

# Pranab *babu's* RSS visit: Seven dimensions

Indians should follow his example, not question his motives



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The former President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, has sparked off a spate of TV discussions and print articles, as well as social media views, following the announcement of his visit to RSS headquarters in Nagpur. The number of views are probably equally divided, “for” and “against”. This article attempts to outline a reasoned approach to this issue which requires consideration.

First, there is a need to recognise and accept that the 1 billion plus people in India are very diverse in every way. Food, language, customs, religion, ceremonies, rituals etc. The diversity is unparalleled in the world and, therefore, makes this nation of ours complex to the extreme. The challenge of bringing people together and keeping people together, in one nation, is unprecedented and humongous. Especially so, when divisive forces are moving the agenda in a very different direction.

The visit of Pranab *babu* to the RSS headquarters has to be seen in this overall context.

Second, it follows directly from this that there is a need for dialogue among and between Indians. Talking and, more important, listening. The

former President’s visit to Nagpur will enable dialogue, two-way, and this is critical in India. Also, it is much neglected. In fact, public discourse has degenerated to name-calling and insults, criticism and dissent. Dialogue is sorely needed to arrest this decline and bring dignity back to the table — Pranab *babu* will do this.

Third, dialogue implies respect for different points of view. And, dialogue has to help find a common ground. Respect is an essential part of this process. Not looking down on people, not being arrogant, not being disdainful. The only way for dialogue to succeed is through respect for all points of view. From this perspective the response of Pranab Mukherjee is just right. His decision to visit the RSS HQ does not reflect agreement with any point of view. It only reflects a willingness to respect “a” point of view.

Fourth, to decry or object to or criticise his acceptance of the invite from the RSS is to, actually underestimate the wisdom, the knowledge, the commitment to the nation and its people, that the former President has. This is a time for him to go, to listen, to speak, to engage in dialogue. It is in the national interest. His visit is not to be seen in any other light.

Fifth, clearly many many people in India have strong, differences with the RSS. And, therefore, the appeals to the former President to cancel his visit. But, they forget that the RSS exists. That the RSS is a force. That the RSS cadres are a huge resource. That the discipline within the RSS and its cadres is unique in India today. RSS is

not to be ignored. RSS is to be engaged. Meeting the RSS is to understand this fact of life.

Sixth, who is this man, Pranab Mukherjee? What is he all about? Is he an Indian who cares for his country? Is he a policy maker of immense experience? Is he an administrator par excellence? Is he a master strategist? Is he a leader acceptable to, and respected, by most people in this country? Is he a man who has experienced much pain? Is he a man who is open to all points of view? Is he a good listener? Is he a good communicator?

If the answers to these questions are “yes, yes and yes”, then shall we trust him to do the right thing at the right time for India? In fact, questioning him, asking and advising him to cancel his visit is far from respectful.

Seventh, and the final point. Let’s all wish Pranab *babu* the very best of success in his visit to Nagpur. In his dialogue with the RSS. And, we should understand that dialogue is not a one-off exercise. It is a process. And, the process of dialogue will only be positive for India and Indians.

There is no alternative.

The larger point, going beyond the visit of the former President to Nagpur is that dialogue on multiple issues and challenges are the need in India. More dialogue, more interaction, more exchanges, not less. Indians should follow the example of Pranab *babu*, not decry and not question motives.

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