

India in a Centrifuge (The Secular Nation in Danger)

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INDIA perhaps is now going through the most severe socio-political crisis in the post-Independence period. Never before has the moral and intellectual content of the Nation dipped so low. Never before has the Nation been so deeply inflicted by corruption, communalism and terrorism, tearing apart the social fabric of the nation. Never before has the ruling class of the Nation so brazenly aligned with the imperialist powers of yester years under the banner of Globalization, pauperizing its own citizens. Never before have all the democratic Institutions like Parliament, including the entire political establishment of the country faced such a crisis of faith. Never before has the Nation been sabotaged from inside by its own political establishments. INDIA is indeed facing a crisis that threatens its sovereignty, unity and integrity.

Yesterday: When the Indian nation state was born in the midnight of 15th August, 1947, was it baptized into any religious order? With Jawaharlal Nehru at the helm of affairs, it was unthinkable that the new born state would pick up a non-secular credential. Contrary to the common belief, the founding father of Pakistan did not also push the new born Pakistan to become an Islamic state. In fact, in his inaugural speech as first governor general of Pakistan, Jinnah had said:

'You will find that in the course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.'

The India of yesterday (1947), despite the partition, had far more tolerance and compassion than today. The leaders of yesterday had, in fact, the foresight and courage to opt for a secular constitution that laid the foundation of an unusual nation-state. In spite of the enormous diversities of the country, they managed to stitch together a national fabric that even had the space for the cultural and religious rights of the minorities under articles 25, 29 and 30 of the constitution. While most parts of the country, despite its ethnic diversity came together at a stage of very low level of economic

development, the divisive forces gained momentum with the uneven and inequitable economic development. In fact, as the country integrated with the global economy and emerged as a substantial capitalist power, it also entered the era of perennial political crisis. The coalition politics representing the regional imbalances has never permitted a stable central Government in the past two decades!

Will the Indian "nation-state" survive the centrifugal forces of capitalist development in the era of Globalization? The multi-ethnicity and caste-class contradiction would only exacerbate with time and may generate enough pressure threatening the unitary structure of the country itself. But over and above all these contradictions in the infrastructure, the communal politics of the past two decades would perhaps prove to be the proverbial last straw on the camels back.

The secular constitution that the country had adopted in 1950 has never been the ideal charter for the RSS or any of its variants. The Hindu Rashtra that was conceptualized way back in 1925 had specifically excluded the persons belonging to any other religious group or race from being the primary citizens of the Rashtra. After the partition, the Muslim minority therefore became the natural target for derision, especially because within the bourgeois

democratic frame work, the minority votes became the main stay for their opponent political organizations. The ingenious manipulation of the Babri Masjid controversy however catapulted them towards central power.

A little known Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi dispute was ingeniously resurrected in 1984 by the formation of the "Sri Ram Janma Bhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti" and a 130 kilometer march was organised by VHP from Ayodhya to Lucknow in October, 1984 to voice the demand for liberating the site on which the Babri Masjid stood. The controversial handling of the Shah Bano case by the Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1985, gave just the stick the BJP was waiting for to beat the Congress. The Sangh Parivar's 'National Thinkers Conferences' held across the country in 1987 and the BJP's Palampur Resolution on Ayodhya in June 1989 finally put Ram Janma Bhoomi on the political agenda of the Sangh Parivar.

The November, 1989 general election thus saw the worst ever communal violence in which over 800 people died in the Hindi belt. V.P. Singh became the Prime Minister with the support of BJP which won 88 seats. To push its own agenda, BJP/ VHP combine first declared February 14th, 1990 as the date to begin the temple construction which was changed to 8th June and later to 30th October, 1990. As a last ditch effort to keep away the other backward classes from uniting with the upper caste BJP, V P Singh introduced the "Mandal Bill" in the loksabha on 7th August, 1990. That's is when the LK Advani hit back with his Ram card, his Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. The arrest of Advani in Bihar on 23rd October, 1990 and the collapse of the V P Singh Government on 9th November, 1990, forever altered the course of Indian politics. The demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6th December, 1992, the repeated instances of communal violence and the hate campaign unleashed by the Sangh Parivar gave them good dividend in terms of votes and seats in the Parliament and since 1998, the NDA Government functioned with almost two dozen local parties supporting the BJP to reap their own local benefits.

Despite making astronomical gains within a very

short period by playing the Hindu card, BJP's political hold kept sliding down equally fast in the year 2001 and by the end of which it had lost power in three states. The entire efforts of VHP to resurrect the Ram Janma Bhoomi issue had also stopped paying the dividends which it did in 1990s. *And that is when the Godhra incident happened.* 59 passengers of the Sabarmati Express, some of them being the Ramsevakhs who were returning from Ayodhya, died in a gruesome manner near the Godhra station on 27th February, 2002. The premeditated murderous attacks that followed, left hundreds of innocent muslims dead all over Gujarat. Dozens of women were brutally raped and burnt alive. Even the children were not spared and scores of them were burnt alive. Most of the commercial establishments belonging to the minority community were burnt and destroyed and the entire Muslim population of Gujarat left bewildered, helpless and insecure. The entire state machinery either connived or kept aloof when such heinous crimes were being perpetrated. The fascist trappings of the Sangh Parivar was completely exposed by their own acts.

Godhra incident gave rise to a new phenomenon called "Modi". He actually 'modi'fied all previous concepts of communalism and refined the hate campaign against the minorities by identifying and projecting the entire Muslim community with "Islamic terrorism" and posing to be the savior of the Hindu community even when no such terrorism existed in Gujarat!

Instead of cooling the spontaneous anger of the majority community at the death of 59 passengers including several Ramsevakhs in the burning inferno of the S6 coach of the Sabarmati Express near the Godhra railway station, Shri Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat rushed to the press in the evening of 27th February, 2002 to blame the entire Muslim community to be responsible for the fire that had burnt down the S6 coach and he described them as "terrorist":

"The abominable event that has occurred in Godhra does not befit any civilized society, is not a communal event but is an one sided collective terrorist attack by one community... He further said that this incident is not a simple incident of violence

or communal event but is a preplanned incident...." (This statement as reported in SANDESH on 28.2.2002)

In the next few days, thousands of innocent Muslims were killed and crores of their property was burnt down systematically by the storm troopers of the Sangh Parivar. BJP led by Modi won the the 2002 state elections in Decembers riding the wave of hatred created by the sustained propaganda against the Muslims and dubbing "Congress" as a muslim party!

Interestingly, the same day , i.e. 27th February, but in the year 1933, the German Parliament (the Reichstag) had been burnt down, though later it was established that Hitler's own storm troopers had burnt down the Reichstag to instigate the Germans against the communists. When informed about the arrest of the arsonist, Van der Lubbe, whom he immediately dubbed as a "communist", Hitler had declared, "The German people have been soft too long. Every Communist official must be shot. All Communist deputies must be hanged this very night. All friends of the Communists must be locked up."

Hitler had thereafter left the fire scene and had gone straight to the office of his newspaper, the Völkischer Beobachter, to oversee its coverage of the fire. He stayed up all night with Goebbels putting together a paper full of tales of a Communist plot to violently seize power in Berlin. Over 4000 communists were killed thereafter. Hitlers' party, the National Socialist Party (Nazis) thereafter won a landslide victory in the elections...

History do repeat and not necessarily as a farce in the second occasion but with the same uncanny resemblance!

The comparison does not stop here. The Gujarat experiments' obvious goal is to create a political system which will do away with the "soft democratic belly" of the Indian capitalist system and replace it with an aggressive jingoistic political machine which will match with the dream of the Indian Capitalism to be the fountain head of globalization. Call it "hindu rashtra" or anything you like, the Gujarat experiment wishes to create a State structure that will rule like the old days; total dominance by the upper caste with the working

people once again deprived of any democratic right. Perhaps the only modification that would be made is to add and include another "varna" to the existing ones- the minorities! It is building a new fascist state by combining the frame work developed by Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, the RSS ideologue and the necessities of the monopoly capital in the era of Globalization. It would be interesting to find out what Golwalkar was advocating as the ideal state. This is what he said in "We or Our Nationhood Defined":

WHAT IS "NATION OF HINDUTVA"?

Nation: Whilst seemingly simple in meaning, this is a word which is often misunderstood. However, understanding of this one word is the key to the comprehension of the whole idea of the "Nation of Hindutva". The fundamental point to note here is the difference between a "Nation" (or "Rashtra") and a "State" (or "Rajya"). If this distinction is understood, then all the rest falls into place. In essence, a "Rajya" is a geo-political designation, based on lines drawn on a map and little bits of paper signed by some (allegedly) important people. In contrast to this, a "Rashtra" is an entity that has as its basis a cultural, philosophical and ideological consciousness, a shared heritage and background and a common ancestral or inspirational root...

Hindutva: Hindutva is what is now commonly known as Hinduism. The basic reason for insisting on its being called as Hindutva rather than Hinduism is that any -ism suggests a (relatively) narrow, limited ideology or set of beliefs, which follows set rules, guidelines and definitions.

As for what exactly Hindutva is, it is the Dharma. The reason for saying "the" Dharma, as opposed to "a" Dharma, which many people would say, is because there can only be one Dharma, since Dharma has implicit within it, all the aspects which make up life. The main reason for this misconception is that Dharma is often translated (wrongly) as "religion". Whilst religion makes up a part of Dharma it is only a part and not the whole of it. Dharma takes a holistic view, and covers the whole spectrum of human experience.

The question arises, if this Dharma is Universal as is implied by the name "Vishwa Dharma"

(Universal Dharma), then why is it that it is given the name "Hindutva", since this implies that it is relevant only for Hindus and for none else. To explain that, it is necessary to look at why it is actually called Hindutva, and where the name Hindutva came from. In Vedic times, there were many names for the country, one of which was "Sapta Sindhu". Nowadays, "Sindhu" refers just to one particular river the River Sindhu (Indus), now in Pakistan. But in those times "Sindhu" was a general name for all rivers, so the name "Sapta Sindhu" (literally Seven Rivers) was used as the country consisted of seven great rivers - Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati (which has been proven, on the basis of NASA satellite evidence, to have ACTUALLY existed - many people earlier claimed that it was purely mythological), Kaveri, Sindhu, Narmada and Godaveri. According to Sanskrit grammar, S and H are often interchangeable, and so "Sapta Sindhu" was actually pronounced as "Hapta Hindhu". The Persians adopted the same name for the country, but with time dropped the "Hapta", and were left with Hindhu, from which is derived Hindu. Hence, the people of the country were called Hindus, and the country itself Hind, or Hindustan (Hindu Stan meaning Place of the Hindus). Thus, the way of life followed by the people of that country came to be known as Hinduism...or Hindutva...

Nation of Hindutva: Having now defined the two individual words, it now becomes immediately completely obvious as to exactly what is meant by the phrase "**Nation of Hindutva**". This is not, as it may at first seem, a vague, general concept, but an absolute, defined entity, which refers to the Nation - i.e. all those people throughout the world, regardless of official "Nationality" (i.e. what appears on the passport, etc.) - of people belonging to the cultural, philosophical, and ancestral background and heritage that is Hindutva.

**COMMENTING ON THE GERMAN EXPERIENCE,
GOLWALKAR WROTE:**

"German Race pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by purging the country of the Semitic Races-the Jews. Race

pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by".

"It is worth bearing well in mind how these old Nations solve their minorities problem. They do not undertake to recognize any separate element in their polity. Emigrants have to get themselves naturally assimilated in the principal mass of the population, the National Race, by adopting its culture and language and sharing in its aspirations, by losing all consciousness of their separate existence, forgetting their foreign origin. If they do not do so, they live merely as outsiders, bound by all the codes and conventions of the Nation, at the sufferance of the Nation and deserving no special protection, far less any privilege or rights. There are only two courses open to the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or to live at its mercy so long as the national race may allow them to do so and to quit the country at the sweet will of the national race. That is the only sound view on the minorities problem. That is the only logical and correct solution. That alone keeps the national life healthy and undisturbed. That alone keeps the nation safe from the danger of a cancer developing into its body politic of the creation of a state within a state. From this stand point, sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation; let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races, who have chosen to live in our country".

The nation state model in practice: While

Golwalkar was being more charitable than Hitler by allowing the Muslims to stay alive albeit as a second class citizen in a 'single state of Hindutva', the concept of the modern nation state did not necessarily coincide with such fascist formulation. The term "nation state" is frequently misused simply to mean a sovereign state, even if its political boundaries do not coincide with ethnic boundaries. The state is a *political* and *geopolitical* entity; the nation is a *cultural* and/or *ethnic* entity. The term "nation state" implies that they geographically coincide, and this distinguishes the nation state from the other types of state, which historically preceded it. If successfully implemented, this implies that the *citizens* share a common language, culture, and commerce and business — which was not the case in many historical states.

The idea of a nation state is associated with the rise of the modern system of states — often called the "*Westphalian system*" in reference to the *Treaty of Westphalia* (1648). The "Westphalian" doctrine of states under which legitimate *states* were assumed to correspond to *nations*—groups of people united by language and culture.

Characteristics of the nation state: The nation state promoted economic unity, first by abolishing internal *customs* and *tolls*. Nation states typically have a policy to create and maintain a national transportation infrastructure, facilitating trade and travel. However, the most obvious impact of the nation state, as compared to its non-national predecessors, is the creation of a uniform national *culture*, through state policy. When the implied unity is absent, the nation state often tries to create it. Language and cultural policies then become negative, aimed at the suppression of non-national elements.

Language *prohibitions* were sometimes used to accelerate the adoption of national languages, and the decline of *minority languages*.

Minorities: The most obvious deviation from the ideal of 'one nation, one state', is the presence of minorities, especially ethnic minorities, which are clearly not members of the majority nation. The nationalist definition of a *nation* is always exclusive: no nation has open membership. In most cases, there

is a clear idea that surrounding nations are different, and that includes members of those nations who live on the 'wrong side' of the border.

The founder fathers of the Indian nation state had ofcourse firmly rejected the concept of a state based on any religion and had chosen to adopt a modern, secular, socialist and democratic state structure. They wrote down a constitution that still remains a path breaking law.

The secular, democratic structure of the constitution is non-negotiable as it reflects the basic principles on which the constitution of the nation state was drawn up at the dawn of its creation. Starting from the *Keshavananda Bharati's* case, the Supreme Court has thus carved out the basic structure of the constitution that includes the "fundamental rights" which cannot be altered even under the amending powers conferred on the parliament to amend the constitution under Article 368 of the Constitution. 34 years after the pronouncement of the judgment in the *Keshavananda Bharati's* case, a bench of nine judges of the Supreme Court in the I.R.Coelho's case has once again reaffirmed the principles laid down in the *Keshavananda Bharati's* case in the year 1973. A few paragraphs from the later judgment reiterate those principles:

(This extract is taken from *I.R. Coelho v. State of T.N.*, (2007) 2 SCC 1, at page 97)

I.R. COELHO (DEAD) BY LRS.

...Appellant

Versus

STATE OF T.N.

...Respondent.

(BEFORE Y.K. SABHARWAL, C.J. AND ASHOK BHAN, DR. ARIJIT PASAYAT, B.P. SINGH, S.H. KAPADIA, C.K. THAKKER, P.K. BALASUBRAMANYAN, ALTAMAS KABIR AND D.K. JAIN, JJ.)

106. Parliament has power to amend the provisions of Part III so as to abridge or take away fundamental rights, but that power is subject to the limitation of basic structure doctrine. Whether the impact of such amendment results in violation of basic structure has to be examined with reference to each individual case. Take the example of freedom of press which, though not separately and specifically guaranteed, has been read as part of

Article 19(1)(a). If Article 19(1)(a) is sought to be amended so as to abrogate such right (which we hope will never be done), the acceptance of the respondent's contention would mean that such amendment would fall outside the judicial scrutiny when the law curtailing these rights is placed in the Ninth Schedule as a result of immunity granted by Article 31-B. The impact of such an amendment shall have to be tested on the touchstone of rights and freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution. In a given case, even abridgement may destroy the real freedom of the press and, thus, be destructive of the basic structure. Take another example. The secular character of our Constitution is a matter of conclusion to be drawn from various articles conferring fundamental rights; and if the secular character is not to be found in Part III, it cannot be found anywhere else in the Constitution because every fundamental right in Part III stands either for a principle or a matter of detail. Therefore, one has to take a synoptic view of the various articles in Part III while judging the impact of the laws incorporated in the Ninth Schedule on the articles in Part III. It is not necessary to multiply the illustrations.

110. The history of the emergence of modern democracy has also been the history of securing basic rights for the people of other nations also. In the United States the Constitution was finally ratified only upon an understanding that a Bill of Rights would be immediately added guaranteeing certain basic freedoms to its citizens. At about the same time when the Bill of Rights was being ratified in America, the French Revolution declared the Rights of Man to Europe. When the death of colonialism and the end of World War II birthed new nations across the globe, these States embraced rights as foundations to their new Constitutions. Similarly, the rapid increase in the creation of Constitutions that coincided with the end of the Cold War has planted rights at the base of these documents.

125. The question can be looked at from yet another angle also. Can Parliament increase the amending power by amendment of Article 368 to confer on itself the unlimited power of amendment and destroy and damage the fundamentals of the

Constitution? The answer is obvious. Article 368 does not vest such a power in Parliament. It cannot lift all restrictions placed on the amending power or free the amending power from all its restrictions. This is the effect of the decision in *Kesavananda Bharati* case¹ as a result of which secularism, separation of power, equality, etc., to cite a few examples, would fall beyond the constituent power in the sense that the constituent power cannot abrogate these fundamentals of the Constitution. Without equality the rule of law, secularism, etc. would fail. That is why Khanna, J. held that some of the fundamental rights like Article 15 form part of the basic structure.

Despite all such pronouncements of the Highest Court of the land and the pious desires of the founder fathers of this nation, the culture and temperament of secularism has systematically eroded with time from all spheres of life. As we have said earlier, the growth of the Sangh Parivar and all its variants like Shiv Sena etc have openly challenged the very concept of a nation state that could be secular. There was a time when seeking votes in any election in the country in the name of any particular religious would have been considered a severe offence and no body ever dared do resort to such tactics. The provisions under the representation of peoples Act would strictly prohibit such misadventures in past.

Unfortunately however, in the last few elections, the so called national party BJP quite openly campaigned in the name of Hindutva. In the 2002 Gujarat Assembly elections, the star campaigners for Modi were people like Sadhvi Ritumbara, Acharya Dharmendra Maharaj, Pravin Togadiya etc who rubbished the Muslims in relation to Godhra and spread hatred all across Gujarat and won handsomely! The most sinister aspect of this destruction of the secular fabric of the society is the erosion of the secular norms and culture in the Judiciary, the last pillar of democracy. The denial of legal justice to the Muslim victims of the post Godhra violence was so conspicuous that the Supreme Court had to step in and reorder the trial in the *Best Bakery* case by transferring the trial outside the State of Gujarat!

In this article, while I do not propose to deal with the rising communal-terrorism in the country, it would be impossible to overlook the phenomenon altogether. We have to take notice of the fact that incidents of violence against unarmed non-combatant civilians by organized groups (we may call it "terrorism" for want of any other word) have increased qualitatively after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. There have been riots in past in which people of different religious communities have butchered each other but never before have members of any one community have planned and executed the killings of the members of another with such diabolic precision as they are doing after the Godhra incident. We ofcourse should not lose sight of the fact that the terrorist activities in India have three distinct currents: (1) The violence perpetrated by persons belonging to the organized Hindu rightist groups- through communal riots and/ or by using IEDs, like in Malegaon (2) incidents of bomb blast specially after the post Godhra violence by organized Muslim groups primary as revenge attacks like in the serial blasts of 1993 and 2006 in Mumbai and (3) the well trained mercenary type of attacks that are linked to conflicts in the international sphere between the American-Zionist on one hand and the Taliban-al-Qaeda on the other hand but spilling into the Indian soil because of growing American-Indian axis, like the terrible event in Mumbai on 26/11/2008. The first two are obviously indigenous and intertwined and historically nothing to do with the third current save and except the fact that the Muslims are the common target.

As we have noted earlier, V P Singh had used the "Mandal Bill" in the August, 1990 to stem the growing rightist influence but LK Advani had hit back with his Ram card, his Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. The arrest of Advani in Bihar

on 23rd October, 1990 and the collapse of the V P Singh Government on 9th November, 1990, forever altered the course of Indian politics. The demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6th December, 1992 and the Hindu-Muslim divide have only helped saffronise the country more than ever before. Thus the Mandal has failed to make much of a dent in the march of the Kamandal, though it did weaken the polarization within the country.

The modified Hindu Rashtra of Narendra Modi is perhaps the ideal model of the nation state that Modi wishes to present to the monopoly capitalist of not just this country but the world which totally safe guards their interest and at the same time disarms the population in the name of religion and disables them from defending their fundamental and democratic rights. Secularism ofcourse has to go altogether as the minorities have to be reduced to a second class citizen. The manner in which more than a 1000 acre of land was transferred to Tatas for the Nano project just in one day proved what Modi can do for the rich!

The secular state, therefore, is in serious danger. It needless to point out that secularism, equality and democracy are completely intertwined and dependent on each other and the destruction of one ensures the destruction of the others. To save democracy therefore we have to save secularism. No amount of social engineering can however guarantee the safety of the secular state except a determined and resolute struggle against communalism and communal politics which is already having all the trappings of fascism. The need of the day is, therefore, a widest coalition of the secular democratic forces which is conscious of the danger faced from the rightist forces and the global monopolist. Let us expose them and defeat them and save our constitution.

The next issue (January-March 2009) of *Bharatiya Samajik Chintan* will be a special issue on **Mathematical Sciences and Education**. Contributions from some notable persons in this field are likely to appear.