

A perverse interpretation of religious neutrality

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✘ Now that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal is the Chief Minister of Delhi, the people, including Muslims, are naturally looking forward to action from him to redress their long-standing problems.

Muslims, whose vote percentage in AAP's favour was the highest among all segments, understandably expect that they would get a fair deal from the AAP government. Seventy percent of the total Muslim vote went in favour of AAP.

It is appropriate to note here that this election brought a welcome relief from the relentless communal mobilisation by BJP continuing since before the Parliamentary election till a few days before the Delhi Assembly polls.

Happily, the Kejriwal campaign sidelined the RSS-driven hate campaign and replaced it with a neutral, non-communal discourse. This led to an improvement in the communal situation and provided a non-communal basis to politics.

However, within days of the AAP victory this apparent religious neutrality was seen at adverse play when the Okhla MLA said in an interview that he would pursue the Batla House fake encounter case to its logical conclusion.

Within hours AAP leaders disassociated themselves from this perfectly legitimate position of their Okhla MLA, who happens to be a Muslim. The MLA's insistence on the establishment of rule of law and curbs on police lawlessness was summarily rejected as some kind of gesture of "appeasement of Muslims".

This is a dangerous trend as it tends to deligitimise with a perverse interpretation of religious neutrality the genuine concerns of a large section of the people. This seems to suggest that AAP will not indulge in active persecution of Muslims, but it will not help them out of their troubles either. This is certainly a negative approach to Muslims.

Even earlier, soon after its first victory in 2013, AAP leaders took a similar stance in an interaction at Patna with a Muslim audience. They said that they did not think in Hindu-Muslim terms. Hence, they did not bother to address the deprivation and marginalisation of this community.

As things stand today, there is very little hope for any standardised, well-appreciated and well-understood political policy like affirmative action to pull Muslims out of their socio-economic difficulties under AAP in Delhi state. However, we will keep on reminding this government of its responsibilities towards the underprivileged and disadvantaged, to serve whom AAP claims to have come into power.

To begin with, AAP will have to shed its negative interpretation of religious neutrality and come to the aid of the section of people so far ignored or persecuted by the system.



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Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam is an erudite Islamic Economist and Social Scientist. He has been associated with Institute of Objective Studies (IOS) as its Chairman for over 25 years now. Dr. Manzoor Alam, a Ph.D. in Economics from Aligarh Muslim University, has held various high-ranking positions in many international organizations such as Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Finance and National Economy, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Associate Professor Deptt. of Islamic Economics, University of Imam Mohammad-bin-Saud, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Chief Coordinator for the Translation of Meaning of the Holy Quran in different languages of the world at King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex, Madinah Munawwarah, Saudi Arabia; Chief Representative of International Islamic University, Malaysia (IIUM) in India; Member of the General Committee of the IDB Scholarship Program for Muslim Communities in Non-Member Countries, Islamic Development Bank, Jeddah, K.S.A.; Consultant of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, USA in India; Founder Member of International Islamic Charitable Organisation, Kuwait; and Member, Steering Committee, Istanbul Talks, Civil Solidarity Platform, Istanbul, Turkey.

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