
Conversion of Religion is Subversion of Nationhood

History Bears Savarkar Out

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Savarkar was known as a rationalist. His articles, published first in the 'Kirkoskar' and then in book-form contain a vigorous advocacy of the views that (1) No book or utterance should be accepted as divine and therefore authoritative, and (2) All problems that face a person or a nation should be dealt with by the method which is adopted in science, viz; preception aided by reason.

Rationale of Hindutva

Many writers who have read only this part of Savarkar's writings wonder how this rationalism squares with his insistence on HINDUTVA. They have obviously not read Savarkar's book HINDUTVA, which argues this question with the same vigour as is found in his writings on rationalism. The HINDUTVA of Savarkar is a nationhood and NOT a religion. The only link with religion in his definition of HINDUTVA is the word PUNYABHU, i.e. holy-land. For a Hindu Hindusthan is a holy land in the sense that his religion originated here.

As a rationalist Savarkar did not accept religion in its other-worldly aspect. But equally as a rationalist he had to

accept religion as a social reality. A Hindu could very well deny God and the divinity of Rama and Krishna, but he could not cease to be moved emotionally by their human greatness. Even an atheist Hindu could admire Christ, but Buddha is not merely admirable for him, he himself feels elevated when the world venerates Buddha. He may dismiss the talks of the Vedas and Dharmashastras being revealed, and yet his critical evaluation of these works will amount to a critical evaluation of his own father and mother.

It is these emotional attitudes that are the essence of the nationhood of this country. It is these attitudes which Savarkar calls HINDUTVA in his book of that title. Conversion from Hinduism does not merely consist of dismissal of idol-worship, polythesim, the revelation of the Vedas and the divinity of Rama and Krishna. It also brings in its wake the abandonment of emotional attitudes which are the very bulwark of this nation. It is for this reason that Savarkar proclaimed that conversions from Hinduism are a direct attack on India's nationhood and warned that such

conversions would lead to a dismemberment of this nation. History bears him out.

Karan Singh, former maharaja of Kashmir, has narrated how the Muslims living in the Kashmir Valley approached the then Maharaja of Kashmir with a petition that they were former Hindus forcibly converted by foreign invaders and would like to return to their parent religion. The Maharaja welcomed the idea but his family-priest threatened to commit suicide at his door if he took back the Muslims into the Hindu fold. The matter was dropped.

Secular Double-Think

What happened later is familiar history. Those who have been preaching that conversion of religion has no political significance themselves pleaded that Kashmir is a special case and the accession offered by the Maharaja cannot be finally accepted; it has to be ratified by a plebiscite; till then article 370 must govern Kashmir as a state in India and yet not a state in India. The only justification offered for this is that the people of Kashmir Valley are Muslims. This shows conclusively that our arch-secularists themselves believe that religion is a major factor in nationhood.

The choice before Kashmir was accession to India or Pakistan. But the creation of Pakistan itself was based on the argument that Muslims cannot have the same nationhood as Hindus. Even the Muslims of the Frontier Province who were willing to stay in a joint state of Hindus and Muslims were not prepared to join "India i.e. Bharat" when a Muslim majority area was carved out as Pakistan. They unhesitatingly cast their lot with the latter.

It is often said that partition was

not an inevitable result of the religious difference between Hindus and Muslims. The British instigated the Muslims and their policy of divide and rule pursued for a century resulted in partition. The example of partition of India does not therefore suffice to prove the thesis that religion and nationhood are related. It is therefore necessary to discuss the partition of India in greater detail.

Might Have Been

It must be remembered that sociological phenomena cannot be explained by laws which have mathematical regularity. It is therefore not necessary to deny that if the Marathas had succeeded in driving away the British and establishing their stable sovereignty over most of Indian territory the Indian Muslims would have lived in India without developing a separate sense of nationhood and without getting formally converted to Hinduism. In 1857 thousands of Muslim soldiers were willing to shed their blood for the sake of the Rani of Jhansi and Peshwa Nana Saheb. These soldiers were not mercenaries. Some of them had given up secure jobs in the British Army and joined Nana and the Rani. Many others who joined were not professional soldiers, they had other means of livelihood and yet they fought for a Hindu ruler under her/his saffron flag. This example shows that it could have been possible to temper the effect of religion on the political thinking of the Indian Muslims if the Hindus had become a powerful nation. But this does not mean that religion is not a factor in determining nationhood.

Examples of Hindus fighting Hindus and siding with Muslims are often cited to prove that religion and nationhood

have nothing to do with each other. Madhav Singh sided with Ahmed Shah Abdali against the Marathas and Jai Chand earned perpetual notoreity for siding with Mohamed Ghori against Prithviraj. But these examples only show that men have other interests besides religion that influence their political loyalties; it does not prove that religion is irrelevant in determining them.

China/Japan and Buddhism

To clarify the matter further, let us discuss the cases where religion and nationhood were unconnected. The obvious examples are the conversion of China and Japan to Buddhism. Both China and Japan accepted an Indian Religion, but their nationhood did not become one whit the less Chinese or less Japanese, nor did it partake of Indian nationhood to the slightest extent.

One reason for this is that India itself ceased to be a Buddhist country. Nevertheless, both China and Japan took interest in pilgrimages to India and Pali and Sanskrit studies were undertaken with an attitude of veneration. To that extent they inclined more towards India than to any other country. Unfortunately after the Turk/Afghan/Mughal invasions nothing of international importance which could inspire respect happened in India. Even after independance the country continued to present an image of still being a colonial, dependent and backward country. The ties of Buddhism, which could have drawn China and Japan to India, did not therefore receive any nourishing atoshpere. The example of China and Japan therefore cannot be held against the view that religion is a factor in nationhood.

The case of Islam and Christianty

in India, is entirely different. Unlike Buddhism in China and Japan, these religions came to India as essential features of military conquest. It is very often asserted that Christianty came to India in the first A.D. itself, much before the Christian powers set foot on India as conquerors. But the advent of Christianity at that time was devoid of any significance because it was on such a small scale as to be unnoticeable in a vast country like India.

The Missionary menace

Christianity came in a major way with the Portuguese conquest of Goa. Alongwith other purposes, conversion of the Indians was an important driving force behind this conquest. The Portuguese established the notorious inquisition in Goa and perpetrated untold horrors for the sake of conversion. The political effect of this is seen even today. The population that was not converted voted for merger with neighbouring Maharashtra while the converted population did not want to return to its ancestral moorings. It voted for the "preservation of Portuguese culture."

These tendencies are even more marked in the movement for Nagaland. On the eve of independance there were only 200 Christians in what is now called Nagaland. Now a sizeable population is Christian. It is only this population that claims separate nationhood and a separate culture with the Roman script and the English language as their own, though most of them are totally ignorant of both and their ancestors never had anything to do with them. The nonconverted population headed by Rani Gidelo, on the other hand, regards itself as part and parcel of this nation.

The Niyogi Commission gives the following information:

The missionaries started an agitation representing Madhya Pradesh Government as consisting of infidels. Some of the articles published in periodicals such as "Nishkalank" "Adivasi" and "Jharkhand" were hardly distinguishable from the writings in Muslim papers advocating Pakistan before 15th of August 1947.

Corridor For The Faithful

The missionaries were reported to be carrying on propaganda for the isolation of the aboriginals from other sections of the community and the movement of Jharkhand was started. This movement was approved by the local Christians and Muslims, and the missionaries sought to keep it under their influence by excluding all the nationalistic elements from this movement. The demand of Adivasisthan was accentuated alongwith one for Pakistan in 1938. The Muslim League is reported to have donated Rupees one lakh for propaganda work. With the advent of political independence the agitation for Adivasisthan was intensified with a view to forming a sort of corridor joining East Bengal with Hyderabad, which could be used for a pincer movement against India.

A search of the house of a missionary found him in possession of letters which showed that he was an active worker of the Jharkhand movement on behalf of the missionaries and that the agitation was still being carried on for the creation of a separate Adivasi province. A Bishop stated, "If we had chosen to urge the aboriginals to join the Jharkhand movement, the situation of Jashpur and

Udaipur would have become much worse than it is now." This is a clear admission that the political leanings of the converts could be determined by their religious heads. Definite evidence exists to prove that the Roman Catholic Mission authorities at Ranchi had made common cause with other elements and were taking active part in the movement.

The Karens Example

The missionaries throughout carried on propaganda that the aboriginals were not Hindus. A sustained attempt was made to foster a sense of separateness among these tribes from the rest of the Hindus.

The attempt by the Christian sections of the Adivasis is a feature that is common to the developments in Burma, Assam and Indo-China among the Karens, Nagas, Amboynes. This is attributed to the concept of religious nationalism awakened among the converted Christians.

Before the coming of the missionaries the Karens were a subordinate hill tribe, animist by faith. The missionaries gave them education and through the translation of the Bible a written language. This has resulted in slowing up the Burmanization of Karens. Karens sent a delegation to London to plead for a Karen nation. One Christian Commission announced, "the Christians must become a well-organised and militant minority."

Rejected Recommendations

The Niyogi Commission's recommendations were not accepted, and the developments to prevent which they were made assumed alarming proportions. On 21-1-1979 Geeta, Ramayan, Mahabharat

etc. were publicly burnt in Manipur by the Maitegi organisation, which declared that the Manipuris are not Hindus. Shri Chakravarti, a Member of the C.P.M., stated that the Christians in this part regard Indians as foreigners. The Nagas of Kohima addressed even Nehru and Morarji as "You Indians". The "Kerala Shabdham" a Malayalee weekly dated 8-7-1979 publishes an interview with a baptist missionary who openly stated that he sent crores of rupees for the creation of independent Nagaland and is going to send more.

Different Muslim Attitudes

Now, why did the Muslims participate in the freedom struggle? The answer will be found if we analyse the different attitudes of the different sections of Muslims who joined the freedom struggle. Among some, as among the Khilafat supporters opposition to the British was a more important consideration than freedom for India. It is to be remembered that not only Muslims but also most Hindus did not expect that their freedom struggle would be able to oust the British, It was more a question of giving vent to their aspirations than of really achieving independence. The Muslims who joined did not therefore, fear that they were helping to establish a Hindu raj. By joining hands with the Hindus they only hoped to get some Muslim demands accepted by the British.

The Frontier Province Muslims who had the greatest share in the freedom struggle did not fear that a Hindu majority Central Government would dare interfere too much in the Government of their province. They never claimed to be what they were not. They were Pathans, the name of their tribe is mentioned even

in the Vedas and they were proud of their descent. They could keep their Pathan individuality more easily in a federal India than in a Muslim State carved out of India where their religion would receive more emphasis than their race. The Indian Muslims have been converted from all sorts of Hindu castes and the Pathan as a caste regards itself superior to them. They had confidence enough in their strength not to be afraid of the Hindu majority. They had no particular reason to demand partition of India on religious lines. But when such a partition did take place their religion decided their choice.

Maulana Azad

There was a third type of attitude among Indian Muslims who joined the freedom struggle. The late Maulana Azad belonged to this category. He looked back to the Mughal rule as his political objective. The British were the usurpers of the Mughal power and they should be fought in order to revive Muslim glory. His writings, particularly his foreward to Dr. Sen's 1857, makes his attitude clear. He welcomed the Cabinet Mission plan because it did not merely consider the right to cessation but also conferred on the Muslims power equal to that of the Hindus in the federal set-up inspite of their being in a minority.

It is clear that the first and third attitude is far from conducive to building up of a common nationhood with the Hindus. The Pathan attitude at best favours a federal multinational State of India. The Azad attitude can hardly be called an attitude of nationalism; it is an attitude of Muslim colonialism with the Hindu majority as a subject people, somewhat on the lines of South Africa

with white colonialism and black subjects. The khilafat attitude is definitely hostile to a common nationhood. It amounts to using the Hindus as cat's paw for pulling Muslim chestnuts out of the British fire.

The glib talk "religion should be kept out of politics" closes its eyes to a basic truth that Savarkar clearly perceived the fact that religion is an all-embracing phenomenon. There is a notion among Hindus that the concept of Dharma is different from that of religion, since Dharma unlike religion, embraces all walks of life, the preservation of social order in general. But this is a mistake. Like Hindu Dharma, Islam and Christianity also are all-embracing. The Shariat regulates all walks of a Muslim's life, and so does the Christian church in the case of Christians. The difference that can be claimed by Hindu Dharma is that it is not based on a single book regarded as revealed to a single person. The Vedas are frankly a collection of hymns to different Gods composed over thousand of years. The Ramayan and the Mahabharat were originally only secular works which grew in size through the centuries and attained sanctity because they contained the lifestories of Rama and Krishna, who were regarded

as incarnations of God. Later came the Puranas and Dharma-Shastras which were also composed in a period ranging over several centuries. Thus Hinduism is inextricably bound up with the entire history of the Hindus and not with a specific event or person who can be dated. Therefore Hindu is more a nationhood than religion. Conversions to Christianity and Islam were mostly brought about with the help of political power with a clear view to segregate as many sections of the Hindus from their parent nationhood as possible, so that the Hindus forever remained under foreign domination.

The unity of India has been developed through thousands of years from the Vedas to the times of the Turk/Afghan/Mughal invasions. This unity is expressed in the word Hindu, not in a spiritual sense, but as designating the Indian ethos developed the course of thousands of years. This secular Hindu ethos is the sole hope of this country ever remaining together. Savarkar had the penetrating perception to realise this abiding reality and summed it up in the words "conversion of religion in subversion of nationhood." Current events prove him a prophet.

It must have been one of those Vedic dawns indeed which inspired our seers with new truths that revealed to (Savarkar,) the author of 'Hindutwa' this 'Mantram', this definition of Hindutwa."