

MYTHS ABOUT UCC

India is moving towards ending different personal laws for citizens of different religions. Personal laws concern marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption based on religion and therefore promotes inequalities. The personal laws have often led to suppression of women and even discrimination against minors in matters of inheritance. The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) would be implements almost across the country before 2029. This was declared by Home Minister Amit Shah while addressing the media. To sound politically correct, Shah said that UCC will be implemented in all BJP (NDA)-ruled. States like Assam and Uttarakhand – and earlier Goa – have already a uniform civil code in place. This is a progressive move and lead to same rights to all citizens. Sadly, some organizations have already launched campaigns against UCC, claiming it would interfere with the religious freedom garmented by the Constitution.

This is pure myth and deliberate falsehood, Firstly, the Uniform Civil Code is outlined in Article 44 of the Constitution as part of the Directive Principles of State Policy. This means that the founders of Modern India and constitutions had left it for the coming regimes to see that this law is implemented in near future or at appropriate time. Secondly. The Supreme Court had questioned why the government was not bringing the UCC law. Thirdly and most importantly, the UCC is a universal principle of justice as it takes all humans of being equal before the law. The myth about UCC being against religions is part of the propaganda. The UCC doesn't take peoples' right to follow their religious rituals in personal matters but it doesn't allow religious traditions to govern the lives of people in matters of their rights. A wedding can take place with full religious procedure but UCC would make it compulsory to get the marriage registered in a designate court so that any disputes – like divorce, inheritance and even adoption – of both the spouses is governed by the law of land and not discriminatory practices followed in the name of religion and tradition. The law will not apply to the tribal communities because India is a signatory to the UN convention which leaves the first nation people to follow their ways of life.

NEP 2020: From promise to classroom reality

JS Rajput

ractically every learned deliberation on education today makes reference to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, its well-articulated mission, vision, objectives, and goals. In its second paragraph, the Policy refers to its being in total sync with the UN's global education development agenda, reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. The NEP 2020 also expects education to move towards "less content" and greater emphasis on learning how to think critically and solve problems. It asserts that learning must primarily focus on nurturing critical thinking and sharpening analytical skills.

It then goes on to list several related expectations, taking note of the swift changes taking place all around us, particularly in areas such as data science and creativity, while emphasizing multidisciplinary, integrated, learner-centred, discussion-based, discovery-oriented, flexible, and enjoyable learning. Having been associated with education policy formulation and implementation for over five decades, one invariably recalls both the achievements and the persistent drags that have impeded the realization of stated goals in several areas.

Six years after the NEP 2020, an extensive yet swift national-level review would therefore be in order. Such a review could bring forth the corrections and strategic changes that are needed and, where necessary, even provide the basis for a fresh formulation of certain aspects of the Policy.

The positives have indeed been overwhelming. Beginning with a literacy rate of barely 12 per cent and extending educational access to more than 80 per cent in the face of a population increase of more than a billion, India's educational expansion is an unmatched achievement in the post-independence era. India successfully envisioned the future national needs and aspirations of its people and created institutions of higher learning. Yet, whenever large-scale and inevitable expansion takes place in any system-particularly in education-quality can suffer, as can work culture.

This is one of the fundamental issues before the Indian education system and its



policies today. The rise in enrolment in schools and universities, as well as the increase in the numbers of teachers required, deserves appreciation. But does this expansion necessarily indicate an enhancement of quality? It remains the constitutional responsibility of the State to ensure that everyone is included in education. Increased numbers are, therefore, fully justified as evidence of India's onward march towards becoming a fully literate nation. They also indicate that India is conscious of its rising population and the consequent responsibility to prepare it and ensure the benefits of the demographic dividend.

Things are to be examined in light of the fact that a wide gap exists in the Indian education system that impedes the education of a large number of young persons because of their economic positioning. The challenge before the nation can therefore be understood through a fundamental question: Is India providing every learner with adequate opportunities to nourish and nurture talent, refine skills, and prepare to make creative contributions to society in every relevant area, including emerging sectors?

In an age when cognitive capital is increasingly taking precedence over fiscal capital, nurturing talent becomes one of the most valuable fundamental entitlements of every child. It is, obviously, a prime responsibility of a welfare state. Unfortunately, the

condition of government schools, even after six years of NEP 2020 implementation, remains far from encouraging. These schools are often the only alternative available to those who stand 'last in the line'.

The media frequently report the persistent lack of basic amenities in government schools. Such reports, however, have increasingly become routine and rarely stir the conscience of those who have the authority and capacity to make a difference. Even minor positive changes are welcomed by the public. Teachers, for instance, have appreciated reports indicating that the proportion of schools with computer facilities rose from 57.2 per cent to 69.9 per cent, while those with internet facilities increased from 53.9 per cent to 67.4 per cent. Such increases are certainly welcome.

One can only hope, however, that the computers are functional, that trained teachers are available to use them effectively, and, most importantly, that the facilities are genuinely accessible to every learner. Could schools also be authorized to extend the use of such facilities to children in the neighbourhood who may not be enrolled in that particular school? Such an arrangement could become a small but highly meaningful step towards reducing the digital divide. The major concern before the nation is quality enhancement. One is reminded of what Albert Einstein observed

more than a century ago: "To me the worst thing seems to be for a school principal to work (chiefly) with methods of fear, force and artificial authority. Such treatment destroys the sound sentiments, the sincerity and self-confidence of the pupil. It produces the submissive subject." Having seen and observed educational processes closely, one could argue that the visible change in this regard remains, at best, minimal. Einstein had something more to say about the purpose of education: "Personally, I never clutter up my memory with facts I can easily find in an encyclopaedia.

One should never cram young minds with facts, names, formulae.... Education should be used only to teach young people to think and to give them this training, which no textbook can replace." The NEP 2020 is, in essence, reiterating the same fundamental principle when it calls for a shift towards critical thinking and analytical skills. The challenge is not in restating this principle on umpteen occasions, but in translating it into everyday classroom practice.

The availability of essential financial and professional resources in government schools can provide children from weaker sections with opportunities that might otherwise remain beyond their reach. But resources alone cannot transform education. The teacher matters most. India has umpteen examples of committed and competent teachers who have transformed their schools, often with little more than professional commitment, community goodwill, and local support, taking them to levels of achievement that were previously considered impossible.

From schools to higher education institutions, teachers are, at one stage or another, subjected to excessive bureaucratic control. For more than five decades, the creation of a much-needed professional cadre of educational administrators has remained a neglected requirement. The absence of professionally prepared educational administrators has serious consequences for educational governance, institutional autonomy, academic leadership, and accountability. The education system cannot be transformed merely through policy declarations. Nor can the objectives of NEP 2020 be realized simply by expanding enrolment, constructing infrastructure, distributing devices, or introducing new curricular frameworks.

Every Death in Exile is Martyrdom: The 36-Year Estrangement of Kashmiri Pandits

Lalit Aditya Pandit

On this Balidan Divas, we must confront a harrowing truth that transcends mere statistics: every single death of a Kashmiri Pandit in exile is martyrdom. To die away from the soil of one's ancestors, broken by the longing for home and forgotten by the state, is a quiet, agonizing extension of the violence that drove the community out 36 years ago. September 14 is no longer just a day to honour those who fell to bullets in 1989-90; it is a solemn marker of a sluggish civilization collapse.

Balidan Divas is not merely a date on the calendar; it is a profound testament to the festering wounds of a community. On September 14, as the global community marks the martyrdom of Pandit Tika Lal Taploo, whose brutal assassination in 1989 fore-

cast the erasure of the community from their ancestral homeland, the collective grief of Kashmiri Pandits is laid bare. Yet, this day serves as a reminder of an ongoing tragedy: the 36 years of systemic abandonment, political opportunism, and institutional apathy that have transformed an indigenous patriotic community into permanent refugees in their own country.

The chronicle of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus is a masterclass of political and bureaucratic neglect. Over nearly four decades, consecutive administrations have reduced a profound human calamity into a trivial incident. Security schemes remain marred by administrative inertia, housing projects stagnate in limbo, and employment initiatives for youth are choked by red tape. This rigid bureaucracy continues to treat the displacement of an

entire civilization as a mere management issue rather than a national calamity.

The baseline of any sovereign nation is that the safety of life, limb, and property is the state's core, non-negotiable responsibility. Yet, for nearly four decades, the Indian state has fundamentally defaulted on this charter for the most patriotic minority of Kashmiri Pandits. This failure has triggered an existential catastrophe: one entire generation has been almost completely wiped out in exile.

The elders, the living repositories of history, memory, and the unadulterated Kashmiri language, are passing away in alien environments. With their departure, the physical bridge to the homeland is snapping. Concurrently, the present generation is trapped in a relentless run for survival. Dispersed across the

globe and forced to adapt to survive, the Kashmiri Pandit youth are inevitably drifting away from a thousands-of-years-old rich cultural, linguistic, and spiritual heritage. Unique traditions like Herath (Maha Shivratri) lose their roots, the indigenous Sharada script fades into history, and the soulful Kashmiri language is replaced by alien tongues out of sheer necessity. Stripped of their native geography, Kashmiri Pandits are nearing actual extinction.

This cultural erosion is the direct result of decades of political depravity and bureaucratic apathy. Across the spectrum, political entities have commodified the community's pain for electoral leverage. The ultimate betrayal arrived from the BJP, whose resounding 2014 promise of a safe, dignified return has dissolved into institutionalised exile. In-

stead of facilitating a comprehensive homecoming, the state has offered token legislative nominations and fragile transit camps that are repeatedly shattered by targeted killings.

The time for hollow rhetoric is over; there must be absolute institutional accountability. The state cannot continue to treat this existential crisis as an administrative file or an election-season talking point while a distinct, millennia-old civilization dissolves into ether. True justice demands a legally backed, time-bound mechanism that guarantees physical security, restores stolen properties, and enforces the state's core responsibility to protect its people. If this systemic abandonment continues, the complete erasure of the Kashmiri Pandit identity will stand as India's permanent collective shame.

Middle East war is bigger than 'Iran-vs-America'

Bhopinder Singh

The most revealing developments in the Middle East are no longer occurring along the conventional Iran-United States (with Israel) axis. They are unfolding in Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the maritime chokepoints interconnecting them. The recent Houthi takeover of a strategically located Yemeni island, their persistent attacks on shipping, and the reported drone attack on Saudi Arabia launched from southern Iraq point towards a conflict considerably more complex than the familiar narrative of "Iran-versus-America", with Israel in tow. Iran undoubtedly occupies a central position in the region's network of armed allies and partners. Houthis in Yemen and Iran-aligned militias in Iraq are not identical organisations, nor are they simply puppets controlled from Tehran. Each has its own domestic interests and political objectives. Yet they operate within an ideological and strategic ecosystem in which Iran's revolutionary worldview, Shia political mobilisation, and opposition to the American-backed regional order have created durable relationships.

The significance of the Houthi advance lies in its geography. Control around the Bab el-Mandeb (maritime gateway connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden) gives the Houthis leverage over one of the world's critical commercial arteries. Their ability to threaten shipping is no longer merely an extension of Yemen's civil war. It provides an Iran-aligned movement with the capacity to impose costs on Western powers, Israel and, crucially, Saudi Arabia without Iran itself having to fight every battle directly.

More revealing still is what has happened on Saudi Arabia's northern flank. Recent drone attacks against Saudi Arabia have reportedly been launched from Iraqi territory, including the southern province of Maysan. The geography matters. Southern Iraq is the country's predominantly Shia heartland and part of the wider area where Iran-aligned political and armed groups have accumulated substantial influence. Iraqi authorities' response, including the dismissal of a military commander following the attacks, underscores the seriousness of the development.

This should not, however, be interpreted as equating Iraq's Shia popula-



tion with Iran-aligned militancy. Iraq's Shia communities are politically diverse, and Iraqi nationalism has often competed with Iranian influence. The significance lies in the armed organisations operating from a region where Tehran has developed considerable strategic relationships. The resulting geography is striking.

Saudi Arabia is potentially being pressured from both ends of the Arabian Peninsula - by the Houthis from Yemen and the Red Sea to the south, and by Iran-aligned armed networks operating from Iraq to the north. Iran itself sits across the Gulf. What appear to be separate theatres therefore begin to resemble elements of a wider

strategic architecture of sectarian dimension. Saudi Arabia is not merely an American ally caught in an Iranian war. It is the principal Sunni Arab power confronting an increasingly assertive Iranian regional order. The rivalry between Riyadh and Tehran has always involved more than oil, territory and strategic influence. It also reflects competing political and religious identities - a Sunni Arab order dominated by established states and monarchies on one side, and an Iranian-led ecosystem of Shia or Shia-aligned movements on the other. Yemen illustrates this convergence particularly well. The Houthis emerged from Yemen's Zaydi Shia

tradition and have developed close military and strategic ties with Iran. But reducing them to Iranian proxies is equally simplistic. Their rise is rooted in Yemen's own political grievances, social divisions and civil war. Iran has provided military capabilities and strategic support; it did not manufacture every grievance sustaining the movement.

The same logic applies in Iraq. Iran does not need to command every militia or dictate every decision. It benefits from relationships with groups whose interests sometimes converge with its own: opposition to American military presence, hostility towards Israel, resistance to Saudi influence and the pursuit of greater political power within Iraq. Such relationships provide Tehran with strategic depth without requiring direct Iranian intervention in every theatre.

That is why describing these organisations merely as "proxies" can obscure more than it clarifies. They possess independent interests and local constituencies. Their relationship with Tehran is better understood as converging interests between autonomous movements and a regional power. The Middle East is therefore

witnessing several wars increasingly sharing the same battlefield.

The danger of the simplistic "Iran-versus-America" narrative is that it encourages policymakers to search for a bilateral solution to a fundamentally regional problem. Even if Washington and Tehran theoretically reached an accommodation, the underlying rivalries in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon and the Gulf would not necessarily disappear. The larger question is not simply whether Iran can withstand the United States and Israel. It is whether the Sunni Arab states can prevent an increasingly interconnected network of Iran-aligned movements from Iraq to Yemen from converting geographical fragmentation into strategic encirclement.

The map is telling a story that the headlines often miss. The Middle East is not simply a chessboard on which Washington and Tehran are moving pieces. It is a region where local conflicts, sectarian identities, state rivalries and great-power competition are increasingly converging. That is the deeper story emerging from the Red Sea, the Gulf and southern Iraq. It is more complicated than "Iran-versus-America". And it may prove far more enduring.