

Editorial

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Will Sharmila have a Third Life ?

At one of his speech, renowned Journalist Pradip Phanjaobam, who is also the editor of the prestigious Imphal based English News Paper The Imphal Free Press said - Human dies three times.

"There are three deaths. The first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time."

Pradip Phanjaobam (whom we called Tamo Pradip) was quoting David Eagleman, the American neuroscientist who is also an author and science communicator.

Logical interpretation makes this philosophy an - Universal truth, which deserves appreciation from all wakes of life.

If one believe in this than, person like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Nathuram Godse (the person who shot dead the father of the nation), some other leaders whose name are still the talk of today's generation, and as for the state of Manipur Lamyamba Hijam Irbat, have died twice and are on the third lives.

Their name, their works and their essence of patriotism are still the talk of the town and as days added their names become more popular among the people. However, on Nathuram Godse who shot dead Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi - the father of the nation, one wonder whether he is having a third live or not. It is confusing as the name of Naturam Godse appeared as protagonist to some few people only few years back in considering whether he lives a third live.

Notorious terrorist Osama Bin Laden- the leader of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda is a hero to thousand of Middle East people even though he had been wanted death or alive. His name still is the talk of the world.

When Tamo Pradip gave an explanation about the third life, it sometimes confuse whether the way people remember after his or her death does not require the kind of good deed in his second life.

Well, a girl, popularly known to the world as Irom Chanu Sharmila was given birth and started living her second live sacrificing her youth life by staging the longest hunger strike. She fasted for over 16 years protesting excess human rights violation committed to the people of the region and she had heard promises after promises for supporting her demand. 16 years she live for the cause of the people without meeting even her mother and by not taking a single food from her mouth. She was kept alive by detaining in judicial custody and by force feeding her.

It is an open secret almost all the people stand by her side. To the Congress, the BJP and all other political party as well as rights activists, it became a fashion meeting the lone fighter which follows the doctrine of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi - who always believed in non-violence.

A pertinent question arises her is that can we said that Irom Sharmila' second live has been dead as she had given up everything for the state of Manipur after she found that the support she get turned as a mere drama after she got only few voters in her support in the last general election.

Sharmila, today settled with her once upon a time controversial husband Cotinho.

A somewhat, interesting news is that the once upon a time "Iron Lady" of Manipur had deliver a twin baby girl at a Bangalore Hospital. After taking leave from the cause of the issues of the Manipur (probably because people don't support her) she now live a peaceful live with her husband and now she will be with her twin girl. She and her husband will now focus more on their children and definitely, the once upon a time Iron Lady will be living as a second live or not a matter that need to be elaborated.

On the question of giving birth of the third live, how could the incomplete 2nd live re-borne a third live.

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The 2019 Elections Are a Battle for the Soul of Hinduism in India

Courtesy The Wire
By: Aman Maadan and Hari Prasad

On April 11, Amit Shah, the president of the Bharatiya Janata Party, declared that if re-elected, "every single infiltrator from the country, except Buddha [sic], Hindus and Sikhs", would be removed.

The timing of Shah's message is not just about anti-Muslim bigotry. It is fundamentally about reshaping how Hinduism is imagined and practiced by over a billion people.

This Indian election is a battle for the soul of India's Hinduism - a topic often overlooked by international media coverage.

"India's Hinduism" is not state-sponsored religion, but a religion with infinite dimensions experienced differently by all of its practitioners. In many ways, India's elections are a fight - led by the country's Hindu nationalist party - against the myriad *Hinduisms* which have seamlessly existed in the subcontinent for centuries.

The BJP belongs to an umbrella organisation called the Sangh parivar. The parivar consists of an array of political movements advocating Hindu nationalism, an ideology which constructs India as historically Hindu, positing a false historical equivalency between Indian and Hindu.

A clear assertion in this proposal is that India's Hindus are all the same, that the natural divisions in practice and belief of Hindus are secondary to a monolithic Hindu identity.

As elections begin in India, the BJP will rely on this ideological vision. This time, the country's diverse Hinduisms - the array of diverse Hindu traditions which vary on ethnic and regional lines - are in danger.

Ideological roots

The parivar's ideological roots can be traced to a number of intellectuals, foremost among them Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. An atheist himself, Savarkar emphasised civilisational dimensions of Hinduism and propagated cultural unity among the descendants of Hindu culture. In Savarkar's vision, Hinduism had been birthed on the subcontinent and thus its descendants were rightfully Indians; Muslims and Christians, with their holy lands in West Asia, were not Indian.

In his statement, Amit Shah articulated the same sentiment, revealing the depth to which Savarkar's ideology has found resonance in the Hindu right-wing. Savarkar's vision (best illustrated in his monograph, *Hindutva*) called for a reshaping of how Hinduism was to be imagined and practiced by India's Hindus. No longer was Hinduism (in of itself a problematic word) a catch-all term for pietistic traditions mediated through regional and ethnic subjectivity, but a monolithic political movement through which Hindus protected their culture and restored their rightful place in the nation.

Reacting to the possibility of a free India, Hindu organisations began to worry about the future of Hinduism. According to a recent paper by Milan Vaishnav at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Hindu groups were concerned with the growing influence of Christianity and Islam. They thus sought to reform Hinduism, or rather reconcile it with modern demands.

Two distinct approaches emerged; the first summoned a Hinduism as a monolithic pietistic tradition as it was imagined to exist in the "Vedic golden age". The second, in an attempt to protect Hinduism from Christian and Muslim polemics, sought to reconcile Hinduism with modernity. Injunctions and interventions were made against idolatry, the mistreatment of women, and polytheism in an attempt to modernise Hinduism and rescue it from detractors, both internal and

external.

Postcolonial India carved a space for Hindu nationalism to merge with officially secular institutions, a phenomenon which now appears to be ongoing in the country. The ease with which Hindu elements blur with secular institutions can be traced to the emergence of the aforementioned Hindu organisations.

Many intellectuals, viewing the Congress as the strongest political representative of free India, joined it and sought to influence it. Hindu elements, or those trends which seek a greater emphasis of Hindu norms continue to exist in the officially secular Congress, a phenomenon which has recently been on display as leaders of the Congress seek to eagerly prove their Hindu bonafides.

Those mistrustful of the INC in India's pre-independence period created a separate organisation by the name of the Hindu Mahasabha. While the Mahasabha would start as an internal challenge to the INC, it soon emerged as a separate entity which challenged Gandhian ideas of nonviolence. Increasing factionalisation would soon lead to more factionalisation.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) soon appeared as an offshoot of the Mahasabha, but unlike the Mahasabha, the RSS would go onto serve as the ideological precursor of the Sangh parivar, of which today's BJP is a fundamental part.

National unity

While there numerous strands of Hindu nationalism, each strand is bound together by a shared commitment to the belief that India is primarily a Hindu nation. What does this mean for Hindus who fall outside the bounds of what is deemed to be the *acceptable* articulation of Hinduism?

For Hindu nationalists, national unity requires homogenisation of the myriad Hindu traditions. At its core, it is a reformist movement. With an increasingly modern need for unambiguous identification, Hindu nationalists seek to target a perceived weakness in the faith, the same weakness which many Hindu nationalists believe resulted in Islamic rule and British colonisation of the subcontinent. Through this broad vision, India's 21st century Hindu nationalist puts forward a Hindu identity, which on the surface offers an appearance of unity but in reality remains deeply fractured.

This vision of Hinduism can historically be traced to Brahminism, geographically centered in North India. Thus any ideological and theological components of Hindu nationalist platforms are squarely derived from within these communities.

In India's recent history, Brahminical values have become enmeshed with Hindutva platforms, leaving no space for a political voice for India's low-caste Hindus. In order to unite a deeply fractured Hindu majority, individual causes are mobilised as exclusively *Hindu* concerns. These concerns take on an existential nature, demanding that Hindus react to a particular issue with a renewed sense of urgency.

Over the last 30 years, these issues have included the construction of a Hindu temple dedicated to Ram on top of the now-demolished Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. This movement was led by Brahmin Hindu nationalist leader L.K. Advani, a close associate of Hindu nationalist organisation Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the ruling BJP. Other issues also include anti-beef laws, which has increasingly become a tumultuous issue since

the BJP-led government swept into power in 2014. The Hindutva demand to ban the sale and purchase of beef products in the country is ironic, however.

A study by anthropologists and economists found that only a third of India's upper-caste Hindu population is vegetarian and that millions of Dalits and Hindus throughout Southern India consume beef, viewing the meat as more affordable than goat or lamb.

The researchers also found that Hindus consistently under-report beef consumption because of "cultural and political pressures," shedding important light on the role Hindu nationalist organisations have had in forcing millions of Hindus into cultural homogeneity. A unification of the country's Hindu population requires antipathy toward plurality and diversity within the faith. Issues such as differing exegetical interpretations of holy scriptures, diet, language all represent a vulnerability for Hindu nationalists.

In 2011, A.K. Ramanujan's 1987 essay which explored the variations in the Ramayana found itself in new controversy. Ramanujan's paper alleged that despite the prominence of one telling of the Ramayana, the sacred story had been written in more than 20 languages, many with their own distinct narratives. The paper was dropped from the history syllabus of Delhi University after protests from Hindutva groups who asserted that the mere proposition that there was more than one legitimate narrative was offensive to 'Hindu sensibilities.'

Despite Hindutva efforts to "unify" Hinduism, relying almost exclusively on upper-caste interpretations of the faith has systematically excluded low-caste Hindus from any theological or political expression. Dalits, pejoratively referred to as India's untouchable community, have been at the centre of this tension.

Dalit resistance to co-optation by upper-caste Hindus is not a new phenomenon made popular by the BJP. In the 1930s, the Hindu Mahasabha claimed that 85% of Hyderabad's population, then part of the erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad, was Hindu.

Shefali Jha, in a comprehensive study on Hyderabad Muslim publics, expertly demonstrates that this claim was false, arguing that the Mahasabha "conveniently" included "among themselves" groups whose shadow they find polluting otherwise."

She goes on to argue that "the lower and Untouchable castes themselves proclaim their separateness from Hinduism", a phenomenon clearly at display in contemporary Indian politics.

Scholar and activist Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd describes his own religious upbringing writing, "whether you call it Hindutva...or Hinduism, Brahminism has no organic link with Dalit-Bahujan life, world-views, rituals and even politics. "In my childhood many of us had not even heard of the Hindu gods, and it was only when we went to school that we learnt about Ram and Vishnu for the very first time."

Ilaiah's testimony makes clear that Dalit interpretations and ritual practices of Hinduism are distinct from mainstream Brahmin traditions, so much so that they constitute their own unique identity. An assertion of Hindu identity divorced from Hindutva interpretations has even led to violent reprisals by the Hindu right-wing, leading to recent attempts by Dalits to organise themselves as a cogent political voice.

Intra-Hindu conflict has also threatened the myriad of diverse Hindu practices in the south of the country. Hindu Nationalists have

advanced Hindi as the lingua-franca of the country's Hindu population, directly challenging ethnic identities in the South who speak their own regional language. Subnationalisms present in India's Southern states have resisted Hindutva impositions. The formation of a Dravidian identity emerged in complete contrast to the Aryan identity championed by Northern Brahmanical elites. This was read as a direct challenge propagated by mostly low caste Hindus against their upper-caste rivals in the North.

A desire to reclaim Dravidian identity allowed for the formation of a unique subnational identity rooted in local politics, traditions, and practices; a direct refutation of a nationalised Hinduism espoused by right-wing Hindu organisations.

Fundamental shifts

Despite resistance to Hindu nationalism from within Hinduism, Hindutva organisations have caused fundamental shifts in India's political discourse. On one hand, the BJP has co-opted the Dalit struggle, putting forward Dalit voices in order to symbolise its commitment to the 'Hindu cause'. On the other hand, the country's only organised large-scale opposition, the Congress, has begun to depart from its secular origins, viewing this shift as the only way to defeat the BJP at the polls. Sitting member of parliament and President of the All India Majlis Ittehad ul-Muslimeen posited that there is really no difference between Congress and the BJP, arguing that secular Congress "has tried to become" like the BJP.

"You cannot become like Modi or you cannot adopt soft-Hindutva. There has to be a difference between everyone. If I tried to become like you, so what is the choice then?," asked Owaisi, who has recently been under fire by the Modi government and whose party has recently entered into a large alliance with Bharipa Bahujan Mahasabha, a regional Dalit party in India's Western state of Maharashtra.

Nor was he alone in expressing this sentiment. Yogendra Yadav, an academic and head of the Swaraj Party, wrote, "Pandering to majoritarian sentiments is without doubt a worrisome trend. It may look like a tactical move today, but yesterday's tactic is today's norm."

India's Hindu nationalists have rarely been better positioned to affect Hindu society and politics. The electoral advantages possessed by the BJP are unprecedented. Owaisi agreed, arguing that India follows the "wrong electoral system". Owaisi argued that the 'First Past the Post system' disproportionately favours upper-caste Hindus who win just "31 percent" of the vote and "still form the government".

"The value of a vote is very less. But after five years of bitter experience, everyone who believes in the Indian constitution [sic] values, they have realised that there is an imminent threat," Owaisi told *The Wire*.

In addition, the lack of any unified opposition offers the BJP yet another opportunity to affect the course of India's future. This time, in addition to India's Muslim and Christian minorities, non-conformist Hindus, and with them their age-old traditions, may also find themselves under attack.

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