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**THE POLITICS OF COMMUNALISM: MARGINALISATION OF
ETHNIC MINORITIES AND WOMEN IN INDIA'S NORTHEAST**

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ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF COMMUNALISM: MARGINALISATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES AND WOMEN IN INDIA'S NORTHEAST

Historical, political and global forces have brought disparate and different looking peoples to live together and share the same land. Every multi ethnic state is a work in progress and maintaining communal harmony always involves a lot of constant hard work. Today, in northeast India, most, if not all spheres of public life in the region are largely communalised. Self styled insurgency groups compete with mainstream political parties to promise effective redress and remedies to particular ethnic groups who are victims of social injustice. Militants use violence to further their aims, often inviting heavy retaliation from security forces. A climate of impunity prevails, where both sides often indiscriminately violate human rights norms. Ethnic minorities and women are very often the worst affected and the most marginalised by the communalisation that has engulfed the region. This paper examines the effects of communal politics on the lives of ethnic minorities and women in the northeastern state of Tripura. Tripura was chosen as a case study because the speaker visited the state in 2009 and 2010 and held consultations with a wide range of stakeholders on the issue of communalisation, particularly within the police force and public services. Though the region is too vast and varied for one to claim that the situation in Tripura is fully representative of it, there nevertheless remain several important parallels between the state and the northeast as a whole. Indeed, the implications of communal politics in Tripura on minorities and women are indicative of the larger challenges policymakers in multi-ethnic states face in their respective ongoing projects of national integration.

KEYWORDS: North East India, Ethnic Politics, Communal Violence, Terrorism, Impunity, Human Rights violations, Marginalisation, Minority Rights.

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1. THE POLITICS OF COMMUNALISM: MARGINALISATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES AND WOMEN IN INDIA'S NORTHEAST

Communalism is a term frequently used in modern Indian political discourse, one that encompasses many different notions and often arouses highly charged emotions. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, 'communalism' shall be defined as "the *political assertiveness* of groups which have three distinguishing characteristics: first, their membership is comprised of persons who share in a common culture and identity, second, they encompass the full range of demographic divisions within the wider society and provide for a network of groups and institutions extending throughout the individual's entire life cycle, and, third, like the wider society in which they exist, they tend to be differentiated by wealth, status, and power"(Melson and Wolpe 1970, 1112).

In India, the process of social mobilization of groups and people on communal lines began during the colonial period of the British Raj. C.A.Bayly, in his pioneering study on colonial adaptations of the communication networks of late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century northern India notes that pre-colonial 'social enquiry and representation were never communal"(Jalal 2002, 43). Many historians have suggested that Indians began viewing themselves as part of distinctive communities as a result of imperialistic British policies in the arenas of law, political representation and colonial administration. One of the ways the British made the people of India conscious of their identities was by creating a system of courts and administrative institutions that applied specifically to each community. This concept of separate personal law for different communities only led to the outbreak of a divisive mindset even as Indians began questioning the legitimacy of British rule. Institutionally forced to fall back on their communal identities, Indians couched their demands for rights in terms of identifiable interests. Discussions on civic rights were for the most part marginalized by the identity and interests of religious communities (Jalal 2002, 141). As historian Ayesha Jalal argues, "Packaging temporal needs in communitarian terms weakened the already feebly delineated rights and responsibilities of common subjecthood. It implied that Indians were first and foremost members of specific communities and only afterwards belonged to the same country" (2002, 144).

The partition of India, a painful and tragic occurrence that saw death, destruction and displacement of previously unfathomable proportions, serves to highlight the full onslaught of violence that can be unleashed when the communal cauldron is stirred in the subcontinent. Partition, however, did not signal an end to communal tensions, as independent India continued to be divided by caste and class, by region, language and religion. Parties and movements of all hues seized upon the divisions of Indian society and exacerbated these divisions, mobilising persons on communal lines in their relentless quest to seize power.

Nowhere were things more complicated than in the northeast, a region which: “to begin with, was a patchwork of tribal and mixed linguistic communities... (and) the least integrated region in the territorial and administrative sphere of British India. The British had followed a policy of neglect and seclusion that had left the region resentful and suspicious of all governments that had sought to control the Northeast from New Delhi” (Chadda 2002, 50). Continued neglect of the region by the central government, underperforming state governments and waves of illegal migrants entering the region from Bangladesh saw increased communal polarisation after independence. Today, a visitor to the region will quickly discern that most, if not all spheres of public life in the region are largely communalised. Self styled insurgency groups compete with mainstream political parties to promise effective redress and remedies to particular ethnic groups who are victims of social injustice. Militants use violence to further their aims, often inviting heavy retaliation from security forces. A climate of impunity prevails, where both sides often indiscriminately violate human rights norms. Ethnic minorities and women are very often the worst affected and the most marginalised by the communalisation that has engulfed the region. This paper will examine the effects of communal politics on the lives of ethnic minorities and women. As looking at the entire region would be far beyond the scope of this paper, the focus will be on the state of Tripura. Tripura was chosen as a case study because the author visited the state in 2009 and 2010 and held consultations with a wide range of stakeholders on the issue of communalisation, particularly within the police force and public services. Though the region is too vast and varied for one to claim that the situation in Tripura is fully representative of it, there nevertheless remain several important parallels between the state and the northeast as a whole. Indeed, the implications of communal politics in Tripura on minorities and women are indicative of the larger challenges Indian policymakers face in the ongoing project of national integration.

Tripura is “a tiny hilly state of 10,486 square kilometres...bounded by Bangladesh in the north, west and south and the states of Assam and Mizoram in the east” (Saha 2002, 50) A princely state, Tripura acceded to the Indian Union in October 1949. The Tripura tribal community, who constitute the indigenous people of the land, is made up of as many as nineteen tribes, of which the *Kok Borok* are the numerically largest group. Most of the non-indigenous people residing in the state are of the Bengali community. The tribal community, that once constituted the majority of the inhabitants of the state, made up only 36.65% of the population in 1951 and had further shrunk to just 30.94% by 1991 (Saha 2002, 50). This change in the demographic character of the state is attributed mainly due to the influx of thousands of displaced Bengalis from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) into Tripura. Whilst communal riots in the Dhaka district in 1941 led to the first wave of migrants into the state, the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 saw a massive inflow of Bengali Hindu refugees across the newly marked international border. The Indian Census Report of 1971 stated that migrants constituted as much as 51.47% of the population of the state by 1961 (Das 2001, 229). Several communal disturbances in East Pakistan in 1963 and 1964, followed by the 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence, led to a continued surge of migrants (Saha 2002, 51), and the influx of both displaced persons and illegal immigrants continue until the present day.

The impact of illegal immigration on the political, economic and social fabric of Tripura, and indeed, of the Northeast as a whole, cannot be understated. The 'Group of Ministers on National Security' of the Government of India admitted in their report in 2001 that "illegal migration from across our borders has continued unabated for over five decades... (and) we have yet to fully wake up to the implications of the unchecked immigration on national security. Demographic changes have been brought about in the border belts of West Bengal, several districts in Bihar, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya. There is an all-round failure in India to come to grips with the problem of illegal immigration. Unfortunately, action on this subject invariably assumes *communal overtones*, with political parties taking positions to suit the interests of their vote banks" (Government of India 2001, 60). Politically, the Indian government could not afford to turn away the largely Hindu immigrants from Bangladesh for fear of an electoral backlash. Communal considerations dictated that the migrants be accommodated. However, as successive waves of Bengali migrants were given land and settled by means of rehabilitation schemes, resentment arose amongst the tribal community as they saw themselves displaced and "converted into a minority in their own land" (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 30). Many tribals were compelled to either sell or abandon their land after disputes or clashes, leading to a loss of tribal land on account of transfers, the legality of which remain highly questionable. The migrants "gradually extended their hold over lands in traditional tribal areas... (and also) started small businesses and settled in several towns" (Singh 1987, 265). Indeed, Tripura became "the only state in the country that has transformed from being a predominantly tribal to a non-tribal state" (Singh 2009, 17) .

The dispossession and displacement felt by the tribal minority was not solely because of the loss of their land, but also due to their being systemically marginalised politically, culturally and economically. Indeed, B.P Singh argues that, over the years, actual "political and administrative power passed from the hands of indigenous tribals to immigrant Bengalis" (1987, 265). One third, or 20 out of the 60 seats in the state legislative assembly, are reserved for the tribal community based on the 1971 census (Saha 2002, 61). This is notwithstanding the fact that the tribal community constituted more than half the state's population before the influx of the Bengali immigrants. The great ethnic divide in Tripura has made it all but impossible for members of the tribal community to compete in 'open' or 'non-reserved' constituencies, with voting occurring largely on communal lines. Several members of the tribal community, whilst interacting with the author, claimed that most of the tribal representatives elected from the reserved seats were loyal members of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), who were careful to toe the party line and rarely took up an active role in addressing tribal needs. The author was informed that all the most important and powerful ministerial posts were occupied by Bengalis and that tribal representatives were provided with posts of little consequence. Additionally, the state's powerful bureaucracy, its police and the paramilitary Tripura Rifles are all overwhelmingly Bengali. A police inspector informed the author that nearly every single Officer-in-Charge of police stations across the state were from the Bengali community, and officers belonging to the tribal community were rarely given this post. This is contrary to one of the main principles of democratic policing; that the

police must be representative of the community that it serves. The widespread perception amongst the minority is that every organ of the “state” is in the hands of the Bengalis. As a result, they have little faith that the state will be responsive to their problems and concerns.

Marginalisation of the minority was not limited to the political realm. Culturally, the adoption of Bengali, alongside *Kok Borok* as an official language of the state and the medium of instruction in government schools widened the gap between the majority and minority communities. Although officially both languages are on the same status and footing, the author was repeatedly told by representatives of the Borok People’s Human Rights Organisation that the use of Bengali in schools put tribal schoolchildren at an acute disadvantage. Tribal literacy rates lag far behind the rest of the population till date (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 105). Similarly, the use of Bengali in government departments greatly reduced the ability of the minority community to effectively compete for government jobs. The systemic hurdles faced by the minority community in accessing education and employment have perhaps contributed to the continued poverty in rural Tripura. The Tripura Human Development Report stated that poverty in rural areas for was as high as 40% as compared to 7.5% in urban areas for 1999-2000 (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 59). In this sense, cultural and economic deprivation compounded and accelerated the political alienation of the tribal community from the mainstream in Tripura.

It is no coincidence that most insurgents are youths in their twenties who joined militant groups for purely economic reasons (Saha 2002, 62). Indeed, the process of marginalisation outlined above saw the rise of several insurgent groups in the state capitalise on the disaffection of the tribal community. Ethno-nationalist terrorism is prevalent in areas where rights have systematically been denied and where repressive ethnic majorities have forced minorities into such deprivation and disaffection that terrorism appears the only solution. It occurs when all other means of peaceful means of changing the status quo have failed and where the disaffected constituency, excluded from the political process, starts seeing ethno-nationalist groups as the only way of redressing their often legitimate grievances. Fred Halliday, a terrorism scholar rightly states:

Every rebel, like every nationalist, claims to be different. Those who oppose such rebellions may equally feel, and claim that they are facing something distinctive, but here too impressions are misleading. Social and political factors may be at play, but often revolt is based on something equally widespread, the denial of *national rights*. (Hafez 2004, xi-xii)

It was clear that large sections of the tribal community came to feel that they had been marginalised to such an extent that their opportunities in nearly every field- politics, education, employment- were bleak and limited. The pervading perception was that every facet of the system had become communalised and the tribal community, being the “other” community, felt excluded from accessing it. Organisations like the *Seng Krak*, followed by the *Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti*

(*TUJS*), Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), the All-Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and National Liberation Front for Tripura (NLFT) sprang up over the years as manifestations of the resistance to the Bengali refugee influx (Tripura Development Report 2005, 5). Though the demands of the groups varied from demanding more autonomy to calling for an independent and sovereign Tripura, most organisations agitated for the “creation of an Autonomous Tribal District Council...restoration of tribal lands alienated from non-tribals, and recognition of *Kok-Borok* in the Roman script as an official language and its introduction as a medium of instruction” (Tripura Development Report 2005, 5). The ideology underpinning insurgent organisations rested upon an opposition to the Bengali migrants and a call for their forcible expulsion to Bangladesh.

The TNV carried out a violent insurgency campaign for over a decade since 1978, instigating riots in Tripura in June 1980 that left 1,800 persons dead (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 106). The state became even more communalised, with tribals and non tribals abandoning homes in localities where they were in the minority. The formation of an armed counter-insurgency organisation known as the *Amra Bengali* completed the process of communalisation in the state. The June 1980 riots “left deep scars on the social fabric and affected people’s ability to live together in peace, thus eroding and undermining age-old social cohesion” (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 106).

Although several TNV insurgents surrendered in 1988 following a peace accord, communal violence continued throughout the 1990s, led primarily by the ATTF and the NLFT. Both groups, though ostensibly fighting on behalf of the tribal minority, soon became increasingly criminalised and “established a bloody record of mass killings, extortion, kidnapping, intimidation and arson” (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 106). The cycle of events of the 1980s repeated themselves, with the emergence of an armed communal Bengali organization, the United Bengali Liberation Front (UBLF) in 1999. The UBLF waged an aggressive counter insurgency campaign, massacring tribal people and areas with mixed populations until the arrest of their leader Biplab Das in April 2000 (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 107).

The Indian Government’s response to the insurgency and violence in Tripura, as elsewhere in the northeast, has varied between negotiating with the insurgents, offering incentives for them to surrender and engaging them using military force. The draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 was extended to the Tripura in November 1970, and much of the state remains declared a ‘disturbed’ area until the present day (Human Rights Watch 2008, 10). Once an area is declared ‘disturbed’ by the central or state government, armed forces have free rein to “shoot to kill, arrest on flimsy pretexts, conduct warrantless searches, and demolish structures” (Human Rights Watch 2008, 1). Provisions of the Act are violative of numerous provisions of international human rights law, including the right to life, the right to be free of arbitrary arrest or detention and the non derogable, absolute prohibition on torture, widely accepted as *jus cogens* under international law. Further, the Act also effectively shields the armed forces from facing criminal prosecution for human rights

violations.¹ It is clear that the continued deployment of the army and paramilitary forces in Tripura has aroused tremendous resentment within the minority tribal community. The author was told repeatedly during his visit to the state that that most tribal areas have been declared as 'disturbed areas', that the paramilitary Tripura Rifles have been housed in schools and that there was a complete absence of civil and political rights in the rural areas. All too often in the northeast, security forces engaged in human rights violations "have served to fuel conflicts and act as a recruiting sergeant for militant groups" (Human Rights Watch 2008, 4).

The violent recent history of Tripura narrated above indicates that communal politics led to a vicious cycle that has repeated itself several times over to the detriment of the state. Communal politics led to the political, cultural and economic marginalisation of the minority tribals in the state. Insurgent groups took up arms on behalf of the disaffected minority, and counter insurgents fought to defend the interests of the majority. Violent tactics practiced by both groups led to even further polarisation, to the point that today, most everyday decisions are being made purely based on communal considerations. In deciding who to vote for, or choosing in which neighbourhood to live in, loyalty to one's community has become paramount. As the armed organisations succeeded in ripping open the ethnic divide between majority and minority, spaces for friendly, civic exchange between the two sides have drastically reduced, particularly with the decline of ethnically mixed neighbourhoods. This ethnic segregation has given politicians on both sides very little incentive to 'cross the aisle' and appeal to both groups. As a result, it does not politically suit the Bengali dominated state government to take significant steps to alter the status quo and alleviate the problems faced by the tribal community.

2. IMPACT OF COMMUNALISATION ON WOMEN IN TRIPURA

Whilst the minorities hailing from the tribal community have undoubtedly been the worst marginalised, the detrimental impact of communalisation on women has also been tremendous. Indeed, tribal women in Tripura have been some of the worst affected. Dr. Krishna Nath observes that "tribal women in particular are the most neglected, underprivileged and downtrodden section almost in all fields. The tribal world of women...remains in darkness" (2005, 7).

Women have borne the brunt of the violence unleashed in the state and have been targeted by actors on all sides. They have suffered both physically and mentally (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 116). Human Rights Watch has reported that tribal women have often been victims of rape and sexual violence committed by security forces who operate with impunity under the provisions of the Armed Forces

¹ Under Section 6 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, no prosecution, suit or proceeding shall be instituted, *except with the previous sanction of the Central Government* against any person in respect of anything done or purported to be done in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act.

(Special Powers) Act (2008, 10). Several have been forcibly recruited into insurgent organisations, and insurgent groups have often indulged in the trafficking of tribal women to fund their activities (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 110). Women belonging to the majority Bengali community have also suffered immeasurably due to the insurgency, with women and children living in the rural areas often being killed indiscriminately by insurgents (Saha 2002, 58).

Other than being innocent victims of violence, women in Tripura have also lagged behind in terms of empowerment. Though reservation has ensured steady representation of women at the local government level, there has been no woman Member of Parliament from Tripura and only one woman in the legislative assembly (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 123). Women in Tripura are also “grossly under-represented in executive, decision-making posts” within the state Cabinet and civil services (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 123). As of March 2007, they constituted only 5% of the Tripura Civil Service, 2% of the Tripura Police Service and were shockingly completely unrepresented in the Tripura Forest Service and the administration of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 123). Communal politics is directly responsible for these disparities; women have been murdered for being members of political parties, standing for elections and even voting. Bayjanti Koli, the first tribal woman member of the Tripura Legislative Assembly, reported that NLFT insurgents threatened women to stop all political activities. She also stated that in mixed areas, insurgents threatened any person who stepped across the communal divide; both tribal women wearing a *sari* or a bangle (perceived as symbols of Bengali culture) or tribals who sold rice to non tribals were victims of intimidation and violence (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 123). Women were thus often violently sucked into the communal cauldron and saw their opportunities in the economic, political and cultural sphere diminish as a result of the polarisation.

3. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

This paper has illustrated the negative effects that communal politics has had and continues to have on both the tribal minority and women. However, it is also clear that the poison unleashed by communalism has also turned the entire state into a battle ground between militants and government forces. If Tripura today is considered to be relatively peaceful, it is because of battle fatigue and not because the root causes behind the communal tensions have been addressed in a holistic manner. History has shown that unless the underlying root causes of violence are addressed, this period of peace will be nothing more than calm before the storm. It is neither feasible nor acceptable for the state to attempt to impose a ‘military solution’ against its own citizens.

To be sure, the state government has over the years taken certain steps to address the question of the tribal minority. The 1982 decision to create the Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council (TTDAC) was a response to the tribal call for autonomy. However “because of the administrative hurdles and constraints of

resources, it has not played any meaningful role in addressing the genuine grievances of the tribals” (Saha 2002, 58). Indeed, during his visits to the state, the author saw that most of the minority community perceived the council as being bereft of any real power and unable to alleviate their problems. Likewise, whereas the state’s ambitious land reform program saw a return of 7,147 acres of land to the tribal minority by September 2005, several problems remain unresolved, including a continued difficulty in identification of the tribal families from whom the land has been alienated (Tripura Human Development Report 2007, 64).

On another front, the state and central governments’ efforts to negotiate and deal with the insurgent groups have also been haphazard and has not been grounded in a convincing strategy. Saha argues that after the appealing to insurgents to surrender, the state adopted a half-hearted approach in rehabilitating surrendered insurgents (Saha 2002, 59). As a result, many of them re-joined insurgent groups. Similarly, co-ordinated action of the army, paramilitary forces and police has failed to contain the militancy and violence for an extended period.

Keeping these failed efforts in mind, it is imperative that the state government change course and take decisive action to remove Tripura from the communal quagmire that it finds itself. One of the surest ways that the government can demonstrate that it is genuinely interested in the welfare of the tribal community is to withdraw the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act from the state. This much hated legislation has brought more harm than good in both the state and the northeast as a whole. To compensate for the withdrawal of the army from the state, the government should focus on building up a police service that is given the functional autonomy it needs to discharge its duties impartially without fear or favour regardless of ethnicity. Autonomy, however, should come hand in hand with accountability. The government must ensure that the police and security forces are held accountable to the rule of law and are not above it. Accountability and impartial treatment will help in engendering the trust of the minority community in the state and its agents. To be perceived as a neutral and non communal institution, the state must also take steps to increase representation of both minorities and women in the state civil service, state assembly and other government bodies. As Saha observes, giving the tribals their due share in the governance of the state is a necessary pre-requisite to a lasting peace (Saha 2002, 62).

The causes and consequences of communal politics in Tripura are mirrored in most other northeastern states. Unchecked immigration, alienation of people from their land and systemic political, economic and cultural marginalisation of minorities has bred resentment, unhappiness and insurgencies all across the region. The government’s heavy reliance on the army without a sound strategy or endgame has left the people of the region mercy to an indefinite military occupation and all the negative disruptions to ordinary life that come with it. Communalism has led to untold sectarian bloodshed in a region blessed with natural beauty and resources. It has also caused irreparable damage to the idea of a pan-Indian national identity. The Central and state governments, together with civil society, must realize that the battle for a secular and inclusive India will be won or lost in the northeast.

The Indian Government must contain and defeat communalism in the northeast not only because it threatens the basic principles of human rights and democracy in the region, but also because not doing so will leave India vulnerable from a national security standpoint. Indeed, proximity with China makes having security and stability in the region imperative. Many border issues between the two nations remain unresolved nearly half a century after the war of 1962 and China still lays claim to vast swathes of northeast India, including most of the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Brahma Chellaney, a security expert at the Center for Policy Research observes that Chinese military incursions into Indian territory had doubled from 140 in 2007 to 280 in 2008 (Arnoldy 2009). If bilateral relations deteriorate, instability, insurgency and discontent in the northeast is liable to exploitation by a China keen on flexing its military prowess. India should take active steps to counter communal politics in the northeast and unite the region in the face of the potential threat that could emerge from across the border.

The divisive tactics of the last fifty years have clearly failed, and it is time for the government to abandon the quest for short term gains and focus on developing a long term strategy to break the stranglehold of communal politics in the region. Initiating a genuine truth and reconciliation process between the different communities, giving all groups a stake in governance and showing a zero tolerance for human rights violations are tough measures that need to be taken urgently to bridge the communal chasm in the region. The cycle of violence that results from the scourge of communal politics will be brought to an end only when there is a just redress of the legitimate grievances of the oppressed minorities and an effective engagement by the Government of India to constitute an inclusive and genuine political solution.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has illustrated the detrimental impact of communal politics on the social fabric of a multi ethnic state. The lessons of the case study of Tripura are instructive for policymakers in any democratic and heterogeneous nation state.

Firstly, in terms of governance, it is evident that any governmental policy that unduly and systemically benefits one community over another over a prolonged period of time leads to a feeling of alienation and disaffection amongst the disadvantaged community. Governments must take all possible steps to ensure that all important organs of the state, particularly the police, army and civil services are *visibly* non-communal and fully representative of the population they are meant to serve. Access to basic facilities such as education, health and the criminal justice system should be available to all citizens. Majority rule should always go hand in hand with minority rights and the specific concerns of minorities, indigenous groups and women must be addressed in a holistic manner.

Secondly, it must be understood that resentment and genuine grievances that build up on communal lines will often be exploited by insurgents and terrorists claiming to represent the 'oppressed' community. If this is not quickly checked and remedied, the state will soon face a crisis of internal security that will consume much of its energy and finances and create a climate of fear and uncertainty within it. External aggressors will seek to capitalize from the weakened condition of the state, turning what began as an internal problem into one that has serious implications on national security. The state must, in these situations, not commit the fallacy of seeking a "military solution" that neither addresses the root cause of the support for insurgency nor win the hearts and minds of the population. Military intervention, if at all required, should be swift and guided by a clear strategy. Soldiers engaged in operations against their own countrymen must be held to the highest standards of accountability for human rights violations.

Historical, political and global forces have brought disparate and different looking peoples to live together and share the same land. Every multi ethnic state is a work in progress and maintaining communal harmony always involves a lot of constant hard work. Civil society, political parties, religious leaders, non governmental organizations and the state must all play their part in rejecting the politics of communalism. Transcending communalism will not be easy, but statesmen can take heart from the words of Nelson Mandela, who famously stated that "there is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires."

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