



Intemperate letter

The Maharashtra Governor is communalising the government response to the pandemic

Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's intemperate letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, in which he mocked the latter, questioned his faith and even took a jibe at secularism, a fundamental tenet of the Constitution, is disgraceful. His letter, written purportedly to seek an early reopening of temples, could have urged that without the accompanying scorn and derision. The Governor reduced himself to the level of a troll warrior, by declaring that "our gods and goddesses have been condemned to remain in lockdown" and wondering whether the CM has "suddenly turned secular". He wrote to the CM that the latter used to be a "strong votary of Hindutva", and cited his visits to temples as proof. This forces the conclusion that the intent, purpose and premise of the letter were all wrong. A person's faith in Hinduism and its practice is not Hindutva. The Constitution envisages no role for a CM's faith in his functioning. Moreover, it is not the Governor's job to interfere in the daily functioning of an elected government. Communication between the Governor and CM must be perfectly civil and respectful besides being constitutionally appropriate. And at any rate, restrictions on gatherings at places of worship as a measure to combat a pandemic are not related to the concept of secularism.

His warped logic apart, Mr. Koshyari has a track record of privileging his political fealties over norms and propriety. In November 2019, he held a swearing-in for BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis as the State's Chief Minister, in a dubious attempt to pre-empt the formation of a Shiv Sena-led alliance government. He continued to wade into political controversies, in a manner unbecoming of his office. Mr. Thackeray rightly reminded the Governor of the fact that secularism was a "key component" of the Constitution and the need to take care of people while being sensitive to their beliefs and sentiments. Mr. Thackeray also descended into avoidable grandstanding in the letter by reiterating his own Hindutva credentials and revisiting earlier tussles with the Governor. NCP Chief Sharad Pawar on the other hand, called out the Governor's ill-advised move in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in which he expressed "shock" and "surprise" that the letter was released to the media. The Governor could convey his views to the CM, but the "kind of language" was unsuitable for someone holding a constitutional office, Mr. Pawar pointed out. Maharashtra is fighting a battle against COVID-19, and all steps in this regard must be based entirely on a proper analysis of the situation. Any political considerations can only be damaging, and a communal one will be dangerous. It is unfortunate that the Governor sought to insert himself into the situation in an extremely unhelpful manner. He must retreat and let the Council of Ministers and the Chief Minister take decisions that they consider appropriate and timely.