



Fracas of Free Speech

By BS Murthy

The irony of the alleged lack of free speech in Modi India lies in the absolute freedom of its uninhibited propagation in its subsidiary media. In so far as the right-wing blowback in the social media, the left-libs fall short on the idiom that 'people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones'. When it comes to the 'agencies' knocking at free speakers' doors, the legal dictum paraphrased as 'one must go to town with clean hands' has to be borne in mind by one and all. Be that as it may, it's not as if it was all hunky-dory in the Nehruvian order of yore that nurtured the Modi-aggrieved of the day, and this is not an essay of its dark shades but an attempt to reach the roots of the self-defeating Hindu mindset, passing through my life and times.

I was born on 27 Aug 1948 and that means I was conceived after India became free but yet in colonial hangover for by then, the century-old Macaulay method to divest the Hindus from their "false history, false astronomy, false medicine, in company with their false religion" with the right western education so as to 'form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' worked well enough though the Musalmans avoided his 'Indian education' like a plague for the fear of Islamic pollution. But let me at the outset vouch for Macaulay's success for somehow I feel embarrassed to sport tilak, and on occasion when it becomes obligatory, I would be itching to erase it from my forehead as soon as I possibly could. Surely, I should alter my mindset for it is my restrained Hindu rearing in it that makes India's constrained story.

It's thus at the dawn of independence, India's politically dispirited and culturally disoriented Hindus needed a leadership to raise their ancestral spirits in the wake of the calamitous partition of their ancient nation. Sadly though, their continuing ill-fate had ensured that the Gandhi-Nehru duo was at the helm of the transition process to their eternal hurt. Gandhi, who managed to become a false messiah of the Hindus, had professed that "they should not harbour anger in their hearts against Muslims even if the latter wanted to destroy them. Even if the Muslims want to kill us all we should face death bravely. If they established their rule after killing Hindus we would be ushering in a new world by sacrificing our lives." So, as if to politically finish off the Hindus, he bestowed the power of the Indian State upon Nehru, who unabashedly claimed "I'm English by education, a Muslim by culture, just born a Hindu by accident" but also conducted himself accordingly. It's no wonder then that he anointed Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as India's education minister as if to redress his fears that post-partition, the Muslim minority in the Hindu majority India would be disadvantaged. Sadly, as Sardar Patel too failed to see the dichotomy of a Muslim education minister in the predominantly Hindu India that too after millennia of alien order, Azad had a decade at his disposal to add on the Muslim modules to the Macaulay minutes to further enervate the

Hindu psyche. And that speaks for the naivety of the then Hindu intellect and that which followed for four more Musalmans were given a free rein for nine more years to continue where the wily Maulana had left that is to mould the Hindu minds in the Islamic moulds!

Thus, what with the plethora of Sultanates not to speak of the Mogul era, it was as if the roller coaster of Indian history was no more than the Islamic rule over medieval India. So as not to make the Hindu kids privy to Islam's idol-braking ways, the destruction of the Hindu temples by the Ghaznis and the Ghoris was pictured as a case of looting for their riches. When it came to the beginning of the end of the Muslim dominance in the Battle of Plassey, the fall of Siraj ud-Daulah was attributed to the perfidy of Mir Jaffar but not sourced to the revenge of Jagat Seth, whom the brash Nawab had insulted, for that would have made Hindus feel good for having avenged the Musalmans. Well, as for the British Raj, it was all about railways, ports etc. with no word on how it had ruined India's economy and looted its wealth. It's thus was drummed into the impressionable Hindu heads that they should not begrudge their Islamic and Christian rulers but must feel beholden to them.

In so far as the freedom struggle went, it was Gandhi all the way with Nehru in tow, never mind, as it transpired later, that it was the prospective rebellion by the Indian men-in-arms, courtesy Netaji's legacy that made the British retreat in haste. While Azad's Muslim agenda augmented Nehru's cynical opposition to Hindu resurgence that both saw as detrimental to the interests of the Indian umma, it was Godse's foolhardy in slaying the spent force of a Gandhi that gave the latter the political stick to beat Savarkar's Hindutva with. That my grandfather forewarned me not to be enamoured of the rashtriya swayam-sevak sangh in our remote small town as that would hamper my later-day career prospects would exemplify the Nehruvian hurdles the Hindu nationalism had to contend with.

In juxtaposition, the Muslim galaxy in the cine field and the musical world not to speak of the worthies in the public life created a communal euphoria, evocatively but falsely called as *ganga jamuna tehfieb*, in the rarified Hindu intellectual zone. So, it was a given that the Good Samaritans in the Indian cinema had to be either a Christian or a Musalman and never a Hindu. If the finesses of the Muslim Nawabs graced the silver screen it was the crudity of the Hindu loan sharks that was on show. While the long-buried Hindu social evils got resurrected on the celluloid, the umma's live religious ills were deliberately kept away from the arc lights. So on and so forth and what with Indira Gandhi too walking in her father's ideological footsteps, India's political culture came to be pegged to the Islamapologic pole endorsed by the intellectual class, and that reduced the Hindu right to the electoral fringe.

Nevertheless, madrasas were allowed to take care of the Muslim minds with Allah's ayats and Muhammad's exploits to sustain their exclusivist credo that, on and off, had erupted in communal riots. Well the Muslim clerics who hold sway over the umma wouldn't complain much for it's a small price to pay to uphold their Islamic exclusivity. At the same time, while the secular politicians felt no need to bridge the communal divide that sustained its Muslim vote-bank, the intelligentsia, as well as the media, Islam-naïve both, were bereft of an idea to address the national debility. So, it's but natural that the Hindu masses too saw nothing amiss in this secular mess, and thus an all-round silence became the norm amidst the periodic communal mayhem.

But the vexatious rama-janmabhoomi movement picked up momentum to eventually bring down the Babri structure that 6 Dec 1992, and that brought about a tectonic shift in India's electoral dynamics to the hurt of the Nehruvian politics. But it was the Godhra-Gujarat communal flare-up that changed things in the long-run, in more ways than one, once and for all. Sensing another Godse moment to push back the surging Hindutva political tide, Sonia's Congress pulled all stops to castigate the Hindu right and cajole the sulking Musalmans back into its electoral fold, of course aided and abetted by a compromised media that amplified the Muslim victimhood and falsified the Hindu culpability. Besides, notwithstanding the

unprovoked Godhra train carnage by the Musalmans (never mind the secular narrative of accidental fire in that S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express on that fateful 27 Feb 2002) as the maulanas took the floor to proclaim that 'Islam is a religion of peace' and indeed it is Bhagavad-Gita that incites violence, it became apparent that the Hindu intelligentsia had no clue on either count to confront.

So, I set out to find out the role religions play in fomenting human discord and came up with *Puppets of Faith: Theory of Communal Strife (A critical Appraisal of Islamic Faith, Indian Polity 'n More)* that I submitted to Popular Prakashan for its perusal. And its rejection slip of 03 Feb 2003 - I enjoyed reading the book. But I suggest you read Dr. Zakaria's 'Communal Rage in Secular India'. Your book is a bit Strident and could prove dangerous in the wrong hands (Hindu fundamentalist) – sums up Nehruvian India's allergy to any Hindu critique of Islam. It's another matter though that the book has been in the public domain as free e-book ever since, and whether or not it could help Hindus develop an Islamic grasp, its intended purpose, it certainly did not set the fundamentalist Hindus at Muslim throats as feared by the publishers. But come to think of it, though Islam was around in India for over millennia, save Chamupati's 1924 pamphlet *Rangila Rasool* and Sita Ram Goel's 1986 book *The Calcutta Quran Petition*, which is about Chandmal Chopra's petition to ban Quran, earlier there were no other Hindu works on and about Islam! And that's about the Hindu intellectual apathy in free India.

But the moot point is, even though the Husains, the Aamirs et al, have all along been abusing their artistic freedom to denigrate Hinduism, Popular Prakashan chose to deny me my literary liberty for a critical appraisal of Islam. However, to the chagrin of the Musalmans all that has changed in the Modi era what with the Sanjay Dixits, the Ranganathans of the Hindu world with a Nupur Sharma or two in tow have been quoting the inimical Quranic ayats and reciting the embarrassing Hadithian anecdotes through the electronic media. All the same, as the saying goes, "To understand Islam is to understand Muhammad" the Hindu intellectuals may look around for a book or two so as to acquaint themselves with the character of the man whom every Musalman seeks to imitate, which by the way, is far easier and more fetching than emulating Rama, the Hindu Maryada Purushottama.

Be that as it may, what's the intellectual fracas of free speech in Modi era all about? It can be expected that the politicians who lost power and their hangers on their pelf would cry hoarse. It's also understandable that Musalmans too would be sore over losing their political veto and what's worse have to bear the ignominy of having to live in a Hindu Raj. It's also okay for the Christian world to resent their hitherto unhindered evangelical drive has to navigate the anti-conversion hurdle. So, for whatever the Hindu intelligentsia is cribbing about, the Hindu masses, at long last, have begun to feel proud being Hindus. If that's an objection for those who have no issues with the Islamic republics and the Christian democracies that abound world over, then so be it.