**Dangerous nationalism**

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The Tipu Sultan Express named after the famed freedom icon who resisted British colonialism in South India in the late 18th Century is being renamed Wadiyar Express after the Hindu ruling dynasty that ruled over Mysore before and after Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan’s reign.

This puerile act is in line with the Hindutva ideology of the BJP and its ideologues in the Sangh Parivar who wish to rewrite India’s history by erasing all vestiges of India’s syncretic and pluralistic past. The present revisionist madness in India is in line with David Zionts’ theoretical model wherein a state invents fictitious past to strengthen a false ideological narrative which is not amenable to any reason or rationality. India being a classical revisionist state is in a vice-like grip of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s (RSS) cultural apartheid campaign.

The ruling BJP party and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi are the political front of the vile Hindutva creed that through a Nazi-like militant cadre known as the RSS is muzzling dissent and muscling out the cultural heterogeneity of India, a land once known for its diversity and Nehruvian secularism.

It is said that the BJP’s electoral successes and the stridency of the Hindutva narrative are moving hand in glove with people buying into the xenophobic narrative. Hindutva is different from Hinduism which is a belief system just like other faiths and other ancient tribal denominations. What fear could the Hindu faith, professed by 79.8 per cent of the Indian population, have from 14.2 per cent Muslims, 2.3 per cent Christians, 1.6 per cent Sikhs, 0.7 per cent Buddhists, 0.4 per cent Jains and 0.7 per cent animists/tribal denominations? The answer might lie in Hindutva ideologues’ misanthropy vis a vis other faiths as enshrined in the teachings of their ideologues like Savarkar, Hedgewar, and Golwalkar.

According to Mohan Guruswamy, the Indian government has an agenda to rewrite Indian history and complete the project begun by a professor from Allahabad University, Dr Murli Manohar Joshi. Badri Narayan has explained his ideas on cultural homogenization of India through saffronization of lower-caste Hindus. Dalits, the traditional target of Hindu caste misanthropy along with Muslims, are being coerced as well as co-opted through inducements to merge their cultural identity into Hinduism.

The Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM) is being propped up as a component of the RSS, using sectarianism as a tool to sow division within the Muslim community. The Dalits, who according to Christophe Jaffrelot are being treated worse than cows, are also being forced to be part of RSS Shakhas (ideological and military training camps) through terror and inducements. RSS leaders like Acharya Giriraj Kishore are on record having said that, “the life of one cow is more valuable than five Dalits”, showing how Hindutva looks down upon all other cultures and faiths as sub-human creeds deserving of extermination.

The extermination strategy of Hindutva votaries manifests itself in the shape of the Ghar Wapsi campaign wherein people professing other religions are urged to adopt Hindu names and cultural practices. The discriminatory Citizen Amendment Act is a concrete manifestation of Hindutva exclusivism as it brazenly excludes Muslims from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan from the Indian citizenship scheme.

Why this implacable wave of irrational historical revisionism and illogical religiosity has not been resisted by the mainstream Indian population that was once weaned on the ideals of Gandhi and Nehru is a question worth pondering by sociologists and behavioural psychologists. Why are Rama and Krishna being touted as indigenous heroes while the descendants of Babar are being reviled as foreigners? According to Sumanta Banerjee, the above irrationality is rooted in the fear and hatred among the Indian middle class that views Muslims as invaders who had persecuted Hindus in the past.

This subterranean hate psychosis is aggravated by the historical revisionism of Hindutva stalwarts like Golwalkar who had defined the Indian nation as “Hindu race united together by common traditions, Hindu culture and Hindu language-based on Sanskrit”. Leaders like Modi have cashed in on that hate by selling Hindu nationalism to paranoid Hindu middle classes that even condone the 2000 Muslim deaths in the Gujrat riots in 2002 under the watch of then CM Narendra Modi. Now the same Modi has ratcheted up the Hindutva madness several notches up.

A social media storm was stirred by the RSS extremists in India based on inflammatory accusations of Hindu-Muslim riots leading to riots in Leicester UK. According to Peter Soulsby, mayor of Leicester, the incendiary tweets on social media had stirred up the tensions between two communities. Eighty per cent of the 200,000 misleading geo-tagged social media tweets were traced to India which claimed that Hindu sites were being attacked by the Muslims.

Online users in Leicester had complained in the past of an increasing frequency of fake news and disinformation campaigns from India through social media platforms stoking unrest in an otherwise peaceful city. The beans were spilled by a Dalit rights based group ‘Equality Lab’ that revealed that the “nationalistic, Islamophobic, and casteist disinformation” was being spread from India through Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram under the direct patronage of the BJP government’s propaganda machinery.

Social media was used to weaponize Hindutva against minorities even as far away as the UK. The local UK chapter of the RSS began in 1966 under the name ‘Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh’ (HSS); it has now expanded to 60 branches which are peddling hate narratives with slogans like, “We are Indians not South Asians”.

In the US too the LA Times has reported that Hindutva organizations are ratcheting up communal tensions. According to a TRT World report, the reach and influence of Hindutva groups is being facilitated in the garb of charity groups in the US. This poisonous religion-based extremism is being spread in the US, UK, Africa, and Australia by RSS affiliates as the world benignly looks away.

The million dollar question that begs an answer is whether such crass misanthropy is permitted just because India is a big country offering commercial advantages and strategic leverage to the world powers. The world must wake up to the threats that this religious nationalism – riding on the shoulders of a Hindutva captured nuclear armed country – poses to the world.

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