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SITARAM YECHURY

## **India@75**

As we approach the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India's independence, a new narrative is being scripted to metamorphose our secular democratic Constitutional Republic into a fascistic 'Hindutva Rashtra'. This new narrative is the complete negation of and the antithesis of India's epic struggle for freedom and the Indian State that was established under the Indian Constitution.

This new narrative suggests that while we achieved our independence on August 15, 1947, India's real freedom was achieved with the abrogation of Article 370 and 35 A of our Constitution, the dissolution of the state of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019, and the formal launching of the Ram temple construction in Ayodhya on August 5, 2020.

This narrative is based on many distortions of history and assertions that are ahistorical and unscientific. These relate to the very conception of India as a country, Nationalism, RSS role in the freedom struggle etc., amongst many others. These need to be evaluated properly to meet and defeat this challenge.

### BATTLE OF VISIONS

This new narrative has not emerged overnight. It is the product of nearly a century-long struggle between contending political, ideological visions that emerged during the freedom movement. It is, therefore, necessary to re-evaluate many concepts that emerged in this churning.

The withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement launched in 1921 by Mahatma Gandhi after the 'Chauri Chaura incident', the founding of the Communist Party of India in 1921 and the founding of the RSS in 1925 heralded an intense battle of visions on what ought to be the character of a future free India, and its state structure.

A continuous battle between three visions emerged on what must be the political, social, economic, cultural character of the independent state of India. Recognising the Indian reality of rich plurality and diversity, both the Congress and the Communists concluded that the unity of India, as a country and of its people, can be consolidated only when the threads of commonality amongst this rich diversity are strengthened and every aspect of this plurality

– linguistic, ethnic, religious, cultural etc. – is respected and treated on the basis of equality. This recognised the fact that any effort to impose uniformity upon this diversity will only lead to a social implosion.

On the basis of this understanding, the mainstream Congress vision had articulated that independent India should be a secular democratic Republic. The Communist vision, while concurring with this objective, went further to envision that in order to consolidate the secular, democratic Republic, the political freedom of the country must be extended to achieve the socio-economic freedom of every individual, possible only under socialism.

Antagonistic to both these was the third vision which argued that the character of independent India should be determined by the religious affiliations of its people. This vision had a twin expression – the Muslim League championing an 'Islamic State' and the RSS championing a 'Hindu Rashtra'. The former succeeded with the unfortunate partition of the country, admirably engineered, aided and abetted by the British colonial rulers, with all its consequences that continue to fester tensions and prejudices to date. The latter, having failed to achieve their objective at the time of independence, continued with their efforts to transform modern India into their project of a rabidly intolerant fascistic 'Hindu Rashtra'. In a sense, the ideological battles and the political conflicts in contemporary India are a continuation of the battle between these three visions. Needless to add, the contours of this battle will continue to define the direction and content of the process of the realisation of the 'Idea of India'. (We shall return to this concept subsequently)

## CAPITALIST PATH OF DEVELOPMENT

The Communists maintained that the mainstream Congress vision of consolidating the secular, democratic foundations of our Republic can succeed only when independent India frees itself from its bondage with imperialism, on the one hand, and breaks the stranglehold of feudal vestiges, on the other. The Congress party's inability to take the freedom struggle to this logical culmination became clear by its serving the interests of the post-independent ruling classes – bourgeoisie in alliance with the landlords, led by the big bourgeoisie – pursuing the path of capitalist development. This, by itself, weakens the foundations of a secular democratic Republic.

How? First, it relegates the anti-imperialist social consciousness that forged the unity of the people during the freedom struggle to the background, thus permitting and buttressing a social consciousness dominated by caste and communal passions. Secondly, instead of strengthening an *inclusive* India, it progressively *excludes* the growing majority of the exploited people.

This was resoundingly vindicated by our experience during the first six decades of independence. This provided the 'grist to the mill' of the communal forces, or the third vision, to strengthen itself, exploiting growing popular discontent against the policies pursued by the ruling classes.

Thus, a mere declaration of safeguarding the secular democratic Republic and its reassertion today remains limited in its ability to safeguard and strengthen secular democratic India.

#### PERPETUATING PRE-CAPITALIST SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

There is another equally important factor that prevents the realization of the 'Idea of India'. The path of capitalist development being pursued by the ruling classes is one where there is increasing collaboration with international finance capital and compromise with feudal landlords. The Indian capitalist path of development, hence, is not along the classic lines of capitalism rising from the ruins of feudalism but in compromise with it.

The inability to eliminate the vestiges of feudalism means, at the level of the super-structure, the perpetuation of a social consciousness associated with feudalism and other pre-capitalist formations. The domination of religion and caste, integral to the social consciousness of pre-capitalist formations, continue to remain powerful in today's social order. The efforts at super-imposing capitalism over feudal vestiges only creates a situation where the backwardness of consciousness associated with feudal vestiges is combined with the degenerative hedonistic 'consumerism' of today's globalised capitalist consciousness.

The process of class formation in India, as a consequence of such circumscribed capitalist development, is, thus, taking place within the parameters of historically inherited structures of a caste divided society. It is taking place not by overthrowing the pre-capitalist social relations but in compromise with it. This results in the overlapping commonality between the exploited classes and oppressed castes in contemporary India. Class struggles in India, therefore, can advance only through simultaneous struggles against both — economic exploitation and social oppression.

Thus, at the level of the superstructure, feudal decadence is combined with capitalist degeneration to produce a situation where growing criminalisation of the society coexists and grows in the company of such social consciousness dominated by caste and communal feelings. Instead of overcoming such consciousness for the realization of the 'Idea of India', precisely these elements are promoted by Hindutva forces for their political-electoral benefits.

Such a reality provides the fertile ground that engenders the current rightward shift in Indian politics buttressing the efforts for

the negation of the 'Idea of India' and the establishment of a fascistic 'Hindu Rashtra' in its place.

### 'IDEA OF INDIA': NATIONALISM

The emergence of Nation-States with its attended Nationalism was integral to the long process of transition of human civilization from the stage of feudalism and capitalism. This period also threw up in Europe the struggle for the separation of the State from the Church. The triumph of capitalism over feudalism, at the same time, signified the separation of the political authority from the myth of a divine sanction to rule invoked by Kings and Emperors across the civilizations during the high time of feudalism. The agreements of Westphalia finally signed in 1648 laid the principles of sovereignty of the Nation-State and the consequent international laws and is widely believed to establish an international system on the basis of the principle of sovereignty of States; the principle of equality between States; and the principle of non-intervention by one State in the internal affairs of another State usually referred to as the Westphalian system. Westphalian Peace was negotiated between 1644–48 by major European powers.

During the course of the defeat of fascism in World War II and the consequent dynamics of decolonization, the people's struggles for freedom from colonialism threw up many constructs of Nationalism and the character of the State in independent countries. For sure, such constructs arose out of a long struggle in individual countries against colonialism, including India, during this period.

### 'IDEA OF INDIA' : INDIAN NATIONHOOD

The concept of 'Idea of India' emerged during the epic people's struggle for India's freedom from British colonialism. *What is this 'Idea of India'?* To put it in simple terms, though conscious of its multiple complex dimensions, this concept represents the idea that India as a country moves towards transcending its immense diversities in favour of a substantially inclusive unity of its people.

Prof Akeel Bilgrami, in his introduction to a volume of essays containing revised versions of lectures on the relations between politics and political economy in India given at a seminar in 2010 at the Heymen Centre for Humanities at Columbia University, New York (a Centre that he chaired then), says about my observations on the 'Idea of India', then, the following:

'(This) might be viewed as an ideal of a nation that rejects the entire trajectory in Europe that emerged after the Westphalian peace. What emerged then (and there) was a compulsion to seek

legitimacy for a new kind of state, one that could no longer appeal to older notions of the 'divine right' of states personified in their monarchs. It sought this legitimacy in a new form of the political psychology of a new kind of subject, the 'citizen', a psychology based on a *feeling* for a new form of entity that had emerged, the 'nation'. This feeling, which came to be called 'nationalism', had to be generated in the populace of citizens, and the standard process that was adopted in Europe for generating it was to find an *external enemy within*, the outsider, the 'other' in one's midst, (the Irish, the Jews, to name just two) to be despised and subjugated. At a somewhat later time, with the addition of a more numerical and statistical form of discourse, these came to be called 'minorities', and the method by which this feeling for the nation was created came to be called 'majoritarianism'. (*Social Scientist*, January–February 2011).

The RSS/BJP objective of replacing the secular democratic modern Indian Republic with their concept of a 'Hindu Rashtra' is, in a sense, a *throwback* to the Westphalian model where the Hindu majority subjugates other religious minorities (mainly Muslim: the *external enemy within*) to foster 'Hindu Nationalism' as against 'Indian Nationhood'. This, in fact, represents a *throwback* to notions of nationalism that dominated the intellectual discourse prior to the sweep of the Indian people's struggle for freedom. Such a State, based on 'Majoritarianism' —their version of a rabidly intolerant fascistic 'Hindu Rashtra' — negates the core, around which emerged the consciousness of Indian Nationhood contained in the 'Idea of India' as a reflection of the emergence of 'a political psychology of a new kind'.

The RSS/BJP ideologues dismiss the 'Idea of India' as a mere idea — a metaphysical concept. They reassert as a given reality Indian (Hindu) nationalism. The RSS/BJP today are spearheading the most reactionary 'throwback' to Indian (Hindu) nationalism as against the Indian Nationhood (the 'Idea of India') consciousness that emerged from the epic people's struggle for freedom from the British colonial rule. Akeel Bilgrami asserts this: 'The prodigious and sustained mobilization of its masses that India witnessed over the last three crucial decades of the freedom struggle could not have been possible without an alternative and *inclusionary* ideal of this kind to inspire it.' (*Social Scientist*, Vol. 39, Nov. 1–2, 2011)

India's diversity — linguistic, religious, ethnic, cultural etc. — is incomparably vaster than in any other country that the world knows of. Officially, it has been recorded, on an earlier occasion, that there are at least 1,618 languages in India; 6,400 castes, 6 major religions — 4 of them originated in these lands; 6 anthropologically defined ethnic groups; all this put together being politically administered as one country. A measure of this diversity is that

India celebrates 29 major religious-cultural festivals and probably has the largest number of religious holidays amongst all countries of the world.

Those who argue that it was the British that united this vast diversity ignore the fact that it was the British which engineered the partition of the sub-continent leading to over a million deaths and communal transmigration of a colossal order. British colonialism has the ignominious history of leaving behind legacies that continue to fester wounds through the partition of countries they had colonised — notably, Palestine, Cyprus, apart from the Indian sub-continent. It is the Pan-Indian people's struggle for freedom that united this diversity and integrated more than 660 feudal princely states into modern India, giving shape to a Pan-Indian consciousness.

### ROLE OF THE COMMUNISTS

The Indian Communists played an important role in this process of the evolution of this 'Idea of India'. Indeed, for this very reason, given the Communist's visionary commitments to the long struggle for freedom, the Communist's role is absolutely central to the realization of the 'Idea of India' in today's conditions.

Consider this with reference to three issues that continue to constitute, today, the core of the 'Idea of India'.

*Land Question:* The struggles on the land question unleashed by the Communists in various parts of the country in the 1940s particularly — Punnapara Vayalar in Kerala, the Tehbagha movement in Bengal, the Surma Valley struggle in Assam, the Warli uprising in Maharashtra etc. — the highlight of these being the armed struggle in Telangana — brought the issue of land reforms to centre stage. The consequent abolition of the zamindari system and landed estates drew the vast mass of India's peasantry into the project of building the 'Idea of India'. These struggles contributed the most to liberating crores of people from feudal bondage. This also contributed substantially to creating today's 'Indian middle class'.

In today's conditions, the issue of forcible land acquisition has acquired a very dangerous dimension with the new Agri laws. By legalising the indiscriminate forcible acquisition of agricultural land forcibly dispossessing lakhs of farmers, aggravates the agrarian distress even further. The question of land, hence, remains a crucial issue for the Left forces, the most important political force that is today focusing on developing the agrarian struggles against the mounting distress and the neo-liberal policies that are intensifying the process of primitive accumulation of capital.

*Linguistic Re-organisation:* Secondly, the Indian Communists spearheaded the massive popular struggles for the linguistic

reorganization of the states in independent India. They, thus, are amongst some others responsible for creating the political 'map' of today's India on reasonably scientific and democratic lines. The struggles for Vishalandhra, Aikya Kerala and Samyukta Maharashtra were led, amongst others, by people who later emerged as communist stalwarts in the country. This paved the way for the integration of many linguistic nationalities that inhabit India, on the basis of equality, into the process of realizing the 'Idea of India'.

Even after the linguistic reorganization of states, today, many problems and demands for smaller states reflecting the lack of equality amongst the various ethnic identities that exist in the country, particularly in the North East. These can only be resolved by ensuring that all the linguistic groups and ethnic national identities are treated equally with concrete plans backed by finances to tackle the economic backwardness of these areas; and having equal access to all opportunities. It is only the Left that sincerely champions this cause to strengthen the unity and integrity of India.

*Secularism:* Thirdly, the Communist's steadfast commitment to secularism is based on the recognition of India's reality. It merits repetition that the unity of India with its immense diversity can be maintained only by strengthening the bonds of commonality in this diversity and not by imposing any uniformity upon this diversity like what the communal forces seek currently to do. While this is true for all attributes of India's social life, it is of critical importance in relation to religion. Following the partition of India and the horrendous communal aftermath, secularism became inseparable for the realization of the 'Idea of India'. The Indian ruling classes, however, went only halfway in meeting the Communist objective of defining secularism as the separation of religion from politics. This means that while the State protects the individual's choice of faith, it shall not profess or prefer any one religion. In practice, the Indian ruling classes have reduced this to define secularism as equality of all religions. Inherent in this is the in-built bias towards the religious faith of the majority. This, in fact, contributes to providing sustenance to the communal and fundamentalist forces.

On this score as well, in today's conditions, it is the Left that remains the most consistent upholder of secularism, spearheading the efforts to forge the broadest people's unity against communalism and the steadfast fighter to defend the religious minorities; to ensure their security, safeguarding their identity as equal citizens of our country.

The drawing in of the exploited majority of rural India; the drawing in of the socially oppressed people, especially those who continue to be subjected to obnoxious caste-based oppression and atrocities; the drawing in of the numerous linguistic nationalities; and the drawing in of the multi-religious Indian population, above

all, the drawing in of all Indians in an inclusive path of economic and social justice, constituting the core of the inclusionary 'Idea of India', remains an unfulfilled agenda. The struggles for realizing these incomplete tasks constitute the essential agenda of the CPI(M) and the Indian Left. Hence, their pivotal role in leading the struggles for the realisation of 'Idea of India'.

### WHAT IS THIS RSS VISION?

Two years before the RSS was born V.D. Savarkar published an ideological pamphlet in 1923 titled 'Essentials of Hindutva'. This was retitled 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?' when reprinted subsequently.

The essence of this ideological pamphlet was to define: all those irrespective of their faiths who consider India to be their *Mathrubhumi* (motherland), *Pithrubhumi* (fatherland) and *Punyabhumi* (holy land), come under the ambit of Hindutva. Those who live in India but whose *Punyabhumi* is elsewhere like the Muslims (Mecca and Medina) and the Christians (whose holy land belongs to the currently devastating Palestinian lands of Jerusalem, Bethlehem etc.) are outside the ambit of Hindutva.

Savarkar further asserted that Hindutva is a political project which has little to do with the Hindu religion. For the establishment of Hindutva, he gave the slogan 'Hinduise the military, militarise Hindudom' — the inspiration for the current Hindutva campaigns of poisonous hate, violence and terror.

This RSS construct of nationalism is its ideological-theoretical justification for the establishment of its 'Hindu Rashtra' (which is very distanced from Hinduism as a religion and should actually be called the '*Hindutva* Rashtra'). This was first articulated by the then Sarsanghchalak or Supreme Leader of the R.S.S. in '*We or Our Nationhood Defined*', first published in 1939. This provided the R.S.S. with an ideological formation, not merely in terms of ideas and principles but also in establishing an organizational structure to achieve the aim of a fascistic 'Hindutva Rashtra'.

This is premised on an assertion of the late RSS chief that 'Hindus have been in undisputed and undisturbed possession of this land for over eight or even ten thousand years before the land was invaded by any foreign race'. And, therefore, this land 'came to be known as Hindustan, the land of the Hindus' (M. S. Golwalkar, 1939, Page 6). Historical facts do not bother them. The word Hindustan was coined by the Arabs to describe lands beyond the river Sindhu (Indus). Those inhabiting these lands were called the 'Hindoos'. (Phonetically, 'S' becomes 'H' in Arabic!)

Hindutva supremacists, having thus 'established' that the Hindus were always and continue to remain a nation on the basis of such an unscientific and ahistorical analysis, proceed to assert the



intolerant, theocratic content of such a Hindutva nation:

The conclusion is unquestionably forced upon us that . . . in Hindusthan exists and must needs exist the ancient Hindu nation and nought else but the Hindu Nation. All those not belonging to the national, i.e., Hindu Race, Religion, Culture and Language naturally fall out of the pale of real 'National' life.

Consequently, only those movements are truly 'National' as aim at re-building, re-vitalizing and emancipating from its present stupor, the Hindu Nation. Those only are nationalist patriots, who, with the aspiration to glorify the Hindu race and nation next to their heart, are prompted into activity and strive to achieve that goal. All others are either traitors and enemies to the National cause, or, to take a charitable view, idiots. (Golwalkar, 1939, pp. 43-44)

This is in complete contradiction with the 'Idea of India' as envisaged by the freedom struggle. Jawaharlal Nehru describes in the *Discovery of India*, 'India is an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously.'

Further, Rabindranath Tagore says: 'Aryans and non-Aryans, Dravidians and Chinese, Scythians, Huns, Pathans and Mongols, all have merged and lost themselves in one body.' And, this body is India.

The RSS project, thus, constitutes a regression away from realizing the 'Idea of India' as inclusive nationalism. What is being promoted today is an exclusive Hindutva nationalism to establish their fascistic 'Hindu Rashtra'.

## RSS AND THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The role of the Communist freedom fighters is well documented. All the nine founding members of the CPI(M) Polit Bureau were freedom fighters who spent long years in British jails and subsequently under Congress rule. Com. A.K. Gopalan hoisted the national flag on 15 August 1947 in the Vellore jail, where he was imprisoned by the British. Harkishan Singh Surjeet was arrested when he was a school student as he hoisted the tri-colour. The overwhelming majority of the names inscribed in marble at the cellular jail in the Andamans were associated with the communists and revolutionary groups.

As opposed to this, the RSS was singularly absent; in fact, it stayed away from the freedom struggle focusing on engineering communal conflicts and riots. It has only one claim of a link to the

freedom struggle, i.e., V.D. Savarkar. Even this is concocted and engineered.

The eminent historian of the national movement, sympathetic to Hindutva tendencies, R.C. Majumdar, documents that Savarkar gave a mercy petition to the British on November 14, 1913, seeking his release from the cellular jail in the Andamans. This surrender made him a public ally of the British policy of divide and rule.

In his petition, he assures the British: 'Now no man having the good of India and humanity at heart will blindly step on the thorny paths which in the excited and hopeless situation of India in 1906–1907 beguiled us from the path of peace and progress. Therefore, if the Government in their manifold beneficence and mercy, release me I for one cannot but be the staunchest advocate of constitutional progress and loyalty to the English government which is the foremost condition of that progress.' (R.C. Majumdar, 'Penal Settlement in Andamans', pp. 211–213)

Further in a letter to British authorities, he wrote: 'I hereby acknowledge that I had a fair trial and just sentence. I heartily abhor methods of violence resorted to in days gone by, and I feel myself duty bound to uphold law and constitution to the best of my powers and am willing to make the reform a success insofar as I may be allowed to do so in future.' (A facsimile of this letter was published in *Frontline*, April 7, 1995, p. 94)

For the major portion of his life after making peace with the British, his politics was oppositional to the Congress and the Left-led movements rather than the British. As the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, he made sure that movements like the Quit India movement of 1942 passed without any participation from members of the Hindu Mahasabha or the Sanghathanists. He categorically called on the Hindus to give no support to the movement' (see Amba Prasad, *The Indian Revolt of 1942*).

'I issue this definite instruction that all Hindu Sanghathanists, in general, holding any post or position of vantage in the government services should stick to them and continue to perform their regular duties' (Quoted in Noorani, *Frontline*, Dec. 1, 1995).

In fact, The Bombay home department, during the 1942 Quit India movement, observed, '*The Sangh has scrupulously kept itself within the law and in particular has refrained from taking part in the disturbances that broke out in August 1942*', (Anderson and Damle, Sridhar D., *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi 1987). Even one of RSS leading lights, Nanaji Deshmukh, once raised the question, 'Why did the RSS not take part in the liberation struggle as an organisation?' (Deshmukh, Nana, *R.S.S.: Victim of Slander*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1979) Further, throughout the national movement, the RSS always collaborated

with the princely states who stood in firm opposition to the freedom struggle. One of their closest allies was Raja Hari Singh of Kashmir, who was reluctant to join India.

In order to conceal this reality, they spread canards against the Communists. One need not go into the details of the already richly documented history of the role of the Left in India's struggle for freedom. It would suffice to note that when the country was celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Quit India movement, the then President of India, Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma, addressing the midnight session of the parliament on August 9/10, said: 'After large scale strikes in mills in Kanpur, Jamshedpur and Ahmedabad, a despatch from Delhi dated 5 September 1942, to the secretary of state, in London, reported about the Communist Party of India: "*the behaviour of many of its members proves what has always been clear, namely, that it is composed of anti-British revolution*".' (emphasis added).

## PARTITION HORRORS

Prime Minister Modi recently announced that the partition horrors remembrance day, August 14, will be observed from now on.

Partition of the subcontinent is probably the only instance of humongous transmigration of people. While accurate estimates are perhaps impossible to establish, close to fifteen million people crossed borders (India had then identified 7,295,870 and Pakistan 7,226,600 displaced people), and anywhere between 1 to 2 million were killed in communal clashes. It was a horrendous experience that continues to fester wounds and prejudices till today. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs have all suffered.

By choosing Pakistan's Independence Day for this occasion, there is a message loaded with communal overtones that PM Modi is giving. Clearly, he wants the present generation not to merely recollect the horror but to actually relive the horror. If otherwise, he could well have chosen the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, the day partition was announced by British Viceroy Lord Mountbatten.

The intention is obviously to further sharpen communal polarisation to facilitate the project of transforming the secular democratic Republic of India into a rabidly intolerant, theocratic, fascistic Hindutva Rashtra.

## TWO NATION THEORY

The foundation for partition was laid by the 'Two Nation Theory'. It was V.D. Savarkar who first advanced the two-nation theory in its complete sense. In 1937, in his presidential address to the All India Hindu Mahasabha conference in Karnavati, Ahmedabad, he said,

'India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogeneous nation, but on the contrary, there are two nations in the main; the Hindus and the Moslems, in India.' (*Samagra Savarkar Vadmay*; Volume 6, Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha Publication, 1963-65, Page 296)

Later, in March 1939, once again, in his presidential speech in the Hindu Mahasabha conference, Savarkar declared: 'We Hindus are a nation by ourselves . . . we Hindus are marked out as an abiding Nation by ourselves'' (see *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol II).

Two years later, in his Presidential address to the All-India Muslim league conference delivered at Lahore March 22, 1940, Mohammed Ali Jinnah said, 'To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built for the government of such a state.'

Subsequently, Savarkar endorsing Jinnah, again said, 'I have no quarrel with Mr Jinnah's two-nation theory. We, Hindus, are a nation by ourselves, and it is a historical fact that Hindus and Muslims are two nations' (*Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol II).

Savarkar, Sangh Parivar and Modi's pre-eminent leader, predates Jinnah in advancing the two-nation theory that led to the partition, which the British admirably aided and abetted.

## GANDHI ASSASSINATION

Noted historian Mridula Mukherjee in her presidential address to the Indian History congress 2011, Maldah, West Bengal, says: 'On August 15, 1947, two nation-states were born. One of them, Pakistan, could be said to conform to Savarkar's definition of a nation, but the one to which he belonged, India, was stubbornly refusing to fall in line. The biggest obstacle, it seemed, was the Mahatma himself. He had to be removed. With him alive, neither Hindu Rashtra nor Akhand Bharat could become a reality.

'There is consensus that it was an extreme wing of the Hindu Mahasabha led by Savarkar that was behind Gandhiji's murder. In January 1948, when Gandhiji was assassinated, Savarkar was arrested as the mastermind behind the conspiracy. He was eventually exonerated in the Gandhi Murder Trial for lack of evidence to corroborate the testimony of the approver, a technical point of criminal law. Sardar Patel, being a fine criminal lawyer, was personally convinced of Savarkar's guilt; otherwise, he would not have agreed to put him up for trial. He told Jawaharlal Nehru in unambiguous terms,

'It was a fanatical wing of the Hindu Mahasabha directly under Savarkar that [hatched] the conspiracy and saw it through.

'When the Commission of Inquiry set up in 1965 under Justice Jiwan Lal Kapoor, a former judge of the Supreme Court of India, gave its report, it came to the following conclusion:

'All these facts taken together were destructive of any theory other than the conspiracy to murder by Savarkar and his group.'

## RSS BANNED

Following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, whom the RSS and Modi government seek to feverishly co-opt into their fold today, banned the RSS. A government communique dated February 4, 1948, drafted by Sardar Patel, announcing the ban on the RSS says: 'The objectionable and harmful activities of the Sangh have, however, continued unabated and the cult of violence sponsored and inspired by the activities of the Sangh has claimed many victims. The latest and the most precious to fall was Gandhiji himself.'

Mahatma's Private Secretary, Pyarelal, in his book *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, recalls: 'A letter which Sardar Patel received after the assassination from a young man, who according to his own statement had been gulled into joining the RSS organisation but was later disillusioned, described how members of the RSS at some places had been instructed beforehand to tune in their radio sets on the fateful Friday for the good news'. After the news, sweets were distributed in RSS circles at several places, including Delhi' (p. 756).

The RSS ban was in effect from February 4, 1948, to July 10, 1949. Eager to negotiate the withdrawal of the ban, the RSS entered into deceitful compromises with the government of India. It agreed with Sardar Patel to confine itself as a cultural organisation and not to be involved in politics. The RSS, thus, needed a political arm under its leadership and control for furthering its political activities. Hindu Maha Sabha leader Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, after his resignation from Nehru's Union Cabinet opposing amendments to the Hindu Code Bill, was seeking to form a separate political party. In 1952, RSS sent cadres to assist Shyama Prasad Mukherjee to launch the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, whose later incarnation is the present BJP. (Basu, Tapan; Datta, Pradip; Sarkar, Sumit; Sarkar, Tanika; Sen, Sambuddha, *Khaki Shorts: Saffron Flags*, Tracts for the Times/1, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1993)

The BJP is, thus, nothing else but the political arm of the RSS controlling state power and all the important organs of the Indian state. It is now seeking the destruction of the secular democratic Constitutional republic and to realise the RSS political project of establishing a rabidly intolerant, theocratic, fascistic '*Hindutva Rashtra*'. This is the real meaning and content of Modi's 'New India'

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## DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

Central to the success of the RSS project is the destruction of the present Indian Constitution. The Indian Constitution rests on four foundational pillars, namely — secular democracy, federalism, social justice, and economic sovereignty. Each one of these is under a severe assault since 2014 intensified post-2019.

Such a severe undermining of the Indian Constitution is taking place through a corporate-communal nexus that has emerged since 2014. This nexus pursues unbridled neo-liberal reforms, looting national assets, intensifying economic exploitation and social oppression; establishing a unitary state structure so essential for the success of the fascist Hindutva project; with the emergence of crony capitalism of the worst order.

## DESTRUCTION OF INDEPENDENT CONSTITUTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Beginning with the Parliament, the Judiciary, the Election Commission, the CBI, ED, and all other institutions established by the Constitution to function as checks and balances in our system are being systematically undermined.

The CPI(M) Central Committee has been regularly analysing these developments along with the ruination of lives and livelihoods of the people. The assault on secularism and constitutionally guaranteed democratic rights and civil liberties of the people are on the rise.

The utter mismanagement of the Covid pandemic and the vaccine shortages, along with woeful public health facilities, continue to take their toll on peoples' life. Unconcerned about all this in the most callous manner, this government single-mindedly pursues its fascist project under the slogan of 'new India'. It employs the necessary means to achieve this objective. An important aspect of this is to control people's lives.

## SURVEILLANCE STATE

In the last seven years, surveillance of citizens violating the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution to personal privacy has sharply escalated. The collection of biometric data, forcibly without the individual concurrence, through the Aadhar and the Universal Health Identification etc., is an assault on peoples' privacy, providing information for the consolidation of a surveillance State.

The exposures concerning the use by the Modi government of the notorious Israeli Pegasus military-grade spyware on individuals is an ominous fascistic trend. This is not only a violation of personal privacy but constitutes an attack on Indian democracy itself. Among those whose mobile phones were/are under surveillance are political leaders, a former Judge of the Supreme Court and the bureaucracy of the judiciary; former member of the election Commission; former director of the CBI; several media personalities who are courageous to tell the people the truth, amongst others, i.e., all independent institutions of our democracy. The timing of such surveillance is also ominous, as it came on the eve of the 2019 general elections.

#### PROMOTING IRRATIONALISM: DESTROYING REASON

For the regressive project of 'Hindutva Rashtra' to succeed in India, central is the RSS/BJP effort to influence and control peoples' social consciousness. This requires the need to promote irrationality and unreason to replace history with Hindu Mythology and philosophy with Hindu Theology. Thus, the BJP government is systematically re-working the syllabus taught to our students and youth, attacking and seeking to neutralise universities that nurture rationalism and scientific enquiry and appointing Hindutva ideologues to various positions in higher education.

At a philosophical level, however, they seek to resurrect irrationalism as the mainstay for the success of this pernicious project. Georg Lucas' seminal work, *Destruction of Reason*, in the form of the critique of philosophical irrationalism, needs to be recollected in our Indian context today. Lucas traces, amongst others, Germany's path to Hitler in the realm of philosophy. Lucas was particularly concerned, as it was Germany that provided the world with an enlightened rationalist philosophy in 19 century. The Hegelian dialectics and Karl Marx's work to make Hegel, who was 'standing on his head to stand on his feet', was the philosophical legacy of the German people. How could they, then, internalise the irrational philosophy of Nazism? His central contention asserts 'irrationalism as an international phenomenon in the imperialist world'.

Irrationalism, by its very definition, is an ideological trend hostile to Reason. Its main objective, in all its manifestations, from the days of European enlightenment to today's imperialist globalization, is to challenge the power of Reason in human affairs and its capacity to provide knowledge about reality. Knowledge, at any point in time, can never explain the whole reality. However, irrationalism negates the dialectical relationship between reality and knowledge. Objective reality is, as Lukacs says, far richer and complex than our knowledge of it. Instead of seeking to bridge this

gap on the basis of rationality by pursuing a dialectic method to scientifically comprehend reality, irrationalism concludes that 'one cannot obtain rational knowledge of the entire reality'. The entire reality can only be grasped with 'faith' or 'intuition', considered a higher form of knowledge.' Hindutva nationalism feeds people with such 'faith' and, thus, feeds itself to promote its twin objectives of furthering the neo-liberal agenda and transforming India into an exclusivist, theocratic, fascist State.

The methodology adopted currently by this RSS/BJP/Modi combine to consolidate the hold of this 'false consciousness' of Hindutva nationalism is by ensuring that objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

By controlling the media and social media, emotional appeals and the building up of a personality cult continuously bombard us with propaganda that India is prospering in a hitherto unknown manner, and the only obstacle for creating an Indian *Eldorado* are the Muslims, Christians and the Communists.

By creating a make-believe world in which the people are forced to live and battle on issues based on emotional appeals totally divorced from the miseries of their day-to-day existence, they seek to divert people's attention away from struggles against intensified exploitation and oppression.

It is such philosophical irrationalism that permeates all aspects of India's socio-political-cultural life under this RSS/BJP government today. This is, simply put — Unreason.

## CONCLUSION

This is the holistic manner in which the Indian Constitution, our post-independent Republic and 'idea of India' are being destroyed.

An equally holistic counter-effort has to be mounted to first save and then strengthen the secular democratic Indian Republic. This must necessarily encompass all spheres – political, ideological, social, cultural – to erect the counter-hegemony against this fascist Hindutva hegemony that is being rapidly erected.

Marx and Engels in *German Ideology* explained how the ideas of the ruling classes are the ruling ideas of their age. Gramsci analyses and explains how the hegemony of the ruling ideas is not enforced merely by the State and its institutions. The State is only the 'outer ditch' behind which stands a powerful system of 'fortresses and earthworks' and a network of cultural institutions and values which buttress the domination of the ruling classes with their ideas.

This hegemony is mediated and transmitted through a complex web of social relations and the consequent social structures. The family, the community, caste, religion, its places of worship and its



festivals, various forms of cultural expressions like theatre, films, television, social media programmes are the modes that constantly feed the fodder to shape values and opinions, fostering the Hindutva hegemony of 'ideas'. In the process, they create the 'myth' of a 'common culture'. This 'common culture' is nothing but the selective transmission of Hindutva, its ideas and its values being passed off as 'common sense'.

The creation of the crucial counterhegemony over society, through the creation of a new culture, embraces both class struggles against the relations of production, economic exploitation and associated political activity with the struggles in the civil society realm against the efforts that transmit and strengthen the hold of the hegemony of Hindutva.

The counter-hegemony must be based on strengthening the basic struggles of the working people, our peasantry, our women, Dalits, Adivasis, youth, students etc., against the policies of class exploitation. This is the foundation on which must be built our advance to achieve our revolutionary goal of Peoples' Democracy in the march towards Socialism.

On the strength of these struggles, a larger unity, along with the likes of the sections that came together in our epic freedom struggle, needs to be built to save India today in order to change it for the better tomorrow.

The choice before us in India @75 is between taking India into the backwardness and darkness of its medieval past, hailed by Hindutva as the 'glory of Hindu civilisation' or taking India into the brightness of the future as a modern, forward-looking world influencing Republic.