

## Cultural Revolution – A Putrid Experience in India

### *The Statesman*

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Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psycho-analyst of the 20th century, once recounted an interesting case of a woman who was known for her stupid prejudices and stubborn resistance to reasoned argument. One night she had dreamt of attending an important social function, where she was greeted by the hostess with the words, “How nice that you could come. All your friends are here and they are waiting for you.” The hostess then led her to a door and the dreamer stepped out... into the cowshed. Jung remarked that the dream language was simple enough to be understood even by a complete blockhead and though the woman would not admit as much initially, the message was eventually driven home and after a while she corrected her behaviour.

The cow is an apt metaphor for the enthusiastic and growing army of *gau-rakshaks* and evangelic anti-beef-protesters who with impunity are targeting anybody who has anything to do with the harmless bovine. But the message is not being conveyed to our leaders. In the process, the script of development and good governance, on which the present government was voted so overwhelmingly to power, has started going awry.

The government was voted to power on the promise of development. It was expected to end the phase of policy paralysis that had characterised the last years of the previous regime, the end of the plethora of scams and corruption scandals, the shameless exhibition of crony capitalism and wastage of national resources and forfeiture of the promise of a vibrant, rapidly-growing economy for which there was abundant scope. The promise of development meant a return of the vanishing jobs for our children, addressing the inequality and inequity that have stymied our society while strengthening the edifice of our nation built on the twin pillars of democracy and secularism. It also meant promoting harmony between different religions and caste groups and ushering in growth and hope for the future. Unfortunately, none of this seems to be happening right now, and the script of development seems to have stopped running.

Soon after the government was voted to power, things had seemed to be on course. Hope returned, growth accelerated, the Sensex bounced back, crucial issues which had been neglected - *Swachh Bharat, Jan Dhan, Beti-Padao Beti Bachao* - were addressed, the anachronism of centralised planning was discarded, and a rustic, robust spirit was overwhelming. An energetic Prime Minister immediately started engaging with our neighbours and the international community at large, immensely improving our relations. Auction of coal and telecom spectrum, conducted in a transparent manner, yielded rich dividend. But the hope turned out to be shortlived.

Before long, certain elements who had sinister designs to hijack the growth story and sabotage the script of development had virtually taken over. They have tried to turn the clock back to the medieval era. A clueless government helplessly watched in despair, not knowing how to react or deal with these characters.

First it was the beef issue which sprang out of nowhere, so suddenly and with so much vehemence that the country was taken by surprise. It was the time for elections in Bihar and the election scenario became

a cauldron of beef, identity and caste. The BJP lost quite predictably, and a dynasty was brought back to power, forgetting and forgiving its many past misdeeds. Then there was the unfortunate suicide of a Dalit student at Hyderabad Central University, who was driven to despair by an insensitive administration. Almost immediately the anti-national debate erupted at JNU, further blurring the script of development. The latest victim of this unfortunate trend is the NIT Srinagar.

The Indian nation is certainly not so brittle and fragile as to start disintegrating over a few slogans, howsoever high-decibel or 'anti-national' these outpourings might have been, even if they were raised by a few radical students in one of our best institutions. Neither will the Indian federation, which has survived several challenges and mutinies, crack up if some students start demanding *azadi*. Not all students may be mature enough to realise what *azadi* means. Logical analysis is the prerogative of the human mind, which, however, seems to be guided rather by instinct in most situations. A mature state is expected to respond to such aberrations in a mature manner, but unfortunately such maturity was nowhere on display. Instead, all sides overreacted beyond all measure to an incident that qualifies to be termed as trivial, bringing the matter to an incendiary flashpoint.

The administration's overreaction was brazenly evident in the arrest of students who needed counselling rather than the prison. The media in a way forced the Government to react the way it did; it abandoned all semblance of morality, responsibility and ethics while flaming and fanning the raw passions of youth. The respected professors who are supposed to mentor students, and whose advice is heeded by them, did not show the wisdom that is expected of them. On the contrary, they provoked the administration and fuelled the rebellion among the students. While responsible ministers made irresponsible statements vitiating the atmosphere further, political parties jumped into the fray, not to lose the opportunity to show their solidarity with the students and derive political capital.

Such duplicitous hypocrites are ever so concerned over the cause of higher education, but none of them has ever uttered a word against the crumbling infrastructure at JNU, Jadavpur, Allahabad or Patna universities. The striking features are the faculty vacancies in our public universities, the decline in standards, and the increasing unemployability of students.

Distractions and entertainment are never found wanting or waning in India, and the latest to come up is the slogan *Bharatmata Ki Jai*. Jung had talked about archetypes or collective thoughts that create myths and religions and philosophies that influence and sometimes characterise nations. We are witnessing a different set of archetypes which are not the product of society's collective thoughts, but are promoted by religious zealots, fundamentalist Hindus and hyper-nationalists who are not much different in substance from the terrorists of the Islamic State who want the entire humanity to be ruled by their version of the Sharia. These elements are projecting *Bharatmata* as the new archetype for the nation expecting everyone to line up before her image and take a test in nationalism and patriotism by raising the slogan. These who fail the test either by remaining silent or by not displaying enough lung-power and enthusiasm in shouting the slogan will be pilloried, branded anti-national and driven out of India. These vicious elements are planning a collective levelling of the individual by forcing everyone to adjust to norms defined by them.

A sane and civilised society thrives on differences and disagreements. A uniform set of values and norms is an oxymoron in a diversified country such as India, where the value for one is non-value for another, and what is sacred for one is profane for another. Norms and standards are valid only in relation to the social milieu in which they apply. In forcing uniform values, these nationalist brigades are trying to bring

the Chinese Cultural Revolution to India. Stretched to its logical conclusion, the Indian variant of the Cultural Revolution could mean the branding of 'anti-nationals' and their public humiliation, forced confessions and self-denunciations, public beatings and the tyranny of the lumpens the Government shows little or no willingness to control.

Goethe's Faust had asserted that in the beginning, there was only the deed. Thought came much later. Sanity will be the last to come, if at all. *Bharatmata* can wait indefinitely and she will.