

Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage as Violation of Human Rights

Case of India: a small Note

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India is a country with rich diversity. It has immense cultural heritage which came as a synthesis, blending and independent existence of different cultures which interacted and lived together harmoniously for centuries. It is a place where the people of all religions have been frequenting the places of worship of other religions. We have Bhakti (devotional) stream which is revered by people of all religions, it has Sufi saint shrines where people of different religions rub shoulders with each other in paying respect to the humanistic Sufi saints. There are places like Shabriamala in Kerala, where the Hindu devotees throng. On their way to their favorite deity they also visit a mosque and a Church. We have Mother Velinkini shrine where again people of diverse faith come and pay their respect. Such places abound all over the country, well revered and respected by one and all.

Last few decades there is a lot of problem in such traditions of the country. The identity based politics of Hindutva has targeted the religious minorities particularly Muslims and Christians. Hindutva is not religion, it is a politics based on the dominant tendency within Hinduism, i.e. Brahmanism. Due to the overwhelming domination of Hindutva politics in cultural matters, in matters related to places of worship, and the ones related to food habits, the traditions are being violated on political ground. The major victims of this are not only religious minorities, but even the indigenous people, Adivasis, and other downtrodden sections of society.

Places of worship

The major issue which was used by the Hindutva politics to build itself up was the one related to the Ram Temple. Currently ruling party, BJP, which is the political arm of RSS, raised the issue that there was a temple of Lord Ram, where the Babri mosque is standing. They raised the pitch of this politics and that led to demolition of the mosque in 1992. The mosque was a place where Muslims were offering Namaz. Later many other disputes have also been constructed leading to the intimidation of Muslim minority and there by pushing them to the status of second class citizenship. Many other places like Idgah Ground in Bangalore, Baba Budan Giri shrine near Bangalore, Kamaal Maula Masjid in Madhya Pradesh have been brought under the shadow of dispute. There are efforts to increase the boundaries of Bhagyalaxmi temple near Charminar in Hyderabad. Many places like in Kashi and Mathura have been threatened demolition. The general story is the same-the claim is

made that earlier there was a temple, Muslim King destroyed that and now we have to abolish the signs of slavery and build the temple. This has affected the lives of Muslim in large part of the country as the heritage structures have been converted in to disputed sites or have been demolished.

The same politics has been playing the divisive games to abolish cultural heritage related to Churches. In Kandhmal violence, ignited on the pretext of the murder of Swami Laxmananand, many a Churches were destroyed. Same way Churches have been the target in pre election polarization plans of BJP in the Assembly elections of Delhi in early 2015. In case of attacks on Christians- Churches many of these incidents are scattered and in places not too much in the notice, and so they do not get the coverage in the media. Such news is mostly tucked in the small headlines in some inner pages.

Traditional Food Culture

The right to food is yet another right coming under attack. The traditional food habit are being targeted by Hindutva politics. While the issue of banning Beef, cow slaughter has been fairly old, it has been brought forth by the RSS combine during last three decades and more so from last two years. One Mohamad Akhlaq was murdered on the charge of eating beef. This is being done in the name of sentiments of Hindus, that Cow is holy mother for them.

So there are structural destructions of cultural heritage and there a attack on the heritage in the form of food habits. Both these are under assault currently. The state apparatus is also turning the blind eye to these violations of human rights as many state officials are sympathizing with the right wing politics of RSS combine*.

Freedom of religion

At places they are conducting aggressive Ghar Wapasi (return home). In this the poor and vulnerable families are coerced to become Hindu, converted by some ritual. The assertion underlying this is that all were Hindus here and were converted by force or fraud by Muslim kings or Christian missionaries. This is impacting the traditional heritage in religious practices.

Yoga and Bharat Mata Ki Jai

Yoga is an ancient Indian practice which has multiple facets. Apart from physical and meditational aspects it also has Hindu religious connotations. Making it compulsory or even optional in schools and Government institutions has an impact where Muslims in particular feel that exercises like Surya Namaskar (saluting the Sun God) are contrary to Islamic beliefs. Similarly the growing atmosphere where RSS combine is propagating that one has to say 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' (Hail Mother India) if one wants to live in India is again contrary to Islamic beliefs where one can do salutation only to Allah and no one else. These norms are against Indian Constitution as well but due to political clout at social level RSS combine is out to attack the human rights of religious minority in various ways.

There is a need to let people have their own cultural practices and food habits. The present scenario is very intimidating and violates the rights of many citizens, religious minorities and weaker sections in particular.

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***RSS Combine:** This is a groups of organizations floated by the ultra right wing RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) They call themselves as Sangh Parivar (Sangh Family), some political scientists call them RSS combine. BJP is the political wing of this group. They believe in Hindu Nationalism in contrast to the Indian Nationalism. They have many similarities with the politics of Islamic Fundametalism and Christian fundamentalism.

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