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## How much tolerant is Indian Democracy Today?

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### ABSTRACT

Plurality of views and visions constitute the kernel of democratic set up. Freedom of expression of opinions in a frank uninhibited manner is another very important hallmark of the existence of democracy. For a country lauded for its tolerance over a wide variety of religious beliefs and practices, India is recently witnessing cases of rising intolerance in India impairing secularism, pluralism and democracy and experiencing upheaval of right winged Hindu nationalist movement.

Political analysts have argued that religious discourse has always plagued India's democracy and would continue to do so. However widespread protests by the intellectual community what makes this time period of religious intolerance unprecedented. Around forty writers have given back their Sahitya Akademi awards, a prestigious award given for literary excellence, to protest intolerance and the lack of free speech. These protests gained popularity following the murder of Kalburgi (M for Malleshappa) by a Hindu fringe group activist. Kalburgi was an atheist scholar who frequently wrote criticism of all superstitious beliefs. And so far the last in the list is Madam Gauri Lankesh who was a hardcore rationalist and devout journalist.

The last blow to the spirit of democracy and of tolerance came in India from the spark of squabbling generated by four top most senior Supreme Court Judges who raised their voices against one of their veteran colleagues, the Chief Justice of India (CJI), against his arbitrariness in making decisions and allocation of the cases according to his personal whims and caprices.

**Keywords:** Democracy Multiparty System, Majoritarianism, Plurality, Intolerance, Secularity, Hindutva, Cow-vigilantes, Social tensions, Mainstream, Fringe Groups, CBFC and Censorship.

### 1: Democracy in India: An update

Democracy depends on the following conditions: (i) coexistence of ideas and of parties (ii) the right to free discussion (iii) universal adult suffrage (iv) periodic elections [1].

Indian democracy is the largest in the world. Indian constitution was enforced on 26 January 1950. Political parties are the conglomeration of the people with some definite pattern of ideas. Parties act as the bridge between social thought and political decision in democracy. The Indian political system is a multi party system. However, gradually politics has become a game of opportunism and corruption. Most political parties are only interested in coming to power by hook or by crook. Every

party adopts different caste politics. Some try to raise the religious sentiments of the people. The Indian ideology today is replaced by caste and religion [2].

## **2: Tolerance, liberal democracy and pluralism**

### **TOLERANCE AND THE IDEAL OF A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY**

#### **Liberal democracy**

Liberalism is the political view that claims liberty is the central, most important political value. In the history of ideas, liberals have argued that human beings are 'naturally' free, and so any restraint on their liberty needs to be justified. That means that the state – with its powers to pass and enforce laws that limit liberty – needs to be justified. Most liberals also argue that while some restrictions on liberty can be justified, extensive restrictions cannot. A liberal society, then, is one in which citizens have a large degree of individual liberty.

The most common answer – certainly the most common liberal answer – to how to justify the state is some form of democracy. The theory is that through democracy we can be governed but also be free – because we have consented to being governed (or if 'consent' is too strong, at least, we have some say in the matter).

But a liberal will not be happy with any form of democracy. Democracies can pass laws that restrict individual liberty when they should not. A liberal democracy recognises the individual's right to liberty, and other rights that are based on the importance of liberty. These rights – whether enshrined in a constitution or just in the political culture – restrict what laws the government can pass.

A very influential argument for liberalism comes from J.S. Mill's *On Liberty*. Mill argues that 'the dealings of society with the individual' should be regulated by 'one simple principle', known as the Liberty or Harm principle:

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others... Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign. (*On Liberty*, pp. 68-9)

Mill thinks liberty should be very extensive, as extensive as possible, without giving us the freedom to harm other people. Mill wants to protect individual freedom in three key areas:

1. freedom of thought, which covers all areas of belief – factual, religious, moral, and so on;
2. freedom in how we live our lives; and
3. freedom to unite with others for any purpose to which we agree.

Mill's work marks the beginning of the modern idea of toleration. Before Mill, discussion of toleration was limited to whether religious differences should be tolerated or not.

#### The tyranny of the majority

In the days of monarchy, there was a threat of tyranny from the monarch. Many people felt that threat diminished with democracy. Democracy is rule of the people by the people; and the rulers express the will of the people.

But Mill remained concerned. 'The people' who rule are not the same 'people' who are ruled, even when the rulers express the will of 'the people', because within any society, there will be majorities and minorities. The rulers express the will of the majority, not the will of all people within society. We need to protect the minority from a 'tyranny of the majority'.

The majority might exercise power over individuals through the processes of democratic government, i.e. eventually through the physical enforcement of laws by the police. A democratic government could pass a law forbidding people to practice a particular form of religious belief, if that is what the majority of people in society wanted. A different example: homosexual practices (at least between men) was a criminal offence in the UK until 1967. And it was not until 2003, that the US Supreme Court ruled that individual states could not criminalise homosexual practices.

The majority also has a tendency to impose its ideas and practices ('what we do/think around here') as rules of conduct on everyone, so that people who don't abide by them suffer social consequences. This can be worse than political oppression, says Mill, because

**it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. (On Liberty, p. 63)**

It is a kind of psychological coercion.

Think of the disapproval of other religious practices, of other cultures' traditions, of homosexuality, even though they are legal. Think how such attitudes are communicated in the press. These feelings of approval and disapproval, when they become 'public opinion', affects how people think and what they do; they are not free to think, feel and experiment with life as they please, knowing it will incur the disapproval of others.

A liberal democracy, for Mill, is more than a democracy; it is a democracy in which individual freedoms are protected against legislation and social opinion.

### **The place of tolerance**

Upholding individual liberty is going to require tolerance, i.e. it is going to require refraining - both in legislation and in the way social opinion is formed and expressed - from acting on opposition to the views of others in such a way that would suppress or interfere with those views. In particular, it will involve tolerance of the majority, which has the social and political power to act on this opposition.

Because liberalism extends liberty very widely, then tolerance will also need to extend widely. This is a trait of liberalism: it aims to tolerate as much as possible. Mill says that we may 'argue, entreat, remonstrate' with other people; but we are not to exercise power over them in our opposition to their views.

### **TOLERANCE AS THE VIRTUE OF A PLURALIST DEMOCRACY**

A pluralist society is one in which there are different views on questions of politics, morality, religion, and what it is to lead a good and meaningful life. Many liberal philosophers argue that disagreements, opposition, and conflicts of ideas and practices are an inevitable and permanent part of human society. Even if one tries to get rid of them by force, in the use of that force, there is still a conflict. While many conflicts can be resolved by political means, conflicts about what to think, how to live, how society is best organized, or how to achieve salvation, cannot.

We can respond to pluralism by trying to force everyone to agree with us - either by changing people's minds, or simply by killing or forcing out of the country those who disagree. Historically, this has been a common response. The thought that everyone must become a Christian or a Muslim or a communist, or at least, must lead a life that is in accordance with the rules and values of Christianity, Islam, or communism, has inspired a great deal of political and social conflict.

If pluralism is permanent, the only alternative to force is tolerance. If we are not to act to suppress or interfere with those practices and values with which we disagree, we must tolerate them. Of course, as Mill notes, we can still try to persuade other people of our point of view. But either we use force or we do not. If we do not, then this is tolerance.

So tolerance becomes the virtue that characterizes a pluralist liberal democracy. Without it, such a society is not possible [3].

The theme reveals the value of tolerance and its implications for both the principles and practices of democracy. It examines tolerance both as it has been understood by political philosophers and as it is understood and perceived by common masses or the laity. The readings therefore encompasses the classics as John Stuart Mills "On liberty" and Isacch Berlin's "two concepts of liberty" and modern studies of public opinion. The subject matter involves the topics like (i) ideas of liberty, (ii) values the pluralism, (iii) the interplay of authority and obedience, (iv) the role and impact of political elites and the common masses in democratic societies and (v) multiculturalism [4].

### **3: Criteria for success of 'Democracy' in any country**

- (1) **Sound System of Education:** Where there is illiteracy, it becomes difficult to make democracy successful because many qualities are needed to make democracy a success. The citizens can acquire these qualities only through literacy. The people should have the sense of understanding political problems and come to know the roots of the problems that afflict the society. They should possess such qualities as sacrifice, sympathy, selfless service of the country discipline, fraternity, etc. As far as possible, education should be free and the rich and the poor should be given equal opportunities for their development. The citizens should strive for mental and physical development through education that inculcates enlightened citizenship which is indispensable for success of democracy.
- (2) **Political Awakening:** It is essential to inculcate political awakening among the citizens to make democracy a success. Where there is no political awakening, the citizens fail to understand the political problems. They are also unable to elect their representatives properly. Political disinterestedness does not help the citizens to understand the economic and political problems of the day and contribute their mite to the implementation of various national plans defence efforts of the country.
- (3) **Freedom:** Democracy guarantees the citizens the freedom of expression, freedom of profession, freedom of religion and freedom to form associations. A free and fearless press is the basic need of democracy in order to keep under check the autocratic activities of the government. In the countries where press is not free, citizens cannot criticise the government with the result that they cannot fully enjoy much freedom. In Russia, China and other Communist countries, the press is not free to criticise the government. Press is also not free in the countries where there is military dictatorship.
- (4) **Equality:** Democracy does not recognise class distinctions. It is based on social, economic and political equality. In democracy all are equal before law and there is no discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, religion, sex and economic status. Economic equality does not mean that everybody should be given equal emoluments it means equality of opportunity, and a fair and open field for all. This kind of equality ensures social justice which is the very life-breath of a democracy. Equality thus means giving everybody right to vote and contest election irrespective of caste, religion, property, sex, colour and creed.
- (5) **Law and Order:** The maintenance of law and order in society by the government is another essential condition for the success of democracy. Anarchy prevails where government fails to maintain law and order and the people's faith in government is shaken. They look towards dictatorship in order to get rid of anarchy.
- (6) **Spirit of Co-operation:** Every democracy has to face many economic, social, religious and political problems. In dictatorship, these problems are solved by the dictator according to his own whim. In absolute monarchy, the situation is similar to dictatorship, but it is different in a democracy. In democracy the Prime Minister or the President cannot act arbitrarily but they have to find the solution of problems according to the wishes of the Parliament or of the people. These problems can be solved by the co-operation of the people. Further, a democracy can flourish only if there is no big gap between the thinking of the people and of the government and when there is a spirit of co-operation between them.
- (7) **Decentralisation of Powers and Local Self-Government:** For the success of a democracy, decentralisation of powers is essential. The concentration of power makes the government autocratic. With the division of power between the Centre and the provinces, the burden of the Centre is reduced and the provinces get autonomy which ultimately brings efficiency in the administration. With the introduction of local self-government, people take interest in the administration and they give full support to the government. The French writer De Tocqueville

has rightly said that, "Local institutions constitute the strength of free nations. A nation may establish a system of free governments but without municipal institutions it cannot have the spirit of liberty."

- (8) **High Moral Standard:** The success of democracy also depends upon the high moral standard of the people as well as of the government. Where there is dishonesty, black-marketing, hoarding and smuggling and where the ministers and public servants are corrupt, the question of the success of democracy does not arise. People should have the spirit of patriotism, discipline, self-control, honesty in payment of taxes and willing obedience to the laws of the land. The government should follow the ideal of service to the community, because a welfare state and a democracy are two inseparable things.
- (9) **Social and Economic Security:** Economic security is essential for the success of democracy. The people should be given the right to work and it is the duty of the government to provide them with suitable employment. In case the government is unable to provide it to the people, it should at least provide them with shelter, clothing and food. In Russia and in many other Communist countries, the government has given this right to the people in their constitution. Our government should also recognise this right of the people for the success of democracy in our country.
- (10) **Tolerance and Spirit of Unity:** It is the responsibility of the people to make democracy a success. For this, the spirit of tolerance and unity is needed. In a country like India where we have a number of religions, languages and castes, and where we find a disparity between the rich and the poor, these qualities are very essential.
- (11) **Written Constitution and Independent Judiciary:** For the successful functioning of democracy, people are given fundamental rights and written constitutions are introduced with a view to checking autocratic activities of the government. Where there is no written constitutions the government can extend and exercise its powers in an autocratic manner.
- (12) **Independent, impartial and periodical elections:** Independent, impartial and periodical elections help in establishing faith of the people and the opposition in democracy, otherwise the opposition party will not get an opportunity for forming the government and there will be no respect for public opinion. In the absence of independent, impartial and periodical elections, the opposition parties shall try to change the government by a revolution with the help of military or by the use of violent force. In Pakistan, elections were not held for many years. The result was that military dictatorship of General Ayub Khan was established in 1958 which gave a server blow to democracy.
- (13) **Political security, good administration, economic prosperity and wise leadership:** Efficient administration is another condition for the success of a democracy. In fact, the success of democracy depends upon efficient administration. People's faith in democracy is shaken in a corrupt administration. Political security is also essential because people start feeling the necessity of dictatorship, if a democratic government is unable to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the country at the time of foreign invasion. If a government fails to remove the scarcity of essential commodities, if the prices of these commodities are abnormally high and if people starve owing to abject poverty, the people's faith in democracy is shaken and they start feeling the necessity of some other type of government [5].

#### **4: The 'Padmavati' / 'Padmavat' film Saga and the Robust Controversy**

On November 19, Viacom18 Motion Pictures, the studio behind Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmavati*, decided to voluntarily defer the December 1 release of the film. Reportedly drawn from Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi's epic poem *Padmavat*, the film has been in the eye of the storm for the

whole year, held hostage by various aggrieved religious and political organisations, with the protests peaking and threatening to turn violent this month in the run-up to the release.

The troubles for *Padmavati* started during the shoot itself, with Shri Rajput Karni Sena, an organisation of the Rajput community, damaging sets at Jaipur's Jaigarh Fort and assaulting Mr. Bhansali in January. Vandalism followed at the shoot in Kolhapur in March. Other groups like Jai Rajputana Sangh joined the protests even as Information and Broadcasting Minister Smriti Irani kept promising a safe passage for the film. In October, a Surat artist's rangoli, featuring the lead Deepika Padukone, was destroyed in a matter of minutes. Protests were held earlier this month in Chittorgarh. The Karni Sena claims the film distorts facts and hurts their pride and sentiments – the queen shown dancing without a *ghoonghat* (veil), allegations of an intimate dream scene between her and the villain of the piece, Allauddin Khilji. The filmmaker has clarified that the two characters don't feature together in any scene. A few weeks ago, the Karni Sena called for a ban on the film, threatening to burn down theatres and called a countrywide bandh on December 1, the film's original date of release. Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Punjab have decided to disallow the screening of the film, even as it awaits certification from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

A debate has been continuing on the sidelines about whether Rani Padmini was for real or just a figure of legends and myths, a figment of the poet's imagination, not a historical entity. Meanwhile, the CBFC returned the supposedly incomplete application form of the film, with its chief Prasoon Joshi also citing the 68-day rule (films should be submitted to the CBFC at least 68 days before release).

He has also been piqued by the film being shown to, and getting endorsement from, some mediapersons before getting certified by the CBFC.

A lot is at stake when it comes to the *Padmavati* issue. On the one hand is the perennial question of censorship. On the other hand, the response to the film from various quarters exposes the deep-seated patriarchal, conservative mindset to the depiction of women on screen. The issue also brings to light the continued threats and censorship imposed by extra-constitutional bodies and States on films. *Tamas*, *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil*, *My Name Is Khan*, *Vishwaroopam*, *The Da Vinci Code*, *Fanaa*, *Parzania*, *Aarakshan* – the list goes on. It has always been up to the judiciary to come to the rescue of films. Even in the case of *Padmavati*, the Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea to stay the release and initiate criminal prosecution against Mr. Bhansali. It made it clear that it wants the CBFC to come to an independent and considered decision on certifying the movie.

At the moment things seem to be in a limbo and the film's team has been told to stay silent. A note from Viacom 18 says: "We have faith that we will soon obtain the requisite clearances to release the film. We will announce the revised release date of the film in due course." There could be other ramifications for the industry at large. If the CBFC holds other films to the 68-day rule, it could mean potential postponements for films like Salman Khan's *Tiger Zinda Hai* lined up for a December release. With uncertainty over a big ticket film like *Padmavati*, 2017's box office revenues are set to take a huge, painful beating. According to trade experts, there has been a slump in revenues since 2014 with the drop likely to get sharper this year. Business is where it eventually will hurt the most [6].

**5: A Few others in the eye of Storm: Why are the three films, 'Padmavati', 'S Durga' and 'Nude', under siege ?**

Nothing can be cinematically more divergent than *Padmavati*, *S Durga* and *Nude*. If *Padmavati* is a mash-up of history, mythology, fable and fantasy, *S Durga* and *Nude* are slices of contemporary lives. One is larger than life in scale, the others are intimate. One boasts of Bollywood biggies, the others are small, in the realm of vernacular cinema – Malayalam and Marathi – with a larger lesser-hyped cast.

*Padmavati* seems to have lush colours, costumes and sets, much drama, song 'n' dance, flamboyance and flourish. *Nude* looks lyrical, riding on quietude and fluid imagery, and *S Durga* is



Spartan, independent and experimental. All three are, however, also curiously united – in one point; all three have the common tag of the off-beat movies and iconoclastic in nature for which the CBFC under siege.

Padmavati has been in the eye of the storm right from the start with Shri Rajput Karni Sena vandalising the sets and assaulting the director Sanjay Leela Bhansali. It is now calling for a ban, threatening to burn down theatres, and invoking a countrywide bandh on December 1, the day of the film's planned release.

The fringe group claims the film distorts facts and hurts their sentiments, without having seen the film or read its script. It has now got institutional support, with Rajasthan Cabinet Minister Kiran Maheshwari joining the protests and UP government officials warning about law-and-order issues.

Nude and S Durga have been summarily removed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting from the screening list of the 48th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) , 2017, scheduled to begin tomorrow. The technical reasons offered for their non-inclusion have, however, been contested vehemently by the filmmakers.

The narratives of their battles are as varied as the films themselves. Padmavati is vulnerable due to its budget – there is big money riding on it, running into hundreds of crores, not to speak of the livelihoods of many. No wonder the makers have been swinging between pacification and confrontation, defensiveness and aggression, when dealing with the mobs. There is too much at stake, the reason why various industry bodies have chosen to make a show of solidarity.

On the other hand, Sanal Kumar Sasidharan (director of S Durga) has decided to take the bull by the horns, all on his own, and has filed a writ petition against the government in the Kerala High Court.

He has no option but to be defiant and fight for the limited spaces – one of them being film festivals – available for his kind of cinema, made on a minus-cule budget.

**A film that supposedly dishonours a goddess and, in turn, women at large with its title is actually all about how women are routinely degraded in real life**

At the root of it is the issue of freedom of expression. But one senses another overarching concern gender representation in cinema and, in turn, our hypocritical attitude towards it.

### **Death of irony**

A section of the conservative and hard-headed viewers get easily offended seeing a Rajput queen dancing, without a ghoonghat, in a film. But in attempting to save the honour of the character, viewers threaten to chop off the nose of the actress (Deepika Padukone) portraying the role. Can we not see irony die a thousand deaths here?

This reviewer has seen S Durga and will stick her neck out for it, in how it holds a mirror to what we have reduced women to – deified in temples but subjected to trauma (physical and mental) in day-to-day life.

It implicates the viewers in a woman's suffocation, making them deservedly uncomfortable. A film that supposedly dishonours a goddess and, in turn, women at large with its title is actually all about how women are routinely degraded in real life. It's a film society should be encouraged to watch, yet the moral police prefers to not go beyond its name.

Nude might be about nude modelling but it is not titillatory or exploitative, filmmaker Ravi Jadhav assures the viewers. It's about the dilemmas nude models face when caught between economic needs and societal censure. "It is an emotional film in which we have handled the subject artistically, with a lot of dignity," says Jadhav. The finger is not pointed not women but at society.

However, instead of introspection there seems to be this righteous desire in both society and state to control narratives about women – how they should be portrayed, what is appropriate womanly behaviour on screen, what is fit for an audience to watch and what is not.



All of this is based on some obsolete patriarchal notion about a woman's honour. In other words, an in-fantilisation of both creation and consumption of cinema in the hands of rampant conservatism. That's certainly not what women want [7].

#### **6: History, Cultural History and the Controversies**

#### **Most children regard history as a compendium of dull facts and dates; then there are ill-researched Bollywood versions**

After the launch last week of my best friend's novel *The King Within* set in 14th Century India, one of her students told her that the lively panel discussion with two history buffs had changed her notion of history as a "boring" subject. Considering my friend was a late "convert" to history herself from literature, it was a great compliment indeed.

The current outrage-on both sides-over Sanjay Leela Bhansali's film *Padmavati* demonstrates the perils of decades of bad teaching of history in India. Most children regard it as a tedious compendium of facts and dates that have no relevance to our own times. Others are so badly informed that ill-researched Bollywood versions of history are taken as the truth.

One panellist at the book event mentioned the film *Mohenjo Daro*, purporting to be set in the time of the Indus Valley Civilisation. No one told filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker that the name means Mound of the Dead so the living city could not possibly have been called that. However, lack of historical accuracy was not the reason why the film flopped.

Many who saw the happy domesticity of *Jodhaa-Akbar* would be hard-pressed to believe that no such empress existed. One generation thought she looked like homely Durga Khote in *Mughal-e-Azam*, while a newer one thinks she looked like Aishwarya Rai. All think she was the apple of Akbar's eye. Except she wasn't. His chief queen was his first cousin *Ruqaiya Begum*.

For some Akbar was the robust, moustachioed Punjabi *Prithviraj Kapoor* in *Mughal-e-Azam*. Now many think of him as a tall, muscular, light-eyed *Hrithik Roshan*, not a half-Central Asian half-Persian with mongoloid features, medium height and solid build. As for the wife who gave birth to his successor, *Jehangir*, she's only recorded as *Maryam uz Zamani*.

But at least enough documentation survives from that era for a more accurate and vividly written history for popular consumption. So there are many historical fiction novels set in the Mughal era from the imaginative mysteries by *Madhulika Liddle* to the harem intrigues of *Indu Sundaresan*. But the textbooks that should spark children's interest in history remain dull or turgid. *The King Within* is set in a period with little epigraphic or archaeological evidence for novelists to work with. But imagination grounded in intelligent correlations and logical guesswork makes the "golden era" of Indian history – the textbook cliché for the Gupta period- come alive. The protagonists seem just like us and suddenly modern parallels spring to mind.

*The Game of Thrones* is pure fantasy-fiction with no historical basis and yet its phenomenal success lies in its ability to strike a responsive chord with us. The motivations and jealousies, the fatal attractions and atavistic urges seem very modern. History – especially India's-is replete with real characters who displayed all these and more. But most lie forgotten. No wonder Bhansali depends on a 16th century poem by *Malik Muhammed Jayasi* about a 14th century Rajput queen for his film *Padmavati*. Had he tried, what would he have found? No contemporary accounts mention her, not even by *Allaudin Khilji's* court poet *Amir Khusro* who'd already composed a 13th century version of the 8th century *Layla-Majnun* love story by then.

Whether *Padmini* and *Ratan Singh*, living in rough-and-ready, war-torn medieval Rajputana, wrote elaborate ensembles such as those *Rimple* and *Harpreet Narula* designed for *Deepika Padukone* and *Shahid Kapoor* is a small quibble. Far more relevant is the matter of clashing factoids and collective beliefs in the case of *Alauddin's* alleged sneak-peek of the beautiful *Rani*.

A panellist at *The King Within* event pointed out recent research shows there is no evidence that Emperor *Ashoka* gave up violence after *Kalinga* and his policies may have led to *Magadh's*

decline, putting his post-facto 'Great' honorific in jeopardy. Historians who rediscovered Ashoka imbued him with a latter-day halo, not unlike Jayasi's belated tale of lust, valour and sacrifice.

The reimagining of Ashoka-even in the incredulous movie on him-didn't ruffle too many features, as indeed was the case with Mohenjo Daro too. But medieval India is a favourite ideological and communal battleground today, exacerbated by the skewed textbooks of yore. Skewing them the other way, as is being done now, doesn't help matters either.

Well researched, engaging books that reach out to lay readers are clearly necessary. If Hilary Mantel can rekindle interest in Tudor England, more books like *The King Within* – turned into films or serials if need be! – can better acquaint Indians (like that young student at the book release) with our multifarious past than films like *Padmavati* and reduce 'outrage' on all sides [8].

#### **7: Latest History Congress in JU in India and the Stirrings of Intolerance**

Political intolerance, killings of rationalists and rewriting of history found prominent mention on Thursday at the Indian History Congress (IHC) being held at the Jadavpur University here this year.

Among those present at the three-day event were leading historians such as Irfan Habib, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Ishrat Alam, Rajmohan Gandhi, Shireen Moosvi and Krishna Mohan Shrivastava, who were in the city to discuss topics, release books and present papers.

The murders of Narendra Dabholkar (2013), Govind Pansare (2015), M M Kalburgi (2015) and more recently Gauri Lankesh came up for discussion at the inaugural session. "They were killed for their intense and persistent questioning of people's superstitious and obscurantist religious beliefs and practices..." said Shrivastava, president of the History Congress this time. He felt that the rising intolerance ran counter to India's inherent spirit of open-mindedness.

Rajmohan Gandhi minced no words when he said the Ram that Mahatma Gandhi spoke about and the Ram of those who brought down Babri Masjid in 1992 were essentially different entities. "When cow lynching happens and cops pursue not the attackers but the "mistakes" of the victims, when the "justice" of the mob is more justified than the law, and when vigilantes are "agents of God", we know we are not free though we are independent," he said.

Along the same lines, Ishrat Alam secretary of the History Congress this time, said history was being being rewritten to give greater credence to mythology than facts. "It is a matter of grave concern that the Centre-backed Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) is sponsoring such rewriting of history..." he said.

During the day, a lifetime achievement award was conferred on Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and handed over by Habib. Later, Habib was made honorary fellow of Asiatic Society, with historian Subhas Chakraborty doing the honours [9].

#### **8: Echoes of Intolerance, Censor Board -Scanner of 'Padmavat' & the History Experts**

The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has invited two Rajasthan-based professors to be part of a historians' panel to review Sanjay Leela Bhansali's controversial film "*Padmavati*".

The two academics, R S Khangarot, principal of Agrawal PG College in Jaipur, and B L Gupta, a retired Rajasthan University professor are among those who have been approached by the CBFC.

Khangarot, a historian who had criticised the film for "factual mistakes" and for not taking into account the "sentiments of people", now said he received a call from censor board chief Prasoon Joshi to view the film. Currently in Dubai, Khangarot said he will be available in the new year only.

Gupta said he will offer his opinion on the period drama after watching the film and will judge it on the basis of historical facts. After months of controversy, Bhansali had appeared before a parliamentary panel on November 30 and said the period drama featuring Deepika Padukone, Shahid Kapoor and Ranveer Singh, was a work of fiction based on the 16th century epic poem "*Padmavat*" by Malik Muhammad Jayasi.

CBFC chief Prasoon Joshi, who appeared before a parliamentary panel had said that it would engage an expert panel of historians to watch the film with the board, before granting it approval. CBFC reached out to the royal family of Mewar, too, to confer with it on the subject of the film [10].

Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has handed over a U/A certificate to Sanjay Leela Bhansali's "*Padmavat* " after the film makers showed the final print incorporating the modifications suggested by the panel.

Now that the certification process is over, it is the prerogative of the producer to decide on the date of the film's release, sources said.

In its December 28 meeting with the film producers, the review committee of CBFC and a special panel of historians had recommended five modifications to '*Padmavati*'. First, the board recommended a change in the film's title to '*Padmavat*'.

CBFC also asked for the inclusion of two disclaimers; one clarifying that the film-makers do not claim historical accuracy, and a second that says the film does not encourage or endorse the practice of Sati or Jauhar. The filmmakers were also asked to modify a song sequence featuring the Mewar queen, played by Deepika Padukone.

While this brightens the prospects of an early release, industry sources said uncertainty still prevails over the film's release date. Apart from the controversy that catapulted Bhansali's period drama into the limelight, from an industry point-of-view, the release of '*Padmavat*' will be significant as it will be the first Indian feature film to get a simultaneous global release across 60 countries by global studio Paramount Pictures.

'*Padmavat*' producers, along with the state and central governments, however, will also have to factor in political opposition to the film before its release. Since the exhibition of a film is a state subject, sources said it is likely that the film will not be released in Rajasthan and MP, which have been the nerve centres of the protests.

Karni Sena and Mewar royals have continued their agitation against the film [11].

#### **9: When the Dusts settle after-dusk ushering a new dawn....**

The tunnel is now really dark, very dark, with intolerance raising its ugliest heads in every nook and cranny of our motherland India. And the end is still not in sight. But historically, we shall have to believe that all these shall have to come to an end in the new future with the sun rising in the eastern horizon with soothing sun beams of soothing sun beams basking us from the shivering swathes of brumal nights. The crooked fringe groups would be subverted and demolished reinforcing the mainstream and no mainstream would attempt at nurturing the fringes anywhere in India. Thus giving rise to a tolerant and peaceful India with growth of rationalism of all hues and wiping out all traces of violent and vulgar radicalism leading to decay, horror, devastation and death.

The umbilical cord between the fringe and the mainstream is both transparent and verifiable. If the VHP, one of the larger affiliates of the Sangh Parivar chants a clarion call for India to become an exclusive 'Hindu Rashtra', which is BJP's artful illusion and the grand delusion of de 'secula'rising Indian constitution. Do these people belong to fringe or mainstream? [12]

The level of tolerance temper in India has now touched the nadir. The serial murders of the rationalists in various big cities including the case of Madam Gauri Lankesh, a veteran Journalist having been shoot at from the point-blank range has been the last blot and social stigma of India of the country.

Besides, the onslaughts cum murders of the people like Aklab by the cow vigilantes or the murder of a Muslim citizen of Maldah in Rajasthan by a fringe Hindu hoodlum who of the 'love-jihad' termed this atrocity to be repurension and retaliation against inter-communal marriages called love-jihad. The latest unfortunate victims are being preys of the cow-vigilante band wagons of BJP-brigades.

### 10: 'Supreme' Intolerance

- Four SC Senior Judges revolted against CJI; they made an appeal to the nation to preserve the independence of the Judiciary.
- The administration of the SC is not in order, the Judges allege.
- The judges hinted that the issue was related to the murder of Judge Loya case.
- PM Modi & Law Minister R. S. Prasad discusses allegations raised by the judges.
- Bar Council of India expected to meet on 13 January to discuss the matter.
- Judges have to act in 'statesmanship' to ensure complete harmony, says attorney General K K Venugopal [13-14].

Of course, the differences were resolved in the Supreme Court with the intervention of the Bar Council Chief of the SC and the Attorney General of India, through indoor negotiations and discussions.

But ignorance is not all bad. **Thomas Jefferson** said : " Ignorance is preferable to error, and he is less remote from the truth who believes nothing than he who believes what is wrong." The greatest obstacle to progress is not ignorance, but the illusion of knowledge. The reason that the fundamentalists are so dangerous is not so much that they are ignorant but that they are certain that they possess the absolute truth. It is this certainty that can lead to repression, bigotry, racism, and fanaticism. [15]

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