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## Attack on Universities: The Larger Picture

Health and evolution of a democracy can be measured by the type and duration of debates a nation engages with. Long lasting debates often yield in better understanding of issues and meaningful responses. Introduction of the Right to Information Act and the the Rural Employment Guarantee Act are some such recent examples improving transparency and addressing poverty through democratic governance.

The sincerity and commitment of a government towards improving democratic governance and welfare of people too is measured by the way in which it engages with such debates. It is worth examining therefore the debates that the Modi government has engaged with proactively and the debates that it has avoided since May 2014.

Before going into the content of the debates, which are far too many for a period of 20 months, it is important to say at the outset that none of the debates during Modi's rule have lasted long. They tend to end in a premature and non-conclusive manner. Does it mean that Indian democracy under Modi government is incapable of mature deliberations on and resolution of issues? Do we have an immature government? Or there is something else going on?

The answer lies in the content of debates and the way in which they have died prematurely. The debates that the government has engaged proactively by way of deputing cabinet ministers to respond to them are all concerned with atrocities on dalits, minorities and poor. The responses of BJP ministers instead of creating a sense of sensitivity, brotherhood and peace, have added fuel to tension and insecurity. They seem to have encouraged mob violence than collective discussions. In the case of killing of Akhlaq in Dadri by a mad mob on the pretext of eating beef the response of BJP leaders was to examine the factual accuracy of the rumour instead of condemning the murder. One wonder on the idiocy of checking the accuracy of rumour before condemning it. The accuracy did not matter for it neither constituted any illegality nor by any means it justified mob taking law in its hand. This showed the intellectual bankruptcy of BJP on the issue of governance. If not, then the claim of BJP to have a sincere intent for governance is a lie and shows BJP's support to the culture of mob violence. The response by BJP leaders to Muzaffarnagar riots was a similar story.

In the case of Rohith Vemula these two issues are very significant. Rohith had led protests against the communal frenzy and had organized beef parties. A more aggressive protest, perhaps, than other protestors on the issue. Instead of engaging on the issue, the government in a bid to divert the debate brought up a year old issue of Rohith criticizing the hanging of Yaqub Memon. Remember, that this issue was already resolved. Why was Rohith targeted? In a sense Rohith was emerging as a symbol of dalit-minority solidarity against brahminical communal assault. BJP could not tolerate a dalit young student to lead a strong pro-democracy, pro-poor secular movement. Again Smriti Irani's involvement in that case ended up in the death of a poor dalit scholar. Responses to his death by BJP leadership were again insensitive. Rather than recognizing the torture of Rohith, they tried to prove that he was not a dalit. Again a point that is absolutely ridiculous and immaterial as if not being a dalit makes death of a promising scholar and citizen less unfortunate. Disrespecting human life seems to be a habit of BJP leaders. Remember the stoning of dog comment by V. K. Singh in the case of a dalit child being burnt alive in Haryana? Time and again the senior ministers in the

BJP government have contributed to the debates in a manner which is disrespectful towards law and insensitive towards the weak and the vulnerable.

Another debate where government engaged proactively was that of juvenile justice. In the bid to appear pro-women the government ended up being anti-child and extending capital punishment to an adolescent. Handling of the debate in this case showed that this government is INCAPABLE of addressing complex and sensitive issues. It cannot lead this country towards a better, informed and considered democracy. It either creates mass hysteria or follows it.

Now let's look at some of the debates that this government should have proactively engaged with but has not. Interestingly, all these debates are concerned with the health of economy and welfare of people. The most recent issue is that of writing off of loans to big corporate running into lakhs of crore rupees. One wonders why this government on one hand is luring poor people to put their hard earned money into banks with false promises and on the other hand writing off loans to big corporate. The fact that the government needs to resort to write off bad loans, shows incompetence of the government in judging the disbursement of loans as well as ensuring their recovery. If not, then there is something wrong with the intent of this government. It is surprising that the government has chosen not to engage with this debate and not explain and educate the larger public on this issue. It has also underplayed the warnings of the RBI Governor, Raghuram Rajan regarding the deteriorating health of Indian economy. We wonder, would the government be as generous in writing off the debt of the farmers resorting to suicide. The BJP had accused some bollywood personalities of seeking cheap publicity when they offered modest financial assistance to the families of farmers. One BJP leader called the farmers suicide a 'fashion'. How SENSITIVE and RESPONSIBLE.

Another potentially historical debate that the government chose to remain silent on was the issue of prohibiting entry of women in certain temples. This was a violation of Constitution and an infringement on the rights of half of the population to worship, yet the government chose to not intervene. Why? One wonders. When BJP and RSS leaders called for rape of Muslim women, the government does not intervene. Isn't the dignity and security of half of the population of the country a threat to law and order and national integrity?

This list is very long. But the pattern is clear. The Modi government is engaging in debates proactively that inevitably leads to the death of people who belong to poor, dalit and minority communities and is avoiding debates that question protection of patriarchy and big corporate houses. The government therefore is pursuing twin goals, and very dangerous combination of, feudalism and corporate capitalism. The weapon that this government has chosen to further this agenda is mass hysteria, encouraging and infusing criminal tendencies in general public. The Universities are antidote to the mass hysteria and feudal system. Hence, such aggressive attacks on Universities and students. The fight of students and universities therefore is a fight for better, equitable nation and strong democracy. Hence, the demand for Justice to Rohith and Dropping the Sedition Charges Against JNUSU president Comrade Kanhaiya and other students is a CALL TO SAVE THE NATION, SAVE THE FREEDOM.

... From HCU to JNU ...

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