

Giving the minorities their due

Without indulging in brazen appeasement for the sake of vote-bank, the Modi Government has quietly but resolutely taken a number of measures to empower the non-majority community. Results have begun to show, regardless of electoral gains



SANJU VERMA

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi is on the cusp of completing three years in office, two things that stand out on the economic front are his revolutionary decisions on demonetisation and passage of the Goods and Services Tax Bill — both are game-changing moves that will leave for posterity a digitised, scam-free, bigger and better India. On the foreign policy front, the surgical strike on Pakistan in September 2016 and eventually isolating Pakistan, with virtually every South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) nation boycotting the Saarc summit in Pakistan last year, the civil nuclear deal with Japan, keeping China at an arm's length by showing heft to engage with Vietnam, Taiwan, Bangladesh and Nepal, in a manner that behoves India's tall stature, spearheading the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Brics) combine, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and East Asia Summit (EAS) meets by not merely signing multi-million dollar deals but more importantly, taking charge of things, with no pussyfooting on issues that count, and of course, India's prized entry into the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), will go a long way in shaping India's growing clout in the global sweepstakes.

Economics and foreign affairs aside, passing the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 that gives courts the right to try juveniles as adults, where the crime is extremely heinous, the Mental Healthcare Bill, 2016, that decriminalises suicide and emphasises on zero discrimination based on sexual orientation, the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2016 that increases maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks and is a salvo in the arm for working women and of course, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Prevention and Control Bill, 2017 that provides for equality in matters of treatment, education and jobs, for persons afflicted, are some of the most path-breaking decisions by the Modi Government, in its earnest march towards a truly inclusive and progressive India.

However, amidst the many noteworthy achievements of the Modi Government, if there is one thing that stands out for its sheer desire to challenge decadent stereotypes and male hegemony in a country of 127 crore Indians, it is the bold move to give Muslim women their due, by initiating a process of doing away with the retrograde practice of triple *talaq*, which is against the most basic fundamental right. The right to life, liberty and the security of person, as enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution. triple *talaq* is also against those principles of natural justice that celebrate love, loyalty, fidelity, common brotherhood, equality and gender parity.

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), which is just another NGO, set up in 1973, under the aegis of a vote-bank hungry Indira Gandhi, has been trying every trick in the book to defend triple *talaq*, forgetting that it is an extra-constitutional body and what it says or believes is legally irrelevant. In 1986, Rajiv Gandhi over-rode the Supreme



Court of India's 1985 ruling in the Shah Bano case and thereby denied a marginalised and divorced Muslim woman, her rightful alimony of just ₹179 per month, by passing the Muslim Women (Protection Of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986. Shah Bano eventually died in 1992, after living a miserable life of abject penury. Rajiv Gandhi's damning blunder in the Shah Bano case undermined Justice Chandrachud's historic verdict and made a mockery of Section 125 of the CrPc which grants maintenance to women with no income, including divorced women.

Thanks to Rajiv Gandhi, India lost a golden opportunity to legally empower Article 44 of the Directive Principles and get rid of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, which has no place in a country like ours, where the Constitution reigns supreme. It took 30 odd years for Modi to have the political will and gumption, no less, to ensure that the regressive practice of triple *talaq* is given the burial, going forward. While the apex court will have the final say, the dice on this one, has been rolled, for good.

The Modi administration's painstaking efforts to integrate Muslim women into the mainstream is not an isolated one. Nai Manzil, a scheme launched with an initial corpus of ₹3,738 crore by the Modi Government, aimed primarily at the thousands, who study in the three lakh odd *madrassas* in the country, is breaking new ground in imparting skilled training to Muslim boys and girls, largely speaking, so that they can get the right jobs and enroll in universities of higher edu-

cation, if they wish to. Upgrading Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/ Crafts for Development (USTTAD), yet another skill upgradation scheme, in ancestral arts and crafts, Maulana Azad National Academy for Skills and Seekho Aur Kamao, are the other schemes the BJP-led NDA has embarked upon, to ensure that it lives up to its basic ethos of 'Justice for all and appeasement of none'.

Besides Nai Manzil, other notable schemes to help the minority community are Nai Udaan, to help students who have cleared prelims in UPSC, SSC etc. Nai Roshni, to empower women, scholarships under Maulana Azad Education Fund (MAEF), Welfare schemes under National Rural and National Urban Mission, mid-day meal schemes, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) services through Anganwadi workers, bank credit at concessional rates, under priority sector lending, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, Padho Pradesh to help those who wish to study abroad by providing subsidised loans, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, Jan Shikshan Sansthan, Multi Sectoral Development Programme to provide basic amenities, health, sanitation, socio-economic infrastructure and more.

The fact that the Modi Government's overarching drive to ameliorate the lot of minorities is yielding desired results is best exemplified by the fact that while under the erstwhile UPA, minorities accounted for just 6.2 per cent and 6.8 per cent of the overall recruitments in Government jobs, public sector undertakings and

banks, that number stood at 8.6 per cent in 2014-15, as per the Labour Bureau. While the Congress was busy playing to the gallery, the Modi Government has gone ahead and implemented various recommendations in the spirit of the Sachar Committee report, thereby, doing what it does best; good governance.

Close on the heels of empowering Muslim women, Parsi women too figure high on the Modi Government's agenda, given that scores of Parsi women, who have married outside their community, are forced to forego various rights, including the right to visit the agiary, the fire temple and are also coerced into renouncing any valid claims, to funds from various Parsi trusts.

It is often said that the best panacea for most ills is economic emancipation. The Modi Government has done far more than any Government in post independent India. Mudra Bank that has disbursed more than ₹3.5 crore worth of loans at concessional rates to more than 7.5 crore underprivileged Indians, has seen a large chunk of its loans being availed of, by SC/STs, including minorities. Raising the minimum wage from ₹246/day to ₹350/day for non agricultural and non skilled workers and amendments to the Bonus Act to raise minimum bonus from ₹3,500 to ₹7,000 or the minimum wage, whichever is higher, changing the dynamics of MGNREGA with a record allocation of ₹48,000 crore are steps that will help the weakest, minorities included, in a 'New India'.

(The writer is chief spokesperson for the BJP, Mumbai)

Nai Manzil, a scheme launched with an initial corpus of ₹3,738 crore, aimed primarily at the thousands, who study in the three lakh odd *madrassas* in the country, is breaking new ground in imparting skilled training to Muslim boys and girls, so that they can get the right jobs and enroll in universities of higher education, if they wish to