

By Sidharth Mishra



Prime Minister Narendra Modi never misses an opportunity to take pot shots at his 'secular' political rivals, who may not necessarily be practitioners of secularism in the true sense as defined by our Constitution. These people, however, cling on to the 'secular' flag more as a means to take on Modi's politics than anything else. Now it's again very difficult to delineate the course of politics, which the Prime Minister is pursuing. Prime Minister is consistent in his very voluble proclamations of pushing for an agenda of development and trying to cut on the subsistence economy. At the Facebook Town Hall, he promised to make India into a US \$20 trillion economy. He proposes to do this with the help of educated and progressive Indians. However, at the same time, he does not ever lose the opportunity of reminding his 'secular' rivals that he essentially is a practitioner of Hindu religion and proud of its traditions, which to him are also his nation's traditions.

This brings us to the idea that Modi in his way is pushing ahead with the agenda of cultural nationalism. In Europe, cultural nationalism was seen to focus on a national identity shaped by cultural traditions and language and not the race.

In its interpretation of cultural nationalism, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) states its belief in the cultural connotation of the term Hindu. "The term Hindu in the conviction as well as in the constitution of the RSS is a cultural and civilizational concept and not a political or religious term. The term as a cultural concept will include and did always include the Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains. The cultural nationality of India, in the conviction of the RSS, is Hindu and it was inclusive of all who are born and who have adopted Bharat as their Motherland, including Muslims, Christians and Parsis. The answering association submits that it is not just a matter of RSS conviction, but a fact borne out by history that the Muslims, Christians and Parsis too are Hindus by culture although as religions they are not so," said the RSS General Secretary in his reply to a Tribunal constituted under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967, which heard cases against the organisation.

Therefore, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the question of “flawed” secularism at Dublin, by pointing out at singing of Sanskriti shlokas in Ireland in his welcome, he reminded his critics of his belief in cultural nationalism. Writing on Prime Minister’s jibe at secularists at home, right-wing ideologue Swapan Dasgupta wrote in his popular column, “This (criticism of Modi’s jibe) may explain the intense prejudice the Left-liberals harbour against not only Sanskrit but also the whole gamut of cultural nationalism. In the past three days, in response to Modi’s jibe in Ireland, a large number of media liberals have gone on record to say that they are not against Sanskrit but only its contrived association with saffron politics. I wish that were indeed the case. In 1998, at a conference of education ministers, the same lot created a stink when it was announced the proceedings would open with a rendition of the Saraswati Vandana — a celebration of the goddess of learning.”

Dasgupta’s scholarship and liberal upbringing, to which he makes a claim in the same article, indeed makes him a good wordsmith and allows him to fire venomous arrows, dipped in honey, at the secular brigade. However, both Dasgupta and the Prime Minister are unable to clarify if they condone the uttering of Culture Minister Mahesh Sharma and likes, who wish to start some sort of a cultural revolution in the country. Such movements whether in China or Iran, focussed at purging, through violent means, the society and establishment of people, who did not believe in the ideology of the ruling party. It also ultimately worked towards building a personality cult, be it around Mao Zedong or Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

History tells us that in the long run both China and Iran suffered greatly on account of cultural revolutions. Both countries, as a fallout of these revolutions, stood isolated politically, socially and economically for a long time. Narendra Modi is seeking to push India as the new global destination for doing business. He could do well by asking his crass trumpeters to tone it down.

But then that’s easier said than done. The Sangh Parivar falls woefully short in numbers when it comes to counter Left-wing scholarship with equally acclaimed right-wing scholars. Their precarious position is attributable to the surfeit of ideologues and a famine of scholars in their ranks. As noted historian Ramchandra Guha wrote it in a recent essay, an ideologue is “more interested in promoting their political or religious beliefs than in contributing to the growth of knowledge. The writings of ideologues are rarely based on serious or extended research.” A scholar rarely advertises on television or newspaper (as an ideologue frequently does) about his or her leanings but the tomes of his or her academic pursuits speak for itself.

Even in the field of economics, where Narendra Modi enjoys the support of true scholars like Jagdish Bhagwati, he cannot find many votaries of cultural nationalism. It’s well known that even Bhagwati all his life has remained a social liberal. Bhagwati in fact at times has cautioned Modi of pussy footing against the Sangh, which to his understanding, and many others could harm the Prime Minister’s economic itinerary.

PM can do without crass trumpeters

Written by Administrator

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Every Indian would stand with Modi in making India a US \$20 trillion economy. It's a dream that he has given to every Indian but a sound economy always comes from a sound social fabric. Weaving that fabric in a multi-cultural society is the greater challenge before the Prime Minister.

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