The ground beneath our feet has moved to the right

Posted at: 25/01/2019

<u>Hate has become mainstream. This can only change when democracy is no longer equated with majoritarianism</u>

Mainstreaming hate

- Since the Congress's victory in December in three Assembly elections, there has been a flurry of communally laced fake news from the Sangh Parivar on social media.
- While there is a gradual mainstreaming of hatred, elections especially push the envelope regarding what can be uttered in the public sphere.
- But this normalisation of hate is not just verbal.
- The Congress's recent victories cannot be read as a triumph of secularism over communalism, or of economic issues like rural distress and urban middle class angst about development.
- This is because the ground beneath our feet has almost irrevocably shifted to accommodate the extreme right-wing agenda of virulent masculinity, anti-minority and anti-Dalit hate.
- Even the language we use has changed.
- In this thrall of a hate-filled false binary of a monolithic Hindu versus a monolithic Muslim, the building of solidarities on the basis of caste, class and gender oppressions is postponed.
- The real beneficiaries are not the most oppressed Hindus and Muslims, but only the demagogues, the "fishers for eels" that Aristophanes recognised 2,500 years ago.
- The so-called victories of secularism will still be on a ground ploughed by the cancer of hate and mountain of fake news.
- India is not unique in this respect.
- Transformational democratic solidarities can scarcely emerge out of a toxic public sphere and social media.
- In India, the vastly disproportionate culpability of Hindutva conjoined with state power is clear.

- According to a BBC study, calls for nation-building are trumping truth and there is an "overlap of fake news sources on Twitter and support networks for the ruling party".

Eliminating hate

- It is difficult to roll back something that acquires normalcy.
- "Uninstalling" hate from social media platforms and the larger public sphere cannot be achieved through mere electoral victories, or stronger laws, even if they are important.
- This can happen only through a multi-faceted cultural and political struggle to realise that democracy is not majoritarianism; rather, its core tenets are equality, liberty and fraternity, all of which incontrovertibly stand against hate and demagoguery.
- And that there can be no democracy if there is no sanctity of speech, and no intention to speak the truth.

The Hindu