**The myth of secularism**

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India has espoused the slogan of secularism for the past 75 years with a false image that the country is home to diversity and multiplicity; a societal norm strictly followed. However, the situation on ground is quite averse to what has been projected. India under the BJP is speeding through massive transformation towards emergence of an ethnicity centered landmass where minorities have no right to live peacefully. The brutalities under the auspices of BJP have now touched their limits and criticism is being echoed in all corners of the globe.
It is but a brutal fact that since its inception, India has witnessed gross human rights violations in different parts of the country. Be it the Muslims especially Kashmiris, Dalits, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists or scheduled caste Hindus, Indian history is replete with the injustices and human rights violations against them. However, those could be subdued owing to lack of visibility from outside the country. Thanks to the power of media that nothing could be hidden now, at least for a long time.
The current issue under consideration is of Manipur where a gruesome act of women abuse has taken place repeatedly. The silence of Modi’s government on the issue has made it further agonising not only for the affected families but also for the world at large. The humanity is ashamed of having witnessed the brutality and malicious treatment that two lower caste women were paraded naked, publicly groped and then gangraped. It is disappointing that this was the only incident where video was leaked after two months, yet it is not the only such incident that took place.
The state of Manipur lies in north-east of India with a population of around three million. Reportedly, Hindus, Christians and Muslims share the demographics as 41%, 41% and 8.4% respectively. Manipur is known for rich culture, traditions, vibrance in dance and music and scenic landscapes. People here are generally friendly and simple. But Manipur is also famous for the insurgency and ethnic violence, it is facing since many decades. To an estimate, around 60 armed groups operate in the state who pursue separatism. Of late, it has been embroiled in an ethnic conflict since early May 2023, between the Meitei community and the Kuki tribe; erupted several times before also.
Meiteis are mostly Hindus, supported by BJP presently control the state government. Kukis are Christians and are subjected to discrimination by the state government including forced evictions that threatened the security of their land, and through an attempt to cast them as illegal immigrants. The current conflict was sparked by a court ruling in March 2023, which granted the majority Meitei “scheduled tribal status”, entitling them to the same economic benefits and quotas in government jobs and education as the Kukis. It also allowed Meiteis to buy land in the hills, where the Kukis predominately live, further fuelling fears that their lands, jobs and opportunities would be taken away. This prompted protests, mostly by Kuki student groups. In response, Meitei mobs targeted Kuki homes and attacked those who tried to flee the state capital Imphal, for the hills. According to reports, Kuki villages were also burned by Meitei militias numbering in their hundreds, sometimes thousands. More than 250 churches belonging to the Kuki community were destroyed. Kuki women were systematically targeted via rape, torture and assault. There have also been several reports of beheadings. So far more than 140 people have died and 60,000 displaced.
The fierce situation has renewed and strengthened a longstanding demand by the Kukis for their own separate state. They believe they can no longer live safely under the oppression of a Meitei-dominant Indian state and have pledged they will not stop fighting until their own state is granted. More disappointing is the response from the central BJP government which was notably muted. PM Modi maintained more than two months long public silence on the conflict. He only condemned the episode of two women yet did not address the broader conflict. According to the reports, police have been complicit in the conflict and have not investigated reports of rape, torture and violence against the Kukis.
Surprisingly, the people friendly in their demeanor, loving art and culture have embroiled themselves into ferocious fights since decades. It is intriguing what has prompted them to pursue this way of life in their own country. Surely, it is the sheer injustice that they have been meted with over the years from the state and central governments. The brutality that is being witnessed in India today can be found nowhere else on earth. With the rising thirst of Hindutva, no limits or bounds can be expected in jeopardising safety and security of the minorities in India. BJP has in fact busted the myth of secularism on which the foundation of Indian society was once acclaimed by their founding fathers.