The fires next door

F.S. AIJAZUD D IN | 3/5/2020

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| AUSTRALIA had bushfires, India the incendiary Citizenship Amendment Act 2019.  It has ignited `fires of anger` across what the BengaliNobelLaureateRabindranathTagore once described as `the idolatry of geography`.  Will these conflagrations die down in due course, or are they unquenchable? Ordinarily, we in Pakistan should not be concerned whether our neighbour`s attic is ablaze or its basement. Haven`t we enough embers within our own home? What distinguishes India`s present trauma though f rom earlier ones (such as the Delhi carnage against the turbaned Sikhs following the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1984) is the clinical, systemic brutality with which this Indian government has turned on its own people, targeting a specific genus who happen to be Muslims.  Hindutvans need to be reminded that, as Rabindranath Tagore once dared to explain, `Hinduism is not the original Aryanism; in fact, a great portion of it is non-Aryan.  Another great mixture had been awaiting us, the mixture with Mohammedans`. At his ashram in Shantiniketan, Tagore practised precepts of brotherhood by making `village boys, some Mohammedan, some Brahmin, some of the lower caste, all work together for the good of the village`. They lived, grew and contributed `in an atmosphere of common activity`.  Tagore die din August 1941, six years before the independence he and his loin-cloth leader M.K. Gandhi had agitated for, but even during his long lifetime, Tagore could see Hindu extremism behaving like `a python which refuses to disgorge the living creature which struggles to live its separate life`. M.A. Jinnah could, too, and created Pakistan.  Modern-minded Indians deplore the actions of their present government for its complicity in pulverising Muslims (whether in Ayodhya or in New Delhi or in Indianoccupied Kashmir), and for its avowed determination to discriminate against those who do not believe in a deity said to have existed before calendars were invented.  Indian Muslims stand today marked for extermination. They wear the Muslim equivalent of the yellow Star of David.  India has never seen a Ram Rajya after Rama. Nor has the Muslim ummah (pious intentions notwithstanding) established a functioning Riasat-i-Madina since the time of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Such refined ideals, like sugar, dissolve in the hot water of realpolitik.  Today, there is a diminishing number of countries where thereis not, what Mao Zedong described, as `turmoil under the heavens`.  The constant restlessness, the ceaseless unrest he spoke of is of our own making fomented by the manufactured mischief of others.In an age of global warming, bilateral relations between Pakistan and India have slipped into an unseasonal freeze. We speak about each other, not to each other. We use tweets as weapons, jibes as lances, propaganda as ammunition. We hurl icy messages across the border, to be melted before their core meanings can be read. Such a state of cornea-to-cornea hostility is not healthy between two neighbouring countries. They have everything to lose and nothing to gain in this flaccid combat for ephemeral supremacy.  In 1918, the surviving world thought it had fought the war to end all wars. In 1945, a second generation believed that it had destroyed Fascism. Hitler and Mussolini, had they been alive, would have smirked at the sight of modern neo-Fascist leaders straddling the world`s touted democracies.  In the United States, death and taxes escape no man except President Donald Trump, who refuses to die or reveal his tax returns. In the United Kingdom, the ghost of Profumo`s sexual indiscretions no longer haunts the morality expected of 10 Downing Street. In Russia, Putin has lost count of hisczarist riches.  And in India, Modi`s rhetoric insires an army of BJP/RSS pracharaks to wield wooden rods with which to smite theheads of Muslims. Why? For not joining the 1947 exodus when they had the chance.  Those who remember, however vaguely, a pre-1947 India will not live long enough to see a rapprochement between India and Pakistan, not while Modi and his alter ego and un-anointed successor Amit Shah retain the reins of government in their besmirched hands. This generation of weakening septuagenarians can see even through clouded corneas the nextgeneradon of Indians and Pakistanis assume adversarial postures, split into inimical citizenries who know little about each other, and care even less.  Open-minded educationists on both sides should recall Tagore`s advice: `Don`t limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time.` In effect, our yesterdays should not be allowed to become their tomorrows.  In this dark age of Kaliyuga, let that disheartened poet Tagore have the last word: `A shadow is darkening over India like a shadow cast by an eclipsed sun. The people of a whole country are suffering from a poignant pain of anxiety.` m The writer is an author and historian.  www.fsaijazuddin.pk |