

Dalitality

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'A BRAHMIN woman raped' or 'A Rajput woman raped'. I often wonder why I don't read such headlines in newspapers. But, every other day, I come across this headline: 'Dalit woman raped'. Is it that only Dalit women are victims of rape? No. Why then, in case of rape of a Dalit woman, her community is identified? Who does this?

The character of Indian media, or should I say the Upper Caste Media, is usually hidden in the answer to this question. I am addressing this group as Upper Caste Media because the way in which this media functions, the way they write and present their news reports, often reflects their character. This media identifies the caste of a Dalit rape victim, but when Mary Kom wins a gold medal at the Olympics, they do not inform their readers about her caste. When Hima Das and Dutee Chand win medals and create world records, no one mentions their caste. This media does not even debate that while Sachin Tendulkar (a Brahmin), who has received crores from the BCCI for playing for 'India', has got a Bharat Ratna, why has Major Dhyhan Chand, the wizard of hockey, a sport that is played in more countries than cricket, not received the honour.

The Indian media's double standards on these issues show that it looks at Dalits

From the margins, a new era for Dalit media

differently. The language used by the Indian media, especially the Hindi media, is often offensive. In newspapers, one often reads the headline, 'Dabang thrash a Dalit'. Who is the *dabang* (fearless one) here? The one who tortures a poor, innocent, weak person, bereft of all rights? Is it not right to use the word *gunda* (hooligan) instead of *dabang* for such a person? Why glorify a criminal each time?

This character of the Indian media is not just evident in news reports but also inside the newsroom. While the mainstream media has a very small number of Dalits, a few of my Dalit friends who work in big news channels tell me that their colleagues often ask them why they write and report about Dalit issues and raise the same in meetings. They are even accused of being casteist, and most of their reports are dismissed.

In 2006, when I joined the mainstream media after completing a diploma in journalism from one of the country's most prestigious media colleges, the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi, my own experience with caste there was quite bad. From the very first day, people were intent on knowing my caste.

At my second job, with a leading Hindi newspaper in North India, despite being

the senior-most person for the job, I was not given a promotion. Questions were raised on my capabilities despite the fact that as a reporter I had been given the responsibility to cover Aligarh Muslim University. If I was incapable, then for the past seven years I would not have edited and published *Dalit Dastak*, a prominent magazine of the Dalit community which has been written about by both the English media in India and the international media. An invite to attend the prestigious Harvard India Conference just landed in my inbox.

Also, in the media, there are no senior journalists from the community to mentor young Dalits. Numbers prove this. In 2006, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) had conducted a survey on the Delhi media. Apart from 37 Hindi and English newspapers, 315 decision-makers at 247 news channels were part of the survey. The study revealed that 90 per cent of the decision-makers at newspapers were from the upper caste. At the 247 news channels, 79 per cent of the decision-makers were upper castes. Of these, 49 per cent were Brahmins alone. Among the top 315 decision-makers at news channels, there was no one from the Dalit or tribal communities. The OBCs accounted for 4

per cent, while the Muslim representation stood at 3 per cent.

It's important to mention another report here. Oxfam India, in association with Newsland, prepared a report titled 'Who Tells Our Stories Matters: Representation of Marginalised Caste Groups in Indian Newsrooms'. The report studied all major Hindi and English news platforms — newspapers, television channels, news websites and YouTube channels. The report said that among journalists writing for English newspapers, only 5 per cent belong to Dalit and tribal communities. The figure stands at 10 per cent for Hindi newspapers. Twelve leading magazines were also assessed as part of the study. It was revealed that of the 972 stories published on its cover pages, only 10 were related to caste — just 1 per cent.

The Indian media is not on a par with the Western media where, to ensure diversity, people from all communities are given opportunities. If this was the case here, the Indian media would prosper because then news from all communities and sections would be reported without any prejudice, which in turn would create a better atmosphere in the country.

It is this indifference of the mainstream media that has brought Dalits to social me-

dia. Many YouTube channels that focus on Dalit-Bahujan issues have lakhs of subscribers and are being run by professional journalists. On such platforms they can speak about the issues of their community in a better manner. Their strength can be gauged from the fact that the Rohith Vemula case came to the fore only because Dalits now have access to social media.

Despite the indifference, Dalits have frequently challenged mainstream media through their small publications. The history of Dalit-Bahujan media is also about to complete a hundred years. *Muknayak*, the Marathi fortnightly newspaper started by Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, is set to complete a century in three months — on January 31, 2020. On this occasion, the *Dalit Dastak* magazine has organised a big programme, '100 years of Ambedkar's Journalism'. Editors and publishers of journals and newspapers from across the country, that focus on Dalit-Bahujan movements, will join the event.

It is the beginning of a new era for the Dalit media.

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Translated from Hindi by Anikta Dwivedi Johri



Fifth COLUMN

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Losing the Kashmir narrative

TWO VIDEO clips I saw on social media last week came as proof for me personally that Article 370 would have had to go sooner rather than later. The first showed Pakistani children playing at becoming suicide bombers. With the sound of verses from the Koran in the background, small children lined up to embrace an older child before he crossed the dusty field in which they played and disappeared in a fake explosion. The second showed ISIS widows and wives in a camp in Iraq the day after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed. They screamed that a new leader would be born soon to deal with infidels. They wore black burqas and black gloves and spoke from behind veils that totally concealed their faces. They said it was the will of Allah that the jihad continue till all infidels be killed. Their dress code reminded me that they have sisters like Asiya Andrabi in Kashmir.

India as a victim for decades of jihadist terrorism has every reason to be worried about this kind of Islam spreading through Kashmir. And, it has been spreading slowly but surely for many, many years. It has changed the nature of Kashmiri Islam and it has changed the objective of the armed insurgency from 'azaadi' to establishing an Islamic state in Kashmir governed by the Shariat. This transformation of the 'freedom movement' did not begin after Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, it began long ago. Last week, on the day that the former state of Jammu & Kashmir lost not just its special status but its status as a state, senior Congress party leader Ghulam Nabi Azad declared publicly that there was no 'Kashmir problem' till 2014. He lied. Our Kashmir problem began in 1947 and was so badly handled by Congress prime ministers that even as the historical problem faded, a new one was born out of bad policies and terrible mistakes. Most of them made in Delhi. Not in Srinagar.

Having said this, it also needs to be said that the Kashmiri tour that those random European legislators were treated to last week was a ludicrous public relations farce. Since the abrogation of Article 370, all attempts to win India's case internationally have been absurdly farcical. Right from that first attempt by our National Security Advisor to show 'normalcy' in Srinagar by hosting a supposedly impromptu buffet lunch for a handful of locals in an ominously deserted street.

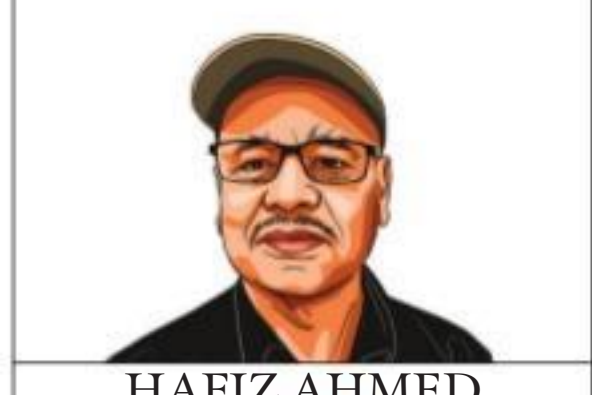
India has compelling reasons for the abrogation of Article 370. But, so far, they have been put before the world so badly that it is Pakistan that has taken control of the narrative. Every time a new story appears in some important western newspaper about torture and repression in the Kashmir Valley, spokesmen of the Indian Government dismiss it as prejudice and Pakistani propaganda. Perhaps. But, when are we going to start telling our side of the story better? When are we going to explain to the world that India can simply not afford to have an Islamic caliphate take birth within her borders? This was beginning to happen in Kashmir right under the noses of Kashmir's 'mainstream' political leaders and they were unable to stop it. Sadly, 'liberal' journalists and human rights activists on our side of the border were reluctant to admit that we were dealing with something more serious than a 'freedom movement'.

What is even more worrying is that instead of a responsible, mature effort to counter Pakistan's false narrative on Kashmir, what we have seen from the Modi government is a childish kind of triumphalism. Where is the need to make the abrogation of Article 370 an issue of 'national honour'? Where is the need for senior ministers in Modi's cabinet to keep boasting about his "56-inch chest"? They do him no good when they talk like this because now that Jammu & Kashmir have come under direct rule from Delhi, every time there is a new act of jihadist violence, it will be blamed on Modi personally. The Chief Minister of West Bengal has already blamed him for the murder of five Bengali workers who have become the most recent victims of jihadist terrorists in Kashmir. Why they are still operating freely is a question for the Home Minister to answer.

Last week, the Prime Minister said while paying tribute to the Statue of Unity that he has ordered built, that by abrogating Article 370 he has fulfilled Sardar Patel's dream of uniting India. "Peace and development will now prevail in Jammu and Kashmir," Modi said while standing beside one gigantic foot of the Statue of Unity. We must hope and pray that he is right. It is what everyone wants, including the people of the state that is now not a state but a Union territory. Sadly, the steps taken since August 5 have been less than convincing.

The uncounted humans

GAINED IN TRANSLATION



HAFIZ AHMED
হাফিজ আহমেদ

COME LET'S BE SILENT FOR A WHILE

Come, let's be silent for a while and pray For them whose fathers are poor And who call their brothers-in-law Baba. Come, let's be silent for a while and pray For them whose need for rewards makes them forget their roots/ And make them massage their masters' hallowed feet So hard that the skin peels off. Come, let's be silent for a while and pray For them who assure/ That the mothers of South Godhuni Char/ Have a literacy rate of only 6 per cent/ And who need to submit a Panchayat certificate to prove their linkage. Come, let's be silent for a while and pray For them who assure/ That we are born in handcarts and country boats/ And that these handcarts and country boats are our ambulance. Come, let's be silent for a while and pray For them who ask our mothers and sisters And fathers and brothers to prove that they were born/ And compel them to hang themselves. Come, let's be silent for a while and pray That Ravana's clan be extinguished, That all Yazids find their graves in Karbala.

BABAJAAN

Just like in the movies/ Every word you say Becomes an incident,/ A wave in my mind This dark night. The incident of 1950/ When you built a banana raft/ And kept it ready on the Bhelengi. So that if needed we could/ Take to the Brahmaputra and save our lives. Babajaan and his people/ Didn't have to leave/ Dhaniram Talukdar of Barpeta said, 'Why will you leave?/ Is this land not yours? Didn't you turn this mother's heart fertile With the sweat of your brow?' Babajaan didn't leave/ But Nanajaan did He left this land/ Not for the land downstream/ But for the eternal emptiness beyond./ One evening he was on his patch of green land/ In Bagulimari/ Mashing rice and milk and ripe plantain/ And raising a morsel to his mouth/ When an enemy newly arrived from downstream/ Swung once his sword/ And Nana's head was on the ground.

On that day a pact was made./ Our king and they who had come for refuge from downstream/ Made an agreement. Just as a hen collects her chicken/ Under her wings/ Our Nanajaan bound my uncles and aunts/ In his shawl and sent them downstream/ They returned eventually but by then/ The counting of humans was over, And our uncles and aunts were left out. They were lovers of green fields—/ My uncles and aunts/ And an intoxication was upon them./ They cleared forests and bared the earth's chest/ And as the green turned golden/ They sang Magun and Bihu, And started the harvest.

The storm of time returned/ Some PIP or something/ What was it called?/ Because their names were missing/ From the list of humans/ They were bound up again And sent downstream. Babajaan, Majaan/ And our aunts/ Were safe But only for a while/ The dark clouds of time Gathered again—/ And one day we heard That our aunt, married in Nellie./ Was still wrapped in a green sari/ Still holding her five month daughter on her breast./ When the guns came/ And granted her eternal peace.

And then Babajaan left Maybe Babajaan was safer/ In the lap of death/ Or else he might have been/ Felled by militants/ In Bashbari, Kokrajhar, Khagrabari/ Or His long beard/ And green lungi/ And broken Assamese/ Might have prompted some Patriot to make him sit on his knees/ In the sun/ Or like Jabbar Ali he might/ Have been called a foreigner/ In his own country and made to rot/ And die in jail. We are not as scared/ As you were, babajaan/ You said, 'Learning is light/ Burn the lights of knowledge/ And the demons will scatter./ I followed your advice/ And am not scared of demons anymore./ Kalam, Dwijen, Tridip and I and many others/ Will fight together/ And prove that this land/ Is not of the masked patriots alone./ This land is not of attackers alone./ This land is the land of your blood and sweat.

A DEAD FROG CROAKS (FOR DULAL PAL)

A citizen's body is left in the morgue for a week/ Everything is fine/ Everything is normal./ Everyone is eating, celebrating And climbing the ladders of power — It's all happening just fine. Only a few twist and squirm, Like fish in a net —/ They who have not mortgaged their morality./ They are children of the same mother./ Same blood and bone and sinew/ And yet Dulal Pal and others like him/ Have morphed into locusts. Forgive us brother, we are dead frogs, Caught in the jaws of poisonous snakes. We croak so that/ The lord of the people might hear.

Translated from Assamese by Shalini M Hussain

She SAID SHALINI LANGER

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I COULD say 'make love, not war'. But who still believes that is possible?

Still, let me put it on record: yes, we did enter college also hoping to find love. And in the harsh, barren, unfriendly landscape of the national capital, particularly for those of us hanging on the fringes of Delhi University's frugal campuses, we headed to Jawaharlal Nehru University to find our moments of romance.

Love blossomed on the slow, somnolent bus rides to this green expanse that till the '90s had just two DTC routes covering it, spread apart by hours. Love blossomed on the long wait for those buses to arrive, in roofless shelters with their broken slats for seats, which we barely even noticed. Love blossomed on the cheap tea and *samosas* we had by the wayside on the JNU campus, with each of its 'landmarks' — the Teflas canteen, the Ganga *dhaba*, the library (an entire building of it!) — marking a milestone. Love blossomed on the long walks at dusk when the campus was bathed in orange light from a sun visible long into the distance, and where, as night fell, the shadows seemed as unthreatening. Love even acquired an edge from the hint of rebellion always hanging round the corner in the university's air.

And yes, love blossomed on the university's Parthasarthy Rocks, named for its first vice-chancellor no less but more known by reputation as a location that provided the romantic settings of ragged rocks and a river gone dry. There, as the sun set and the dark suddenly came on, it didn't require much to imagine oneself in a different world. Yes there were remnants of the evenings before, the couples before, even the revelries — glistening in abandoned bottles — before, all around us. But that only added to the charm of the place, of being part of this unbroken chain that would last long after us.

One hears the Rocks are now barred, due to "unsavoury" activities. The locks are "partial", the university insists, but like other things on that campus and outside, the censure seems total.

Not far away, on one of those nights when the Delhi moon still shone bright and clear, on a parapet bordering a culvert, I sealed a bond of marriage. A guard may have driven past on a scooter, I can't remember; some others like us may have giggled past, I forget.

For, nothing can change the memory of that night for me, particularly not the sordidness that has followed on that

JNYou and Me



Illustration: Mithun Chakraborty

campus.

I would create other memories in JNU, of becoming parent to a child who could imagine ghost stories in the abandoned house next door, and who could walk out and see a snake cross the road one evening and a peacock on the terrace the next morning. I was struck, each time, by the sight of a peacock that high up, unweighed by its long tail.

It has been years now since we moved out of JNU — though moving only just, so that its tree tops remain visible from our new house's balcony, while its peacocks and monkeys keep straying across to the neighbourhood park.

I went to JNU some time ago amidst the protests surrounding the sedition case against its students. The security checks were up at the gate but, reassuringly, the university went on unflustered like always even as, at the centre of it, heated slogans raised below a Jawaharlal Nehru

statue bounced off walls painted with protest graffiti.

Some months ago, I returned to JNU to drive past that culvert. It stands there, just so. The Parthasarthy Rocks now have a looming mobile tower and a gate but, at the time I went, it stood thrown open, a guard standing disinterested.

Perhaps the moon doesn't shine as bright — the lights of the malls next door (one, two, then three) have bleached the night sky. Perhaps the son doesn't miss the snakes or peacocks, even the ghosts, as much as we want him to. Perhaps my second child, born in the other home — two floors above the ground, with no front or back lawn, a geographical boundary set early in life for a city kid — could have done with some of the same too. Perhaps neither the snakes or peacocks, nor the ghosts, hang around any more, chased away by the clicks of cellphone cameras.

But, nothing will take away those memories, associated forever with JNU, for me. For, that is love.

National Editor Shalini Langer curates the fortnightly 'She Said' column

Out of MY MIND MEGHNAD DESAI

ALL IS fair in love and war. Governments are entitled to do whatever is within constitutional limits according to the political belief of their ruling party and normal rules of conduct. Others may not like it, but then they did not win the confidence of the people. What is unforgivable is incompetence. The saga of Article 370 began at the top as a brilliant manoeuvre. The decision to abrogate Article 370 on August 5-6 was a stunning success. Somehow the government seemed to have found a window of opportunity when, with the J&K government out of

Govt's dozen own goals on Kashmir

office and hence the responsibility for any change in Article 370 falling on the Central government, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah found a sequence of adjustments to various articles in the Constitution to make the most profound change in Article 370.

Modi and Shah had cut the Gordian knot. The de facto situation of J&K not being truly autonomous was now legally secured. As used to happen in the past, mobile telephones were shut down, public meetings banned, curfews imposed. Now, however, we were promised that these bans would not last. The promise was that business of the government would improve and healthy and prosperous Kashmiris would be empowered. New

governments would be established. This was however not a priority. The eyes of the government were firmly fixed on Pakistan and the United Nations. The avoidance of any official censure by the UN Security Council was adroitly managed by the government.

Ninety days have passed since then. There is even now no normalcy. What is obvious is that whatever scheme the top echelon of the government had in mind has not been delivered by the lower rungs, from the Governor down.

The episode involving the European Parliamentarians shows that the government does not believe in its own propaganda that all is well. Whoever dreamt up this clumsy and transparently flawed

programme should be sacked. It is not just one but a dozen own goals. It has exposed a serious gap in international diplomacy.

It has been obvious for some time that there is a serious dearth of talent in political personnel below the top two. The PMO also has not been up to the challenges that the PM sets for it, as was obvious in the demonetisation case. The Article 370 saga has been allowed to harm India's reputation thanks to a lack of foresight.

An urgent policy intervention is needed. Chanakya's sequence of *Saam*, *Daam*, *Dand* and *Bhed* seems to have been reversed. *Dand* has been used at the outset. But *bhed* has failed as the MEP

(Members of European Parliament) *fi-asco* shows. *Daam* has been promised but not delivered.

What remains is *saam*. There is a need to display confidence in the rightness of the policy if indeed it is believed and, I am sure it is, that the policy was correct and in the interest of J&K.

Relax the curfew completely, release all prisoners, face the crowds of protesters and show the world that they remain a minority. Allow anyone and everyone to visit Kashmir as indeed now, after the abrogation of Article 370, they have the right. Let the world come openly rather than report furtively. Somehow people believe furtively obtained news more than its truth value. It hurts India.