

Understanding the Agenda of RSS-BJP

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Preface

BJP-Narendra Modi is completing nine years of its rule. During this period, we witnessed the drastic and harmful decisions like demonetization, which affected millions of poor and small traders. Nearly four hundred people died standing in the bank queues. GST came as a big jolt to small traders and consumers. We also saw the lockdown in the context of Covid 19. This lockdown led to massive migrations in which hundred lost their lives. Covid management saw hundreds of people dying because of lack of oxygen cylinders and other facilities. Imposition of GST further worsened the plight of small traders.

The farm laws, which were totally against the interest of farmers saw the farmers agitation for close to an year, in which nearly 600 farmers lost their lives. There was attempt to disenfranchise section of Muslims through NRC, CAA, which saw the Shaheen Baug movement across the country. The wrestler's agitated against the BJP MP for sexual harassment.

This period also saw the unprecedented price rise, highest levels of unemployment, the increasing poverty, increasing wealth of select few; the rich poor gap is increasing to unprecedented scale. At national level the country fell on the lower side of the international indices related to hunger, freedom of press, freedom of religion, democratic freedoms to give some examples. The violence against women, dalits, women and Adivasis showed a steep rise. Religious minorities have been subject to marginalization and ghettoisation through moves like Ram Temple, Love jihad, Cow-beef among others.

The mainstream media is totally in the lap of the ruling government and is critical of the opposition in a blind manner. It has stopped asking questions to the government which is its main job. Through social media networks and IT cell of BJP fake news and 'Hate other' is rampant.

This booklet is a small compilation of some of my writings on the current political scenario under BJP dispensation.

I am thankful to Abhish K. Bose for the interview.

Ram Puniyani

All India Secular Forum

1. Hindu Nationalism: From Genesis to Present

As per Indian Constitution India is a secular democratic Country. Lately Hindu nationalism has started impacting the nature of state and citizenship in a very strong way. As Indian Nationalism developed during freedom movement, Hindu nationalism and Muslim Nationalism came as opposites of Indian Nationalism.



The origin of Hindu nationalism and also Muslim Nationalism can be traced to colonial period. During colonial period, when the rising freedom movement was articulating the concept and values of Indian nationalism, the section of Hindus, from the kings of princely states and upper-caste elite to begin with, kept aloof from freedom movement asserted the concept of Hindu Nationalism. Hindu nationalism is a

politics and a category with a specific meaning which is the agenda of RSS-BJP. Similar were the roots of Muslim nationalism.

Hindu Nationalism: Historical roots

During colonial period the rising classes of industrialists, businessmen, workers and educated classes came together and formed different organizations: Madras Mahajan Sabha, Pune Sarvajanik Sabha, Bombay Association etc. These organizations felt for the need for an overarching political organization to put the demands to the Government. These organizations came together and formed Indian National Congress (INC) in 1885. (1) The declining sections of society, Muslim and Hindu landlords who felt threatened by the social and political changes, the landlords and kings also decided to come together to oppose the all-inclusive politics of Congress, which in due course became the major vehicle of the values of freedom movement. These declining sections were feeling threatened due to the social changes. To hide their social decline, they projected as if their religion is in danger. They raised similar slogans. (*Islam Khatre mein hai, (Islam in Danger) Hindu Khatre mein hai (Hinduism in Danger)*). They also did not like the standing up to the colonial masters by rising national movement as articulated by INC, which had started putting forward the demands for different rising social groups and thereby for India. National movement and Congress saw this country as 'India is a Nation in the making'.

As per declining sections of landlords and kings; standing up to, not bowing in front of the ruler, is against the teachings of 'our' religion so what is needed according to them is to promote the loyalty to the British. They, Hindu and Muslim feudal elements, came together and formed United India Patriotic Association in 1888. (2) The lead was taken by Nawab of Dhaka, Sir Syed Ahmad and Raja Shivprasad of Kashi. Later due to British machinations, the Muslim elite from this association separated and formed Muslim league in 1906, while in parallel to this the Hindu elite first formed Punjab Hindu Sabha in 1909 and then Hindu Mahasabha in 1915.

These communal formations argued for Muslim Nationalism and Hindu nationalism respectively. Hindu nationalists also developed the political ideology of Hindutva, articulated particularly by Savarkar in 1923 in his book 'Hindutva or Who is a Hindu?' (3) While Hinduism is a religion, Hindutva is a politics based on (a). Aryan race, (b) this land from Sindhu River to seas and (c) elite Brahminical culture. This was an enviable situation for British as such groups would weaken the rising national movement. These groups never protested against British rule, and neither did British repressed them in anyway. Rather British subtly encouraged them. On one side they quietly supported the Muslim League and parallel to this they meted out similar treatment to Hindu Mahasabha-RSS.

Hindu Nationalism: RSS

Taking a cue from the ideology of Hindutva brought forth by Savarkar, RSS came up in 1925 taking the path of Hindu Nationalism and aiming at the goal of Hindu *Rashtra* (Nation). The values of rising classes embodied in the persona of Bhagat Singh, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and many others mainly revolved around Indian Nationalism, built around the principles of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Justice. The ideology of Muslim League selectively drew from some Muslim traditions to assert the class, caste and gender hierarchy of feudal society. While Hindu Mahasabha and RSS had tomes like Manusmriti to talk about similar graded hierarchies of caste and gender. Muslim and Hindu communalists were not part of freedom movement, as freedom movement was all- inclusive and aimed at secular democratic values. Muslim and Hindu communalists drew from glories of Kings of the past and kept aloof from anti-British struggle. (4)

Gandhi's attempt to draw the masses in to an anti-British struggle was the major point, due to which the Constitutionalists like Jinnah; traditionalists of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha further drifted away, and consolidated themselves after 1920s. The trajectory of Hindu Nationalism from the decade of 1920 becomes very clear, to be on the side of British to oppose the Muslim Nationalists and also freedom struggle. Same applies to Muslim League, as it regarded Congress as a Hindu party. The Freedom of the country and tragic partition led to Muslim Leaguers going to Pakistan while leaving sufficient backlog to sustain Muslim communalism here in India. Hindu Nationalists in the form of Hindu Mahasabha and RSS

gradually started asserting themselves, beginning with murder of Mahatma Gandhi, who surely was amongst the best of the Hindus of twentieth century. (5)

RSS: A Brief History

RSS was formed in 1925 in Nagpur. The immediate cause of its formation was the discomfort among the upper castes/landlord elements due to the non-cooperation movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi as a part of freedom movement (1920). This movement brought the average people to the freedom movement; this caused discomfort to the elite sections of society. At the same time, the 'non-Brahmin movement' in Maharashtra was shaking the social domination of



Brahmin-landlord. The founders of RSS, most of them being Chittapvan Brahmins (higher sub-caste among Brahmins) were inspired by the ideas of nationalism of Hitler. (6) The RSS had contempt towards the concept of Indian nationalism, which was the ideology of freedom movement of India, led by Gandhi.

The RSS took off from Hindu Mahasabha, an organization formed by the Hindu kings and landlords. Hindu Mahasabha later was led by middle class-upper caste elites, the likes of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. He propounded the ideology of Hindutva, Hindu-ness, which is the concept of Nationalism based on Brahminical values of hierarchy of caste and gender. The RSS founders were to make the concepts of Hindutva and Hindu Rashtra as their base ideology and politics. (7)

The RSS began with training of its volunteers in a version of history which was communal and had nothing to do with truth objectivity. It said that India has always been a Hindu nation and Muslims are aggressors, Muslims and Christians are foreigners. The concept promoted by Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru that India is a land belonging to people of all religions is wrong and what is needed is to build a Hindu nation and undermine the Muslim nation. It decided to keep aloof from direct electoral politics and went on to create a set of volunteers, *swayamsevaks*, trained in the ideology of Hindutva. It kept aloof from freedom movement as it was based on the values of secularism and democracy (a). It stood for Hindu nation and perpetuation of Brahminical values in a new garb.

It was, and is, exclusively a male organization. When Laxmibai Kelkar, a person related to RSS worker, wanted women to be taken into RSS, they were advised to form a subordinate organization, Rashtra Sevika Samiti (1936). In the very name of this organisation the word *swayam* (self) is missing as this organization, like all other communal organizations, stands for superiority of males, and believes in patriarchy. It discouraged people from participating in movements related to freedom. (8) Barring few exceptions (K.B. Hedgewar), none from RSS went to jail during freedom movement. And those who happened to go to jail went either looking for more recruits for RSS or accidentally went to jail and later on apologized to the British and got themselves released from prison (like Atal Bihari Vajpayee). (9)

The RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha held Gandhiji responsible for appeasement of Muslims, for partition of the country etc. On this charge, Nathuram Godse, an ex-Pracharak (trained propagator) of RSS, who joined Hindu Mahasabha later, killed the father of the nation. Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel had said that it was due to the hate spread by the RSS that the country lost its father Mahatma Gandhi and Patel banned RSS for some time. (10) Savarkar was also one of the accused in the murder of Gandhiji, but he was let off for lack of corroborative evidence.

The RSS formed other subordinate organizations. One of them was Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) for working among students. In 1951, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee of Hindu Mahasabha in collaboration with RSS formed Bharatiya Jan Sangh. It raised identity related issues and resorted to war mongering by calling for Nuclear weapons to be made by India. It also demanded that Muslims should be Indianized (*Musalmanon ka Bhartiyaakaran*). It remained a marginal force till it joined the Jaya Prakash Narayan movement and became part of the Janata Party. Meanwhile, RSS was silently infiltrating in all the wings of state and society, bureaucracy, police, education, media, judiciary and army. It was working to oppose the progressive liberal values of Indian Constitution by promoting religiosity and conservatism in cultural arena. (11)

Jan Sangh joined Janata Party and came to power in 1977; its leaders became a part of the Government. Using this opportunity, they planted their workers in media and other areas of the state apparatus. After splitting Janata Party, the Jan Sangh component emerged as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980 on the stated objective of 'Gandhian Socialism'. For electoral purposes it projected these values in which it had never believed, Gandhian Socialism. RSS lent support to Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 elections (b). Meanwhile; it gave birth to Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram. VHP started taking up emotive issues and Ram temple was made the center of its political credo. They went on to form Bajrang Dal on the lines of storm troopers of Nazi party in Germany. (12)

During 1960s and 1980s, it kept propagating hate against minorities, first against Muslims and then against Christians. The result was anti-minority violence in many parts of the country. In

anti-Muslim violence, 80 per cent of the victims are Muslims. Most of the inquiry committee reports have concluded that riots are generally begun by RSS affiliates. (13) They create one or other pretext leading to violence. Due to communalization of state apparatus, most of the guilty are not punished. Many a time, other political leaders have also used communal violence for their narrow political goals. The agitation around Ram temple created a great deal of social hysteria, leading to Babri demolition and major violence in Mumbai, Bhopal, Surat and other places. Mumbai violence of 1992-93 shook the whole country and instilled a great amount of fear among minorities.

Due to violence, the RSS base became stronger and its political wing BJP too grew up to the extent that it could grab power at the center in 1996. (14) It came to power again and ruled the country, under RSS supervision, for six years. From 1997, in order to scare away Christian missionaries from Adivasi areas, the areas where their work is leading to empowerment of poor Adivasis, it started violence and during its course Pastor Graham Stewart Stains (1999), along with his two sons, was burnt alive on the charge that he was indulging in conversion. The Wadhwa Commission, which enquired into this murder, opined that the Pastor had not done any conversion. Most horrific form of anti-Christian violence was witnessed in the BJP-ruled Gujarat and later in Kamdhamal in Orissa (2008). With every act of communal violence, BJP became stronger. (c, 15)

After the 9/11 incident in the US, when globally terrorist activities started going up, the RSS intensified its campaign of demonization of Muslims saying that all terrorists are Muslims. With the Malegaon blast of 2006, concrete evidences against RSS affiliate ABVP's member Pragya Singh Thakur came to light. It was her motor cycle which was used in the blast, which brought the matters to surface. It led to other RSS workers associated with the Sadhvi. (16) The role of serving military officer Lt. Col. Prasad Shrikant Purohit, Swami Dyanand Pande, and Major Upadhyay in the blasts was being pursued doggedly by Hemant Karkare, the chief of Maharashtra ATS, before the 26/11 terror attack took place in Mumbai in which Karkare was killed (d).

Most of the links of these blasts led to those who were indoctrinated into the ideology of Hindu Rashtra by some or the other affiliates of RSS. The Hindu Jagran Samiti, near Thane-Mumbai, also allegedly resorted to acts of terror. This organization is inspired by Hindu Mahasabha and RSS leaders and believes that Hindus, the *Devs* (Gods), are facing the Danav (demons) in the form of Muslims and Christians in the *Kali Yug* (Dark Ages). As per them such acts of terror should be engineered to teach these communities a lesson.

With the polarization of society on the upswing, the electoral strength went on the rise. With clever support to Anna Hazare movement, RSS combine succeeded in defaming Congress on the eve of 2014 elections. This opened its pathway to grabbing power at the Centre. With corporate

support and immaculate electoral management, the BJP came to power. From 2014 onwards apart from other phenomenon, the number of RSS *shakhas* rose phenomenally and emotive issues have created an atmosphere of intolerance in the society and has succeeded in relegating minorities to second class citizenship. (17)

Hindu Nationalists formed first Jan Sangh (1951) and later the present BJP. The major issue taken up by these nationalists was opposition to cooperative farming, public sector and undertook a program called 'Indianization of Muslims', 'protection of Cow', 'Love Jihad' and Ghar Wapasi (Reconversion to Hinduism) along with hyper nationalism, directed against Pakistan. Hate for Pakistan hints at Indian Muslims association with Pakistan and demonizes them in society.

The identity related issues have been the staple diet for religious nationalist tendencies. 'Cow as our mother', Ram Temple, Ram Setu, Abolition of article 370 and Uniform civil code has been the foundation around which emotive hysterical movements have been built. While they keep bringing to our notice as to under whose rule more riots have taken place, one forgets that the root of communal violence lies in 'Hate other' ideology spread by communal streams. And most of the communal violence led to coming to power of communal party. Its major outcome is polarization of communities along religious lines.

Present Ruling Dispensation

Modi-BJP is part of Hindu nationalist ideology. They gloss over the fact that the large masses of Indian people, Hindus never called and do not call themselves Hindu nationalists. Gandhi was not a Hindu nationalist despite being a Hindu in the moral and social sense. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was not a Muslim nationalist, despite being a devout Muslim, being a Islamic scholar of highest caliber.

During freedom movement also most of the people of all religions, identified with Indian Nationalism and not with religious nationalism as being projected by Modi and company. Even today people following different religions identify with Indian nationalism and not with religious Nationalism on the lines of Modi and his ilk.

Hindu nationalism is exclusive and divisive, Indian Nationalism is inclusive; rooted in the issues of this world, and not the identity related ones. Unfortunately, Hindu nationalists have been raising the pitch around identity issues undermining the issues of the poor and marginalized. The Indian Nationalism, the product of our freedom movement is being challenged by the Hindu nationalism in India, Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar and Sri Lanka and is a major threat to the process of democratization in those countries; Muslim Nationalism has wreaked havoc in Pakistan, and many other places.

As Modi came to power in 2014 on the promises of ending corruption, controlling price rise, controlling violence against women, none of this came true. Instead, the rising prices broke the back of common people. The demonetization increased the miseries of people as nearly 100 people died while standing in the queues to withdraw their own money, and later 99.7% of currency returned to the banks. The implementation of GST was tardy and increased the miseries of traders and others. The state started being more authoritarian to the extent that many felt it is moving towards 'elected autocracy' (18). The institutions of state, which are autonomous like Election Commission, Enforcement Directorate and CBI, started showing their partisanship to the ruling dispensation.

The overall atrocities against Muslims, Christians and Dalits started going up. (19) The Muslims were targeted in the name of cow-beef. Nearly 100 people died after 2014 in mob lynching. Of these over 80% were Muslims and remaining were Dalits. The campaign to stop interfaith marriage took the form of intensifying the attacks on interfaith couples where the girl happens to be a Hindu. New legislations are being brought in the name of freedom of religion. These aim at preventing conversions away from Hinduism, while conversion to Hinduism, in the name of Ghar Wapasi (Return Home) is going on. Many a prayer meetings have been attacked on the pretext that conversion to Christianity is going on. Sub radar violence against Christians is an ongoing phenomenon.

The tedious and painful exercise of National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam was undertaken on the premise that nearly 50 Lakh Bangladeshi infiltrators have entered Assam. People were to submit their papers related to citizenship. At the end of the whole exercise 20 Lakh people were found to be without papers. Of this 12.5 Lakh were Hindus and remaining Muslims. In major violation of Indian Constitution, Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was brought in. This gives citizenship to persecuted minorities in neighboring countries. All are eligible for citizenship barring Muslims as per this law. The response to this came in the form of massive Shaheen Bagh movement. In city after city Muslim women did the sit-ins, which went on in a peaceful way (20). To disrupt this great democratic movement for withdrawal of CAA, the Delhi violence was orchestrated. In this violence 50 people lost their lives of which 2/3rd were Muslims. The major damage was done to the Muslim properties.

The communal forces are always in collusion with the big Corporate. Three new farm laws were brought in. These laws were totally opposed by farmers as it makes them vulnerable in the hands of big corporations eyeing the agricultural sector. Huge protests went on in Delhi. In these nearly 600 farmers died. Government was impervious for long time and then withdrew these oppressive laws on the eve of elections. (21)

The agenda of Hindu nationalism is multifold. At one level it wants to put the religious minorities, Muslims and Christians on the margins. Dalits and women are deprived of affirmative action and status quo of their social situation, their subordinate position is maintained. The civic norms have been shelved and social activists working for the cause of Adivasis and Dalits have been labeled as 'Urban Naxals' and put behind the bars without any proper or expeditious process to give justice to them.

As Jean Dreze points out that Hindu nationalism is a revolt of the upper caste male against the values of equality due to which Dalits and women are marching towards equality. (22) In revised edition of book on Partition, Ambedkar strongly opposed the formation of Pakistan in the name of Islam. His argument was that if Pakistan is formed in the name of Islam, the path of Hindu Raj will be facilitated and Hindu raj will be a great calamity for Dalits. (e)

Way Forward

Struggle for restoration of democratic values is a big task in current times. The misconceptions against minorities have been constantly propagated through multiple channels and have become the part of social thinking to a large extent. The hatred against these sections is widely prevalent; it is this hatred which forms the ground on which violence can be orchestrated. This violence in turn leads to polarization and coming of communal forces in the seat of power. Communal forces in power in turn strengthen the RSS, the organization working the agenda of Hindu nation.

A multilayered struggle to counter the misconceptions against religious minorities is the core task. This needs to be supplemented by building the bridges of love and amity between different religious communities. The social movements for defense of human rights need to be supported and a platform of social issues has to work for the values of Indian Constitution, where fraternity, equality and justice have to accompany the liberty. Tasks are immense.

Foot Notes (numerical)

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2. Hindutva: Ideological Foundations

The construction of Hindutva is to be seen in the backdrop of emergence of Hinduism as a homogenous religion. The concept of Brahmanical Hinduism, projected as Hinduism, was at the root of multiple religious revivalist movements. Its political translation began mainly with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who initiated the Ganapati Festival to wean away the popular participation of lower castes people in Muharram festival. Some sociologists (1) have called such ideological



maneuvers as “manipulative reinterpretation of cultural material” and “invention of tradition”. Later Tilak went on to organize a festival in honor of Shivaji, who broke the Moghul hold on western India and opened the way for rampage of Maratha armies through much of India. A strong anti-Muslim slant was brought into the function.

Anti-Muslim sentiments were consistently used to project a political methodology of consolidating the Hindus. Starting from Bankimchandra Chatterjee, various other Hindu national ideologues had whipped the fear psychosis against Muslims being the ones’ threatening the survival of Hindus. All these fabrications were manufactured and propagated by the ascendant, nascent, amorphous Hindu nationalist forces. The combination of ‘Syndicated Hinduism’ with nationalism was brewed by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar who can be called the first exponent of the doctrine of Hindutva. The mix of Brahminical Hinduism with nationalism reflecting the interests of upper castes and part of upper class was defined and later refined on the exclusionist principles, which are so basic to the Brahminism. Savarkar’s initial anti-British struggles were very impressive. After assuming the role of the proponent of Hindutva his major energies were channelized in strengthening the politics of hate, formation of communal Hindu Mahasabha and helping RSS from distance.

Savarkar’s work ‘Hindutva: Who is Hindu’ (1923) became and remains the basic text defining this political concept. With the simultaneous rise of Muslim communalism: Muslim nationalism, in due course most of the Hindu consolidations took place by showing the fear of Muslims. This nationalism consolidated itself on the ground of the threatening other, but this threatening other was not the British imperialist colonizers whose rule the country was suffering but was the ‘Muslim’. As an aside we should note here that Savarkar’s anti-British struggles and anti-British activities totally ceased after his release by the British, and from then on all his guns were to be

targeted against the Muslims, presented in most threatening way by him. Savarkar argued (later on this became the ideological base of most of the Hindutva organizations) “the Aryans who settled in India at the dawn of history already formed a nation, now embodied in the Hindus.... Hindus are bound together not only by the ties of the love they bear to a common fatherland and by the common blood that courses through their veins and keeps our hearts throbbing and our affection warm but also by the ties of the common homage we pay to our great civilization, our Hindu culture.”(2) Thus Hindutva according to him rests on three pillars: geographical unity, racial features and common culture.” He further went on to elaborate the criterion for who is Hindu? According to him all those who regard this land as their fatherland and holy-land are the only ones who are Hindu and thereby the people to whom this land belongs. This led to the automatic interpretation that the Christians and the Muslims, whose holy places are in Jerusalem and Mecca, are not on par with the `Hindus' who own this country. This Initiated the theorizing of the `doubting of patriotism of Muslim's' in India.

Savarkar posits, “...but besides culture the tie of common holy-land has at times proved stronger than the claims of a motherland. Look at Mohammedans: Mecca to them is a sterner reality than Delhi or Agra.” This development of the concept of Hindutva comes in succession on the construction of Brahminism as Hinduism and this Brahminical Hinduism then forming the base for Hindutva politics. Savarkar began to articulate the ideology of Hindu elite (zamindars, Brahmins, kings) by integrating Brahminical Hinduism with nationalism, calling it Hindutva which further showed the way for building the Hindu Rashtra. His key sentence was `Hinduize all politics and militarize all Hindudom”.

Hinduism	Hindutva
(1) A collation of multiple traditions: Brahminism, Shramanism- Charvak, Tantra, Kabir, Tukaram	(1) Politics of Hindu elite, Drawing from Brahminical Hinduism.
(2) Brahminism: Caste system, the dominant eth	(2) Brew of Brahminical Hinduism and Nationalism
(3) Brahminism projected as Hinduism initially in 6-10 century, then in early 19 th century, Brahminical Hinduism projected to be synonymous with Hinduism.	(3) Aims at Hindu Rashtra based on Brahminical Hinduism

(4) Shramanic traditions: Constant rebellion: attempt to escape the clutches of Brahminism: conversion to Buddhism (early times and now after the lead given by Ambedkar). Vivekananda said: Why amongst the poor are so many Mohammedans..., not due to Escape the tyranny of the Zamindar and the priests.	(4) Led initially by Brahmins: Banias: even now dominant leadership from upper castes.
(5) 'Dharma' is a mix of Humanism and caste based religious duties.	(5) Political expression through Sangh Parivar now, earlier Hindu Mahasabha and RSS.
(6) Semitisation process being spear- headed by Ram Holy Book: Gita, clergy: Shankaracharyas e	(6) A mix of fundamentalism and Fascism (see table)
(7) Its proponents claim it to be tolerant and catholic.eg : earlier it's attitude to shudras eg: Now it's attitude to Muslims	(7) VHP brings in the stink of fundamentalism in the essentially fascist politics of RSS, BJP and Bajarang dal.

Savarkar's politics was rival to Gandhian politics. Gandhi - the representative of Indian Nationalism was branded as conciliator and appeaser of Muslims. Savarkar propounded that struggle for supremacy would begin after British left and that the Christians and Muslims were the real enemies who could be defeated only by "Hindutva". His key sentence was "Hinduise all politics and militarize Hindudom". He maintained that this land belonged to Hindus and so by implication Muslims with Hold Land in Mecca and Christians with Holy land in Jerusalem cannot have equal status to 'Hindus'. This concept was later to be made more explicit by Golwalkar, who despite adoring Hitler, was 'generous' and 'kind' enough to these 'aliens' by granting them the status of second-class citizens! With this began the concept of Hindu Raj - the precursor of the present Sangh Parivar goal - the Hindu Rashtra. The final crystallization of Hindutva occurred with foundation of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which became the Father organization for plethora of organizations, which were to take birth after a period of consolidation of the core swayamsevaks (volunteers).

Hindutva: Growth

The early simmering of Hindutva can be seen in the opposition to the secular Congress movement of 19th century. The Jamindar (landlord) moneylenders, Brahmin and Banias spearheaded the reaction to secular politics. This support base constantly stood by the Hindutva politics all through. Later some industrialists did successfully ride on two boats of supporting secular Gandhian movement and also supporting Hindutva movement. But mostly the modern industrialists stood by the secular movement led by Gandhi. The Rajas (Hindu kings of Princely States) also by and large stood by the politics of RSS. The march of industrialization process changed the social composition and brought in newer layers into society. Though BJP and its predecessor the Jan Sangh began with small electoral support, this support was fairly consistent. It was the urban middle classes, sections of upper castes. Let us have

a brief look at the changes in social composition, which have occurred during last 50 years of the republic. The proportion of urban population has gone up by 20-25 per cent. They also constitute the



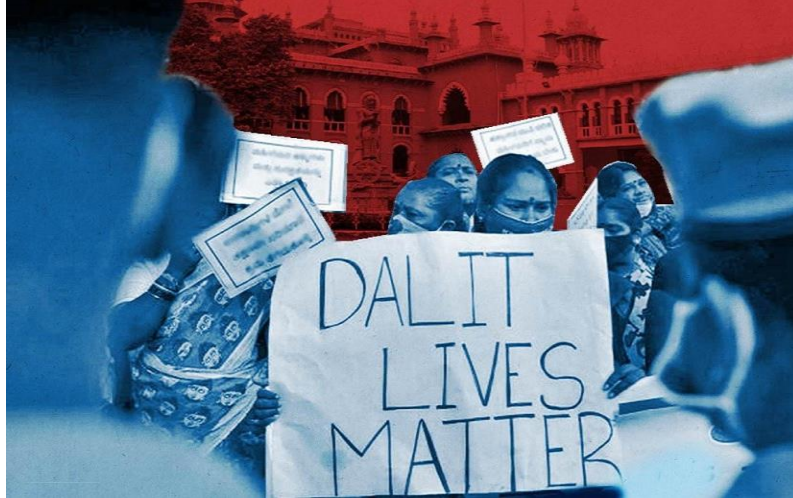
ones' who have derived maximum benefit of modern education and the facilities thrown up by the industrialization process. They do have a sort of dominant presence in the society. The cultural, social and political aspirations of this Sector is the ground, on which has risen the edifice of Sangh Parivar.

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3. Dalits and Communalism

In Karakthal village in Ahmadabad, Gujarat, a Dalit youth was thrashed for daring to sport a moustache. (1) In Chikkmagaluru, Karnataka, a Dalit youngster was tortured and subjected to degrading treatment in police custody. (2) In Madhya Pradesh, the wife of a Dalit laborer, five



months pregnant, was raped before her children over his refusal to chop some trees. (3) These are just some of the anti-Dalit atrocities reported from across India of late.

The rise in anti-Dalit crimes is there not for the first time, (4) but ever since the BJP-led NDA government came to power in 2014, their incidence has climbed significantly. [Crimes

against Dalits and Adivasis have increased by 27.3% and 20.3%, respectively in 2018.] (6) It contradicts the claim of the BJP that its government and politics are pro-Hindu and pro-poor. It is not just the minority Muslims and Christians who are subjected to 'other-ing' process in the current dispensation. The growing frequency of caste-based atrocities reflects how the BJP encourages and promotes Brahmanism. It happens at the cost of those Hindus who do not belong to elite castes according to the traditional caste hierarchy. In other words, the impact of Brahmanical policies and strategies on the Dalits, women, and others is hugely under-recognized in India. The words of the first law minister BR Ambedkar seem to be coming true. (7) "If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country," he had written. (8)

A two-pronged process is underway in India. First, there is a decline in the social status of the Dalits, which reflects in the increasing atrocities. Many Dalit communities are also in an economic decline because, for ideological reasons, the BJP has devalued, banned or opposed some trades they engage in without creating alternative sources of income. "Constitutional and Legal Challenges Faced by Religious Minorities in India", a report sponsored by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). (9) It says, "...religious minority communities and Dalits, both have faced discrimination and persecution... In particular, since 2014, hate crimes, social boycotts, assaults, and forced conversion have escalated dramatically." (10)

While the socioeconomic scenario for Dalit and other marginalized groups has deteriorated, the government has done little to change things. Affirmative action through reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes existed, but the policy was never properly implemented. As a result, multiple Dalit communities remain under-served by reservation in educational

institutes and under-represented in jobs. Now, the BJP, which is in power at the Centre and in many states, is diluting the very basis of reservations. Instead of taking historical deprivation as the benchmark for affirmative action, the government wants economic criterion to determine eligibility for reservations. (11) The cut-off for eligibility in a new reservation quota based on economic criteria is so liberal that well-off sections of elite castes would easily capture this quota. Therefore, even within the economic reservations, the BJP has accused of catering to the cream of upper caste society rather than the less well-off or poor.

What is not acknowledged in the public discourse is that the concept of “creamy layer” applies to reservations for the backward classes. Those above the cut-off of income and some other criteria are barred from seeking reservations. It means the economically better off, and therefore more educated, among the OBCs are at a disadvantage even as the seats reserved for OBCs are not filled. Further, there are demands to introduce a creamy layer to determine eligibility of Scheduled Caste applicants for reservations. This would exclude a large section of the educated among the Dalits from any affirmative action policy as well. (12)

Rubbing salt in the wound of exclusion and marginalization of the Dalits is the campaign run by affiliates of the RSS to project the cow as holy. Violence over allegations of sale and purchase of cattle has upset the applecart of the rural economy, affecting farmers in general and the Dalits in particular. This is because several Dalit groups engage in occupations related to processing cowhide, which in turn goes into manufacturing consumer and industrial goods. Additionally, many victims of lynching over this “emotional” issue were Dalits. (13) The Una episode, in which, seven Dalit men were stripped and beaten sent a frightening message to the community. Forget cowhide, even the trade in buffaloes and goats came under a cloud due to the vigilantism unleashed in rural areas. (14)

What we are witnessing is a systematic marginalization of Dalits in the socioeconomic realm even as they are co-opted for electoral purposes. The BJP has gained a toehold over many SC-Adivasi-OBC constituencies through its “social engineering” and other mechanisms. Of the 84 Lok Sabha seats reserved for Scheduled Caste candidates, in 2014, the BJP won 40 seats, according to a Centre for the Study of Developing Societies study. It could make this happen because its affiliated organizations, such as the Samajik Samrasta Manch (Social Harmony Forum), Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and others, are actively Hinduising the people who live in these regions. In other words, the BJP and its affiliates are promoting Brahmanical religiosity in these areas. (15)

Many icons of Dalit-Bahujan communities, such as Raja Suhel Dev, have been lionized and valorized. However, true to its style, these popular local icons are painted over as anti-Muslim figures. Affiliates of the BJP and its parent body, the RSS, have glorified Ambedkar too—while opposing his core belief in equality, pluralism and diversity. The BJP has won over several Dalit leaders who further this political agenda through the cultural and social realms. Scholar Anand Teltumde has called leaders such as the late Union Minister and leader Ram Vilas Paswan and RPI leader and Minister of State for Social Justice Ramdas Athawale as “Hanumans” of Hindu

nationalist politics. However, Chirag, Paswan's son and a minister, openly called himself the Hanuman of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

That said, the younger sections of Dalit communities are waking up to the harsh realities of Hindu nationalism due to their growing anger and frustration over the economic crisis and growing atrocities, especially against Dalits-women. (16) Surely they will stand against the tactics of Brahmanical nationalism as time goes on. A newer generation of Dalit leaders, such as Jignesh Mevani in Gujarat and Chandrashekhara Ravan in Uttar Pradesh, has warned that the marginalized are being cornered in exchange for temporary and conditional "respectability". It is hard to predict when the Dalit community will overcome the "magic spell" of the RSS-BJP combine, but in the growing atrocities and economic marginalization, people can see the motive to keep them in a subordinate position indefinitely.

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4. OBC: Why no caste census

On 14 April, numerous organisations celebrate the first law minister and Constitution-writer Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar's birth anniversary. The celebrations every year are big programs and should remind us of Ambedkar's contributions to uplift India's Scheduled Caste, Scheduled



Tribe, and other disadvantaged communities. Now his birth anniversary is being celebrated in over 150 countries. Most groups committed to social justice and equality, which oppose birth-based hierarchies and injustices, mark this day with reverence and hope. Often, this celebration takes on a quasi-religious overtone, as rituals are accorded more space than

Ambedkar's values. In this context, the struggle to fulfil the dreams he fought all his life for must be re-launched and sustained. (1)

Other formations, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its Hindu nationalist progeny, deeply oppose the 'annihilation of caste' and the principles Ambedkar stood for. Instead, they project the notion of harmony among castes, which does not involve altering the hierarchy inherent in caste system. Ambedkar espoused affirmative action for the deprived sections of society. Reservations were initially meant to last for ten years—perhaps Ambedkar and others hoped a decade would be sufficient to root out the malice of caste from Hindu society. However, implementing the reservation policy itself lies in the hands of members of elite castes, and they found ways to circumvent it. That is why discrimination and exclusion based on caste have continued, and ending it remains a prerequisite to the march toward social justice.

The Constitution of India—Ambedkar chaired the committee that drafted it—provided reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. However, backward classes, a significant constituent of society, did not get recognition or reservations. The Other Backward Classes (OBC) was not a legal category until the Mandal Commission report was implemented in the 1990s.

Further, the last decadal census that considered the caste composition of India was released in 1931. At the time, the proportion of backward classes was 52%, which the Mandal report relied on. It became the basis for ensuring 27% of reservations in the 1990s to the backward classes. These classes were identified based on social and educational backwardness, thus beginning India's post-independence journey in affirmative action.

But reservations, for any social group, have always been an eyesore to a large section of Indian society. Groups such as “Youth for Equality”, which stood for the abolition of reservations, spread the idea that reservations have allowed undeserving people to find jobs at the cost of “deserving” ones. The social biases around Dalits and OBCs recently culminated in the deaths by suicide of Rohith Vemula (2) and Darshan Solanki (3). This bias also formed the base of anti-Dalit violence in the 1980s in Ahmedabad and anti-backwards violence in Gujarat in 1985.

In the meantime, the BJP, using its Hindutva plank, floated organisations like the Samajik Samrasta Manch or Social Harmony Forum to reach the most marginalised sections of society. At an ideological level, the Hindu right-wing has made efforts to attribute the ills of the caste system to the “invading” Muslim rulers—the crux of Hindutva. This effort has paid it rich electoral dividends but did not improve the conditions for the poorest and most marginalised sections. One outcome was that the BJP has been able to score many victories for its leaders from constituencies reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The pracharaks (propagators) and swayamsevaks (volunteers) of the RSS have pursued what is widely known as social engineering in tribal regions, encouraging Sanskritization without rights and charitable works without demanding the State recognise the rights of the people who live in these backward and remote regions.

It is no surprise that the BJP and its associates also celebrate Ambedkar anniversary with gusto. Yet they undermine the need for a caste census which can pave the way to modify policies which would benefit the marginalised sections in a real sense (4).

This background makes Congress leader Rahul Gandhi’s recent speech in Kolar, Karnataka, significant. He has asked for a population census and said the results of affirmative action are not visible in the top bureaucracy in the Union government, as hardly 7% belong to the most marginalised or backward sections. He said the findings of the 2011 caste census, conducted when his party shared power with other constituents of the United Progressive Alliance, must be made public. He said, “The data will provide evidence if OBCs, Dalits, and Adivasis don’t have enough representation in the country’s politics proportionate to their population.” (<https://www.outlookindia.com/national/rahul-gandhi-questions-modi-government-on-caste-census-and-reservations-in-kolar-karnataka-news-278875>) Share in power and representation proportionately to their share in the population is a long-standing slogan and demand from India’s disadvantaged communities.

In contrast, the BJP is trying to dodge the issue. The party did not want a caste census and pleaded in the Supreme Court in 2021 that such a census would be “administratively difficult and cumbersome”. It said it was a “conscious policy decision to exclude such information from the census purview”. Its position has not changed. The real intent of the BJP vis-a-vis social justice becomes apparent when it makes crucial decisions.

During the last nine years, it introduced reservations for the Economically Weaker Section or EWS, a category that dilutes provisions for the non-elite castes and social groups. It is widely understood that the EWS category will help the better-off members of elite caste groups whose income is below a generous Rs 8 lakh a year cut-off. The BJP wants to obfuscate the fact that economic status was never a criterion to provide or deny reservations. Reservations in India are based on historical discrimination (for the Scheduled Castes), geographical remoteness (for the Scheduled Castes), and social and educational backwardness (for the OBCs). But the BJP wants to nullify caste as a category for people wishing to improve their societal position. (5) Its constructed biases are why the BJP faces the charge that Ambedkar's principles don't matter to it. Hindu-nationalist politics could spread widely precisely because it opposed the growing assertion of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and backward sections. Its foundational ideological pronouncements glorified holy tomes and traditions that boost traditional caste and gender hierarchies. A genuine assessment of the population of different marginalised sections is needed to modify our policies and bring society's uneven and unequal growth on the path of equality.

Numerous and relentless deaths of students from non-elite castes studying in top educational institutions and allegations that caste-based discrimination led to these deaths should awaken us to combat caste-based discrimination. India must strive for a future where the annihilation of caste is the central credo of society.

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5. Are Adivasis Hindus?

Few years ago, massive protests are going on against NPR, NCR and CAA. At the same time, we are going to begin the process of decadal census in 2021. RSS was active in promoting NPR, NCR and CAA. At the same time RSS wants that Adivasis should register themselves as Hindus rather than ticking the column of 'Others'. As per their spokesperson in the 2011 census many Adivasis



groups ticked that column because of which the population of Hindus came down to by 0.7 percent point to come down to 79.8 %. This has sent signals to this Hindu nationalist organization and is planning to ensure that Adivasis tick the column of Hindus in this census.

As such RSS has a very clever attitude in defining the term Hindu. The first formulation was

by Savakakar who said that all those who regard the land east of Indus as their Holy land and Father land are Hindus. This left out Muslims and Christians, and brought all others in the ambit of Hindu fold. From the decade of 1980s due to electoral compulsions, they have been trying to articulate that all those who are living in India are Hindus. Murli Manohar Joshi stated that Muslims are Ahmadiya Hindus and Christians are Christi Hindus (1). Later there was a controversy when they restated that Sikhs are not a separate religion but are a sect of Hinduism. Many Sikh organizations stood up to say that Sikhism is a religion by itself and recalled the book of Kahan Singh Nabha, "Hum Hindu Nahin". (2)

As far as Adivasis are concerned in contrast to what is being planned by Hindu nationalist RSS, many Adivasis groups have been meeting from last many years to demand just the contrary. As per them there should be a column where they can tick their identity of Adivasis. There are active campaigns among Adivasis groups to uphold their Adivasi identity in Census. As per them in the first census which was conducted in Independent India, the column, Aborigines, was there, which was later removed forcing them to club themselves with other religions.

After 1951, in addition to Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jain and Buddha, the column 'others' was also there, which was removed in 2011. Even during British period if you look at the censuses of the British era (from 1871 to 1931); there was provision for tribes to choose Aborigine as an option. There are nearly 83 religious practices being followed by Adivasis. Few major of these are Sarna, Gondi, Punem, Adi, and Koya. What they share in common is that they are animists, worship nature and spirit of ancestors; do not have priestly class or Holy Scriptures and Gods and Goddesses characteristic of the broad Hindu pantheon.

RSS as per its political agenda of Hindu Nation regards them as Vanvasi. They pontificate that they have been part of Hindu society who were driven away to forests to escape the forcible

conversion being done by the Muslim invaders. This concoction is contrary to the interpretations based on the studies from population genetics. The Hindu nationalist argues that Aryans have been the original inhabitants of the country from where they spread to other parts of the World. The book by Tony Joseph, 'Early Indians' tells us that away from the race theory, we are all mixed up. The first inhabitants in our land were the ones who emigrated from South Asia over Sixty thousand years ago. (3)

The Indo-Aryans came here nearly three thousand years ago and they pushed the aborigines to the forests and hills and that's what constitutes the Adivasi community of India.

Hindu Nationalists like all the nationalists who construct their nationalism around their religion claim to be the most original inhabitants of the land, and their interpretations of past are molded according to that. RSS right from beginning has not been using the word Adivasi, it calls them Vanvasi. As per its agenda it wants them to be part of Hindu fold, despite Adivasis themselves saying that they are not Hindus, they have beliefs and practices which are far away from Hinduism in whatever form.

To enhance its political reach from the decades of 1980s in particular its work in Adivasis areas has been intensified. While 'Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram', part of RSS Combine which was formed much earlier, it was in the decades of 1980s that their work was jacked up by sending more Pracharaks (propagators) in Adivasi areas. We see that in Gujarat, Dangs and nearby area, Swami Aseemanand, in MP, centered around Jhabua-the followers of Asaram Bapu and in Orissa Swami Laxmananad stationed them. They saw Christian missionaries working in the field of education and health as an obstacle to Hinduization of Adivasis. Their propaganda against Christian missionaries led to the ghastly murder of Pastor Graham Stains (4). It was this propaganda which led to anti-Christian violence in various forms, the most horrific being the Kandhamal violence of 2008.

In order to culturally co-opt them into the fold of Hinduism they began series of religious congregations, Kumbhs. Shabri Kumbh in Dangs and many other Adivasis predominant areas created an atmosphere of fear, Adivasis were asked to be part of it, saffron flags were distributed and they were made to put it in their houses. Two religious icons were popularized in these areas, one was Shabri and other was Hanuman. To cap it all, Ekal Vidyalayas, started spreading RSS's interpretation of history in these areas. The other angle of the whole thing is that Adivasis are living in the areas rich in minerals, which the BJP supporter Corporate World wants to take over. (5)

World over aborigines have similar pattern. They are animists and what they practice is a culture as such. Many have converted to other religions out of their choice for sure, but finally in these matters what is important is the self-perception. Hemant Soren the Chief Minister of Jharkhand pointed out that "Adivasis are not Hindus." Keeping that in mind; the column of Aborigines needs to find its place in our census forms. (6)

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6. RSS and the Gender Question

One always wondered as to why the patriarch of Sangh combine, the plethora of organizations pursuing the goal of Hindu Nation, RSS, is an exclusively male organization. While one hears quite a bit about Uma Bharati, Sushma Swaraj Vijaya Raje Scindia, Nirmala Sitaraman, Smriti Irani and



Sadhvi Ritambhara in the recent past, one knew that even they could not enter the hallowed precincts of the controller of Hindutva politics, the RSS itself. We were enlightened about this by none other than the RSS Supreme dictator (Sarsanghchalak), Mr. K. Sudarshan himself.

While talking at a function (March 21, 2005) meant to release the Video CD on, Rashtra Sevika Samiti's (National Servants Group) founder, Laxmibai

Kelkar, he pointed out that women are barred from RSS as Indian society did not accept, and does not accept even now, young boys and girls working together because it could have consequences (!) on the society. One does not know which Indian society Mr. Sudarshan is talking about with all the co-ed schools and women and men working together in most of the spheres of society, but it is not difficult to guess these consequences, which he is talking about! Keeping women out of RSS is not a minor matter for RSS, as it reflects its own ideological understanding at deeper level. That Indian society does not accept men and women, working together are a make-believe mirage meant to hide RSS ideology, its foundation in patriarchal value system.

The first RSS supremo, Dr. K.B Hedgewar, was approached by Laxmibai Kelkar in 1936 with a request to be permitted to join the organization as she wished to get the lathi (baton) training for women's self-protection. RSS is specialist in imparting this training to its volunteers. Faced

with the dilemma of giving permission to a woman in the exclusively male outfit, keeping in mind the ideology and functioning necessities of RSS, he prompted her to form Rashtra Sevika Samiti, rather than permitting her to join RSS. (1) The functional reason for this is that the highest rung in RSS ladder, the Pracharaks (propagators) has to take a vow of celibacy (Brahmacharya) and with women also becoming part of the same organizations the consequences may not be to the liking of RSS founders. And this is what Dr. Hedgewar was afraid of and this is what Mr. Sudarshan was also scared of.

The other and deeper reason had to do with the ideology of RSS, which is rooted in male domination, the commitment to the hierarchy of gender. On one hand RSS was planned as the controller of the Hindutva movement, so this has to be naturally by the males. This also gets reflected in the names for this organization, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (sangh) and Rashtra Sevika Samiti (samiti). The latter is a body subordinate to RSS, and in its name the word swayam, 'self', 'being' is missing. This is not an accidental omission. It reflects that men control the 'being' of woman.

This was the time when parallel to the ideas of National movement and other progressive movements, women had started their forays into national and social life on equal footing. While one presumes there was a good presence of women in national movement, they were conspicuous by their absence in organizations like Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha. This was also a time when Ambedkar was burning Manu Smriti on the ground that it laid the provisions for slavery of Shudras and women. (2) It is no accident that Manusmriti and laws of Manu were eulogized by the Hindutva ideologues. Rashtra Sevika Samiti was instructed as being the subordinate. As ideologically RSS was/is rooted in the feudal hierarchies of caste and gender, the tasks of samiti were outlined, as presented in one of the pamphlets of the samiti, "due to western impact, women were struggling for equal rights and economic freedom. There was every risk of women becoming non-committed to love, sacrifice, service. This unnatural change in women might have led to disintegration of family the primary and most important unit for imparting good *samskars* (social norms) ('Gender in Hindu nation', Paula Bachetta, p.8).

This was reflective enough of the agenda of the samiti. All the Sangh ideologues have stuck to this in different languages. This ideology in due course affirmed that primary role of women is that of mother, and in raising the children, giving them good *samskars* (another name for indoctrinating the children with Brahminical values). Later there were other organizations where women got associated with sangh, BJP Mahila Morcha and Durga Vahini are the two other major one's amongst these. The sample of this ideology comes to four times and over again. In the wake of Roop Kanwar sati (burning of women on the funeral pyre of their husbands) incident, when Parliament was debating a new legislating to ban Sati, Vijayaraje Scindia, BJP vice president, took out a procession to parliament with the slogan that committing sati is not only the glorious tradition of Hindu women but it is also their right. One wonders why the leader of this procession herself did not exercise her right after the death of her husband!

Another of their outpourings, which is most representative of this ideology, was the interview given by Mridula Sinha, the then chief of BJP Mahila Morcha. (Savvy April 1994) In this interview

she defended the dowry system, went on to uphold the wife beating and opposed women's equality apart from advising the women that they should not go out to work unless it is a dire economic necessity. Her thrust in the interview was to equate the women's struggle for equality as being equivalent to opting for a life of 'loose morals'!

The similarity of RSS attitude to women and that of Taliban or other Islamic fundamentalist streams on one hand and Hitler's advice to women on the other is so starkly similar. Islamic fundamentalists prohibit the women from going outside for work and also hide behind *sharia* (Islamic laws as per tradition) to curtail women's rights. Hitler articulated this most blatantly when he said that German women's greatest glory is in motherhood and that women's world should revolve around Kitchen, Church and Children.

While RSS and its celibate pracharaks may come with a more sophisticated language of respect for women, place of women in Indian tradition to selectively highlight some exceptions to the oppression of women, their present agenda is to dish out the patriarchal impositions in more subtle and clever language, but surely women's movement for equality, has definitely made good strides to see the real goals of Hindutva ideology and to reject it through and through.

Notes

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(A book of great importance on the topic, Women and the Hindu Right: Edited by Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, Kali For Women, Delhi 1996)

7. Rising Majoritarian Politics: Dilemma of Indian Muslims

As atrocities against Muslim minorities increase and the news comes in that various Muslim leaders and intellectuals are knocking the doors of RSS for a dialogue, what do we make of it? A brief peep into the past may help us understand the current dilemmas of Muslim community.



The partition of India left the Indian Muslims in a precarious position. Pakistan was formed due to a complex phenomenon, in which the British policy of 'divide and rule' aided by the Muslim and Hindu communalisms played the central role. While the demand of Pakistan was from elite sections of Muslims, it also attracted some other sections also. Pakistan (East and West) was primarily for the

Muslim majority areas, while an equal number of Muslims were scattered all over the country, most of whom had not stood for this retrograde solution, neither did they desire to go there nor they went to the 'land of pure' (Pakistan). Before we go further the later division of Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangla Desh stands as a live critique of the theory that 'Nations can be based on religion'.

Irrespective of this; the Muslims who continued to live their well-deserved citizenship here were and are regularly taunted that Pakistan was meant to be for them so why are they here. After Independence, Muslim Communalism got deflated and changed its form into a small tendency giving due provocations to the Majoritarian politics. Majoritarian politics duly started coming to center stage culminating in holding political power from 1996 onwards. It is now in the saddle for last close to nine years.

The pressure of rising sectarian politics manifested in the waves of violence directed against this community and in due course the insecurity of the community led to its ghettoization at places. The walls of Hate have been erected all around making the fertile ground for intimidation, violence and glorifying of bulldozer politics. The starting point of the community was a low socio-economic status and it got worst compounded by rising marginalization and sense of insecurity.

While party which ruled during earlier period cannot be totally exonerated from the failure to undertake affirmative action for this deprived section, its' little intent of affirmative action was mocked as 'appeasement politics'. This was no appeasement in any way; it was at best going the way of conservative orthodox sections of leadership while the Muslim masses' condition continued to deteriorate. Sachar Committee articulated the 'nose diving' status of Muslims. State action was already blocked as any consideration for this section of society was propagated as 'vote bank politics'.

One example is in order. In the wake of Sachar Committee report, the then Prime Minister made a general comment that the deprived sections of society (including Muslims) have first right on national resources. The network of shakhas, social media, Godi (lap) media and word of mouth Goebbelsian technique propounded as if Manmohan Singh is diverting all the funds for Muslims! (1) His clarification hardly reached the popular perception, "It will be seen from the above that the Prime Minister's reference to "first claim on resources" refers to all the "priority" areas listed above, including programs for the uplift of SCs, STs, OBCs, women and children and minorities."

The party which formally believes in secularism could hardly stand up for the rights of minorities (Muslims and Christians), mainly due to the intimidating propaganda and social-political pressure of the vast network of the politics of Hindu nationalism.

Today a section of Muslims is trying to put up a brave face to oppose the dominating presence of orthodox, retrograde leadership of Muslims, mainly in the hands of Maulana types, steeped in 'frog in the well' psychology and claiming to be the leaders of Muslim community. Surely their hold on a besieged community is at the core of opposition to the process of reform within the community. The 'moderate' Muslims and those for 'secular democracy' have limited influence in the vast masses of Muslims, intimidated by the fear of violence, built around temple issue, built around 'Hindus have been persecuted by Muslim kings' a narration built around religion while the issue has been that of power. As salt on the wounds the American-Imperialist design of controlling oil wealth gave birth to the likes of Osama bin Laden-Taliban and so the superficial and biased media popularized the word "Islamic Terrorism" and hundreds of Muslim youth's careers was crushed under the suspicion. Many like Mohsin Sheikh, a IT worker, were killed while those accused for acts of terror were incarcerated due of the prevalent system, where every Muslim is looked down as a criminal. (2)

The moderate Muslims and those for secular democracy are burning midnight oil to make sane voices; while the orthodox section gets good following. The progressive Muslim women did take up the reform (against triple talaq, burqa and polygamy in particular) the biggest support for them came from Hindu majoritarian politics, whose central concern is presented as welfare of Muslim women. Same forces create a situation where hoards of Muslim women stage Shaheen Baghs to preserve their citizenship rights and try to save themselves from 'detention camps' many of which are under readiness to give them a life of hell.

Meanwhile the inability of secular parties is exploited to the hilt and many from Muslim community, in their intense 'sharp' criticism of secular parties land up in the lap of Hindu

nationalist forces. As such RSS-BJP and its allies are doing their all to woo a section of Muslims community, Pasmanda, Bohra, Sufis among others. The Rashtriya Muslim Manch with RSS pracharak (Propagator) Indresh Kumar has been trying to woo a section of community around the politics of Hindu Rashtra. (3) Narendra Modi visited the most affluent sect of Muslims, the Bohras, and declared that he has come to 'his family'. On one side the rampage of Monu Manesar (Killing of two Muslim youth in Haryana), the Hate speeches against Muslims and yet at another level giving the impression that the RSS chief himself is giving time to the top of Muslim echelons like S.Y. Quraishi et al, is going on at present. This feat can only be performed by a multi-headed hydra.

The dilemma of different sections of Muslims is writ on the various reports of plight of Muslims in India. The only hope is to realize that there may be weaknesses in other parties, but none of them is guided by the ideology of 'Hindu Nation'. And that should be the primary factor to be kept in mind by the different sections of the Muslim community. And surely the way out is not to prostrate in front of the tormenter but to try to associate with political tendencies having commitment to values of Indian Constitution, and to put pressure on them to pursue the path of Maulana Azad and Gandhi.

Notes

1. <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/india/pms-statement-over-minorities-misinterpreted-1.270300>
2. <https://www.newsclick.in/Mohsin-Shaikh-Lynching-Case-Pune>
3. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/topic/muslim-rashtriya-manch>

8. Indian Muslims Today

In the recent announcement (2023) of BJP's new National executive, its President J.P.Nadda, included a prominent Pasmanda Muslim name, Tariq Mansoor, ex Vice-Chancellor of AMU, as one of the thirteen Vice Presidents of the National Executive. Another Muslim face from Kerala BJP, P Abdulkutty retained his place in the executive. The current focus on BJP at national level is to give prominence to Pasmanda Muslims. Pasmanda are the most backward Muslims, mostly dalits and OBC, who are at the bottom of socio-economic rungs of society in general and among the Muslims in particular.



One recalls the forays of BJP into sections of Muslim community off and on. While it does not have a single Member of Parliament from among the Muslims currently, earlier it had Muslims adorning official positions of Governor (Sikander Bakht) and a couple of Ministers, Shah Nawaz Husain and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi. Modi has also visited Bohra Mosque and announced

that he is a part of their family and also keeps offering Chadar to Sufi Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer.

Lately, a bigger focus is to woo the Pasmanda community among Muslims. In the 2023 UP elections for local bodies some Pasmanda Muslims were given tickets and some of them also succeeded. This trend has picked up more after the Hyderabad meeting of BJP in 2022 (July), where Modi called upon BJP workers to reach out to the Pasmanda section of Muslims. He pointed out that the Muslim community is not uniform and these Pasmanda Muslims are backward sections of Muslim community. The research shows that the discrimination of Pasmanda among Muslims is much less than that of dalits among Hindu community. A recent study by Christophe Jaffrelot and Kaliyasan A, disproves Modi's claims about Pasmanda Muslim exploitation and shows that caste matters more for Hindus than Muslims. (<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/christophe-jaffrelot-kaliyasan-a-write-on-bjps-pasmanda-muslim-outreach-its-not-as-divided-as-you-think-8908162/>)

Following that, BJP has been trying to reach this community by pointing out that Modi's policies don't discriminate on the grounds of religion and that they (Pasmanda Muslims) are equal beneficiaries (*Labharthi*, in their lingo) of the 'development schemes' of the Modi Government. Following this prominent Muslims, like Lt Governor Nazeeb Jung, Ex Election Commissioner S Q

Quraishi, Gen Zameeruddin Shah, Shahid Siddiqui and Saeed Sherwani wrote to the RSS chief Mohan Bhagawat, seeking appointment to meet him to aim for dialogue for reconciliation. After a month's wait they were ushered into the durbar of RSS Supremo.

The prominent Muslims talked about the 'Hate against Muslim' community, Bulldozers' justice and they being called Jihadi Pakistanis. Bhagwat shot back that Hindus feel offended by being called Kafirs and are hurt by Cow slaughter. The 'dialogue' was followed up by top leaders of RSS echelon like Indresh Kumar (Chief of Muslim Rashtriya Manch), Krishna Gopal, and Ram Lal had a meeting with the Chief Imam of the All-India Imam Organization (AIIO), Umer Ahmed Ilyasi on 22nd of September, 2022 where Ilyasi had expressed the hope that the talks would help create communal harmony.

How much the dialogue is affecting National politics, which affects the Muslim minority? Many prominent writers from within the Sangh like Ram Madhav and ex BJP leader Sudheendra Kulakarni are arguing that following the three lectures of Bhagawat in Vigyan Bhavan in September 2018, RSS is changing. Bhagawat had stated that Hindus and Muslim share the same DNA, Hindutva is not complete without Muslims etc.!

What is the truth? Truth of the claims of a political formation, even if it calls itself to be a cultural organization, lies in the issues and politics which it and its affiliates undertake in the society. Bhagwat himself had raised the issue of Cow-Beef. Cow-Beef has been raised into an emotive issue during the last few decades; it has also upset the applecart of Village economy apart from tormenting the Muslims in general. How can it be an issue in Cow belt and not in Kerala, North East and Goa? How can BJP leaders like Kiran Rijuju openly state that beef is a part of their cuisine. And how can the BJP leader of the stature of Vajpayee, consume the same?

As such Pasmandas are the biggest victims of the politics of Hate, Hate against minorities, Muslims in particular, which in turn is due to the misconceptions spread through the network of Shakhas, Shishu Mandirs, (run by RSS affiliates), social media and IT cell. The recent incident of Aurangzeb DB in some young Muslim boys was used to intensify the Hate. Sure Hate is the foundation of violence, polarization and in turn of ghettoisation of the Muslim community, going up by leaps and bounds. It is Pasmanda Muslims who are the biggest victim of the communal violence.

Similarly use of Bulldozers has been the add-on phenomenon of recent times. While RSS-BJP spokespersons claim all this is as per law, they are away from truth to say the least. The funny part of the whole thing is the rampant propaganda coming right from the top of RSS echelon hinting at Muslims will become a majority. One recalls that S.Y.Quraishi had gifted his book, 'Population Myth', to Mohan Bhagwat, which effectively burst this myth in a very rational manner. A few days later Bhagwat himself hinted that Muslim population is rising disproportionately.

Then, no occasion is left unused as far spreading Hate is concerned, be it the Corona Jihad or rising prices of tomatoes being attributed to Miyas (Muslims)! What to mention of the recent threat of implementing 'undrafted UCC', as a matter of giving justice to the Muslim women? We

do recall the NRC and then CAA which threatened to disenfranchise the Muslims, in response to which Muslim women came out in one of the most remarkable protests of independent India, Shaheen Bagh.

The recent spate of films, aimed at driving a deep wedge between the Hindu and Muslim, like Kashmir Files, Kerala Story and 72 Hoorain, many of which, are actively promoted from the Sarsanghchalak to Prime minister to the BJP supporters who ensure full hoses at times by buying bulk tickets to ensure that the message of Hate goes far and wide.

In sum and substance, a tiger does not change its stripes. Newer language is formulated at a constant pace, the content of the Hindu Rashtra agenda is the same. For electoral purposes now wooing Pasmanda Muslim is one of the latest steps on one hand and to drive a wedge within Muslim community, in tune with the 'divide and rule' policy of sectarian nationalism on the other. Pasmanda or Ashrafs, both are targeted by this politics irrespective of their caste divide, is more than true. Creating one more delusion of sympathy for Pasmanda Muslims!

9. Alarming Rise in Attacks on Christians



As sectarian nationalism is becoming more assertive and strong, the religious minorities are being subjected to intimidation and violence on regular basis. There is an increase in the frequency of this phenomenon in an alarming way.

The anti-Muslim violence is noticed and partly reported but the

anti-Christian violence, for various reasons, is not brought to the fore adequately. One reason is that it is scattered and of low intensity, so it does not make headlines as such. This is the conclusion of a citizens' fact-finding team which went to investigate various incidents of anti-Christian violence in recent times. Its report laments, "Human rights groups which monitor

atrocities against Christians in India, have been recording regularly the cases of violence against Christians by Hindutva groups from all states. But they have largely been unnoticed in the media or even in the human right circles.”

This report chronicles the violent acts against Christians in various districts of UP, and investigates the attack on Roorkee Church in October 2020. In this violence, though the police was given prior information, it did not take preventive steps; and when the attack began, it arrived only after the attackers had left. The aim of the attack seems to be to build a narrative that Christian groups are doing conversion work.

The report compiled other incidents of violence from different sources like Sabrang.india, UCF, and EFIRLC. Some of the incidents that occurred this (2020) year are: Mau (10th October); Indore (26th January); Shahjahanpur (3rd January); Kanpur (27th January); Bareilly (16th February); Ambedkar Nagar (21st February); Prayagraj (25th February); Kanpur (3rd March); Agra (14th March); Maharajganj (19th April); Bijnor (23rd June); Gonda (25th June); Azamgarh (25th June); Rampur (26th June); Raibairly (28th June); Aurayia (29th June); Jaunpur (3rd July); Hoshangabad (3rd October); Mahasamund (3rd October); and Bhilai (3rd October).

This compilation shows that most of such incidents are taking place in UP, while there are some from Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. In most of the cases it is prayer meetings which are targeted and these are labeled as attempts at conversion. The assertion of VHP-Bajrang Dal in these matters is so intense that in Satna on 25th October members of this group demanded that the idol of Goddess Saraswati should be installed in a school run by Catholics.

In tune with the rising majoritarianism, the religious minorities are projected in adverse ways and Christians in particular are accused of conversion through force, fraud and allurements. A large section of Christians does feel intimidated. It is this trend that made Julio Reibero, the ex-police officer who served the nation with distinction, state that “As a Christian suddenly I feel stranger in my own country”. Since the time he stated it way back in 2015, things are worsening at rapid pace.

Persecution Relief, a group monitoring anti-Christian violence in India, states that in 2020 it recorded 293 incidents of anti-Christian persecution in the first six months of the year. Six of those cases resulted in murder. Two women were reportedly raped and killed for their faith, and another two and a 10-year-old girl were raped for refusing to renounce Christianity. Uttar Pradesh “remained the most hostile state against Christians in India,” noted the report. Sixty-three hate crimes were reported there.

According to its founder Shibu Thomas, these are cases about which they have records; there may be many more cases that have gone unreported. Open Doors, another organization working with local Churches, points out that, “Christians are persecuted in all areas of public and private life; and anti-conversion laws (currently in nine States, with more considering enacting similar laws) are abused to harass and intimidate Christians. Few people are actually convicted under

these laws, but cases can drag on for years.” India figures in its list of 10 most dangerous places for Christians to live.

As Karnataka Government is planning to introduce ‘anti-conversion laws’, it has set up massive intelligence gathering exercise on the Churches and the Christian Congregations. At a rally in Sarguja district of Chhattisgarh on 1st October, Swami Paramatmanand called for targeted killings of minorities involved in conversion work. He stated this in the presence of leaders of the BJP.

While the propaganda is made through various channels about conversions by missionaries, the population census tells a different tale. As per census figures, Christian population in India was as follows: in 1971-2.60%, 1981-2.44%, 1991-2.34%, 2001-2.30%, and in 2011-2.30%. It is projected as a foreign religion, but it is a very old religion with its advent in India going back to the coming of St. Thomas in AD 52 at Malabar Coast in Kerala. The Christian missionaries, while some of them overtly claim their aim of converting the people, have been working in the arena of health care and education in remote areas or among the poor dalit communities. The educational institutes set up by them are known for their quality education. There is a competition for getting admission to these institutions.

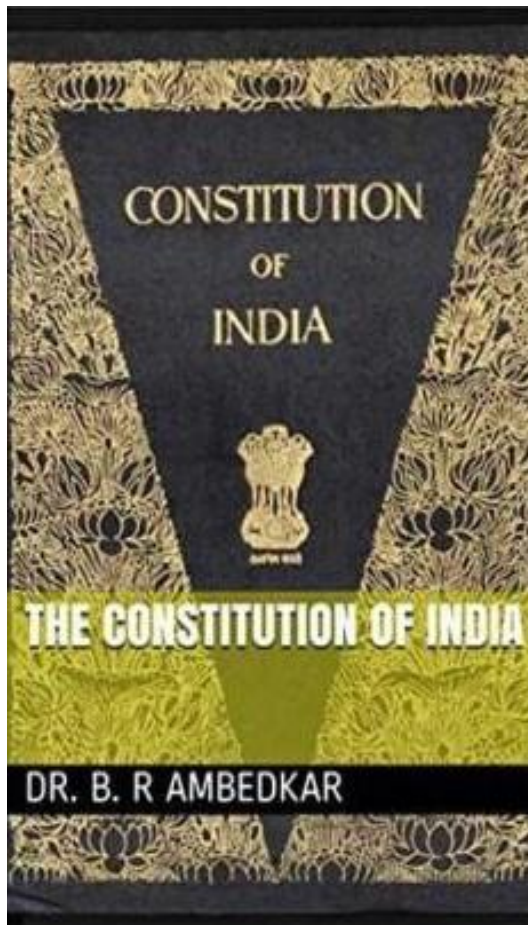
The anti-Christian tirade picked up momentum in the decade of 1970s when the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram extended their work in Adivasi areas. Dangs in Gujarat witnessed violence in April-August, 1998. Here Swami Aseemanand, who was accused of being part of various bomb blasts, set up the Shabri Mata temple and organized Shabri Kumbh. In Jhabua area of Madhya Pradesh, the followers of Asaram Bapu (now in jail) organized similar congregations and violence was witnessed there on September 23, 1998. In Orissa, Swami Lakshmananand set up his work and Kandhamal violence took place in 2008. Prior to this, Pastor Stains and his two children were murdered by Dara Singh aka Rajendra Singh Pal in 1999 who was part of Bajrang Dal.

While the accusation against Pastor Stains was that he was converting gullible Adivasis into Christian-fold, the Wadhwa Commission report which went into this ghastly murder concluded that he was neither involved in the work of conversion nor the population of Christians showed any statistical increase in Keonjhar area of Orissa where he was working.

While freedom of religion is our human and social right, it is also part of Indian Constitution. It is being challenged in practice through different mechanisms of assertion and that is leading to constant increase in violence against Christians and Muslims.

10. India: Bound by Constitution or Selective interpretation of Civilization?

Couple of years ago article 370 was abrogated, and our Supreme Court is yet to give its verdict whether this move conforms to our Constitution. The recent incidents of Hate speech of the likes of Nupur Sharma were not taken action against till the Gulf courtiers reacted very strongly to the insult to Prophet Mohammad. Currently bulldozers are ruling the roost, selectively demolishing the houses of Muslims on various charges. Does it conform to the values of our Constitution?



The putting of the values of Constitution in deep freeze and deliberate acts of omission and commission cannot be understood without going to the depth of the political tendency which is ruling the country. Narendra Modi in 2014 declared that he is a Hindu nationalist. The parent organization of the ruling party, RSS, has the agenda of Hindu Rashtra. How do we understand the current phenomenon in this light? So far as we wanted to articulate Indian Nationalism the alternative outlined by the current dominant political force talked of Cultural nationalism.

Now many of the ideologues of this politics, many of the top officials of present regime are telling us the deeper explanation of the present incidents. The talk of 'Civilization Nation', a nation guided by civilization and not by law is in the air. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) vice-chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit on Friday (May 21, 2022) stated that India was a "civilization state" and should not be reduced to a

civic nation *bound by the Constitution*. As per her, "Reducing India to a civic nation bound by a Constitution disregards its history, ancient heritage, culture and civilization. I would place India as a civilization state." (1)

How do we define civilization? The clear cut articulation of these worthies is that Hinduism is the core civilization of India. They are blaming the Left historians for distorting the interpretation of history by giving importance to Islam and particularly Muslims, more particularly Mughals. They are very pained that Hindu kings like those of Chola dynasty are underrepresented in our national discourse, while the *alien* Mughals are given large space in our historical accounts. Also the

nature of Hindu kings, their winning over other territories through trade, commerce and culture are not highlighted enough.

The narrative of Hindu kings versus Muslims kings forgets the basic issue that kings were the autocratic rulers, and kings' (kings of all religions) armies resorted to loot and plunder. In case of Cholas, they plundered and brought thousands of salves from Sri Lanka. Could it have been through peaceful means or appealing to the locals to become slaves? Well that's what these ideologues want us to believe. There was a Buddhist king, Ashoka, who did maximum welfare work, there was Akbar who believed in Suhle-kul (harmony between different religions) and there was Pushyamitra Shung who destroyed many Buddha Vihars. Can we pick only the Hindu kings are a representative of Indian Civilization?

India as such has been a land of great interaction between different cultures and religions. Just to give one central example, the Sufis from Islam and Bhakti Saints from Hinduism both emphasized on love as the core part of religion and had following among people of different religions.

In contrast to the 'Civilization nation' theorists the leaders of freedom movement saw the Indian history as inclusive and adopting to each other. Gandhi emphasized "The Hindus flourished under Moslem sovereigns and Moslems under the Hindu... With the English advent quarrels recommenced... Should we not remember that many Hindus and Mohammedans own the same ancestors and the same blood runs through their veins? (2)

His disciple Nehru in his book 'Discovery of India' tells us that these diverse cultures, religions interacted and celebrated the diversity. About India he writes, "She was like some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously..." And "Though outwardly there was diversity and infinite variety among our people, everywhere there was that tremendous impress of oneness, which had held all of us together for ages past, whatever political fate or misfortune befell us. The unity of India was no longer merely an intellectual conception for me: it was an emotional experience that overpowered me." (3)

These were ideological foundation of India as a nation in the making. These were the values of groups which represented emerging modern India. Those who kept aloof from the process of freedom movement talked of ancient Hindu glories and presented Muslims and Christians as outsiders. 'India as a nation in the making' was the theme of emerging modern India this was well presented in Surendranath Bannerjee's book "India Nation in the making'.

In contrast those who were not part of anti-British struggle had roots in the ideologies of landlord-clergy combine. They articulated Nationalism in the name of religion, called it cultural

nationalism and based it on Brahmanical Hinduism. Its ideologue Golwalkar says, "Instead, we must acknowledge that a nation is "not a mere bundle of political and economic rights"—it entails culture as well. And in India, this culture is "ancient and sublime" Hinduism, full of love and "free from any spirit of reaction". Ambedkar correctly points out that Brahmanism is the dominant stream, which passes off as Hinduism. (4)

Prior to him Savarkar had laid the foundation of Hindutva defining it as not just a religion but total Hindu-ness. This totality as per him is based on Aryan race, the land from Sindhu River to seas and Culture. By culture what is meant is a Brahminical culture, though most of the times word Hindu is used instead of the more apt Brahmanical Hinduism for that.

So while culture-civilization has many aspects, from Charvak, to Buddha to Kabir to Sufis to Rahim and Raskhan, for those who articulated "Cultural Nationalism" and are now using 'Civilization nation' not bound by Constitution', the practical reality is close to what they had been envisaged and so we see the present apathy towards following the norms of Indian Constitution.

Notes

1. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/india-not-a-civic-nation-but-a-civilisation-state-jnu-vc-101653070322039.html>

2. https://www.mkgandhi.org/hindswaraj/chap10_hindumahomedans.htm#:~:text=The%20Hindus%20flourished%20under%20Moslem,the%20English%20advent%20quarrels%20recommenced.

3. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-how-jawaharlal-nehru-understood-indias-past/400945>

4. <https://lifestyle.livemint.com/news/talking-point/decoding-rss-ideologue-m-s-golwalkar-s-nationalism-111646992779999.html>

11. Is RSS Changing?

What is the issue 'Hindu- Muslim Ties' or RSS Concept of Nationalism?

Sudheendra Kulkarni's (SK) article "Bhagwat's Glasnost in RSS-Muslims Ties is welcome but who will rein in Modi-Yogi"? (Scroll, July 13, 2021) (1) is unable to go to the roots of the issue as he analyses Mohan Bhagwat's speech. Bhagwat was releasing a book *The Meeting of Minds: A*



Bridging Initiative. This is the title of the book by Khwaja Iftikhar Ahmed. The function was organized by Rashtriya Muslim Manch, an affiliate of RSS. On this occasion Bhagwat said "Dialogue alone can be a solution... A person is not a Hindu if he says Muslims should not live in India...Those involved in mob lynching is against Hindutva." (2)

This is a very soothing sentence and likes of SK are seeing a

hope that RSS is changing, the way Russian communist party with Gorbachov in the leadership talked Perestroika and implemented Glasnost. SK quotes Ram Madhav, the RSS-BJP leader, who in one of his articles stated that the process of change in RSS under the leadership of Mohan Bhagwat is underway based on the observation to which he is privy as an insider.

This was in 2018 when in the series of lectures in Delhi Bhagwat not only read the preamble of India's Constitution but also affirmed his faith in secularism and socialism. SK reminds us that Madhav wrote that it is glasnost moment for RSS, and Kulkarni affirms that "Any unbiased observer of the RSS, who listens to Bhagwat's full speech, would know that he is trying to break new ground with the Indian Muslim community. This deserves to be welcomed."

While he is welcoming Bhagwat for the call of dialogue and building bridges he himself does not go to the roots of the problem. Author of the book Ahmad did diagnose the problem correctly at some level. As per SK "Ahmed expresses the anguish of Indian Muslims...without mincing words. In the case of communal riots, Muslim property worth "thousands of crores of rupees is lost and destroyed", and yet "proper FIRs are not registered". And further a "majority of perpetrators and perpetrators of violence, looting and rape go scot free". In contrast, Muslims "exercising their

constitutional right to protest are severely penalized, killed in police firing, mass arrests made and personal recoveries fixed for the losses accrued to public property. Where is the fair play?"

If this is the problem baying at our face us; who will be parties having dialogue to sort it out? Who represents the Muslims of India? Muslims are not uniform community. Hindus are not a uniform community. Apart from regional differences there are also the inner denominations among Muslims as well as Hindus. Politically before partition if there was Mohammad Ali Jinnah wanting to have a separate country, Pakistan, there was also Allah Bakksh who organized a massive convention in Delhi to oppose the demand of Partition of the country. (3) At political level it was Gandhi whom majority of Hindus followed. Another Hindu, Nathuram Godse was also a Hindu, who was RSS trained pracharak, who killed the greatest Hindu of twentieth century.

SK presents as if problem is between Hindus and Muslims. A political problem is being looked at through the lens of religion. Problem during freedom movement was that the Indian nationalism represented by Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Bose and Maulana Azad was opposed by the Hindu nationalism propounded by Hindu Mahasabha and RSS on one hand and Muslim Nationalism represented by Jinnah and company on the other. I will not delve much into Muslim Communalism which was running parallel all through, but after partition has got deflated here in India.

The battle between kings was not for religion they were for power and wealth. The ethnic conflicts between Shias and Sunnis or between Shaiva and Vaishnav had another logic altogether. Politics in the name of religion begins during the colonial period. As the social changes due to modern industries (formation of working class and industrialists-businessmen), modern education and social reforms (abolition of Sati, education for dalits and women) begin due to which the section of society which was privileged (Landlords and kings) started feeling marginalized and resorted to politics in the name of religion. They also presented ancient period as the golden period. Ancient period was the period when the birth based hierarchies were structural part of society, when Manusmriti was the law.

It is very important to understand the roots of origin of streams which prefix their nationalism with religion. These are basically feudal classes; feudal landlord-clergy combination which was opposed to the changes where birth based inequality was being practically challenged. In India initially these Muslim and Hindu segments were together but soon they separated, forming Muslim League on one side and Punjab Hindu Sabha, Hindu Mahasabha and RSS on the other. They did not participate in anti colonial struggles or social reforms for equality. There may be few exceptions thrown in here and there like Savarkar working against untouchability also.

Coming to Hindu nationalists, RSS, it developed a training module for young boys as per which we have been a Hindu nations from times immemorial. We had a great and happy society. All

castes were equal and women had glorious place in society. With invasion of Muslims and later by coming of Christians, the society was tormented; Muslim kings spread Islam on the strength of sword, destroyed our temples, imposed jizia and our women were subjected to molestation by them.

During their intellectual sessions where the battles between Akbar-Rana Pratap, Shivaji-Afzal Khan are given religious twists. Hindus are shown to be tormented by foreign rulers. The picture is projected of villainous Muslim kings and noble Hindu kings. This is what forms the root of Hate for Muslims. This hate is the root of violence. The Muslim Communalism also did similar things in spreading hatred against Hindus and communal violence was the result. To cut the long story short by such indoctrination lakhs of Swayamsevaks and thousands of Pracharaks have been trained and they are working in different areas of society. There is a long list of organizations affiliated to RSS, and their core DNA is this ideology, 'hate-Muslims-Christians, glorify the past'.

As RSS began, its initial leaders talked bluntly against Muslims, Christians. They glorified laws of Manu; opposed Indian Constitution and Tricolor. This indoctrinations' latest addition is the propaganda that Hindus are in danger due to deliberate attempt by Muslims to increase their population. (4) This has been ably countered by the facts presented by S.Y Quraishi in his book 'Population Myth: Islam, Family planning and politics in India'. The National fertility rate is 2.2 and Muslims fertility rate is 2.6, but is showing a rapid decline during last couple of decades. (5) In Muslim majority states the fertility rate is lower than states like UP, Bihar and UP. Still Quraishi's book will be rusting in the library and the 'Hum Do Hamare Do, Who Panch Unke Pachis' (We two our two: They Five their twenty Five) will rule the social common sense.

After Bhagwat became Sarsanghchalak in 2009, RSS has been part of Ram Temple campaign, he himself asked the Muslim community to give up the land for Ram Temple and there are already rumblings about Kashi and Mathura. Now he is talking about lynching, when nearly hundred innocent Muslims and dalits have lost their lives. We saw Shambhulal Regar brutally killing Mohammad Afrazul on the issue of love jihad. (6) His silence all through was very eloquent. In a way it is this violence which is the outcome of Hate and leads to polarization; giving strength to its electoral progeny BJP. (7)

BJP's coming to power has further increased the number of Shakhas of RSS. The work in shakhas has been aided by their meticulously conducted long trainings, giving this Hindu nationalist ideology to the trainees, who are the backbone of Hindutva politics, of BJP, VHP, Bajarang dal and innumerable such organizations. To add to the phenomenon the Godi media, IT cell, fake news, and section of social media have heightened the degree of hate in the society.

So in that sense what is happening or is being orchestrated is the logical outcome of the seeds of indoctrination which have been sown over a period of time. India has seen people of different

religions coming together to get independence. The roots of dialogues between different religions have been part of our Bhakti-Sufi traditions and cultural syncretism which we see in our society. The dialogue is needed between the concept of nationalisms, the one represented by Gandhi-Nehru-Patel on one side and the one represented by Savarkar-Hedgewar-Golwalkar on the other.

It is to the credit of Bhagwat that he is using the language which is very palatable. Words sound good but it is deeds which count in social matters. Modi-Yogi are not aberrations of Hindu nationalism, they are the logical outcome of what has been propagated through multiple mechanisms to train the swayamsevaks and Pracharaks. One knows Yogi is not from RSS stock, but his wavelength is similar to that of what Hindu nationalism has been propagating and practicing.

One appreciates the good intentions of SK to have dialogue; one agrees with Bhagwat that discord does not work. Breaking new ground with Muslim community is very crucial and important, agreed. Can it be done when anti-Muslim sentiments which are being propagated and encouraged at all the levels! Take the recent case of Corona and Tablighi Jamaat. What role did Bhagwat's ideology play to combat the propaganda against Muslims? Take the case of CAA-NRC, the insecurity caused to crores of Muslims, Bhagwat is defending this unnecessary move, which has created massive insecurity among Muslims in general! (8)

History has seen amity as well as discord no doubt. If we attempt to go a bit deep we will see that poor dalits felt closer to Muslims at social level. Even in the matters of power it was the nobility, Hindu and Muslim which ruled. Here Gandhi's inclusive understanding of Indian history needs to be brought to the fore to replace the existing Hindu versus Muslim elaboration of history by RSS. Gandhi writes in Hind Swaraj "The Hindus flourished under Moslem sovereigns and Moslems under the Hindu. Each party recognized that mutual fighting was suicidal, and that neither party would abandon its religion by force of arms. Both parties, therefore, decided to live in peace. With the English advent, quarrels recommenced. (9)

. . . Do people become enemies because they change their religion? Is the God of the Mohammedan different from the God of the Hindu? Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? Wherein is the cause of quarreling?"

Where are we standing today? Author of the book Ahmad, SK and Bhagwat are talking at a level which ignores the deeper causes of the violence. Discord is not among the religious communities; conflict is between two streams of Nationalism, Indian nationalism on one side and Hindu nationalism on the other.

In the spirit of dialogue and positive words which Bhagwat states what is missing is the direction to undo the hate which has been propagated so far. SK with all his noble intentions should have remembered what Sardar Patel's Ministry of Home put out after the murder of the father of the nation, "violence sponsored and inspired by the Sangh claimed many victims -- the latest and the most precious to fall was Mahatma Gandhi himself". Surely SK's criticism though valid does not take into account the prevalence of hate and its reasons in society. (10)

The methods RSS are strange. Its subordinate/affiliate organizations are trained to fulfill different components of the march towards Hindu Rashtra. On one day Mr. Bhagwat says that those who ask Muslims to leave India are not Hindus, the next day Suraj Pal Amu who asks Muslims to leave is promoted to be the BJP spokesperson in Haryana. The person who invites the slogan of 'Goli maro' is promoted from Minister of state to Cabinet minister. RSS thinker Rakesh Sinha in an interview to Dainik Jagran openly says Christian missionaries should leave India. (11)

One needs to understand that Bhagwat's words are more for the sake of consumption and gaining credibility in the changing times while its age-old agenda remains the same. Dialogue should be done to urge upon the Bhagwat's organization to adopt the values of Indian nationalism of Gandhi-Nehru-Azad-Patel-Bose, and reassure minorities that the Hate and consequent violence against them will be condemned and halted. The large mass of Muslims, battered and ghettoized, as Ahmad points out; should follow the values of Allah Baksh, Maulana Azad, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and the principles of Indian Constitution in due course.

Notes

1. <https://scroll.in/article/1000038/opinion-bhagwats-glasnost-in-rss-muslim-ties-is-welcome-but-can-he-reign-in-modi-and-adityanath>
2. <https://scroll.in/article/1000038/opinion-bhagwats-glasnost-in-rss-muslim-ties-is-welcome-but-can-he-reign-in-modi-and-adityanath>
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12. Demanding a New Constitution: Why?

Dr. Bibek Debroy is the Chief of the economic advisory council of the Prime Minister, obviously very close to the centers of power in more sense than one. He recently (August 15, 2023) in an article in a major newspaper questioned the continuation of the present Constitution. For him this is not the same Constitution which was adopted after Independence as it has been amended



many times. As per him, since the Supreme Court has ruled that the executive cannot change its basic structure and it has outlived its time, we should prepare for a new constitution. More importantly he says this Constitution is a colonial legacy and questions various provisions of the same, particularly the values of socialism, secularism, justice, equality and liberty. The PMO has officially distanced itself from the opinions expressed by Debroy but the purpose of

raising doubts and opposition to the Indian Constitution has been raised successfully.

Already the ideologues and leaders from Hindu right have been asserting that this constitution is a colonial legacy, based on the Government of India Act of 1935 of the British and does not reflect the Indian values. The right-wing Hindu nationalists were never comfortable with this Constitution, which is not a continuation of the GOI act of 1935, but prepared after painstaking debates for nearly three years and meticulously put forward by the Chief of drafting committee of Indian Constitution Dr. Ambedkar. The President of Constituent Assembly Dr. Rajendra Prasad and most members of the Constituent Assembly (CA) were the ones who identified with the anti-colonial struggle of Indian people. It was this struggle which also was crucial in the formation of 'India as a Nation'.

In contrast to those who stood for plural, inclusive Indian nationalism, the religious nationalists stood away from this great struggle and also opposed the values which emerged with this mass movement. As the Constitution was implemented the unofficial mouthpiece of RSS declared that "Three days after the CA passed Constitution the RSS English organ, Organizer on November 30, 1949, in an editorial rejected it and demanded Manusmriti as Constitution. It read: "But in our Constitution, there is no mention of the unique Constitutional development in Ancient Bharat. Manu's laws were written long before Lycurgus of Sparata or Solon of Persia. To this day his laws as enunciated in the Manusmriti excite the admiration of the World and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our Constitution pundits that means nothing." (1)

The opposition to the Constitution started being articulated more sternly with the rise of Hindu right. As Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Government came to power in 1998, it appointed Venkatchaliah Commission for reviewing the Constitution. The strong opposition to the commission was to the detriment to the BJP led coalition to implement it. (2)

This opposition to the Constitution keeps manifesting itself in diverse ways. When K. Sudarshan became the Sarsanghachalak (Supreme Dictator) of RSS he openly declared that the Indian Constitution is based on Western values and should be replaced by one based on Indian Holy books, indicating Manusmriti. He asserted "We need not fight shy of altering the constitution completely, having already amended it a hundred times," And that France had done the revision four times. There is nothing sacrosanct about it. In fact, it is the root cause of most of the country's ills." (3)

Times and over again; one or the other worthy from BJP-RSS stable do make statements of this type. Recently as the opposition alliance formed I.N.D.I.A many from this politics came to oppose it on the ground that the word was given by the British. One BJP Rajya Sabha MP. Naresh Bansal questioned the place of very word India in the Constitution, as it is a symbol of slavery. (4)

It is also related to their concept of decolonization of minds as put forward by RSS General Secretary Dattatray Hosabale, "The Euro-centric ideas, systems and practices, the western world view were still ruling us for decades. Independent nation didn't shirk them totally," (5)

Debrroy and the RSS stable merged on the point of opposition to the Constitution. While RSS combine focuses more on its Western nature, Debroy lets the cat out of the bag, when he questions the need values of Liberty, Equality, secularism and the like in our Constitution. The colonial legacy argument is akin to the organizations like that of 'Muslim Brotherhood' of West Asian countries, which opposes the values of liberty and equality on the ground that they are Western imports. Debroy and apologists of the present regime are disturbed by the concept of equality, equality between people of different religions, castes and gender.

RSS combine projects the era of Manusmriti as Golden Past as caste and gender hierarchy was core of the society that time. True, colonialism opened the path of changing the social structure in a very deep way, it is during this period that caste and gender hierarchy started loosening their grip, it is during this period that workers could make their organizations (Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, Com Singaravelu), it is during this period the likes of Bhagat Singh articulated the exploitation by the ruling classes, which needs to be done away with.

Colonial period cannot be looked at as black or white. It has shades of gray. While colonial powers plundered our wealth, they also had to open up institutions which were to articulate the "Equality of Man (and Women)". RSS combine and the advisor of Prime Minister though are giving different arguments for doing away with this constitution; in essence they are opposed to Equality, which was the hallmark of the values propounded by the likes of Bhagat Singh, the struggles launched by Ambedkar and the overarching National movement.

Till 1990s the country did try to pursue the path of struggle for equality, with the Indian Constitution as the fulcrum and modernization policies of Nehru. Now we seem to be moving in

the reverse gear. With Temple and cow dominating the scene, the path towards inequality is being carved by invoking the ancient values, the Brahmanical interpretation of the past (Labeled as civilizational values) and undermining of what we achieved through the greatest ever mass movement in the World, the 'Freedom Struggle of India'.

All the oppositions to the Indian Constitution are a mere reuse to push the country back to the era where inequality, (caste, class and gender) was sanctified by religion (Brahmanism)!

Notes

1. https://www.academia.edu/35261924/68_TH_ANNIVERSARY_OF_INDIAN_CONSTITUTION_WHEN_NATION_CELEBRATED_ITS_ADOPTION_RSS_MOURNED_IT
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13. RSS-BJP Political Strategies Today

Abhish K.Bose Interview

Questions in bold font

Abhish K.Bose: It is said that India is a country built on the foundations of a civilisation- that is fundamentally non - religious. But ever since a series of incidents beginning from the Ramjanmabhumi mobilization, the demolition of the Babri Mazjid, the Gujarat riots to the violence in various parts of the country after BJP ascending to power in 2014, is there a conspicuous change in the character of the Hindu religion which is being practiced. Has the Sangh parivar designs to alter the pluralistic edifice of Hindu religion to a violent aggressive religion materialized? What is your assessment?

Ram Puniyani: Indian culture is plural with multiple diverse traditions living side by side with peace and amity. This was seen by the rising National movement as 'Unity in Diversity' on one hand and 'Ganga Jamuni tehjeeb' (mixed or syncretic culture, named after the two major rivers of north India, which merge) on the other. The tallest leaders of freedom movement saw it this way. Gandhi in 'Hind Swaraj' (Gandhi's major book) and Nehru in 'Discovery of India' highlight and underline this fact. Nehru sees it as multiple cultures coming one after the other as different layers and mingling and coexisting with the other layers with full openness. These leaders of National movement saw the whole of culture and not just religion as the defining point of their understanding of society.

In contrast to the leaders of freedom movement for whom culture was inclusive, the communal streams were exclusive in their outlook and harped on their culture based exclusively on the narrow interpretation of their religions.

Hinduism which practiced was open and liberal for the most people. This was reflected best in the Bhakti tradition where moral values reign supreme and those belonging to other religion are not looked down upon. This was best presented by the leader of freedom movement, Father of Indian nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who saw Ishwar (Hindu God) and Allah (Muslim God) as being the same. He regarded all religions, Islam; Zoroastrianism, Christianity etc. as belonging to this land. For him morality of religions was supreme. In contrast; the Hindu communal stream harped on the upper caste; Varna based Hinduism, presented the period of Brahmanical domination as the glorious period of our past and saw Islam and Christianity as foreign religions.

Their presentation of Hinduism was Brahmanical and harped mainly on identity issues like Temple, Holy Scriptures, and caste and gender hierarchy to be the mainstay of Hindu religion. This was reflected in the recent awarding of Gita press with Gandhi award. Gita press represents the type of Hinduism which the present ruling dispensation wants to promote. Gita press publications have constantly opposed temple entry for dalits, has opposed women working outside home, supported dowry and wife beating.

Gandhi made non-violence as the central part of practice of religion. Sangh Parivar (RSS Combine) has been promoting violence in various ways. Those indulging in violence against religious minorities are generally let off and enjoy impunity. This impunity being enjoyed by them further encourages such violence, against not only religious minorities but also against dalits (Downtrodden, marginalized caste), Adivasis (Tribal) and against women. Barring some exceptions those indulging in communal violence are not punished or are let off lightly like Maya Kodnani and Babu Bajarangi. In case of Bilkis Bano those punished for deaths and rapes were treated with kid's gloves and then prematurely released. They were honored with garlands and sweets. This is all is being done in the name of Hinduism.

AB: Scholars categorized the communalism that exploded in India in the 1980s and 1990s and later period as a new kind of communalism which is starkly different from that of the previous period, that is before 1980s and even that of the pre independence period. The later period also claimed many lives and damages as well as helped BJP to capture power in India. Could you compare the nature and texture of the two kinds of communalisms prevalent at the two separate periods to throw light on the majoritarian Hindu communalism flourishing currently in the country?

RP: Communalism in India rose to oppose the secular democratic national movement, which had elements of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. In contrast communalism had roots in the pre-modern ruling classes of landlords and Princes-Kings of yore. They were totally opposed to the embryo of values of modern democratic norms, which were the foundation of rising Indian Nationalism. The communal forces, Hindu and Muslim initially were together and later with British policy of 'divide and rule' the Muslim and Hindu communal streams separated and emerged, as parallel and opposite to each other. During this period they took up issues related to music in front of mosque, beef in temples, pork in mosque, dishonoring of the women of 'other' community, cow-beef and religious conversions like Shuddhi (Converting low caste who embraced Islam back into Hinduism and Tanzim (Converting Dalits into Islam) and inter religious marriage etc.

The violence which was triggered was equal from both the communal streams and in dealing with the perpetrators of violence the British colonialists did not take sides. This did start polarization in the society along communal lines. The communal propaganda from both sides was intense and a section of upper middle sections of society, in particular, came under the influence of this communal stream.

Post Independence, the nature of communalism changed. Now Hindu communalism became the majoritarian one. Jawaharlal Nehru did point out that both communalisms are a danger to democracy. While Majoritarian communalism presents itself as Nationalism, the minority communalism comes up as separatism. In the aftermath of partition Muslim community started wrongly being blamed for partition and violence was orchestrated against them on the pretext of rape of Hindu girls (Jabalpur 1961) to begin with. Many a trade rivalries also took the form of communal violence in places like Meerut, Malayan among others. The significant change during this period was the partisan attitude of police and state, the political leadership and other state officials. They were favoring Hindu communal forces. The major victims of violence Muslims and those who were arrested for this were also primarily Muslims.

After 1980s the communalism assumed more menacing form; taking recourse to personal laws and using history as a tool for spreading Hate and thereby was able to orchestrate violence. Babri Mosque issue was the major issue opening the Pandora's Box of history and the communal historiography ruled the roost associating today's Muslims with atrocities of some Muslim kings. This worked well for the majoritarian communal stream and polarization of communities along religious lines and ghettoization of Muslim community due to insecurity became a major factor of social-political life.

Adding to the historical abuse for communal goals came up issue of love jihad and Cow-beef in particular. Today Hindu majoritarian politics is riding on the wave of these issues and getting strengthened by adding more misconceptions against Muslim and also Christian minority.

AB: You have conducted extensive field studies in northern India especially at the riot-torn places at the time and after the Ramjanmabhumi mobilization. What is your current assessment over the communal situation in those places where you held field visits? What is the status of communal amity in these places? It is said that wounds of communal riots will remain unhealed for many years and will flare up with slight provocations?

RP: The places which have witnessed communal violence have become very polarized and the physical and emotional walls have been erected between religious communities. While the majority community harbors the misconceptions of hate against the minority community, the minority community's primary sentiment is that of fear and insecurity. The joint celebrations, at social and religious level have come to a total halt. The core value of a Nation, fraternity has suffered a severe jolt.

The wounds of communal violence have mostly remained unhealed. The major obstacles to this had been the failure on the part of the state to give justice to the victims and rehabilitate the victims of violence. The places which have suffered the violence may not see the repetition of violence in immediate future as the polarization in these places is close to complete and communal forces behind the violence do not achieve much by repeating this in the same place, by and large. Yes but in the country overall the provocations needed to flare up the violence are many more and easy to instigate the attacks of violence against minority. The Hate against minorities is the dominant feature of present political discourse.

AB: Scholars have maintained that the Gujarat riots killings represented a distinctively new cultural moment in the long history of Indian communal violence similar to that of the Sikh massacres of the 1984 in which people were similarly targeted. Can you discuss the theoretical and evidentiary basis for the aptness of such a classification? Are the Gujarat massacres an 'elite conspiracy' or bottom - up 'mass movement' of the hindutva, or a combination of both?

RP: First of all I will like to point out that anti Sikh pogrom of 1984 and Gujarat Carnage and other acts of anti-Muslim violence are not comparable. The violence against the religious minorities can be broadly categorized into two groups. One is the anti-Sikh violence, which was *one go* event and came up as a sort

of insane political revenge against the hapless Sikh community. The other is a regular repetitive violence against Muslims and Christians, which is part of the Hindu Nationalist agenda.

What they share in common is the mechanism of violence against the innocents. The violence appears to be spontaneous, but there is a planning behind it. Those in leadership generally get it organized in such a way that it appears to be spontaneous, 'bottom up'. This bottom up is incited by the ground already prepared due to the Hate spread against the minority communities. In case of Anti Sikh pogrom it was a single go event, orchestrated as revenge against the killing of Indira Gandhi, which in turn was due to Operation Blue star, prompted by the occupation of Golden Temple by Khalistani elements. The Gujarat carnage was orchestrated on the pretext of Godhra train burning. The list of Muslim households and shops were ready; handy and people were incited by taking the burnt bodies in a procession from Godhra against the advice of the local Collector of the city; Jayanti Ravi.

The violence began with blame on minority community that 'they' burnt the train, locals particularly subalterns were roped in to take 'revenge'. The anti-Muslim violence is regular and repetitive; it's a part of Hindu nationalist agenda which aims at polarizing the communities to reap the electoral dividends. To me the violence is organized by inciting the 'bottom' and by letting participants know that they will enjoy impunity. While mechanism of violence creation is similar the underlying politics is very different in both.

AB: How did the hindutva populism blurred the gap between caste and religion in the Indian society thereby the caste populism got vanished and hindutva nationalism emerged?

RP: As such the central goal of Hindutva populism is to maintain the caste-Varna hierarchy while presenting Hindu unity. It has done so by showing the fear of the 'external enemy', Muslims and Christians. In the context of rising consciousness among dalits for equality, in the backdrop of movement for dalit dignity and the Constitutional provisions for equality and space for reservation and affirmative action, Hindu populism went all out to win over the lower caste at social and political level without approving the reservations, without challenging the caste-Varna hierarchy. It floated 'Samajik Samrasta Manch' (Social Harmony Forum) and did a massive ground work to win over dalits through Seva (service) on one hand and by symbolically upholding dalit icons without taking up their principles.

Hindu nationalists have also picked up historical icons, presented them as *dalit Heroes* and given an anti-Muslim slant to their narrative. Suhel dev is an example of this, Pasi and Bhar communities uphold him as there icon. Yet again the process of Sanskritization is unleashed where by upper caste dine with the dalits and this sounds like giving a sort giving respectability to them. Yet again there is a process of cooption of Dalit leadership in Hindutva fold like Ram Vilas Paswan and Ramdas Athawale, who for the crumbs of power stick to Hindu nationalist cabal. To cap it all the massive network of RSS shakhas, (Branches, local units) which have doubled up during last decade, are able to spread a massive outreach to these sections and through regular, religious-cultural programs and have constructed a base for Hindu nationalism.

AB: What is the rationale that binds a large majority of the lower caste population behind the Hindu nationalism project and BJP, when the fact is that neither the predominant section of the Hindus that is the Dalits or the OBCs enjoys the status of the Hindu community members and were historically relegated as outcastes? Only the Brahmins which are a minority are given the status of Hindus. When this exists as a raw fact how the Dalits and OBCs rally behind the BJP thereby helping to electorally success? Will there be the emergence of a political configuration which separates them from BJP and stand as an entity of their own?

RP: BJP is the electoral wing of Hindu nationalist politics. Its parent organization has floated many organizations to work among dalits and Adivasis. Through its vast network of Shakhas RSS has trained large number of pracharaks (propagators) and swayamsevakas (Volunteers) who work on the ground level, at community level among these sections of society. They first begin with religious machinations, promoting Hindu religious festivals among these sections. During seventies and eighties their volunteers promoted Vinayaka (Lord Ganesh) festivals in dalits localities. They used to initiate the process, support with the funds and involve the dalit communities and introduce Brahmanical norms among them. In Adivasi areas they organized Shabri Sangams.

Shabri is an Adivasi character in Ramayan who offered berries to Lord Ram, after tasting individual berries. She is a symbol of poverty and destitution. RSS combine has made her temples and promoted her as their goddess. This is a cultural messaging also, as to who is the idol of Tribal. Also they started making Lord Hanuman as their deity and initiated multiple campaigns to polarize him in Adivasi areas, this again is a sort of messaging, loyalty to Lord Ram, who has been projected as icon by Hindu nationalist forces. This helped in co-opting these sections at religious level towards the RSS version of Hinduism.

At social level they constantly interacted with these communities, giving them a feeling of respect. Their constant interaction gave the impression to these communities of being honored, and consequently being won over at electoral level despite the BJP opposing the reservations, diluting reservation through introduction of reservations based on economic basis, avoiding caste census among others. It is pure ground level community interactions, undertaken at massive scale, which have prepared the ground for BJP making gains amongst these sections of society at electoral level.

With this and the policies (Anti dalit) which led to institutional murder of Rohith Vemula, banning of Periyar study Circle in IIT Madras, a section of dalit youth are becoming clearer about the deeper agenda of BJP-RSS. There are many dalit groups, who are trying to come together to oppose the deeper caste discrimination by BJP. Many youth leaders are articulating dalit aspirations as separate groups or through other parties. For example youth leaders like Jignesh Mevani and Chandrashekhar Ravan, stand as a good example of that. Similarly many non dalit youth and organizations are trying to incorporate the dalit-Adivasi issues in the mainstream political discourse. Kanhaiya Kumar is one such example who is trying to take up caste issue along with class issues. True, dalit movement is fragmented but the awareness to include these in the mainstream discourse, away from the caste discriminatory politics of BJP is surely in the air.

AB: According to a certain point of view ' the deepening of democracy' happened in India after the 1980s. The emergence of BJP as a major force in the country also happened in the same period. How do you perceive the deepening of democracy in India and simultaneous emergence of BJP in India? Is it that BJP's emergence as a primal force deepened democracy in India?

RP: It is true that democratic process has been deepening in the country. This process gives articulation to subaltern sections of society as well. With deepening democracy and coming up of dalits and women in the social space a section of society, which felt threatened due to the coming to fore of downtrodden, resorted to communal politics. In the decades of 1980s, this manifested first as anti-reservation riots in Gujarat in 1980s, then riots against OBC promotion policy in 1985 and later after the implementation of Mandal Commission (which gave boost to OBC aspirations). In reaction to this implementation of Mandal Commission, a section of society, already in privileged position in society rallied behind BJP, the politics of communalism, to strengthen its electoral power to be able to oppose the deeper changes in society.

BJP-RSS stand for the values of pre-Modern, pre-Industrial caste and gender hierarchy and by decade of 1980s the social transformation towards equality started showing up in rudimentary form. It was this which gave a fillip to the already existing BJP mechanism, which brought it to the fore. It is not a primal force in deepening of democracy of India. As a matter of fact, it has taken advantage of the process of deepening democracy to make inroads for an agenda which cuts the very roots of democracy as such.

AB: Certain scholars are of the view that the Modi era in the Indian politics will not last long and are pointing towards the emergence of a new political configuration based on hindutva other than BJP on the anvil. How realistic are such expectations in your understanding?

RP: The Modi period of Indian politics has wrought havoc on the plight of average people of society. The rising unemployment, the increasing prices, the worsening poverty, increasing rich poor divide and social polarization has made the large sections of people aware about the negative impact of continuing BJP rule. The declining press freedom, worsening indices of democracy and freedom of religion has raised a severe alarm among most sections of society. The BJP government is insensitive to people's plight as demonstrated in its response to farmers movement (In which nearly 650 people lost their lives), to the effort to disenfranchise Muslim through NRC, CAA leading to Shaheen Bagh movement and then orchestration of Delhi violence, and lastly ignoring the wrestlers complaint against sexual harassment, followed by shameless silence on Manipur Incident. The use of ED, CBI, IT against the opposition leaders have made them aware of the dangers of the Modi dispensation.

In addition Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra and result of Karnataka elections (2023) has brought massive change in the political horizon. Now opposition political parties more than before feel the need to come together and form a political electoral front for democracy and secularism. There are lots of obstacles in its path but as the matters are developing there is a good possibility that the united opposition by fielding a single candidate against BJP candidates in the elections may succeed in coming to power.

This seems easier said than done as BJP is vastly equipped with thousands of RSS pracharaks, lakhs of swayamsevaks, many RSS affiliate organizations who work for BJP success in elections. BJP has media on its side aided by IT cell and social media network carrying its message. It is also the richest political party in the country. It may play some tricks yet again to polarize the society apart from the already floated Uniform Civil Code and the issue of National security.

AB: It is said that the electoral fixation towards the BJP can be sizeably stemmed by educating a large segment of the Indian society. Do you think if a sizeable chunk of the electorate in rural and urban areas are educated they will jettison from voting for the BJP. How prudent is this perception?

RP: No doubt education has immense role in electoral awareness. It was also joked that BJP is not able to make inroads into Kerala as that state is very literate. But that apart; mere formal education is no counter to the BJP politics. The RSS and its vast network of Shakahs, the Sarswati Mandir chain of schools, Ekal Vidyalayas all run by this organization popularize its version of history, culture and politics which makes strong case for BJP's success. This is aided by Godi media, BJP's IT cell, and large number of print media which spreads the BJP version of politics. This is what Noam Chomsky called "manufacturing Consent". In Indian scenario 'social common sense' among large sections of society is constructed on communal lines; the religious minorities are demonized by using History. The medieval period of history is used to demonize the Muslim community by propagating that Muslim Kings destroyed Hindu temples, Islam spread by force, and Muslim kings were cruel to Hindu subjects. The demographic issues related to increase of Muslim population is attribute to religion in popular parlance and threat of Muslims becoming a majority in the country; is used to polarize section of Hindus. Similarly, Christians are presented as doing conversion work through force, fraud and allurement. Though all these are totally false these are becoming part of social common sense. We need to popular works to combat these misconceptions, which in turn lead to hate, violence, polarization and victory of BJP in elections. Mere formal education will not counter the politics of BJP.

AB: What do you think of the rise of religious nationalism worldwide? Do you consider it essential to modify the concept of religious nationalism and/or construct new concepts to address the increasingly technologically driven character of political change?

RP: There are multiple factors due to which religious nationalism has grown world wide, particularly from the decade of late nineties. In the post-colonial states, the absence of total secularization process had been the seed. The landlordism and associated clergy continued to thrive with their values, which are based on birth-based hierarchies, hiding themselves behind the cloak of religion. In South Asia India was the best placed, but Pakistan, Sri Lanka in particular adopted a path where religious nationalism was dominant.

In West Asian countries, it was the imperialist greed for oil, which proactively promoted the fundamentalist elements and led to the right ward shift all through. Its seeds can be discerned from the 1953 CIA overthrowing Mosaddegh Government in Iran. Mosaddegh, the democratically elected Leader was overthrown as he was out to nationalize the oil wells. The installing of Raza Shah Pahlavi in due course paved the way of coming to power of Ayatollah Khomeini.

US had also proactively promoted the right-wing Muslim groups in West Asia. The Russian occupation of Afghanistan brought the matters to the fore with US funding the training of Taliban, Al Qaeda which brought in havoc in the name of religion. It was this major factor which led to the global Islamophobia, the putting forward of the theories like, 'Clash of Civilization' and the right-wing groups becoming stronger. This is how we can understand the rightward shift in the politics of the region, religious nationalism becoming dominant in the last few decades.

While the incomplete transformation to the norms of the democratic society due to the impact of colonialism had already been prevalent in some countries; the proactive training of Taliban brought the process of global rightward shift to the fore. Capping it all; there were multiple invasions in the region by US, attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq being the major ones. These in turn provided the fertile ground for rise of fundamentalist tendencies in the region.

On the top of it, the plight of poor in the ex-colonies, of Africa in particular, trying to migrate to the countries which had colonized them created an adverse atmosphere. These poor from the ex-colonies in the slums and poor localities of France etc. gave a further boost to the right-wing parties in those countries, Identity of religion seems to be stalking the World.

The US media coined and propagated the word "Islamic terrorism' has been the underlying statement all through. We see the combination of incomplete secularization process in colonies, aided by the Imperialist lust for oil control as the two central phenomenon's aiding the Fundamentalism during last three decades.

The religious nationalism is a mammoth setback to progress of human society towards equality. The issues of people, the social movements through democratic means and upholding of substantive democracy is the key to combat this retrograde phenomenon. The Information technology revolution has helped us to see the process in a more transparent manner. Social movements imbibing this technology as its mechanism of expression will be very crucial to combating the religious nationalism.

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AB: The Sangh parivar has established a rapport with the most under privileged people of the country regardless of the rural urban divide. The Sangh has extended its roots among the Dalits, tribal's and the financially deprived segments of the society and also the elites. Is this because of the absence of effective interventions from the secular forces to the plight of those segments which helped the Sangh to exert their influence over them?

RP: As pointed out above Sangh has most effectively reached to communities on the basis of 'service' (Seva) and social engineering, co-opting them in the grip of their agenda. Their propaganda mechanism has influenced large sections of society. Secular forces, particularly after Nehru era, failed to reach the message of democratic-secular values far and wide. The network to reach to communities with the message of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity remained more on paper than becoming a part of societal consciousness. The left forces, focused on rights of workers and peasants without reaching to them the underlying principles and values which oppose the social inequalities in the name of religion. The caste system and struggles for opposing impact of caste on the dalits remained an issue only for fragmented dalit groups.

The class and caste struggle were not standing on the same platform. These energies which could have become a formidable force to transform the society towards democratic values remained fragmented. The religious nationalists, and those upper caste that benefit from the status quo of religious nationalism, were powerfully mobilized under the umbrella of Sangh. The secular forces, did neglect to reach the communities at grass roots with a positive message. Their fragmentation has been a major weakening factor in rise of Sangh and Hindu nationalist politics. The secular forces could not match the 'status quoist' message of Sangh which was couched in language of religion. Also social messaging by progressive groups remained a minor part of their work leading the Sangh creating a 'social common sense' in which hatred for minorities helped it to mobilize the large numbers around emotive identity issues.

AB Are the Muslim community in India are looking forward for a large-scale migration in view of the adverse political climate prevailing in the country?

RP: Large scale migration for Muslim community is out of question in India, seeing the massive number of this section of society. Their quest to have peace and harmony remains a deep longing. It is only a small section of middle class and more affluent one's who can afford such migrations. Giving the situation of employment World over, large scale migrations are impossible but surely many of Muslims who can afford and get the opportunity will like to migrate.

(An abbreviated, edited version of this appeared in Quint

<https://www.thequint.com/news/politics/ram-puniyani-interview-hindutva-communalism-bjp-politics>)

14. Promoting Communal Amity

Need for Dialogue with communities to promote campaigns on social issues and to promote awareness movement for Harmony and Peace

Movement for Weekly Community Addas-centers (Meetings)

The society is in the grip of multiple pressing issues. People want to have dialogue on their problems and also understand the deeper dynamics of different political streams and their impact on social lives. The rising Hate is a matter of great concern for us all.

We need to promote the dialogue and also reach to the community with proper understanding of different issues. The campaigns related to their issues need to be broadened. We also need to combat the



hate which is dividing the society. There is a need for platforms/ addas to have dialogue and reach to them the values of amity and peace, while giving expression to their deeper social concerns of livelihood. The campaigns for social issues need to be properly channelized and associated with other such endeavors. The grass-root level work needs to be strengthened and awareness levels need to be built up.

While lot of good material is produced by activists/scholars/film-video makers,

its reach seems to be limited. We need to put our heads together to promote weekly (Fortnightly) community meetings in localities, where we celebrate cultural programs, have a library, view the videos-films, sing songs of communal amity and participate in community celebrations while we also communicate the values of amity through diverse mechanisms. These weekly meetings; call them as per local appeal; will also be the platforms of hearing the problems/travails of the people and reflect upon them to give a shape to our social interventions through campaigns for people's rights. Each of these aspects can be developed by discussion in localities with the aim of communicating the deeper message of harmony and peace. These ideas can give a direction to our social movements.

Many of us feel that we are preaching the converts; we need to break this shackle. Some random thoughts are here in this direction.

1. The hate against religious minorities is rising in dangerous proportions. We have been seeing the Dharam Sansad speeches and Sully Deals and Bullibai Apps are just the tip of the iceberg. Our efforts to understand the deeper problem, the Hate manufactured and propagated from

Shakhas and spread through schools, Godi media, Social media and IT cell is well known. Now the seeds of hatred sown by these mechanisms are assuming cancerous proportions.

2. While those believing in harmony and peace are more in number, their efforts are fragmented and not reaching the nook and corner of society. Brilliant analysis of the situation is there, but mostly we are talking amongst ourselves. The crucial link of reaching the community needs to be taken up seriously.
3. The city based cultural programs promoting amity are most welcome; we can also organize Amity Film Festivals and NukkadNataks in each city.
4. We also need to work for community centers, *addas*, where weekly or fortnightly programs need to be started. These programs have multiple dimensions-cultural, educational and political in particular. These also need to be linked with the national campaigns and protests. We have to take up this task to run these mini centers in a consistent fashion.
5. We need to discuss and thwart the communal violence by promoting Mohall committees with people from different religions in collaboration with police. This committee can meet regularly and at sensitive times urge upon police authorities to take suitable steps to prevent and likelihood of violence. Regular meetings of this committee will also create a positive atmosphere in the communities.
6. We should aim to raise Amity platforms, which give space to diverse groups working for amity. The area, city, state and national level platforms can meet occasionally and chart out the programs for increasing the work of harmony in the local areas and in the country as a whole.

Types of programs

- a. National Festivals- 15th August, 26 January, Constitution Day
 - b. Social aspects of festivals- Divali, Id, Christmas, Onam, Lohri etc.
 - c. Special Days: Social Justice Day, Women's Day
 - d. Anniversaries: Gandhi, Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, Maulana Azad
 - e. Regular discussion on social issues: unemployment, workers-farmers plight, social Justice; gender justice
 - f. Inviting social activists for interaction as and when possible
 - g. Video screenings; Every session can have video selected for the occasion
7. Urgent need to make the social media network; starting WhatsApp groups to spread good material to friends activists, community leaders, to associate with similar efforts by other concerned individuals/groups
 8. There are excellent feature films and videos which can be screened
 - a. **Feature Films:** Gandhi (Attenborough) Ambedkar (Jabbar Patel), Bhagat Singh (Ajay Devgan), Udham Singh, Garam hava, Padosi, Mr. Mrs Aiyer, Mammo, Nasseem, Zakhm, Siskiyan, Black and White, Perzania, Khudake Liye, Dhokha, Shourya, New York, My Name is Khan
 - b. **Documentaries:**
 - I. Anand Patwardhan: Ram Ke Naam, Father Son and holy War, War and Peace, Vivek (reason)
 - II. Anhad- Hindostan ki Kahani, Re-Imagining India, Series on Syncretic Culture

- III. Karavan_e-Mohabbat –different videos
- IV. Apoorvanand's Videos on The Wire
- V. Citizens for Justice and Peace Videos
- VI. Suma Jossan: Ayodhya se Varanasi tak
- VII. Madhushree Datta; I live in Behrampada
- VIII. Rakesh Sharma: Final Solution,
- IX. Debaranajn: Hindu to Hindutva
- X. Waqar Khan; Hum Sab Ek hain
- XI. Ekta Collective: January 30 1948
- XII. Bhishma Sahani-Tamas
- XIII. The serials by Shyam Benegal: Bharat Ek Khoj and Sanvidhan
- XIV. Bharat Ek Soch; 15 Episodes (Also in English)

c. Educational

- I. EKTA: Raah Aman Ki (English and Hindi)
- II. Anhad: In Defence of our Dreams, Hindustan Ki Kahani-Sohail Hashmi)
- III. Ashok Kumar Pandey's Videos
- IV. Jaga Bharat videos and Pathshala
- V. Some of my videos- English and Hindi Series on Communal harmony, Satya Hindi-Sach Ka Samnaa: Mukesh Kumar, Video series on issue of Communalism, in English and Hindi

English Video Series

Understanding India: Pluralism to the Core

Video Series by Ram Puniyani

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhRJInF9cDU&t=7s>
Social Perceptions and Communal Violence
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1mAXEVHvnM>
Sectarian Violence in India
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Aq6YpI1208>
India: Nation in the making-I
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDp5Rlp3bxs>
India Nation in the making-II
5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Um_lvqCXZYQ&t=89s
Indian Culture Mixed: Bhakti Sufi Traditions
6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGOovqLVU38&t=136s>
Rise of Communalism in India
7. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77DRO_mO-2A&t=124s
Temple Destructions: Reasons Behind it
8. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMDum3zOpB0&t=395s>
Battles Between Hindu-Muslim Kings: For Power or Religion
9. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZE62q2JBMQ&t=18s>
Myths about Conversion to Islam

10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mt9jclRQ1J4&t=540s>
Anti Christian Violence: Truth
11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLzj2L MDhs&t=75s>
Communalism, Hindutva and Dalits
12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBhR-2Oh6Yw&t=1s>
Women, Fundamentalism and RSS
13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziichEdKFr0&t=907s>
Hindu Nationalism, RSS and Sangh Parivar- I
14. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dkVvmrIDY8&t=6s>
Hindu Nationalism, RSS and Sangh Parivar II
15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNR0IjvNwjc&t=1188s>
Terrorism: Due to Religion or Politics
16. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mg9DapPI3q8&t=295s>
India in Communal Grip
17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5GtMdn5AJE&t=73s>
Mixed Culture and Struggle for Peace

Hindi Series from Jaga Bharat

भारत एक सोच

धर्म, समाज और राजनीति

वक्ता :श्री राम पुनियानी

इस ऑनलाइन पाठ्यक्रम में राम पुनियानी जी भारतीय राष्ट्रीय आंदोलन के माध्यम से 'भारत एक सोच' और स्वतंत्रता युग में आधुनिक भारत के उदय पर विचार करते हैं। वह विशेष रूप से सांप्रदायिकता और उससे संबंधित मुद्दों के उदय का विश्लेषण करते हैं क्योंकि यही वो मुद्दे हैं जो आज के भारत को आकार देने में अहम भूमिका अदा कर रहे हैं।

जग भारत यूट्यूब चैनल प्लेलिस्ट पर सभी 15 एपिसोड देखें।

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IM_XhWTbOIM&list=PL8yx eoFGdAQYr0CFE ZK2oXtxvRYOOW8VQ

Song Cassettes

CharulBharvada, Vinay Mahajan: Insaanhai Ham

We can pick and choose from the vast material available and consistently run the weekly program,

9. Also set up a small library with posters, literature promoting Harmony.
10. Reach out to social campaigns for human rights

This book is a bird's eye view of the development of Hindu nationalism in opposition to Indian Nationalism. It gives outline of Hindutva and Hindu nationalism and then goes on to present as to how the politics of RSS combine affects the dalits, Adivasis, women and religious minorities.

The interview of Abhish K.Bose incorporated in this also gives the strategies adopted by Sangh to co-opt the sections, which it wants to subjugate and target. How do we combat Hate and promote Communal amity is also outlined giving different sources.

Author

Ram Puniyani

President, Center for Study of Society and Secularism Mumbai, Former Professor IIT Bombay.

Is associated with various secular initiatives and has been part of various investigation reports on violation of human rights of minorities. He has been conducting workshops and delivering lectures in different parts of the country on the themes related to, threats to democracy; the agenda of communal politics; myths about minorities and politics of terror and Path to Peace and Justice.

Books: Religious Nationalism, Social Perception and Violence, Caste and Communalism (Olive), Communal Politics: facts versus Myths, Deconstructing Terrorist Violence (Sage), Indian Nationalism versus Hindu Nationalism (Pharos), Communalism Explained (Media House)

Awards: Indira Gandhi National Integration Award (2006), National Communal Harmony Award (2007), Mukundan C. Menon Award (2015).

Weekly column on issues related to secular values and defense of human rights.

Youtube Channel: Dr Ram Puniyani, Facebook Page - Ram Puniyani



Centre for Study of Society and Secularism