

# Let us protect and preserve our multi-faceted culture



**K. S. Alagiri, president, Tamil Nadu Congress Committee**

The changes of thought which happened before and after the Indian Independence Struggle were immeasurable. When the British decided to grant freedom to India, they had not originally wanted to treat India as a single landscape, but to divide the land into, at least, three segments. They succeeded in their plan, to some extent. Pakistan was carved out on Jinnah's efforts. The inhuman acts, tortures and riots that happened at the time of Partition are beyond the pale of human dignity, decency and decorum.

But our great leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, Jayaprakash Narayan and so on restored normalcy, putting an end to this nightmarish violence, serving as a bridge to link people of all religions and all regions. At that time, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, all bubbling with sense of humanity, put out the fire of religious violence with a firm hand. If the people who indulged in

incendiary activities constituted 10 per cent, those who stemmed the rot 90 cent.

Then a miracle happened in Kashmir. The state where 99 per cent of people were Muslims accepted Nehru's assurance, reposed faith in Gandhi's leadership and joined India in the spirit of democracy. The credit goes to Nehru for annexing Kashmir to India without resorting to any war or bloody violence. Had Kashmir Muslims willed it, the then Governor-General Mountbatten would have handed over Kashmir to Pakistan. At that time, some concessions were granted to the Muslims in exchange for the massive land. In fact, it was not an easy joke; rather a feat. But the present rulers find fault with it.

Pakistan, which got freedom as India did at the same time, is now not a single nation; it has been divided into two countries (Pakistan and Bangladesh). They have only one religion binding on them. But India is home to several religions, yet the massive land remains a single undivided entity. The credit for this distinction goes to Nehru and his style of governance.

Muslims in Kashmir have set a good example to the world, having accepted India's sovereignty. Of course, like in other parts of the world, in Kashmir too there are some fissiparous forces. But they are not the real face of Kashmir.

Meanwhile, Pudumadam Jaffar Ali wrote an article 'Why do some people have extremist thoughts?' in the Hindu Tamil Thisai dated November 8, 2022. He had presented his honest perspectives in a highly balanced and meaningful manner. His clear vision and lucid viewpoints on the current scourges of religious hate politics and lack of understanding are quite laudable. The majority Indian society, abiding by the Constitution and following democracy, owes answers to the reasonable and just questions he has raised.

Jaffar Ali says that it is secular forces which thrust on the Muslims the responsibility of fighting the religious fanaticism. What he says is more or less true. When the followers of a culture are

confronted with problems, other brothers must extend a helping hand to them. But no strong voices are heard in politics.

The Islamic leader themselves do not like some deviant Muslim youths to try to wreak havoc with the Indian society, adopting violence as an ideology. But they hesitate to be vocal in their condemnation. It is a great deficiency. The reason is that they fear the terrorists or violence-prone youths will underestimate their attachment to Islam.

In the past neither Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan nor Abul Kalam Azad had supported the Muslim League's vociferous demand for Pakistan because they had an immense faith in India's unity. Of course, today's Muslim leaders' faith too in India's democracy and unity is no less great. But the catch is that they never express themselves as fearlessly as Pudumadam Jaffal Ali does.

That fear of expressing opinions freely is also plaguing the Indian society by and large. When the Babri Masjid was demolished, several democratically spirited leaders were pained and came out in condemnation of the incident. But thereafter they hesitated to go about finding a solution to the problem or were afraid of doing so. This hesitation or fear had spurred the religious fundamentalists to go their violent way. Had Gandhi been alive now, he would have made a clarion call, saying, ""Come, ye Indians! Our brothers' place of worship has been demolished; Let us revive it and rebuild it for our dear brothers."

This is the difference between the Gandhian generation and ours.

All said and done, one thing is undeniably certain. The Indian culture is a multi-faceted culture alive and kicking for centuries on end.

If an attempt is made to convert India into a single culture-oriented, single language-oriented and single religion-oriented monolithic superstate, then India will end up going the Pakistan way, getting broken up into several segments.

Our great national leaders had great faith in their religions, in the gods they worshipped and in their own languages. Yet they had never imposed their faith on others. That is India's national character and national culture. It is my strong belief that we must tread the lofty path.

**Translated by V.Mariappan**