

THE RSS AND THE TRICOLOUR

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(English Version)

As Indians get ready to celebrate the nation's 70th anniversary in few days, our main worry should not be whether some have suddenly decided to become anti-national, but it should be on a new dangerous game of competitive hyper-nationalism that has recently been unleashed. Ridiculous ideas are floated to instil this 'nationalism' like installing a military tank within the precincts of a genetically restless university. With systematic attacks on plurality, the atmosphere has already been heated to the desired degree that facilitates the branding of inconvenient dissent as anti-national. We shall soon witness how a government that excels in event management zaps the nation on its Independence Day with dollops of patriotic fare produced at public expense, which must of course come with that mesmerising oratory. But one fact is certain: the organisation that runs the party that runs the regime cannot just appropriate the 'Indian national movement' as its own.

This is extremely relevant because of the well planned ongoing exercise to slaughter the Nehruvian legacy and pluck other national leaders of stature - from Gandhi to Patel - almost out of context to replant them on the rightists' pantheon, that is so understaffed. True, both these leaders hailed from Gujarat, as does the Gir lion, whose weird gear-crunching 'Make in India' animation has put the traditionally-peaceful India's elephant icon into the shade. But that cannot suffice and even Swami Vivekananda is not spared by those who cannot see beyond his saffron dress but fail to read his very stern anti-communal messages. And, in all such cases, the political right makes selective use of their words and deeds to claim them as 'mentors' in the hope that their association may lend some 'mainstream lineage' and respectability to a sectarian and secretive ultra-national outfit. Despite tireless systematic attempts to distort history, the version we possess till now is quite clear that the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, the RSS, had refused to participate in the freedom struggle. It has, therefore, no right to claim its glory even though the Congress cannot also monopolise on any 'sole heir' status, for various reasons.

K.B. Hedgewar, who founded the RSS in 1925, did have some initial loose association with the freedom struggle but from the 1930s, he ensured that his boys in khaki shorts stayed away from this historic movement and the harshest of retaliation it attracted. His biographer, C.P. Bishikar quotes him as having said "Patriotism is not only going to prison. It is not correct to be carried away by such superficial patriotism." On the other hand, Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha, who is another cherished role model of the current ruling dispensation, had been active long before Hed-

gewart but he was rather mercurial. He did lead strident anti-British agitations and was jailed, but he also signed multiple clemency petitions to the colonial government, promising total cooperation if only they released him. The Congress retaliated in 1934 and banned its members from joining communal organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS and the Muslim League. In any case, during the critical phase of the Quit India movement and other agitations, not only was the RSS missing but we have British reports of the 'good conduct' and the law-abiding nature of its members, while so many thousands of women, children and men all over India braved the onslaught of imperial repression.

Nana Deshmukh raised the issue in his book, *RSS: Victim of Slander* (1979) "One might well ask: why did the RSS not take part in the liberation struggle as an organisation? The question arose for the first time when Gandhiji launched his movement in 1929-30. It was decided that the members of the RSS were free to take part in their individual capacity". Fine: but it may be educative to know which particular RSS member actually took part and what suffering he went through for it. The National Archives in Delhi have preserved the Home Ministry files that contain Intelligence Branch records of the role played by them as well as by the nationalists. It is only logical that the RSS and its dedicated cadre that runs the government should come clear on this phase of history before attempting to snatch credit in its new version of ultra-nationalism. This caveat is essential as we come to the next issue on how the RSS had actually opposed the Indian national flag. On the eve of Independence, when much of the nation was bursting to celebrate freedom, the RSS's mouthpiece, *Organiser*, declared that the Indian tricolour "will never be respected and owned by Hindus. The word three is in itself an evil, and a flag having three colours will certainly produce a very bad psychological effect and is injurious to a country." Apart from distorting facts like the age old reverence of Hindus for 'three' as evident in the Trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar, this reveals the nonsense that rules the minds of those who peddle faith for votes. We must also understand the psyche that declares cow urine to be a divine antidote and declares that an elephant's head was grafted on a decapitated Ganesha, through plastic surgery in very ancient times.

The earlier issues of the *Organiser*, such as those of 17th and 22nd July 1947, had also voiced the opposition of the RSS to many such national issues, but to get to the root, we need to see the book *Bunch of Thoughts* that the second head of the RSS, M.S. Golwalkar published. He lamented that "our leaders have set up a new flag for the country. Why did they do so? It just is a case of drifting and imitating...Ours is an ancient and great nation with a glorious past. Then, had we no flag of our own? Had we no national emblem at all these thousands of years? Undoubtedly we had. Then why this utter void, this utter vacuum in our minds." We would, in all fairness, be enlightened if Guru Golwakar could show us the ancient national emblem or flag that he refers to, unless his intention is to substitute the nation's culturally-composite flag with the Bhagwa Dhvaj. This saffron 'split flag' of the RSS symbolises not only divisionism but is synonymous with Hinduism and Hindutva, that militate against the very plural reality of India.

Mahatma Gandhi's assassination on 30th January 1948, however, changed the political chessboard of India decisively. Government banned the RSS and the Deputy Prime Minister, Sardar Patel declared quite unequivocally that “though the RSS was not involved.... his assassination was welcomed by those of the RSS and the (Hindu) Mahasabha who were strongly opposed to his way of thinking and his policy”. Golwalkar repeatedly pleaded with Patel, but the leader whom the current regime seeks to appropriate, remained totally firm. He lifted the ban on the 11th of July 1949, only after the RSS undertook to stay away from politics, not be so secretive and to abjure violence. More important, it had to profess “loyalty to the Constitution of India and the national flag.” Is it this ‘complex’ that engendered the recent government order to publicly demonstrate patriotism every where, even in movie halls?