



Unsavoury Hindutva Politics In India

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Abstract:

India is one of the biggest democratic countries in the world in terms of population, geography and multi-party system in governance. The secular nature of the country keeps united all the citizens of India irrespective of their religious differences. The sovereignty of this country rests in its republic with a constitution that binds all as Indians. But in the recent past after the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) came to power in 2014, the secular fabric of India is being distorted. The age old Congress party that stood for secularism is made redundant when the right wing political party (BJP) started asserting its hegemony with its political philosophy of Hindutva. The majority of Indian population though consists of Hindus, the Hindutva ideology is disdained and remains unsavoury. This research article deals with the essence of Hinduism and how the distorted image of Hinduism is projected by Hindutva forces to create a make-believe situation where the secular nature of India is targeted to form one nation, one culture and one people. The unsavoury Hindutva politics indeed undermines democracy and secularism in India.

Key words: Hindutva, Hindustan, Hindus, Digital-war-room, Secularism, Democracy

Introduction

The Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was disqualified from the Lok Sabha on Friday (24th March, 2023), a day after being sentenced to two years in jail in a defamation case over his 'Modi surname' remark in 2019. This has triggered the unsavoury Hindutva Politics in democratic and secular India. The broad vision of India is constricted by the nation-builders of recent times by relegating the reminiscence of the freedom fighters at the time of pre-independent India.

At the time of India's independence, Churchill was emphatic: "to abandon India to the rule of the Brahmins [who in his opinion dominated the congress party] would be an act of cruel and wicked negligence" and if the British left, "India will fall back quite rapidly through the centuries into barbarism and privations of the middle ages".¹ This comment of Winston Churchill in the 1930s not only foresaw the armed ascendancy of the Hindus but also the Dalits and minorities see in hindsight, a ray of truth in it.

We are proud that India is recognized as a significant country in the world. Yet we wonder at the recent identity emulation of India which distorts the legacy and original identity of this great nation acclaimed in the world arena. In the words of Pope Paul VI, "India has always been a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and hymns and fervent prayer".²

¹ The quote of Winston Churchill is as cited by Guha, India After Gandhi, xv. *In 1930 speaking at the Albert Hall on 'Our Duty to India' – with his kinsman the Duke of Marlborough presiding* – Winston Churchill spoke likewise

² Pope Paul VI's speech is found in Jacques Dupuis, ed. *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Faith*, seventh revised and Enlarged Edition (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, pg. 437, 2014).

In India, secularism means that all religions are duly respected, highly regarded and equally treated. However, the secular nature of this democratic country is gradually fading away after Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) came to power in 2014. Quoting eminent economist Amartya Sen, Alla Stanislaus writes: “The idea of India as an inclusive society is threatened, and we have to do something about it. Things have gone pretty bad. It has taken a quantum jump in the wrong direction since 2014!”³

Sadly, India moves in the direction of a theocratic state at the cost of dismantling its democratic and secular fabric. A make-believe situation is created wherein Hindus are considered majority in the country. Hence people belonging to minority religions are threatened. Ultimately India is being attributed an identity of a Hindu nation emphasising Hindutva ideology. How many of us are fully aware of the Hindutva ideology and strategies perpetrated in our country? How many of us have studied the writings and analysed the ideologies of Rashtria Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and their strategy? Hardly we would have read the writings of M S Golwalkar and Veer Damodhar Savarkar to find out the ideology and strategy of RSS. The Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bajarang Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP: a political wing of RSS), come together under the umbrella of the Sangh Pariwar. The ruling party of India by its very nature is deeply rooted with a strong political ideology of Hindutva. The unsavoury Hindutva politics indeed undermines democracy and secularism in India.

The essence of Hinduism:

There is no one definition which can make us understand what is Hinduism all about. If we say Hinduism is a way of life, hardly people will deny this fact. In essence Hinduism promotes *loka samgraha* (It means, the interconnectedness of the society towards community welfare) and affirms that everyone belongs to *Vasudaiva kutumbakam* (in the Maha Upanishad, which means “The World is One Family”). “Ironically, while the Hindu spiritual traditions promote and nourish an inclusive and universal outlook, the Hindutva forces construct and perpetuate the notion of ‘the other’ for both survival and flourishing”.⁴

Hindutva ideology propagated by RSS, out rightly denies the pluralistic and secular nature of India. It tries to impose the Brahminic culture as the national culture and makes it supreme over other existing cultures in India. It hides all discrimination of caste. It projects non-Hindus as enemies. Eventually, it tries to bring the Dalits, Adivasis and others under the umbrella of Hinduism (Co-option) for the sake of mustering political power by projecting Hindus as the majority in number. The tribals in reality worship the power in nature. These nature worshippers are co-opted into Hinduism by attributing personification in their religious worship. Even Buddha who went away by rejecting Hinduism was brought back into the same religion co-opting him as one of the Avatars of Lord Vishnu. Even Ravidas who was born in 1377 CE in a Chamar community (untouchable) worked against social division based on caste through his verses and teachings. He wrote 40 poems in the Adi Granth, which is the sacred scripture of Sikhism. Yet, Sikhism also is merged into Hindu Religion.

Referring to M.S. Golwalkar, Pankaj Mishra quotes, “The foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen’s rights.”⁵ He further said, “India is a land of Hindus. Establishing the Hindu Rashtra is our Birth right.”⁶

³ Alla Stanislaus (2018) Inter Religious Dialogue an Indian way, Building Bridges in Sarajevo, Edited by Christin E.Heyer et al, Orbis Books, 2019

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Pankaj Mishra (2011) Temptation of the West: How to be modern in India, Pakistan and beyond, Pan Macmillan, ISBN: 9780330543118, 0330543113

⁶ Ibid

Anustup Basu writes by referring to V.D. Savarkar, that Hindus share in the common blood. Those Indians for whom India is the *Janmabhoomi* (place of birth), but those who subscribe to other religions have fallen out of this mainstream of blood and belonging. They have thus lost their rights as equal members of this nation and should therefore be prepared for repression or even extermination.⁷

Decisive Distortion of History:

Those who propagate Hindutva nationalist ideology run into a problem with history. They paint themselves into a corner of denying the fact of ancient Aryan migration in favour of advocating a mythology wherein Hindus in the past, present and future are most closely bound with the soil of Hindustan as original inhabitants.

For a Hindu nationalist being “Hindu” is deeply associated with the land and tied to originating from India with the caste identity. M.S. Golwalkar says, “Out of the heap of hypotheses we reject all and positively maintain that we Hindus came into this land from nowhere, but are indigenous children of the soil always, from times immemorial and are natural masters of the country.”⁸

Placing Hindus as children of the soil also serves an effective function, specifically to assert aggressive nationalist pride in a Hindu ethno-religious state. However the tribal population which is identified as original inhabitants (Adivasi) of the land are branded as forest dwellers (Vanavasis). V.D. Savarkar, often invoked allegiance to the “fatherland” (a term he borrowed from Nazi propaganda) to provoke an emotional, even violent response in his followers. He also wrote “indigenous Hindu Power” vociferously adding political will to a land-based Hindu identity. We should know that the indigeneity of land claimed by the indigenous people is entirely different from Hindutva ideologues. Because, Hindutva ideologues treat land as something to be conquered and exploited, not preserved as is common among Indigenous people.

Are the Hindus the Indigenous people of India?

Hindu nationalists especially the upper-caste Hindus frequently anoint themselves as the Indigenous people of India. It is a core part of Hindutva mythology. No doubt, it is misleading and harmful to numerous minority religious communities in India. It undermines the status of Adivasis, “first dwellers.” It also provides fodder for assertive Hindutva conversion campaign and land grabs that seek to disenfranchise Adivasis.

Hindu nationalists also aim to homogenise Adivasi communities – in a sense making their denial of discrete Adivasi identities retroactively true – through aggressive conversion campaigns. Hindu nationalists run one of the most extensive ongoing lucrative proselytising efforts in the world, called “Ghar Wapsi” (literally means “Returning home”). Ghar Wapsi is evidenced on the ahistorical ideas that all inhabitants of the subcontinent used to be Hindu. So non-Hindus should “return home” to their original religion. Claiming indigeneity for the politically powerful, Hindu nationalists seek to disempower already precarious marginalised communities.

Indian history is a long and messy affair stretching back thousands of years, but arguably two rare points of consistency are diversity and migration. Continual movements into the subcontinent over millennia have resulted in, India being home to many religions and cultures. Most if not all Indian communities have been affected by non-Indian influence at some point of time. Two hundred long years of British rule and Islamic rule prior to the arrival of the British immensely contributed for the existing pluralistic nature of India. India’s incredible diversity and robust migration trends also present complications for speaking about Indigenous communities. So there is always a question of ‘to whom the land belongs’!

⁷ Anustup Basu (2020) Hindutva as political Monotheism, Duke University press, ISBN: 9781478009887

⁸ Shamsul Islam (2006), Golwalkar's We Or Our Nationhood Defined, the University of Michigan, ISBN:9788172210304, 8172210302

Savarkar's two Nations Theory:

During the time of independence struggle in 1940, MA Jinnah demanded a separate territory from India as Pakistan. Long before this idea was conceived Savarkar had laid foundation for two-nation theory. In his book '*Hindutva*' (1923) he declared India to be the homeland of Hindus only and Muslims could not be part of Indian nation.

In 1909 Savarkar in his book 'The Indian War of Independence 1857' glorified the joint struggle of Hindus and Muslims in the 1857 rebellion. He said, that Hindus and Muslims were both children of the soil of Hindusthan. Their names were different. But they were all children of the same Mother India. Therefore, being the common mother of these two, they were brothers by blood. He praised the Jehadi spirit of Moulvi Ahmud Shah in the liberation war of 1857. He said that the great and saintly Ahmud Shah had woven fine and cleverly the webs of the Jihad- the War of Independence – through every corner of Lucknow and Agra.

Savarkar took over the leadership of Hindu Mahasabha in 1937. While addressing the 19th session of Hindu Mahasabha at Ahmadabad he stated: "As it is, there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India. India cannot be assumed today to be a Unitarian and homogenous nation, but on the contrary, there are two nations in the main: The Hindus and the Muslims, in India".⁹

Savarkar's loyalty to the British Government:

Savarkar was taken to the Yervada Central Jail in Pune. The trial before the special tribunal was started on 10 September 1910. One of the charges on Savarkar was the abetment to murder of Nashik Collector A. M. T. Jackson. The second was waging a conspiracy under Indian penal code 121-A against the King-Emperor. Following the two trials, Savarkar, then aged 28, was convicted and sentenced to 50-years imprisonment.¹⁰

Savarkar was sent to Andaman on July 4, 1911 and released from the Cellular Jail on May 2, 1921. While in prison, he wrote three mercy petitions, the last of which said, "I am ready to serve the Government in any capacity they like."¹¹

Addressing the 24th session of the Hindu Mahasabha at Khanpur in 1942, Savarkar outlined the strategy of the Hindu Mahasabha of co-operating with the rulers in the following words: "The Hindu Mahasabha holds that the leading principle of all practical politics is the policy of Responsive Co-operation (with the British)." He called upon Hindu Mahasabha councillors, ministers, legislators and conducting any municipal or any public bodies to offer Responsive co-operation which covers the whole gamut of patriotic activities from unconditional co-operation right up to active and even armed resistance.

Backstabbing Netaji Subash Chandhra Bose:

When Netaji Subash Chandhra Bose was tactically planning to liberate India forming militant force against the British, Savarkar offered full military co-operation to the British. Addressing 23rd session of Hindu Mahasabha at Bhagalpur in 1941, he declared that their best national interests demands that so far as India's defence is concerned, Hindudom must ally unhesitatingly, in a spirit of responsive co-operation with the war effort of the Indian government in so far as it is consistent with the Hindu interests, by joining the Army, Navy and the Air forces in as large a number as possible. He said that Hindu Mahasabha must, therefore, rouse Hindus especially in the provinces of Bengal and Assam as effectively as possible to enter the military forces without losing a single minute. According to Hindu Mahasabha documents Savarkar was able to recruit one lakh Hindus in the British armed forces against Netaji Subash Chandhra Bose.

⁹ <https://www.counterview.net/2016/01/savarkar-in-ahmedabad-declared-support.html>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vinayak_Damodar_Savarkar#:~:text=Jackson.,the%20Andaman%20and%20Nicobar%20Islands.

¹¹ <https://www.counterview.net/2016/01/savarkar-in-ahmedabad-declared-support.html>

Savarkar defended Hindu Princes who were British stooges

Savarkar was a great defender of the Hindu princes who were ruling native India. These Hindu rulers as true and committed stooges of the white Masters never allowed any democratic activity in their kingdoms. There were numerous instances of rape, killing, maiming and terrible persecution of political activists demanding basic human rights in these native states. As the freedom struggle took momentum in these princely states people were not allowed even to unfurl Tricolour flag of India. In Mysore Hindu princely state 26 patriotic Indians were massacred by the police of the ruler for daring to salute Indian Tricolour flag.

Savarkar advised Queen of England to hand-over India to Nepal King

Savarkar's ardent desire was that India should be a Hindu country by all means. Savarkar even suggested to the British Queen that India before it slips out of her hand "should be handed over to an equal an independent ally of Britain like His Majesty the King of Nepal who was the sovereign of all Hindus of the world".¹²

These are really sad times for the largest democracy in the world that a personality antithetical to all its ideals, Savarkar is being presented as an icon with total disregard to historical facts available even in the Hindutva archives.

With the emergence of Hindu consciousness, in 1925, Sarvarkar and others began to entertain and promote a dangerous thought that India naturally belongs to the Hindus. He asserted that the others (read Muslims and Christians) can return to the Hindu-fold or "they could stay in this country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights".¹³

In this above mentioned trajectory, one notices that India even though, as a secular democratic nation, it has been celebrating diversity and plurality. It is disheartening that the Hindutva forces engage in disrupting the life of the nation, endangering its collective dream.

Hindutva Populist Digital Authoritarianism:

Initiating the Digital Divide and Godi Media, haunt social media ethics. The largest democracy in the world is now moving towards authoritarianism under the Hindutva civilizational populist prime minister Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s rule. Hindutva populist government has closed avenues of open discussion and exchange of views by enforcing new rules and regulations. Digital rights in India has seen a sharp decline in recent years. Social media has been targeted from a relatively open and liberal space to a restricted one¹⁴.

Democracy is the anchor of hope for religious minorities in India:

We know from our experience, democracy is the most humane form of governance where diversity is respected, plurality and differences are accepted. Every human person's dignity is revered. It aims at maximum good for the maximum number of people. Though apparently democracy is on a decline all over the world, any effort to support democratic ways is a human agenda worth the effort.

Unfortunately, the BJP lead ruling party which is highly influenced by the RSS with Hindutva ideology makes the government more and more fascist. Majoritarian influence in the government overlooks the constitutional democracy of our country. At times it is not democracy but mobocracy takes upper hand in parliament affairs. In this democratic country serious attempt is made from every corner to replace Indian constitution with Manu

¹² <https://gaurilankeshnews.com/ahistoricity-of-savarkar-rehabilitation-project-part-2/>

¹³ M.S. Golwalkar (1939), *We or our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur: Bharat Publications.

¹⁴ Hindutva civilizational populist BJP's enforcement of digital authoritarianism in India - ECPS (populismstudies.org)

Smruti. The law of Manu that promotes a system of hierarchy based on the Caste system in India can never be allowed to take the place of our Indian Constitution that guarantees equality and fraternity among all.

The fulfilment of the ideals of our Constitution and the protections guaranteed under it cannot only be achieved by exercising our role as citizens of this country once every five years when we exercise our political will in the electoral process, rather there must be a conscious and continuous engagement with all the pillars of democracy ie. Legislative, Executive, Judiciary and Press.

Justice Chandrachud said: “Dissent is a symbol of a vibrant democracy. Voices in opposition cannot be muzzled by persecuting those who take up unpopular causes. Where, however, the expression of dissent enters upon the prohibited field of incitement to violence or the subversion of a democratically elected government by recourse to unlawful means, the dissent ceases to be a mere expression of opinion”.¹⁵

Interestingly, on the contrary, according to Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), in the Global Democracy Index rates of 2021, India is in the category of ‘flawed democracies’ through our ‘indirect democracy’ and almost slipping into ‘hybrid regimes’, far from the countries with ‘full democracy’¹⁶.

Conclusion:

Harsh Mandar, who gave up his administrative position to work for justice that promotes interreligious harmony among various religious communities, faced strong oppositions for taking side with the victims/Muslims in Delhi riot during 23rd to 29th February 2020. He says that civic response must be creative and non-violent. His inspirational message to the students: “If someone is darkening the country’s future, and we reply in the same language, then we will only be amplifying the darkness. Darkness can be fought only with light. We have only one answer for their hate: LOVE.”¹⁷ He says, “In fact, Indian democracy has slipped into a dark hole”.¹⁸

In a similar vein, Kannan Sundaram invites fellow Indians to meet intolerance “with tolerance, discussion, debate, peaceful demonstration and campaigns – which are all, of course, relatively tougher options. We have to draw on the positive aspects of our tradition that have nurtured strong unifying points for different milieu and cultures.”¹⁹

One of the greatest poets and the first Indian Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, echoed the aspirations of millions who longed for truth and freedom:

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

¹⁵<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/dissent-is-symbol-of-vibrant-democracy-jus-tice-chandrachud-on-activists-arrest-case/story>

¹⁶ Garcia, L. (2022, February 10). Democracy Index 2021: Decline in world democracy. Retrieved December 8, 2022, from Economist Intelligence Unit website: <https://www.eiu.com/n/democracy-index-2021-less-than-half-the-world-lives-in-a-democracy/>

¹⁷<https://scroll.in/article/965111/with-harsh-mandar-named-in-delhi-riots-chargesheet-indian-democracy-has-slipped-into-a-dark-hole>

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹<https://scroll.in/article/884179/as-intolerance-grows-in-dia-needs-a-brand-of-secularism-that-keeps-a-distance-from-religion-caste>

*Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert of dead
habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action---
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.*"²⁰

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²⁰ <https://thewire.in/culture/rabindranath-tagore-nation-gitanjali>