




*(With apologies to whoever it was that first coined the phrase “lies, damned lies, and statistics”- there seems to be a lie there itself)*

Lies masquerade as merit in these post-truth times. As a matter of fact, lies have been morphed into stereotypes and stereotypes morphed into merit long before terms like ‘post-truth’ or ‘alternate facts’ became popular.

What better way to begin to see how lies are masqueraded as merit or high standards than through taking a look at the controversy surrounding Vishnu Surya Wagh’s ‘Sudirsukt’? Wagh’s 2013 book of Konkani poems, some members of the dominant Gaud Saraswat community in Goa contend, lacks any kind of literary merit necessary to receive an award. These same people have taken offence to his poems saying they are stirring passions against a certain community.

There is one poem titled “Mhaji Bhasha” (My Language) that is raw with the feelings of hurt caused by casteist oppression. It actually addresses the lie that the ancestors of the depressed castes were forced to pass off as truth – that their language was ‘lost in a forest’, when in fact ‘those who came along with Parashuram/From Kashmir or Bengal/While chopping off forest cleanings/Chopped off our language as well’, because ‘our ancestors .../Would speak to their face/Seeing this they began to fear.../And they connived to make our ancestors dumb’. The Brahminical elite have in fact manipulated the debate on official language to selectively get their language, which they call ‘Konkani in Devanagiri script’, to be the only one meritorious enough to be declared *the* official language of Goa, despite the truth of the limited access and usage of this Brahminical language.

The legislature and the literary world are not the only areas where lies are masqueraded as merit. This also happens in the world of the judiciary. As recently as May 2017, the Madras High Court had to, in so many ways, chastise a particular Trial Court judge, with a warning, “Let this be the last judgment ever written on communal consideration”. The Madras High

 Court was hearing a case, where, in the Trial Court, the judge had arrived at the conclusion that the particular accused had committed a murder solely because they belonged to a particular community and with a perception that the traditional occupation of the community was theft. There was no evidence otherwise linking the accused to the crime. What the judge had done in this case, was to perpetrate a racist lie, by giving merit to the values of the dominant sections of society earlier, that the particular tribe has criminality in their genes. Lies, Damned Lies, and Merit

The Madras Court pointed out that the “Judiciary cannot afford to decide the cases by tracing the criminal activities of the forefathers of the accused. No Court of Law can stigmatize a community as a whole. Proof beyond reasonable doubt of the guilt of an accused should be reached on the basis of the evidence on record. Any finding of guilt based on no evidence but on communal considerations is unconstitutional”.

An attribution of merit to arguments by certain dominant circles, could well mean, for instance, that, if a Goan were accused of drunken driving in some part of India, then, with the Bollywood imagery about Goan men being drunkards, the judge would presume that since he is a Goan, he must have committed the offence of drunken driving, without appropriately appreciating evidence led through due process.

Giving merit through the law or otherwise to dominant arguments (buttressed by casteist sexist corporate centric sections of society) can actually challenge the very existence of people, as is happening, for example, with Aadhaar. If you don't have an Aadhaar card, you don't exist. Your existence itself is a lie. You can't file your tax returns, you can't have a telephone connection or a mobile number, you can't get any subsidies, your relatives won't be able to get your death certificate. There is no merit in your existence.

There has also been some hype created about how the standards of teaching are declining at Goa University because of reservations. If anything, this hype is a stark example of the nexus between lies and merit. Despite the reservations, there are exactly four reserved posts when the constitutionally-mandated seats should have been around 66 in a teacher strength of 163. Clearly it is not those who are occupying reserved posts who are really responsible for the declining teaching standards? If anything, this indicates that it does not mean that if

there are 159 teachers holding positions by what is called 'merit', it is not a passport to high standards in education.

Lies, Damned Lies, and Merit



In the financial sphere also, lies have masqueraded as truth courtesy those at the helm of affairs, who claimed that demonetization would stymie the black economy. But as a recently-released Reserve Bank of India Annual Report itself points out, 99% of the demonetised currency notes of Rs. 1000/- and Rs. 500/- have come back into the system, that is, 99% of the notes have been exchanged in banks. This has been at a cost of Rs. 21000 crores plus to the Reserve Bank of India. The people with black money have not been stuck with those notes as was statedly anticipated. If black money was indeed operating through stashing of currency notes which are undeclared income, this gives a clear signal at the very least, that it is not primarily so. An indictment of the merit of the ruling dispensation, and their ability to rev up the economy and cripple black money!

Indeed, one can see that lies, damned lies, are sanctified with the aura of merit.

(First published in *O Herald*, dt: 7 September, 2017)



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