

Hindutva: The Great Nationalist Ideology

From the Manifesto of the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at <http://www.bjp.org>

In the history of the world, the Hindu awakening of the late twentieth century will go down as one of the most monumental events in the history of the world. Never before has such demand for change come from so many people. Never before has Bharat, the ancient word for the motherland of Hindus - India, been confronted with such an impulse for change. This movement, Hindutva, is changing the very foundations of Bharat and Hindu society the world over.

Hindu society has an unquestionable and proud history of tolerance for other faiths and respect for diversity of spiritual experiences. This is reflected in the many different philosophies, religious sects, and religious leaders. The very foundation of this lies in the great Hindu heritage that is not based on any one book, teacher, or doctrine. In fact the pedestal of Hindu society stems from the great Vedic teachings Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti -- Truth is One, Sages Call it by Many Names, and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam -- The Whole Universe is one Family. It is this philosophy which allowed the people of Hindusthan (land of the Hindus) to shelter the Jews who faced Roman persecution, the Zoroastrians who fled the Islamic sword and who are the proud Parsi community today, and the Tibetan Buddhists who today face the communist secularism: persecution of religion.

During the era of Islamic invasions, what Will Durant called the bloodiest period in the history of mankind, many Hindus gallantly resisted, knowing full well that defeat would mean a choice of economic discrimination via the jaziya tax on non-Muslims, forced conversion, or death. It is no wonder that the residents of Chittor, and countless other people over the length and breadth of Bharat, from present-day Afghanistan to present-day Bangladesh, thought it better to die gloriously rather than face cold-blooded slaughter. Hindus never forgot the repeated destruction of the Somnath Temple, the massacre of Buddhists at Nalanda, or the pogroms of the Mughals.

Thus, the seeds of today's Hindu Jagriti, awakening, were created the very instance that an invader threatened the fabric of Hindu society which was religious tolerance. The vibrancy of Hindu society was noticeable at all times in that despite such barbarism from the Islamic hordes of central Asia and Turkey, Hindus never played with the same rules that Muslims did. The communist and Muslim intelligentsia, led by Nehruvian ideologists who are never short of distorted history, have been unable to show that any Hindu ruler ever matched the cruelty of even a moderate Muslim ruler.

It is these characteristics of Hindu society and the Muslim psyche that remain today. Hindus never lost their tolerance and willingness to change. However Muslims, led by the Islamic clergy and Islamic society's innate unwillingness to change, did not notice the scars

that Hindus felt from the Indian past. It is admirable that Hindus never took advantage of the debt Muslims owed Hindus for their tolerance and non-vengefulness.

In modern times, Hindu Jagriti gained momentum when Muslims played the greatest abuse of Hindu tolerance: the demand for a separate state and the partition of India, a nation that had had a common history and culture for countless millenia. Thus, the Muslim minority voted for a separate state and the Hindus were forced to sub-divide their own land.

After partition in Pakistan, Muslim superiority was quickly asserted and the non-Muslim minorities were forced to flee due to the immense discrimination in the political and religious spheres. Again, Hindus did not respond to such an onslaught. Hindu majority India continued the Hindu ideals by remaining secular.

India even gave the Muslim minority gifts such as separate personal laws, special status to the only Muslim majority state -- Kashmir, and other rights that are even unheard of in the bastion of democracy and freedom, the United States of America. Islamic law was given precedence over the national law in instances that came under Muslim personal law. The Constitution was changed when the courts, in the Shah Bano case, ruled that a secular nation must have one law, not separate religious laws. Islamic religious and educational institutions were given a policy of non- interference. The list goes on.

More painful for the Hindus was forced negation of Hindu history and factors that gave pride to Hindus. Hindu customs and traditions were mocked as remnants of a non-modern society, things that would have to go if India was to modernize like the west. The self proclaimed guardians of India, the politicians of the Congress Party who called themselves secularists, forgot that it was the Hindu psyche that believed in secularism, it was the Hindu thought that had inspired the greatest intellectuals of the world such as Thoreau, Emerson, Tolstoy, Einstein, and others, and that it was Hindus, because there was no other land where Hindus were in a significant number to stand up in defence of Hindu society if and when the need arose, who were the most nationalistic people in India.

When Hindus realized that pseudo-secularism had reduced them to the role of an innocent bystander in the game of politics, they demanded a true secularism where every religious group would be treated the same and a government that would not take Hindu sentiments for granted. Hindutva awakened the Hindus to the new world order where nations represented the aspirations of people united in history, culture, philosophy, and heroes. Hindutva successfully took the Indian idol of Israel and made Hindus realize that their India could be just as great and could do the same for them also.

In a new era of global consciousness, Hindus realized that they had something to offer the world. There was something more than tolerance and universal unity. The ancient wisdom of sages through eternity also offered systems of thought, politics, music, language, dance,

and education that could benefit the world.

There have been many changes in the thinking of Hindus, spearheaded over the course of a century by innumerable groups and leaders who made their own distinct contribution to Hindu society: Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhiji, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Swami Chinmayananda, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Muni Susheel Kumarji, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharatiya Janata Party, and others. Each in their own way increased pride in being a Hindu and simultaneously showed Hindus their greatest strengths and their worst weaknesses. This slowly shook the roots of Hindu society and prompted a rear-guard action by the ingrained interests: the old politicians, the Nehruvian intellectual community, and the appeased Muslim leadership.

The old foundation crumbled in the 1980s and 1990s when Hindus respectfully asked for the return of their most holy religious site, Ayodhya. This demand promptly put the 40-year old apparatus to work, and press releases were chunked out that spewed the libelous venom which called those who represented the Hindu aspirations RmilitantS and Rfundamentalist,S stigmas which had heretofore found their proper place in the movements to establish Islamic law. Hindus were humble enough to ask for the restoration of an ancient temple built on the birthplace of Rama, and destroyed by Babar, a foreign invader. The vested interests were presented with the most secular of propositions: the creation of a monument to a national hero, a legend whose fame and respect stretched out of the borders of India into southeast Asia, and even into Muslim Indonesia. A hero who existed before there was anyone in India who considered himself separate from Hindu society. The 400-year old structure at one of the holiest sites of India had been worshipped as a temple by Hindus even though the Muslim general Mir Baqi had partially built a non-functioning mosque on it. It was very important that no Muslims, except those who were appeased in Indian politics, had heard of anything called Babri Masjid before the pseudo-secularist apparatus started the next to last campaign against the rising Hindu society. It was also important that no Muslim had offered prayers at the site for over 40 years.

Hindus hid their true anger, that their most important religious site still bore the marks of a cruel slavery that occurred so very recently in the time span of Hindu history. It was naturally expected in 1947 that freedom from the political and economic chains of Great Britain would mean that the systems and symbols that had enslaved India and caused its deterioration and poverty would be obliterated. Forty years after independence, Hindus realized that their freedom was yet to come.

So long as freedom to Jews meant that symbols of the Holocaust in Europe were condemned, so long as freedom to African-Americans meant that the symbols of racial discrimination were wiped out, and so long as freedom from imperialism to all people meant that they would have control of their own destinies, that they would have their own heroes, their own stories, and their own culture, then freedom to Hindus meant that they would have to condemn the Holocaust that Muslims reaped on them, the racial

discrimination that the white man brought, and the economic imperialism that enriched Britain. Freedom for Hindus and Indians would have to mean that their heroes such as Ram, Krishna, Sivaji, the Cholas, Sankaracharya, and Tulsidas would be respected, that their own stories such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata would be offered to humanity as examples of the brilliance of Hindu and Indian thinking, and that their own culture which included the Bhagavad Gita, the Vedas, the temples, the gods and goddesses, the art, the music, and the contributions in various fields, would be respected. Freedom meant that as the shackles of imperial dominance were lifted, the newly freed people would not simply absorb foreign ideas, they would share their own as well.

In India, something went wrong. The freedom from Britain was supposed to result in a two-way thinking that meant that non-Indian ideas would be accepted and that Indian ideas would be presented to the world. So long as the part of India giving to the world was suppressed, the freedom was only illusory and the aspirations of the freedom hungry would continue to rise in temperature.

The freedom could have been achieved if a temple to Rama was built and the symbol of foreign rule was moved to another site or demolished. The battle was never really for another temple. Another temple could have been built anywhere in India.

The humble and fair demand for RamaJanmabhoomi could have resulted in a freedom for India, freedom from the intellectual slavery that so dominated India. This freedom would have meant that all Indians regardless of religion, language, caste, sex, or color would openly show respect for the person that from ancient times was considered the greatest hero to people of Hindusthan. For the first time, Hindus had demanded something, and it was justifiable that a reasonable demand from an undemanding people would be realized. Imagine if the Muslim leadership had agreed to shift the site and build a temple in Ayodhya. How much Hindu-Muslim unity there would have been in India? India could then have used that goodwill to solve the major religious, caste, and economic issues facing the country.

But some of the vested interests in politics and in the Muslim community saw that such a change would mean that their work since 1947 would be overturned and that this new revolution would displace them. Rather than join forces and accept the rising tide, the oligarchy added fuel to the greatest movement in Indian history. One that on December 6, 1992 completely shattered the old and weak roots of Indian society and with it, the old political and intellectual structure. The destruction by the Kar Sevaks of the dilapidated symbol of foreign dominance was the last straw in a heightening of tensions by the government, and the comittant anger of more and more Hindus to rebuffs of their reasonable demands.

The ruthless last-ditch effort of the powers-that-be was the banning and suppression of the leaders of the Hindu Jagriti. The effort of the rulers reminds one of the strategy of all ill-

fated rulers. Throughout history, when monumental upheavals have taken place, the threatened interests have resorted to drastic measures, which in-turn have hastened their own death.

Hindus are at last free. They control their destiny now and there is no power that can control them except their own tolerant ethos. India in turn is finally free. Having ignored its history, it has now come face to face with a repressed conscience. The destruction of the structure at Ayodhya was the release of the history that Indians had not fully come to terms with. Thousands of years of anger and shame, so diligently bottled up by these same interests, was released when the first piece of the so-called Babri Masjid was torn down.

It is a fundamental concept of Hindu Dharma that has won: righteousness. Truth won when Hindus, realizing that Truth could not be won through political or legal means, took the law into their own hands. Hindus have been divided politically and the laws have not acknowledged the quiet Hindu yearning for Hindu unity which has until recently taken a back seat to economic development and Muslim appeasement. Similarly, the freedom movement represented the supercedence of Indian unity over loyalty to the British Crown. In comparison to the freedom movement though, Hindutva involves many more people and represents the mental freedom that 1947 did not bring.

The future of Bharat is set. Hindutva is here to stay. It is up to the Muslims whether they will be included in the new nationalistic spirit of Bharat. It is up to the government and the Muslim leadership whether they wish to increase Hindu furor or work with the Hindu leadership to show that Muslims and the government will consider Hindu sentiments. The era of one-way compromise of Hindus is over, for from now on, secularism must mean that all parties must compromise.

Hindutva will not mean any Hindu theocracy or theology. However, it will mean that the guiding principles of Bharat will come from two of the great teachings of the Vedas, the ancient Hindu and Indian scriptures, which so boldly proclaimed:

TRUTH IS ONE, SAGES CALL IT BY MANY NAMES - and - THE WHOLE UNIVERSE IS ONE FAMILY.



HINDU VS HINDUTVA

The Great Debate



A WAY OF LIFE, an ancient tradition of religious thought and diverse practices. A uniquely inclusive culture and the source of shrill and polarising rhetoric. How can the rich legacy of Hinduism be squared with the fractious politics that surround it today?

While the appropriation of Hindu identity by the 'Hindutva' politics of the Sangh Parivar has gathered momentum and helped propel the NDA

government to power at the centre—and now in 19 states—recent months have seen an unprecedented attempt by 'liberal' political forces to reclaim the lost ground. From Rahul Gandhi's temple tour on the Gujarat campaign trail to Rajinikanth's manifesto of 'spiritual politics' and Siddaramaiah's war of words with Yogi Adityanath or the latest posters depicting the PM as Ravana in Amethi—the battle of 'Hindu versus Hindutva' has been joined.

Now, as the loquacious Congress MP Shashi Tharoor releases another broadside in the form of a book reclaiming Hinduism as a liberal legacy, we asked a panel of eminent and engaged writers from across the political spectrum to weigh in. The result is an enlightening, sometimes perplexing debate reflecting, we think, the richness of the Hindu cultural tradition. Call it diversity in unity. ■



HINDU VS HINDUTVA



By SHASHI
THAROOR

A Liberal Faith

Exclusive excerpts from the author—MP's new book, *Why I Am a Hindu*, on the need to reclaim an ancestral—and chosen—religion



I GREW UP IN A HINDU HOUSEHOLD. Our home always had a prayer room, where paintings and portraits of assorted divinities jostled for shelf and wall space with fading photographs of departed ancestors, all stained by ash scattered from the incense burned daily by my devout parents. I have written before of how my earliest experiences of piety came from watching my father at prayer. Every morning, after his bath, my father would stand in front of the prayer room wrapped in his towel, his wet hair still uncombed, and chant his Sanskrit mantras. But he never obliged me to join him; he exemplified the Hindu idea that religion is an intensely personal matter, that prayer is between you and whatever image of your Maker you choose to worship. In the Hindu way, I was to find my own truth.

I think I have. I am a believer, despite

a brief period of schoolboy atheism (of the kind that comes with the discovery of rationality and goes with an acknowledgment of its limitations). And I am happy to describe myself as a believing Hindu: not just because it is the faith into which I was born, but for a string of other reasons, though faith requires no reason.

One reason is cultural: as a Hindu I belong to a faith that expresses the ancient genius of my own people. I am proud of the history of my faith in my own land: of the travels of Adi Shankara, who journeyed from the southernmost tip of the country to Kashmir in the north, Gujarat in the west and Odisha in the east, debating spiritual scholars everywhere, preaching his beliefs, establishing his mutts. I am reaffirmed in this atavistic allegiance by the Harvard scholar Diana Eck writing of the 'sacred geography' of India, 'knit together by countless tracks of pilgrimage'. The great philosopher—president of India, Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, wrote of Hindus as 'a distinct cultural unit, with a common history, a common literature, and a common civilisation'. In reiterating my allegiance to Hinduism, I am consciously laying claim to this geography and history, its literature and civilisation, identifying myself as an heir

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(one among a billion heirs) to a venerable tradition that stretches back into time immemorial. I fully accept that many of my friends, compatriots and fellow-Hindus feel no similar need, and that there are Hindus who are not (or are no longer) Indian, but I am comfortable with this 'cultural' and 'geographical' Hinduism that anchors me to my ancestral past.

But another 'reason' for my belief in Hinduism is, for lack of a better phrase, its intellectual 'fit': I am more comfortable with the tenets of Hinduism than I would be with those of the other faiths of which I know. I have long thought of myself as liberal, not merely in the political sense of the term, or even in relation to principles of economics, but as an attitude to life. To accept people as one finds them, to allow them to be and become what they choose, and to encourage them to do whatever they like (so long as it does not harm others) is my natural instinct. Rigid and censorious beliefs have never appealed to my temperament. In matters of religion, too, I found my liberal instincts reinforced by the faith in which I was brought up. Hinduism is, in many ways, predicated on the idea that the eternal wisdom of the ages and of divinity cannot be confined to a single sacred book; we have many, and we can delve into each to find our own truth (or truths). As a Hindu I can claim adherence to a religion without an established church or

all, as a Hindu I belong to the only major religion in the world that does not claim to be the only true religion. I find it immensely congenial to be able to face my fellow human beings of other faiths without being burdened by the conviction that I am embarked upon a 'true path' that they have missed. This dogma lies at the core of the 'Semitic faiths', Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father [God], but by me' (John 14:6), says the Bible; 'There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet', declares the Quran, denying unbelievers all possibility of redemption, let alone of salvation or paradise. Hinduism asserts that all ways of belief are equally valid, and Hindus readily venerate the saints, and the sacred objects, of other faiths. I am proud that I can honour the sanctity of other faiths without feeling I am betraying my own.

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A Travesty of Hinduism

What does this 'Abrahamic Hinduism' of the 'Sangh Parivar' consist of? The ideological foundations laid by Savarkar, Golwalkar and Upadhyaya have given members of the RSS a fairly coherent doctrine. It rests on the atavistic belief that India has been the land of the Hindus since ancient times, and that their identity and its identity are intertwined. Since time immemorial, Hindutva advocates argue, Hindu culture and civilisation have constituted the essence of Indian life; Indian nationalism is therefore Hindu nationalism. The history of India is the story of the struggle of the Hindus, the owners and custodians of this ancient land, to protect and preserve their religion and culture against the onslaught of hostile alien invaders. It is true that the territory of India also hosts non-Hindus, but these are invaders (Muslims, Christians) or guests (Jews, Parsis); they can be tolerated, depending on their loyalty to the land, but cannot be treated as equal to the Hindus unless they acknowledge the superiority of Hindus in India and adopt Hindu traditions and culture. Non-Hindus must acknowledge their Hindu parentage, or, better still, convert to Hinduism in a return to their true cultural roots.

Those political forces in India who are opposed to the Sangh ideology are mistaken, the doctrine goes on, since they make the cardinal error of confusing 'national unity' with the unity of all those who happen to be living in the territory of India, irrespective of religion or national origin. Such people are in fact anti-national, because their real motivation is the selfish desire to win minority votes in elections rather than care for the interests of the majority of the nation. The unity and consolidation of the Hindus is therefore essential. Since the Hindu people are surrounded by enemies, a polarisation must take place that pits Hindus against all others. To

THE SANGHIVADI QUEST FOR POLARISATION AND UNITY IS ALSO A YEARNING TO MAKE HINDUISM WHAT IT IS NOT

priestly papacy, a religion whose rituals and customs I am free to reject, a religion that does not oblige me to demonstrate my faith by any visible sign, by subsuming my identity in any collectivity, not even by a specific day or time or frequency of worship. (There is no Hindu Pope, no Hindu Vatican, no Hindu catechism, not even a Hindu Sunday.) As a Hindu I follow a faith that offers a veritable smorgasbord of options to the worshipper of divinities to adore and to pray to, of rituals to observe (or not), of customs and practices to honour (or not), of fasts to keep (or not). As a Hindu I subscribe to a creed that is free of the restrictive dogmas of holy writ, one that refuses to be shackled to the limitations of a single volume of holy revelation.

And while I am, paradoxically, listing my 'reasons' for a faith beyond understanding, let me cite the clincher: above



achieve this, though, Hindus must be unified; the lack of unity is the root cause of all the evils besetting the Hindus. The Sangh Parivar's principal mission is to bring about that unity and lead it to the greater glory of the Hindu nation.

The problem with this doctrine, coherent and clear though it is, is its denial of the reality of what Hinduism is all about. What Swami Vivekananda would have seen as the strength of Hinduism—its extraordinary eclecticism and diversity, its acceptance of a wide range of beliefs and practices, its refusal to confine itself to the dogmas of a single holy book, its fluidity, the impossibility to define it down to a homogeneous 'Semitic' creed—is precisely what the RSS ideologues see as its weakness.

The Sanghivadi quest for polarisation and unity is also a yearning to make Hinduism what it is not—to 'Semitise' it so that it looks like the faiths of the 'invaders': codified and doctrinaire, with an identifiable God (preferably Rama), a principal holy book (the Gita), a manageable ecclesiastic hierarchy, and of course a unified race and a people to profess it. This is not the lived Hinduism of the vast majority of Hindus. And so the obvious question arises: Must every believing Hindu automatically be assumed to subscribe to the Hindutva project? And since manifestly most do not, does the viability of the project require a continued drive to force the dissenters into the Hindutva straitjacket?

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Hindutva and History

Unsurprisingly, a [particular] period of Indian history, following the Muslim conquests of north India, has become 'ground zero' in the battle of narratives between the Hindutvavadis and the pluralists. When, with the publication of my 2016 book *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, I spoke of 200 years of foreign rule, I found it interesting that at the same time the Hindutva brigade, led by Prime Minister Modi himself, was speaking of 1,200 years of foreign rule. To them, the Muslim rulers of India, whether the Delhi Sultans, the Deccani Sultans or the Mughals (or the hundreds of other Muslims who occupied thrones of greater or lesser importance for several hundred years across the country) were all foreigners. I responded that while the founder of a Muslim dynasty may have well have come to India from abroad, he and his descendants stayed and assimilated in this country, married Hindu women, and immersed themselves in the fortunes of this land; each Mughal Emperor after Babar had less and less connection of blood or allegiance to a foreign country. If they looted or exploited India and Indians, they spent the proceeds of their loot in India, and did not send it off to enrich a foreign land as the British did. The Mughals received travellers from the Ferghana Valley politely, enquired about the well-being of the people there and perhaps even gave some money for the upkeep of the graves of their Chingizid ancestors, but they stopped seeing their original homeland as home. By the second generation, let alone the fifth or sixth, they were as 'Indian' as any Hindu.

This challenge of authenticity, however, cuts across a wide intellectual terrain. It emerges from those Hindus who share V.S. Naipaul's view of theirs as a 'wounded civilisation', a pristine Hindu land that was subjected to repeated defeats and conquests over the centuries at the hands of rapacious Muslim invaders and was enfeebled and subjugated in the process. To such people, independence is not merely freedom from British rule but an opportunity to restore the glory of their culture and religion, wounded by Muslim conquerors. In this Hindutva-centred view, history is made of religion-based binaries, in which all Muslim rulers are evil and all Hindus are valiant resisters, embodiments of incipient Hindu nationalism....

Communal history continues past the era of Islamic rule. Among those Indians who revolted against the British, Bahadur Shah, Zinat Mahal, Maulavi Ahmadullah and General Bakht Khan, all Muslims, are



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conspicuous by their absence from Hindutva histories. And of course syncretic traditions such as the Bhakti movement, and universalist religious reformers like Rammohan Roy and Keshub Chandra Sen, do not receive much attention from the Hindutva orthodoxy. What does is the uncritical veneration of 'Hindu heroes' like Rana Pratap (portrayed now in Rajasthani textbooks as the victor of the Battle of Haldi Ghati against Akbar, which begs the question why Akbar and not he ruled the country for the following three decades) and of course Chhatrapati Shivaji, the intrepid Maratha warrior whose battles against the Mughals have now replaced accounts of Mughal kings in Maharashtra's textbooks. The Maharashtra Education Board's newly-revised class VII history book of 2017 has eliminated all mention of the pre-Mughal Muslim rulers of India as well, including Razia Sultan, the first woman queen of Delhi, Sher Shah Suri and Muhammad bin Tughlaq, who notoriously and disastrously moved India's capital south from Delhi to Daulatabad. (The educational system is the chosen battlefield for the Hindutva warriors, and curriculum revision their preferred weapon.)

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Taking Back Hinduism

As a believing Hindu, I cannot agree with the Hindutvavadis. Indeed, I am ashamed of what they are doing while claiming to be acting in the name of my faith. The violence is particularly sickening: it has led tens of thousands of Hindus across India to protest with placards screaming, 'Not In My Name'. As I have explained... and would like to reiterate, I have always prided myself on belonging to a religion of astonishing breadth and range of belief; a religion that acknowledges all ways of worshipping God as equally valid—indeed, the only major religion in the world that does not claim to be the only true religion. As I have often asked: How dare a bunch of goondas shrink the soaring majesty of the Vedas and the Upanishads to the petty bigotry of their brand of identity politics? Why should any Hindu allow them to diminish Hinduism to the raucous self-glorification of the football hooligan, to take a religion of awe-inspiring tolerance and reduce it to a chauvinist rampage?

Hinduism, with its openness, its respect for variety, its acceptance of all other faiths, is one religion which has always been able to assert itself without threatening



others. But this is not the Hindutva that destroyed the Babri Masjid, nor that spewed in hate-filled diatribes by communal politicians. It is, instead, the Hinduism of Swami Vivekananda. It is important to parse some of Swami Vivekananda's most significant assertions. The first is his assertion that Hinduism stands for 'both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true'. He... [quotes] a hymn... to the effect that as different streams originating in different places all flow into the same sea, so do all paths lead to the same divinity. He repeatedly asserted the wisdom of the Advaita belief that Truth is One even if the sages call It by different names. Vivekananda's vision—summarised in the credo 'sarva dharma sambhava'—is, in fact, the kind of Hinduism practised by the vast majority of Hindus, whose instinctive acceptance of other faiths and forms of worship has long been the vital hallmark of our culture....

I reject the presumption that the purveyors of hatred speak for all or even most Hindus. The Hindutva ideology is in fact a malign distortion of Hinduism. It is striking that leaders of now-defunct twentieth-century political parties like the Liberal Party and the pro-free enterprise Swatantra Party were unabashed in their avowal of their Hinduism; the Liberal leader Srinivasa Sastry wrote learned disquisitions on the Ramayana, and the founder of Swatantra, C. Rajagopalachari ('Rajaji'), was a Sanskrit

scholar whose translations of the Itihasas and lectures on aspects of Hinduism are still widely read, decades after his death. Neither would have recognised the intolerance and bigotry of Hindutva as in any way representative of the faith they held dear. Many leaders in the Congress Party are similarly comfortable in their Hindu beliefs while rejecting the political construct of Hindutva. It suits the purveyors of Hindutva to imply that the choice is between their belligerent interpretation of Hinduism and the godless Westernisation of the 'pseudo-seculars'. Rajaji and Sastry proved that you could wear your Hinduism on your sleeve and still be a political liberal. But that choice is elided by the identification of Hindutva with political Hinduism, as if such a conflation is the only possible approach open to practising Hindus.

I reject that idea. I not only consider myself both a Hindu and a liberal, but find that liberalism is the political ideology that most corresponds to the wide-ranging and open-minded nature of my faith.

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A Reflection of Insecurity

The irony is that Hindutva reassertion is a reflection of insecurity rather than self-confidence. It is built on constant reminders of humiliation and defeat, sustained by tales of Muslim conquest and rule, stoked by stories of destroyed temples and looted treasures, all of which have imprisoned susceptible Hindus in a narrative of failure and defeat, rather than a broad-minded story of a confident faith finding its place in the world. Looking back towards the failures of the past, it offers no hopes for the successes of the future.

This seems to be conceded even by one of the foremost voices of contemporary Hindutva, the American Dr David Frawley. Hindus, he writes in his foundational screed *Arise Arjuna!* (1995), 'are generally suffering from a lack of self esteem and an inferiority complex by which they are afraid to really express themselves or their religion. They have been beaten down by centuries of foreign rule and ongoing attempts to convert them'. Frawley's answer is for Indians to reassert Hindu pride, but his diagnosis calls that prescription into question.

As a Hindu and an Indian, I would argue that the whole point about India is the rejection of the idea that religion should be a determinant of nationhood. Our nationalist leaders never fell into the insidious trap of agreeing that, since Partition had established a state for Muslims, what remained was a state for Hindus. To accept the idea of India you have to spurn the logic that divided the country

in 1947. Your Indianness has nothing to do with which god you choose to worship, or not. We are not going to reduce ourselves to a Hindu Pakistan.

That is the real problem here. As I have mentioned earlier, Nehru had warned that the communalism of the majority was especially dangerous because it could present itself as nationalist. Yet, Hindu nationalism is not Indian nationalism. And it has nothing to do with genuine Hinduism either.

I too am proud of my Hinduism; I do not want to cede its verities to fanatics. I consider myself a Hindu and a nationalist, but I am not a Hindu nationalist. To discriminate against another, to attack another, to kill another, to

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destroy another's place of worship on the basis of his faith is not part of Hindu *dharma*, as it was not part of Swami Vivekananda's. It is time to go back to these fundamentals of Hinduism. It is time to take Hindu *dharma* back from the fundamentalists.

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Hinduism as Culture

Thanks in many ways to the eclectic inclusiveness of Hinduism, everything in India exists in countless variants. There was no single standard, no fixed stereotype, no 'one way'. This pluralism emerged from the very nature of the country; it was made inevitable by India's geography and reaffirmed by its history. There was simply too much of both to permit a single, exclusionist nationalism. When the Hindutvavadis demanded that all Indians declare '*Bharat Mata ki jai*' as a litmus test of their nationalism, many of us insisted that no Indian should be obliged to mouth a slogan he did not believe in his heart. If some Muslims, for instance, felt that their religion did not allow them to hail their motherland as a goddess, the Constitution of India gave them the right not to. Hindutva wrongly seeks to deny them this right.

We were brought up to take this for granted, and to



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reject the sectarianism that had partitioned the nation when the British left. I was raised unaware of my own caste and unconscious of the religious loyalties of my schoolmates and friends. Of course knowledge of these details came in time, but too late for any of it to matter, even less to influence my attitude or conduct. We were Indians: we were brought up (and constantly exhorted) to believe in an idea of nationhood transcending communal divisions. This may sound like the lofty obliviousness of the privileged, but such beliefs were not held only by the elites: they were a reflection of how most Indians lived, even in the villages of India. Independent India was born out of a nationalist struggle in which acceptance of each other which we, perhaps unwisely, called secu-

MAJORITY COMMUNALISM IS IN FACT AN EXTREME FORM OF SEPARATISM BECAUSE IT SEEKS TO SEPARATE OTHER INDIANS FROM INDIA ITSELF

larism was fundamental to the nationalist consensus.

It is true that Hindu zealotry—which ought to be a contradiction in terms—is partly a reaction to other chauvinisms. As I have pointed out, the unreflective avowal by many Hindus of their own secularism has provoked the scorn of some Hindus, who despise the secularists as deracinated ‘Macaulayputras’ (sons of Macaulay) or ‘Babar *ke aulad*’ (sons of Babar). They see such Hindus as cut off from their own culture and heritage, and challenge them to rediscover their authentic roots, as defined by the Hindutvavadis.

...

Hinduism Is Not a Monolith

[F]rom time to time, a Hindutvavadi, reminding me of the religion that has been mine from birth, succumbed to the temptation to urge me predictably to heed that well-worn slogan: ‘*Garv se kaho ki hum Hindu hain.*’

All right, let us take him up on that. I am indeed proud that I am a Hindu. But of what is it that I am, and am not, proud?

I am not proud of my co-religionists attacking and destroying Muslim homes and shops. I am not proud of Hindus raping Muslim girls, or slitting the wombs of Muslim mothers. I am not proud of Hindu vegetarians who have roasted human beings alive and rejoiced over the corpses. I am not proud of those who reduce the lofty metaphysical speculations of the Upanishads to the petty bigotry

of their own sense of identity, which they assert in order to exclude, not embrace, others.

I am proud that India’s pluralism is paradoxically sustained by the fact that the overwhelming majority of Indians are Hindus, because Hinduism has taught them to live amidst a variety of other identities.

I am proud of those Hindus, like the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, who say that Hindus and Muslims must live like Ram and Lakshman in India. I am not proud of those Hindus, like ‘Sadhvi’ Rithambhara, who say that Muslims are like sour lemons curdling the milk of Hindu India.

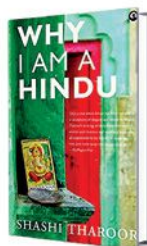
I am not proud of those who suggest that only a Hindu, and only a certain kind of Hindu, can be an authentic Indian.

I am not proud of those Hindus who say that people of other religions live in India only on their sufferance, and not because they belong on our soil. I am proud of those Hindus who realise that an India that denies itself to some of us could end up being denied to all of us.

I am proud of those Hindus who utterly reject Hindu communalism, conscious that the communalism of the majority is especially dangerous because it can present itself as nationalist. I am proud of those Hindus who respect the distinction between Hindu nationalism and Indian nationalism. Obviously, majorities are never seen as ‘separatist’, since separatism is by definition pursued by a minority. But majority communalism is, in fact, an extreme form of separatism, because it seeks to separate other Indians, integral parts of our country, from India itself. I am proud of those Hindus who recognise that the saffron and the green both belong equally on the Indian flag.

The reduction of non-Hindus to second-class status in their own homeland is unthinkable. As I have pointed out here, and in my other writings, it would be a second partition: and a partition in the Indian soul would be as bad as a partition in the Indian soil. For Hindus like myself, the only possible idea of India is that of a nation greater than the sum of its parts. That is the only India that will allow us to call ourselves not Brahmins, not Bengalis, not Hindus, not Hindi-speakers, but simply Indians.

How about another slogan for Hindus like me? *Garv se kaho ki hum Indian hain.* ■



WHY I AM A HINDU
By Shashi Tharoor
Aleph Book Company
Price: ₹699; Pages: 320



HINDU VS HINDUTVA

Rashtra Is not 'Nation'

Hindutva means Hinduness, not Hindu nationalism in the Western sense



By K.N.
GOVINDACHARYA



WHEN PARALLELS ARE DRAWN between Hindu and Hindutva, I'm reminded of my days in the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) in the early 1980s. My mentor then was Yashwant Rao Kelkar, who had earlier been a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) *pracharak*. He would say that Atal Bihari Vajpayee has his idea of Hindutva, L.K. Advani another, K. Sudarshan and Ashok Singhal have their own ideas of it, as do Vinay Katiyar and the Bajrang Dal, and so on and so forth. Why were these varying shades of the Hindutva spectrum at 180 degrees from each other? He said this would cause trouble in the future.

Kelkar said that we are all situated in our respective resolve to protect and nurture four facets of being Hindu: its *dharma*, culture, society and *rashtra*. If these facets are different, then their meanings and implications will also vary. When we talk of the danger, it's not to *dharma*, because that is timeless. The danger is to Hindu society. This creates confusion, which spreads from the supporters of Hindutva to its opponents. He often said the Sangh Parivar should address and resolve this confusion.

Above all else, he said, the varying arms of the Parivar need unity and coordination along two values, self-sufficiency and cooperation. How are these to be achieved, through what means, and in which spheres?

Answers to these were important because the divergence was set to increase with time.

That's exactly what we see today. There is a feeling that Hindutva carries a universal message; at the same time, there is also the feeling that Hindutva is a kind of obsession that targets Muslims. If such contradictory impressions persist, it's not without reason. Yet, we know that in politics one cannot assume that where there is smoke, there must be a fire. Politics can create smoke without a fire. This has a cascading effect in a media-saturated world.

I see Hindutva as a qualitative term; its English translation is 'Hinduness', not Hinduism, though it includes the latter. It signifies five qualities to me. One, an undivided respect towards all forms of faith and worship, because all prayers reach the same unified divine. Two, divinity pervades all and everything, living and non-living; this is a unity of understanding and belief. Three, humans are a part of the natural world, not its conquerors, because the world has not been created for human consumption. (This means it is not just humans who have rights, but all flora and fauna, and even land and water bodies and the atmosphere are entitled to their rights.)

Four, a recognition of the special place of women in society, given the unexceptional human dependence on mothering and motherhood. (I do not equate this with the arguments in favour or against women's rights, because that comes from a Western context, and conflating the two creates a distortion, causing more problems than it resolves.) Five, a living sense that there is more to life than consumption and material satisfaction; non-material goals can vary from *nirvana* to *moksha* to innumerable others. All effort to create material prosperity should be based on these values of



**IF SUCH CONTRADICTORY
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HAS A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE,
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IT'S NOT WITHOUT REASON**

Hinduness. Such prosperity will reach all around.

Even the term *rashtra* has to be understood in its cultural context. It's not the same thing as the idea of nation, nationhood and nationalism that resulted from the 1648 treaty signed in Westphalia, Germany, by more than 100 European powers. That is Europe's history and cultural background, not ours. Europe has its own ideas

of individualism, of how the individual relates to the state. This results from what happened there over time. Hence the nation-state, hence democracy.

India didn't function along similar lines through its long history. Here, society was a more powerful entity than either the individual or the state. The term *rashtra* is linked to the Sanskrit word *raati*; it means to give, to contribute. I learned this from Dr Fateh Singh during a *bauddhik* (intellectual) session in the 1960s in Uttar Pradesh. That's the sense behind *rashtra*, it is not a synonym of 'nation', and to use it in the same sense is unfair to both the terms. *Rashtra* stands for an entity that has a surplus of material and non-material resources, which are invested for the betterment of all. That's Bharat to me.

RASHTRA IS NOT NATION-STATE. Instead, it draws from *sanatan*—timeless—traditions with their own values. It draws from a recognition of the divine—in parents, in the teacher, in guests, in the whole world



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and beyond. A society that lives by these values will produce a surplus, but will also distribute its resources in a just manner; it will practise moderation in consumption, tempering its aspirations. Its values cannot be merely materialistic. This is not a feudal state of being. Please remember, respect for teachers does not mean you are bound to their deeds. The poet Kabir was steeped in the *guru-shishya* tradition, but he wrote that the teacher will go by his deeds and the pupil by his.

Our societies absorbed and refined these ideas over centuries, and this folk heritage spans thousands of years. Why must we underplay this heritage? Why must we overplay only the past thousand years? Why can't we understand ourselves from our perspectives, our values? Why must our terms, our reference points be borrowed from the Westphalia treaty? We have our own problems, we should have our own ways of tackling them. That's Hindutva, that's Hinduness, that's Hindu *rashtra*.

So how do we go about achieving this? I see three

OUR CATTLE ABSORBS THE POWER OF THE SUN AND TURNS IT INTO SWARNAPITTA. SUCH MILK CAN MAKE YOU AGILE, PRUDENT, WISE, MORAL

ways. The first sees India as not a nation but a multinational subcontinent. An example is the Communist Party mentioning 17 distinct nationalities in India around the time of independence. The second sees India as a new nation-state formed on August 15, 1947, and Mahatma Gandhi as the father of this nation. Under this, it's not a nation in the making but a new nation, hence the call to make India anew. The third view sees India as one nation, which hasn't yet built a state befitting its non-materialistic values. I believe in the third, that Bharat is one ancient Hindu *rashtra*—one people, one culture.

The two examples of this that I often cite are Gangaji and *gau mata*, two incomparable gifts of the divine to India and the world. I believe this because there isn't a mountain higher than the Himalaya and there is no comparison for the kind slope that the mighty Ganga traverses. Likewise, the cow breeds found from the Himalaya to the tip of northern Africa, which have the prominent hump and dewlap. Traditional literature describes a special feature of our cattle, called the *suryaketu naadi*.

People have believed that our cattle absorbs the power of the sun and turns it into a reagent called *swarnapitta kshaar*. Hence the yellowness of the milk and its ghee; hence the difference in cholesterol, hence the A2-type milk. You are what you eat, and such milk has the capacity to make you agile, prudent, wise and moral. Another example is the 127 agro-climatic zones that we have.

BHARAT MATA TO ME IS LOCATED TO THE SOUTH of the Himalayas, with the seas on three sides, including the islands. *Rashtra* is a combination of society, culture and a border. Its sense of values, its identity, its soul are formed over time. But time also damages this sense. The greatest shock to me on this count was the 2001 destruction of the Buddha monuments in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. Madness causes people to chop off their own hands, and not pay attention to the pain. Why else would you destroy such a monument crafted by your ancestors? How did they begin to consider that as not their heritage? This indicates a diseased mindset, a lapse of memory and also a distortion of memory.

All the same, they are our own people, and we regard them as a part of Bharat. So how do we address them, how do we improve this situation? For starters, the part of Bharat that retains its memory and its sanity must strengthen itself in material and spiritual terms. This strength will keep bringing other people back into its fold. This will rectify the situation gradually.

We have a glorious past, we've given much to the world, in line with the idea of *raati*. *Rashtra* is the giver; that which takes or takes away is not worthy of being called a *rashtra*. I believe in reconstruction—not new construction—of that *rashtra*. Our future will be even more glorious than our past.

I do believe in keeping an open mind. There is no place for caste-based discrimination in this *rashtra*. It's not that I don't find desirable qualities outside Bharat. For example, in our preoccupation with oral traditions, we in India did not put an adequate stress on documentation. Europe has had that tradition, and it's worth emulating. The West has the quality of staying up-to-date, contextual. Another is the ability to take risks, be courageous. For example, it's one thing to criticise Christian missionaries and their inspirations, but one must appreciate the immense effort they undertook to live in difficult circumstances, for no material gain. We need to reconsider the reasons for our excessive introversion. ■

A Hindutva ideologue, K.N. Govindacharya runs the Rashtriya Swabhimani Andolan. He is a former RSS pracharak and BJP general secretary



HINDU VS HINDUTVA

A Mythic Dissonance

Hinduism thrives on diversity, transcends the equality of Abrahamic faiths or the monotheism of Hindutva



By **DEVDU TT
PATTANA I K**



HINDUS ARE AT ODDS with the world in terms of its underlying mythic structure. By contrast, Hindutva is very much aligned to the dominant global discourse. We realise this if we meditate on two myths: the myth of equality and the myth of the wound.

Myth here does not mean fantasy, a 19th century misunderstanding that continues among those who prefer binary thought and cannot handle nuance. It means the subjective truth of a community shaped by inherited stories, symbols and rituals.

Myth of Equality

In nature, there is diversity. There is also equality in the sense that no creature is nature's favourite. Every living organism has to fight for its survival using its strengths and overcoming its weaknesses to find opportunities and fend off threats. The cultural idea of equality is very different: it is the myth that shapes the Abrahamic faiths.

The God of Abrahamic faiths loves all

his followers equally; he is a jealous god who does not tolerate other gods. There is no one high or low in god's eyes. In his world, any attempt to highlight difference, hence uniqueness, is viewed as vanity and chauvinism. No one is better as god has no favourites. Hierarchy in god's world is the work of the devil. This is why Abrahamic faiths seek uniformity in belief and practice and are highly intolerant of deviations, constantly yearning for the homogeneity of a single truth.

Hinduism is very different. It thrives on diversity. Every community is seen as unique, with its own gods, its own vocation and its own beliefs and practices. As between trees and animals in the forest, there is tension between communities as they compete for resources, resulting in fluid hierarchy. Some communities, hence some gods, become more important than others, but not forever. There is always someone centre stage, someone at the periphery, but it is dynamic. Diversity breeds hierarchy, but when it becomes stagnant, it institutionalises inequality. So it is that Hinduism is full of diverse communities, with thousands of *jatis* vying for power, that everyone tries to force-fit into a theoretical Vedic four-fold varna system. Equality here comes from the doctrine of *atma*, or soul, which is resident (*dehi*) within the body (*deha*), which in turn is established in a dynamic diverse society.

**RATHER THAN
A WOUND-
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Contemporary humanistic doctrine of the global village, with its doctrine of human rights, is derived from Abrahamic faiths, except that god is replaced by state, and faith is replaced by patriotism. A good constitution is a set of commandments that looks at all citizens equally and grants them equal rights and equal access to resources. This doctrine of equal rights does not know how to deal with diversity: hence the current global crisis. For how does a state that grants equality to all its citizens accommodate religions whose god does not allow them to treat women as equal to men, or whose culture has never treated homosexuals on par with heterosexuals? How does such a state accommodate tribes that will not let their women marry outside the tribe, or men change their faith? How does such a state accommodate castes that declare other castes as impure and unworthy of human dignity?

'The Idea of India' was designed around the doctrine of equality. While India has long struggled with its diversity, developed nations are only now facing the challenge as they face an influx of immigrants, a slowing economy and widespread discomfort with the homogeneity heralded by the doctrine of equal rights and social justice. It is but natural that the Idea of India, as well as most nation states, populated by followers of Abrahamic faiths, will be at odds with Hinduism's alleged comfort with caste, diversity and hierarchy.

Myth of the Wound

In the beginning, the world was perfect. Then came the wound. Followed by the healing. This is the dominant myth of Abrahamic faiths. The perfect world is Eden. Disobedience of god's law results in a rupture of humanity's relationship with him, hence the wound. Prophets help humanity heal the wound. In a more dramatic retelling, humans are not held responsible for disobeying god. They are victims, enchanted by the devil. The prophet then transforms into the saviour, who fights the devil-dragon, like a knight in shining armour, and rescues humanity, the damsel in distress.

This myth of the wound, and the resulting saviour complex determines much of the modern global discourse. Exile and Holocaust are the wound of Judaism. Death of Ali is the wound of Shia Islam. The end of the Caliphate is the wound of jihadi Islamism. Caste is the wound of Dalit activism. Patriarchy is the wound of feminism. Poverty is the wound of Communism, and Capitalism. 'Century of humiliation' is the wound of China. All these worldviews are propelled by the notion of loss, injustice and a determination to remember. They see forgetfulness as the greatest tragedy, as do many 20th century intellectuals who therefore feel it is the duty of writers and poets and artists to ensure we 'never forget' the many tragedies of the world so that we are morally





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compelled towards social justice like the enslaved tribes following the messiah towards the freedom and dignity offered by the biblical Promised Land.

Hindutva is all about a wound. It will 'never forget' the humiliation of the Hindus and the breakdown of Indic civilisation, that began a thousand years of 'slavery', at the hands of invaders, first the Muslims, then Christian missionaries and finally the British. Modern academicians, the intellectual elite of India, will reject this narrative as fascist propaganda, but that is true of all 'wounds'. Every politician knows that a culture's obsessive, strategic and manipulative attachment to an event successfully drives social behaviour, rationality notwithstanding.

This wound-based mythic structure is totally at odds with Hinduism where Shiva is *smara-antaka*, the destroyer of memories. He who seeks *mukti*, liberation from the cycle of rebirths; he who seeks *sad-chitta-ananda*, the fetterless tranquility of wisdom, needs to learn to 'let go'.

Misunderstood Hindu

A Hindu is exposed to two contradictory ideas from childhood. First is the myth of *tyaga*, or letting go of all wounds, that are viewed essentially as delusions (*maya*). Second is the myth of *jati*, or diverse caste identities, whereby he is bound to obligations, beliefs, practices as well as resources and privileges of his caste, and simultaneously made aware of the differences of obligations, beliefs, practices, resources and privileges of others castes. The myth of *tyaga* says that one must not be attached to anything, be it one's social status, or to one's desires, and so love all creatures equally, if one seeks liberation (*mukti*). The myth of *jati* either makes him the oppressor or the oppressed in the caste hierarchy of India.



WHILE THE HINDU STRUGGLES with these two contradictory ideas, he also has to cope with being misunderstood by the Western academic, the Westernised Indian, and the Hindutvavadi.

The Western academic will insist that the doctrine of *tyaga* is Hindu propaganda at best, which seeks to obscure the 'reality' of caste oppression. The Westernised Indian will insist that true Hinduism is all about *tyaga*, and that caste is a later-day corruption that needs to be purged through reform movements including 'The Idea of India' with its reservation policies and its secular value system. Both decide how a Hindu thinks or should behave. He will be boxed as 'savarna' if he speaks in favour of *tyaga*, and shows any comfort with his caste identity. If he is 'low' caste, he is expected to reject his caste, identify himself as 'dalit', a political neologism, and he must never ever be heard referring to

Brahminical concepts such as *tyaga*, *atma*, or *maya*.

Additionally, adding to the mythic dissonance, the 'wounded' Hindutvavadi will also deny the feminine nature of Hinduism, further confounding the Hindu.

Hindutva is monotheistic in spirit, as it prefers to focus on one deity, Bharat Mata, the embodiment of the nation-state. Like all wives and mothers, she is chaste. But while we are aware of her children, the people of this land, we don't know who her husband is. This seems odd as mother goddesses of the Hindu pantheon such as Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga have colourful and volatile relationships with their consorts, be it Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva. Hindutva posters show Krishna without Radha, Ram without Sita, and Shiva without Parvati. Their discourses valorise celibacy of saffron-robed

HINDUTVA FOCUSES ON ONE DEITY, BHARAT MATA, WHO HAS NO HUSBAND. ODD—AS HINDU GODDESSES HAVE INTENSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CONSORTS

leaders such as the Shankaracharya, who they claim established the order of martial Nagas over a thousand years ago to protect the docile sadhus of India from foreign invaders, a claim that justifies the existence of Hindutva goons or 'fringe groups' as they are called. They will, however, ignore the legend where the same Shankara, on the advice of Mandana Mishra's wife, Ubhaya Bharati, experienced sex through the body of King Amaru using his occult powers.

Hindutva rejection of the feminine, and of sensuality, resonates with Abrahamic myths where God is avowedly masculine, where his messengers are men, and where his son is conceived in a 'virgin' woman without sex, and where pleasure is reserved only for the afterlife, for those who live in their lives denying themselves pleasure. As in Abrahamic faiths, devotion in Hindutva is about obedience, discipline and submission to an institution (RSS, VHP, BJP) and nothing to do with love (*shringara*), or affection (*madhurya*) with the other (*para-jiva*) in the quest for the almighty (*param-atma*), which are hallmarks of Hindu *bhakti*. As the Hindutvavadis rave and rant against Valentine's Day, public displays of affection, female agency and empowerment, and Hinduism's erotic (*kama*) culture in general, one realises that like all overzealous saviours, they risk destroying the very thing they seek to save. ■

Devdutt Pattanaik writes on mythology and its relevance in modern times, with over 30 books and 700 columns on the subject in the past 20 years



HINDU VS HINDUTVA



By **PURUSHOTTAM
AGRAWAL**

The Hullabaloo over Hindutva

Political Hindutva fails to articulate the rich cultural diversity of India and inevitably distorts its history



ANANTDAS, A VAISHNAVA sadhu, wrote the first biography of Kabir around the turn of the sixteenth century. At one point in the story, he recounts how a delegation of pundits *and* maulanas of Kashi went to Sikandar Lodhi to complain about the waywardness of Kabir. Being an argumentative Indian, Kabir, the faith leaders complained, refused to believe in the putative divinity of any holy book, and insisted on assessing all propositions and practice against the touchstone of common sense and wisdom derived from everyday life. Naturally, they were upset with him.

Sikandar, who had not heard of Kabir, was perplexed. What possible harm could a humble weaver have inflicted on the high and mighty of the city? Had he seized a piece of land or robbed someone perhaps? But, of course, the complaint against Kabir was not simply material—and perhaps therefore harder to grasp. Kabir had discarded Islamic dogma and practice, and was equally scathing of Hindu customs and beliefs. Instead of following the dictates of holy men, he would insist on using his own intellect and, even worse, encourage others to do so as well. This couldn't go on, the mighties of the delegation concluded, and Kabir had

to be banished from Kashi for “as long as this weaver lives in Kashi/ No one is going to follow us”.

All authoritarian ideologies see interrogative human beings—intellectuals, that is—as a threat. Conversely, fear and hatred of such human beings is a clear marker of an authoritarian ideology, irrespective of whether it invokes religion, history or nation to justify itself. Such ideologies, by their nature and systematic practice, foment passions in public life, and seek to create structures of feeling filled with anxiety, aggression and hatred for the ‘other’—and an antipathy for intellectuals. The ‘law of controversy’ propounded by American science fiction writer and astrophysicist Gregory Benford, as a parody of Newcomb-Benford’s law, puts the authoritarian mindset’s dependence on passion in perspective: ‘Passion is inversely proportional to the amount of real information available.’

POLITICAL HINDUTVA IS NO EXCEPTION;

It cannot be. It can remain acceptable only when passions run high, hence the constant attempts to create anxieties and regular appeals to sentiment with no regard for fact or information. Recall the controversy over a recent Bollywood film: it has to avoid rational examination, hence the bid to stir up passions against intellectuals. Consider the oxymoron ‘intellectual terrorism’ being popularised by political campaigns and the media and bandied about in Parliament. All this is justified in the name of ‘Hindu sentiment’. Like its counterparts among other religious communities, ‘Hindutva’ claims to represent the culture of its believers and their interests; it calls



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itself ‘cultural nationalism’—as distinct from ‘geographical nationalism’, a term it uses derisively to describe the more inclusive variant of Indian nationalism. And yet, as V.D. Savarkar put it bluntly: ‘Hinduism is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of Hindutva.’

Savarkar was the first and probably only Hindutva ideologue who took intellectual pains to define Hindutva

and explain its composition and orientation in the 1928 pamphlet titled *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (first published in 1923 as *Essentials of Hindutva* under the pseudonym ‘A Maratha’). Savarkar was aware of the richness and complexity of Hindu tradition—every Hindutva ideologue worth his salt is—but he saw this richness as a liability rather than as an asset. Savarkar desperately



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wished to bring the rich matrix of Hinduism under a monolithic definition. Being motivated solely by contemporary political concerns, he was insensitive to the historically evolved content and texture of Hinduism. He wrote: 'Hindutva is not identical with what is vaguely indicated by the term Hinduism.' Further, 'By an "ism" is generally meant a theory or a code more or less based on a spiritual dogma or a system. But when we attempt to define the essential significance of Hindutva, we do not [primarily] and certainly not mainly concern ourselves with any particular theocratic dogma or creed. Had not linguistic usage stood in the way, then Hinduness would have been a better word than Hindutva as a near parallel to Hindutva' (p. 4, *Hindutva: Who Is...*).

Savarkar's definition solves the puzzle of why beef is alright in Goa and Meghalaya, while in the Hindi heartland, mere suspicion that there may be beef in your fridge is fair excuse for a mob-lynching. The Gau Raksha sentiment is not sacrosanct, it appears; it is about the political expediency of a certain brand of 'cultural nationalism'. Savarkar's 'Hindutva' is not as concerned with intellectual rigour as it is with keeping passions roiled. His idea is to somehow exclude Muslims and Christians from the ambit of nation, so he comes up with the idea of 'holy land' as the real touchstone of patriotism. He asks: 'Who is a Hindu?' And puts the essence of his answer in a Sanskrit verse, attempting to bestow on it the sanctity of ancient scriptural wisdom. The verse says: 'He who considers this land of Bharat, spread from Sindhu (the river) to Sindhu (the ocean) as his motherland, fatherland and holy land is Hindu.'

HIS IDEA OF 'HINDUTVA', in its traditional wisdom/ Sanskrit masquerade is actually foreign; it coheres with the European/ Christian idea of national community, defining it in terms of uniformity of language, culture, history and religion. M.S. Golwalkar was only taking the next logical step in his *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966) when he saw not poverty, deprivation and structured injustice, but 'the Muslims', 'the Christians' and 'the Communists' as 'internal threats' to the nation (Ch. XII). Naturally for him, the Indian freedom movement was "reactionary" as in it, '...anti-Britishism was equated with patriotism and nationalism (p. 143)'. It might come as a surprise to some female votaries of Hindutva that Golwalkar brackets the idea of empowering women (including Hindus) with communalism

and casteism: "There is now a clamour for 'equality for women' and their 'emancipation from man's domination'! Reservation of seats in various positions of power is being claimed on the basis of their separate sex, thus adding one more 'ism'—Sexism!—to the array of casteism, communalism, linguism etc" (p. 117).

Many people in their fear and hatred of the chosen other—the so-called 'enemy of culture'—don't see that as an articulation of patriotic sentiment, and as a basis for Indian nationalism, political Hindutva is hopelessly inauthentic as it fails to articulate the rich cultural diversity of India and perforce distorts its history. It is not only against the inclusive idea of India, but also indifferent to Hinduism as Savarkar himself admits.

EVERY SENSIBLE PERSON MUST KNOW THAT NATIONALISATION OF RELIGION IS GOOD NEITHER FOR RELIGIOUS FAITH NOR FOR THE IDEA OF NATION

SAVARKAR COULD NOT IMAGINE the quandary Hindus would find themselves in if his ideas were taken to their logical conclusion. I was addressing a group of students at Columbia University, New York, in 2002. A belligerent young Hindu American asked: "Why can't Muslims and Christians (he presumably meant those living in India) treat India as their holy land instead of Mecca or Rome?" I asked him if he had ever taken a dip in the Ganga? He said he hadn't, but his parents did every year. "Why don't they take a dip in the Hudson to prove their credentials as patriotic Americans?" I shot back. The young man was flabbergasted; he'd probably never been shown the mirror this way. I told him to be thankful to God that his fellow American citizens did not subscribe to a Christian version of this Hindutva world view.

Not only that "proud" NRI Hindu but every sensible person anywhere in the world must know that nationalisation of religion is good neither for religious faith nor for the idea of nation. Jawaharlal Nehru's note of caution remains relevant for all times: 'The affairs of nation must be conducted on the basis of political principles, not religious sentiments'.

Purushottam Agrawal is a writer, academic and political commentator



HINDU VS HINDUTVA

The Menace of Monopolist Traits

Hindus face a challenge—technically, Hinduism is like other beliefs. Practically, it is much more, hence the confusion



By DR VINAY
SAHASRABUDDHE



LET ME FIRST CONTEXTUALISE this concept ideationally. ‘Hindutva’ is to ‘Hindu’ what ‘Christianity’ is to ‘Christian’. This is elementary grammar—an abstract noun formed from an adjective/ noun by adding the derivative particles—*tva*, *ity* respectively. As such, it connotes ‘the essence/ the principles thereof’. The particles denote ‘ness’. So what is the problem?

The problem is India—specifically political, and globally civilisational—acquiring and retaining political power by rubbishing Hinduism and thereby dividing the Hindu society into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Hindu(ism). The Hindu is ‘good’—he is submissive even in the face of rampant abuse because his perennial virtue is ‘tolerance’. But when he rejoins or fights back for his values, he is ‘Hindutva’—‘bad’, ‘exclusivist’ Hindu. The Hindu, we accept, they patronisingly say, but Hindutva we reject, efforts at ‘being Hindu’ we reject. This convoluted argument amounts to this—“Allow

us to denigrate you and we accept you. However, if you rebut our attack on your basics (values, beliefs, symbols, heroes), we call you ‘fundamentalist’, ‘fascist’ and hence retrograde”. Be good on our terms. The term ‘Hindutva’ was wantonly sought to be delinked from its etymology and its other religion synonyms, interpreted as an antonym of Hindu and propagated as the ‘ideology’ of Hindu civilisation, not as the ‘essence of Hindu civilisation’ but as a deviant construct. In truth, however, Hindutva simply means being a Hindu.

There are Hindus who tend to consider themselves Hindus by accident of birth since to them it hardly matters whether they are Hindus or non-Hindus. They claim the privilege of denigrating Hinduism by asserting that they are, after all, ‘Hindus’—but they are, in fact, just born in Hindu families. Such fashionable secularists have almost abandoned their ‘Hindu-ness’ as their brand of progressivism takes them to the belief that the world would not have been any different to them had they been born in a non-Hindu family. Sadly, in the case of a majority of proud Hindus, the quest to define Hindu, and thereby Hinduness has not gone too far at least at the popular level, maybe because the ordinary Hindu does not see why this question should be asked at all. What it means to be a Hindu

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HINDU VS HINDUTVA

very logically depends on what characteristics go along with the concept of being a Hindu.

Much has already been and is still being said about Hinduness by both its adversaries and its advocates. The confusion that surrounds the concept of Hinduness—thanks mainly to the intellectual liberty, almost bordering on irresponsibility—has added to the intricacies of the task. Too much of politically motivated discussion about Hindutva and an absolute apathy emerging out of a bygone-era psyche—when any talk about anything Hindu in the public sphere was anathema—have contributed to the lack of rig-

of straitjacketing that one can find the roots of *adhyatmika lokatantra*—the Indian phrase to be preferred over ‘spiritual democracy’ for its non-material, ethical overtones—and sustainable pluralism. Spiritual democracy is singularly the most distinguishing factor of the Hindu faith and belief system. Unlike many other belief systems, Hinduism never presents itself as the only way to seek salvation. On the contrary, Hinduism considers that all paths lead to the same truth, the same almighty and that wise/knowledgeable people designate them in different ways. This credo is communicated in the widely cited saying—

“*ekam sat, vipra bahuda vadanti*” and is the cornerstone of Hindu spiritual thought. It is due to this fundamental faith in the existence of multiple ways of seeking salvation, traditionally, that Hindus do not engage in proselytisation and the resultant competition for converting people. Thanks to this uniquely distinguishing factor of Hinduness, India could evolve a replicable model of sustainable pluralism. It must be remembered that if one commits himself/ herself to the cardinal principles of sustainable pluralism, one cannot

talk of superiority of a way of worship and the need to convert adherents of other faiths. Besides, once one decides to indulge in the concepts of superiority of a religion, no meaningful dialogue between faiths can happen. Today, when the entire world is facing a severe threat of terrorist tendencies and the root cause of terrorism is linked to an essentially exclusivist approach motivated by the superiority of belief systems, one wonders how humanity can survive without accepting spiritual democracy?

With the acceptance of the principle that every path ultimately leads to the one and the same ultimate truth, the questions of caste and creed should have been settled permanently. It is a fact that perversions like casteism have eaten into the vitals of the Hindu world view, but ideally, the notion of Hinduness has absolutely no place for discrimination on the basis of caste. With equality of human beings as its cardinal principle, in the Hindu scheme of things, superiority or inferiority of an individual cannot depend on the social group of one’s birth. When Hindutva aspires to put an end to such discriminations, there is absolutely no question of defending caste hierarchy and the resultant untouchability.

THEORIES LIKE THE ARYAN INVASION, conflict between indigenous and non-indigenous people, differences between the aboriginals or Adivasis and others, branding of certain social groups or communities as criminals by birth, or a conflict between the victor and the vanquished and so on cannot find a place in the concept of

IT IS ONLY THE RAM JANMABHOOMI MOVEMENT WHICH UNITED HINDU SOCIETY. IT SUCCEEDED SO EFFECTIVELY THAT LEFTIST SCHOLARS WERE AT PAINS TO EXPLAIN IT

orous and dispassionate research on the re-emergence of Hindu consciousness at the popular level in the 1980s and later. This inertia of the academic community, in addition to the already existing lure of political correctness, contributed to the politico-ideological untouchability in several ways. This eventually made easier the task of Hindutva adversaries to paint Hindutva or Hinduness as something like an illegitimate ideology.

India after 1947 witnessed systematically devised and promoted divisive socio-political movements. It is only the Ram Janmabhoomi movement which united Hindu society on what is an existential issue for them. It succeeded in communicating the message of Hindu unity so very effectively that hundreds of Leftist scholars were at pains to explain as to how Hindus can and have come together through a movement which they had perceived as sectarian and upper caste. At least for a certain period of time, the Ram Janmabhoomi movement made the Hindus forget their smaller caste identities and, in a way, forced them to think of their larger cultural identity—the Hindu identity.

Notwithstanding the success and the impact of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, misperceptions about Hinduness refused to go away, explained only as wilful neglect.

Due to a huge multiplicity of worshipping deities and diversity practically in every sphere of human life, including ways to worship, straitjacketing is neither desirable nor possible in the Hindu belief system and, as a consequence, in the Hindu world view. It is in this complete denial



Hinduness. Remember, the Aryan invasion theory was rejected by no less a person than Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar.

Social and economic justice is a must for an enduring unity of Hindu society. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the privileged and comparatively less unfortunate sections of society have to ensure that all those socially and economically weaker sections enjoy equality of protection, respect and opportunities as well. One cannot afford to be unmindful of the fact that if emotional integration is not achieved, an integrated Hindu society may remain a chimera. For emotional integrity to sustain itself, one has to—through his or her personal conduct in day-to-day life—promote this spirit of mutual understanding, accommodation and social responsibility. Gender equality and justice is inherent to the idea of Hinduness. Imagery of the *ardhanareeshwara* is and should be at the centre of the indigenous narrative of gender equality. Women need equality of respect, opportunity and security. The way to ensure this goes via changing the traditional male mindset.

Hindus are known for being adaptive. The Hindu world view has an evolutionary characteristic. *Nitya nootan, chira puratan* is the cornerstone of our thinking. How could Hindus be anti-modernist? Buddha in 6th century BC shifted the Indian mind from ritual to reason, the hallmark of Renaissance modernity. However, since Hinduness is understandably linked with being a Hindu, i.e. adherent of Hinduism, Hindus have to face the challenge of accepting the fact that technically, Hinduism is like other belief systems. But practically, it is much more than a belief system, as it abhors recognising only one prophet, only one holy book, or only one god, as seen in most Semitic faiths. This leaves a huge scope for confusion, largely wantonly created. And when Hindus are very understandably forced to face comparisons with adherents of other belief systems, the element of competition becomes unavoidable. Like political democracy, in spiritual democracy, too, the non-monopolistic approaches feel constantly threatened by the monopolistic ones. If monopolists do not become more accommodative and non-hegemonic, non-monopolists are more likely to be lured by the monopolist traits, ending up trying to adopt them.

A MINDLESS COMPETITION TO get the tag of minority by different groups, or the indulging in politics of hurt emotions occasionally by a few sections, are the symptoms of an ailment—which is apparently contagious. Vote-bank politics, with promotion of smaller identities—facilitated by an electoral system that is acutely fragmentary—has made the challenge before the Hindu integrationists all the more daunting. But all this shouldn't deter a true Hindu, because if he abhors spiritual democracy, who would protect the same? ■

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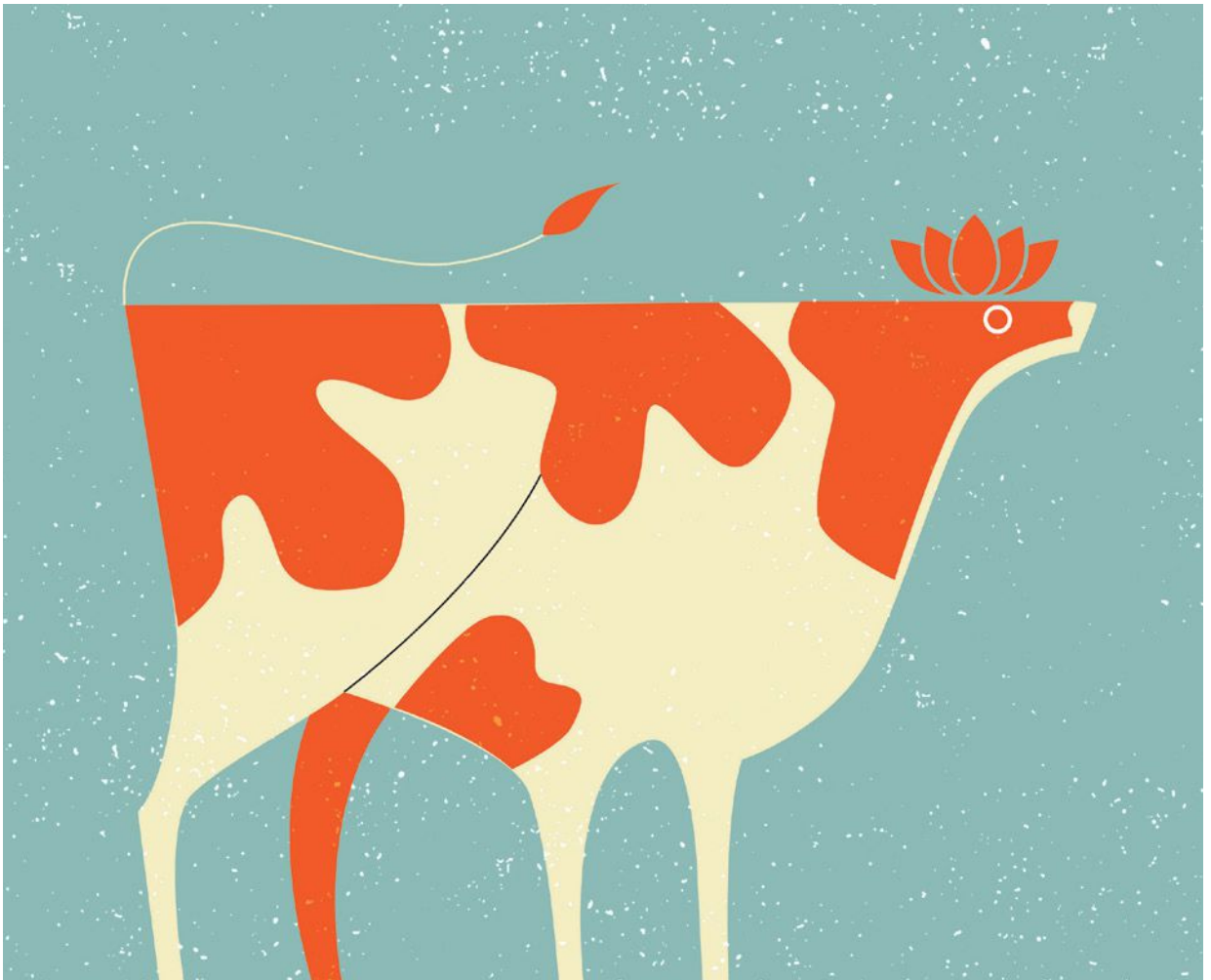
HINDU VS HINDUTVA



By KIRAN
NAGARKAR

Constitution vs the Cow

The Sangh's Hindutva project is obliterating the inherent liberal and inclusive values of the faith





LET'S FOR A MINUTE look at the title chosen for this series by the editors of the magazine. The meaning of Hindutva, as we all know, is 'the quintessence of Hindu thought, dharma, and belief system'. If that was truly the case, the title of this piece should have been the conjoined pair 'Hindu and Hindutva'. But there is a good reason why the title was split with the word 'vs' or 'versus'. Quite simply the reason 'Hindu versus Hindutva' is so apt is because despite its flaws and shortcomings, the former is open-minded and inclusive while the latter is fanatical and has no room for Dalits, Muslims, Christians or any other faith barring Hindutva. One other thing, let's never forget that the idea of Hindutva is the preserve of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its proxy, the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Hinduism and Hindutva have one curse in common, the caste system, especially the part that deals with the outcasts of society, the untouchables or the Dalits as we call them these days. Dr Ambedkar tried to overcome the bane of Untouchability by converting his people to Buddhism. It's debatable whether this move really changed the status of the Dalits. Come elections and every major party attempts to woo the Dalit vote bank by offering bigger quotas in jobs or reserving seats in educational institutions. The elections get over and things go back to normal: the low caste Hindus can once again be victimised.

Both the Congress and BJP claim vociferously that they do not differentiate between caste Hindus and the Dalits. The fact is they both do. But there is a vital difference between the views of the two parties. The study of ancient history tells us that long long ago the Aryans invaded and settled in India. The Hindutva ideologues like to think that they have preserved this Aryan bloodline over millennia. Golwalkar and his ilk bought wholesale into the bogus myth of Aryan purity and superiority promoted by Hitler and his fascist hordes. So despite PM Modi's voluble praise of Ambedkar, the RSS along with the BJP clearly despise the Dalits.

Paradoxically, it is within a section of the Hindu fold (but not Hindutva) that one has witnessed the most stinging criticism of the caste system. They stress the urgent need to embrace the Dalits devoid of that label and to weave them into the very fabric of our society and give them access to the best in education and jobs. Which is why despite its flaws, Hinduism is still the most liberal and inclusive of faiths in India. It is thanks to Gandhiji, Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Ambedkar and the majority of the leaders of our freedom movement that the Indian Constitution is undeniably the most secular and liberal in this part of the world. That statement, however, will hold true only so long as we live up to its letter and spirit.

HINDUISM'S GREATEST VIRTUE was its inclusiveness. Its arms were always open to welcome whoever happened to seek refuge or do business. The Parsis were amongst the first to settle down in India. A few Muslim marauders followed the Parsis and looted India and occasionally committed unprecedented mas-

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sacres. And, yet, let's not forget that many of the invaders who chose to settle down in the subcontinent ruled in a fair and benign fashion. The Mughals, for instance, did India proud on many a score. The Portuguese Christians arrived next and then came the Brits who colonised us for 300 years.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first BJP prime minister of the country and Narendra Modi the chief minister of Gujarat when the ghastly Gujarat riots took place. Conservative estimates put the figure of Muslims massacred way above a thousand and over a hundred thousand displaced. Lest we forget, here's Vajpayeeji's memorable tepid reprimand to CM Narendra Modi for this monumental man-made tragedy—'This is not *raj dharma*.' But in fairness to Vajpayeeji, his vision of Hindutva was far more liberal and his cabinet had fine experts in different fields like Arun Shourie and Yashwant Sinha.



HINDU VS HINDUTVA

Narendra Modi has been PM for over three years now. For all his bravura talk, he is intensely insecure and has surrounded himself with mediocre colleagues in the cabinet. His connection with the RSS is not only far more pronounced, what you get is a new, extremely aggressive avatar of Hindutva. So far, there have been no anti-Muslim riots in the country but something far more dangerous has been going on with the tacit approval of the government.

Let's understand, once and for all, that while the Constitution is not sacred for the Hindutva brigade, the cow is. So sacred indeed that the poor animals are often left to starve on the roads and forced to feed on toxic plastic waste while the BJP government has made cow slaughter, beef consumption and sale a cognisable offence. This despite the fact that thousands of Muslims lost their livelihood overnight, not to mention that what any citizen of India eats comes under the privacy clause of the Constitution. But the saddest part of the cow politics is that it is but another instance of Hindutva's pride in its ignorance not just of our sacred texts, sanskriti, history, mythology, science and our truly superb intellectual traditions. For instance, it is of no consequence to them that the Vedas tell us that cow slaughter was an integral part of many religious ceremonies.

PEOPLE LIKE DINANATH BATRA,

the epitome of a closed mind, are regarded as intellectuals and the PM proudly told us that our ancients knew transplantation techniques, citing Lord Ganesha as an example. While some Hindutva scholars have no problem claiming that the Taj Mahal was originally a temple, Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu blasted the Mughals (and the British) for looting, ruining and cheating India. Will someone please inform the vice-president that during the 1857 uprising, 100,000 Brahmin soldiers marched to Delhi in support of the last Mughal emperor and placed him on the Delhi throne?

The beef ban, however, is nothing but cow politics and an excuse to persecute and lynch Muslims on the pretext that they are breaking the law. Time and time again, so-called *gau rakshaks* murder innocent people. Let's take just one example. Fifty-five-year-old Pehlu Khan was beaten to death in Rajasthan's Alwar district even though he had documents vouching that he had legally purchased the cows. The five assailants were arrested and confessed to their crime. What followed set a new precedent in jurisprudence. FIRs were registered against the culprits and they were sent to prison for a few days and then quietly let off. The chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi

Adityanath, was an accused years ago in several cases and yet he was allowed to withdraw the criminal cases against himself. Moral of the story: This is one of great benefits of practising Hindutva: death for the innocent and impunity for the guilty and the murderers.

WHEN QUESTIONED BY FOREIGN MEDIA,

Narendra Modiji grew lofty and spoke of taking stern action against the murderers of Muslims. What followed was silence. In the three years as the highest representative of Hindutva, the prime minister has trained us to understand that speech is one thing and action an altogether different matter.

One of the most dangerous and ultimately self-destructive projects of the Hindutva regime has been the deliberate erasure of memory. Gandhiji, Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and other leaders and the hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens who fought and won India's independence with the world's first non-

'DISAPPEARING' OUR ICONS HAS BEEN HINDUTVA'S MOST FOUL PROJECT. THESE DAYS GANDHI IS INVOKED ONLY FOR SWACHHATA CAMPAIGNS

violent freedom struggle have all been 'disappeared'. The only time Gandhiji is recalled is in the context of the 'Swachhata' campaign.

Let me end with a very brief excerpt from President Richard von Weizsäcker's extraordinarily wise and insightful speech given on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of WWII: 'The young and old generations must and can help each other to understand why it is vital to keep alive our memories. It is not a case of coming to terms with the past. That's not possible. It cannot be subsequently modified or undone. However, anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present. Whoever refuses to remember one's inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection.'

In fact, I would urge every single Hindutva leader, starting from PM Modi, Shri Bhagwat of the RSS and the millions of their followers to read this speech. ■

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