

RSS and Minorities

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The new RSS Sarsanghchalak, Mr Mohan Bhagawat told Minorities (Sept 20, 2009) that they should join RSS and see that 'our intentions are clear and our behavior is good'. According to his analysis Muslims in India were Hindus in the past. They have only changed their way of worship, and if they accept this fact there will be no clashes. He told Christians that they should not convert people, as that creates communal violence.

Mr Bhagwat is partly correct in saying that Muslims have Hindu ancestry. Islam spread in India, by various ways, major being the attempt of Shudras to escape the tyranny of Landlord Brahmin, to quote Swami Vivekananda, "Why amongst the poor of India so many are Mohammedans? It is nonsense to say that they were converted by the sword. It was to gain liberty from Zamindars and Priests..." (Collected Works-Vol 8-Page330). These conversions took place as dalits were not permitted to enter temples so they were visiting the shrines of Sufi saints and under the influence of the Humanistic aspect of Islam they took to Islam. There were other reasons like, anticipation of reward, interaction with Muslims, the least important factor being fear of Muslim kings. So he is partly right that most Muslims have local ancestry.

But is the change of religion mere change of mode of worship or is it a total change in religious belief system? Syncretic traditions of Hinduism and Islam have drawn a lot from each other. But as far as Holy book, belief in one God, Allah, belief in Mohammad as the prophet, this is not just a change in mode of worship, it is much broader than that.

So, are there clashes because Muslims deny their ancestry, and culture. By no means! As far as culture is concerned for the extremist elements, for the clergy and for those using religion for politics, the culture is just a subset of elitist version of their religion. For average people culture is a broad category, it is affected by regional factors and by some aspects of religion. A large population of Muslims and Hindus both regarded culture as a meeting and mixing point, while elite traditions look down upon the culture of the 'other'. In India Muslims and Hindus did live in peace, creating different facets of culture, Music, Poetry, clothes and food habits, architecture and religious traditions. One sees Ustad Bismillah Khan creating his wonderful work devoted to Hindu gods and goddesses while sitting on the pavements of Kashi temples, there are Rahim and Raskhan writing beautiful poetry in devotion of Lord Krishna. There is intermixing in the customs, festivals. To delineate a Hindu and Muslim component of Indian culture was difficult at a point of time. India has the lovely tradition of people from both religions following the teachings of Ramdeo Baba Pir and Satya Pir. Then there is great Saint Kabir who was loved by both Muslims and Hindus.

The problem begins with the communal historiography, looking at History through the prism of religion, introduced by British to pursue the policy of divide and rule. This version was picked up by the communal streams of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha-RSS, and aided in the communalization of society and rise of communal violence, more so from the decade of 1940s. To think that clashes are there because Muslims deny their common ancestry is wrong. Also Islam is a religion with its own spirituality and to reduce any religion to just a mode of worship is not correct. In post-Independence India the clashes were brewed by this communal thinking, by political motivations not because of religions. Those who deny that Sufis are a part of Indian culture, or Urdu is an Indian language or that the contributions of Muslim Kings, poets, artisans, are the ones who have created divisiveness leading to clashes. Those who deny that Bhakti tradition was part of tradition which was respected by a section

of Muslims, or that celebrating Holi, Divali or Muharram and Id is part of Indian culture are the cause of the political thinking which leads to clashes.

Coming to Christians, it is not they came here with the British. Christian community in India is over 1500 years old. While there may be some aggressive proselytizers, mainly the conversions take place because of social interaction and genuine charity work. If conversions were a forced phenomenon, how to explain that there are merely 2.30% Christians in India today? How does one explain that during last four decades the all India percentage of Christians has fallen down, 1971-2.60%, 1981-2.44%, 1991-2.34% and 2001-2.30%? One concedes that some dalits taking to Christianity may not be getting registered as Christians to keep availing the job reservations, but surely this cannot tilt the population percentage to a very great extent.

Wadhwa Commission, which investigated the burning of Pastor Graham Stains by Bajrang Dai's Dara Sing and is facing the jail term for that, concluded that Pastor Stains was not involved in any work of conversions and that the percentage of Christians in Keonjhar of Manoharpur district in Orissa, did not go up. Even recently the anti-Christian violence was launched on the pretext of murder of Swami Laxmananand. It was a clear pretext to scare the Christian missionaries away from the Adivasi areas, where they are involved in the work of education and health care of Adivasis, something which empowers Adivasis. It was a clear pretext as Maoists had owned the murder of Swami.

Most of the organizations at the core of communal politics are manned on one side by Muslim Communalists and on the other by the RSS trained swayamsevaks working and controlling BJP, VHP, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram or Bajrang Dal. Minorities want a safety, and freedom to follow their own religion. Indian Constitution does give people the liberty to practice and preach their own religion. Also RSS is not the representative of Hindus at large. They have diverse traditions of Hinduism ranging from the one of Gandhi to the other ones which are like those of Bajrang Dal etc.

RSS has tried to co-opt and win over sections of minorities for enhancing its agenda. RSS progeny BJP keeps doing it trying to win minorities, so often for electoral purpose. But over all the minorities have experienced at heavy cost of losing lives, that RSS is like a wolf trying to put on sheep's clothing. It is unlikely that after what has been done by its pracharks, Swayamsevaks through its progeny, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad etc. that minorities can ever be fooled by the language being used by Mr Bhagwat. By now it is also well known that the second Sarsanghchalak of RSS, MS Golwalkar had ordained that minorities, "the non-Hindu people in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of Hindu nation i.e. they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ingratitude towards this land and its age old traditions, but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word, they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in this country wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights. (*We or our Nationhood Defined*. 1938, p. 27)

RSS is no representative of Hindus. It stands for values which are opposed to the human rights of weaker sections of society, Dalits, workers, adivasis, women and minorities. It stands for values of birth based hierarchy of caste and gender as ordained in Manu Smriti. Its primary goal is to establish Hindu nation, i.e. nation with primacy of Hindu elite men, rather than the nation envisaged by the Indian people during the freedom movement, the values which are an amalgam of the principles of Bhagat Singh, Ambedkar and Gandhi. One wishes RSS rather than deceiving others, learns the lessons of freedom movement and makes Gandhi's Hinduism as its base rather than pursuing Godse's Hinduism. One knows this is a practical impossibility as RSS is the organization of those who are not elected beings; they are self-appointed

guardians of Brahmanical Hinduism, who neither represent Hindus nor the Humanistic aspects of Hinduism. Let's wish RSS clan can be retrained to think as Indians rather than just as Hindus with Brahmanical values! □□□