

Countering False Narratives in the West: Right-Wing Ideology and the War of Perceptions

Rami N Desai*

When Narendra Modi won the General elections in 2019, it was the outcome of the largest democratic exercise in the world. It also clocked the highest ever voter turnout in India's history at 67.11%. Among those who voted for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), 46% were women, 50% postgraduates, 54% professionals and 48% farmers voted amongst other crucial voting sections¹. These figures completely derailed the prospects of the western media favourite Indian National Congress led by Rahul Gandhi. The BJP led National Democratic Alliance managed to cut across all sections of society winning a staggering 353 seats out of 543 seats, authenticating the acronym 'Tsunami', (Tsunami + Narendra Modi). The historic mandate was celebrated not just by BJP supporters but also citizens of India who had hoped for a strong and clear mandate.

However, the mood seemed to be polar opposite on the other side of the world. The western media seemed shaken. The self-titled 'liberal' and left-leaning media of the west, that has a few poor cousins in India as well, had been following the Indian elections closely. They had patronisingly forewarned Indian voter, as if she was gullible or shortsighted, of an apocalyptic future if Modi came to power. *The Economist* headline, reeking of British colonial hangover, stated: "*We do not find the prospect of a government led by Congress*

under Mr. (Rahul) Gandhi an inspiring one. But we have to recommend it to Indians as the less disturbing option."

The Guardian too, reporting on the results of the elections, decided to focus on how Rahul Gandhi lost Amethi rather than how Modi won over India. These pharisaic pietistic bullies titled their editorial "*Bad for India's Soul*" stating that "*the world did not need another national populist leader who pursues a pro-business agenda while trading in fake news and treating minorities as second class citizens*". Across the Atlantic, *The New York Times* was not far behind in its unfounded criticism of a democratically elected government, their opinion piece was titled "*How Narendra Modi seduced India with envy and hate*". The Chicago based media company *The Onion* that claims to be 'America's finest news source' was also not willing to fall behind in the race of spewing venom against Indians and their choice of leadership headlined an opinion piece "*India Continues Surge Towards Status as First World Nation by Re-electing Racist Right-Wing Authoritarian*".

Many of these articles, redolent of white supremacist behaviour, were collated by none other than *Huffington Post* India, to convince Indians that the West was not happy. A clear attempt of white racism, wherein it was presumed that if white-dominated news sources denounce Modi

*Ms. Rami N. Desai is the Director of iSTRAT CA, a company that deals in research, communication and data management and skill development.

and right-wing politics in India, then the rest of India would automatically follow suit. As a slave that looks up to his master, as a coloured primitive that looks up to the advanced civilised white man for guidance, Indians must feel ashamed for making an electoral choice that the citizens felt was right for them.

More recently, during Modi's second term, which he won with a far larger majority than his first term, four long-standing issues came to a close in quick succession. The abrogation of Article 370, the *Ayodhya* verdict by the Supreme Court of India in favour of the Hindu litigants, the Supreme Court-mandated and monitored National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam and the Citizenship Amendment Bill (now an Act-CAA).

Western media, taking its cue from a handful of its sycophantic following in Delhi, slandered, turned, twisted and outright lied in much of their reporting on these issues. *The Washington Post* in an article titled, "*India's settler-colonial project in Kashmir takes a disturbing turn*" author Hafsa Kanjwal noted, "*This move highlights the ways in which India is quickly descending to an authoritarian State, only interested in its expansion and securing power — and one that will flout international law and its own Constitution to achieve these ends.*"² Hafsa Kanjwal forgot to mention that Article 370 in the Constitution had a temporary status, to begin with, nor did she shed any light on the relief that came with its abrogation to women and minorities across the state. She also overlooked the fact that basic human rights and laws such as Right to Education Act and Prohibition of Child Marriage were not applicable in Jammu and Kashmir before the

abrogation of Article 370, rights that she clearly takes for granted by the sound of her article. Also, not worth a mention was the nationwide celebration throughout the country that ensued the abrogation of the draconian Article 370, even by Indian Muslims.

The New York Times editorial board wrote: "The Indian government's decision to revoke the semi-autonomous status of Kashmir, accompanied by a huge security clampdown, is dangerous and wrong. Bloodshed is all but certain. The United Nations recommended holding a referendum to let Kashmiris decide their fate, but that never happened."³ *The New York Times* once again failed to present an unbiased picture; not only was there no bloodshed, but the referendum that it mentioned was only subject to Pakistan vacating Pakistan Occupied Jammu Kashmir (PoJK). *The New York Times* never once mentioned the role of Pakistan sponsored terrorism in Kashmir or the forced exodus of Kashmiri Hindus who were murdered, raped and thrown out of their legitimate inherited homes, overnight for their religion.

The line of attack was similar after the *Ayodhya* verdict. *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and other western major news daily's chimed together with the same tired and overplayed commentary of the verdict being a stepping stone for the BJP towards a *Hindu Rashtra*. *The New York Times* wrote that the verdict was "*handing the prime minister and his followers a major victory in their quest to remake the country as Hindu and shift it further from its secular foundation.*"⁴ *The Washington Post*, in its report, called India under PM Modi "*fundamentally a Hindu nation*" and "*not the secular republic promoted by the country's founders*".⁵

Both pseudo-liberal mouthpieces overlooked the fact that the long-awaited *Ayodhya* case verdict was delivered by a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court. Neither did this have anything to do with a *Hindu Rashtra* nor was it a government decision. The repetitive use of the word *Hindu Rashtra* in every commentary on India's political scenario reflects a state of crisis journalism aimed at creating a shared sense of illegitimate paranoia. To create fear, to create chaos and crisis is an old tactic to get noticed especially at a time when readership is dwindling.

But the misrepresentation of the abrogation of Article 370 and the *Ayodhya* verdict was still somewhat subtle compared to the diabolical representation of the NRC (National Register of Citizens) and the CAA (Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019). *The Guardian* played its natural role in further peddling false narratives generated by India's homegrown BJP critics, and also by the miffed leadership of Congress and other regional parties whose influence has severely diminished since the rise of the BJP in 2014. *The Guardian* stated "Rights groups warn of a possible humanitarian crisis as those left off the list (NRC) face statelessness and detention. It spoke of how the list was unfairly skewed against several people—women, for instance, who often lack access to necessary documents, and Muslims".⁶

The Guardian it seems, in the above narrative, simply forgot or chose to omit pivotal details about the NRC to its readers. Firstly, the NRC in Assam was a 2013 Supreme Court order. Secondly, the NRC was a part of the Assam Accord, a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) between the Congress government of the time and the leaders

of the Assam movement against illegal immigration. And finally, there were more Hindus whose names did not appear on the NRC list as opposed to Muslims. Besides, *The Guardian* also conveniently forgot to mention crucial details like detention centres had been previously constructed and illegal immigrants had been moved to these centres under the Congress regime. The nuances of the order of the Supreme Court, like an allowance for an individual who did not possess any documentation to bring a witness from their locality as proof of their citizenship, were carefully left out. Details like these may not make a difference to the shoddy and tainted journalism of *The Guardian* but it certainly makes a difference to a country that is trying to move forward from the politics of religion played by the previous dispensation.

Finally, the most recent thorn in the flesh of the racist pseudo-liberal media was the Citizenship (Amendment), Bill. In a move to raise the bar of the frenzy, they had already created against the BJP they blatantly used subterfuge. With a flagrant display of antipathy towards the delicate relationship between the Hindu and Muslim communities in India, they fabricated a narrative that this bill would be used against the Muslim citizens of India. *The Telegraph* wrote, "It is the latest in a string of actions the government, led by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, and has taken against India's Muslim population." *The New York Times* headline read "Mode makes his bigotry even clearer?" *The Guardian's* headline read. "Violent clashes continue in India over new citizenship bill, Protests spread to Delhi as BJP government

*accused of making Muslims second-class citizens”.*⁷

The astounding misrepresentation of the Bill could only indicate the perfidious intentions of these articles that is to incite hate in India and destabilise its growing influence in the world. It also highlights the utter incapability of the writers and editors involved in looking beyond their personal biases towards the right-leaning ideology of the BJP.

The Bill had, in fact, nothing at all to do with Indian citizens. It was merely an amendment to the citizenship law, to give refuge to a handful of persecuted minorities from three neighbouring Islamic republics. These refugees had already been living in India for decades and had been persecuted for being minorities. These countries are well known for their intolerance and the bill was brought in specifically to provide relief to these minorities, persecuted for their faith. Therefore, by the sheer characteristics of the Bill, it was a case of positive discrimination for the religiously persecuted minorities of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and the country of Bangladesh where the official state religion is Islam. However, Muslims from the same countries can still apply for citizenship of India through the existing channels. The Modi government in 2018, had offered Indian citizenship to nearly 550 Pakistani Muslims. Where then does the question of CAA endangering Indian Muslims arise?

This continuous false propaganda and misrepresentation of facts by the media in the west can be deeply debilitating to India's image. This unabated fear-mongering with an underlying current of racism that is slowly becoming discernible has severe consequences on internal

peace and security in the nation as well. Whether it's *The New York Times* or *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* or *The Washington Post*, the agenda seems to be the same, reminiscent of colonial tactics in India of Divide and Rule. The Hindus and Muslims in India have always been pitted against each other by western powers; today it is evident that these fault lines are once again being exploited.

However, India now as an Independent nation must look deeper into the critique meted out to Indians. Under the glossy veneer of concern is an unforgiving judgment, rooted in history, towards our internal matters as well as our vibrant and thriving democracy. Therefore, it is imperative now, more than ever, to ask ourselves some critical questions - Why is it that the western media has such a skewed perspective of the Indian right? Why is it that they have a cavernous appetite for criticising India asserting its 'Indianness'? Why is it that the western intellectual and the media is so highly influenced by left-leaning liberals, pseudo secularists and westernised Indian cronies?

The answer to these questions is primarily three-fold:

1. Colonialism and Racism
2. Cultural Elitism
3. 'Liberal' Indian aspirations (and the West)

Colonialism and Racism

Indians have encountered Indo-phobia and Hindu-phobia over the centuries, whether it was under invaders, the colonialists, western scholars or even the Indian liberals who looked towards the west for acceptance. India, during the colonial era, was a complex and mystical place for the Europeans and Hinduism was something alien to

them. Europeans, having never encountered a culture so vastly different to theirs and society so deeply entrenched in its religion, consciously decided to use evangelicalism to destroy the Indian spiritual backbone, in an attempt to control the country. Many historians have noted that the British policy made a concerted attempt to disparage and belittle India's rich cultural, scientific and religious knowledge.⁸ This policy was also aimed to justify British control of India, back home. Systematically, with the assistance of evangelicals and the colonial administration, the British destroyed the Indian sense of self-worth.

Political analysts and social anthropologists of the colonial era like James Mill believed "*that the English government in India with all its vices is a blessing of unspeakable magnitude to the population of Hindustan. In their present state, the Indians were unfit to govern themselves; a simple form of arbitrary government, tempered by European honour and European intelligence was needed. The wider the circumference of British dominion, the more extensive the reign of peace.*"⁹ While in the employment of the East India Company, he even recommended bringing in a large number of Europeans to be settled in India. This, he argued, would be a civilising influence on who he thought were a population of heathens.

Mill focused on Hindu society explaining that "*If the mistake concerning Hindu society, committed by the British nation, and the British government, be very great; if they have conceived the Hindus to be a people of high civilisation, while they have in reality made but a few of the earliest steps in the progress of civilisation, it is impossible that in many of the*

measures pursued the government of that people, the mark aimed at should not have been wrong."¹⁰

Further, Charles Grant and Lord Macaulay institutionalised racism via education and administration. They neither had any respect for Indian languages and culture nor for our ancient traditions. In 1796, Grant, in his highly influential tract "*Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*" criticised the Orientalist for being too respectful to Indian culture and religion. His work tried to determine the Hindus' "*true place in the moral scale*" and he alleged that the Hindus are "*a people exceedingly depraved*". Grant believed that Great Britain's divine duty was to civilise and Christianise the natives.

Colonialists step by step diminished any sense of pride that Indians had in their rich history. They ensured this by replacing the education system so that Indians did not study or comprehend their past without the contribution of the British. Erasing thousands of years of knowledge and culture, the British ruthlessly left a whole nation's identity in chaos.

In 1835, Lord Macaulay famously wrote in his Minute on Education that "*A single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.*" He envisaged creating "*a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect*".¹¹ Lord Macaulay's insidious idea of creating a class of people that aspired to be English had far-reaching consequences for India creating a divide that is yet to be bridged.

It is this residue of colonialism that today simmers in the West. Western media does not just

limit itself to commentary on Indian politics and our internal affairs but believes that it has a right to direct our future just the way the British did. The self-titled liberal media is far from liberal, on the contrary, it wrests between radical and extreme. It looks down upon a confident India, asserting itself but prefers to pity poor India, reliant India, and the 'heathen' India.

Cultural Elitism

All countries have a culturally elite class of people that more often than not, form the intellectual core and leadership of society. Jawaharlal Nehru was one such example in India—the first Prime Minister of the country. The anglicised Prime Minister seemingly found his strength and confidence in the fact that he was English speaking, Cambridge University educated, westernised and was at least superficially accepted by European society. This was so because he embodied and represented European morality, education, manners, virtues and vices.

Unfortunately, for the rest of India such was the man leading the nation towards its destiny. An India that should have been free from the biases instilled in our mindsets by the Europeans, had instead these biases reinforced in the minds of the people by its very own icons. The West, on the other hand, found this leadership to be easily palatable. The British had created this somewhat tolerable elite class of Indians, on the one hand, while on the other, poor, Hindi speaking, traditional and practising Hindus remained pagans in their imagination.

Modi and the BJP, in contrast to Nehru and his dynasty, are anything but westernised; nor do

they identify themselves as elite. Modi and his followers are looked down upon by racist western media as well as their white skin obsessed coterie in India. Modi was neither born wealthy nor was educated in fancy schools; he was not born speaking English but learnt it on the way. The thought of a common Indian 'tea seller,' today leading the world's largest democracy is unpalatable to the West. It defies their basic upper crust principles. It is unimaginable for a man of his credentials to impress the West. He embodies nothing that the West taught us nor does he seem to be interested in impressing his western critiques. He is work focused and doesn't enjoy strategic social interactions that Indian intellectuals, as well as western journalists, have become so used to. He does not have a dynasty behind him, nor the global connections that come with a dynasty nor any such dynastic aspirations. Modi and his Party simply don't fit into the expectations of the elite in India or the West.

Further to their annoyance, Modi wears his religion on his sleeve and does not shy away from fulfilling his traditional commitments. Unfortunately, the cultural elites don't realise that this is exactly how the other social classes in India live. To them, these are strange new winds. There is acceptance for the first time in India for 'Indianness'. The majority are neither apologetic and nor hiding their faith, but revisiting it with pride. There is renewed interest in indigenous tongues, cultures and traditions. New confidence in being Indian is increasing at a rapid speed. This in no way excludes or limits the freedom of expression of any other religious minority.

In contrast, the western media and its friends in India, thoroughly bonded in the last few decades

of the Congress rule, finding common ground in their elitist leanings and distaste for archaic Indian traditions. Their resentment for ritualistic Hindus was rooted in European understanding of the religion. With Sonia Gandhi at the helm of affairs, a white European with immense faith to the “religion of the civilised” –Christianity, the same sanctimonious western media put her and her fair-skinned children on a pedestal as the saviours of India. The western media never questioned with similar rigour their dynastic rule in a democratic system nor criticised their apparent lack of scruples. Their wealth, as well as the instantaneous wealth of the son-in-law, Robert Vadra was barely ever brought up. Sonia’s interactions abroad, her credentials and Rahul’s frequent disappearances, educational qualifications and personal life amongst many other parts have been shrouded in secrecy, were never been questioned by these watchdogs of justice. Unsurprisingly, the western media has been unusually kind to them, unlike Modi whose personal life and choices have often been not just questioned but also cruelly judged.

The crux of the matter is that the western media finds common ground with other westernised communities that represent western civility, morality and culture that the West itself bestowed upon them. They had hoped for India to follow in their footsteps. When that transformation did not take place, and instead Indians began to reinvent and reassert themselves and their inherent culture, the West was disappointed. This is why Rahul Gandhi, a middle-aged spoilt man born in the lap of luxury and power, who shows no signs of responsibility or maturity is ‘suggested’ to us as our leader. This man who is the symbol of

incompetence in India is preferred by the West over Narendra Modi, a self-made, focused, hardworking and selfless leader who inspires a billion people.

‘Liberal’ Indian Aspirations (and the West)

Unfortunately for Indians, the problem doesn’t stop with white media; the problem is also a handful of Indians themselves—a combination of radical extremist left-liberals who also are the glitterati of elite Indian society. They are found in the corridors of Lutyen’s Delhi, masquerading as intellectuals whilst hobnobbing with every potential benefactor from the West. They can be found openly talking about freedom of speech whilst feeling no such compulsion to allow others with opposing views the same liberty. However, when it comes to making career choices, these communist sympathisers don’t choose to migrate to China; they prefer the US or Europe.

Indian anti-BJP scholars and intellectuals crave white approval and a career in the West at the cost of making India look like a banana republic and rural Indians as some antediluvian creatures. Once they have managed to entrench themselves in western societies with successful careers, they tell their patrons what they want to hear.

One such character born in India but brought up in the folds of British elitist institutions is Amol Rajan, The Independent’s Indian-origin former editor. Rajan wrote of Modi: “The charge sheet against Narendra Damodardas Modi is familiar and well-founded: the stench of Hindu nationalism covers him.” The Prime Minister has done little to flame this idea, and the claims of India stepping

towards a Hindu Rashtra have been thrust upon him and his party by the West and journalists like Rajan. He also fails to give a strong balanced analysis, not mentioning that India has been home to various other religions, religious minorities who thrive and grow in India, unlike the state of minorities in our neighbouring countries. On the contrary, the charge sheet against Amol Rajan and his types are all too familiar to Indians living in peace in India to whom Rajan's rhetoric reeks of bigotry and sycophancy.

Modern societies around the world have also become more dependent on social media and the power of decentralised information. The common man neither has the time nor the interest to read the lengthy analysis in newspapers or magazines. Information is fragmented and promoted through unvetted social media channels. Celebrities know that their future is not dependent on their talent but on which side of the buying power they stand. World-famous artist Anish 'Mikhail' Kapoor who wrote a piece in the Hindu phobic British newspaper *The Guardian* in 2015 titled "*India is being ruled by the Hindu Taliban*" gave his liberal modern art appreciating fans and buyers exactly what they wanted. He cemented his place in European high society by agonising about the state of his country. Considering he does not live in India, his credentials to write a piece like this in a major daily was a mystery to most Indians. Maybe, what 'Mikhail' needed was to get a fuller perspective, to comprehend the freedom we enjoy in India he should visit a Taliban controlled country and attempt to create his next art collection there while criticising the Taliban. If he survives, he may learn to appreciate India.

Conclusion

Over the course of the human civilisation, change has been inevitable. Ideologies transform, human thinking evolves and even languages mature from time to time. In the same manner, it is important to revisit the essential definitions of Right and 'liberal' ideologies. It is imperative to redefine and articulate these ideologies in context to India. The genesis of most of these ideologies was in western countries; we need to re-contextualise them. India is unique and the understanding of such leanings have to be broader.

For instance, the BJP is a Party that represents the Right and for many decades 'liberal' has been seen as a characteristic of any party opposing the BJP. However, the truth is that in the last few decades, the essential characteristics of 'liberal' in the opposition has faded away and has become a hateful mix of a radical and extreme character. Their intolerance towards any other ideology has transformed their relationship with the rest of India. With the rising Right, the opposition is fading and the recent agitations against Supreme Court orders and government initiatives are prime examples of their frustration. Western media is bigoted. They use these ideological rebels from BJP's opposition and make heroes of them in the West. For if the West accepts them, they hope that the rest of the world will follow suit. This propaganda, mostly choreographed by western governments are old tactics to demolish credibility. Media houses that promote this new wave of racism and prejudice should be taken on by the intellectual right. Every article that appears in these influential dailies should be countered and exposed until they learn to give the correct picture of India. It is essential to take

this onslaught of lies seriously. Historically, India has allowed outsiders to undermine her strength and uniqueness-especially the West. The results have been devastating for the Indian civilisation. Today, when

India has a chance to stand strong we must ensure that we foil these underhanded tactics and do what we think is right for us, and not what the West wants us to do. This is the true essence of Independence.

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