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A RELIGIOUS AWAKENING OR AN IDENTITY CRISIS?- Navya Dubey¹

THE ‘REAWAKENED’ RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS OF THE INDIAN MAJORITY AND THE DIASPORA

When Rabindranath Tagore wrote “Where the Mind is Without Fear” when the fighters died collectively for our freedom, never did they actually think that we would be so fragmented over something that has been in existence for so long. After all, we evolved quite much in the last seven odd decades post our independence. Surely, we could have got over the petty “Divide and Rule” policy of the British. In India, secularism has now been pronounced by Supreme Court of India to be a part of the basic structure and cannot be done away with even by a constitutional amendment.

The controversy around religion in India has been marked by a general hesitation on the part of Supreme Court of India to intervene in matters of religion. One of the earliest cases in this regard is the case of *NarsuAppaMalli* wherein the statutory prohibition on polygamy among the Hindus was questioned as contravening the right to freedom of religion. The Bombay High Court ruled that this was a constitutional measure of reform and upheld the impugned provision as valid. **The NarsuAppaMalli case** illustrates two important tendencies that have been reflected in judicial discourse in the following years. The reflex of courts in India, when it comes to discussing matters of religion is to staunchly follow a policy of nonintervention. If for some reason they

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find it in themselves to intervene, it is mostly to uphold the religious practice, even if it is blatantly in contravention of fundamental rights.

And yet, call it the inability of the previous regimes or the complacent reluctance of the current one, we are hardly getting over it. In fact, we are sinking into it in the name of finding religion again. While being religious is a highly personal call and should not be questioned, the issue with this new-age religious awakening is that rather than stemming from a desire to know about one's roots, it is being cultivated to further breed hatred and create a competition of extremism, of who can be the best bigot of all. Finding one's identity is not a part of this crisis.

ARE WE AWAKENING THE BELIEF OR COMPETING WITH THE INGRAINED BIAS?

The problem with this new-age religious awakening arises from a two-fold aspect. Since I am a Hindu and I live in India where it is a majoritarian religion, let me speak about mine, even though this mostly applies to all religions (castes/ race/ etc.). Most of the Hindus, middle-class ones at least, do not grow up learning about religion. If their parents can afford it, they are sent to English- medium schools, mostly convent, where they spend the next 14- odd years of their lives reciting hymns and prayers in the name of Jesus. It has to be underscored that I am not talking about the authenticity of these beliefs right now. I am not saying that this converts them into the believers of the Christ. They still come back home and indulge in regular affairs, including having "dahi-cheeni" or applying "roli tika" before heading off for important events. There is no importance attached to learning about religion, it's just a way of life' hymns at the school and prayers at home. It's a parroting pattern that is prevalent. This is present first in the form of obedience at home and then as a herd following at schools and colleges.

These people grow up alongside other individuals who are taught both religion and modern affairs. Religious people and it's so- called gatekeepers may have a hundred vices, but that does not counter the fact that a substantial population across the world still finds solace in its beliefs. Also, to say that all religious people are bigoted and not fit to live in the modern society would be a gross discrimination against them. I have seen many ordinary people going about their lives

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with religion and co-existing in the evolutionary aspects. For them, their religion is a matter of pride. This may be a bone of contention for agnostics and atheists, nevertheless, we cannot deny that there are many believers out there, normal people who find peace in their respective Gods. They know their customs at home as well as their catalogs at offices.

Now bring the first category that has no sense of its religious identity, at par with the second one. Note that the former has also grown up mostly rebuking the latter in the quest to fit in the “modern” category that thrives on bashing culture and even mother tongue. Add on the majoritarian privilege and it creates a bullying atmosphere at the institutions.

Cut to the present times, now these same middle-class Hindus who are rediscovering religion cannot go back to the roots without having to give up their colonial upbringing and education. This is a big ideological clash happening within an individual. Because when you look at religion in its essence, regressiveness is bound to come up. How we interpret it and do not make it a cause for making other’s lives miserable is on us, depending on the kind of individual we are. So, they aim to make religion “cool” by twisting facts and making other religions look bad in comparison. They make white celebrities who perform “poojas” as a symbol of how tolerant the religion is because well, the “cool” that they know, comes from white Christians. It is embedded in their psyche. They don’t understand that people with power and money can twist their identity any way they want and whenever they want, not because they are devoted to an ideology, but because they are interested in it at that moment. I am sorry to break your bubble, but celebrities have the privilege to pick and choose religious beliefs like a bouquet and your religion is a part of it. For the rich, your religion is not the best of all, it is more like their flavor of the season. That being said, how others perceive a religion should never daunt or affect your beliefs, if your beliefs are pure.

This current chase of religion is a typical mindset to walk in the herd mentality and fit in to be accepted, yet again. Because that is the wave at the moment. Dissent is not their cup of tea because face the fact, they have never ever dissented in their lives. They love to be bossed around and want others to be bossed around too. That is the life they know. On the other hand, a

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life of unpredictability, wherein you create your own ideology by applying your own intellect, scares them.

If ever in the future we manage to go back to the normal from here, these same individuals will have a hard time coming back to the moderate mentality. Siding with sponsored and validated hate is not only the easiest thing to do, but also one that feels the best because it gives preference to a natural state of mind. Take a look at the bewildered Trump supporters who cannot accept that their bigotry was hoax all along as the world tolerated him and his goons. That fall is a shocking setback to them because they have to give back their power. They now will have to be answerable for their hate. They will now be looked in the eye by the people they considered vermin. The same fate awaits such ideologically awakened majority in India. The invalidation will destroy them internally, whenever that happens. No moderate will be there to open their arms and welcome them back.

Come to think of it, it's nothing short of ironical that many from the Indian diaspora; the rich ones who are happy slaving away as long as they get paid in higher currencies and get a celebrity traction back in India, are happy with the rigorous white ideologies and privilege. The Mughals, apart from the ones who were invaders, became a part of India, yet these NRIs justify the minority hate in India in their name. On the other hand, they are happy to get cozy with the Brits whose ancestors not only destroyed and looted the nation, but also made it extremely clear that we are an inferior race, not fit to sit or eat with them. Remember 'Indians and Dogs' not allowed? And they still continue to be racist. Americans are no different. We all know how white privilege works there. If we can forgive them, what makes us so hateful towards our own fellow citizens? Is it our own inferiority complex that makes us bow before the Whites, or is it the fact that Muslims are just normal Indians, with the same appearances and struggles, and are a reminder to us of the third world lanes that we come from; a pesky mark from the past on our whitewashed present? Or is it the fact that when we see successful people from the minority religion, we feel that it was ours by default and they stole it? That they should have secured it for us? There may be a hundred reasons, but none justifies our ideological bias.

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And if our acceptance and sudden interest in religion is to further this bias, I don't think we were ever interested in being closer to God. We are just interested in being more hateful, and by extension, being further away from God.

What extremists supported cannot be forgotten. They chose to move towards the discriminatory and bigoted tangent, fully aware of the consequences. Had they been truly interested in their religion, they would have studied it well and would have made it a point to educate; rejecting the redundant and accepting the best, thus evolving their identity. Alas, their only aim was to fit in with the crowd with power, and they are too weak to even understand dissent.

This awakening is not true to any religion. It's just a lame attempt to ace the short-cut towards majority acceptance, without knowing the essence of origin. You don't need to ditch or embrace religion to be a better person as per any specific ideology. You just need to be a rational and logical human who can differentiate between the whites, the blacks, and the greys of the world. And that is clearly not the intention of such people who claim that they are waking up to "reclaim" their identity. Your identity, is that of a rolling ball, and it conveniently falls in whichever pit of validation offers the best benefits.

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