

IN SERACH OF A POSSIBILITY FOR MARGINALIZED GRAYS!

I just cast my “NOTA” vote and showed the left index finger to the press waiting outside the booth. Yes, I don’t belong to the world of *selfies*! I don’t have the urge to share any smallest detail of my being with others! This distinguishing factor in itself will probably brand me as anti social-media therefore a political nihilist therefore anti-*Modi*! The present world of ‘branding’ devoid of any rational nexus between my action and the label sought to be imposed on me, has created this new binary paradigm – pro or anti *Modi*!!! The minute I say that ‘your criticism of *Modi* is getting exceedingly irrational, my libertarian friends push me into the pro-*Modi* group. The moment I utter the word ‘secular’ in a warm tone, the cyber trolls from Madison Square Garden attack me for being ‘anti-*Modi*’.

See how many times I have used the M word in a small paragraph!

This is life for all of us now. We all have a political sub-text to our existence which is fractured on account of our religion. *Hindutva* is like fluoride; it’s just there in the water without our realizing it. If one has a Muslim surname, one becomes a suspect of many things bundled together ranging from terrorism to treason. I am familiar with a similar sentiment as I was made to feel defensive when my *savarna* surname was pronounced. When atrocities against women was the dominant subject of news coverage, I heard my single male assistant among 6 female assistants saying “don’t look at me as if I’m a misogynist.” This branding trend is actually bringing people together breaking their individualistic cocoons. Ironic isn’t it?

After withering away of *Kejriwal’s* self-authored *AAP* brand due to its own rancorous, petulant missteps, the grand size *Modi*-the-savior brand was created by and propounded through the popular media. The common factor in both these brand waves was the brand called *Youngistan* - some grouped as the anti-corruption squad, and the rest as the reclamation-of-Hindu-identity brigade. This *Youngistan* is our new thermometer gauging the social fever. Unfortunately this *Youngistan* majority of whom are the techies and fund managers, deal with the binary programs in reality and not just metaphorically.

As I will be watching the election results in Maharashtra and Haryana with the loud, self-righteous anchors, my email account will be flooded with mails labeling me as a ‘social anarchist’ or ‘anti-democratic’. Oooops, I’ve committed a blunder as they’d point out! The vow of secret ballot which is the quintessence of democracy has been breached by me in my very first line. Let me tell the vigilant mail-senders, NOTA is merely my right of abstention and not the right to reject all the candidates. Even if the NOTA votes exceed the number garnered by the highest vote-getter, it does not mean that all candidates in a constituency stand rejected or defeated. If my NOTA vote is going to be counted as an invalid vote, then how am I different from the 36% who did not show up at all for voting? Why am I to be called a conscientious citizen and them to be irresponsible? The answer lies in the deliberate exercise of my democratic right of choice. I am not naïve to believe that my vote will make a difference in the system that neither allows my participation in choosing the candidature nor gives me a right to reject or recall an elected candidate. However, I wish to assert my voice howsoever marginalized it may be and say that I do not want to choose between the lesser evils.

In the world of black or white duality, this is the third possibility of “marginalized grays” that I wish to resurrect. The crusade will be to establish a gray palette allowing the ideological ambiguities,

nuances to surface. Creation of gray-friendly tolerance where seeming antithetical ideas will not be summarily thrashed without deeper analysis is my intellectual need. Once that third spectrum is created, it will accommodate people who support the need for reforms in Madarassah education without being Islamophobe; who say that our dynastic politics with 34% of parliamentarians having family ties is indeed an offshoot of democratic politics; who can support the repeal of the NREGA while saying 'India is no more secular than it is socialist'. I can advocate uniform civil code without having to sacrifice legal pluralism. The staunch BJP supporters who fume against Wendy Doniger's *Hinduism* for its content while vehemently opposing the ban on the book, may find a seat next to me.

Perhaps tomorrow's rising sun will shine on the saffron horizon when my tweeter bird shall convey to my gray comrades, "please be patient; give them a fair chance."