

Editorial

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Chadong, the lake of tears or a site of tourism

The tears of the villagers of Chadong and the water gushing from Thoubal River make this artificial lake of Chadong destroying the lives of the villagers and their paddy fields. The Maphou or Maphithel Dam has submerged the three hundred years old Tangkhul settlement. The village was sacrificed in the name of development. The village of Chadong was almost a model Christian village after it accepted Christianity in 1935. It used to be a neat and clean village which produced its own electricity from the streams that flows its low lands. It produced 400-500 baskets of rice every year feeding its own population. For now all is lost.

Those who gave up their land in the old village at the face of carrots and sticks brought by the rich and powerful of Manipur have moved to a new site called New Chadong. But they have no fairy tale to tell. They lack sustainable livelihood and most importantly water at the new site. Those who chose to stay at the old village land, refusing to move to the new site, lack a proper school, electricity, health care and livelihood. Most importantly, they now immediately need means to master the artificial lake above which they must go to reach the valley, not for recreation but for the lives that they must feed. The old village authority still stays at the old village lands at the edge of the lake along with hundred homes and they refuse to recognize the new site as Chadong.

The sadness and trauma of their lost wealth are now slowly surfacing as tears that float this artificial lake. The happiness of those, oblivious of the lake's history, who come to visit the lake and the thrill of travelling in make shift boats without life jackets, for a moment, overwhelmed the sorrows of the hill men that the lake hides under its surface. For some time, people celebrated as they have a new place for recreation. But when three tourists died in a tragic accident caused by a cyclone, the time stopped for those who had hopes to earn money serving the tourists as their farmlands were submerged. Villagers say that there have been more deaths in the lake. It is now not just a lake of tears which has swallowed the wealth that Chadong villagers have earned through living there for hundreds of years but also a death trap that lures people in towards their destruction. But the sadness has resurfaced again when the noise of the tourists died down. Now that the tourism has stopped, the villagers at Chadong said that the fight over which village around the lake will earn more money from tourism, which village will operate the boats, has now come to halt.

It almost seems like the movie God Must Be Crazy where the African villagers fight over an empty Coca-Cola bottle and finally they had peace when one throws the bottle far away from their village. What do we do with the lake now? It does not matter what the grand answer is for the people of old Chadong as of now. Their immediate needs must be the first concern, a livelihood, safe means of transportation, a proper school, a proper village.

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, Hindus 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 Has Nowhere to Go Except Down the Road to Tyranny



Hinduism.

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 *adharm*: 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 *adharm* 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 deify 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 Hegdegar, the founder of the RSS, as freedom fighters. But as the biographer of Hegdegar, 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. Hegdegar 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.

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