

# PLAYING TO THE GALLERY: ON INCIDENTS THAT HAVE LOWERED THE MAJESTY OF THE INSTITUTION OF PARLIAMENT

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi had [called for a new chapter in parliamentary history](#), and exhorted members to “forget all past bitterness”, as they moved into a shiny new building last week. “Whatever we are going to do in this new Parliament building, it should be an inspiration to every citizen in the country,” he had said. Fittingly for a new beginning, Mr. Modi’s government brought a Bill for reserving 33% seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. The [proposal found near unanimous acceptance across the political spectrum](#), though some parties were concerned about the timeline for its implementation, and some wanted a carve out for Other Backward Classes. But this show of unity and purpose was soon overshadowed by incidents that lowered the majesty of the institution of parliament. A Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Member of Parliament [hurled toxic communal slurs at a fellow MP from the Muslim community](#) even as some other senior leaders of the ruling party smiled on in the Lok Sabha during a discussion, of all things on the success of India’s Chandrayaan mission, hardly a partisan issue. In the Rajya Sabha, [visitors in the gallery reportedly raised political slogans](#) in support of the government during the discussion on the women’s reservation Bill, a singularly inappropriate method of credit appropriation.

The conduct of the BJP MP was condemnable but what compounds it is the party’s overall approach that followed. Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh who was present during the outrage did apologise to the House for the remarks. But soon after that, the party fielded several spokespersons to explain away the episode, and they accused the one who was at the receiving end of provoking the incident. An equivalence has also been sought between communal abuse against a fellow member and remarks allegedly made by some Opposition members about faith and the existence of god. The Lok Sabha Speaker who has in the past suspended Opposition members on charges of misconduct is expected to take a more serious view of this incident, and set out an example, making it clear that the House cannot condone communal slurs against any one, and certainly not a member. Several Opposition leaders have written to Rajya Sabha Chairman regarding sloganeering from the visitor’s gallery. That episode too calls for exemplary punitive and preventive action. The new building must foster healthy dialogue among members, and between the institution and the people.

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