

POLITICS OF CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

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Abstract

This paper contests the charges raised in Organizer magazine, Volume 1, January 4, 2020 based on aspect of Truth vs Myth where eminent Marxist historian Irfan Habib have been charged as propagator of Myth. Habib came in controversy when he contested speech of Kerala Governor Arif Muhammad Khan at session of Indian History Congress at Kerala in December 2019. This incident has been given considerable limelight by Organizer. It has been a mouthpiece of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS). The charges raised by the magazines against not only Habib but against entire secular fraternity of discipline of History. In this issue certain -isms are highlighted but the -ism that require most fairly attention i.e. of Fascism has been paid very little or no attention at all. Here one must take note of the fact that Habib had always been one voice that has vehemently criticized RSS. He has been very critical of their 'idea of India'. He has repeatedly criticized their methodology of functioning. He has been highly critical of their 'idea of India', which many have found, borrowed from Nazi Germany. To Habib, like many another Historians RSS have always propagated notion of hatred, disturbing secular space and communal harmony of the nation and this notion of Habib requires explanation

Introduction

Since inception of RSS in 1925, it has tried to create a blueprint of how India should be, to which they call as 'Hindu Rashtra'. The fundamental prerequisites of nation have been penned down in the works of its leading stalwarts like Golwalkar and V.D Sarkar. According to them -a nation is a contiguous piece of land delimited as far as possible by natural boundaries, to serve as the substratum on which the nation has to live, grow and prosper. Then the second requisite is, the

people living in that particular territory should have developed love and adoration for it as their motherland, as the place of their sustenance, their security and prosperity. In short, they should feel they are children of that soil (Golwalkar: 1939). -Then, that people should not be just a mass of men, just a just apposition of heterogeneous individuals. (Golwalkar; 1939). In order to achieve this project of converting secular democratic republic into Hindu Rashtra, RSS primary function remained confined to the production of knowledge system that is Hindu in its form and character. In post independent India, particularly after 1980s with a shift towards new market policy and after 1991 with globalization of economy leading to play of free-market, various institutions like media, newly constructed civil societies emerged. There was a sudden rise of corporate culture. This rise of corporate culture resulted in and what Sandria Freitag (Quoted in Ludden: 2005) called as commodification of culture. Even religion was commodified. Thus, one could clearly see religion and culture which were hitherto confined to the private sphere coming in the public sphere. All these things required time to time this requires as argued by Gyanendra Pandey (Pandey: 1990) construction of master narratives through creating moment of ruptures which primarily rests upon notion of violence.

Historiography denotes the way historians write history using different theories, sources and techniques. Just as Tantric system rests on Panchmakaras Madya (wine), Matsya (fish), Mamsa (meat), Mudra (parched grain), Maithuna (sexual intercourse) and similarly Sangha historiography rests upon 5 Ms. i.e. Mill, Macaulay, Muller, Marx and Muslims. Mill who characterized Indian History as Hindu period, Muslim period and ironically British period not Christian period. Muller who constructed notion of 'others' in his numerous works. It was he who glorified Hindu period of History. The whole idea of India was explained in terms of Aryan superiority, projection of Muslim period as dark period of history, rendering Muslims as inferno and it is from these colonial notions and writings RSS derives its fundamental postulates, which is rooted in colonial mode of thoughts and practices.

It was Madam Blavatsky of Theosophical society who propagated idea of Aryans as indigenous people and it is from whom RSS derives its ideology that this land belong to Aryans, thereby practicing colonial mode of thoughts and practices in nature of divide and rule, and constructing notions of us and they. Colonial construction of Indian society rests upon notion that Indian society was static. It was according to them spiritual and metaphysical which has

nothing to do with outer world thereby concealing entire notions of transformations and throughout projecting Indian History as homogenous History and to give shape they suppress alternate opinions and manufactures distorted facts. As in case of medieval historiography concealment of Ghaznis destruction of mosque etc.(See Hasan@scroll.in)

RSS has always depicted Indian history as History of violence and conflicts between two communities and have always downplayed it as a history of what one can call as -shared spaces. Another major lacuna in RSS historiography is that is quite visible is its complete omission of the colonial period, as if it was never significant. This is not an unconscious omission but a conscious one. If one take a close look of period right from the time of inception of RSS till India's independence one could see that it has worked in hand in hand with British.. It is for this reason they deliberately try to ignore this period and for this reason that they prefer glorifying Prachin Bharat or Ancient Period as 'Hindu Rashtra' with its own distinct culture characterized by peace and prosperity. This was followed by so called Muslim/medieval period where there was entire change in the essence of the nation with the arrival of Muslims who had contaminated the very essence of fabulous Hindu Culture'. This has been the master narrative of RSS over the time. Another lacuna of their historiography have been a complete disregard of the economic factors. They have paid least importance to gradual transformations of various systems of production and its impact on different classes. Rather they have preferred focusing on religious lens. The other problem is of selectivity For instance RSS historiographers have selectively mentioned about the concept of slavery prevalent in Medieval India but have conveniently forget that this institution was widely prevalent in Ancient India. Thereby rendering discipline of History as discipline of faith rather than being discipline of reason.

Another visible example of selective history writing is that is quite apparent in RSS historiography that there has been constant attempt to portray Mughals and other medieval rulers as barbaric. The only instinct prevailing in them is war mongering and expansionism. They give a lot of importance to the acts of Ghazni, Aurangzeb and conveniently forget or rather conceal Kalinga war from mainstream of Ancient history. There is always a constant attempt to project an idea of homogenized Hindu solidarity. This could only be done by invisibilizing caste and other ethnic conflicts. For instance, Aryans vs Dravidian conflicts are often ignored so as to preserve Brahminical order.

Another notable aspect of RSS historiography is Interpretation of Vedic age as golden age and eliminating the subaltern perspectives from mainstream of discussion. RSS historiography completely eliminates concept of modernity from focal point of their studies as notion of modernity is based on logic, reasoning while RSS thoughts and practices corresponds to traditional faith and belief systems as that of prevalent in medieval Europe and even projects modernity from perspective of religion. Phenomenon explanations of RSS puts religion as dominant force of change or transformation of phases of History in which Mughals intermingling with Hindu culture led to distortion of Hindu races and so are responsible for pollution of Indian society. Modernity too is seen as alien and even projects modern values as interference with Indian culture

Irfan Habib(**Habib:1963**) through his pioneer work *Agrarian system of Mughal India*, contested colonial explanations of Decline of Mughal Empire and argued it was Agrarian crisis, which was ultimately responsible for decline of Mughal Empire. Habib, has comprehensively focused upon economic and statistical data of Mughal Empire and has highlighted that difference between jam-i-dami(revenue fixed) and jam-i-hasil (revenue realized) has considerably grown up. As a result of which the tripartite relationship got affected leading to peasant rebellion in form of Jat and Satnami revolt on basis of Vrindavan documents while RSS and rightwing historian directly locates reason of decline in Aurangzeb's reactionary policies based on notion of faith, as reasoning and reasoned explanation have always been outside ambit of studies of RSS.

Habib has charged RSS rightly as authoritarian. Here one could clearly draw parallels between Nazi Germany and Right wing in India. Just like in Nazi Germany, Hitler resorted to methodology of Anti-Semitic program, highlighted superiority of Aryan race, controlled popular institutions like Media, Universities, Colleges, Schools and their curriculum, In similar manner RSS methodology too resorts to Anti-Muslim Agenda by projecting them as invaders and aliens. Golwalkar saw three principal threats to the formation of the Hindu Rashtra which included Muslims, Christians and Communists (**Guha, 2012, p.375**). RSS stalwarts claim that the territory of India belongs to Hindu alone thereby ceasing space for other communities. This could only be achieved via homogenization of Hindu community, which is otherwise divided into so many castes. This alone explains the constant authorization of Muslims, Preserving of Brahminical cultural values and marginalizing difference within the Hindu community. This is

often done via control of popular institutions like mass media by constantly projecting stories, which support the above-mentioned narrative. This is how via control of civil society the ruling class in this case RSS and its supporters and sympathizers create hegemony a term coined by Antonio Gramsci (**Gramsci:2000**) .

Habib, has not only explained decline of Mughal Empire but is a staunch critique of Colonial/Imperialist historiography. He has justified conceptualization of Dada Bhai Naoroji pioneer work Poverty and Un-British rule in India by working on fresh statistics that Drain of wealth had been ultimate cause of bleeding of India and rendering India poor and also established with reason that is where divergence of India from Europe had taken place. Habib and his group through well-supplied statistics and evidences have explained prosperity of India during Age of Akbar. He has systematically by making calculations and comparisons of GDP during reign of Akbar and of Colonial India have clearly established that India under Akbar was much more prosperous. He has also systematically established how British industrialization was premised on the corresponding deindustrialization of India. Thus clearly establishing the disastrous effects of British colonialism on India.

India currently is in the midst of economic crisis GDP has fallen to a record low, unemployment is on a 45 year old high, there is farmer distress. In the midst of these crises the ruling regime wants to shift the discourse from economy to cultural issues. The methodology of discourse shift is via construction of binaries, thereby one could see titles as Truth vs Myth, Historian vs Distorian.

As communists too were considered a threat to the idea of ‘Hindu Rashtra’ The Marxist historians which have dominated Indian academia especially when it comes to history writing has come under severe attack. Right wing historians had collected, selected and interpreted historical fact from lens of religion and had distorted facts to a larger extent. R.S Sharma (**Sharma: 2009**) had discussed concept of Kaliyuga in a different manner. To him it corresponds to period of degeneration of Brahminical culture leading to a differently socially stratified society. The right wing historians had equated it with arrival of Mughals. This again is a clear example of distortion of history. RSS historiography eliminates Feudalism and its development during later Gupta period owing to system of land grants and changes in later Gupta period leading to decline of trade and commerce, which in turn resulted in witnessing process of De-

Urbanization. In works of right wing historians, Mughal history not medieval history has been referred as period of Dark Ages and renders Mughal history as static, characterized by barbarism and violence with primary focus upon Mughals as destructor of temples, and fond of killing. Ghazni story of destruction of Somnath temple has been often cited example to justify their instance but by concealing basic material fact that Ghazni too had destroyed the mosque while on its way to Somnath temple and justifies notion of Habib that initial attacks were for purpose of loot and plunder. Aurangzeb is next villain in RSS historiography who is charged for imposition of Jaziya and for his reactionary Hindu policies. Habib through well supplied statistics of Aurangzeb period established that it was a period of economic crisis as there was considerable difference in jam-i-dami and jam-i-hasil and hence Aurangzeb policies were largely governed by these factor, further statistics too confirms that Aurangzeb period was characterized by large Hindu bureaucracy. RSS historiography also eliminates development of Iqta system and Mansab system giving rise to centralization of Administration. RSS historiography eliminates Age of Akbar from their ambit of studies, as India has reached its zenith during period of Akbar. Akbar policy of Sulah-i-Kul, ban on cow killing and peacock killing is something, which completely negates conceptualization of RSS historiography, and hence it has been eliminated from project of study.

Habib and his group through numerous works and with well supplied statistics have confirmed that Medieval Age was an age of heterogeneous development encompassing all areas. Habib through well-made comparison of GDP of Akbar's period and that of Colonial India has well confirmed to readers of medieval India that it was high period of growth and stability and leaves no space for RSS historiographers to render medieval period as Dark Age of Indian History. **M Athar Ali(Ali:2006)** too through well supplied statistics has analyzed pattern of Hindu –Muslim relations and argued of peaceful coexistence of relations between two communities as both communities were enjoying greater shared spaces and even highlighted that Aurangzeb bureaucracy was largely comprised of Hindus.

Studies of eminent scholar Gyanendra Pandey, confirms that disturbance in shared spaces of Hindus and Muslims was an outcome of Colonial policies and locates development of communalism as colonial construct. Colonial policies as like Introduction of census in 1871,

Introduction of Separate electorate in 1909 etc. were major developments from where location of identity politics based on religion started witnessing development.

Pandey confirms through his studies that colonial masters were ultimately responsible for projecting Hindus and Muslims as enemies. It was a colonial construct based on stereotypification. Which emphasized that relations between two communities had never been peaceful, because of difference between two communities, as Muslims are violent etc. and Hindus were docile? This ultimately led to Muslims ‘otherisation’. This helped in achieving colonial policy of Divide and Rule. Nandini Gooptu(**Gooptu:2001**), extensive studies too confirms how Hindu-Muslims relations started taking different shape in 20th century due to colonial policies and due to interest of dominant business elites. During inter war period rise of Indian business class and continual process of urbanization for search of employment had changed nature of demography of Indian cities and how employer-employee relations shaped process of communalization of India which were intertwined with rise of religious movements in India as initiated by Dayanand Saraswati. It was during this period in 1925, rise of RSS is located but were unable to find any space in public sphere during Indian National Movement and even in post independent India and largely remained isolated and remained as political untouchable till 1980’s as Nehruvian’s era was strongly committed to Secularism.

After 1980’s trio of RSS, VHP and BJP started marking considerable influence in public sphere owing to multiple reasons. First reason for expansion of Right wing forces was considerable weakening of congress as ‘Congress System’ argued by Rajini Kothari was based on master-client relationship (**Kothari:1995**). Other plausible explanations can be located in social transformation in post-independent India in which Nehruvian policy of education, and Green Revolution occupies center stage. With the coming of green revolution and because of decades of political mobilization of dalits and OBC’s after Mandal Commission, As a result of these, there seemed an eminent threat to RSS leadership which was primarily ‘Upper caste’. Thus RSS undertook the project of homogenization of Hindus.

In order to consolidate their base RSS in 1980’s started shifting their instance from earlier issues comprising of Hindi-Urdu controversy, Muslim population issues, Cow killing controversy, Pseudo secular politics of Congress towards Pilgrimage centers and rituals as neatly established by Peter Vander veer. This notion was primarily given acute shape due to mandalisation of

politics to subdue caste identity politics and with an acute ambition of homogenization of Hindu community in which Ayodhya was projected as an exclusive choice. VHP after 1984 had played pivotal role in increasing their mass base by launching voice of *Tala Todoat Ayodhya*, and since then Ayodhya became an acute center of RSS politics and culture. Developments of this period intersected with liberalization of economy, as due to which free players started emerging in the economy and state control over multiple institutions was loosened. Arvind Rajagopal(**Rajagopal:2001**) has shown how through Doordarshan broadcasting of Ramayana and Mahabharata and symbolic representation of Ram as warrior which became sole basis of Advani's Rath yatra giving rise to process of Toyota Hinduism. Further rise of vernacular media and their considerable expansion leading to a construction of new class of readers, thereby giving rise to a new civil society provided a fill-up to the Ayodhya movement of RSS through transformation of sub conscious religious identity to an active religio-political identity ultimately leading episode of Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 , an act of vandalism carried out by RSS karsevakas ,which too has been recorded as finding by Honorable Supreme Court of India in its recent passed judgement in 2019. After 1992 Ayodhya controversy , there was growth in stature of BJP as it emerged as strong opposition party and there was considerable transformation from 2 seats in 1980'S to 100 plus seats after Ayodhya crisis and in this impact factor was Ram Mandir movement.

RSS historiography had always focused on religio and cultural issues while writing history. Their vision of 'Hindu Rashtra' is inherently exclusivist, which had no place for minorities like Muslims and Christians. They aspire to build model of nation in which Hindu culture and aspirations will remain focal point while all other identities will be subdued to the Hindu religion .RSS history writing is more based on faith, it is selective in approach and often based on distortions.ⁱ

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