



THE TIMES OF INDIA

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## Mobs on the march

### *Lynch gangs are getting out of hand*

#### **TOI Editorials**

The spate of lynchings across the country since early August, most of them following child-lifting rumours, calls for urgent attention from state governments. Mob vigilantism signals scant respect for the law enforcement machinery. Even police officers aren't spared. Among the latest victims of mob violence are a middle-aged mentally challenged man in Varanasi, a 70-year-old sadhu in Bundelkhand, and a middle-aged man in Bengal's West Burdwan district. The survivors include three cops thrashed on suspicion of being child lifters in Bihar's East Champaran.

It is easy to dismiss the rumours as the outcome of social media disinformation. But that does not explain what emboldens a mob to take the law into its hands. When a rash of gauraksha related lynchings were reported, the emphasis was on shielding the accused men. Investigation/ prosecution failures in the Akhlaq, Pehlu Khan and Tabrez Ansari lynchings have been well documented. When one category of transgressions is treated benignly, it is only natural that others of the same feather are encouraged. The lesson was not learnt even after Bulandshahr cop Subodh Kumar Singh was killed during mob violence last year.

The vigilantism over child lifting and gau raksha derives succour from the same source: weak policing. By daring to shoot videos of their crimes, the mob is actually cocking a snook at cops. The state must reclaim the majesty of the law. Last year, Supreme Court issued a set of guidelines to all state governments to tackle "mobocracy" – but to no avail yet. The dire economic situation may also be creating its own vast cadre of jobless youth hunting for phantoms like child and cattle lifters. Strangers, social outcasts and minorities end up paying a heavy price.

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## दैनिक भास्कर

# फैमिनिज्म और महिलाओं के हक के बीच लकीर जरूरी

### संपादकीय

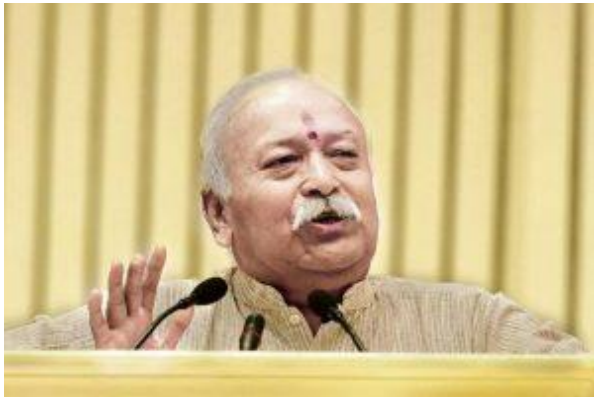
देश में इन दिनों फैमिनिज्म पर जमकर चर्चा हो रही है। बड़ी बिंदी और कलफ वाली कड़क साड़ियां पहनीं, फर्राटे से अंग्रेजी बोलतीं, हाथ में मोमबत्ती लिए सड़कों पर नारेबाजी या मौन प्रदर्शनों का हिस्सा बनीं ये महिलाएं देश में फैमिनिज्म का लेटेस्ट चेहरा हैं। आमतौर पर इन्हें महिलाओं के हक के लिए लड़ने वाला माना जाता है। लेकिन जरूरत है कि फैमिनिज्म और महिला हक के बीच एक गाढ़ी लकीर खींची जाए। एक्टिविज्म को ऑनग्राउंड असलियतों से नापा-तौला जाए। ये समझने के लिए कि काम करने का प्रोपेगेंडा और असल काम करने में जमीन-आसमान सा फर्क है। इन दोनों पक्षों के बीच फैमिनिज्म सिर्फ शिगूफा भर है। और जमीनी स्तर पर काम करके लोगों के जीवन में बदलाव लाने वाले वे अनजान हैं, जिन्हें कम ही लोग जानते हैं। यदि जानते भी हैं तो समझ कम ही पाते हैं। हमारे देश में फैमिनिज्म शब्द का अस्तित्व ज्यादा पुराना नहीं है। लेकिन इसका ये मतलब कतई नहीं कि हमारे यहां एम्पावर्ड औरतें पहले नहीं होती थीं। यदि यह समझा जाता है कि फैमिनिज्म शब्द की पैदाइश पश्चिमी देशों से हुई है तो ये याद कर लेना होगा कि यहां सावित्री बाई फुले से लेकर रानी लक्ष्मीबाई, एनी बेसेंट जैसे कई नाम हैं, जो फेहरिस्त को किसी भी लिहाज से छोटा नहीं करते। ये तो वे नाम हैं जो पुरुषों को पूरा सम्मान देकर उनके साथ चलकर आगे बढ़े और बदलाव लाए, जबकि आज के फैमिनिज्म का पूरा गणित ही पुरुषों की खिलाफत के फॉर्मूले पर आधारित है। जरूरत है कि आगे बढ़ाने के लिए वह तरीके हों जो बाकी आबादी को जलालत न दें। जो सबसे पहले याद आता है वह है वर्दी पहनी महिला। ये महिलाएं किसी भी लिहाज से कमतर नहीं। इस सबकी चर्चा सिर्फ इसलिए, क्योंकि देश में महिलाओं को बतौर सैनिक सेना में भर्ती की पहली प्रक्रिया शुरू हो गई है। सेना की भर्ती रैली में पहुंची ये महिलाएं मिलिट्री पुलिस में शामिल होंगी। अब तक औरतों को सेना में सिर्फ अफसर बनने का मौका मिला था। आमतौर पर दौड़ लगाकर, कूद और बाधाएं पार करने वाली इन महिलाओं की तस्वीरें एकदम ताजा हैं। अब तक इन तस्वीरों में सिर्फ पुरुष नजर आते थे। इस नए आसमान का हिस्सा बनकर महिलाएं वर्दी वाली दुनिया में अपनी मौजूदगी को और ज्यादा बढ़ाएंगी। यह मजबूती की ओर उनका एक और महत्वपूर्ण कदम होगा।

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## Quota questions

*Let's listen to the RSS chief. Contentious issues about India's reservation policies need to be examined*

**Faizan Mustafa**



“The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal,” said Aristotle. India has all kinds of unequals who were historically disadvantaged and exploited. Should they be treated now at par with the upper castes or as equals is the crux of the matter that RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has raised. He has not opposed reservation and the Opposition is unnecessarily targeting him. He has just called for a debate on reservation in a harmonious atmosphere between those who are for social justice through quotas and those who favour “merit”. Reservation is considered anti-merit and a compromise on quality and

efficiency of administration. Of course, no one really knows what “merit” and “efficiency” really mean. The RSS itself does not have clarity on reservation and that’s why not only has it been talking in multiple voices but even Bhagwat has been contradicting himself on the issue.

The Congress has promptly termed the RSS and BJP as anti-Dalit. It seems to be still in denial and overlooks the remarkable achievement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in not only making caste irrelevant in the 2019 general elections but in making substantial inroads into the so-called Dalit vote bank.

The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) reservation in Parliament was made initially for just 10 years. Thus, unlike Article 370 that referred to no time frame, this reservation was indeed temporary. As far as reservation in jobs and educational institutions is concerned, this is on a weaker ground as there is no fundamental right to reservation. Articles 15 and 16 are merely enabling provisions that lay down that if the state decides to make reservation in favour of SC/ST/OBC, this will not be considered as violation of the right to equality. Thus, any government is free to end reservation as and when it wants. With the abrogation of Article 370 and the abolition of privy purses, pre-constitution solemn pacts/agreements like the Poona Pact between caste Hindus and depressed classes no more have any sanctity.

This is not the first time that the RSS chief has made a demand for a debate on reservation. In September 2016, he had given a similar call for a review of our reservation policies and suggested setting up of an apolitical committee to undertake this exercise. In an interview to the RSS mouthpiece, Organiser, he had

said that “we believe in forming a committee of people genuinely concerned for the interest of the whole nation and committed for social equality, including representatives from the society, they should decide which categories require reservation and for how long.” Though Bhagwat had not advocated the abolition of reservation, the BJP quickly disowned him. By December 2016, Bhagwat himself made a U-turn and conceded ground probably due to another round of assembly elections and said “as long as discrimination remains in the society, reservation is needed.” Meanwhile, at the Jaipur Literary Festival, Manmohan Vaidya, head of RSS’s communication department, again advocated the abolition of reservation and said that “it is against the principle of equality. (Give them) opportunities, not reservation.” In yet another damage control exercise, the RSS joint secretary clarified that the “underprivileged deserve reservation.”

Since the RSS and BJP are two faces of a coin, it is difficult to understand why the BJP government in Maharashtra recently extended reservation to Marathas though the Mandal commission had identified them as forward caste and state backward class commissions had twice refused to consider them as OBC. In the process, the BJP government breached even the 50 per cent upper ceiling on reservation. Similarly, BJP governments have extended reservation to Gujjars in Rajasthan and Patidars in Gujarat. There was no statement from the RSS in opposition of these extensions to newer and politically dominant groups. Prior to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, even the Modi government created a new category of economically backward classes and provided 10 per cent reservation for them over and above existing quotas. The Modi government also argued in the Supreme Court in favour of reservation in promotions in Jarnail Singh (2018). All these actions of the BJP demonstrate that it is not opposed to reservation. In fact, it favours extending reservation to newer groups.

As a matter of fact, there is some merit in Bhagwat’s argument. We need to examine some highly contentious issues about our reservation policies: How far have the benefits percolated down the ladder? Has an elite within the SCs/STs monopolised all the benefits of reservation? Should we extend the exclusion of the creamy layer to SCs/STs as well? Should benefits of reservation be confined to either admissions or jobs? Should reservation at promotion be withdrawn? How do we define backwardness? Should social backwardness be replaced with economic backwardness? Have the 11 parameters of social and educational backwardness identified by the Mandal commission and approved by the nine judge bench of the apex court in Indira Sawhney (1992) become outdated and need revision? Should reservation be extended to the private sector? Similarly, in some states, if the number of SCs/STs and OBCs is more than 75 per cent, should we still insist on the 50 per cent upper limit of reservation? The “carrying forward” rule under which unfilled posts are carried forward to subsequent years, needs a critical examination. Similarly, the “catch up” rule on consequential seniority too must be seriously debated as officers of unreserved categories do feel frustrated when their own batchmates are promoted and become their bosses.

Even western countries promote the use of several mechanisms to ensure that societal diversity is reflected in all public institutions. The reservation system has indeed contributed to the diversity in our state institutions. If we are convinced that reservation does promote equality, the question of its abolition till we achieve substantial equality becomes redundant.

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## It begins in school

*India's growth story will stand, or slip, on the foundational skills it gives its children*

**Ashish Dhawan**



By next year, the average age of an Indian is expected to be 29 years, while it will be 37 in China and 48 in Japan. Additionally, around 12 million youth in India are now reaching the employable age each year. Perhaps, it is this demographic trend that prompted the government to announce its ambition of making India a \$10 trillion economy by 2030. However, the country's youth will be able to do very little to push the economy upward if we fail to invest in universal quality education. School education is the most important socio-economic issue that will generate the demographic dividend needed to power India's growth story.

During the past 10 years, the Right to Education Act ensured a steady increase in school enrollment with more than 260 million children in the age group of six to 14 years enrolled in schools. However, this is only half the job done as just ensuring schooling does not result in learning. In India, according to ASER 2018, only a little over one-quarter of third grade students can read second grade text or subtract one two-digit number from another. Further, the Indian government's own National Achievement Survey (NAS), too, indicates that a large proportion of children are not picking up critical skills in the early grades. To say that we have a crisis in school education would be an understatement, and to address it, its outlines and nature will have to be diagnosed well.

Benefits of good quality school education accrue only when students complete and leave school after having acquired the gateway skills. Like one learns to walk before running, similarly one picks up advanced skills only after picking the basic foundational skills. The advent of the knowledge economy poses new challenges, and one of the severe consequences of having an uneducated workforce will be our inability to keep pace with the global economy. Without a strong learning foundation at the primary level, there can be little or no improvement in higher education or skill development.

The draft National Education Policy (NEP) identifies foundational literacy and numeracy — the ability to read, write and perform basic calculations — as prerequisites for all learning. The draft NEP states that attainment of foundational skills has to be given the highest priority, which, if not achieved, would render all other efforts irrelevant for a large section of population.

As research indicates, Class 3 is the inflection point. Children are expected to “learn to read” by class 3 so that they can “read to learn” after that. Beyond this critical stage, it becomes extremely difficult for children to pick up these basics and if they are still unable to read simple text or do simple math, they start to fall behind. A longitudinal study of 40,000 students in Andhra Pradesh from class 1 to 5 clearly brought to light the widening gap in learning levels for a huge majority of students who were falling

behind due to lack of foundational skills. Almost all of these students were never able to catch up as their learning trajectory flattened over a period of time and additional years of schooling beyond the inflection point yielded little or no improvement in learning.

The absence of foundational skills hits children from poor households or first generation learners the most. Their ill-equipped home environment combined with the lack of other external influences makes it even more difficult for them to make up for the lack of gateway skills. In primary schools, teachers are usually guided by the curriculum-based textbooks, and they choose to focus on the children who are easiest to teach or who are most likely to follow and finish the curriculum. Due to this challenge in our school education system, children who don't know these critical skills tend to get left behind. Universal acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy skills can be a great equaliser for such students and can go a long way in making learning for all possible.

The challenge is that, in our country, delivering quality education is complex, and we do not have the resources to simultaneously focus on multiple things. But, we also now have sufficient learnings from successful foundational learning programmes in India and around the world that tell us that there are four critical pillars for any state-driven reform to achieve scalable long-term impact.

Firstly, the government needs to, urgently and ruthlessly, focus on foundational learning. They need to address key issues — be it the gaps in expectation setting across the entire chain of stakeholders or the lack of sharp and actionable literacy and numeracy skills-based goals or limited involvement of parents. The gaps in classroom instruction practices is the second pillar that need a more holistic approach. Appropriate teaching-learning material, tools, training and teacher support need to be made available.

Thirdly, we need to ensure system enabling conditions, such as teacher training, for teaching foundational skills and dedicated teacher allocation for primary classes. Lastly, improved accountability through independent monitoring and measurement can play a critical role in setting the system reform agenda. To cite an example, in Peru, every stakeholder in school education knows that a student has to fluently read 40 words per minute in class 2 and 60 words per minute in class 3.

Improvement in the education system is crucial for India to cement its position as a global leader. Making foundational learning a priority is the need of the hour. For, foundational learning opens up opportunities for better income, health, sanitation, safety, and so on.

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