India's soul is wounded

THE MASK is off and the claws have been

Project Hindu Rashtra is gaining speed. The engine is the Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi; at the wheel is the Home Minister, Mr Amit Shah. The designer/engineer, the RSS, is watching with great interest.

Message to Muslims

The only surprise is that the BJP is pushing its agenda so quickly after its massive election victory: criminalisation of triple talaq, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise in Assam, the repeal of Article 370 of the Constitution and, now, the passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill are part of an elaborate plan to advance Project Hindu Rashtra.

The common intent behind these moves is to send a blunt and unambiguous message to the Muslims of India that they are not equal citizens of this country and to reiterate the Golwalkar-Savarkar theory of 'India is a Hindu nation'.

The Citizenship Act, 1955, recognises citizenship by birth; citizenship by descent; citizenship by registration; citizenship by naturalisation; and citizenship by incorporation of territory. All other persons living in India would be 'illegal migrants'. The Foreigners Act, 1946, and the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920, would apply to them and they are liable to be expelled. The religion of a person — whether a citizen or an 'illegal migrant' — was alien to the concept of Indian citizenship.

All the above have changed with the passage of the Citizenship (Amendment)

thread by which we hang on to.

For the last few years, we have spent

most of our summer and winter vacations

on the streets fighting to save our jobs. Every

year comes a new assault, sometimes from

the government, sometimes from the uni-

versity administration. It goes unsaid that

only a mind free of fear and uncertainties

can afford to be innovative and resourceful.

with a college where we are allowed to

contest elections to staff council commit-

tees, a provision that came into existence

only last year. This was the result of a strong

collective resolve shown by the members

of our staff association and staff council to

bring inclusiveness into our college's aca-

demic and corporate life. However, ad hoc

colleagues in most other colleges work in

various committees without any formal

recognition. Their views and their contri-

butions are also considered 'ad hoc'. Even if

we are formally recognised members of

the committees, when it comes to any fi-

nancial matter, our signatures aren't

enough to get the bills passed through the

accounts section. A counter signature by a

permanent colleague becomes mandatory

irregularities and failures on the part of

the administration and promotes the nar-

rative that the ad hoc teachers are ad hoc

because of their 'incompetency'. This is no

different from the flawed perception that

the marginalised sections of society are to

be blamed for their socio-economic state

or that rape victims are to be blamed for

where I was introduced to the groom's fa-

ther as an Assistant Professor. Before ask-

ing for my name, the person asked if I was

ad hoc or permanent. On learning of my

status, his tone changed to that of pity and

he soon lost interest in me. So, even in a

high-voltage marriage party, I was quickly

reminded of the fact that I belonged to a

academics, I worked as a data analyst in a

multinational company. I have chosen

teaching as a profession out of passion and

not merely for a livelihood. It has been nine

years since I started teaching. Solidarity and

love given by our students in times of crises

provide us with the strength to carry on de-

spite the indifference shown by successive

governments, the UGC and the University

The writer teaches in the

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administration in ensuring justice.

I teach statistics and before shifting to

marginalised class of teachers.

Once I went to a friend's wedding

bringing it on themselves.

Public perception focuses less on the

to bring "legitimacy" to our hard work.

I am very fortunate to be associated

Bill, 2019. The Bill is suspect. In fact, many scholars and former judges have opined that it is unconstitutional.

MANY QUESTIONS, No answers

What does the Bill do? It picks three countries — Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It picks six 'minority communities' — Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians. It **presumes** that any person belonging to one of the six communities from one of the three countries who had entered India on or before December 31, 2014, was 'persecuted' in home country and could, therefore, by an *executive order*, be exempted from the provisions of the Foreigners Act and the Passport (Entry into India) Act, Such a person shall not be an 'illegal migrant'.

In short, the amendment Bill has introduced a new route to acquire citizenship — citizenship by executive fiat.

Questions arise, they were asked, but the government had no answers:

1. Why were only three countries picked for special treatment leaving out other neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal?

2. Why were only six minority communities picked leaving out other communities — discriminated in the home country because they do not belong to the majority — such as as Ahmadiyyas, Hazaras, Balochis, Rohingya, Jews etc?

3. Abrahamic religions are three: why was Christianity alone included, leaving out Judaism and Islam?

4. Why were Hindus included, but Sri Lankan Hindus excluded? Why were Christians included but Bhutanese Christians excluded?

5. The premise of the Bill is religious persecution. What about victims of other forms of persecution, like linguistic, political, cultural, casteist etc? What about victims of civil wars?

6. Why is the cut-off date December 31, 2014? What is its impact on the cutoff date of March 25, 1971, mentioned in the Assam Accord? Has the latter been discarded?

7. What is the purpose of exempting from the provisions of the amended Act "the tribal area of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram or Tripura as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution" and the area covered under 'The Inner Line' notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873? What are the consequences of such an exemption?

8. Are CAB and the NRC not Siamese twins? Which will be implemented first? **9.** Will those who claimed they were born in India or entered India before March 25, 1971, have to change their story now and claim that they were victims of religious persecution in their home country? Which claim will be a lie and which claim will be truthful?

Consequences of **EXCLUDING MUSLIMS**

If both CAB and the NRC will be implemented, the non-Muslims *excluded* under the NRC will be **included** under

CAB. The **net result** will be that only Muslims will be identified as illegal migrants and excluded. The consequences will be monstrous.

Once excluded, the government must sequester the excluded persons in camps until any country or countries agreed to accept them. Where will the camps be built and how many will be required? Will the 'illegal immigrants' remain in the camps for the remainder of their lives? And what will be status of their children?

Besides, there will be social, economic and political consequences, in India and abroad, of incarcerating, indefinitely, millions of Muslims in virtual concentration camps. Reacting to the cleansing in India, there will be pressure on Hindus living in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Pakistan to emigrate to India.

It was apparent that the government had not taken a considered view on the constitutional validity of CAB when tested on the anvil of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Violent protests have broken out in Assam and the Northeastern states. Large sections of people across the country, a majority Hindu, have joined the protests.

Despite the serious questions about CAB and the turmoil all around, Parliament collaborated with the Executive in passing an unconstitutional Bill. The task of restoring equality and constitutional morality will now fall on the Judiciary.

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LIFE AND WORK

Life as an 'ad hoc'



THE WORD 'ad hoc' itself may not have a negative connotation, but the moment it is used to define the identity of a person, it becomes a synonym for marginalisation and humiliation. Such a marginalised class exists in one of India's premier universities, Delhi University. Around 5,000 teachers — more than 50 per cent of the teaching fraternity in DU — are fighting for a way out of this marginalisation. Over several years of our ad hocism,

we have seen humiliation in various forms, and on various platforms. Talking about the absence of routine provisions such as medical benefits and salary increments will sound like complaining about the non-existence of utopia in a system which denies even basic human rights like maternity leaves and medical leaves. Women ad hoc teachers facing loss of job over maternity is a regular phenomenon.

More than losing life to illness, ad hoc teachers fear losing their jobs over illness. A few months ago, a colleague was battling for life after an accident. When we went to see him, his wife told us that after remaining unconscious for around 48 hours, he couldn't recognise her but kept repeating "college jaana hai, letter lena hai (have to go to college, take the letter)". He was referring to the 'appointment letter' that we get, if lucky, after a one-day break post every 120 days of our ad hoc service.

According to a University ordinance of 2007, "ad hoc appointments shall only be made for a period of more than one month and up to four months". While the rules say ad hoc appointments are to be made only in extra-ordinary situations — such as "sudden, unexpected and short vacancy, arising out of a sudden sickness or death, on medical grounds (including maternity leave), abrupt leave, or any other situation that may disrupt the normal process of teaching-learning" — the fact is, ad hoc appointments are more the norm, with some working as ad hoc against the same vacancies for 15 to 20 years. For the sake of technical "legitimacy" to the bizarre system, a working day break is given between consecutive appointments, after which the ad hoc teacher collects a new letter that enables her/him to continue working, a thin

DALITALITY

Hindu, Muslim, and the nonsense of it



A DOMINANT-caste acquaintance at Harvard who recently turned liberal was aghast at the Ayodhya verdict. She went on a long tirade about the situation in the country, describing how her family and friends are anti-Muslim, especially since Narendra Modi came to power. She had forums of fellow dominant-caste Hindus and Muslims to discuss these issues. Even liberal universities in the US continue to host events to discuss 'the communal problem of India'.

Every now and then I bump into the group of wokes trying to make sense of their frustrations. Their arguments range from Muslims not having equal rights, to the Kashmir issue and, the favourite of all, how their Muslim friends living in posh quarters in state capitals are now unable to perform their Muslimness openly.

I asked my friend if her family members were always anti-non-Hindu or she just became woke after coming to the US and working in MNCs? She said, "Maybe I was like them. Oh my god a Muslim hater!"

And then I asked, do you know Dalits and Adivasis of India? She replied with an 'of course' and a slight reserved posture this time. I asked her if she knew the population of Muslims in India and she got the answer off the top of her head (14%). I asked if she knew the percentage of Dalits. She did not (it is 17% by government figures and some more in actual, if Dalits in other religions are counted). The Q&As continued for a while.

I asked her if her love for Muslims is rooted in deep-seated hatred for Dalits? Second, if her family's hatred for Muslims was rooted in deep-seated hatred for

Dalits? She was flummoxed. This acquaintance knew Muslims were undergoing problems with regard to their food culture, religion and citizenship. But she had no idea about Dalit and Adivasi lives. She is not to blame. The liberal, conservative, progressive, radical, revolutionary, education system, media, family, political and social organisations, all help continue the legacy of untoucha-

bility and anti-Dalitness. Despite her new-found love for India's minority, that for her were singularly Muslims, she could not deliberate upon the condition of other minorities.

Invasions & Invasions

Muslims, like Brahmanic and Hindu colonisers, ruled over India in the pre-British era. During their tenure, there were no significant efforts to eradicate untouchability or facilitate a society of equals. Hindus butchered Dalits, Buddhists and Jains who were challenging the Brahminical order. Likewise, the Muslim invaders contributed in desecrating Buddhist heritage sites and monks. Many were forced to accept Islam.

The laity, mostly Dalits, accepted Islam to escape the tyranny of Brahminism. They pursued Sufi Islam that was liberal in posture when it came to practices.

The Hindu-Muslimisation of India's past and present falls well into the trap of Brahminical rhetoric of theocratic nationalism that wants the world, and Indians in particular, to believe in this dichotomy and not about the grand legacy of Buddhism and the internal violence of caste. Babasaheb Ambedkar is spot on. In his scholastic treatise, The Triumph of Brahmanism, he uncovers how the legacy of invasions of both Hindus and Muslims diluted the non-colonial (non-Hindu, Muslim or Christian) peaceful past.

"Reels and reels have been written to show how wave after wave of Muslim invasions... enveloped the people. The whole history of India is made to appear as though the only important thing in it is a catalogue of Muslim invasions. But even from this narrow point of view, it is clear that the Muslim invasions are not the only invasions worth study... If Hindu India was invaded by Muslim invaders, so was Buddhist India invaded by Brahminic invaders... From the point of view of the permanent effect on the social and spiritual life of the people, the Bramhanic invasions of Buddhist India have been so profound... that compared to them, the effect of Muslim invasions on Hindu India have been... superficial... ephemeral."

THE DALIT EXPERIENCE

An ideal subaltern and native perspective is to identify the conditions of the poor. In current times, the poor — from the oppressed castes — suffer the most. The ruling elites only parade as the spokespeople in the meat market of dead Dalit bodies. Muslim hatred in India has caste sitting at the centre of its function. Although unacceptable in the egalitarian doctrine of Islam, caste is freely practised under the guise of being a minority Muslim in a majority Hindu India.

Almost in every Muslim forum, or in the presence of Muslim audiences I address, an obvious question is asked: why did/do Dalits not convert to Islam (same goes with

Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists; in case of Hindus—reconvert)? Well, they did, but the people responsible for managing the affairs of Islam betrayed the message of the Prophet. The untouchability practised against Dalit Muslims has filled reports and research projects. Yet, their condition is not the concern of the supremacy-hungry Ashraf band of elite Muslims. Aftab Alam, Anwar Ali, and Prashant K Trivedi, Srinivas Goli, Fahimuddin, Surinder Kumar have underscored the overwhelming caste experiences amongst 75% of Indian Muslims.

Communalism, as historian Dilip Menon uncovered, has lower-caste assertion dating back to 19th century violence. Be it the Cow Protection Riots of the 1920s or the violence during Partition. To upturn lower-caste assertion, dominant-caste Hindus used Muslims as target to unite the lower-castes. The worst victims of communalism are Dalits of every religion. Thus, when the lingo of communalism is presented as a binary of religious issue, it is playing into the hands of the Brahminical framework. The ones opposing communalism also contribute to the oppressive framework of their brethren on the 'right-wing' side of the debate. While the cow violence in current

times can be seen in light of the growing Dalit assertion and OBC atomisation from Brahmin control, a need to paint the anti-Muslim rhetoric is active. Similar instances happen in the Ram-Babar conflict over the structure at Ayodhya.

How about we enquire pre-Ram and pre-Babar histories? Ayodhya was one of the centres of Buddhist activities, with monasteries housing thousands, records Hsuan Tsang. Buddha had stayed here for sometime. The neatness with which identities have been demarcated into Hindu and Muslim ones "hide the porosity of identities as much as histories of the inner violence of hierarchy", posits Menon.

Violence in India's governmentality ensures the validity of the caste system by making fools of majority Shudras, whereas minority Brahmins of Hindu and Muslim faith never alter their egoist position. Instead, they are projected as the penultimate prophets of their ethnicity to a world still attached in dichotomies. The problem of post-Aryan India has always been a caste problem and thereby it remains a Dalit problem.

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FIFTH COLUMN



Dangerous priorities

WHAT A MESS. And, what for? I have tried, really tried, to understand the point of the law that was passed last week. And, I have failed. I wanted this week to write something good about the first few months of Narendra Modi's second term as Prime Minister. I have not had good things to say of late and, contrary to the opinion of the Twitter termites that support him, it is not because my son has been exiled.

Of course, I think it was wrong to exile my son from the country that has been his home for 40 years. Of course, I believe this was done out of petty vindictiveness, but this does not influence the opinions in this column. Only smallminded, venomous termites (such a lovely word) whose claim to fame is that Modi follows them would have such degraded thoughts. So the less said about them the better.

The truth is that I continue to nurture the hope that Modi will be able to transform India if he gets his priorities right. He has already brought about a social revolution by ousting a ruling elite that deserved to be ousted. As someone who belongs to the said ousted elite, I admit without hesitation that we used our education and privilege in a way that benefited us and us alone and did almost no good for the vast majority of Indians. We deserved to be replaced by a new ruling elite.

Having said this, I believe it is necessary to point out that the priorities of the new ruling elite are very worrying. With the economy in a dismal state, with prices rising, with industrial production falling, with fine Indian companies going bankrupt and unemployment at a record high should this amended citizenship law have been a priority?

It is supposedly meant to help victims of religious persecution (excluding Muslims) in our Islamic neighbourhood. And, perhaps this is a worthy cause, but surely the needs of Indian citizens should come first. Surely Modi 2.0 should have made it his first priority to put a team of economists together to find solutions to our grim economic woes? Surely he should have immersed himself in long meetings with Indian investors to find out why they are not in-

Instead, he has been almost absent from matters of governance. Should he not have been in Parliament for the passing of a law that has already caused massive disruption and is likely to cause much more in the future?

Ironically, it is in our eastern states that disruption has turned to violence because it is in our eastern states where there could be some justification for trying to keep out illegal Muslim immigrants.

What the Prime Minister seems not to have noticed is that the people of Assam and Tripura are as keen to keep out Hindus as well. Not just from other countries but from other Indian states. They made this clear decades ago. Sometimes with such savagery that images of the massacre in Nellie fill my head as I write these words.

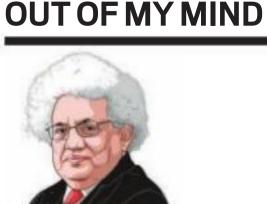
In Assam, the campaign against Bangladeshi Muslims caught the eye of the RSS long ago. Ever sympathetic to causes that demean Muslims, they supported the angry protests that were led by Assamese students. Then came the Assam Accord that Rajiv Gandhi signed as prime minister and a relative calm prevailed till last week, despite the aggressive exercise to register citizens that the government carried out at awful

Many among the 'foreigners' in detention centres in Assam are Hindu, but now that they have been granted the right to full citizenship, the people of Assam have reason to be worried that once more they will have to fight to preserve their culture, identity, language and their jobs. The only good thing that may come

out of the violence we saw last week is that perhaps Modi will now persuade his Home Minister to postpone his plans for a nationwide register of citizens. The main purpose of this exercise appears to be to target Muslim 'infiltrators', when there is already an atmosphere of terror spreading through the ghettoes in which our poorest Muslim communities live. Many have never had documents to prove their Indianness. Nor do Hindus and Sikhs of my generation. In those lax, louche old days when the ruling elite was less allergic to Muslims, most Indians spent their lives without documents of identity. Those who had passports were only a small handful of us privileged types who could afford to travel to foreign lands.

To return to the main point of this week's column, may I urge the Prime Minister to examine the priorities of his government and set a new agenda. At the top of this has to be the economy. We are already in an economic crisis that could become an emergency.

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MEGHNAD DESAI

WHEN HE was in London in 1931, Mahatma Gandhi was asked what he thought of the European civilisation. Being a master of the English language, he replied, "It would be a good idea". The expression 'would be' was to denote the current absence of, but hoping for better in the future. He was to be proved horribly right as, within his lifetime, the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed. Germany, an old

mess.com

Myanmar, and an Asian atrocity

European nation, the cradle of Martin Luther, Goethe and Einstein, inflicted the most uncivilised murder upon six million

Jews and left many more damaged forever. This week, in the Dutch city of The Hague, Asia is on trial. Aung San Suu Kyi, the State Counsellor (de facto Prime Minister) of Myanmar and previous winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, is the head of a Burmese delegation facing trial at the International Court of Justice. The charges relate to genocide of the Rohingya. The tragedy of the Rohingya has been unfolding before our eyes for years now. They have been hounded out of Myanmar. They have flooded into Bangladesh and India and far-

Suu Kyi, the granddaughter of former

Burmese prime minister Aung San, suffered house arrest for many years as she fought the military rulers of Burma, and won the battle for restoration of democracy in the country. She regained her legacy as a member of a ruling dynasty. But that was a quarrel among the Buddhist Burmese. When it came to othering Muslims, Suu Kyi has proved as seasoned a politician as the worst military general.

There is a huge tragedy here of Asian culture and Asian politics. How is it that a Buddhist country long known (perhaps wrongly?) for its peace-loving people has conducted one of the world's worst genocides? The Khmer Rouge of Cambodia made a virtue of slaughtering all 'intellectuals' — everyone who wore spectacles or

was educated — to build a one-class paradise where only peasantry had the right to live. They killed one-seventh of the total population. They were othering their own. But they were not Buddhists; just Maoists.

Myanmar and Suu Kyi have 'othered' the Rohingya who have lived in Myanmar for centuries, just because they are Muslims. Of course, the Myanmarese defence is that Rohingya are terrorists. The word terrorist has become almost synonymous with Muslims across the world since 9/11, regardless of evidence. The idea seems to be that only Buddhist Burmese are authentic citizens.

The astonishing thing is that the case has been brought by Gambia. Not by any neighbouring Asian nation. Not Malaysia nor Indonesia nor Pakistan. It says something about Asian solidarity or humanism that no country in Asia has cast a critical eye towards Myanmar. Of course, the reason is China, which is a strong ally of Myanmar and a country no other Asian nation wants to displease. China has its own Uighur problem which has brought no protests on any street in any Asian country. Only the American Congress seems to be fighting for human rights these days. Though not the American President!

During Gandhiji's lifetime, Burma was a part of India. In 1935, it was separated. Then, in 1947, Partition made Pakistan a different country. In 1971, Bangladesh separated from Pakistan. From one, we have four. How many more?