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Nido Tania's death, India's shame

February 14, 2014 11:50 IST



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The post-colonial Indian nation project that comprises its vast geographic, linguistic, ethnic, religious and racial expanse, even after over six decades of Independence, remains overwhelmingly Gangetic valley centric. The notion of India and Indians in Delhi continues to be heavily coloured by the ethnic and racial profiles and prejudices of the Hindi-Punjabi belt...

Much of the negative perceptions of the North-East diaspora owe their origin and existence to the perverse policies of the central government toward the region and its people. This realisation must be the beginning of an earnest endeavour to address the issue, says R N Ravi.

The brutal attack on Nido Tania, a young boy from Arunachal Pradesh, by a crowd in a busy New Delhi market on January 29 and his resultant death has shocked the country and shamed the national capital. The young men and women from the North-East, frustrated with their day-to-day social, physical and emotional persecution in the city, vented their frustration by taking to the streets.

The central government, in its stock-in-trade response, constituted a toothless committee to look into the issue and also conceded the family's request for a Central Bureau of Investigation probe. In popular discourse the dominant interpretation of the shocking incident is in terms of racism, abhorrent to civilisation and antithetical to the culture of a liberal plural democracy. However, such an explanation is intriguing and inadequate.

It is intriguing because there is no historical context of the North-East having ever clashed either politically or racially with the rest of India except for the brief Mughal invasion in the 17th century which no one except a few academics remember. There is no toxic residue in the collective historical memory of India about the region that could go towards inciting racial violence against the people of the North-East.



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the national capital does not impinge in any significant way on the political, social, cultural or economic space of the city and thus their presence precludes any clash of interest with those who regularly abuse and vandalise them physically and emotionally. This abuse is unarguably one way. The north-eastern diaspora in India is socially and emotionally ghettoised.

A mere racial distinction fails to offer a satisfactory explanation for attacks like the one on Nido and day-to-day humiliation of the people from the North-East. These are indeed manifestations of a maliciously noxious perception of them in the rest of the country, more so in the national capital engendered by a mix of corrosive notions of their racial and regional identities.

While racially they are largely looked down, their regional identity is that of 'secessionists', 'excessively prone to violence'. The mix of malicious prejudices -- racial and regional -- constitutes the driving impulse of the capital city to despise them, keep them at bay and gratuitously abuse them.

Much of the negative perceptions of the north-east diaspora owe their origin and existence to the perverse policies of the central government toward the region and its people. This realisation must be the beginning of an earnest endeavour to address the issue.

The malaise is far deeper than what is usually assumed. The post-colonial Indian nation project that comprises its vast geographic, linguistic, ethnic, religious and racial expanse, even after over six decades of Independence, remains overwhelmingly Gangetic valley-centric. The notion of India and Indians in Delhi continues to be heavily coloured by the ethnic and racial profiles and prejudices of the Hindi-Punjabi belt.

Thanks to the political ascendancy of peninsular India during the last some decades, a 'Madras' -- once a disparaging epithet for all South Indians -- suffers less racial discrimination in New Delhi today than before. In certain respects, especially in the matter of renting out a flat, they are even preferred over the landlord's 'crooked' racial kin. Unfortunately, the North-Easterners are not so lucky.

The central government has always looked at the North-East differently from other parts of the country. Its predominant perspective of the region is geo-strategic -- a troubled periphery surrounded from all sides by countries either outrightly hostile or ill-disposed towards India. The acute sense of insecurity that New Delhi felt in the initial decades after Independence, largely due to presence of hostile East Pakistan and China in the neighbourhood, shaped its entire approach to the region and its people.

India sought to deal with its perceived strategic insecurity in the North-East by insulating the region from the rest of India. It restricted the two-way flow of information, ideas and people between the region and the rest of the country. The school textbooks blacked out the region entirely. Abysmal infrastructure, inhibitory regimes of Inner Line Permit that restricts an Indian from visiting large areas of the region, and a perception of rampant insecurity kept the Indian public ignorant and at bay.

Ill-founded and maliciously concocted anecdotes of the region dripping with monstrous negativities, given currency mostly by members of the Indian security establishment, shaped the popular perception of an ordinary Indian about the

In the initial decades of independence when some handful of tribal militias launched insurgencies, the central government declared the whole region 'dangerous and disturbed' under various laws, including the notorious Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, flooded it with the Army, Assam Rifles and other central paramilitary forces and created a war-like situation. Its dominant narrative became a sustained defensive war to safeguard the territorial integrity of India.

The logic of war determined every move of the central government to the region. The national mainstream media gave the region a short shrift. Manmade human tragedies of horrendous magnitude went unreported or grossly under-reported to the Indian public. Even today, more often than not, the journalists reporting on the region have hardly an alternative to the handouts and authorised official briefings for the security related news.

Even though the context has radically changed and militancy today is no more than a mere shell of its earlier self, the central government's attitude to the region remains anachronistically trapped in the past. Its distrust of the region and its people persists. Rarely any thing good about the region reaches the rest of India. The continual stream of negatives about the region permeates the popular perception of the region.

The state apparatus of New Delhi is callous and often hostile to a North-Easterner. Look at the police response to the Nido Tania episode! Nido's sole crime was his refusal to swallow unmerited racial slurs heaped upon him. He vehemently protested the gratuitous insult and in return was pulverised by the very people who had abused him. Bystanders, instead of restraining the assailants, joined their ranks and battered him. The guardians of law demonstrated their willful indifference to Nido's grievous injuries and instead of setting the routine process of law in motion-- registering a criminal case and taking Nido to a hospital for his medical examination -- shooed him off.

Anyone who saw the video clipping of an injured Nido could see his battered and swollen face strongly suggestive of serious internal injuries. One common thread running through the brutal assault on Nido by the crowd and culpably aloof indifference of the police to his plight in the aftermath of the aggression, was his negative racial and regional identity.

If the young person happens to be a girl, her ordeal is further compounded. She is viewed and often treated as a cheap commodity. Having long suppressed and brutalised their womenfolk, the owners of the capital city recoil at the inherent tribal innocence and demonstrative freedom of the girls from the North-East. They feel challenged by them in their entrenched orthodox beliefs and prejudices and seek vehement revenge on them at the first opportunity.

Ironically, all this happens to the North-Easterners despite the fact that they are the least troublesome -- police records bear testimony to that -- among all the ethnic diasporas in Delhi, and their superior soft power is increasingly getting acknowledged more and more by the service industry all over the country. Shopping malls, restaurants, star hotels, the tourism industry and private hospitals in the capital and other cities are increasingly being managed by the young men and women from the North-East.

The rabid racism against North-Easterners in New Delhi is largely a function of the government-inspired disdain and suspicion of the region. The central government

R N Ravi is a retired special director of the Intelligence Bureau and monitored the China border for over 20 years.

R N Ravi

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unnecessary, awkward, frustrating...incidents do help at home too
 by [dineshassija](#) ([View MyPage](#)) on Oct 17, 2014 11:20 AM

... therefore unavoidable at public places

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Yadavs are criminals. Keep all of them on an island and then drop
 by [KAFIR KHAN](#) ([View MyPage](#)) on Oct 17, 2014 11:09 AM

Yadavs are criminals. Keep all of them on an island and then drop an atom bomb on them.

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Armed Forces Special Powers (Assam and Manipur) Act
 by [NASIM ZAMAN](#) ([View MyPage](#)) on Oct 17, 2014 10:59 AM

It is to be noted that Armed Forces Special Powers (Assam and Manipur) Act has been enforced in Assam and Manipur only. In spite of unprecedented violence perpetrated by the Maoists in states like Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh etc. such act has not been enforced there. This itself shows that there is a policy to consider the entire North East differently from the rest of India. For many Indians outside the North East India, people of the North-East are 'Janglis' or savages. These people also consider the tribal people like the Kole, Munda etc. of Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh in the same manner.

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Nido Tania's death, India's shame
 by [Rohit C](#) ([View MyPage](#)) on Feb 18, 2014 08:07 PM | [Hide replies](#)

With such attitude from all who matters, the gut feeling is that India is going to disintegrate.

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Re: Nido Tania's death, India's shame
 by [Deepak](#) ([View MyPage](#)) on Oct 17, 2014 10:55 AM
 going to ?

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You cannot single out a death just based on region
 by [Atulan Lahiri](#) ([View MyPage](#)) on Feb 18, 2014 05:14 PM | [Hide replies](#)

What happened when a guy doing his duty at a toll both and gunned down by a raging goon? What happens to the victims of rape and arsony all across? Why this hype about kicking out regional sentiments when in fact it was a case of rage and counter rage? The incident was extremely unfortunate but the death is not just on account of him being a North Easterner. Anyone pelting stones at a shop out of retaliation could be handed a similar treatment. India is ABSOLUTELY divided based on race, ethnicity, language and cultural lines. What were the same people talking of cultural tolerance doing when 28 states were formed - more so why are there 8 states in North East in the first place? Why this divide. I do believe, political divide creates mental divide and such outrage will not stop at one.

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Re: You cannot single out a death just based on region
 by [Rohit C](#) ([View MyPage](#)) on Feb 18, 2014 07:59 PM
 I did not get your point . Are you justifying the assault? Your ideology is to get abused but not to protest. Well a bong can take it that way, but that does not speak for others.

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in India because of a policy of Central Govt., so that the people there remain separate. Otherwise, I see no reason why all people of the North East unite together to form a single state.

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Re: You cannot single out a death just based on region
by [NASIM ZAMAN \(View MyPage\)](#) on Oct 17, 2014 11:16 AM

At the time of Independence there were Assam, Manipur, Tripura and NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) only. The states of Meghalaya and Nagaland were cut off from Assam later on. In fact Manipur acceded to India on On 21 September 1949 only. I think there are seven separate states in India because of a policy of Central Govt., so that the people there remain separate. Otherwise, I see no reason why all people of the North East unite together to form a single state.

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Racial discrimination or minor squabble that blew up?
by [Raj A \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 17, 2014 11:03 AM

The young boys death is unfortunate and is really heart breaking. Whether he is from NE or SE, it is to be condemned. Having said that, another question, which affects as a nation as a whole arises. Is this really a case of "racism" or "regional bias" or was it just a case of yet another incident of a spontaneous altercation between a youth and his teasers resulting in (probably un intended) murder? If it was the later, then all this discussion about people from the NE being targeted and will just end up in alienating the people from NE further.

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The
by [ramesh jain \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 17, 2014 10:54 AM

Indian society of love, affection and liking; discovering and appreciating has been well buried by our role play models, ie. politicians right from independence. To rediscover this we have to go back to the old and gold era. Pl. dont call it saffronisation.

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Nido Tania's death, India's shame
by [Kumbakonam Venkataraman \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 16, 2014 05:20 PM | [Hide replies](#)

This is an example of regionalism that is raising its ugly heads in various parts of India in varying degrees. This incident cannot be evaluated in isolated manner. Even when India was ruled by a number of monarchs, the religion and culture united all the peoples of India. The people belonging to various communities recognized the fundamental unity. There were numerous divisions among the Hindus; but all of them lived with mutual goodwill. The foreigners took advantage of the divisions and introduced the element of animosity among the people. Unfortunately, their divide and rule tactics continues to be adopted by the Indian political parties and this has spoiled the national integrity in India. The governments in states and center should concentrate on strengthening patriotism and national identity. For this, they should first of all dissociate governance from the religion, region, caste, language, region, and class. All Indian citizens should be treated alike and their identity should be only 'Indian citizen.' All help should flow to all the deserving people on the basis of economic criteria. Vote bank politics of our political parties is the main reason for all sorts of violence and crimes we see in India. For having misguided the people for selfish reasons and created such a shameful and dangerous situation in India, only the post-independence political 'leaders' are responsible. They should mend their ways. The people of India should unite and

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Re: Nido Tania's death, India's shame
by [ravi eerugula \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 17, 2014 10:49 AM

people should understand that mainland people are treated as foreigners in North-East areas. The locals abuse, threaten and beat the main land people. Go to nagaland and arunachal and manipur. you'll understand. You people never gone to North east and say so many things.

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Re: Re: Nido Tania's death, India's shame
by [karunaditya das \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 17, 2014 11:36 AM

what do u mean by "mainland"? is only hindi speaking states are mainland and others are sub land? do u know where is Nagaland, arunachal or Manipur? u so called "mainland" Indians know nothing about NE. when china attacked india in '62, all these "mainland" Indians have fled leaving NE to the mercy of china.

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Re: Re: Nido Tania's death, India's shame
by [Rohit C \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 18, 2014 08:02 PM

People like you with such divisive mentality should be thrashed every where in India

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WHAT ABOUT THE DEATH OF HUNDEREDS OF HINDI SPEAKING PEOPLE IN NE
by [dARASHIKHO \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 15, 2014 02:33 PM | [Hide replies](#)

Why everybody is silent, when the hindi speaking people have their hands tied and shot at pointblank in North East.

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Re: WHAT ABOUT THE DEATH OF HUNDEREDS OF HINDI SPEAKING PEOPLE IN
 by [Gaolia \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 16, 2014 09:37 PM
 make yourself cutured first - u m**r**n

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Re: WHAT ABOUT THE DEATH OF HUNDEREDS OF HINDI SPEAKING PEOPLE IN NE
 by [Ganesh Iyer \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 16, 2014 10:53 PM
 Hindi speaking people r beaten in.maharashtra too why other places. sometimes crimes committed by these men becomes biased.I personally know how north easterners r treated anywhere in india either in south or north or central. for almost 6 decades there is no development, growth or progress. now they r being killed.It is therefore for their well being n living with dignity they get separated from india n form a separate independent home country which in future will b another enemy neighbour for all the wounds we caused to them shall never b forgotten. our President n Prime Minister failed to make our country as one country one people one law thats why they dont deserve any respect.we r divided by community; castes; sub castes etc then why call secular. the day our birth certificates stop nentioning our relugion caste n language we will free from all pproblems.

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Re: WHAT ABOUT THE DEATH OF HUNDEREDS OF HINDI SPEAKING PEOPLE IN
 by [ravi eerugula \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 17, 2014 10:51 AM
 these are all politics and media is biased and people react to whatever media shown to them. they don't go to the root cause.

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I echo
 by [Pro Indian \(View MyPage\)](#) on Feb 15, 2014 11:47 AM

I echo this article that Nidos death is a National Shame. Culprits should be given death penalty.

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