

WE THE PEOPLE: What Makes Us Different?

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Soon after the horrific and disturbing 26/11 incident at Mumbai, I have witnessed a major trend in the electronic media which is also disturbing. For more than 100 hours, “LIVE” footage was shown in all the major news channels. Each news network competed with their rivals to paint a picture of more gloom and distrust on our foundation of democracy – our resolve and determination to listen to people with whom we disagree. Our articulate, smart and savvy media anchors would want us to hear more of hatred. In an environment of hatred, the media wants us to hate more. They don’t want us to listen to people with whom we do not agree. In such a context, I would like to quote a couplet from Gulzar:

“Khaamoshi ka haasil bhi ek lambi si khaamoshi hi hai”

(the outcome of silence is another long silence)

It is important for us to remember that instant “trial” in media, the ease with which the media blames and investigates the accused puts immense pressure on our legal system and in many cases, misdirects the investigating agencies. Media indeed has a very important role in bringing to notice the lacunas in our system but also needs to follow up the processes of justice. But, maybe that does not add too much to their TRPs.

Patriotism does not mean that we hate our adversaries and neither does it mean that we harbour ill intentions for our not-so-friendly neighbours. In the last 60 years of our freedom, we have resisted the temptations of “instant-mix” and “hate thy neighbour” policies of winning votes. In India, in spite of poverty and lack of education, people still vote for love and not hatred. This feeling of all-inclusiveness makes us different and makes our democracy work. To quote from J. F. Kennedy: “Let us not negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate”. We do not fear to negotiate with our neighbours. It may not be out of context to also mention that the main accused and the sole survivor in the 26/11 attacks, Ajmal Qasab, has been provided with a lawyer for his defense by our judiciary. It is this sense of freedom and fairness in our fundamental institutions of democracy that makes us different from most .

In the last nine months of my teaching experience, I have come across students from many different geographical terrains, food habits and language. In my brief interaction with the students, I have found that sometimes such conceptually misdirected news reporting in media leads to a biased and

one-sided viewpoint on many issues amongst the students. Since the future of IISER as well as the country depends on the ability of our students to think and imagine out of the box, it is very important that they cultivate the habit of analyzing facts. One of the classics of Indian philosophy, *Nyāyasutra* (200–400 AD), justifies knowledge to be true if it satisfies all the four conditions: *pratyaksachintāmani* (knowledge through perception), *anumanachintāmani* (knowledge through inference), *upamanachintāmani* (knowledge through analogy), and *shabdachintāmani* (knowledge through words). I was pleasantly surprised that a course on the philosophy of science introduced the logical arguments in knowledge to our students. The effects were immediately visible in my course on reactions and mechanisms in chemistry, where the students could derive a mechanism for a chemical reaction from the given experimental facts through logical reasoning. I wish all our students further progress in their ability for logical reasoning in every aspect of life.