

# Why 'Hate Speech'?

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Varun Gandhi in his election speeches (March 2009) has been pouring vitriol against minority community. He presented the usual prejudices and biases in a very hateful manner. He associated minority community with being aggressive and violent. He pointed out that arms are being smuggled into ghettos (i.e. Muslim localities), Hindus are being targeted, cow slaughter 'remains' have been found but no action has been taken. This is part of his speech, which he accepted as being part of his talk. At the same time he disowned the CD, which shows him talking of cutting hands of those attacking Hindus, that Muslims have frightening names etc. Any way, this taped speech came to the notice of the Election Commission. The Commission sent him a notice about violation of code of conduct. Meanwhile, he first apologized and then disowned the tape. Election Commission rejected his plea of CD being doctored, and also advised BJP not to field him as a candidate for elections. BJP spokesman said it is their prerogative to decide as to whom to field or not. Meanwhile Varun Gandhi is being more sought after as a speaker in BJP rallies. The Muslim members of the BJP first were appalled by all this, condemned it but later they took ambiguous position about the same.

Apparently Varun Gandhi got the advice not to apologize as his speech has given a "correct" signal to the core constituency of BJP. Watching part of the video on TV show was an experience of total disgust, the language, the content, the way such hateful things have been talked about against minorities in such a hateful manner.

One realizes that 'Hate speech' is the outcome of the politics of divisiveness, it is the concentrated expression of the 'social common sense' prevailing in the society, it is the forthright and blunt way of putting things, which communal parties propagate anyway. It is not out of the blue that these formulations suddenly crop up, their infrastructure, the base of these has already been made by a section of political outfits.

Also 'Hate Speech' is generally an accompaniment of the politics in the name of religion and language, and also many times it precedes the violence. The communal-sectarian parties decide when and in what proportions to use it. One recalls two major examples in the recent times. One was Sadhvi Ritambhara who was propped up for pravachans (religious discourses) by RSS combine. She was talking blunt anti-minority things, duly endorsed by communal political organizations. This took place around the Babri demolition.

One has been hearing similar things from many a sadhu of VHP, small and sundry members of communal gang, some Muslim communalists and the ilk of Togadia. There has been a more sophisticated presentation of the similar formulations by many others. Modi, all through talked of divisive language, but kept changing the form in a very subtle way to suit the changing needs of his political strategy. When he said that post-Gujarat refugee camps should be shut down as they have become factories of production of children, he was reinforcing the propaganda about Muslims having more number of children. The effect on minority community was the intensification of the atmosphere of fear and intimidation. When intermittently these types of politicians are not talking Hate language, it is not because they have a change of heart but because at that moment it may not be needed as per their calculations. Away from the gaze of the media many of communalists have been spreading hate against minorities in equal measure.

In the wake of Mumbai riots Bal Thackeray, who currently is praising Varun Gandhi, indulged in Hate speech, inciting his Shiv Sainiks to undertake violence. He also got away with it due to clever way of putting his vitriol and due to the lack of adequate laws which can distinguish the Hate speech from freedom of expression, which can distinguish between one's political opinion and painting the "other" community in a negative light. Incidentally it is important to distinguish between criticizing a community and criticizing a political organization. While political organizations can and must be criticized, communities should not be humiliated or insulted. Also no political organization can be synonymous with the religious community, whatever its claims.

It is not only disturbing but totally against the values of Indian democratic society that such 'hate other' ideology and speeches have become the weapon in the hands of a type of politics, which thrives on exclusion, which identifies a particular religious community as synonymous with the nation state. Again this 'hate speech' is the language of section of those who thrive on identity politics far away from the real issues of the society.

As such Hate speech in India entered the political arena with the rise of communal streams in politics, like Muslim League on one side and Hindu Mahasabha and RSS on the other. These streams believed in the nation based on one religious community. These streams came from the sections of earlier rulers, landlords, Nawabas and Rajas etc. The ideology of religion based nationalism is narrow and it excludes 'other' from its notion of nationhood. These beliefs then get converted into Hate other, and later turn into 'Hate speech'. This did form the basis of many a communal violence in pre-independence era and also during the last two decades. Varun Gandhi, as a BJP follower may not have undergone the total indoctrination in RSS shakhas, where the Hate Ideology is instilled in the minds of young recruits, but he must have been exposed enough to those formulations, through his personal interaction. Hate ideology as seen above is the prelude of hate speech.

The CD of Varun Gandhi rally not only showed a very liberal sprink-ling of the saffron, it also shows the hysterical approval of violence from section of those participating in the rally. Ironically Varun Gandhi is eager to cut some hands while protecting the Mother Cow! This Hate ideology first creates a social common sense, which becomes the mind set of large sections of society. From here it goes on to form the base on which communal violence may be triggered. Communal violence in turn leads to polarization of communities and later to ghettoization in due course as one is now witnessing in Gujarat to a great extent, and in other states in different degrees.

This Hate Speech can be understood in two ways. On one hand it is just a concentrated expression of communal ideology. By now lot of communal ideology has become overt part of social common sense. One needs to introspect as to from where these divisive ideas take root. Second it is based on the politics of exclusion. Most of those who have at one or the other point of time resorted to it come from a sectarian political stream. The exclusionary one's can also be based on linguistic considerations, as in Bal Thakeray and now his nephew Raj Thackeray is pursuing the same divisive politics in the name of language, and region.

Where does Hate speech lead in the short run and long run? In the short run some of the gullible, weak sections of society may see some hope in this language of bravado, away from the serious existence related issues, they may feel empowered temporarily by Hating other, feeling that their problems will get mitigated. Those against whom Hate is

being propagated, out of fear start erecting a physical and emotional cordon around them. This is when ghettoisation, not just physical but more importantly psychological takes over. And the bonding of fraternity, the essential values of democracy starts feeling immense strain. Its 'final destination' is Germany like situation, where the community against whom Hate is spread, becomes an easy target of the social discrimination to the extent of physical elimination, as was witnessed in the case of Jews.

The biggest challenge people face today is to propagate the inclusive ideas at social, political and cultural level, the ideas and values which united Indians, cutting across religion, region and language. These values have been challenged by the practitioners of regional and communal politics. The debate needs to be broadened to reach the positive values to all the people.