

Hindutva forces should never ever govern India

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The most heart-warming Diwali ritual, as far as I'm concerned, is lighting diyas. Not just because they look incredibly pretty, but because when I was little, my mother told me we must light the way home to Ayodhya for the tired but victorious King Ram. I do this with touching faith every year. At the same time, I must confess, that unlike India's trident-rattling Hindutva forces, my sentiments were not hurt by the statement in the Ram Setu affidavit that Ram was a mythological figure and did not exist. I did not burst into floods of bitter tears like a child who has just found out that Santa Claus is not real (yes, Santa Claus is also a part of wonderfully secular India). Nor did I take to the streets, brandishing 'I am wounded/insulted/rejoicing at the opportunity to trash the UPA government' placards. Because, like a lot of other progressive Hindus (these, I promise you, actually do exist!), I can have faith and be rational at the same time.

Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi's remarks on the affidavit were the most shocking by far: “Sonia Gandhi's birthplace is Italy and Ram was born in Hindustan. Then how will she know of the existence of Ram?” Good heavens, has the man never heard of Google Search?

The Hindutva protests backfired in my case. Instead of seeing this as yet another reason why the UPA should be vanquished, I see this as yet another reason why the Hindutva forces should never ever govern India. The idea of mixing religion with politics is terrifying — I'm not the only person in the country who trembles like a leaf in a monsoon storm at the mention of kar sevaks. And now, thanks to this ridiculous uproar, an Aryan-Dravidian divide has suddenly reared its ugly head, a bus has been burnt, two people were charred to death (so far), and God knows (actually, I 'm prepared to bet he doesn't) what else will follow. I will never stop being thankful that when the BJP-led NDA was in power, Hindu fundamentalists had to behave themselves (as best as they could) for fear that the secular parties in the coalition government would abandon them.

These days, while in the opposition, the BJP is doing a great disservice to our nation by adopting a childish stubborn 'Alfred said No' stand in Parliament. For those who are not familiar with the story, here goes: Alfred was a petulant little boy who'd throw tantrums and say no to just about everything (except chocolates and ice-cream, naturally). Then one day, the wind changed direction and the only word Alfred could utter was 'No' (to his horror, even when he was offered chocolates / ice-cream!). The moral of this story is that the BJP is blocking our country's progress by instinctively uttering a stubborn 'No' to almost anything the government proposes — metaphorical chocolates and ice-cream included! Oh well, they'll learn one day — thank God for karma!

But, back to the bridge. It must be said that I'm sorely disappointed with the UPA government too, for panicking, apologising profusely, and even worse, handing out punishments to scapegoats. Excuse me, are we willing to let a bunch of regressive political opportunists hold the nation's progress to ransom?

This Diwali, I will light the diyas for Ram with my usual enthusiasm. Whether he existed or not, I have more faith in God than in politicians. Especially those politicians who make a big show of believing in God. Now, if only they believed in our country instead!

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