

OPINION | Bengal Polls, Kumbh Mela & More: We Get The India We Deserve

By: [Rahul Jayaram](#) | Updated : 11 May 2021



(Images: AFP)

With the debris that the recent Assembly elections in many states (especially West Bengal) left, once more an alarming number of Indian fault-lines have cut into the foreground of our collective consciousness. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) invested deeply in the West Bengal poll. The Central government parlayed in hollowing out one more public institution, the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The ECI bent over backwards to accommodate the Centre's wishes. The rallies the BJP held in West Bengal – in an election it lost – became coronavirus 'super-spreader' events that the prime minister and the home minister helmed. Throughout, the draining & attrition-driven campaigns (certainly in West Bengal), were communalised and there were gendered barbs flying about.

During this time, Uttarakhand held the Maha Kumbh and later cancelled it. The government ran advertisements with the prime minister and the Uttar Pradesh chief minister and the then Uttarakhand chief minister inviting all to attend it. Doctor Ashish K Jha, dean of the public health department at Brown University, considered it as the pandemic's "worst super-spreader event".

All these blunders took place under the public glare, despite the medical and scientific community's warnings and messages in November 2020 to mind the coronavirus second wave and scale up infrastructure for it. For all the burning and bleeding and gasping we see now, Modi is squarely and singularly culpable. But that would be only half the point. We've been this way for long.

A social crisis in Indian society is generally a long-standing one. It's a sustained social problem because pockets within that society aim to gain from it, depending on class or caste.

Overall, one is tempted to think large parts of our society are truly backward and retrogressive, anti-rational, anti-health, anti-public health, and anti-hygiene. Manipulating the Hindu almanac, the Centre and the Uttarakhand governments brought forward the Kumbh Mela. This event is crucial to maintain a government's popularity but also fill the local state treasury. One wonders how the mahants and babas agreed to this astrological jugglery? Perhaps such trickery peppers the history of many public religions in the world, it certainly does ours.

It is one more example of India's quintessential wretchedness – only a truly and genuinely irrational people, and third rate, brainless and venal leaders who represent the pits of human society, return to the everyday nonsensicality of organised religion, when your country is beginning to front up to the brutal second wave of the pandemic.

A lot of commentary and opinion making has spoken of the lack of oxygen cylinders and ICU beds – people have deemed this public health disaster as nothing short of a genocide of innocents. Yet this public health disaster has been long in the making. Remember the encephalitis deaths of children in Bihar some years back or the AMRI hospital deaths in Calcutta or the deaths due to lack of oxygen in Gorakhpur not very long back? These bespeak a country forever wanting to be on its deathbed: a lifelong love for death. Karma anybody?

There is nothing as self-defeating as some of our philosophical traditions like karma – why haven't they lead us to exercise a collective rationality; a true predisposition towards the cultures of logic, verification, testification – all of which are present in ancient Hindu forms of thought, to some degree in the Charvaka school? No matter what arguments are advanced to rationalise the punishment and devastation of the second wave of the pandemic in India, people will say we would have been overwhelmed even if we were prepared. All this points to a default non-scientific, callous culture and civilisation. There's no way but to see the scars of the second wave as chronicles of death foretold.

For Modi to have had the gall to think that India have won the coronavirus war, go on an ad spree about how our vaccines and vials went across the planet medicating the world to win plaudits, while our masses were primed for the imminent disaster through Central government complacency and hubris, indicate our brazenness and our extreme lack of education in the widest sense of the term. We have not made health and education and true systemic empowerment our constant goals. We are a fig leaf, con job 'democracy', where human life has no value.

The billionaire one percenters of India took their chartered flights and flew off to London or elsewhere in the First World. All our traditions, with so many gods, goddesses, rituals, and festivals every other day, have brought us to this cruel, inhuman, dehumanising pass. It has produced and sustained a society that is hyper religious only in name, with little content or values, apart from some exceptions. Some of our rich, and surely our central government, are accurate reflections of 'Indian values'. We get the India we deserve.

(Rahul Jayaram teaches at the Jindal School of Liberal Arts & Humanities)

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