



A prayer for our times

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Unsound judgments and faulty moral reasoning are not the lot of leaders alone — but also of those who support them

- As all of us ordinary citizens recovered from the carnage in Pulwama, and wondered how the government would respond to this latest instance of cross-border terrorism.
- While a few, driven by moral hatred for the perpetrators, were understandably crying for revenge, others, even at this moment of utmost suffering, spoke of the futility of retaliation.

War and patriotism

- War is sometimes necessary, especially in self-defence.
- But one doesn't have to be an unconditional pacifist to acknowledge the misfortunes it begets or to decry war mongering.
- Nor is readiness to go to war the only indicator of patriotism.
- True, patriots must be prepared to die in defence of their 'patria', their mother or fatherland.
- But one is not any less a patriot if one strives for everyone in his country living peacefully, happily, flourishing, leading life to its fullness.
- A country at war is different.
- War is disruptive, and because it is lethal and involves human sacrifice, a patriot must eschew any bravado about it.
- This is particularly expected from contemporary leaders, patriots who never themselves go to war; quite unlike the past where the ruler who declared war was expected to always lead from the front on the battlefield.
- Decisions on war must then be taken responsibly, without haste, not for spectacular effect or as tactical ploys in a game.

Prayer for peace and wisdom-A civilisational anchor

- Allahtero naam, Ishwar tero naam (You, whose name is both Allah and Ishwar).

- This invokes not only Gandhi, but an entire, centuries-old religio-philosophical legacy of the subcontinent in which all traditions are believed to share the same semantic universe that enables the god of one religion to be translated into the god of another.
- This is inclusive monotheism at its best, where god is one but referred to in different traditions by different names. And so, the prayer is addressed to Allah, Ishwar, and implicitly to the god of every religion.
- With men spewing venom, not satisfied with fighting a war with their own fellow countrymen, itching to go to war with others, nothing (empathy, reason, dialogue) seems to work.
- Helpless spectators, no longer in control of their collective life, in sight of a looming disaster on the horizon, often break into a prayer.
- Those who believe in one god, invoke him; those who believe in gods and goddesses, invoke them; and those who believe in neither, hope for some good fortune to fall in their lap.
- This is why this is a prayer for our times: we offer this prayer to you, Allah to some, Ishwar to others, that you miraculously bring an end to needless killings, wisdom and conscience to the rich and powerful, and peace and good sense to everyone.

The Hindu

