

Modi Celebrates the Constitution to Aton for the Hindu Right's Past Sins. But Is it Enough?

Samuel Fury Childs Daly's mins read

One of the heavy costs that Narendra Modi is paying for staying in power is disowning the strongest of biases of his parent organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – to which he swore everlasting loyalty when he joined it in his teens. He also retracts, ever so stealthily, from the principle of his political guru, V.D. Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha, even as he never misses a photo opportunity to worship him publicly.

The RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha had shied away from the Gandhi-led national freedom struggle, when thousands of Congress supporters and very common people, including women and the young, were beaten up mercilessly by British batons and crushed under the horse-hoofs of their mounted police. Countless protesters were injured quite grievously and several died as well, while many thousands were jailed for months and years. But this did not matter to the Hindu Right and Modi knew quite cannily that this betrayal would be raised during his tenure. He has much to hide under the carpet.

The founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangha (precursor of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the BJP), Syama Prasad Mookerjee, had, for instance, been tactless enough to put on record his advice to the British to crush the Quit India movement with a heavy hand. This Hindu Mahasabha leader was then the senior-most minister in Fazlul Haq's coalition government in undivided Bengal and is another icon of Narendra Modi and of many in the BJP-RSS. On July 26, 1942, he wrote a letter to the Governor declaring "anybody who, during the war, plans to stir up mass feelings, resulting in internal disturbances or insecurity, must be resisted by....government". Mookerjee told the Governor to ensure "that in spite of the best efforts of the Congress, this (Quit India) movement will fail". He offered the Hindu Mahasabha's "whole-hearted cooperation ... at this hour of crisis" and that "Indians have to trust the British".

With such a political heritage, it is not strange that when India finally gained its Independence, the RSS chose to oppose the Indian national flag giving the flimsiest of reasons. *Organiser*, the RSS's English organ, attacked the Constituent Assembly's decision in its third issue (July 17, 1947), saying: "The 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." The RSS demanded that the saffron flag be chosen instead, in its issues of July 31 and August 14, heckling the tricolour. Incidentally, just after the Mahatma's assassination by a Hindu Mahasabha fanatic (a former RSS acolyte), Sardar Patel banned the RSS and jailed several thousands of its members. Writing to RSS's head, M.S. Golwalkar on September 11, 1948, Patel chided him saying that all the RSS's speeches "were full of communal poison. It was not necessary to spread poison and enthuse the Hindus and organise for their protection. As a final result of the poison, the country had to suffer the sacrifice of the valuable life of Gandhiji." This letter is quoted in Desraj Goel's *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*. After 15 months in jail, RSS's M.S. Golwalkar drafted a 'constitution' for the RSS – at Sardar Patel's insistence, and sent it to him on April 11, 1949. The government of India lifted the ban on the RSS on July 11, 1949, stating that the decision to lift the ban had been taken in view of the RSS leader Golwalkar's undertaking to make the group's loyalty towards the constitution of India and acceptance and respect towards the national flag of India more explicit in the Constitution of the RSS, which was to be worked out in a democratic manner.



To understand PM Modi's strategy of obliterating these shameful facts of history, one has to appreciate his skill at overkill. He wiped off this sordid past by claiming to be the greatest champion of the tricolour by mandating that every Indian, without exception, must pay public tribute to it in auditoriums, movie theatres and important gatherings. His stormtroopers made life miserable for those who felt they need not wear their patriotism on their sleeves. Then began his government's much hyped *Har Ghar Tiranga* blitz, literally flooding the citizenry with the tricolour – till no one could ever dream that Modi's political ancestors had opposed the freedom movement and the tricolour so vigorously. The hyped show of ultra-nationalism also found its most resounding cry in his *Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav* series of high-publicity programmes that commemorated the 75th anniversary of India's national movement and Independence. One must admit that Modi's artful cover for the non-participation of the Hindu Right during the freedom struggle and its early, fanatic opposition to the Indian national flag has been rather effective.

It is in this light that we view PM Modi's announcement that the 26th of November is being celebrated on a grand scale as the 75th anniversary of the Indian constitution. But, let us recall the real position of the RSS on this issue which it spelt out in its mouthpiece, *Organiser*, on November 30, 1949. It said that "in our constitution, there is no mention of that unique constitutional development in ancient Bharat...To this day, his laws as enunciated in the *Manusmriti* excite the admiration of the world and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our constitutional pundits that means nothing." On the February 6, 1950, the *Organiser* insisted "Manu rules our hearts", reaffirming the RSS's commitment to the very controversial and largely retrograde *Manusmriti*, declaring it to the final lawgiving authority for Hindus, rather than the Constitution of India, stating, "It is nevertheless a fact that the daily lives of Hindus are even at present-day affected by the principles and injunctions contained in the *Manusmriti* and other *Smritis*."

V.D. Savarkar reiterated this stand, commenting that "the worst about the new constitution of Bharat is that there is nothing Bharatiya about it...*Manusmriti* is that scripture which is most worship-able after Vedas for our Hindu Nation and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture-customs, thought and practice. This book for centuries has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Even today the rules which are followed by crores of Hindus in their lives and practice are based on *Manusmriti*. Today *Manusmriti* is Hindu Law".

This was not a one-off stand and much later, in 1966, we find RSS's chief, M.S. Golwalkar, lashing out against the Indian constitution in his book titled *Bunch of Thoughts*. According to him, "Our Constitution too is just a cumbersome and heterogeneous piecing together of various articles from various Constitutions of Western countries. It has absolutely nothing, which can be called our own. Is there a single word of reference in its guiding principles as to what our national mission is and what our keynote in life is? No!"



Despite this burden of angst against the Indian constitution that was never retracted by the RSS, that guides and provides ideological directions to the ruling BJP, the prime minister carries on with his institutionalised hypocrisy by getting his government's media organ to make a solemn poker-faced public declaration. "The Government of India calls upon the citizens to be a part of this historic occasion and show our collective pride in our Constitution and demonstrate our commitment to the democratic values that define our nation."

We need not tire ourselves with the usual *sarkari* format of celebrations from the village and school level right up to the publicly-discarded old parliament building's Constituent Assembly (of Central) Hall – to bask in the glory of the millions of television screens. But, behind the pomp and artifice, lies a heavy heart that atones for the sins of Modi's gurus and political ancestors.

What we need to understand also is that in the process, he tries his best to 'mainstream' the recalcitrant Hindu Right and, in doing so, he goes about his artful atonement in sackcloth and ashes.

Jawhar Sircar is a former Rajya Sabha MP of Trinamool Congress. He was earlier Secretary, Government of India, and CEO of Prasar Bharati.