

HINDUTVA'S SECOND COMING: UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNAL CHALLENGE*

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Abstract

Communalism and struggle for secularism happens to be an issue that demand our attention again and again. The rise of Modi as the Prime Minister of India is not only due to the communal fascist catalogue in India; rather it has a larger context of South Asia. There has been a consistent advent of similar communal fascist groups in most of the South Asian countries including Sri Lanka, Burma, Pakistan, and Bangladesh alongside, which threatens the secular democratic fabric of any nation as well as a region.

Today we have an India where the centre of gravity has shifted perhaps decisively to the right, in three crucial spheres: economy, secularism and democracy. While for Indians ascendance of the Hindutva right at the centre on its own has been an exception but if we look at this part of South Asia one could observe it as part of an overall pattern which has emerged in the second decade of 21st Century. One knows that we cannot limit ourselves merely to communalism, perhaps as the characterisation of this phase itself implies – may it be communal fascism or corporate fascism – it is essentially walking on two legs.

This paper is divided it into three parts. The first one builds the broader plank of the emerging situation. In the second sections I have tried to look at how we need to explode myths, raise new questions and practice interrogation. I have also tried to analyse the limits of the secular movement. The last part of the presentation focuses itself on Breaking New Grounds and few suggestions towards immediate, mid-term and long-term programme for fighting communalism and strengthening secularism.

Keywords: Communalism, Fascism, Hindutva, South Asia, Secularism, Secularisation, Hinduism, Genocide Convention

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PART-I

1. Towards Hindu Pakistan?

Communalism and struggle for secularism happen to be issues that demand our attention again and again. The immediate context to take it up is that *Pracharak*¹ Modi completed one year in office as Prime Minister (PM). The ascendance of right-wing forces led by Hindutva² Supremacists has definitely put the future of secular democracy in jeopardy. There is a real possibility that India would one day metamorphose into (what Prime Minister Nehru used to call) 'Hindu Pakistan'. It was Nehru who could foresee how communalism of the majority presents itself as nationalism in a multi-religious country and can one day overwhelm the state.

Today we have an India where the centre of gravity has shifted perhaps decisively to the right, in three crucial spheres: economy, secularism and democracy. It was the year 1991 when the then Rao-Manmohan³ government took 'right turn' in economic policy. We have entered the twenty-fifth year of those momentous changes in Indian economy. Would it be correct to say that such a right-wing economic shift has greatly increased the need for a correspondingly right-wing political representation for ruling elites that breaks from the traditional populism of India's politics?

Therefore it is high time that we

- Acknowledge changes in the political scenario
- Reflect on the marginalisation of secular-left camp
- Discuss the way out
- It is important that our analysis does not remain at the surface; it tries to go deep.

2. Situating Modi in South Asian Context

While for Indians, ascendance of the Hindutva right at the centre on its own has been an exception but if we look at this part of South Asia one could observe it as part of an overall pattern which has emerged in the second decade of 21st Century. It is really a strange coincidence that while we are debating its implications here, situation in this part of

¹ Pracharak literally means evangelist. Here it is referred to Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), which is believed to be the mother body of all organisation affiliated to the principles of Hindutva. Sangha Parivar is another reference to the RSS.

² Hindutva is the ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life.

³ P V Narsimha Rao was the Prime Minister while Manmohan Singh was the Finance Minister in 1991.

SouthAsia looks very similar where majoritarian forces owing allegiance to a particular religion or ethnicity seem to be on the upswing. Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Pakistan and you name a country and find democratic forces being pushed to the margins and majoritarian voices gaining new voice and strength.

Not very many people would have imagined that people claiming themselves followers of Buddha – who is considered as the apostle of non-violence – would metamorphose into perpetrators of tremendous human rights violations in Myanmar. Two years ago Guardian (2013) had done a special story on the Burmese monk Wirathu – called ‘Bin Laden of Burma’ – who with his 2500 follower monks has become a dreaded name in the country, instigating Buddhist fanatics to attack Muslims. The plight of Rohingya Muslims has become a cause of international concern. The military in Myanmar has provided tacit support to him or others of his ilk.

In Sri Lanka, the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) started by Buddhist monks had reached headlines for attacking Muslims and causing loss of property and human lives. Since the suppression of the Tamil militancy the Sinhala extremist forces – which has enough sprinkling of Buddhist monks – with due connivance of the then Rajpakshe government had discovered ‘new enemies’ (Mallawarachi 2014). If Muslims were target number one, Christians and Hindus were not far behind. Two years back in a place called Dumbulla, Sinhala extremists led by Buddhist monks had raided the mosques, temples and churches in the area claiming that it was a ‘sacred area’ for the Buddhists and ‘others’ will not be allowed to pray here and this despite the fact that these structures were decades old and had been constructed on the land by taking valid permission from the authorities. As expected here also police and security forces were mere bystanders.

You go to Bangladesh or reach neighbouring Pakistan where you find Islamist forces trying to play havoc with the lives of ‘others’. It is true that because of a strong tradition of secular movement, situation seems to be still under formal control of such forces in Bangladesh, although there are recent cases of attack on secular and atheist bloggers. Pakistan, however, seems to be bursting as its seams where various fanatic groups with their violent acts against the ‘others’ – Ahmadiyahs, Shias, Hazaras and Hindus are a few to name – have created a situation of implosion. What is noticeable in this picture is that

- Perpetrator community changes as you cross the national borders. In fact, one finds a reversal of roles.

- Perpetrator community on this side of the border metamorphoses into victim community on the other side of the border.
- One type of fanaticism feeds on the other. And there are reports that different types of alliances are coming up between them.

One can look at the words of appreciation expressed by then RSS leader (and now loaned to BJP) Madhav (2013) about the Bodu Bala Sena sometime back in this connection and also attempts by the Buddhist extremists to make a common cause with Hindutva Supremacists to form a 'peace zone' against the 'common enemy' (read Islam). In order to evolve critical alliance with such forces, Madhav (2013) places the title of the write-up as 'Bodu Bala Sena – A New Buddhist Movement in Sri Lanka

'Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) - a Buddhist organisation many wish to call as Right or Ultra Right - is a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. One may prefer to brand them in any manner one would like to. But the fact remains that this new outfit is slowly growing in stature and popular support in the country's Buddhist-dominated areas...So far, the issues raked up by the BBS are worthy of active and sympathetic consideration...'

Attempts to coordinate activities against a 'common enemy' namely Islam had received a boost when the infamous Wirathu visited Sri Lanka last year and a proposal was put forward by Wirathu and BBS jointly seeking RSS nod to form what they called a 'peace zone'

'... "The time has come to ally internationally," Galagodath the Gnanasara, the leader of the radical Sri Lankan Buddhist group Bodu Bala Sena, announced at a convention held in Colombo last month. The guest of honor was Ashin Wirathu, a Buddhist radical whose picture Time magazine put on its July 1 cover as "The Face of Buddhist Terror." The government of Prime Minister Mahindra Rajapakse ignored pleas by Sri Lankan Muslim and Christian civil groups, fearful of more anti-Muslim violence in their country, to deny Mr. Wirathu a visa. Granting Mr. Wirathu a visa can only reinforce the fears of many Muslims that the government – and perhaps more powerful regional allies – back Bodu Bala Sena, which translates as Buddhist Power Force.

Last week, Mr. Gnanasara claimed he was in discussions "at a high level" with the right-wing Indian Hindu group Rashtriya Swayam Sevak to form what he called a "Hindu-Buddhist peace zone" in South Asia. A Rashtriya Swayam Sevak spokesman, Ram Madhav, promptly denied that there were any such discussions. But Mr. Madhav, now General Secretary of India's governing Bharatiya Janata Party, has written comments sympathetic to Bodu Bala Sena and Mr. Wirathu's group 969 in Myanmar on his Facebook and Twitter accounts' (TNYT 2014).

Perhaps as an aside one can deliberate over the economic agenda of the different rulers in our neighbourhood and you will discover that it is essentially neoliberal.

3. Grounds for an Asian struggle against Communalism

It is important to emphasise how developments here affects developments in neighbouring countries. One can recall the period when for the first time Hindutva Supremacists reached echelons of power here under NDA-I⁴, that was the period when Islamists who have been dominating social life since quite some time in neighbouring Pakistan won elections in two provinces for the first time after independence. Or, how the ascendance of Islamists in Bangladesh as well as Pakistan and the growing Wahabbisation of Islam/Muslims – thanks to what Pervez Hoodbhoy calls ‘Saudisation’ of Pakistan – has impacted social/political life of Muslims here.

It would not be out of place here to underline that if secularism is able to retrieve lost ground, neoliberal agenda is put on the defensive in these countries, then it would have a very positive impact on other Muslim majority countries also. It is important to note that India stands second or third as far as population of Muslims is concerned in the world and Muslims here have been largely 'saved' from joining the ISIS or other Pan Islamist reactionary forces.

A Caveat

One knows that we cannot limit ourselves merely to communalism, perhaps as the characterisation of this phase itself implies – may it be communal fascism or corporate fascism – it is essentially walking on two legs. And if the year of Modi rule is to be defined, it can be characterised as growing neoliberal offensive (couched in the language of ‘development’) that was accompanied by (as and when necessary) communal tensions supposedly to further drive a wedge between different sections of the toiling masses, so that the broader issues of deprivation and pauperisation do not get raised at any level.

Here I would like to add a caveat that in the following discussion I will be more ‘concerned’ with Communalism/Secularism than with the neoliberal changes in economy. This is just to acknowledge the fact that such a comprehensive treatment of the subject is beyond my capacity and secondly, it is rather necessary to do so that our attention does not get deflected from our core concern.

⁴ NDA refers to the National Democratic Alliance initiated by the Bharatiya Janata Party in India in the early 1990s. NDA-I is referred to the first round of BJP and it’s alliance coming to power in India.

PART-II

After this, not so brief, introduction I would like to formally begin my conversation around the theme and to facilitate it. I have divided it into three broad sections: Exploding Myths, Raising New Questions and Interrogating Practice. The idea is not to have some high-sounding discussion around the theme, which does not lead us (immediately) anywhere but to flag of few broad suggestions towards intervention. The last part of the presentation focuses itself on 'Breaking New Grounds' and few suggestions towards immediate, mid-term and long-term programme for fighting communalism and strengthening secularism.

1. Exploding Myths

Aaag Musalsal Jehan Me Lagi Hogi

Yu Hi Koi Aag Me Jala Nahi Hoga

Everybody must have read stories of victims of mass-rapes committed during the Muzaffarnagar riots (in Uttar Pradesh) and the common refrain from the victims that people (from other communities) whom they called 'uncles' who were from the same village/locality 'did it to them'. We know that such stories of rapes or killings undertaken by the rioters – which also witnessed many familiar faces – are no exception. How is it that one's neighbour – suddenly metamorphoses into a rapist/arsonist/murderer – unless and until he is filled with tremendous hatred for the 'other'. The persistence of Communalism and its further deepening in our society and polity and the emergence of what Brass (2004) calls 'institutionalised riot systems' is becoming part of the living reality. We are yet to explode myths and some of these myths are as mentioned below.

Myth-1 People are basically good and are misled by right-wing political forces

This is one of the myths that is widespread these days where a section of people would place and argument that people are not bad as such. I would say that the construct of Indian mind based on social power and social hierarchy itself is not progressive in any sense. There communal and caste tensions are very common and after such tensions there are pseudo efforts too. One sign of this prevalent understanding is the 'formality' of holding Sadbhavna rallies after every such riot and one's refusal to come to terms with the fact that 'riots' are no creation of a few bad apples. Riots follow a typical pattern in India. All the orgy of violence and people's 'joyous participation' in it is followed by a conspiracy of silence where nobody is then ready to talk about the truth.

When we read reports of any riot and the 'emptying of villages', we will find that the people remaining in the villages inform the investigators that people from 'outside' were involved in it. Bhagalpur in Bihar which had become such a site of violence in 1989 where officially over a thousand people had been slain, most of them Muslims, is still remembered for a particular incident. In Logain village, 116 Muslims were massacred, buried in a field and cauliflowers were grown over their bodies.

Myth-2 Tolerance of Hinduism

'...[p]lant life is plural, it is not thereby tolerant. Tolerance in its positive sense means much more than coexistence.'

- Sudipto Kaviraj

'..Hinduism has been tolerant only of such other ways of life and systems of thought and values, which consented to let themselves Hinduised in their fundamentals'

- 'Myth of Tolerance' - Ashok Rudra

The two above-mentioned quotations provides how tolerant Hindu society it, but it is not untrue that Hindu societal mind-set has the supreme legitimacy of violence imbedded in it. It is worth noting that in a country, which talks of the greatness of the apostle of non-violence, one type of violence is considered not only 'legitimate' but is sanctified as well. Violence against Dalits, women and other oppressed sections of the society has received religious sanction from times immemorial and the onset of modernity has not changed the broader picture. India could be said to be the only country where a widow is burnt alive on the dead husband's pyre. If earlier new born daughter was killed in some brutal manner, today parents employ sex selective abortion – thanks to the developments in technology. It is not for nothing that India is the only country in the world where we have 33 million missing women.

Interestingly imprints of many such customs and hierarchies which had their genesis in the Hindu religion is visible in religion as it is practised by others as well. Caste discrimination in Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, which could be unimaginable outside is very much visible in the life-worlds of people owning allegiance to these faiths.

Myth-3 Merits of India's composite heritage

The secular movement, has always emphasised an image of India which has been 'through most of its long history, a diverse, pluralist and tolerant civilisation – the land of Buddha, Kabir and Nanak, of Ashoka, Akbar and Gandhi as a counter to a narrow, intolerant,

exclusivist, monolithic interpretation of Indian culture done by the Hindutva right-wing, which Romila Thapar describes 'as the right-wing Semitisation of Hinduism'. It has celebrated the existing culture here, which has provided space and freedom for every major faith to flourish, where 'persecuted faiths have received refuge' and 'where heterodox and sceptical traditions thrived alongside spiritual and mystical traditions'.

Basing itself on this understanding it has tried to interrogate, question and challenge Hindutva Supremacist forces. But this understanding as anyone can notice seems to be a partial description of our society which invisibilises the stark reality of caste – the hierarchical division of society – an integral part of Indian social fabric based on the age old doctrine of exclusion, legitimised and sanctified by the Brahminical ideology. This sociological blindness towards such an age-old structure has impacted its task of secularisation. Undoubtedly the biggest violators of minority rights – including their right to exist – are the state and the right-wing majoritarian organisations but does not it have societal legitimacy?

2. Raising Questions

There is no denying the fact that RSS was not the 'pioneer' project of Hindu unity. Arya Samaj, which was founded by Swami Dayanandin later part of 19th century or the efforts of someone like Savarkar preceded RSS but could not move beyond a point. While the Savarkarite stream just evaporated, Arya Samaj remained mainly confined to Punjab-Haryana region whereas RSS could become *numero uno* among Hindutva organisations.

Centrality of Maharashtra in the Hindutva Supremacist Project

A question has always baffled many about why Maharashtra? This state has always taken pride in the great legacy of Phule, Ambedkar, Shahu Maharaj and many other social revolutionaries. Here the minority population has never crossed 10 percent nor were they politically dominant. The question is how could Maharashtra metamorphose into a region, which saw not only emergence of many leading Hindutva ideologues – ranging from Savarkar, Hedgewar and Golwalkar – and their organisations but also a strong base as well as popular legitimacy. Why and how an organisation called RSS or the whole idea of Hindutva has received a legitimacy – which is not witnessed outside.

This query appears contrary to how we have viewed the politics of Hindutva. The general practice has been to see the idea and politics of Hindutva in the form of religious imaginaries.

For its proponents, it is THE way to correct 'historical wrongs' supposedly committed by 'aggressors' of various hues against 'Hindu Nation' – which according to them has been in existence since times immemorial. It does not need recounting how this strange mix of mythology and history, which is fed to the gullible followers, unfolds itself before us with dangerous implications.

The dominant antidote to this exclusivist idea rubbishes the 'us' versus 'them' rationale provided to justify its actions, denies any such continuous strife on the basis of religion amongst people, talks of emergence of composite heritage and the flourishing of many syncretic traditions. It is no surprise that the explosive manifestations of communal conflict are presented here as a handiwork of 'few bad apples' within the communities, which need to be weeded, out or quarantined. Perhaps it is high time to revisit this prevalent understanding as it not only appears incomplete but also seems to miss the target.

Would it be proper to say that Hindutva is rather an extension of the ongoing Brahminical project of hegemonisation of Indian society and in fact could be seen as part of Brahminical counter revolution against the *Shudras-Atishudras* who had witnessed loosening of the social bondages and restrictions under the twin impact of policies promulgated by the colonial regime coupled with the path breaking movements led by the social revolutionaries. How does one relate to the emergence of the *weltanschauung* (world view) of Hindutva with the struggles against Brahminism pioneered by the likes of Savitribai and Jyotiba Phule and the ongoing efforts of many stalwarts of the movement – ranging from the leaders of the *SatyashodhakSamaj*(Truth-seekers society) to the *Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha* (Society for the Welfare of the rejected masses), Independent Labour Party or for that matter Republican Party of India and the path breaking role played by the legendary son of the oppressed Ambedkar.

To put it other way we need to address what Menon (2006) calls 'the general reluctance to engage with what is arguably an intimate relation between the discourses of caste, secularism and communalism.' He adds:

The inner violence within Hinduism explains to a considerable extent the violence directed outwards against Muslims once we concede that the former is historically prior. The question needs to be: how has the deployment of violence against an internal other (defined primarily in terms of inherent inequality), the Dalit, comes to be transformed at certain conjectures into one of aggression against an external other (defined primarily in terms of inherent difference), the Muslim? Is communalism a deflection of the central issue of violence and in egalitarianism in Indian society? (Menon2006: 2).

Few discomfoting facts about the national movement

Scholars like Bipan Chandra have portrayed national movement as antidote to communal movement. This understanding not only fails to comprehend the nuances of both but it also glosses over the fact of overlapping of national movement and struggle around communalism. Silence about the internal incongruities and asymmetries of society like caste, gender, and community, were not addressed by the national movement, remains as the major flaw. There was no attempt to carry forward the debate raised by social revolutionaries like Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar and others about impossibility of carving out a nation from a society based on caste. Perhaps Tilak and the genesis of communal politics need closely study while Gandhi's Hindu imaginary had again added impetus to the existing discomfort.

3. Interrogating Practice

There are many things, which can be discussed while critically looking at anti-communal practice. The first and foremost thing becomes our approach and our intervention during and after communal riots.

Justice in Riots and Bringing Guilty to book

There have been thousands of riots in post-independence times. As rightly put by Brass (2004) there have developed what he terms as 'institutionalised riot systems' which are in a position to engineer riot at any moment. Despite such routine mass killings, none of the real planners/masterminds of the riots have been caught or people leading riots have been arrested. Regardless of reports by various judicial commissions, rarely one notices prosecution of anyone from the administrative side or people supposed to maintain law and order for their complicity in the pogroms. The issue has normally got reduced to substituting justice with peace or throwing some compensation to avoid prosecution.

The Gujarat genocide can be seen as an exception where for the first time in post-independent India, senior leaders of the Hindutva Supremacist group who actively participated in the riots and many foot-soldiers were punished and the issue of 'culpability' of top most executive of the state was kept alive even after a decade. One cannot imagine this situation if people like late Mukul Sinha or Teesta Setalvad had not put daring above everything else to do it.

This experience should prod us to think in terms of instituting mechanisms so that we make sure that the guilty are brought to book. If individual efforts can make some difference at the

grassroots level if the organised left takes up the issue, situation would be radically different. We are also becoming aware – post 2002 riots – how the state has slowly abdicated the role of providing relief and rehabilitation to riot affected people and victims of communal violence and the vacuum has been filled by different community organisations. This was witnessed not only in Gujarat but also in a state like Assam. If Gujarat has been ruled by BJP, Assam has been ruled by the Congress consecutively for three terms. Even during the BTAD violence, it was the Congress government in power. According to a journalist most of the relief camps set up for the internally displaced people were run either by Jamaat-e-Islami or Jamiat-Ulema-i-Hind making the victims and other affected people more amenable to their agendas.

Fight for Genocide Convention

A related point is taking up the issue of genocide convention. It needs be underlined here that India has signed the said convention way back in 1959. However there is still an absence of suitable domestic legislation to not only prevent and punish genocide, but also designate a tribunal for the trial of those charged under the same act which has created a strange situation where the ability of the Indian criminal justice system to dispense justice – when it comes to mass crimes – seems to be in grave doubt. It is worth emphasising that the said Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (in article 2) defines genocide as: ...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

One can easily gather that if genuine democracy loving persons are able to overwhelm the powers that be on this issue, we can easily do away with the stigma of covering up of mass crimes or metamorphosis of riot organisers or murderers into respectable politicians.

Response to Muslim apathy

The findings of Sachar Committee

The findings of Sachar Committee⁵ report tells the world that a large section of the Muslim community faces deprivation, dispossession, pauperisation – brought in by the nature of socio-economic development followed, which gets accentuated because of the prejudice/bias prevalent against them in all the organs of the state and civil society. Many of the myths perpetuated by the majoritarian forces like ‘appeasement of Muslims’ lie shattered and their ‘majority going for Madarasa education’ stand exposed. We also know that the Kundu committee formed to undertake ‘post Sachar evaluation’ that though a start has been made in ‘addressing development deficits of the community, government interventions have not matched in scale the large numbers of the marginalised.’

Sachar Committee also brought forth the stark fact about the disturbing status of Muslims in West Bengal under CPM⁶ for three decade. Yes, it was true that in West Bengal – barring exceptions – there were no major riots but why the material world of the Muslims largely remained unchanged which had minimal participation in government services. It thus raised the question of left’s approach towards minorities: whether it considers them merely a ‘victim community’ which needs protection or views it as ‘equal citizens of the republic’ which should be provided equal opportunities in all fields.

Undermining the *Pasmanda* (backward) Muslims Movement

Prior to the appointment of the Sachar committee, the issues and aspects raised in it have been consistently raised by the *Pasmanda* movement. The questions raised by the movement were never taken seriously neither by the State governments nor by the Central government. Interestingly, most of the State governments failed to acknowledge the severity of the questions raised. An added complication is that the left has also overlooked inner fissures within the minority community based on the issue of gender, caste etc. Would it be proper to say that for the left also (like the right), Muslims are a ‘monolith’.

⁵ The Government of India in 2005, appointed Justice (Rtd.) Rajinder Sachar to head a Committee to prepare a report on the latest social, economic and educational conditions of the Muslim community in India.

⁶ CPM is commonly referred to the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Questions on Community Leadership

What does one think about the community leadership – the dominant politics there – which is undemocratic to say the least? In fact, one can cite many examples to show the growing disjunction between the leadership and the Muslim masses. The leadership is neither ready to take up issues of internal divisions, asymmetries nor does it want to move beyond community interests while taking highly problematic stands on various issues of concern. For instance it has not bothered to take up the issue of rights of Muslim women nor it has ever acknowledged the issue of discrimination based on caste in the community. Much on the lines of Pakistan – that happens to be the only country in the world, which has declared ‘Ahmadiyahs/Qadianis’ as unIslamic – one witnesses similar forces on the ascendance in the community in India as well.

It has also exhibited its myopic nature by not coming clean on anti-human actions undertaken by Islamist groups/formations elsewhere. Be it the activities of Boko Haram or for that matter the war crimes committed by Jamaat-e-Islami in neighbouring Bangladesh during its war of liberation, it has either maintained ambivalence or went out unashamedly supporting them. Our fight against targeting of Muslims in general and Muslim youth in particular should not mean that we remain silent when some popular Front issues diktats to Muslim women to wear this or that dress or has no qualms in attacking a professor and chopping his hand just for the fact that the question he put in a question paper ‘hurt their sentiments’. One feels that it is high time that we move beyond the bind in which we find ourselves on various sensitive sounding issues. While we should fight against deprivations of the Muslim masses, we should not remain silent over depredations of its leadership.

On Minority Communalism

I would like to bring a different side of the fact. Despite claiming that we are opposed to all sorts of communalisms, the secular movement has remained focussed on majority communalism leading to a ridiculous situation where one objectively sided with leaders of community, which were opposed to granting any right to the oppressed/marginalised within the community. Perhaps the approach towards the religious minorities is that of a homogeneous group – denying any internal fissures within. It also helped our adversaries winning over a vacillating section within the secular movement for ones ‘silence’ towards ‘minority communalism’.

Imperialism and Islam are too much in discussion in all the mainstream spaces including media, religious groups, academic, political circles, and diplomats in all possible forms and

means. Some of the major key areas are war against terror, Islamophobia, left plus Hezbollah, stop war coalition caged prisoner case, and so on so forth. Looking at the world's Muslim majority countries with the vision of Islamophobia and thus glossing over the historic importance of a movement called Shahbagh would provide vital insights while investigating these questions in the backdrop of minority communal questions.

Ignorance about trajectory of Right (Hindutva as well as Islamist) in India

Interestingly, while the left has consistently opposed the anti-human politics represented by the Hindutva right, they left have not bothered to look at the trajectory the right wing have followed and how they have undertaken this journey from margins to the centre stage of politics. No one is aware that there have been changes within the right without compromising on its core concerns. Golwalkar – the unashamed supporter of the Nazis – is rightly remembered as being the ideological and organisational leader of the Hindutva Supremacist project in India but not much discussion takes place on Deoras who provided a mass character to the movement. While Golwalkar envisaged what I call 'exclusivist' version of Hindu Unity, Deoras broke new grounds and went in for 'inclusivist' version of Hindu Unity. It is important to emphasise this point because this leads us to a ridiculous situation where our critique of the right remains focussed on its earlier version.

But let us focus here on Golwalkar. Whether one likes it or not he is a person who has impacted course of post-independence history like no one else could do singlehandedly and we know so little of him. How did he build the organisation and helped spread it to different sections of people and regions of India and outside, when the idea of Hindutva found itself on political margins in post-independence times needs to be studied in depth.

No doubt his worldview was 'obnoxious', he supported Manusmriti till the end of his life and opposed making of Constitution under the leadership of Ambedkar as he – like Savarkar believed that Manusmriti can serve the purpose better – was against Hindu Code Bill, which was the first attempt in known history to grant formal rights to Hindu women, was an admirer of the ethnic cleansing which was undertaken in Nazi Germany, had no qualms in opposing India's independence struggle under the specious aim of building Hindu organisation and one can go on and on narrating similar aspects. But the fact remains that despite his anti-human worldview, he provided an ideological foundation and organisational basis for the Hindutva project, which has been a dominant voice in India's polity since last around three decades that rules India today.

The menace of Communalism especially majority communalism which we face today is unimaginable without knowing his contributions. It is true that he was definitely not the pioneer of the Hindutva Supremacist movement. There were other stalwarts – ranging from Swami Dayanand Saraswati to Hedgewar and host of other leaders – who can be called pioneer of the project in different sense, but remove Golwalkar from the scene and you will find that the influence of the idea of Hindutva would have remained rather localised. Arya Samaj, despite its stormy rise, remained basically a movement which remained restricted to few states, Savarkar, despite his pioneering work on Hindutva could never give a solid shape to the organisation he led, which today has a symbolic presence in the polity. Hedgewar, who along with Munje and others founded RSS, could never make it really an all India organisation and it was Golwalkar alone, who combined in himself role of an ideologue and organiser and thus consolidated the organisation with a network of what are known as affiliated organisation.

Looking back, the situation of the seculars today and that of Hindutva Supremacists at the time of independence could be said to be comparable. If today the word secular itself is derided and secularists find themselves on the margins of state and society, the idea of Hindutva and its half pant wearing promoters was similarly made a butt of joke then. One still remembers watching a drama in Pune – in late 1960s or early 1970s – written by the legendary Vijay Tendulkar, wherein when a character portraying the role of a RSS Swayamsevak use to appear on stage, one could witness laughter in the hall. Maharashtra that carries special importance in this right-wing project – which is the birth place of RSS and also of Savarkar, the chief ideologue of the project of Hindutva, it was a popular perception that RSS is an organisation of (Chitpavan) Brahmins.

While its non-participation in independence movement or its role in Gandhi's assassination had dealt a heavy blow to the organisation, the 1950s also happened to be a period of disorientation within the RSS. With Communists emerging as the principal opposition to the Congress in the 1952 elections who made further gains in 1957, when they formed a government in Kerala, and the Centrist forces, under the golden years of Nehruvian socialism and a certain move to the left, the ambience had further marginalised the right-wing forces. It is interesting to understand how Golwalkar led the organisation then. Basu (1993:34) brings this important information about Golwalkar in this context.

‘Golwalkar revealed his qualities of leadership in the two major initiatives – ideological and organisational – which he and his associates took in confronting this ‘near crisis of the early 1950s. In March 1954, he refurbished the ideological arsenal of the RSS through a long speech at a conference of district organisers.... In the self-image of the RSS today, it appears, this speech constitutes the ‘philosophical’ foundation of a Hindutva brought up-to-date to suit the contemporary conditions...

Much more important was the organisational initiative to set up a series of affiliates or ‘family’ members...With the emergence of the RSS affiliates, Hindutva entered a new and more dynamic period of its history, culminating in the present strength of the RSS-VHP-BJP combine.’

In fact, the idea of launching affiliated organisations was already in practice. For instance the later part of 1940s witness the launching of ABVP. Bharatiya Jana Sangh was launched as the political formation of the Sangh. 1951 also happened to be the year when RSS established a school in Gorakhpur, part of eastern Uttar Pradesh. Vishwa Hindu Parishad⁷ (VHP) was established in 1964. Similarly other major fronts were launched one after another such as Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram in the following years. A senior RSS functionary Sapre (1997) gives details of more than 40 organisations created by the RSS for different tasks. In the preface of the book the author writes:

‘Introduction to the RSS would always remain incomplete until you are aware of the different types of activities undertaken by the volunteers. Realising this, a tentative attempt has been made in this book to give a brief summary of the various types of work undertaken by RSS workers. The position detailed in this book is upto 1996. Details of work undertaken on account of their importance at the time, despite there being no preliminary work in that direction, however have been included (translated from original Hindi).

The preface also contains details of some novel work such as the establishment of Rashtriya Sikh Sangat (National Sikh Council) for fighting the machinations for digging a precipice between Sikhs and Hindus or the Samajik Samrasta Manch (Social Harmony Forum) for crossing the unfathomable pit being dug between the Dalit and the rest of the Hindus or the floating of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (Nationalist Awareness Forum) to fight the financial encroachment of the West. Western India is home to great leaders of the right – ranging from Savarkar, Hedgewar, Golwalkar, Thakeray to Maulana Maududi who have left a great impact not only on the politics and social life in India but in neighbouring countries too. While followers of the Golwalkar are today custodians of a country of 1.2 billion, the ideas of Maududi are a moving force in many of the movements one witnesses in the Muslim majority countries. And I repeat we do not know much about them.

⁷World Hindu Council.

Revisiting Icons of the anti-communal/secular movement

While Kabir from the medieval Bhakti movement or Bhagat Singh, Ashfaq and Bismil from the revolutionary movement are much popular icons; the left has almost rediscovered Gandhi after the demolition of Babri Mosque and more after the Gujarat genocide. One can notice few obvious silences. No critical understanding of Gandhi and glossing over the fact that while he was uncompromising as far issue of Hindu-Muslim unity and question of secularism is concerned and was ready to challenge majority over its trampling of minority rights, many of his ideas and the imagery could help the cause of Hindutva. Nehru as an icon of the anti-communal movement stands abandoned for various reasons. Bhagat Singh stands nowhere as an icon of anti-religious secular movement.

None has ever thought to project Ambedkar as an icon of the movement. In general, one has witnessed a strange reduction in his image – engineered by the ruling classes and aided by the Dalit intelligentsia – as a Dalit messiah ignoring his magnificent, and at times unparalleled, contributions to the cause of emancipation of the exploited and the oppressed. The anti-communal/secular movement is no exception to this overall trend. In fact, it is important to project Ambedkar as a pioneer of secular India not only because of the fact that broad masses of Dalit people revere him or deify him. It is a fact that there is growing acceptance of his name among all sections/formations in society. Whether his acceptance remain or not, what is more needed to fight today is the appropriation of Ambedkar by the Hindutva brigade.

Why Ambedkar is important to be seen as an icon of secular movement is because he has championed the struggle against Brahminism for caste annihilation and for gender equality. He brought forth a devastating critique of Hinduism from within. He laid the foundation of India's constitution on the principles of democracy and secularism. Therefore he offers us an alternate route to fight communalism. If we look at all the great leaders of the first half of 20th century Ambedkar is one of the few – apart from legendary Bhagat Singh and Nehru – who are not much enamoured about India's glorious tradition and makes his followers aware of the dangers of Hindu Raj.

Struggle for Secularism and Secularisation

Secularism, as we look back, clearly indicates the lack of a social foundation. During any conflict situation involving different communities it becomes more evident. The question arises that why after more than sixty years we embarked on a secular path, it still remains so weak. Perhaps it needs to be mentioned that there is still the confusion or lack of

consensus within the broader secular movement about what constitutes secularism. Should we see it as '*Sarv Dharm Sambhav*'⁸ as popularised by Gandhi and his band of seculars or should we look at it as 'separation of religion and politics'? On this question, in fact, within the left also confusion exists. Absence of clarity gets reflected in the strange formulation one witnessed after the demolition of Babri mosque when a section of mainstream left tried to 'appropriate Rama in its own way' by dividing Ram into Real Ram and Phoney Ram.

For various reasons, serious thought could not be given to the whole process of secularisation [a process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols as referred by Berger (1967)] in a country like India and we remained focussed on maintaining or strengthening secularity of the state in a society which was not secular but was based on exclusions of various kinds – may it be based on caste, gender, ethnicities or other disparities. It is possible that many people broadly concurred with the then prevalent understanding by scholars like Berger (1967), which argued that why the decline of religion was inevitable in modern industrialising society. As an aside it can be mentioned how this understanding flows out of what Nanda (2012: 178) calls '[e]nlightenment project which believed that as men and women begin to understand the underlying order of nature without involving God, they will learn to outgrow their faith in God.'

One knows that the Indian constitution is based on this classical view of secularisation. Our confidence in the rationalisation of work process, removing all scope of divine intervention or magical action or the unfolding reality of emancipation of the state from the sway of religious rationales for economic activity, law and politics which is universal characteristics of all modernising states (Nanda 2012: 179) led us to a situation where whole world of culture and society was left open to various status quoist. Such reactionary interventions may it be from the religious formations or from the likes of RSS/Jamaat which further helped desecularise society. It was a manifestation of the situation within the society where one witnesses emphasis of the progressive/transformational movements on political-economic struggles and their neglect of intervention in social-cultural arena.

⁸ Respect for all religions was the most popular mode of secularism that Gandhi popularised during his time, however strongly holding on to the four-fold Varna system of Hindu religion.

One discovers that forces like RSS/Jamaat-e-Islami or other status quoist or reactionary organisations have been very clear about their anti-secular agenda, which they tried to bolster through intervention in culture in a strategic manner. They tried to enhance their religious viewpoint by institutionalising it through *n* number of affiliated organisations. May it be the formation of schools or hospitals or organisations catering to diverse sections of society, they tried to fashion society in their own images. It is not for nothing that RSS describes itself not as 'organisation in society' but 'organisation of society' (*Samaj me Sangathan nahin, Samaj ka Sangathan*). Pannikar(2013: 169) writes that RSS's educational work started in the 1940s itself and today they have 70,000 schools – from Ekal Vidyalayas to Saraswati Shishu Mandir – spread all over the country. These activities have helped them in transforming the cultural consciousness of the people from the secular to the religious. According to him

'This is qualitatively different effort from that of the secular forces who mainly focus on cultural intervention, the impact of which is limited and transient. The difference between cultural intervention and intervention in culture distinguishes the cultural engagement of the communal and the secular and their relative success' (Pannikar 2013: 169).

If we take a closer look at the functioning of Jamaat-e-Islami we can find similar processes unfolding before there. Another limitation is secularism was envisaged broadly in terms of an extension of anti-communal struggle, which left many a fraternal struggles outside its purview. If secularism could be broadly construed (to quote Charles Taylor) as 'emptying of religion from autonomous social spaces' movements whose direct/indirect impact was on similar lines, were never considered as an essential part of the movement. For example, anti-caste or Dalit movement, movement against patriarchy and gender based oppression, people's science movement, rationalist movement, or movement of the exploited and oppressed for dignity and rights, definitely bear the potential of limiting the role of religion in statecraft as well as society, but there was no attempt to broaden the constituency of 'secular movement' or integrate them in a larger framework.

Perhaps it is opportune here to quote Gudavarthy and Mannathukkaren (2014) wherein they discuss how a society based on caste hierarchies and absence of secular spaces facilitated emergence of Hindutva politics.

'A society suffused with caste hierarchies and culture (or caste privilege itself masquerading as merit) and the lack of secular spaces, have prepared the ground for the rapid incursion of Hindutva – modified now to incorporate the oppressed castes without dismantling the hierarchy, and modified also to make it a majoritarian ideology tied now with the economic one of neo-liberalism. The failure of the Left in building secular identities, even in their traditional strongholds, is a colossal one. This failure is worsened further by the domination of the upper castes and the exclusion of

the marginalised, the Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims in the communist movement as in West Bengal (though Kerala does much better, especially with regard to the OBCs). Prabhat Patnaik (2013) calls this exclusion an “extraordinary phenomenon”.

Put it otherwise, the ascendance of anti-secular/communal politics could be seen as a result of the new low, which one witnesses in struggles waged by the exploited and the oppressed. This constitutes the vast majority of the population and therefore the intensification of struggles to dismantle class, caste, gender, religion based oppressions, searching for and forging commonality among them is the need of the hour. While we debate on these and try to find models and modalities, like the French Model, or American Model of Multiculturalism or the Gandhian formula of Sarv Dharm Sambhav, one needs to engage with some unavoidable questions.

- (a) How can struggle for secularism be advanced without challenging religion?
- (b) Is it correct to say that democracy and secularism are two concepts, which are not in tune with each other?
- (c) The more democracy we have, the more we demand that hitherto excluded sections/communities join the democratic process, can we ensure that they first pay obeisance before secularism?

PART-III

Breaking New Grounds

In order to initiate and wage new struggles, it is essential to revisit the existing understanding of fascism within the left camp. The dominant understanding within the left has been the position of the Communist International, which analysed it as ‘monopoly capital's attack against Proletariat’. Perhaps looking at the experience of fascism(s) or fascistic movements in the second decade of 21st century, one feels that it is important to revisit the dominant understanding. In this process I would propose a few immediate programmes in the fight against communalism and fascism.

(a) Immediate Programme

Looking at the fact that RSS has been able to create a favourable image of its work among a significant section of Hindu population, it is important that we make attempts to challenge the social legitimacy of RSS. I have a feeling that our dogmatic understanding vis-à-vis communalism or element of opportunism in our politics leads us to a situation where we tend to 'miss the bus' at crucial moments when the communalists could have been put on the defensive. Our recent history has been witness to two such episodes. The exposures in

Hindutva Terror cases and involvement of RSS activists in those attacks is the first one, while the second one related to the funding of hate campaign through Seva where it has been clearly proven that how corrupt it's leaders were. Missing such opportunities would only help in further legitimising the RSS and it's outfits. There are assumptions that both BJP and Congress are equally bad which needs to be re-looked. Riot prevention through curbing of hate speech and formation of Mohalla (locality) Committees are very important. Fight for the rights of the riot affected through relief, rehabilitation and rebuilding lives remains one important part however the fight to bring guilty to book along with the leadership is more essential. I would, thus, broadly throw a few points for all to ponder and work on for a better space. These are –

1. Fight against social legitimacy of RSS
2. Struggle against wrong assumptions
3. Prevention of Riots
4. Fight for relief and rehabilitation during riots
5. Bring the guilty to book - culpability of its leaders
6. Struggle for genocide convention
7. Challenge and question every manifestation of minority communalism

(b) Mid-term programme

One should have a mid term vision in this fight. Apart from the immediate intervention it is essential to acknowledge and understand that the continuity of a struggle for secularism would rely much on how we strengthen parallel processes as well as look forward towards the struggles such as anti-caste struggle, struggles against gender oppression, struggles for rationalism and class struggle thereby emptying the religion from social spaces. Every such attempt that reduces the role of religion from the daily life of people should be encouraged. A few suggestions are noted below.

1. Intervention in culture
2. Build parallel organisations
3. Fight for secularisation - emptying of religion from social spaces

(c) Long-term programme

The long-term objective has to be aimed towards the fight for socialist revolution. This would emerge out of the struggles at the immediate and midterm level with a better clarity of a political ideology.

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