

Hindutva: A Threat to Democracy and Diversity in India

By

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We are here to discuss issues that are central to the wellbeing and integrity of India for years and decades. As we are commemorating the life and achievements of one of the stalwarts of the second half of the 20th century, our dear departed friend, guide, and philosopher, the inimitable D. Prempatiji who cherished human freedom, dignity and equality, it would be highly becoming if we discuss these issues in depth. He was so free-spirited that he never accepted the superiority or inferiority of birth, a primary focus of *varna dharma* that assigns people a position in life according to the *varna* in which they are born. The underlying logic of it is that the upper castes (savarnas) are fair and the lower orders are black *varna* meaning colour. Interestingly, Prempatiji was deeply dark coloured, a fact that he paraded like a badge of honour.

Prempatiji was a philosopher. Deeply interested in Lock, Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant and Karl Marx, this professor of English literature of Delhi University also looked at the indigenous political philosophy of Babasaheb Ambedkar, Baba Phoole, Ramaswami Naicker. These men were not just thinkers but doers. He was of the conviction like Karl Marx, who said other philosophers tried to understand the word, but he had come to change the world. Prempatiji, though diminutive in stature had the will of a giant.

He believed that where the world stood today was because of the constant struggle for equality, human rights and the annihilation of some of the most vicious caste discrimination. Nobody gives anyone anything on a platter, but it comes in the wake of relentless struggle. He clearly understood that fascist philosophy of Hindutva was a lethal enemy of Dalits, tribals, Christians and Muslims. He cautioned his friends, including me, that joining hands with Hindutva is like striking a powerful blow to the socio-economic political agenda of progressives.

He clearly understood Hindutva's mortal threat to the minorities, including Muslims. He also believed that the unity of the marginalised communities can defeat the Hindu fascist forces. Also, economic liberalisation and privatisation are fatal to millions of Dalits, shudras and the religious minorities. He wanted to unite forces fighting against communalism and economic liberalisation and against Hindutva capitalism, which is nothing, but a resort to Brahminical hegemony. It is not for nothing that Arundhati Roy combined the rise of Narasimha Rao's liberalisation, countrywide Ayodhya movement and the mass murder of Muslims. Prempatiji never changed his views about leaders (both SP and BSP) who hobnobbed with Hindutva and harmed Dalit-Bahujan interests as well as the minorities.

Hindutva, literally “Hinduness”, is a political doctrine, at a remove from the religion, Hinduism. The term came from VD Savarkar in the early thirties. RSS and its myriad branches represent this philosophy derived from German Nazism and Italian fascism. The difference between them was just nomenclature. BR Hedgewar was so much taken in by the Nazis, whom he met in Germany and came home to form a replica of Nazism in the RSS. Over the death of Hedgewar, his great disciple MS Golwalker took over the RSS presidency. In his *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* praised Hitler in the following words,

German race pride has become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic Races—the Jews. Race pride at the highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible 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.

The triumphal announcement of Golwalker is about the murder of sixty lakh Jews by Germans. Golwalker wanted to implement this in India to kill Muslims on a large scale similar to the Nazi pogrom of Jews. At the time of Partition, chief secretary Godbole of UP seized a trunk belonging to Golwalker which had detailed documents in it showing precisely the addresses of Muslims in West UP. The RSS wanted to kill Muslims en masse at the time of partition. As was his style so far, he disappeared for some time. He had done the same when his man (as well as that of Savarkar) Nathu Ram Godse under a conspiracy hatched by these fascist groups, killed Mahatma Gandhi.

That Golwalker unhesitatingly wanted to model his Hindu Rashtra on Hitler’s totalitarian and fascist pattern is clear from his following words in the same book:

It is worth bearing well in mind how these old Nations solve their minorities problems. They do not undertake to recognise 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.

Hindutva is an anti-democratic, fascist doctrine. It is the opposite of everything that Prempatiji stood. He used to complain that Hindutva was undemocratic, racist and anti-human. Watch the references of Golwalker to race and racial pride. This pride is a justification for him for the murder of 60 lakh Jews. They even celebrated the genocide of Jews in the name of race pride. Interestingly

Golwalker writes Race with a capital R. It is clear that Hindutva is fascist thuggery and has no relation with democracy.

As Hedgewar brought the philosophy of Nazis from Germany, his pal BS Moonje brought these ideas from Italy, straight from the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Marzia Casolari, a renowned scholar on fascism, had the following to say:

The existence of direct contacts between the representatives of the Italian fascist regime, including Mussolini and Hindu nationalists demonstrates that Hindu nationalism had much more than an abstract interest in the ideology and practice of fascism. The interest of Indian Hindu nationalists in fascism and Mussolini must not be considered as dictated by an occasional curiosity confined to a few individuals; rather, it should be considered as the culminating result of the attention that Hindu nation's, especially in Maharashtra, focused on Italian dictatorship and its leader. To them, fascism appeared to be an example of conservative revolution.

Hindutva, being the Indian face of fascism, is incompatible with the people's democratic aspiration. How closely they have interacted with their Nazi and fascist heroes is obvious from the excerpt below recording Moonje's interaction with Mussolini.

'Signor Mussolini: What is your opinion about them?' 'Dr Moonje: Your Excellency, I am much impressed. Every aspiring and growing Nation needs such organisations'. Signor Mussolini, who appeared very pleased, said: 'Thanks, but yours is an uphill task. However, I wish you every success in return'. Saying this he got up and I also got up to take his leave.

The above is a brief account of what kind of people the nation is faced with. A full-fledged, democratic and secular political environment alone can save India, not Hindutva, because it is a wholesale copy of fascism, the complete contrast of democracy.

Friends, the late lamented Prempatiji was an original thinker. Instead of relying on his formidable scholarship, his knowledge of Western tradition, English literature and Western political thought he did not trust received ideas, but liked to examine them. Like Socrates, the first established Western thinker, who said, "an unexamined life is not worth living", Prempatiji, too, did not want to live an unexamined life ever for a day. What I am going to tell you will bear it out.

Prempatiji was a great democrat, but he believed that the Indian democracy was deeply flawed. The Western democracy is more successful in its areas because it genuinely thinks that every person is equal. In India, with its Sanskriti traditions

and silent operation of highly racist laws of *Manu*, the idea of human equality is not operational in society, in government offices and other workplaces. It is not operational in police stations or even courts. Hence, this democracy, meaning “rule of people” is deeply flawed by Hindutva ideas. Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar was permanently conscious of it. He was convinced that democracy could not function in such environment. That’s why he converted to Buddhism.

The original thinker that Prempatiji was, he could easily find that Hindutva was a racial supremacist doctrine like fascism and Nazism. This was clearly evident from one of the original names of present-day Hinduism, “*varna ashram dharma*”. Simply translated, it means “colour religion”. The fascist-Nazi doctrine also believed that the master races are white and superior to others. The early Aryan who came to India were also fairer than the original inhabitants of India and thought of themselves as superior. That tradition continues till date.

Prempatiji’s original and independent thinking did not allow him to be Marxist even though Marxist thought was brilliant. He knew well that the communist parties in India were started by some good people. However, the fact remained that they came from high-caste backgrounds. They thought that caste inequalities will automatically go away after the Marxist revolution came. They had a mental equipment developed in high-caste background that failed grasp immediacy of caste inequality. Hence, Prempatiji could not subscribe to their world view.

To Prempatiji only a genuine democracy was acceptable in which everybody was equal.

Note: This is the lecture delivered by Dr. Dr. M. Manzoor Alam, Chairman, Institute of Objective Studies in the first Prof. D. Prempati Memorial Lecture on “Democracy and Fascism” organised by Prof. D. Prempati Memorial Committee and New Democratic Party of India on August 8, 2015 at Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi.

Mr. Anil Chamadia, Editor, Mass Media, Mr. Anand Swaroop Verma, Editor, Samkalin Teesri Duniya, Mr. Nandlal, Mr. Arun Majhi and Ms. Leena were among the speakers on the occasion.