The Protagonist of a Tolerant Society

Social and racial violence, both latent and manifest, against various minorities has been on the rise in many countries of the world. However, in the South Asian context, communal violence has lent itself to measure up to the spectacle of intolerance against certain religious minorities. Although violence has been evident in almost all the countries of South Asia, it is the right-wing vigilante groups in these countries that have been held responsible for violence against minority communities through attacks on the religious symbols of the latter.

Vigilante groups that have mushroomed across these countries have several things in common. First, these groups seem to have rather unilaterally arrogated to themselves the right to represent the majority community. They make an arbitrary claim that they have got a responsibility to counter the violence, which is perceived to be externally incited and inflicted, when, in actual practice, is sometimes self-generated by fake news circulated through social media. While the concocted content of these circulated messages that feed into the violence is fake, the consequences of such violence are real. It is real in the sense that it involves the destruction of property, collective as well as individual, of the members of the minority community.

In this regard, it is important to appraise ourselves of the changing nature of resources that have been used by fringe groups to create conditions of communal violence. Before the advance of digital technology in media and communication, these groups seemed to rely mainly on rumours—for the "ears"—that accommodated fake messages. Ears were made more attentive to the vicarious need to transmit these fake messages mostly by telephones and word of mouth with the intention to inflict violence against minorities. Today, it is the "eye" that has been made susceptible to the production of fake images of violence, which are produced and reproduced through the process of digital recycling. Right-wing groups, thus, no longer require rumours as the main source of communal trouble. This has been replaced by the digital savvy, albeit, self-deceptive eye, which chooses to look at distorted, morphed digital images of violence. Moreover, the fringe groups have perceived that concerted digital images serve better and are enduring resources, as they stay in the digital archive longer than the rumours that had only an airy and, hence, short presence in the past. The digital serves as the better repository of fake images that can be efficiently and appropriately used for creating misunderstanding.

Second, these groups arrogate to themselves the authority and power to patrol the boundaries of racism, casteism, ethnicity, and gender. Such groups patrol boundaries either with the tacit support of the official police or by acting as super cops.

Finally, these fringe groups find their relevance and purpose in the production of a barbaric recycling of communal violence. It is needless to mention that the right-wing vigilante groups do not share the universal perception of even a morally bare minimum conception of mutual tolerance.

In response to the vitriolic sputtering from the vigilante groups against the members of the minority, the avant-garde groups and forces have been active in condemning the communal attack on the members of the minority communities. While the avant-garde groups in the South Asian countries are socially vigilant and share the universal perception that intolerance to the minority community's cultural expression is an unacceptable evil that cannot be justified on humanitarian grounds, such groups do play a prophetic role in expressing the need for mutual tolerance. This was evident in the most recent case of communal violence that was allegedly inflicted by fringe groups against the Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. The protest for the protection of minorities in Bangladesh was spectacular both in terms of social magnitude and intensity of feeling of care for the collective self—a community of humans.

Avant-garde groups or forces thus suggest "spiritual fitness"—meaning the average human emotionally stays together within the moral framework of mutual tolerance. The spiritual impulse should be linked to searching for the truth that would keep at its the reconstruction of average humans along with the universal conception of tolerance at its centre. Brutal inhuman experience has to be addressed and driven out so as to make a human world of truth and peaceful tolerance.

However, generally speaking, these avant-garde groups are intuitively too quick to issue moral judgments to condemn the violence, which is desirable, but this, in itself, does not allow full attention to accommodate the need for mobilising the average human in favour of collective tolerance. The universal perception of mutual tolerance has to emerge from the socially accommodative consciousness of an average person. The average person does not always lend themselves to a parochial agenda of the fringe groups. The common person or the average person has to be the subject of tolerance and the protagonist of a tolerant society.