

A DISORIENTED NATIONALISM CANNOT STAND!

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It is not many days since a strange statement of a Minister of Goa appeared in Times of India on 25 July 2014. The occasion of the statement was a motion congratulating Modi on BJP's electoral victory in the state assembly. The words of the Minister go thus, 'I am confident that under the leadership of Modiji, India will develop into a Hindu nation. Prime Minister will work in this regard is what I feel'. The Minister was none other than Deepak Dhavalikar. It may be noted that the said minister belongs to Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party, an ally of BJP.

Obviously, a reaction was bound to follow. The Deputy Chief Minister, Francis D' Souza, observed that 'India was always a Hindu nation and will always be a Hindu nation. You don't have to create a Hindu nation; for that matter, all Indians in Hindustan are Hindus; for instance, I am a Christian Hindu, as well' (Times of India, 26 July 2014). Did the Deputy Chief Minister agree with the above-mentioned Minister or did he differ from him? To a certain extent, he did both. But, from another angle, he re-defined the idea, to some degree. But, from yet another angle, he added to the deep-seated confusion about the word 'Hindu', as well.

Now, it is ours to discuss the truth about the matter and draw certain sensible conclusions. Among the Ministers in question, whose version is correct? In line with the 'daydream' of Deepak Dhavalikar, is Modi government intending to make a 'Hinduraashtra'? If Modi is trying to do that, could it be justified according to the Constitution of India? If not justified by the Constitution, how could he do it or would he do it at all, as the prime minister of a secular country?

Suppose Modi deems it right to do it and if he does, is he really going to succeed, sooner or later? Even if he succeeds, would it be fair towards the vast majority of the population that is composed of diverse communities, groups and ideologies in the country, who do not subscribe to the so called idea of 'Hinduraashtra'? Even if it is fair, will it take the country to certain respectable heights? And again, even if it does, is it going to solve the vital problems of the country and give the country a lift towards a brighter future? Though the honourable Minister Deepak has every right to feel what he feels, I should say, some of these vital questions seem to escape his naive and ambitious imagination!

As far as the remarks of Francis D' Souza is concerned, there is a fundamental problem about his statement 'India was always a Hindu nation and it will stand for good'. To bluntly put it, it is like a double-edged sword and it has to be assessed from two angles. The first point of view is that 'India was never a Hindu nation any time and can never be one any time either, as per the connotation Dhavalikar is attributing to the word. There is a sharp contradiction between the perceptions of the two ministers. The honourable Deputy Chief Minister doesn't appear to be aware of the nuances of his statement as well as of the context laid by the previous minister.

Besides, with reference to the second part of his statement 'I am a Hindu Christian', the hangover of the funny undertone of the word 'Hindu' persists. Therefore, there is serious doubt as to how many people would support his idea from the community he belongs to. I don't think, many people would come forward from other minority communities to endorse his idea, as well. Minister Francis shows clear signs of being a little confused as regards both the idea and the implications of the words used. I don't think a responsible minister can afford to reside in a castle that is built in the air.

At the wake of the Himalayan confusion existing around the word 'Hindu' and of the negative 'politics' of 'Hindutva' and 'Hinduraashtra' that have been perpetrated by certain quarters, it becomes

necessary to make a historical note on the evolution of the word 'Hindu'. 'Vedic Dharma' is the religious foundation of the currently called Hindu community. But, the irony of the fact is that the word 'Hindu' is not found in the entire Vedic literature. It was introduced by Muslims from provinces next to India, such as Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Persia. In fact, the basis of the emergence of the word is the river called Sindhu, which was bordering the north western provinces of India.

Since Persian language did not have the letter 'sa', Muslims replaced the 'S' of river Sindhu and called it 'Hindu'. Later, the British brought in the word 'India', possibly recognizing the linguistic root of Greek 'Indos' as well as basing on the same river 'Indus' and the civilization that surrounded it. It is also possible that the first part of the word 'Indus' was used so by making the first letter of 'Hindu' silent, as in 'honour', which is equal to 'onour' in pronunciation.

At any rate, the people on this side of the river Sindhu were 'baptized' 'Hindu' only in the 19th century, with a 'put on top' religious meaning of the word 'Hindu' by certain interested sources. That would amount to say that a community called 'Hindu' never existed since then. The truth of the matter remains intact that the word 'Hindu' has absolutely nothing to do with any religious tradition or a group of religious traditions. It represents only 'geographical and cultural implications'. Suppose it has a religious meaning, it has to be inclusive of all religious communities present in India till date as well as then. Therefore, a sectarian application of a religious meaning can never be justified.

That establishes for sure that the misunderstanding involved in this matter is based on the manipulated and superimposed religious overtones of the word 'Hindu' in the 19th century. Unfortunately, this confusion seems to have been emotionally considered more than God's word by the vast majority of the people both in India and overseas. In a way, so much could still be condoned. But, worse still is the 'political strategy' of making a 'Hindu nation' on the plinth of the fictional idea of Hindu religion. A building constructed on a sandy foundation is bound to fall in the long run!

As regards the idea of making India a 'Hinduraashtra', as a matter of fact, certain strategies or programmes of the new government, for that matter, even of the previous government, though in a lesser degree, smacks of the pursuance of a certain agenda of making a Hindu nation. Raashtreey Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), having mooted the idea in the 20th century, had been pushing the idea from behind the curtain. But, of late, it has come into clear view and is monitoring the idea from the stage itself. It is no secret that some of the fringe and lunatic elements affiliated to RSS, called saffron brigade, have been perpetrating terrible havoc in the lives of many communities of the country, in view of pulling off their pet target.

Moreover, if we process the statement of minister Deepak alongside the evolution of the musings and attempts that are geared towards 'Hindu', 'Hindutva' and 'Hinduraashtra' almost over the last century, it could be affirmed that some sectarian connotations are being perpetuated in line with the idea of 'Hindu nation' in India. Viewed from this angle, the recent focus of the new government on 'Ganga', 'holy rivers', 'development of the Himalaya region, in terms of religious tourism', etc gives an impression that the schemes have something to do with the above target, as well. All the same, one requires time and patience before one would formulate an opinion about the intention of the young government, along the lines of the statement of minister Deepak.

I was invited in the capacity of a Christian religious leader, along with religious leaders of other faiths, to address a national seminar named 'Ganga Manthan', organized by the ministries of Ganga, environment, water, etc, along with PMO, at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on 07 July 2014. It was really edifying to observe the high-spirited enthusiasm in the participants and the stakeholders, coupled with their commitment to the cause of clean Ganga. It was repeatedly highlighted there that Ganga is our national river as well as mother and Ganga symbolizes the national identity of India.

With all appreciation for and solidarity with the cause as a devoted citizen of this country, I was given to think whether according a 'national status' to Ganga in 2008 by the then Prime Minister has contributed anything much to reducing its deep-seated miseries. Even if it did not, I am ready to wait patiently for the result of the recent national seminar as to the destiny of the national river. Nevertheless, the first ever national dialogue of multi-faith and large scale character on Ganga, initiated by the new government, I should say, offers hope for something really better.

At this instant, a new problem seems to arise for the heroes of 'Hinduraashtra'. Though in a distorted way, the 'river Hindu' or Sindhu gave an identity to the people of this land, so far. This identity, without a doubt, was basically intended to include people of all traditions who have their being in this geographical unit. But it was narrowed down to one community, though the majority community by way of number, and was distorted to represent one particular religious belonging only. As it stands, the religious identity of the Vedic community in India derives from the river Hindu or Sindhu. Naturally, most of them, the fanatic and the illiterate in special, take this consciousness to their heart, almost to an un-negotiable point. No doubt, the historical and emotional reasons could very well be granted.

But, to apply a little logic into it, suppose, river Ganga was there in the place of river Sindhu, the so called 'Hindus' today would have been called 'Gangus', ever since they were called Hindus. The 'Hindustan' would have been 'Gangustan', too. Similarly, the philosophy of the Gangus would have been called 'Ganguism', instead of Hinduism, and the politically motivated and manipulative agenda would have been known as 'Gangutva' and 'Ganguraashtra', in the place of 'Hindutva' and 'Hinduraashtra' respectively, as well. The passionate loyalty and ever-increasing centrality of the 'national river Ganga' today, that too, to the point of being over-sensitive and highly inflammable in some respects, give an inkling that the Hindu-identity will in the foreseeable future shift into a Gangu-identity!

Moreover, it is also likely that the allegiance of the concerned community may change tomorrow to river Yamauna and a terminology of 'Yamunu', 'Yamunustan', 'Yamunutva' and 'Yamunuraashtra' may come to vogue. In the same way, it is not impossible that a devotion to 'Himalaya' and a subsequent vocabulary of 'Himalayu', 'Himalayastan', 'Himalayatva' and 'Himalayaraashtra' would emerge some time. There is no end to such after-meal imaginations. Let me ask, what is the logic of wasting intelligence and messing up the state of affairs in the country further? History is a muted witness to the fact that forces of bias and political high-handedness, in whatever pretext, have caused more than enough harm to this country. I don't think it is acceptable to any sane citizen of this great country, anymore. It is high time the concerned people in administration and citizenry of the country refrain from such wasteful politics and focus attention on the sustainable development of the entire country. There is still a very long way to realize the far-fetched goal of an 'incredible India'. Only the concerted effort of all citizens can make it. It would be wise to save every bit of our resources for the same.

Coming to our point of nationalism, to tell the truth, the idea of the nation as 'Hindustan', 'Bharat' and 'India' is totally secular. It does not suggest preference to any community or sector. It voices the 'spirit of solidarity' of the people on this side of the ancient river Hindu/Sindhu and the great civilization that emerged around it. Language, ideology, culture, religion or any other persuasion does not count. It has a commendable Constitution that affirms its 'secular' character. Secularism in India doesn't mean non-attachment to any religious or other belonging. 'Being secular' in India implies 'accepting all streams and strands of its social fabric' as the national cultural heritage of the country. It also connotes 'imbibing the values of all religious, ideological and cultural traditions'.

Besides, any view that is dominated by the majority community of any sort, may that be based on faith, language or culture, cannot stand the ground of this large nation. Enlarging and laminating the concerns of one community, to the point of side-lining other communities, is equal to failing to see the

thief who plunders the house from inside. To be majority is not a game of number, but 'being great in heart'. It would mean playing the role of an elder brother to the minority communities, by protecting their interests and advancing their concerns, as well. Any ideology or force that violates the character of being 'great-hearted' cannot have any place in this nation. Even if it has, I don't think, it has any sustainable future. The noble notion of 'nationalism' that is worthy of this nation is an 'all-inclusive' one, in equally name and meaning. As all types of communities existing in India has contributed to the making of the 'India' or 'Bharat' of today, so also the right sort of nationalism should be inclusive of all communities. Any other fabricated nationalism, which caters to sectarian interests only, is both a distorted and a disoriented one. I do not think, it can ever stand the ground, in the long run. India, with its great heritage of civilization, cannot afford even to try any such, either.

In order to come out of the entire predicament, I would like to suggest that, since the word 'Hindu' is highly polluted, it is better to avoid using it or diminish the use of it. Terms like 'Vedic', 'Vedic religion', 'Vedic Indian', 'Vedic community', etc are better options. They have in them specificity, clarity of thinking and brighter history, all in one. Likewise, 'Indian Christian', 'Indian Muslim', 'Indian Jew', etc are in tune with the correct notion of the Indian nationhood. Positive, innovative and all-embracing language will contribute to the quality of national solidarity as well as to transparency in the concept of nationalism. I hope the new government will prove its mettle in mustering all its energies in making such a nation out of the unique country of ours, relying on the popular slogan 'Achhe Din Aanevale Hein'. 'Satyamev Jayate'! Jai India! Jai Bharat!

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