

WHY LEFT-LIBERAL MEDIA HOUSES WILL LOSE THE BATTLE OF CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY

Because they are the only ones engaged in it.

Let me state it as clearly as this, the beef ban is not a debate to be fought on grounds of constitutionality. The debate is not whether the beef ban is constitutional but in whose interest is the ban. The question is not which community is being targeted but which community wants the ban. The issue rests on public morality where the public is the majority community. One must shift away from arguing about minority rights guaranteed under the constitution because no one is really playing by 'the book'.

When we pose it such, the 'secular' cloak of the right-wing falls. The right-wing news anchors uphold the constitutionality of the beef ban by stating that it does not per se target any community but only those who are eating beef.

Even before the beef ban became an official policy of the government, the mob had lynched to death Mohamed Akhlaq on the suspicion that he had beef in his fridge. A rumour sparked a moral panic among the Hindu community of Akhlaq's village. Essentially this was a crime of public morality being upstaged rather than a violation of constitutional morality. Of course the mob violated the constitutional rights of the family but the heinous act gains social and local sanctimony because it adheres to public/majority sentiments. The legitimacy of the violence is evident in the act of draping one of Akhlaq's killer's coffin in the tricolor flag. It is evident in the act of BJP politicians paying homage to the accused.¹ Therefore is a waste of time to fight the battle on the terrain of constitutionality when public morality is all that matters. But media houses are choosing to look at it from the lens of the victims of the ban. They are engaging with a 'hurt' mob in a language that is totally alien to them, that of democracy and freedom. And they are miserably failing to understand why the mob violence continues unabated. Surely it must be the 'kalyug' because nothing else really explains the madness.

The law, media house and the viewers

1 <https://sabrangindia.in/article/all-killers-mohammed-akhlaq-get-bail-dadri-lynching>

The constitution and the laws of the land are alien to most of us. We are scared to tread into the terrain of law, because the law for most of us is the tool of the state to punish and not to protect. A minuscule percentage of the population really believes that the constitutional laws are a guarantee against the local laws of the land. Most of us do not know the difference between the two. The hegemony of the local goondas prevails.

Media house debates are the closest we can safely get to investigating the constitutional law. All the 'facts' of the case are laid out to the viewers and the panelists and a feeling of oneness with the world is packed in those few words, "We the People" or "the nation wants to know". We become one big investigative family, where the judge and the advocate is the news anchor. When media houses become the para-legal domain of ensuring justice, fairness, equality and all those values that are enshrined in the constitution, we have a problem. The fact is the media has its own biases. No news anchor is devoid of their value positions. But they do debate on line of neutrality and objectivity.

Given that certain news channels air a certain ideology, the viewers most often turn to their own 'trusted' news channel. Yellow journalism seems to have swept the news market and fake news is driving people to lynch the usual suspects. There is nothing ethical or constitutional about news anymore. It will be a welcome change if the media or the government flashes a disclaimer, "viewers discretion is advised" before the airing of any news.

Media houses and the beef ban debate

The left-wing or liberal intellectuals will pose the question of beef ban on the constitutional right to freedom of expression and the like. They will question the double standards of the government to persecute Muslims and Dalits in the name of cow protection but not persecute the mob lynchings who hacked the victims to death. They argue on grounds of law and constitutionality that the government is being un-constitutional and is representative of majority interests. They argue that the right-wing party is out to suppress the voice of the marginalised or the dissenters. While all of it is true, it does not seem to spark a debate in the public domain.

What does the government do? It takes out a bill on illegal trade of cattle.

The liberals will badger the government on and on about liberal values and the law of Ambedkar. All to no avail. Right-wing panelists argue that the majority interests and sentiments regarding the cow must be respected. It is here that the liberals must take the cue and state that the law in fact is operating for the majority. But they foolishly fall back on the argument that the constitution is made to protect all communities including minorities. The point is lost once again as the liberals speak on behalf of the victims and their rights without pushing to limits of the right-wing panelists by questioning the majoritarian politics or public morality. They miss the bus to force an admission that public morality is not always the right way to go. Following which they fail to question the neutrality of the cattle trade ban. But the liberals choose to instead harp on minority victimization rather than vilifying the majority for what it is, a dictatorship of the majority! Rajdeep Sardesai only ends up being a Muslim apologist. And is the public not up to their gills with such type?

Now this type of media house law politics makes it easy for the right-wing media houses to escape the debate unscathed. The right-wing news anchors argue that the beef ban is not targeting any community. It is a bill on illegal practice. They argue that the victims just happen to be Muslims or Dalits. Arguing in this manner there is not a dent on the secular identity of the ruling party. They argue that they are only representing the wishes of the majority. The majority being those who want to protect the cow, also known as the patriot. And that this is an open category, for there are many in their definition of the who do not like beef consumption.

The right-wing anchors cloak their biases in neutrality of patriotism and national spirit. This type of cloaking closes the gap between the constitutional morality and public morality. The debate is closed preferably with the national anthem playing in the background. The issue is skirted via the constitution which is apparently is reflective of the majority/patriotic interest. Thus right-wing media houses use the constitution to their advantage. Arnab Goswami ends up being the national/patriotic upholder of the law as the public knows it.

Hindutva and the liberals

The first type of media house does not let the audience reflect on public morality. By talking in the language that is alien to the masses, they alienate/isolate themselves even further. They make the masses feel fools for not being able to understand why their sentiments are in fact worth

questioning. What is wrong with having a Hindu party? What is wrong with Hindutva? The crowd does not understand the moral panic within the liberals about Hindutva. So what if India is proud of being a Hindu nation? It does not mean that they are attacking the minorities. Hinduism is a peaceful religion (unlike some Others we know), and can co-exist with other religious minorities as well. After all, as Raveena Tandon says, Hindutva is all about wearing a saree, which is a traditional Indian dress. She later goes on to state that the liberals are free to tag her as a 'sanghi' for being a blue-blooded Hindu.² Her tweet (for which she has apologized for provoking communal sentiments!) holds the key to the frustration of the liberals who cannot understand why the country is so willingly going to the cows.

The liberals and the intellectuals have failed to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. They feel that with the constitution in their right hand and the left hand in their pocket they can reach out to the public. They believe that the masses who fought the British will fight ignorance and age old traditions with a scientific and modern rationality all through ambiguous laws and articles and schedules that do not penetrate the epithelial layer of the average person. The average person is tired of hoping that an independent India is going to solve their socio-economic woes. The constitution and its values have few takers at the grass roots where the local hegemonic powers dominate. Constitutional morality is willfully rejected by the political elite who survive by breaking the law. And for much of the middle class Hindu household, the language of the law is tough, it is intimidating and it is always making the majority feel bad without knowing why they should feel bad. Moral codes built around public sentiments and traditions on the other hand are easier to understand, relate to and apply.

Therefore for the liberals to be now arguing about constitutional rights of the individual in terms of beef eating does not hold any water, in the opinion public. Instead they should be questioning the 'hurt' sentiments of the masses and the moral codes that exist at the local level. They should ask themselves. How is it that after the barbaric act of lynching, the villagers still came out in full support of the accused? How is it that they became the 'patriots' of the nation while Akhlaq was criminalized for a crime he did not commit? The sentiments must be investigated thoroughly and then perhaps liberals can come to the question, is it a crime to eat beef? Is it not a greater crime

² <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/entertainment/bollywood/120617/will-i-be-termed-sanghi-raveena-tandon-trolled-for-saree-tweet-apologises.html>

to lynch a person to death? Is it not the job of the law bearing bodies to deliver justice and not the duty of the mob? What happened to the constitutional law of the land?

Hindutva is an ideology that is built around a twisting of facts and figures. Hindutva is premised upon fascism. Culture and moral codification is one of the key elements towards the same. It is not just about beef eating, it is about feeling insecure about wearing the saree. It is about a moral panic within the majority that the Muslims are going to take over any minute in terms of population and culture. Hindutva is an ideology built around fear and hatred. And the majority is as much doomed as the Other if they allow the local hegemonic law to become the moral keepers of the nation. First it was the Muslim, later they came for Dalits who were skinning a dead cow. Tomorrow it will be the woman in the Hindu household and the next day they will come for any 'dissenter'. Public morality should never be given the scope of setting the moral code of the land. Unfortunately the government has just done that by introducing a bill to prevent illegal cattle trade as an appeasement offering to calm the public/ majority. The number of incidents of mob lynching has only spiked since then.

Resentment and identity politics

Resentment is a strong feeling. It is a feeling that currently is deciding the public mood. It is causing anger among the majority Hindus who feel that the Muslims who cannot be like Hindus/Indians must leave for Pakistan. It is a feeling that is popular among the minority who suddenly find that they are having to prove their patriotism/ nationalism at every turn, sometimes at the cost of their religious identity. The Hindu and the Indian have merged under BJP rule. The Dalit and the Muslim have been sidelined.

With the rot in the agricultural economy becoming harder to ignore, dwindling urban sector jobs, the BJP failing at every point on its agenda, the government is festering this communal sore to divert the minds of the public. It is nurturing this resentment among the Hindus who feel that with the BJP in power, their golden era has finally come. The Ramrajya of jobs and a full stomach will be realized soon, once the Muslims are out of the country (we need the Dalits!). The 'sickular' Congress can keep their constitutional values jargon to themselves. Minority appeasement in the language of constitutional morality will no longer be tolerated by the majority. Gou Mata must be protected from the villains, her/our time has come!

Ask yourself. Why should Raveena Tandon feel bad or insecure about flaunting a saree? Why should the majority feel bad for a beef eater? Oh! They are not pro-violence. They will condemn the mob-lynching vociferously. Let the law of the land take its course and punish the guilty. But it is also one's patriotic duty to protect the mother of the nation, the cow, even at the cost of arrest. Thus they become martyrs to the cause of the nation.

It is the duty of the left liberals to tease out the Hindu from the Indian. To question this merger and bring out the anxieties of the majority. It is their task to unpack the moral panic among the majority that is making them easy tools of the politicians. Instead they will shroud their arguments in the language of right to eat and tolerance. They will not engage with those who see these policies as not an aggressive Hindutva with horns but only a pro-majority sentiment. They will not engage with the minds who have read and been brought up on Vedic texts interpreted by the local goonda. For if one really read the texts closely, vegetarianism was not the cult of the great and mighty Hindus, and they also fed on beef.³ The key is to challenge the farcical stilts upon which the Hindu dream is built. The key is to go back to the Vedas and reveal to the public that their ideals are not so much built on fairness and equality as much as on twisted facts. To hell with the constitution, first let's talk of the Ram Rajya and the casteist, patriarchal society that India was in the Golden Vedic age, in a language that will relate with the audience. People will turn off your channel, they are doing so anyway.

Give viewers bitter truths and shout it as loud as Goswami, and you will give them a headache and a nagging thought. Do not make them go to bed feeling bad for being a Hindu and wearing a saree. Do not make them resent that the anchor was once again just taking the side of the minority community. Make them feel bad that the Vedic era has no mention of the Vedic dasi. Make them feel bad that they have been fooled into thinking that Hindus never ate beef! But the liberals will not do that.

³ B. R. Ambedkar, 'Did the Hindus never eat beef?' in *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?* in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches, vol. 7, (Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1990, first edition 1948) pp. 323-328. *Compiled by Shamsul Islam in Countercurrents.org.*
<http://www.countercurrents.org/ambekar050315.htm>

And people will go to bed with the same feeling of persecution politics. Every community ends up feeling persecuted. Surely it is one's patriotic duty as Arnab da, paralegal, semi-judge, says, to protect the cow and the constitution. Or was it only the cow? Or the constitution? Who cares? Where's the difference?