



Following the abominable lynching of Muhammad Akhlaq in Dadri, the beef bans, and the overall rise of the Hindu nationalist BJP's rise to power in India, many are worried about the perceived threat to the 'Idea of India'. The 'India as a Hindu Rashtra' rhetoric propagated by RSS is at loggerheads with the Nehruvian idea of secular, liberal and modern India. These are disturbing, but nonetheless interesting, times where these two imaginations of India, both originating from elite upper caste positions, are fighting for their supremacy. However, it is important to note that both these imaginations have failed to cater to the assertions of marginalized and subaltern communities in India.

A deeper probing into history would tell us that this Secular vs Communal, attributed to Congress and BJP respectively, is a false binary that the marginalized communities are forced to choose from. Both these political parties have operated largely to serve and safeguard elite interests in this country. While both the Congress and BJP have often tried to project a liberal image, their history tells otherwise. To believe that one of them is secular than the other would mean to live in a fool's paradise. In such scenario, one can conclude that if we are to think of a political discourse focused around emancipating the marginalized communities, neither Congress nor BJP can be our best bet. The reason for this, as noted by the late historian Prof. MSS Pandian in an essay he wrote in the year 2000, is that both these groups populated by the modernizing elite cutting across the ideological divide of communal and secular, have a deep-rooted feeling against the Indian democracy.

Pandian provides examples of how the modernizing elites have repeatedly exhibited their contempt towards values of democracy. According to Pandian, the implementation of Mandal commission report by the United Front Government in 1990 that extended reservations in government jobs and educational institutes to non-creamy layer OBCs along with SC and ST communities, was a moment of deepening of democracy in India. While the so called secularist Congress government did not implement the recommendations of Mandal report for a decade, the opposition to the implementation originated from the modernizing elites of India across party lines. This is indicative of the fact that the then political establishment in India was united across false divisions to oppose a democratic decision. If one were to look within Goa, the denial of official language status to Roman Konkani and opposition to the

state grants for English medium primary schools would be fitting examples to explain the contempt harbored by elites towards values of democracy.

Destabilising the Idea of India



Pandian further illustrates the anti-democratic urge of elites by drawing the reader's attention to the attitude of the elites towards politicians who have come to occupy positions of power through the support of the rural lower caste voters. He specifically talks about how Lalu Prasad Yadav was parodied in mainstream press for being a village bumpkin unfit for the serious business of politics. Even after the recent victory of Grand Alliance in Bihar against BJP, Lalu's 'village joker' image is constantly brought back into the mainstream discourse to perpetuate Lalu's incapability to be a serious politician.

Soon after Laxmikant Parsekar succeeded Manohar Parrikar as the Chief Minister of Goa, a photo parodying Parsekar was being circulated on WhatsApp. The photo showed Parsekar's face morphed on a monkey's body while Manohar Parrikar's face was morphed onto a man's body that held a rope around Parsekar's neck. Some of the seasoned BJP members shared this photo with utmost glee, exposing their discomfort to accept a non-Brahmin leader as the Chief Minister of Goa. In such situation, it was not surprising when recently asked to list achievement of his government on the account of completing one year as the Chief Minister, Parsekar responded by saying that people have stopped parodying him on social media.

The aforementioned articulations by Pandian show that the the idea of India perpetuated by its modernizing elites does not provide enough space for contesting power based on the existing disparities of caste, region, language and religion. Instead, it homogenizes the struggles of the subaltern on the lines of secular versus communal, forcing them to choose the so called lesser evil. In contemporary times where the Hindu right is establishing control over institutions of power in India, the Nehruvian idea of secular liberal India as a necessity to combat the Hindu right is also getting affirmed. However, it needs to be pointed out that the Nehruvian polity was no less compatible with a certain form of Hindu right and hence needs to be destabilized.

To rethink subaltern politics, in the wake of such situation, would first require us to avoid falling into the traps of these so called lesser evils and false binaries of communal vs secular.

The recourse would be, as suggested by Pandian, to foreground a political strategy that is based on the perennial contestation of different forms of power by acknowledging and addressing difference as the fundamental reality of the social. Alternatively put, instead of relegating the differences of caste, religion, region, language etc. into one's private domain as 'taught' to us by the modernizing elite, we must use these very differences as arsenals for contesting power.

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