

The Identity crisis

-Mahesh Balasubramanian

The other day, a huge assembly of intellectuals debated on the prime question Indians faced today –what is Indian –ness? Some opined that we are losing our identity with the onslaught of *phoren* culture encompassing pizza joints, ear-splitting music and vulgar outfits. In the end, the conclusion reached at signified the need for introspection within us. The meeting was dismissed with a vote of thanks, consisting of 8-anna English and 8-anna Hindi.

Inspired by that event, I felt that the noble (re) search should begin at home, or rather, self. I rated myself to know where I stand (if in troubled waters, then also how much neck deep!) on three different scales of: assimilation of nice things from others, secularism and language preferences.

My scales are different from those of Dewang Patels', in that I don't use a mobile set, which is kept off, to talk on, because I don't own one. (But I would buy one, as I hope that someday I 'd get to meet Virendra Sehwag on the pretext of delivering his mom's SOS message, but that's a different matter!). Moreover, I've never been to any marriage, uninvited.

First and foremost, Indian-ness is about incorporation of all good things from all over the world in order for them to prosper, without forgetting our glorious existence. That is the reason why small tidbits here and there assembled from the literary works of reputed authors go in to conceive great many of my middles.

Secularism comes next. Cutting across religions and castes, I mingle with people on festivals and relish feasts, whether it is *Biryanis*' during *iftar* parties or Punjabi delicacies during *Baisakhi*.

Lastly, it is language. I would quote a story in this context. Emperor Akbar one day received an unknown guest who,

though not a dumb, wouldn't utter a word. Using sign language, he posed a challenge to the king, that of establishing his (the guest's) ethnic identity until next day. His appearance didn't provide any clue. So, at night, the witty Birbal delivered the guest, who was in deep slumber, a terrible blow. The belief was that he would react using his mother tongue, which comes naturally to everyone. That did the work.

As regards the languages I know, don't be surprised if I reveal, that I know all the major languages of our country. It is only because I believe in the saying, "speech is silver but silence is gold", that I maintain silence in those languages.

Of course, if need be arises for me to speak (or shriek!) I use Hindi (*devanagari script*), the symbol of Indian nationalism, devoid of any local or regional flavor. I wish I were the guest in the *Shahanshah's Durbaar*.

Last, but not the least, people say, extremely talented people prefer going outside to build their careers than being in India. I' am not one of them, let me assure you. When it is possible to remain jobless here, why worry about going there?

To conclude, the heart-warming score I achieved in the process of introspection reflects light at the end of the Indian tunnel. That is to say, I 'am indeed, a 16-anna Indian!