

HISTORY, MYTH AND HINDUTVA CONSCIOUSNESS: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

Cultural plurality has been the quintessence of the Indian society, until nationalism as an ideology or a national culture came forth and started building the pillars of polarization. Patronizing fictitious claims, self-constructed notions on food habits of the people, historicizing myth and mythologizing history; ideological projects like *shuddhikaran*, *ghar-vapasi*, *love-jehad* are all the symptoms that India is certainly changing tracks from Nehruvian concept of secularism to majoritarian consciousness. The uncivil ideology of nationalism and communal understanding of national history is a problem that confronts a pluralistic country like India today. Following paper will be an attempt to understand the dichotomy and politics of a consciousness, which is divisive and dangerous for our nation. How our cultural and religious identity is planted and nourished by these fascists forces; who are politically as well as religiously motivated.

Keywords: History, Myth, Ideology, Consciousness, India

In any culture it is important to analyse and study the agencies who control the discourses. These agencies also have powers to determine the individual identities. Dissection of these power structures is necessary as they influence the image, representation and meaning of everyday life. Meaning is manufactured and ideology is coded in our everyday life and actions. These codes embedded around us can be any symbol; a name, a word, a metaphor, a visual sign or an exercise. (International Yoga Day: a signifier). The semiotics of these codes mask as well as propagate certain political ideas like national identity, cultural identity, polarization or patriarchy. When the audience respond readily to serials like *Pavanputr Hanuman*, *Jodha-Akbar*, *Razia Sultan*, *Suryaputr Karan* or *Maharana Pratap*, we immediately identify ourselves as Hindus and Muslims with distinct cultural codes.(end/footnote) It germinates the seed of *us* and *them*, creating cultural boundaries Nationalistic enchantment, the division of humanity into distinct nations, national self-determination have consumed a million of souls and it is still not satiated. Therefore, it becomes necessary to contemplate on the questions : How important is the self-understanding of being a member of a nation, and why does it sometimes dominate our self-consciousness?

The nation is product of the collective self-consciousness and often the continuity of the nation is thought to be a result of a supposed descent from a common ancestor; the popular

belief of the Indian communalists that Hindus belong to the Aryan race and Muslims are all descendants of Babur and therefore a different race. Such beliefs in a supposedly common descent in many cases are without factual basis, yet they appear repeatedly throughout history. When one divides the world into two irreconcilable warring camps, one's own nation in opposition to all other nations where the latter is viewed as one's irreplaceable enemy, then in contrast to patriotism there is the ideology of nationalism. For e.g. Indian nationalism may have the criteria that to be an Indian, one must hate everything Pakistani, anyone who does not is suspicious and isn't truly Indian. The politics of nationalism becomes more intoxicated and dangerous when it is mixed up with religion. The relation between the nation and religion has always been complicated historically as well as conceptually. The partition of India-Pakistan in the twentieth century and the rise of the demonic organisation like Islamic State of Iraq and Syria(ISIS) in the 21st century are also witnesses where religion act as an alibi for the rape, murder, mass executions, exodus and division of humanity. Religion proves to be opium of the people where an individual formulates the purpose of his or her existence, often the relation of his or her society or other societies.

The Babri Masjid suddenly becomes a bone of contention between two communities in India after partition although Babri Masjid in Ayodhya (U.P) did not simply exist for the majority of the Indians in the pre-independence era. This happened primarily because the issue was orchestrated very carefully by the Hindutva forces with a vision to appropriate it for contemporary politics. Ayodhya is now the centre of Hindu nationhood for the Hindu communalists. Without Ayodha India cannot be a nation in the fullest sense of the word although the exact location of Ayodhya is still marred with controversy. In this Two Nation Theory (with jingoistic slogans Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan/ Hindu Raj Amar Rahe/Vande Mataram Kehna Hoga ya Bharat say jana hoga) of the communalist the medieval Indian history has to be re-written/re-created as to present two nations always at war, one brutally assaulting while the other nobly defending.

Internalising history and religion by fixing stereotypes renders a colonial approach to the bigoted minds which enables colonial authority providing the justification that the coloniser rules the colonised due to innate superiority. Such approach then becomes prejudiced and discriminatory structure of governance. Claims of historicity (India with a classical past), evocation of monolithic Hinduism(one God, one temple, one book) with a homogeneous Hindu Samaj (Aryan race) and exclusion of the *other*(Muslims, Christians) is being injected in the collective psyche of the Indians. This *mythic-psychic-folklorish* psychoanalysis of the average minds makes it possible for some politicians and religious fascists to manipulate and mislead people. By mixing history with faith in order to concretize the Hindu historical knowledge and consciousness, these communal forces (RSS, VHP,BJP) plan to reap the much desired political dividends. This Brahminical orthodoxy misappropriates Indian heritage, misrepresents Indian legends and unfolds a communal drama where both Hindu and Muslim communities play their role religiously. For India , the image of a legally and religiously unified territorial relation of Hindustan, was justified by an appeal to past mythical and historical events.

D.W. Winnicott, English child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst (1896-1971) names "*art and religion in both of which one constructs a world with a far deeper meaning. Just as a child clings to a physical object- a teddy bear to create a safe world that enables the child to explore with confidence the outside world, so as an adult clings to an internalised object- a hobby, an*

interest, value or myth- that then enables the adult to deal with much a wider world." Political Hinduism can be compared to such an adult with an internalised idea of *Hindu Rashtra* or *Ram Rajya*, its obsession to place mythological creations on par with history or objective truth to deal with a world of proselytizing Islam and evangelist Christianity. Eminent historian Irfan Habib believes that *"rewriting of history by the Sangh Parivar is not saffronisation but fictionalisation of history building false history and false claims for the nation."* (The Indian Express)

The recent beef ban with the self-constructed notion that beef is the food of the Muslims and Christians and beef food culture is an imposition of Islamic-Christian culture on the Indian people is a myth and a brainchild of Brahminical Hindutva consciousness. The tactic of these extremists has been to elevate seemingly secular phenomenon to religious ones. Myth is no longer confined to explicitly religious ancient tales. They are now overtly secular modern myths as well. Seen from the Hindutva angle, Ram is more of a historical hero than a mythical God, and Ram temple is the manifestation of true and sincere patriotism. Having translated mythical lore into modern mobilizing metaphors and ideology Hindu communalists are conjuring the majoritarian consciousness. For Leopold von Ranke(German Historian), "*History tells us what really happened.*" The authenticity of history depends on the evidence of facts gathered (coins, epigraphs, archives, archaeology etc) all being objective realities rather than imaginary creations. In contrast to history, mythology is a product of imagination, much like fiction or folklore with no objective reality or evidence but dependent instead on one's belief and faith.

In this modern world the question is whether myth is real and can it be brought back to the external world without facily dismissing the authority of science? The real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to extricate its true, symbolic meaning by interpreting it anthropologically not cosmologically helping express man's understanding of himself in the world he lives in. The study of mythology would be enriching and enlightening as a cultural phenomenon rather than to study it as an authentic history that is based on material evidence, without denominating it as inferior or unreal. But then, labelling mythology as suppositious and rejecting mythological figures as historical figures at once hurts the Hindutva sentiments and invites political ire from the Sangh Parivar and their disciples.

India is witnessing subterranean dictatorship under the guise of democratically elected government. The present regime is recreating history mixing myth with reality with a sectarian agenda driven on religious grounds. The new nationalist history of India will be a stereotypical figure of the Muslim, endowed with a 'national character' : he will be fanatical, bigoted, warlike, dissolute and cruel (think of ISIS). Alarmingly, learners of the government schools in Gujarat are being bombarded with some genuinely bizarre information advancing the Hindutva agenda, through textbooks published by Gujarat State Board for School Textbooks (GSBST) and Gujarat Council of Educational Research and Training (GCERT). Textbooks written by Dina Nath Batra who opposed Wendy Dongier's, an American Indologist book *The Hindus: An Alternative History* and founder of the Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti an RSS affiliate are taught as reference literature with titles like *Indianisation of Education* (Shikshan nu Bhartiyakaran). Class VI CBSE textbook titled: *New Healthway says that "They(non-vegetarians) easily cheat, tell lies, they forget promises, they are dishonest and tell bad words, steal, fight and turn to violence and commit sex crimes"* (indiatimes.com, Nov 2012). Social Science English medium textbook published by GCERT present contradicting and biased interpretations of partition of the nation, it says : After partition in 1947 a new nation was born called Islamic Islamabad with Khyber Ghat

its capital in the Hindukush mountains. Celebrating purely Indian culture, rubbishing holocaust as myth and projecting Hitler as a true leader, sexist remarks about women, racism are all part of these fascists textbooks. One can easily imagine the kind of indoctrination being administered to the future young minds. These religious fanatics with stone age minds in modern skulls are trying to change the cultural environment of India by propagating the biology of *us* versus *them*. The History of India (published in 1878) by Tannicharan Chattopadhyay, a product of colonial education, a professor of Sanskrit College, Kolkata and a social reformer points out how the materials of Hindu extremists, political rhetoric today were fashioned from the very birth of nationalist historiography or the construction of the classical past. Ancient glory, present misery is the subject of this entire story. In this fictionalised history of the communalists Mughals are mentioned as Yvana jati (read Ravana Jati), Muslims subjugated the nation and polluted the pure Aryan blood and were the main cause for the decline of the Vedic/ Sarawati Civilization. K.B Hedgewar founder of the RSS described Muslims as hissing Yavana snakes and today people like Sadhvi Niranjani Jyoti giving crude communal remark: ramzade vs haramzade is the product of this Hindutva consciousness. Fusing science with mythology by patronizing fictitious claims like aviation technology, genetic science existing in the ancient India, the 102 Indian Science Congress 2015, sparked much controversy in the empirical community.

These kinds of beliefs are not confined to the past but they are found in the formation of modern nations as well. Historian Delmer Brown describes as *"making myth most historical and making actual events more mythical"*. The state broadcaster peddles RSS philosophy while the popular media appropriate myth as reality using magic bullet theory as a means to inject the idea in the psyche of the Indians. Interestingly with BJP in power, epic serials have reappeared on television with a new flavour and appeal (Pavanputri Hanuman, Suryaputri Karan, Devo ki Devi Mahadev, Maha Kumbh, Hum hai Yum etc). Knowing the rules of the game that myth governs our attitudes and behaviour as social beings, the propagandists forces are constructing history by investing millions on TV serials promoting Indian culture and presenting myth as real.

Unfortunately RSS ideology is spreading, particularly in the middle class and the present regime seems to be lacking inclusiveness. Modi as an Orwellian character has been particular in his "Hindu projection" (e.g. refusing to endorse skull cap, choosing Varanasi as his entry into politics, promoting Yoga, gifting Bhagavad Gita to a foreign dignitary). The BJP and the rest of the Sangh Parivar wants to reinvigorate the Hindu fire in us. Irfan Habib says: *"Divisive forces like Sangh Parivar must be matter of great concern for every citizen of India, who has any care at all for the secular and democratic character of our republic"*. Assertion of the singularity of truth and attempts to reduce mythology into history is not only alarming but also disrespect to the world of mythology itself.

Constructing theories to present myth as real will glean off the effervescence from the myth and reduce them to ordinary standard texts. Myth should be interpreted symbolically and the aura surrounding the mythical figures and demonic representation of some others can be understood to elevate the depraved social structure and economic inequality rampant in the society. Good days (*Acche Din*) for India is only when the society is intolerant towards the communal forces, inclusive policies adopted by the government and the majority consciousness respects the minority consciousness.

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