

Underhanded agenda

Anirban Ganguly

March 24, 2020

A certain, apparently deranged American academic, Professor Steve Hanke of a certain Washington DC-based public policy think tank, Cato Institute, displayed great irrationality when he made fun of the clapping of hands, ringing of bells, blowing of conch shells and clanging of utensils that the whole of India did on the afternoon of March 22, 2020, the day Prime Minister Modi had appealed for making effective a spontaneous 'Janta Curfew.'

Prime Minister Modi had clearly specified that there are two components to the 'Janta Curfew', one was the need to remain indoors throughout the day — even after the curfew had ended at 9:00 pm — and the other was to express one's gratitude to all those frontline workers who are striving fearlessly and tirelessly to ensure that we succeeded in overcoming the Coronavirus challenge – these include doctors, nurses, daily need providers, sweepers and cleaners, police personnel and airline personnel etc. Such an expression of gratitude has been reported from a number of European cities as well; in India, it had a flavour and dimension of its own. Social distancing, self-isolation, breaking the chain are some of the crucial imperatives for slowing and gradually ending the spread of the Coronavirus. Almost all countries affected by the virus have implemented these, have called for these to be made the norms of our current living scenario and India too has been quick in working these out. PM Modi's personal involvement, the active involvement of legions of well-meaning and well-informed social volunteers, civil society leaders, practitioners across the fields is gradually making sure that these enter the collective consciousness of India. Together with this is again resurfacing a vibrant revisiting of our civilisational ways and world view.

In his address to the nation, Prime Minister Modi had also clearly indicated that this thanksgiving was to be done standing at one's window, balcony or doors. His instructions were clear, well defined, and direct. For those who heard his address on the evening of March 19, 2020, his message was unequivocal. It was to unite and crystallise a spirit of determined resistance against the pandemic and also to evoke a definite, undiluted and un-diminishing spirit and gratitude towards those who are helping us to sail through this challenging time. The vast majority of Indians enthusiastically adhered to and participated in responding to Modi's appeal, a number of political leaders and veterans from parties opposed to the BJP also joined in this collective expression of our national gratitude. The response was across divides, barriers, it radiated throughout the country, in fact, the 'Janta Curfew' came across as a unique initiative, a 'national yoga' of sorts, in which people breaking all divisions and barriers took the plunge. The likes of Professor Hanke and his communist counterparts — both political and academic — in India did

not understand the full portent of PM Modi's message and action. Being completely disconnected from the Indian psyche and ways, they were incapable of internalising the complete meaning of PM Modi's exhortations. When the citizens of the West clap their hands to express gratitude for their frontline warriors against the pandemic it is kosher, but when India and Indians do it in their way, it is to be ridiculed isn't it?

While Professor Hanke irrationally talks of Modi being irrational, the Modi administration is advancing systematically, with the Prime Minister himself leading from the front. Each day sees him engaging with different segments of society, starting from the leaders of the SAARC countries; to discussing with the leaders of the pharmaceutical industry, to interacting with media leaders; to discussing the strategy ahead with captains of the Indian industry, to holding consultation with Chief Ministers of Indian states and fast track their requirements; to forming a special task force under Union Finance Minister Sitharaman to assess the impact on the economy; to ensuring that the "production of critical drugs and medical equipment within the country" can take off apace by approving "schemes worth Rs 10,000 crore and Rs 4,000 crore respectively"; to ensuring that there is seamless inter-ministerial coordination, to enlisting the support of vital bodies like the Indian Council of Medical Research and at the same time appealing to people; to regulating the lockdown pace; bringing home to people in a simple and earthy manner the challenges of the pandemic, Modi has been steadily, comprehensively, scientifically, rationally, socially addressing the menace, step by step. To add to these, BJP ruled state governments are coming up with models to cater to the marginalised sections of society in these periods of lockdown. The Uttar Pradesh administration led by Yogi Adityanath, the Karnataka administration led by B.S. Yeduryappa, among others, have all come up with measures that proposes to mitigate the difficulties for this section in some measure.

Modi's approach to tackling the Coronavirus issue thus, bases and props itself on the basic Indian spirit of resilience. It is a multi-dimensional model, it touches the traditional, the modern, the emotional, the pragmatic, the scientific and the economic, all aspects with each wing and section doing their part to the maximum. He is putting together a model for the world to see. It is strange that academics engaged with public policy institutions miss out on this aspect and lampoon an entire nation and people just because they have chosen, in their own way, to honour those who serve them without respite in difficult times? Are Professor Hanke and his co-ideologists, the Indian communists, simply thankless pseudo-intellectuals after all?

The Indian communists, of course, are a breed apart. It is an interesting pastime to be a Communist in times of Coronavirus – it is not a very demanding metier, some of the main things to do in order to be counted as one is to, ad nauseam, keep speaking about withdrawing CAA; halting NPR; to encourage protests to continue on these issues and thus make sure that the public continues to congregate; to agitate and contribute to health hazards; to lampoon all those trying to do their best; to keep inciting sections of the population; keep harping that Modi is ignoring the threat; doubt the veracity and authenticity of every figure put out by your government, ministries and agencies; amplify those dished out by Chinese agencies and institutions and finally conclude that the fight against the pandemic in India is being compromised. Do all of these and be counted in these times of Coronavirus as the stellar apparatchik, the commissar-ideologue with no equal.

Meanwhile Modi, without paying heed to such kinds, with the people by his side, wages, inch by inch, India's fight against COVID-19.