

Editorial

Saturday, August 17, 2019

Saving future Manipur - the need of the hour

The greatest tragedy of our society, as it turned out, is the inconceivable reluctance to embrace change and accept the realities of life. What made it worse is the fact that there is an ever-present expectant air of anarchistic freedom. Perhaps, the public have got so attuned to the protracted disturbances and social unrest at a subconscious level that we have now come to accept these frequent social unrest and flare-ups as a way of life. There is no other plausible explanation for the innumerable acts of wanton violence and irrational destruction which apparently provides sadistic pleasures to the rapidly growing rank of perpetrators. The underlying current of uncertainty and uneasiness that has pervaded our society, even at the best of times, speaks more for the situation we all have come to experience and abhor, but have been forced to endure. One of the most affected section of the society during the present social flare-up, or any social unrest for that matter, has been the student community. One would be hard pressed to come up with a single year without the disturbances and interruptions in their academic activities. With such protracted disruptions year after year, do we now have the right to expect the students to perform to their optimum and to compete with students from the rest of the country and come up trumps? Don't we at least owe them the responsibility to shield and protect them from influences and disruptions which take them away from their main priorities- to acquire and assimilate knowledge which will help them achieve their dreams and help in changing the society for the better?

The social tension erupted in the aftermath of the death of a 14 years old girl in a suspicious way inside her hostel room at Standard Robarth School, even though sounds for justice of a students, now I becoming a threat to thousands of students. The trust deficit towards the law enforcing agency of the state is one reason for the current fiasco. If the present regime fails to believe that 'a stitch in time saves nine' than the condition of our future is at stake.

We need to provide the future of the state, an atmosphere free of apprehensions and tensions- an ambience conducive to development of knowledge and progressive thinking.

Students, especially those who are below 10 standard should not be made to indulge in agitations and protests, except under extreme circumstances when absolutely required. We have been increasingly witnessing the participation of very young students, some as young as primary level, either voluntarily or through coercion, in various demonstrations, protests and agitations. They need to be made to understand their priorities and be provided with enough space and support to realize their full potential. And contrary to popular argument, home schooling in the state is a concept whose time is yet to come. For now, schools remain the only practical option for imparting knowledge and teaching social interaction skills to the impressionable young minds.

While it was announced that there is no objection or opposition to reopening of schools by any group, organizations or students' bodies, yet the school authorities are wary of resuming classes, lest some self-proclaimed crusaders of the people comes along and mete out instant justice which would invariably involve vandalizing and destroying the school properties.

Meanwhile, the students of Standard Robarth Hr. Secondary School are losing out on valuable time and opportunities. It has however opened yesterday but it would be the most prudent move for us all if we can ensure a disturbance-free atmosphere for the students in the state.

We owe at least that much to ourselves and to the future of the state.

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Hindutva Has Nowhere to Go Except Down the Road to Tyranny

Courtesy The Wire
By : Prem Shankar Jha

Two preceding articles in this series have argued that Hindutva is, in every way, the antithesis of *dharma*. *Dharma* is a way of life based upon a human being's duty to her or his fellow human beings. It has shaped the practice of religion in India for 2,500 years. It prevented the growth of a Brahminical clergy in Hinduism, and severely limited the power of the clergy in Indian Islam. It has even indigenised Christianity. By doing all this, it has, despite the shock of partition, kept India very largely free from religious strife. Hindutva and Hindu *Rashtra* are synthetic concepts, created only 96 years ago. *Dharma*, on the other hand, is entirely indigenous. The roots of Hindutva and Hindu *Rashtra* lie in an attempt to create a Hindu nation modelled on the European nation-state through the enforced cultural homogenisation of the entire population, especially religious minorities.

Savarkar's role in the rise of Hindutva

This attempt sprang from Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's passionate belief that the freedom movement had to harness Hinduism to nationalism to force the British out of India. At one stage in the freedom struggle, this was a widely-shared view. Bengal had resorted to what the British called 'revolutionary terrorism' after the 1905 partition of Bengal. Revolutionary terrorism had spread to Punjab after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. In Maharashtra, Bal Gangadhar Tilak had endorsed the use of violence and been imprisoned by the British for his pains.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Photo: savarkarsmarak.com
Savarkar, who wrote his book, *Hindutva*, in 1923, had been deeply affected by the examples of Bengal and Punjab. But it was the rapid spread of the *Khilafat* movement among Indian Muslims after the fall of the Ottoman Empire that gave concrete shape to his concept of Hindutva. The Muslims were capable of uniting rapidly to defend an institution located a quarter of a world away that they barely understood, he reasoned. Yet, Hindu had no such capability. And they needed to develop it if they wished to free their motherland from slavery. The three essentials of Hindutva, he concluded, were a common nation (*rashtra*), a common race (*jati*) and a common culture or civilisation (*sanskriti*). The impress of Europe on his thinking is reflected by the similarity of this slogan with the German Nazi party's *ein Volk* (one people), *ein Reich* (one nation), *ein Fuhrer* (one leader). And just as the Nazis decided that Jews could not be a part of this 'Volk', Muslims and Christians could not belong to the Hindu *jati*, because their *sanskriti* and their prophets originated outside of the Hindu civilisation.

Hindutva – the antithesis of dharma
Savarkar did not exclude non-Hindus from the Hindutva fold. But to belong, they had to first accept that they belonged to the Hindu *sanskriti*. This has remained the core requirement of Hindutva down to the present day. Its corollary is the need to exclude those who do not wish to belong. Those who wish to belong have to profess their 'Hinduness' and allegiance to the Hindu *Rashtra*. As in Catholicism and Islam, the reward for accepting the true faith was the promise of absolution for sins committed in



the name of Hindutva. Thus Babu Bajrang, leader of the Gujarat-wing of the Bajrang Dal, who was at the centre of the massacre of Muslims in 2002, boasted to Ashish Khetan of *Teelka* in a secretly-filmed video interview that he had felt immense satisfaction at doing God's work while he killed innocent, unarmed Muslim men, women and children. Similarly, in the course of four interviews lasting more than nine hours that he gave to Leena Reghunath at Ambala central jail in 2013 and 2014, 'Swami' Aseemanand – once the principal accused but now exonerated in the Samjhauta Express bomb blast case – did not once condemn the killing of more than 200 Muslims on board the train and in the Malegaon and Ajmer mosque bombings. Instead, he repeatedly insisted that *jo hua, wo theek hi hua* (what happened was correct). This is what makes Hindutva the antithesis of *dharma*. For what it preaches and what Aseemanand, Pragna Thakur, Babu Bajrang and now millions of others who consider themselves Hindus, have been converted to is *adharma*: it is *paap* (sin).

RSS's goal of a Hindu India
In the 1920s, Hindutva could perhaps be condoned because it was a counsel of despair. The Congress was still a middle-class debating society, Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine of *satyagraha* was still largely untried and the British had taken to shooting down and summarily hanging freedom fighters after labelling them terrorists. But the last shred of justification for its *adharma* ended after India gained its freedom. For the creation of Pakistan had fulfilled at least one of the goals of the RSS – it had rid India of all the Muslims who did not accept that they were part of the 'Hindu *sanskriti*'. The 12% who stayed in India had chosen consciously to do so. They had, therefore, demonstrated their allegiance to India – which the Hindutva advocates equated to Hindu *sanskriti* – with their feet. So what fuelled the frantic rage against Partition that the RSS vented in its immediate aftermath? What made Hindutva fanatics condone and later glorify the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, and want to defy his assassin, Nathuram Godse? And what has made them demonise the Muslims who had chosen India in 1947 so consistently in the ensuing seven decades?

The explanation is that from its inception, the RSS's goal was not simply the 'negative freedom' India would get from the departure of the British, but the 'positive freedom' of creating a Hindu India moulded to fit their image of Hindu *Rashtra*. Nothing less would satisfy them. Today, the Sangh *parivar* is trying

to pass off Savarkar and Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, as freedom fighters. But as the biographer of Hedgewar, and some of the remarks of his successor Golwalkar show, from the Dandi Salt March in 1929 till Gandhi's Quit India call in 1940, the RSS stoutly opposed every attempt to secure freedom through *satyagraha* and even offered its cohorts to the government to act as civil guards to quell the unrest that Gandhi's call would generate.

RSS volunteers march past portraits of K.B. Hedgewar and M.S. Golwalkar. Photo: Shome Basu

To the RSS, freedom was less important than power. It needed more time to create the Hindutva legions with which it hoped to storm to power. And as with fascism in Europe, it required an enemy that it could persuade people to hate and fear, to facilitate their creation. In Europe, the fascists targeted the Jews. In India, the RSS targeted the Muslims.

Caught by surprise by Partition, which Mountbatten announced only in March 1947, the RSS made an attempt, nonetheless, to seize power in the wake of the turmoil unleashed by it and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, which it certainly welcomed and might even have instigated. That got it banned for several years, but power remained its unwavering goal through all its vicissitudes then, and its violent rebirth after the Congress opened the locks on the Babri Masjid in 1985.

What happens now?

Today, the RSS has finally achieved its goal. Narendra Modi has brought it to power on a wave that will almost certainly sweep through the states and give it the two-thirds majority that it needs to change the constitution of India. The closest parallel in history to BJP's victory this year is Hitler's return to power in March 1933. The Nazi campaign too was based upon hatred and paranoia. Its targets were principally the Jews, but also the Gypsies whom they considered another inferior, polluting, race and the Communists.

Like the BJP today, the Nazis took advantage of the collapse of the German economy after the Wall Street Crash of 1929 to seize power in 1930 with 33% of the vote. Three years later, their hate rhetoric had pushed up their vote to 43%. Within days of the January 1933 results, its storm troopers duped a Communist sympathiser into setting the German parliament building on fire and helped him do it. In the anti-Communist hysteria that followed, Hitler was able to win the March 1933 elections persuade the German parliament to pass an

enabling act giving him extraordinary powers and thus destroying the Weimar Republic. His storm troopers then systematically attacked Jews, Gypsies and Communists, set up internment camps and when these became too expensive to maintain, sent them to the gas chambers.

While history seldom repeats itself, the new BJP government has already taken its first steps down the road to tyranny. The arrest by the UP Police of four journalists on defamation charges, for simply reporting the claims of one woman, has not only broken every guarantee of free speech and reporting in the constitution, but has also sent a warning to the media that anything they report that can be construed to be disrespectful to a BJP leader or government, will land them in jail.

During its previous avatar, the Modi government had already opened detention centres in Assam for those whom the courts declared to be illegal residents in the state. Today, such centres are proliferating in Assam. But for the Hindu *Rashtra*, that is not enough. It has followed this up within days of coming back to power, with an enactment that "allows" district magistrates to open similar camps in any or all of India's 724 districts.

Is it too early to ask Modi what he will do with those whom the police in the BJP-ruled states will intern when Bangladesh refuses to take them back? Photo: PTI

Amit Shah has not hidden the ultimate intention: the search for 'illegal immigrants', i.e. the hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of Bangladeshis who have come to India in search of work and made it their home, is about to commence. Is it too early to ask Modi what he will do with those whom the police in the BJP-ruled states will intern when Bangladesh refuses to take them back? What solution will he then propose?

Readers sceptical about this reading of recent would do well to study the findings of a recent US-based study of 'Facebook In India – towards the Tipping Point of Violence, Caste and Religious Hate Speech'. This has meticulously charted how the Sangh *parivar* has used the same social media that it has warned its opponents against using to infect the youth of this country with fear and animosity towards Muslims and Christians across the country.

Such false news designed to make them credible make up 62% of posts on it. So numerous and violent are the postings that the study had to separate India from what was initially intended to be a global study of the impact of Facebook, and to create a separate classification for it. The Modi government has another four years and eleven months to go. Prem Shankar Jha is a Delhi-based journalist and writer.