Janata Party to create confusion among Muslims. I got abused for writing this. But how else can you explain their decision to go public with their instructions to Muslims?”
Poet Ameer Imam, who teaches in a college in the Muslim-dominated Sambhal constituency, said, “Muslims will have to tell the maulanas that their services are required in mosques, not in politics. When Muslims applaud their rabble rousers, can they complain against those in the BJP?”

To this, add another question: When Mayawati spoke of Dalit-Muslim unity, didn’t Muslims think it would invite a Hindu backlash?

True, members of the Muslim community are doing a reality-check and are willing to emerge from the fantasy world in which they thought that they decided which party won an election. The Uttar Pradesh results have rudely awakened them to the reality of being a minority, of gradually being reduced to political insignificance, and their status as an equal citizen – at least in their imagination – challenged and on the way to being undermined.

But this does not mean they wish to enter yet another world of fantasy, which journalist and Union minister MJ Akbar held out to them in the piece he penned for the *Times of India* on March 12. Akbar wrote,

“…[T]his election was not about religion; it was about India, and the elimination of its inherited curse, poverty. It was about good governance.”

One of those whom I spoke to laughed uproariously on hearing me repeat Akbar’s lines. So you can say that with them...
believing their future is darkled, Muslims at least haven’t lost their humour. **Ajaz Ashraf is a journalist in Delhi. His novel, The Hour Before Dawn, has as its backdrop the demolition of the Babri Masjid. It is available in bookstores.**

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**Adityanath Ji don't Malign Romeo**

L.S. Herdenia

I request UP Chief Minister and RSS Parivar not to malign Romeo. Please stop using Romeo's name with your women protection programme. I hope these people are not aware that Romeo and Juliet is the title of one of the dramas written by William Shakespeare. It is an immortal love story. It is also the story of two lowers whose deaths ultimately reconcile their feuding families.

Romeo and Juliet belong to a tradition of tragic romances stretching back to antiquity. The plot is based on an Italian tale. Adityanath you must know that Romeo never try to tease Juliet. He never tried to molest or rape her.

It is a pure love-nothing else. In fact lovers should be told that they should emulate Romeo and Juliet. It is such a powerful love story which has inspired hundreds of film makers and have been staged thousand times in various countries of the world. Romeo and Juliet love story is in the glorious company of Heer-Ranjha, Laila-Majnu, Meera and Krishna. Meera gave up luxuries of a palace and continued to sing "Mere to Girdhar Gopal, Dusra Na Koi".

Also can we forget the love story of British king who sacrificed crown for the sake of love. Love is one of the purest human elements, don't malign it.

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**3. Harmony**

**Holi and Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent**

Ravi Nitesh

Holi, a festival of colours has lots of stories around its origin but at the same time, the very nature of this festival has a philosophical note attached to it and that is ‘losing one’s identity’. Colours applied in Holi are from a vast range of colours and speaks of the importance of diversity; applying these colours involve

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‘colouring everyone’ and doing so, it denotes equality and equal identity. In the color smeared face, the identity, the divisiveness of it, is also lost.

The Indian subcontinent, as a diverse space and with a history of its ‘cultural absorbency’ has brought Holi in different contexts and it is its beauty that despite being called as a Hindu festival by many, it has history tracings among Muslims as well where the context of Holi was specially brought. With its beauty of diversity, our society has brought many beautiful examples of cultural harmony and intermingling. Holi is one such festival that spreads and celebrates universal brotherhood.

Mughals in India, as we know, adopted many traditions and started many new. Holi was one festival, tradition that was beautifully adopted by Mughal Emperors and Sufi saints.

In the reign of Emperor Jahangir, Holi is called Holi as ‘Eid-e-Gulabi’ or ‘Aab-e-Pashi’ and he even played it with his queen. The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri talks about this Holi festival.

Verses of Bahadur Shah Zafar (Last Mughal emperor of India) has been adopted very commonly by people. It says ‘Kyomope rang kimaaripichkari, Dekhokunwarjidoongi main gaari’ (Why you sprayed color on me, Now my prince, I will swear you). It is told that during his reign, special arrangements were made to celebrate holi and groups of people singing Holi songs and making jokes were allowed. On this day, making fun even on the cost of princess of princesses and it was not a punishable act that time. Spray of colorful and scented yellow flowers and sprayed through syringes of wood and metals.

‘Hori Khelungi, KehBismillah’ was a poem by Bulleh Shah, a 16th century Sufi poet. He has written in this poem about his desire to lose himself in God. Syed Abdullah Shah Qadri or Bullehshah lived in 17th century in places like Multan and Kasur that falls in present day Pakistan. Bulleshah was a humanist and philosopher and has written poetry on many subjects including social issues. His poetry has been sung by renowned singers of modern time including Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Abida Parveen, Wadali Brothers and others. In his Holi poem, he expressed ‘nambakiratnchadhi. Boondpariallahallah’

Amir Khusro’s love with ‘Aaj rang hai’ is known to many people when he sung this song for his peer Auliya. Khusro was a 13th century poet, Sufi musician and scholar and spiritual disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya. Khusro is known as ‘Father of Indian Qawali’ and also has the credit for the invention of musical instruments like Sitar and Tabla. Khusro expressed in another verse ‘Kheloongoholi, Khawaja jiaaye’.

The Nawabs of Lucknow celebrated Holi as a festival of everyone. Wajid Ali Shah, the last nawab of Awadh has written ‘More kanhajoayepalatke, Abkholimaikhelungidatke’. Wajid Ali Shah also distributed sweets and thandai (a special Holi drink) to everyone in his kingdom.

Even ‘HolikheleinAsafuddaulaWazir’ is one of the famous lines of renowned poet Meer and has talked about
Asaf ud-Daula was nawab of Awadh in 18th century and is known as the architect general of Lucknow. He shifted the capital of Awadh from Faizabad to Lucknow and built famous structures like Bara Imambara and Rumi Darwaza. One of his very famous work includes construction of Asafi Imambara as a charity project in 1784 to generate employment after a famine. It included more than 20,000 people in construction of a structure that was neither a mosque nor mausoleum. It was also told that to protect dignity of noble and upper class (as they were also affected in famine), common citizens were employed to construct building in daytime and noble and upper class people were employed to demolish the structure on every fourth night. They all received payments for their work. There is still a famous saying ‘Jiskonadeinmaula, uskodeinAsaf ud-Daula’ means one who does not receive from Lord, will receive from Asaf ud-Daula.

Abida Parveen, renowned Pakistani Sufi Singer, beautifully sung verses of the Sufi poet Shah Niaz where the poet says ‘Holi ho rahi hai Ahmed jiyakedaar, Hazartalika rang banohai Hasaan Hussain Khilar’ (Holi is happening at beloved Ahmed’s door, Color has become Hazrat Ali and Hasan and Hussain are playing.’

It is also said that even today’s old Lucknowchowk area witness the ‘Holi Baraat’ jointly by Hindus and Muslims that runs along Muslim dominant areas and receive showers of flowers and colours.

Holi was not just restricted to Nawabs and Emperors, it also went to writings of many poets. Even freedom fighter and poet Hasrat Mohani writes ‘Mohechhed karat nandlal, Liyekhadea beergulal’.

Even Nawabs of Bengal like Murshid Quli Khan Alivardi, Siraj ud-Daula and Mir Jafar celebrated holi as well. The shrine of Haji Waris Ali Shah in Deva Sharif observe Holi even in today’s India.

If we say that this is the society we hail from, we desire and we contribute for, what can be more beautiful than this!

Ravi Nitesh is a Delhi-based peace activist. He is the founder of Mission Bhartiyaam and Aaghaz-e-Dosti (An Indo-Pak Friendship Initiative). He can be reached at ravinitesh@gmail.com

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Anwesha Madhukalya - Hindus And Muslims Join Forces To Save A Mosque - A lesson in brotherhood from Gujarat

Posted: 28 Feb 2017 05:33 AM PST

After communal riots broke out in Ahmedabad's Kalupur neighbourhood 30 years ago, the area's Muslim residents began to avoid the prayer hall located in the predominantly Hindu area. When riots broke out again after the demolition of Babri Masjid in
December 1992, devotees stopped going to the mosque altogether. According to a report in the *Times Of India*, the mosque, which is nearly 100 years old, is located near three temples. After it was abandoned, it fell into disrepair, with weeds and foliage taking over the prayer hall. However, in March 2016, *azaan* was heard from within the mosque for the first time in three decades.

The communal riots of 2002, set forth an unlikely but not unprecedented chain of events. Residents near the mosque volunteered and came together to save the mosque. Hindus reached out to the Muslim community and people from both the communities set forth to protect and save the mosque.

They cleared the vegetation and contributed resources for the mosque's renovation. The efforts led to solidifying the bond between the two communities and an atmosphere of peace prevailed. In fact, a set of keys to the mosque have been given to flower sellers Poonam Parekh and Kaushik Rami, who set up shop near the mosque. As reported in *Times Of India*, the priest of one of the temples in the vicinity said that after the rehabilitation of the mosque, Muslim youths do not have to go to another locality to pray anymore.

As they say, the way to bring in love and peace is by love and peace. 

http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/02/27/hindus-and-muslims-joining-forces-to-save-a-mosque-shows-that-hu/?utm_hp_ref=in-homepage

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**Beef on Rampage**


**Beef is yummy in Kerala too; BJP candidate in Malappuram says he will start ‘good slaughterhouses’ if voted to power**

SOUTHLY April 2, 2017, 9:44 am

At a time the BJP apparently eyeing towards a ‘vegetarian India’ closing down meat shops across the country, the saffron party's candidate for Malappuram by-poll in Kerala said that he will take all necessary steps to avail good quality meat in the constituency. The candidate N Sriprakash also said he will start quality slaughter houses if voted to power.

Addressing the media, the BJP candidate in Malappuram Lok Sabha constituency, which is going to poll booths on 12 April, also said the BJP has no objection towards consuming meat.

*Secular Action Network, April 2017*
There is no issue in having whatever food one likes. BJP has not banned beef in any of the states, instead, cow slaughter was banned. I will start quality slaughter houses here if voted to power N Sriprakash, BJP Candidate, Malappuram

He also urged people not to vote against him thinking he is against beef consumption.

The BJP candidates comments came while the BJP is up in arms against slaughter houses at many states where the saffron party or its allies lead the government. Uttar Pradesh and Jarkhand have closed down several ‘illegal’ slaughter houses.

Seven illegal slaughterhouses were sealed in Bihar’s Rohtas district after the Patna High Court directed them be sealed within six weeks.

Various cow protection organisations from Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have also started demanding for the closure of various meat shops in the respective states.

The Bajrang Dal and the Vishva Hindu Parishad activists have also been asking for an increase in the punishment for cow slaughter to life term in the Maharashtra assembly replicating the Gujarat law.

In Karnataka too, the Gau Samarakshana Prakoshta and Karnataka Federation of Gaushaalas reportedly have demanded 1,700 meat shops in the city be closed down as they are unauthorised.

The Gujarat government made cow slaughtering punishable with life imprisonment. Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh said his government will hang those kill cow.

However, in Northeast, BJP has taken a contradictory stance. They party leadership there said they will be no beef ban if the party comes to power in Northeastern states.

The by-election in the Muslim majority Malappuram constituency was necessitated after the passing away of Muslim League veteran E. Ahamed.

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At UN: Minorities In India

Teesta Setalvad delivers an indictment at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on the human rights situation in India

Renowned Indian activist speaks on behalf of IAMC, Advocates for Human Rights and other partner organizations

March 21, 2017
Indian American Muslim Council (http://www.iamc.com) a non-profit advocacy group dedicated to safeguarding India's pluralist and tolerant ethos, today welcomed Ms. Teesta Setalvad's hard hitting testimony at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 15, 2017.

One of India's most recognized activists and a strident voice against hate and sectarianism, Ms. Setalvad spoke on behalf of The Advocates for Human Rights, Indian American Muslim Council, Jamia Teachers' Solidarity Association and the Quill Foundation. Her testimony was part of a larger effort by IAMC and its partner organizations that includes a joint submission to the UN Human Rights Council for India's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) scheduled for May 4, 2017. IAMC has also made a separate joint submission with Ms. Setalvad's organization "Citizens for Justice and Peace," for the same UPR.

Her brief testimony was before a full session of the UN Human Rights Council, with all the UN member countries in attendance, convened to review the report of the UN Rapporteur on Minority Rights. Ms. Setalvad noted that since the UN Special Rapporteur's 2013 General Assembly report, the following developments had taken place in India:

Speeches by political leaders and members of Parliament had exacerbated the violence in Muzaffarnagar that claimed over 60 lives and left thousands homeless

1. The targeting of religious minorities accused of "improper" conversions from Hinduism

2. In the wake of state laws banning the sale of beef, mob attacks on people alleged to have beef in their possession have becoming a recurring event

3. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial or arbitrary executions noted that encounter killings "have become virtually a part of unofficial State policy" in India.

4. The above acts are often committed with impunity stemming in part from close alignment between the government and non-state actors.

5. Law enforcement agencies fabricate terrorism cases where Muslims are often targets.

Ms. Setalvad then went on to mention that "progress in minority rights protection is under threat, including by hate speech, xenophobic rhetoric and incitement to hatred against minorities." She then voiced the partner organizations' position, joining the Special Rapporteur "in calling on UN Member States and the Human Rights Council to recognize that States bear..."
the primary duty to protect the security of religious minorities with positive and preventive actions, through active engagement with religious minorities."

"Ms. Teesta Setalvad’s testimony and the joint submissions of the partner organizations mark a turning point in international spotlight on the human rights situation in India", said Mr. Ajit Sahi, noted journalist and Advocacy Director for the Indian American Muslim Council. Mr. Sahi, along with Jawad Khan, President of IAMC and Jennifer Presthold V.P. of AHR were also present at the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Indian American Muslim Council is the largest advocacy organization of Indian Muslims in the United States with chapters across the nation. For more information, please visit our website at: http://iamc.com/

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References:

1. Video of Teesta Setalvad Testimony at UN Human Rights Council at 22 minutes in link below


2. Joint Submission of Indian American Muslim Council, The Advocates for Human Rights, Jamia Teachers' Solidarity Association and the Quill Foundation

   https://www.scribd.com/document/342451699/India-UPR-Submission#from_embed

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Secular Action Network, April 2017
Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy

From Javed Anand: General Secretary MSD

Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy applauds the achievements of two young Muslim women, Nahid Afrin (Assam) and Suhana Sayed (Karnataka), who have wowed music lovers cutting across religions with their outstanding singing talents.

And it condemns the attempts of certain Muslims who with their blinkered brand of Islam seek to silence the nightingales of Indian Islam.

In the latest instance of dissonant discourse, 46 Muslims from Assam, maulvis and madrassa teachers included, have put out a pamphlet seeking to muzzle the 16-year-old Nahid Afrin who was the first runner-up in the 2015 season of a musical TV reality show.

Five days earlier, 22-year-old Suhana Sayed was trolled by an outfit that identified itself as “Mangalore Muslims” after she received a standing ovation at a Kannada reality TV show for her superb rendering of a bhajan in praise of Lord Balaji. The judges even applauded the young hijab-wearing woman as a “symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity.”

The pamphleteers from Assam and the trolls from Mangalore are cultural misfits who seem to have imbibed nothing of India’s composite culture where for centuries Hindus and Muslims have dressed alike, shared the same cuisine, spoken the same language, sung, danced and played music together.

Who hasn’t heard of Bismillah Khan, or Allah Rakha’s jugalbandi with Ravi Shankar? Or Mohammad Rafi singing, Hari Om! Man tadpat Hari darshan ko aaj with lyrics by Shakeel Badayuni and music composed by Naushad?

Suhana who was warned that even “her parents will not go to heaven” because of her sinful act reportedly went “underground”. But the gutsy Nahid is not so easily frightened.

“I was shocked and broken from inside at first, but many Muslim singers gave me inspiration to not quit music, will never do so,” she has told the media.

Bravo, Nahid. Be not afraid, Suhana.

Through the simple act of singing their songs, they project an image of Muslims at peace with the world. In striking contrast, through their pamphleteering and threat of hell-fire, the maulanas of Assam and the “Mangalore Muslims” present before others the unpleasant picture of bigoted Muslims and an intolerant Islam.
Sing on Nahid, sing on Suhana. Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy is proud of you.

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4. Book Talk

“Pale shadow of Harmony will remain” – Saeed Naqvi in AMU

April 5, 2017

TCN News

Aligarh : Noted journalist Mr. Saeed Naqvi today delivered a talk on ‘Fair is Foul and Foul is Fair’ at the Cultural Hall of Maulana Azad Library of Aligarh Muslim University.

Saeed Naqvi said that historically Indians have enjoyed a plural and secular culture in which Islam and Hinduism and other faiths complemented and celebrated each other and Urdu culture merged with Awadhi and Brajbhasha.

Mr Saeed Naqvi addressing at the Global Talk on Fair is Foul and foul is Fair
He added that it is pity that certain forces are trying to destroy the unique social fabric and glorious culture of India. “We Indians have always been proud of how different faiths have been co-existing peacefully and creating a culture that drew upon the best that each community had to offer,” said Mr Naqvi.

He further said it is feared that soon only a pale shadow of the harmony that once existed will remain unless we do something about it.

During the talk, Mr. Naqvi threw light on various deliberate and inadvertent acts that have contributed to the ‘othering’ of certain communities in India. He spoke on how divisions between different religions began in the modern era.

AMU Vice Chancellor, Lt. General Zameeruddin Shah (Veteran) in his presidential remarks said that if there is hatred and if there are differences, it is important to identify the quislings and prevent attacks on our Country’s social fabric.

General Shah pointed out that the real danger lies in the silence of people and it is the need of the hour to speak up in genuine terms on the behalf of all communities. He further said that people need to speak from their mind and avoid being aggressive.
AMU Vice Chancellor also said that AMU students are the future of the nation and they should make the maximum use of their time in reading and understanding things for the betterment of the country.

Delivering the welcome address, Professor Shafey Kidwai said that Mr Naqvi’s books in general and ‘Being the Other-The Muslim in India’ in particular is an essential read for those interested in understanding the forces that have shaped the religious divide and its consequences.

Prof. Kidwai added that in the course of reading the book, readers can investigate the major missteps that took place after independence and see how some instances could have been better handled. He also pointed out that Mr. Naqvi’s book points out at how our politicians, power brokers, ordinary citizens have failed to reach out to bridge the divide between various communities.

While proposing the vote of thanks, AMU Public Relations Officer, Mr Omar S Peerzada conveyed gratitude to the Vice Chancellor and Pro Vice Chancellor for having constituted the Bicentenary Committee for the celebrations of the 200th birth anniversary of AMU founder Sir Syed Ahmad Khan under the able leadership of Professor A R Kidwai in much advance.

He added that AMU holds an emotional bond with Mr. Naqvi and looks up to him for educating the young minds in the campus. “I am sure, Mr. Naqvi’s mesmerizing talk on the chosen subject of his interest has left a deep impact on everyone present in today’s program,” said Mr. Peerzada.

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5. Interviews

1. Teesta Setalvad

Teesta Setalvad stays the course to fight the good fight

Teesta Setalvad has published her memoir on a career dedicated to defending human rights. Here, she stresses on the need for restorative, not retributive, justice.

Salil Tripathi

Civil rights activist Teesta Setalvad has written a memoir, Foot Soldier Of The Constitution. This is not how she describes herself; this is how Fali Nariman, one of India’s seniormost lawyers, sees her. Nariman’s compliment not only recognizes Setalvad’s own tireless campaigning to
defend human rights, it is also a respectful nod to her family—her great-grandfather Chimanlal Setalvad was one of three Indians on the nine-member Hunter Commission that investigated the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. Chimanlal Setalvad asked pointed questions that made General Dyer, who ordered the firing on a peaceful gathering at the Jallianwala Bagh, squirm. Her grandfather, Motilal Setalvad, was independent India’s first attorney general. Her father Atul Setalvad distinguished himself as a leading advocate in the Bombay high court, arguing cases that expanded civil liberties. The burden of history on Teesta Sebalvad’s shoulders is rather heavy.

And she has fought for accountability for the violence in Gujarat in 2002 with the steadfast, stubborn dedication that’s common to many human rights defenders. I have known Setalvad for almost four decades, since we were students in Mumbai—she studied at Elphinstone College when I was at the Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics in the early 1980s; she was a reporter at The Daily and Business India when I was at India Today. In her memoir, she outlines the path her life has taken, the hurdles she has encountered, and the optimism that underlines her work. Edited excerpts from an interview:

Do you think there are sufficient safeguards for fundamental rights in the Constitution?

Yes, but they need to be deepened. For instance, the justiciability of fundamental rights has remained restricted to state violations. Large-scale violations by non-state actors remain more difficult to litigate. As also the directive principles, which have thereafter needed special legislation, like for instance the Right to Information Act, the right to food Act, and the right to education Act. The 2013 law enacted to protect the lands of small farmers, landholders and tribals (Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act) has also made another set of rights justiciable but this Central law has been vicariously undermined by four state governments: Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Jharkhand.

Are the reasonable restrictions in the Constitution on freedom of expression indeed reasonable?

This issue has to be revisited taking into consideration not just what, if at all, such restrictions should be, but the fact that India has seen the spawning, with impunity, of speech that incites violence against sections of Indians. This is done by politicians, elected representatives, who are all violating their oath of office to the Indian Constitution.

What structural changes are needed so that massacres such as those we saw post-Godhra in 2002, and of Sikhs in 1984, don’t recur?
With this “tu tu mein mein” (squabbling) level of discourse, which the Indian media does little to deepen, little time and attention is paid to best practices or best standards for our criminal justice system: The fact that we need time-bound trials (in India, an average criminal trial takes 15-20 years for completion); independent standards of investigation and prosecution (prosecutors should be good lawyers paid decent salaries and appointed by the judiciary, not the executive); and witness protection. Courts need to not just limit adjournments but ensure high standards within trial procedures so that witness survivors—often from marginalized backgrounds—can depose with dignity and without fear or favour.

You have been scrutinized, criticized, investigated. Yet you persist. What drives you?

The belief and conviction that not only have I/we done no wrong but what we have done, achieved and continue to do is something that needs doing. It is a measure of hope and faith in the system that we do not give up. All manner of vicious and cheap pressures have been used to coerce us into stopping. We have men in power with small hearts and petty minds whose abiding motto is vengeance and vendetta. It is important that we calmly stay the course and fight the good fight.

You see the following solutions to the present situation of slow justice and lack of accountability: mass reparations, affirmative action for social justice, non-discrimination, and ending the divisive policy of hate. You also speak of the need for reconciliation. Do you think reconciliation is possible without justice?

I believe it is important for the survivor who has been a victim of mindless, senseless violence to get justice; in the sense, for the perpetrator to be punished. I also believe that this desire for justice stems from a deep-seated need for the victim/survivor to be reassured by us—state and society—that what she/he has gone through will not be repeated with anyone again. Through our battle for justice we negotiated the punishments and on principle we did not ask for death penalty. This was grounded in the belief that a society, to be stable and move forward after upheavals caused by bitter hate-driven mass crimes, must be founded on notions of restorative justice, not retributory blood and gore. Please remember that this is not an abstract idea. In Gujarat after 27 February 2002, threat and intimidation were unleashed, mobs were allowed free will on streets, with impunity. The language was one of false revenge and vendetta. And it is this that needs to be exorcised from the public domain and discourse, not valorized, as it is being now.

Yes, eventually reconciliation is also needed between the families and the wider community of the perpetrators, and the survivors too. We saw a glimpse of this on 28 July 2016 in Naroda, when
a group of Dalits took out a silent procession speaking of brotherhood and sisterhood between both Dalits and Muslims. When I spoke to my sister survivors of the Naroda Patiya massacre (in which 97 Muslims were killed by a mob on 28 February 2002), they had tears and said they felt as if a silent apology was being tendered (there had been widespread reports of Dalit involvement in the attacks on the minorities in the cities of Gujarat in 2002). But please remember, for such reconciliation to be real, the political dispensation must need shed its commitment to intimidation, vengeance and vendetta.

Salil Tripathi writes the column Here, There, Everywhere for Mint.

Salil Tripathi
Topics: Teesta Setalvad, Foot Soldier Of The Constitution—A Memoir, Career, Constitution, Books

First Published: Fri, Mar 24 2017. 07 52 PM IST

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2. Anand Patwardhan

in Life/Philosophy — by Vidya Bhushan Rawat — April 5, 2017

For over 40 years Anand Patwardhan’s documentary films have stood for freedom of expression. He faced censorship on numerous occasions, took the government to court, and won each time. Anand is not just a filmmaker but an activist in the cause of Indian democracy, clearly under threat today. In this candid conversation with Vidya Bhushan Rawat, Anand discusses his views on the challenges before us, and most importantly, how he perceives both Gandhi and Ambedkar as liberation theologists whose ideas are in danger of being revised by their enemies.
VB: As a freedom lover secularist what is the difference between today’s media and that which existed during the official Emergency in 1975.

AP: The Emergency of 1975 was visible to all. The world condemned it and in India some brave newspapers protested with blank editorials. Within a fairly short time a strong resistance movement grew. Today’s Emergency is largely invisible to the masses because Indian media houses have been corporatized and these corporates, both Indian and foreign, are direct beneficiaries of an economic system that has been surreptitiously imposed on the country not just by the present regime but by forces that were already moving in the same direction but at a slower pace. We have sold our sovereignty to USA and the global corporates and people have been told that this is for our own good. The invisible Emergency of today depends on what Chomsky called “manufactured consent”.

VB: Today we face the biggest challenge to Indian democracy since independence when our civil liberties are under the attack, when freedom of expression is under threat and when media is constructing the ‘news’. Is ‘free media’ now the biggest threat to democracy?

AP: The media is free in the sense that it now has the freedom to tell lies about both, the domestic economy and about national security – lies that parrot an American-Israeli-Saudi axis which created, nurtured and unleashed Al Qaeda and ISIS on the one hand and pretended to “fight terror” on the other.

VB: You have documented major events not only of communal violence but also of violence against Dalits in Maharashtra. After the death of Rohit Vemula, in HCU, JNU and other campuses, students of all ideological frames – from the Left, to Ambedkarites and other Bahujan groups, joined in a common struggle against the ABVP and its attempt to vitiate the climate in the universities. Today that unity appears to be crumbling and we are again at the cross roads. Why?

AP: The fault lies as much with the Left (of all shades) which is still unclear about how to destroy the caste system within, as with Dalit groups that fall prey to red-baiting and exclusivist identity politics. On one side are traditional Marxists who were brought up to think that caste is part of a superstructure that will automatically wither away when the economic base becomes socialist. On the other side are those who think that the caste of your birth alone forever determines how you think and how you act. Not only is such thinking contrary to the teachings of Dr. Ambedkar, it mirrors the mindset of the worst Manuvadis who believe that caste determines everything.

VB: Your film Jai Bhim Comrade was an extraordinary work which brought us back the memories of the struggle for justice of the people of Ramabai Nagar in Mumbai. You screened the film in various places. What were the reactions?
AP: The film as you know took 14 years to make. In the winter of 2011 we screened it in the open air in Dalit bastis across urban Maharashtra. We bought a powerful video projector, made a huge foldable cloth screen, and in each basti erected bamboo scaffolding to mount it on. As the screen was being erected, we played progressive film songs and Dalit movement songs to alert and attract the audience. Often the crowd would swell to well over a 1000 people. As we could not afford so many chairs, people sat on the ground or stood at the back and on the sides for the three hour duration of the film. At the end of the screening we tried to organize a discussion but often instead of a back and forth question and answer session, people just grabbed the mike and poured their hearts out about what the film had meant to them. It was an overwhelming experience for me. Later I began to understand the reasons for this amazing response. Although in the bastis, little of the hardship shown in the film was unknown to people, the fact that the film presented its protagonists not as victims but as resisters, was a morale booster. The genre of music heard in the film was in danger of either dying out or getting commercialized, so the film, so full of these songs captured over decades, served as a valuable archive. Lastly the politics of the film was appreciated, as it did not pull punches. It called to task not only sections of the Left for not recognizing the primacy of caste, but also Dalit leaders who were being lured by Manuvadi Hindutva to betray the legacy of Dr. Ambedkar.

Much later I began to show the film in colleges and schools and other middle class and elite circles. Here the response was enthusiastic but very different from that in the bastis. Even though people generally appreciated the film, almost invariably someone would ask about the evils of “reservations”. It was as if the audience had been blind and deaf to what they had just seen. After 3000 years where manual scavenging has been reserved for one caste alone and education has been forbidden, was it not time to reserve education seats for the dispossessed? In the end after long discussions, we agreed that reservations could be done away with only when the children of the rich and the children of the poor start going to the same schools – from the primary to the college level. Such prolonged inter-caste, inter-class contact could also open the door for inter-caste marriages. Many generations of such mixed marriages could finally end the caste system. This sounds idealistic but in my view this is the only way to finally end caste – when bloodlines become so mixed that no one can clearly say what caste they come from.

VB: Do you think that as secular activists we have not been able to communicate to common people in the language they understand or have failed to use the great secular legacy of India which was radical and rational as well?

AP: In general this is true but in particular some people are genuinely trying to address this. Of course the task is huge and we are up against a fascist force in the Brahminist RSS that has created a hydra-headed, cadre based organization that indoctrinates people in the name of cultural and religious pride, as well as today, of fake nationalism. In the early days they attracted mainly Brahmans. Today they are drawing in all castes and tribes that can be mobilized against their stated three enemies – Muslims, Christians and Communists. Religious culture and right wing politics is a potent combination and we rationalists have so far failed to match
the organizational genius that runs this fascist machine.

VB: This government has been in hyper-active mode to keep people busy but if we analyse their actions we find clear attempts to divide people and polarize the debate. It started with their favorite topics like ‘Gaay’, Ganga, Rastrawaad, beef, Jana Gana Mana and then to Kashmir. Things went horribly wrong in Kashmir and the last part was a surgical strike but that too was questioned. Then came demonetization which hurt the poorest of the poor but was dressed up to look like an attack on “black money” and the rich. Each act is commonly linked, in my opinion, to privatizing our national resources and creating business for crony capital.

AP: Yes there is a clear strategy. Nothing in the Hindutva Parivar happens ad hoc or without central planning. At the same time perhaps Modi and Amit Shah have surprised even their own cadre by their willingness to be brutal and dishonest. Demonetization is an example. Even the direct beneficiaries, like the crony capitalists who emptied the banks and refused to pay back their loans must have been surprised at how the poor were squeezed to fill the bank coffers up again and then sold the idea that this was a strike on the unscrupulous rich. Even when all the “black money” came back into the banks and became white money, no question was raised while thousands of jobs were lost across the nation. It may be the undoing of Modi in the long run but in the short term he is still fooling most of the people most of the time.

VB: Communalism or I would call it Brahminism has joined hands with capitalism here but the resistance too is stronger. Unfortunately, political parties are unable to join hands with their egos and brinkmanship for votes. Will people’s pressure bring them together?

AP: At the moment there is no visible peoples’ pressure. There is visible suffering but the anger is not yet visible. Let us see if it manifests later.

VB: Do you feel that the Indian way of secularism i.e. equal respect to all religions, or what we call Sarva Dharma Samabhava is damaging the cause of social change as it allows religious dogmatics to hijack the leadership of different communities? There is a virtual competition between the religious right taking place in the polity thereby denying common persons of all communities the means to counter them. How do we respond to it?

AP: All over the world rationalists have found that religion that has existed for centuries is hard to stamp out and some form of co-existence is the norm in most secular countries. After the Soviet Revolution, St. Petersburgh became Leningrad but in 1991 it became St. Petersburgh again.

In India, both Gandhi and Ambedkar recognized that this country was so steeped in the idiom of religion that atheism or pure rationality would not be easily accepted by the masses. I consider Gandhi and Ambedkar, each in their own right, to be liberation theologians. Of course, Gandhi unlike Ambedkar, did not choose his own religion, he inherited it. But to whatever he inherited, he applied post-Enlightenment ethical values that were essentially modern. When he began to do manual scavenging and began to advocate this (even force it) on to his followers, he actually destroyed the very basis of the Pollution/Purity dichotomy.
that is at the heart of the caste system. Theoretically he for a long time infamously clung to the concept of Varnashram Dharma, but in actual deed he destroyed it the day he took up manual scavenging, a job that had been hitherto reserved for the so-called 'untouchables'. As time went on Gandhi became ever more radical. He clearly learned from Dr. Ambedkar as well as from his own intuitive understanding of the world he was witnessing. For instance, towards the latter stages of his life, Gandhi refused to attend any marriage that was not an inter-caste marriage. By the end of his life he had fashioned out of his inherited Hinduism, something entirely new. Only the idiom remained, and not the original hierarchical Sanatan dharma. Whether his reluctance to discard the idiom was a practical decision that stemmed from a desire to remain in touch with the vast Indian masses in a language they could easily follow, or from his own inner belief system, is something that can be debated, but is of no great interest to me. What is unmistakable is that Gandhi's ethical code bears little resemblance to the hierarchical and vengeful structure of traditional Hinduism.

Dr. Ambedkar in some ways was more fortunate than Gandhi in that he clearly saw how oppressive the religion of his birth was, being as he was, a direct victim of it. So he discarded it and searched for the best alternative to it. After examining many religions he finally chose the religion that was closest to Reason. Buddhism is the one world religion that does not posit an external, all-knowing God. However it has a very strong ethical core that Dr. Ambedkar highlighted. At the same time he discarded irrational and unproveable Buddhist tenets like Reincarnation that many traditional Buddhists ardently follow. This is why I see both Ambedkar and Gandhi as liberation theologists. In the same way that Left wing priests like Ernesto Cardinale in Latin America, a minister in Nicaragua’s revolutionary Sandinista government, re-interpreted Jesus Christ as a revolutionary who fought and died for justice to the poor and powerless, Gandhi and Ambedkar gave new ethical meaning to the religions they adopted and adapted.

Make no mistake that I am equating the two. Their differences are obvious. One came from a privileged caste, the other from the most oppressed. One was educated in a limited sense and steeped in traditional religion in his formative years while the other came from a caste denied the right to education and rose to become the best-read and easily the greatest intellectual of modern India.

I am not at all blind to the things about Gandhi that are paradoxical and irrational like his life-long demonization of sexuality. Gandhi’s insistence on chastity puts him in the same irrational, patriarchal boat as the priests and monks and nuns of many world religions. To examine this aspect in depth would take a whole chapter. And yet this same sex-denying man, by introducing the Charkha as a weapon of non-violent resistance, brought thousands of women into the mainstream of the Indian freedom movement.

I realize that I have let my stream of consciousness diverge from your original question. To get back to the issue about whether Sarva Dharma Samabhava can take the place of constitutionally guaranteed secular democratic rights, I think it cannot. We need Dr. Ambedkar’s Constitution much more than we need holy books. And yet as many in our country are still hooked to holy books and unholy pretenders, we
need liberation theologians who can help people to culturally discard the worst features of their inherited religious culture and replace these with ethical, just and non-exclusivist interpretations.

Waiting for everyone to become atheist or rationalist may take centuries. Ethics is the answer. Small wonder that Ambedkar and Gandhi, each in their own way, arrived at individual definitions of Ahimsa.

VB: In post-Mandal India communities are seeking their space in the polity. In the earlier phase of secularism the Indian elite always kept the marginalised communities like Dalits, OBCs, Muslims outside the gates of their decision making bodies and public platforms but things are changing now. Very unfortunately more than the seculars it is the communists who are jumping into identity politics and social engineering. Meanwhile communist parties still retain their upper caste leadership. Will we be able to face the challenge in such a way?

AP: Actually identity politics is a double-edged weapon. As long as oppression of identifiable groups exists, it is perfectly legitimate for oppressed groups to unite according to their identity. “Black is beautiful" was a necessary movement for Afro-Americans in the USA, just as pride in Dalit or Buddhist identity is necessary in India. The trouble begins when this turns into an exclusivist or separatist movement. Malcolm X went through a Black Muslim phase when he described all white people as “devils". But in the latter stages of his life he completely rejected this theory for a much more inclusive critique of injustice and inequality. That is when the American deep State killed him. Similarly while a broad section of Dalits are inclusive and fully understand the distinction Dr. Ambedkar made between the ideology of Brahminism and individuals who happen to be born into one or the other "upper" castes, there is a tiny section of separatist Dalits today who see birth as the sole determining factor. The fact that Western post-modern academia encourages such identity politics in preference to class analysis has given this form of separatist politics international acceptance. Meanwhile in India Manuvadi forces feel obvious glee when Dalits attack the Left or Gandhi, as both have long been the enemies of Hindutva.

VB: Hindutva people are expert in appropriating icons who are secular. They used Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, Vivekananda, Subhash Chandra Bose, Sri Narayan Guru etc for their purposes. Is this because an overdose of Gandhi and Nehru's role in our freedom struggle minimized all other icons that a kind of resentment began against Nehru and Gandhi?

AP: Frankly I am not a fan of Subhash Chandra Bose. I cannot swallow his alliance with Hitler and Hirohito. Freedom could not be wrested at such a cost. Vivekananda is also very troubling because he advocated a kind of machismo that I think is deeply problematic. Also what is little known about him is that he was deeply casteist. In fact he seems perfectly suited as a BJP icon. The resentment against Gandhi lies at the heart of the project of Hindutva which is why they killed him first and then attempted to appropriate his glasses and broomstick later. Nehru is hated because his development paradigm goes against the grain of privatization. Ambedkar they do not dare criticize openly these days so the only option is to use his image, minus any content.
VB: Your uncle Achyut Patwardhan was an icon of the socialist movement in India. We heard a lot about his relationship with Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Was there any influence of him on your socio-political thoughts?

AP: Achyutkaka and Aruna Asaf Ali, according to British records, were amongst the most wanted underground leaders of 1942. He ran the underground radio and was a master of disguise amongst other things but in later years he ensured that history erased him. You hardly hear or read about him anywhere because soon after Independence he became disillusioned with mainstream politics. He did educational and social work but he would never discuss the past, even with me. He felt it had all been mostly an illusion. His elder brother, Purshottam (Raokaka to me) was also a freedom fighter and spent over 10 years in British jails. In the 1930’s while he was making an anti-communal speech, Madanlal Pahwa tried to assassinate him but was caught. Raokaka who was a Gandhian socialist, refused to file charges and Pahwa was let off. Later this same Pahwa threw a bomb at Gandhi and was part of the conspiracy that finally killed him.

To answer your next question, it is true that in the decade of the 1930’s Dr. Ambedkar spent several months living, writing and studying at our family farm home in Ahmednagar, but this again is a chapter of history that has been irretrievably lost. Raokaka like Achyut left active politics after Independence and both, by their own choice, were written out of history. I have heard that Dr. Ambedkar and Achyutkaka were friends and met when Achyutkaka was underground, but I have no documents about this. What I do know is that my family opposed the caste system and many married outside their own caste, including my parents.

VB: You have always tried to bring together not only left and Ambedkarites but also what you call ‘Progressive Gandhians’. Why are you using this term? You have been critical of people who as you say ‘blow out of proportion’ the differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Many of the Ambedkarites feel it quite disturbing?

AP: I must speak the truth as I see it. I have always felt that the affinities between Gandhi and Ambedkar are greater than their differences. They were both egalitarian humanists at heart. It may not win me any popularity contest today but I think those who are ready to set prejudice aside and undertake a proper historical study will come around to this point of view. Take the act of “Satyagraha”, a term coined by Gandhi. Ambedkar used this very term and form of struggle to launch his Mahad Satyagraha to claim drinking water rights. There are many other examples of common ideas and action. I was pleasantly shocked to read what Dr. Ambedkar had to say in 1932 immediately after concluding the now infamous Poona Pact (where the idea of separate electorates for Dalits was abandoned in favour of reserved seats for Dalits). Popular theory is that Ambedkar was blackmailed by Gandhi’s fast- unto-death into accepting a bitter compromise. But Ambedkar’s statement in 1932 after signing the pact was totally different in tone. He had high praise for Gandhi and stated that the “Mahatma” (yes, contrary to popular belief, Ambedkar referred to Gandhi as “Mahatma” at this point in time) offered a much better deal for Dalits in terms of reserved seats than Ambedkar himself had asked or hoped for. There is no denying however that Ambedkar did get
disgusted with the Congress in later years. How much of the blame for the failures of Congress are attributable to Gandhi is a matter of discussion and debate. We know that Gandhi’s writ did not work in preventing Partition or the bloodshed that preceded and followed it and that Gandhi did not attend the Independence Day flag hoisting at the Red Fort in Delhi. He was busy fighting the communal inferno in the countryside.

Gandhi had a lot of obscurantist ideas to start with but as time went on he was honest enough to keep evolving. In the end I see him as a great humanist who died for his belief in non-violence and religious universality. He was also an inventive anti-Imperialist (though in his earlier days he had supported the British Empire) and an organic naturalist that today’s madly consumerist, globally warmed world desperately needs. Are most of today’s Gandhians like that? Of course not. That is why I used the term ‘progressive Gandhians’. It describes dedicated non-violent fighters like Medha Patkar, Narendra Dabholkar, the whole Baba Amte family, Sandeep Pande, S.P Udaykumar, Teesta Setalvad, Aruna Roy, Admiral Ramdas, and so many others. It certainly does not include government-fed Gandhians and those Gandhians who jump onto the Hindutva bandwagon as soon as it gathers steam.

Today I believe that all humanists, rationalists and fighters for social and economic justice must unite to fight the usurpers of our democracy and our history.

Vidya Bhushan Rawat is a social and human rights activist. He blogs at

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6. Resources

Our Shared Cultural Heritage From ANHAD

Video Series

Architecture- Romi Khosla
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-Sadqi676k

Preview YouTube video Our Shared Cultural Heritage " Architecture" Romi Khosla

Secular Action Network, April 2017
Cinema- Javed Akhtar
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INGk4rrj0TE
Preview YouTube video Our Shared Cultural Heritage "Cinema" Javed Akhtar
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INGk4rrj0TE

Music- Shubha Mudgal & Aneesh Pradhan
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rHdch98Ux8
Preview YouTube video Our Shared Cultural Heritage "Music" Shubha Mudgal & Aneesh Pradhan
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rHdch98Ux8
Literature- K. Satchidanandan
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riRTLJilZZc

Theatre- Tripurari Sharma
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBFDGEoLeRI

Food- Sohail Hashmi
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdjeRab8TuU
People’s Movements - Mridula Mukherjee
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWl0gLElpRI
Preview YouTube video Our Shared Cultural Heritage “People’s Movements” Mridula Mukherjee

Cultural Heritage - KN Panikkar
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP0dPbnt76s
Preview YouTube video Our Shared Cultural Heritage “Culture Heritage” K.N. Panikkar

Heritage as History - Romila Thapar
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APNC_rXqqk
Preview YouTube video Our Shared Cultural Heritage “History as Heritage” Prof. Romila Thapar
Science- Gauhar Raza
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPET1P9Ek3M

Dance-Prathibha Prahlad
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqu9n_9g6PE

Puppetry-Dadi Pudumji
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NWgwgvdmjQ
Fabric- Kumi and Anil Chandra
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py2NaqA9DE0

Preview YouTube video Our Shared Cultural Heritage lecture Series "Fabric" Kumi Chandra & Anil Chandra

Shared Sacred Spaces- Yogi Sikand
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9z7f4HeqG5E

Preview YouTube video Our Shared Cultural Heritage "Religious Spaces" Yogi Sikand

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European Islamophobia Report


Secular Action Network, April 2017
Book Launch:

Kandhamal
Mr. Justice A P Shah
Former Chairman, Law Commission of India And Former Chief Justice, High Court of Delhi
Will launch the path-breaking research

KANDHAMAL
Introspection of Initiative for Justice 2007-2015
By Vrinda Grover & Saumya Uma

At 5 pm On Friday, 31st March 2017
At the Deputy Speakers Hall, Constitutional Club
Rafi Marg, New Delhi

Discussants: Supreme Court Senior Advocates Raju Ramachandran & Rebecca Mammen John and The Caravan Magazine Political Editor Hartosh Singh Bal
You are cordially invited to the Book Launch and discussion on aspects of the difficult search for justice by victims and survivors of Communal and targeted violence

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A NOTE ON THE BOOK ON KANDHAMAL

India has seen many incidents of communal violence targeting religious minorities. Every violence sees children and adults killed in the most inhuman manner, women raped, and thousands rendered homeless in mass arson. State impunity, police bigotry and insensitivity, and shoddy or non-existent investigation have marked the post-violence scene. Relief, rehabilitation, and the criminal justice system has repeatedly failed the victims and survivors.

The violence in Kandhamal, in the state of Odisha, was the Christian community’s first experience with targeted mass violence in centuries. Human rights groups estimate that around 100 people were killed, including disabled and elderly persons, children, men and women. More than 600 villages were ransacked; at least 5,600 houses were looted and burnt; at least 54,000 people were left homeless; 295 churches and other places of worship, big and small, were destroyed; 13 schools, colleges, philanthropic institutions including leprosy homes, tuberculosis sanatoriums, and offices of several non-profit organizations were looted,
damaged or burnt. About 30,000 people were uprooted and lived in relief camps and continue to be displaced. During this period about 2,000 people were forced to renounce their Christian faith. More than 10,000 children had their education severely disrupted due to displacement and fear. There has been no official estimate of those who suffered severe physical injuries and mental trauma.

This book is a unique investigation of the Justice process in targeted mass violence on this nature. Similar work has perhaps not been done in earlier cases targeting other communities. It is a searing indictment of the system that has failed the victim.

**Vrinda Grover** is a lawyer, researcher and human rights activist based in New Delhi, India. Her research and writing probes the impunity of the state for human rights violations particularly in areas of militarization and conflict, and the role of law in the subordination of women. She was a Research Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi 2013-2014. She has done seminal research on targeted communal violence including the 1984 anti Sikh pogrom and the attack on Christians in Kandhamal in 2008. Vrinda Grover is a prominent commentator in the media on jurisprudential issues relating to human rights violations and violence against women.

**Saumya Uma** has worked in varying capacities over the past 22 years, including as a lawyer, law researcher, law trainer, campaigner and academician, with a specialization in gender and human rights. She has engaged with the issue of justice for the survivors of the violence in Kandhamal violence since 2010. She researched and authored 'Breaking the Shackled Silence: Unheard Voices of Women from Kandhamal', published by National Alliance of Women – Odisha chapter in August 2014, which examined the status of the women survivors six years after the violence. She has researched and authored twelve books, edited / co-edited books by reputed publishers such as the Oxford University Press, and has written and published more than 45 articles on a range of issues pertaining to human rights, violence against women and the law. She is a recipient of the prestigious British Chevening scholarship for human rights in 1998. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. from NLSIU, Bangalore.

Fascism in Europe came as a horrific phenomenon where ultra nationalist political ideology accompanied by targeting of minorities, rise of a supreme leader and smashing of popular movements led to the torture and massacre of large section of population. Democratic rights stood suspended in these regimes. The authoritarian political ideology and its rulers had a mass base, which gloried the ‘constructed past’.

The situation developing in India from last decade, more so from last couple of years has many features which give semblance of these regimes. The nature of this phenomenon is under debate from quite some time. Some like Prakash Karat of CPI (Marxist) characterize it as ‘mere authoritarian’ while many others argue that it is fascist. The characterization of RSS-BJP has lot of implications on the type of political alliances to be forged by secular democratic forces.

This compilation aims to put together different articles, which unravel the politics of RSS-BJP-Modi

No. of Pages: 224

Price: Rs.240/-

ISBN: 978-93-7495-678-6

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Indian History: Facts versus Myths

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#label/SAN/15a9ec6863f5880e?projector=1
https://youtu.be/Y2zNCP8PZd4

Preview YouTube video MUQADAMMA (FAKE HISTORY)
5 Myths Behind India’s Communal Violence

Ram Puniyani debunks 5 misconceptions that drive violence against religious minorities.

Ram Puniyani quit as a professor at the Indian Institute of Technology in 2004 to devote himself to fostering communal harmony in India. The country has witnessed numerous incidents of communal violence, mostly against religious minorities, over the years. Communal tensions are often preceded and succeeded by narratives that seek to justify violence based on certain myths, or misconceptions, Puniyani says.

The 71-year-old activist has identified the five most prevalent and dangerous myths, which have led to massacres. Included in the long list of such brutalities are the killing of at least 2,000 Muslims in the western state of Gujarat in 2002, and massacre of more than 100 Christians and torching of thousands of homes in Odisha’s Kandhamal district in 2007 and 2008, according to civil rights groups. In one particularly grisly incident, Graham Staines, an Australian Christian worker, and his two underage children, 10-year-old Philip and Timothy, 6, were burned alive by a group of people while the three were sleeping in a station wagon in Manoharpur village in eastern Odisha state’s Keonjhar district in 1999.

Puniyani identifies the five harmful myths as: (1) Christians use force, fraudulent methods, and money to convert others; (2) Muslim kings destroyed Hindu temples to hurt the Hindu community; (3) Muslim kings converted Hindus through the use of the sword; (4) All terrorists are Muslims; (5) Muslims have four wives and their population rises faster than other communities. He debunks each of these myths in an interview with The Diplomat.

http://thediplomat.com/2017/03/5-myths-behind-indias-communal-violence/

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Book Review

Name of the Book: Non-Violence and Peace-Building in Islam
Author: Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Published by: Goodword Books, NOIDA, India | www.goodwordbooks.com

Secular Action Network, April 2017
Hardly a day passes without the media reporting some violent barbarity somewhere in the world being committed in the name of Islam. Today, there is an urgent need for popularising an alternate understanding of Islam, one rooted in a commitment to peace, nonviolence and inter-community harmony. Peace and prosperity for all peoples, not just Muslims alone, crucially depends on this. Promoting that understanding of Islam has been one of the major concerns of New Delhi-based, 92-year-old Islamic scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan over a great part of his life. In this latest book of his, a collection of 21 short but deeply insightful essays, he persuasively argues the case for non-violence as a means for negotiating differences, based on his understanding of Islam.

In his Introduction, the Maulana remarks that because today the world is so closely interdependent, peaceful, mutually-beneficial relations between different religious communities have become simply indispensable. “We simply cannot afford to resort to conflict in order to resolve disputes,” he rightly notes. In the face of what he says is “the serious threat to peace posed by terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam” he stresses the “urgent need” to articulate and promote a “positive” approach to conflict-prevention, conflict-resolution and peace-building. This approach, which he outlines in this book, is based on inspiration from the Quran and from the life of the Prophet Muhammad, and also draws on the Maulana’s own personal experiences as well as his reflections on inter-communal relations, particularly in India. The primary focus of the book, he notes, is on conflict-prevention, based on the understanding that if conflicts can be prevented at the very outset, violence can be completely avoided.

In setting out his vision of an Islamically-inspired vision of non-violence, the Maulana writes that “Island positively encourages Muslims to work for peace and for harmonious relations between them and people belonging to other communities.” Critics, however, could easily point to scores of Muslim groups across the world that show no sign of such enthusiasm for inter-community harmony, groups claiming to speak for Islam that foment hate for other communities and are engaged in terrorist violence. But here one needs to consider an important point the Maulana makes—that one must distinguish Islam from Muslims, implying, therefore, that the claims of such self-styled ‘Islamic’ groups are bogus. This point leads the Maulana to insist that “Contemporary instances of Muslims resorting to violence in the name of their religion” are “in complete contrast to Islamic teachings.”

The Maulana argues that competition has been written into the law that runs this world. Being thus part of God’s Creation Plan, there will always be differences of opinion between people. So, while they can never be done away with completely, the wise course is to respond to challenging
situations involving differences with others in a wise way, without recourse to conflict and violence. This holds true for differences at all levels—for differences between individuals, between communities and even between entire countries.

In line with the laws that God has devised for the world, the Maulana says, peace and success are possible only through patience, not impatience; positive action, not denouncing and protesting against others; pragmatism, not emotionalism; reform of the self, not agitating against or condemning others; acknowledging one’s own mistakes, not seeking to prove others wrong.

The Maulana provides evidence from the Islamic tradition to back this point, citing, for instance, the Prophet Muhammad’s decision to avoid confrontation with his opponents and his agreeing to their conditions at the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. Skilful handling of differences that could otherwise lead to conflict, he indicates, requires one to unilaterally offer and accept peace and to refuse to get provoked by others. It requires one to ignore lesser evils and not to make them into a prestige issue that can only further magnify differences and foment conflict. It also requires one to introspect and to realise that one alone is responsible for one’s misery, not others. The Maulana appeals to his fellow Muslims to recognise this and to stop blaming others for their woes and to desist from conflict with them.

Reflecting on relations between Muslims and others, the Maulana stresses what he calls the “Islam of humility”. This he contrasts with what he terms the “Islam of pride”, which, he says, leads those who follow this warped interpretation of Islam to imagine that they are superior to others, a “psychology” that, he contends, “creates all the differences and disputes that Muslims are beset with today.” On the other hand, the “Islam of humility” brings Muslims close to others, the Maulana explains, automatically resolving conflicts. “The fear of God takes away from them any sense of superiority [...] In the face of the prejudice of others, their God-consciousness makes them humble and modest. This acts like water in the face of the fire of other people’s prejudices. And it brings violence to an end”. The “Islam of humility” leads to resolving differences and ending conflict through love and compassion.

Furthermore, the Maulana insists that instead of complaining about others and making demands on them—something that almost inevitably magnifies differences and easily leads to conflict—Muslims should make themselves eligible and become useful to others. That itself would help reduce differences, defuse conflicts and build harmonious inter-community relations. The key to a successful life in this world, the Maulana says, is to be beneficial to others, indicating that if Muslims proved themselves to be of benefit to others, there would be no conflict between them. “People and groups gain a position of respect if they prove to be
“useful” he explains, adding, “In contrast, those who lose their usefulness are dumped in the dustbin of history and the world moves on.”

In the concluding essay of the book, titled ‘Consciousness of the Hereafter’ the Maulana reminds us that we, after all, are merely travelers in this world and that what awaits us after our short span here is the eternal life after death (for which this present life is a period of preparation). The Hereafter is something that all religions, not just Islam, teach. Someone who is conscious of God and the Hereafter, the Maulana says, “will refuse to get involved in controversies that will divert him from his spiritual goal”.

Mindfulness of the ephemeral nature of this world (and of the many worldly issues that people seem to never cease squabbling about) and consciousness of the eternity of the Hereafter, then, can help people avoid wasting their lives in pointless conflict with others, thereby ruining their prospects in the eternal Hereafter. That itself can be a powerful means of promoting peace and harmony and of resolving differences between individuals and groups.

This slim book, packed with deep spiritual insights from one of the world’s leading exponents of Islamic nonviolence, simply cannot afford to be missed by anyone interested in the very important issues that it discusses. The eminently practical tips for conflict-prevention, conflict-resolution and peace-building that the Maulana provides can be found immensely useful by Muslims and others alike.