

I am a *Janagon*—an *Amm-public*. If you still don't get it, then let me spell it out for you, because I know you are an *Amm-public* too—the ever-so-celebrated mango people. I hope you now realise who I am as well as who you are.

Yes, we are the most empowered people of the country. Without us nothing happens. Not even a flame starts. Not even a car rolls into the street. Not even a power plant rolls out. Not even a drop of water flows into the river. Yes, we are that powerful; if you still

don't realise it, then look around you. I know an *Amm-public* has the memory of a goldfish. Well, it does not matter as a goldfish actually has a memory much longer than the mythical three seconds. My memories and yours, however, do not challenge the three-second myth.

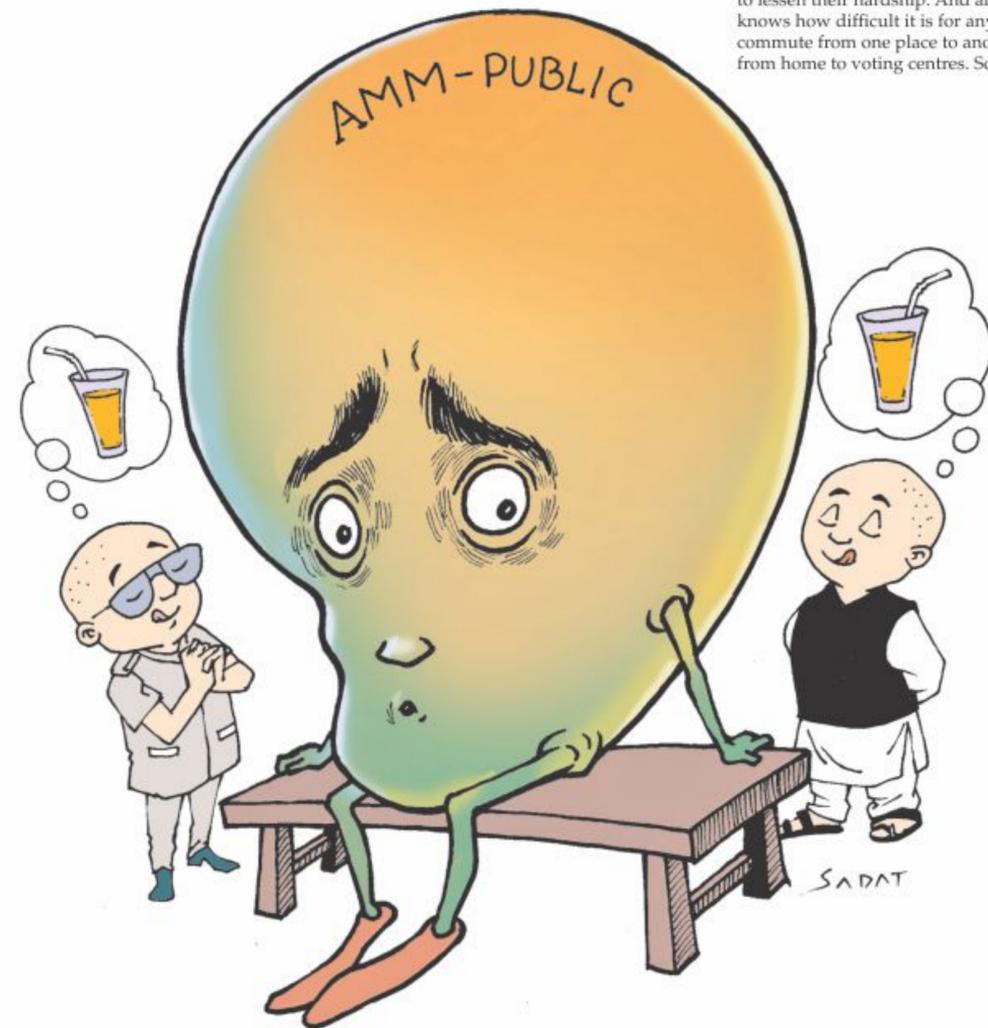
So let's flex the grey and mostly black matters encased inside the black holes of our thick skulls. Not long ago, our beloved political leaders felt that the voting rights of the *Amm-janata* were being snatched away by another party. They took it as their sacred mission to protect and bring back the political rights of the *Janagon*.

So countrywide violence was instigated. Buses and trucks were burned with petrol bombs. Yes, some of us *Amm-janata* were burnt and killed. But surely that was a small sacrifice compared to the crusade to uphold the *Janagon*.

Then the other party stood up to protect us. They took it upon themselves to protect the voting rights of the *Amm-janata*. Nobody has the right to snatch their right to go to the voting booths. When the *Janagon* wants voting, who can stop them? And political parties should help out the people—they should work to lessen their hardship. And any fool knows how difficult it is for anyone to commute from one place to another, from home to voting centres. So for the

WE, THE AMM-PUBLIC

INAM AHMED



| SATIRE |

sake of the *Janata*, votes can be held without voters. The governments are especially sensitive to the sufferings that the *Janagon* have to undergo every day. So they want to make sure electricity reaches them, that roads and bridges are built, and so on and so forth. Only in their zeal to serve do they sometimes forget which thing to do first. So instead of power plants, first they set up poles. Well, electricity will come one day, won't it? For the 'upliftment' of us, the *Amm-public*, our governments do not leave any stone unturned to set up power plants.

And now the *Amm-janata* come to the limelight again, proving their mighty nature, when the debate on 'we the people' in the constitution is raised. Just think about it, a whole constitution is dedicated to them. And yet they are not happy.

In busy industrial hubs and in pristine deep forests. It is another story entirely whether the plant in the industrial hub ever gets any gas or if the plant in the forest ruins the ecosystem. Then again, for the *unnoyon* of the *Janagon*, what do a few forests matter?

To protect the *Amm-public*, bridges are built. The planners can be forgiven to overlook the fact that there are no link roads to use the structure. Mile after mile of road networks are laid out. Only the thankless *Amm-janata* try to find fault in the potholes.

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These *Amm-public* are the most difficult breed to handle. The most unyielding kind to satisfy. The most ungrateful species.

When the politicians call hartals to establish the rights of the *Amm-janata*, they don't like it. As the saying goes, even an insane person knows what is best for him. Not the *Amm-public*. They would start grumbling that hartals are eating up their livelihood. What is livelihood without rights? Damn fools.

So, these *Amm-janata* are not only the most powerful group—they are also the craziest. And so it serves them right when governments tighten the screw on them and turn them into mango squash. Ah, squash. That nice cool drink!

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| PERSPECTIVE |

Envisaged as vast, impregnable structures in their inception, walls have been proclaimed to defend realms and their inhabitants from invaders for time immemorial. The same can be said to apply to the Wall in George RR Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, televised on-screen as *Game of Thrones*. Laid at the end of the Long Night, some 8000 years prior to the start of the story, it is a 700-foot tall fortification of solid ice constructed by men and the Children of the Forest to keep at bay the White Walkers, the most feared creatures in Westeros and a menacing humanoid race that had long receded into myth and memory, unheard for centuries. Trapped on the other side of the Wall, however, are the wildlings or the Free Folk—men and women who had refused to kneel to the Northern feudal lords—and it cannot be by chance that they have been segregated, condemned to a bitter life in the Lands of Always Winter where they cannot thrive.

The historical inspiration for RR Martin's Wall is Hadrian's Wall in England, which marked the northern boundary of the Roman Empire. A modest affair by far, it runs 113 kilometres and stands hardly 10-feet tall. As Emperor Hadrian's biographer described, the wall was built to "separate the Romans from the barbarians", the barbarians being the unconquered northern tribes.

British writer and academic Richard Lockhurst offers a more nuanced understanding of our age-old fixation with building walls: "[walls] are often gestural markers that serve more social, psychological, and symbolic purposes. They help a culture to define itself by keeping what it's not at bay." Hadrian's Wall was not some cure-all, impassable fortification. Porous as all borders are, people within and beyond the wall passed through it each day when conducting business. Organised checkpoints provided the perfect opportunity for taxation and keeping smuggling in check—it was a means to control and restrict the economic power of citizens above all else.

The Wall in Westeros, too, means to control and restrict, if not trade, then the influence of a non-feudal, potentially anarchist people—one that can instigate a revolution, releasing subjects from the clasp of the feudal chokehold. But who were the Northmen to pass this judgment? Did they hold a greater claim to the land? Did they set foot on the continent first? Are the Free Folk foreign invaders? Alas, the two not only share the same forefathers—the First Men—they are adherents of the same faith, they sole remaining adherents of the Old Gods in the realm. And if they are primitive because they have no tall towers and possess no precious jewels, it is not because of some inherent savage streak—the Lands of Always Winter are simply too harsh for life to flourish. The erection of the Wall, therefore, was a land grab that undermined their whole claim to land and livelihood. Why else did the entirety of the Free Folk conveniently end up on the other side?

And while they have been branded wildlings by the 'civilised' people of

THE 'OTHER' SIDE OF THE WALL

AMIYA HALDER



IMAGE: COURTESY

The Wall represents and propagates the power of the feudal system with the myth that the Northerners are superior. All memory of their shared past needed to be erased—memory that the Free Folk are in fact the same people. Without this delineation that relegates the self-governing, non-feudal population, the validity of the Northern lordship, and perhaps by extension the monarchy of Westeros, would come into question.

Westeros, the Free Folk are arguably a more egalitarian people. They are not kneelers. There are not vassals or serfs or slaves. Social stratification does not exist for these so-called barbarians. The title of the King-beyond-the-Wall, the leader of the Free Folk, is not hereditary—it is bestowed upon whoever manages to unite a significant number of the northern tribes under his command. Women are not restricted to the roles of mother and child bearer—they are spearwives, warriors on equal footing as the men.

As Ygritte complains to Jon Snow, the land should be available to all of them: "Your lot just came along and put up a big wall and said it was yours!" The Wall represents and propagates the power of the feudal system with the myth that the Northerners are superior. All memory of their shared past needed to be erased—memory that the Free Folk are in fact the same people. Without this delineation that relegates the self-governing, non-feudal population, the validity of the Northern lordship, and perhaps by extension the monarchy of Westeros, would come into question.

Even the White Walkers are the butt of a cruel trick gone wrong. Products of an experiment on humans by the Children of the Forest, they were biological

weapons created to resist the invasion of the First Men. However, they eventually broke free of the Children's yoke and took up their own battle. So what makes them the bad guys?

While the rest of Westeros has been fighting bloody wars since the beginning of time, the White Walkers are united in a struggle for their own existence, led by a king whose leadership is contested by none of his people. Are they too not an oppressed race trying to break free of a fate they did not choose for themselves? Having kept the peace for eight millennia, are they too not only defending their land from human invaders?

And while the realm views the Night King as a menace, under his rule, wouldn't the people of Westeros live forever, as equals? Wouldn't it eliminate the class system and all of the material trappings that accompany it? Sure, one may argue that once raised from the dead, people are transformed into mindless beings, devoid of a single shred of individual will and human emotion. Conventional notions of good and evil, human and non-human aside, the Wall coming down should instead be seen as a metaphor more than anything else—that there is no longer anything dividing us and we're all the same. ■