

Western UP on Verge of Explosion



Source: <http://www.tehelka.com/2016/01/picture-gallery-saffron-army/#.Vx3bqI9OLRF>

In This Issue

LEAD ESSAY:

- Western UP on Verge of Explosion

HEADLINE OF THE WEEK:

- Raghuram Rajan Warns Against 'Euphoria' over India's Fastest Growing Tag

SECTION 1: ECONOMY

- What next after financial inclusion?; IT raids on pulse cartels, Rs. 700 crore tax evasion likely

SECTION 2: GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

- **Politics and Governance:** Scarcity of good governance; Only 1.8 percent for 150 days of work in drought hit states; Centre to Supreme Court: Direct Cash Transfer for NREGS soon
- **Environment:** Hotter, Longer, Deadlier Summers

SECTION 3: SOCIETY

- **Casteism:** The global gaze on caste
- **Demography:** Analysing India's demographic bomb
- **Language and Culture:** Furore over a handshake in a Swiss town holds lessons for India

SECTION 4: OPINIONS

- Refugees and the 'globalization of indifference'

Lead Essay

Western UP on Verge of Explosion

Introduction

Western Uttar Pradesh, consists of 25 districts, which are divided into three police administrative zones- Meerut, Bareilly and Agra. It is also popularly referred to as Harit Pradesh, due to the agricultural prosperity of the region and has reaped maximum benefits from agrarian and industrial advancement in the state such as green revolution and economic liberalization. The active engagement of people in progressive agrarian and farmer politics had also helped western UP to gain more in comparison to other parts of the state. In addition, the progress of the region can be traced to various efforts of building inter-community trust as well. Community level social engineering by the prominent leaders of the region such as former Prime Minister Ch. Charan Singh and farmer leader Mahendra Singh Tikait built social unity and inter-community respect over the years. In 2011, the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Ms. Mayawati proposed creation of western UP as separate state as part of her proposal of reorganizing Uttar Pradesh into four smaller states.

However, it has been observed that in last few decades, that certain changes taking place in the region are bringing about some drastic changes. The relationship between the religious communities- namely Hindus and Muslims is slowly deteriorating. So much so that the the region has become a hot bed of communal hatred and violence. The communal riot of 2013 in Muzaffarnagar was a manifestation of eroded trust, love, respect and empathy between various communities in the western Uttar Pradesh. In the last few years, this region has recorded the highest number of communal clashes in the state. According to the available crime record data of the last three years, western Uttar Pradesh that accounts for around 23 per cent of total population of the state has recorded more than 50 per cent riots. In last three years, it has emerged as the breeding ground for major communal issues such as *Love Jihad*, *Ghar Wapasi* and *Cow Slaughtering* instigated by Hindu right wing fringe groups.

Table: Riots in Various Parts of UP

Region	Riots		
	2012	2013	2014
Western UP (Meerut, Bareilly and Agra Police zone)	3359	3143	2625
Rest of UP	3079	2946	2451
Total UP	6438	6089	5076

Source: Compiled from SCRB, Uttar Pradesh

Historically, communal violence used to be an urban phenomenon, but we have seen its spread its tentacles to rural parts as well. The 2013 Muzaffarnagar riot followed by various other incidents of communal clashes in rural parts of western Uttar Pradesh, signals towards the rapid expansion of communal hatred. The rapidly eroding community level peace and increase in communal incidents in this region is a serious issue. It needs to be researched as to why this phenomenon is taking place in Western UP. This brief article is an attempt to relate incidents of communal cases with growing activities of Hindu fundamental organizations in the region.

Social-Cultural Dynamics

The community composition of Western Uttar Pradesh is highly diverse. Numerically, Dalits, Muslims and OBCs including Yadavs have the largest share in the total population, but none of them have ever dominated social and political affairs in this part as a consequence of merely numerical majority. The percentage of Muslims in this region is highest in the state. In each parliamentary constituency of western UP, Muslims account for 20 to 25% of total population (Narayan, 2014). Similarly, according to latest Socio Economic and Caste Census data, Schedule Castes account for nearly 20% of the population of the region. Both of these communities together make more than half of its

Lead Essay

population. To assess the population of the OBCs in UP with the purpose of providing reservation for them in the urban and rural local bodies' election, the UP government conducted a rapid census in 1994. According to that rapid census, Jats along with Bhumihars and Tyagis account for only 2 per cent of the State's population and OBC along with Yadavs constitute 37 per cent of it (Singh, 2001). These numbers shows that there is high level of social and cultural diversity in the region but economic and political powers remain in the hand of numerically insignificant Jat community.

The land holding pattern and agricultural production had been shaping socio-economic relations amongst various communities in the Western Uttar Pradesh. Hindu Jats are numerically insignificant in this area but they hold the largest share of agriculture land. It has given them both economic and political strength – one leading to another. Communities such as Muslims and Dalits, who are significantly larger groups, had been close allies of Jats because of traditional and feudal economic arrangement controlled by the Jats¹. Mishra (2016) argues that the coalition of Jat and Muslim was trusted but Muslims were subordinate allies of Jats especially during the time of emergence of charismatic Jat leadership by Ch. Charan Singh and Mahendra Singh Tikait.

After independence, it was Ch. Charan Singh who built community alliance on agrarian issues in western Uttar Pradesh crosscutting religious and caste identities. He build an alliance called MAJGAR, which was an acronym making the coming together of Muslim, Ahir (Yadav), Jat, Gujjar and Rajputs². This alliance not only built community level trust and affection but also manage to acquire tremendous political power. After Charan Singh's decline, Mahendra Singh Tikait took over the Jat leadership, but continued with the MAJGAR alliance founded by the Singh. Tikait consciously made efforts to maintain mutual trust of Jats and Muslims. Its most telling symbol was the 40 days agitation "that Tikait led at Bhopa (Muzaffarnagar) in 1989 for the safe return of Nayeema, a Muslim girl who had been abducted (Ashraf, 2015)." These political process in the western Uttar Pradesh helped Jats to exert political influence along with economic and social dominance. Moreover, it also helped to maintain community level trust and affection between various communities.

Many commentators have argued that in post liberalization period, the change in economic relations has also altered other social and political patterns. In the case of western UP, the agrarian crisis especially in the sugar cane has hurt Jats the most. The persisting agrarian distress in Uttar Pradesh has put Jats on the receiving end. It has lost the economic advantage gained through green revolution (Narayan, 2014; Mishra, 2016; Ashraf, 2015). On the other hand, the liberalization of economy helped Muslims to explore modern and professional economic activities. Muslims participation in non-conventional occupations such as wholesale trade, transportation, automobile repair, tobacco manufacturing, textile and apparel and fabricated metal product is quite high (Mishra, 2016). Along with this, they have gained significantly in politics as well. Out of 77 assembly seats in this region, Muslim won 26 seats in 2012 assembly election of Uttar Pradesh. At the local levels, in Panchayats and Municipalities, Muslims have been winning more seats (Mishra, 2016). The change in political dominance and economic relation has challenged the overall dominance of Jats in this region.

Communalisation of Social Tension

Social scientists have observed that in last few decades, community level bonding between Jats and Muslim has decreased. Ashraf (2015) writes that during the transition of social, political and economic dominance in western UP, many communal political forces pitched in to erode the grip of community bonding amongst various communities of Hindus and Muslim in the region. The Jat violence against Muslims in the Muzaffarnagar riots showed that the relationship between the two communities was at a all time low. The pattern of Muzaffarnagar riot followed in various other communal clashes in western UP and Haryana where Jats pitted against Muslims (Ashraf, 2015). Mishra (2016) argues that the current communal tension in western Uttar Pradesh is a result of changed scenario of economic and

¹ <http://www.thequint.com/opinion/2016/01/05/why-has-communal-tension-taken-root-in-western-uttar-pradesh>

² <http://scroll.in/article/732464/why-bjp-and-the-rural-distress-are-to-blame-for-the-violence-of-jats>

Lead Essay

political dominance. It seems that the process of economic and political transformation took a logical and democratic path. But, it is disheartening to see communalization of society to re-assert dominance of feudal elites in the region.

The increasing inter-community tension can be traced to the transformation of social, political and economical domination which in turn has also acquired a communal colour. In last few years, the western part of Uttar Pradesh has observed an exceptional rise in communal clashes. According to an investigation by Indian Express 259 out of 605 incidents of communal clashes during 10 weeks (May-July 2014) of its study took place in western UP alone³. Most of these incidents were small but effective enough to create fear in the society. The investigation report of the Indian Express found that most of issues leading to communal clashes were- construction activities involving Masjids, Madrasas and graveyards and use of loudspeakers for prayers. It also found that other issues such as land dispute, alleged incidents of cow slaughter, alleged incidents of elopement and eve teasing or harassment involving men and women of different communities led to communal clashes in many places. Dr. Badri Narayan (2014) writes that engineering small-scale communal conflict is a strategy of religious fundamental political groups to maintain a momentum of communal hatred. It helps them to plan large-scale riots over a long period of time but also help them to gain political advantages.

Caste Panchayats and Hindu Fundamentalist Organizations

Various social scientists and journalists are of the opinion that the persisting tension between Jats and Muslim in the region has destroyed inter-community unity and trust. The political strong coalition MAJGAR started by Charan Singh and sustained by Mr. Tikait has fallen apart. It provided space for religious fundamental groups and political parties to mobilize people around their religion. The BJP, RSS and other affiliates of Sangh Pariwar have been actively engaged in such activities in this region for many years. Politically aspiring upper caste Hindu communities found it suitable to re-assert their dominance. The involvement of Caste based Panchayats in western UP and parts of Haryana in such activities indicate that traditionally dominant communities in the region are desperate to get back their social, political and economic hold in the region. Mahapanchayats organized in Muzaffarnagar set the stage for 2013 riot; similarly, the media have reported various cases in last few years, where caste Panchayats played an active role in communalizing issues of law and order.

In last 2-3 years, BJP, RSS and other affiliates of Sangh Parwar were seen actively fueling communal issues in the region. Various leaders and workers of BJP and Sangh Pariwar are accused in court of law for their involvement in various communal clashes such as Muzaffarnagar riot, Shamli riot, Dadri lynching, love jihad in Meerut, forceful conversion in Agra in the name of Ghar Wapsi and many more. Moreover, BJP leaders such as Sangeet Som and Aditya Nath have been booked several times for hate speeches. It is the Sangh Pariwar which has made western UP the focal point of communal hatred by raising issues of Love Jihad, Cow Slaughtering and Ghar Wapsi. In a press conference, a leader of RSS announced that the Western UP is the first region in the country, where RSS has its Sakha in each Nyay Panchayat. According to the RSS spokesperson, it 2015-16 alone, the RSS has started 673 Sakhās in Western Uttar Pradesh⁴. It indicates that the Sangh Parwar is effectively using the community tension to spread its roots in the region.

Mushrooming of Hindu Extremist Groups

Apart from RSS, Western UP has also been witnessing higher visibility of Hindu extremist groups who share ideas and propaganda of Sangh Pariwar. Danish Raza (2015) in his journalistic investigation found as many as nine potentially active fundamentalist groups in the region. Interestingly, his inquiry found that various current and former leaders and members of BJP, VHP and RSS founded all of these groups. These groups recruit young boys in the age group of 12-30

³ <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/uttar-pradesh/express-investigation-part-i-over-600-communal-incidents-in-up-since-ls-results-60-near-bypoll-seats/>

⁴ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/West-UP-becomes-first-region-in-country-with-an-RSS-shakha-in-every-nyay-panchayat-area/articleshow/51431426.cms>

Lead Essay

years for their activities and extensively use social media such as whatsapp, facebook and twitter to propagate their messages. These groups are- Hindu Kranti Dal, Rashtravadi Pratap Sena, Samadhan Sena, Hindu Shakti Dal, Krishna Gau Raksha Dal, Hindu Yuva Vahini, Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Ekta Dal, Akhand Hindustan Morcha and Hindu Swabhiman Sangh.

Hindu Swabhiman Sangh (HSS) has emerged as one of the most violent organizations in this region in last few years. The HSS is recruiting young adolescents to train and indoctrinate them into becoming Hindu fundamentalists. The HSS not only “trains them in traditional warfare techniques, using knives, swords and sticks but also ‘educates’ them about the Hindu religion and the threat of the Islamic State.”⁵ According to a report published in the www.thequint.com, “Young Hindu recruits are tutored about Love Jihad, an alleged conspiracy to increase the Muslim population – the allegation being that Muslim men lure young Hindu girls into marriage, only to abandon them or force them into prostitution after they bear children to add to the Muslim population.” According to various media reports, the organization has developed a network with other religious fundamental groups across the western part of UP and operating such training and indoctrination camp various villages. Some of the groups mentioned above conduct campaigns and spread messages which spread communal hatred. Many of these organizations were part of communal clashes that have been occurring in western UP in the last few years. Justifying the activities of such group, Parminder Arya, founder of Hindu Swabhiman Sangh says, “I believe that we cannot move court on every occasion. There are times when we cannot rely on the system and have to take matters into our own hand. This is how we gained independence from the British⁶.” These groups disassociate themselves from the Sangh Pariwar, but it has been observed that these groups have many similarities with the Sangh Pariwar in terms of ideology and functioning.. Activities of these groups seems to be that of retailing of propaganda conceptualized by the Sangh Pariwar such as Love Jihad, Cow Protection, Ghar Wapasi, Increasing Muslim Populaiton and hatred against Muslims.

Conclusion

Western Uttar Pradesh has not come out of its bitter memories of 2013 Muzaffarnagar riot. The riot resulted in large scale deaths, and displacement in villages of the region. Even after more than two years, law and order has not been restored in this part of the state. Moreover, after the riot of 2013, the Western UP observed number of communal clashes in different districts. It contributes to most of the communal clashes in the state. High-level frequencies of communal clashes in western UP keeps hatred memories of 2013 riots alive and works as a catalyst to further destroy inter-community bonding. The mushrooming of extremist /fundamentalist groups working to further Sangh Pariwar’s agenda is a dangerous experiment. It has been observed that these groups are more violent in their action and speeches. Increasing outreach of these groups would minimize possibility of re-building inter-community relation in the region. There is urgent need to understand the patterns in these communal clashes and identify people and strategies behind.

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⁵ <http://www.thequint.com/videos/2015/11/26/the-wild-west-of-uttar-pradesh-rise-of-the-hindu-fringe>

⁶ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/hindutva-warriors-hard-liners-in-up-redraw-communal-lines/story-jK6PpEIP3J9VH04J7PnAOI.html>

Lead Essay

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Headlines

Raghuram Rajan Warns against 'Euphoria' over India's Fastest-Growing Tag

(The Huffington Post, April 20, 2016)

Warning against being "euphoric" about India being the fastest-growing economy, RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan today sought to contextualise his "one-eyed king" remarks about India's growth and said the country has a long way to go before it claims to have arrived.

"As a central banker who has to be pragmatic, I cannot get euphoric if India is the fastest growing large economy," he said.

Seeking to explain his 'one-eyed king' comments, Rajan said his comments were "hung out to dry out of context" and even offered an apology to the visually-impaired for hurting them by the use of the proverb.

Stating that the per-capita income of Indians remains lowest among BRICS, Rajan said, "We have a long way to go before we can claim we have arrived. We need to repeat this performance (economic growth) for 20 years before we can give each Indian a decent livelihood."

He also said India's global reputation holds great promise, but is seen as a country that has under-delivered and that it should "implement, implement, and implement" the structural reforms.

Read More: http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/04/20/raghuram-rajn-growth-eup_n_9736876.html?utm_hp_ref=in-politics

Date Accessed: 22.04.2016

Economy

What Next after Financial Inclusion?

(Jayshree Venkatesan, *The Hindu Businessline*, April 19, 2016)

Financial service providers pass off this provision of information to customers as ‘financial literacy’, effectively ticking off a regulatory requirement, and most spend little time on content or training the trainers. In the long run, the biggest up-side to well-implemented financial capability initiatives is that it puts the customer at the centre of the business. In the process, it breaks down traditional power structures and ensures that low income customers are treated respectfully. While this seems like a tectonic shift for most financial service providers including banks, this could be the only way to make financial inclusion sustainable in the long run.

Read More: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/what-next-after-financial-inclusion/article8495075.ece>

Date Accessed: 21.4.2016

IT Raids on Pulse Cartels, Rs 700 Crore Tax Evasion Likely

(Jeevan Prakash Sharma, *Hindustan Times*, April 22, 2016)

The income tax department, which had kept a close watch on pulse traders and their involvement in recent price speculation, on Thursday raided 22 offices, including those in Delhi, Mumbai, Akola, Baroda and Indore, and found incriminating documents that points towards cartelisation of pulses and a tax evasion to the tune of Rs 700 crore.

IT officials also informed the Enforcement Directorate and Delhi Police for further action under the Essential Commodities Act and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, besides other penal provisions. “These trading and importing companies, especially some MNCs, are indulging in cartelisation of pulses, which has led to an artificial escalation of their prices in the retail market. The documents collected from several offices hint at price manipulation on commodity exchange and the collection of kickback from dal mills,” said a source in the IT department.

Apart from the increasing prices of essential commodities, what prompted IT officials into action was a recent report from the Intelligence Bureau, which said that of the 151,000 tonnes of pulses imported in January this year, 63,000 tonnes were deliberately left at the port. “The traders were aware that pulse crops would be harvested in March-April and if these 63,000 tonnes were kept away from the market, it would automatically hit supply in the domestic market and escalate prices,” said the report.

Read More: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/it-raids-on-pulse-cartels-rs-700-crore-tax-evasion-likely/story-8nQZy9RMiP3Yc9GX0AxagN.html>

Date Accessed: 22.04.2016

Governance & Development

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Scarcity of Good Governance

(The Economic and Political Weekly, April 16, 2016)

Even if all cricket pitches in the country remain unwatered for the next month, nothing would change for the millions of people who struggle each day for a drop of water. The Bombay High Court's judgment on 13 April, in response to a public interest litigation (PIL), ordering Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket matches to shift out of drought-stricken Maharashtra from next month might be good for optics but does precious little to address the root of the problem of water scarcity. The crisis that Maharashtra and nine other states in the country are facing is not just scarcity of water but also an acute scarcity of good governance. The water crisis is not just the result of two consecutive failed monsoons, it is a direct outcome of the inability of the governments over decades to manage sensibly, sensitively and sustainably India's water resources.

Read More: <http://www.epw.in/journal/2016/16/editorials/scarcity-good-governance.html#sthash.2NyDbIJQ.dpuf>

Date Accessed: 21.4.2016

Only 1.8% Got 150 Days of Work in Drought-Hit States

(Shalini Nair, The Indian Express, April 18, 2016)

For states hit with severe drought, the latest decision of the Ministry of Rural Development to continue providing 150 days of employment under MGNREGA may come as a much-needed succour. However, data shows that in 2015-16 of the households that were provided work under the scheme in these regions, merely 1.8 per cent got full 150 days of employment.

The data for 10 drought-hit states show that a total of 1.52 crore people got employment under MGNREGA in the financial year ending March 31, 2015. But of this, just 2.80 lakh i.e. 1.8 per cent were employed for 150 days. In states such as Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the proportion of such workers is 0.2 per cent or less.

However, central government officials attributed the low off-take as a reflection of the demand as they said MGNREGA was demand-driven. Activists have blamed lack of funding for agencies at the state government level for not registering the demand unless they are able to provide work. This is because the Act mandates that once a demand is registered, work has to be provided within 15 days or else the state has to bear the liability of paying each worker an unemployment allowance.

Read More: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/only-1-8-got-150-days-of-work-in-drought-hit-states-mgnrega-data/>

Date Accessed: 21.04.2016

Centre to Supreme Court: Direct Cash Transfer for NREGS Soon

(Amit Anand Choudhary, The Times of India, April 21, 2016)

Facing the ire of the Supreme Court for delay in payment for work under MGNREGS, the Centre has assured the court that wages would be directly credited to the workers' bank account under National Electronic Fund Management System (NeFMS) to ensure timely payment.

Delay in payment to workers has always been a stumbling block in making the much acclaimed rural job guarantee scheme successful and also dampened people's interest in seeking employment under it.

The Centre has itself admitted before the Supreme Court that there had been delay in payment. In an affidavit filed in the court, it said only 27% of wage payment was paid on time in 2014-15 and around 55% of workers were denied timely payment in last financial year.

Governance & Development

The government on Tuesday assured the court that there would be no delay in payment as wages would be sent to workers' bank account directly from Delhi by the ministry of rural development.

Read More: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Centre-to-SC-Direct-cash-transfer-for-NREGS-soon/articleshow/51919746.cms>

Date Accessed: 22.04.2016

ENVIRONMENT

Hotter, Longer, Deadlier Summers

(Hem H. Dholakia, *The Hindu*, April 21, 2016)

If hotter, longer and deadlier summers are to be the new normal under a changing climate, proactive adaptation measures are required. This implies policy intervention and coordination across three sectors — health, water and power.

First, scale up heat-health warning systems (HHWS). At their core, such warning systems include providing weather forecasts in advance, issuing warnings to people, providing readiness of emergency response systems, and preparing doctors and health facilities to handle a sudden influx of patients. Warnings facilitate people in taking appropriate actions against heat-related harm.

Second, expedite the rollout of the National Action Plan on Climate Change and Health that was launched last year. Preventing temperature-related morbidity and mortality could be a key programme under this mission.

Third, ensure an adequate supply of water. Dehydration is a key outcome of heat exposure which can cascade into life-threatening conditions and ultimately death. Timely access to drinking water can help mitigate this escalation.

Fourth, provide reliable electricity for adequate duration. Access to cool environments remains the mainstay of preventing heat stress. In rural areas, where electricity access is a challenge, supplementing power supply of primary health centres with solar-based systems should be undertaken.

Finding policy alignment and coordination across these sectors remains a daunting, yet much needed exercise. The romance of the seasons may be lost in the years to come. Lives need not be.

Read More: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/how-to-tackle-hotter-longer-deadlier-summers/article8500083.ece?homepage=true>

Date Accessed: 22.04.2016

Society

CASTEISM

The Global Gaze on Caste

(*The Frontline*, April 29, 2016)

Out of the maze of the United Nations Human Rights Council came a short report—just over 10,000 words—with an innocuous title, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues” (January 28, 2016). This report takes aim at caste discrimination as a global affliction, not one that impacts South Asia only. It is a powerful report, which suggests that the caste system contradicts “the principles of human dignity, equality and non-discrimination”. It is not caste violence or caste discrimination that is objectionable, notes the report, but caste hierarchy itself.

Read More: <http://www.frontline.in/world-affairs/global-gaze-on-caste/article8465962.ece?homepage=true> Date Accessed: 21.4.2016

DEMOGRAPHY

Analysing India’s Demographic Bomb

(Saurabh Mukherjea and Ritika Mankar-Mukherjee, *The Business Standard*, April 20, 2016)

India’s rapid economic progress over the past two decades masks its abysmal performance on social indicators. Worryingly, this imbalance between rapid economic progress and stagnant-cum-awful social metrics is particularly glaring in India’s northern belt (INB, the region spanning Rajasthan in the west to Bihar in the east). Despite the fact that INB is the youngest region in India, it runs the risk of exploding, as millions of barely literate men face a lifetime without jobs and without women.

Read More: http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/saurabh-mukherjea-ritika-mankar-mukherjee-analysing-india-s-demographic-bomb-116042001197_1.html

Date Accessed: 21.4.2016

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Furore over a Handshake Declined in a Swiss Town Holds Lessons for India

(Peter Ronald deSouza, *The Scroll*, April 21, 2016)

To understand how India is dealing with its minority question, with its fluid majority-minority relationship, it is sometimes useful to look at episodes elsewhere, and extract the principles that are being negotiated in these other societies, which are to govern this relationship. The basis to do so is to identify principles of dignified co-living in public spaces. Recognition of difference is one such principle. Non-discrimination and granting respect is another. If difference becomes discriminatory then the recognition given to that different practice must be withdrawn. The practice must be replaced by a non-discriminatory practice. In public spaces, other-regarding actions, which discriminate must be opposed, even if such practices are sanctioned by religion. These have been the gains of the anti-racist, anti-caste, and feminist movements. We must defend these gains.

Read More: <http://scroll.in/article/806868/furore-over-a-handshake-declined-in-a-swiss-town-holds-valuable-lessons-for-india>

Date Accessed: 21.4.2016

Opinions / Books

OPINIONS

Refugees and the ‘Globalization of Indifference’

(Uri Friedman, *The Atlantic*, April 16, 2016)

In 2013, in his first official trip outside Rome, Francis visited the Italian island of Lampedusa to honor migrants from North Africa who had drowned off its shores. In a sermon there, the pope recalled the story of Cain and Abel to illustrate the threat that the situation in Lampedusa posed to the human family. “God asks each one of us: ‘Where is the blood of your brother that cries out to me?’ Today no one in the world feels responsible for this,” he said. He had a striking name for the phenomenon: “the globalization of indifference.”

And he’s argued that it’s unique to the modern age. “Clearly, indifference is not something new; every period of history has known people who close their hearts to the needs of others, who close their eyes to what is happening around them, who turn aside to avoid encountering other people’s problems,” he wrote earlier this year. “But in our day, indifference has ceased to be a purely personal matter and has taken on broader dimensions.”

There’s no lack of information in today’s world about distant hardships; globalization, after all, contributed to the widespread outcry over Alan Kurdi’s photo. But as the fading of attention to the refugee crisis since then demonstrates, this kind of knowledge doesn’t always translate into compassion; indeed it may compound apathy, calcifying public opinion and paralyzing world leaders. “Sadly,” according to Francis, “today’s information explosion does not of itself lead to an increased concern for other people’s problems. ... Indeed, the information glut can numb people’s sensibilities and to some degree downplay the gravity of the problems.”

Is the pope right when he contends that this indifference has only recently mutated to acquire “global proportions?” Didn’t indifference have global ramifications during, say, the Holocaust? And is the availability of more information about others’ suffering really counterproductive?

Read More: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/refugees-pope-francis-lesbos/477870/>

Date Accessed: 21.04.2016

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