

Why India needs to be a Hindu Nation?

During the Delhi Assembly Election, the CM-candidate Kiran Bedi was stumped by a reporter asking her views on India being a Hindu Nation. There are 50+ Islamic countries and same number of Christian countries, a few Buddhist and a solitary Jewish nation, some de facto and some de jure. Nepal was a Hindu Nation till few decades back. There were around 500+ Hindu Kingdoms in India till 1947. Why then is it a sacrilege even to talk about Hindu nations? People give reason that India is diverse; it is so because Hindu Kings did not forcibly re-convert people and Hinduism in general has been a non-Missionary religion. Then people say India will become Hindu Pakistan. But then Pakistan is Pakistan because of Islam, which has no space for other religions. Rather Hindu India will be a modern state that can benefit from rich religion that has evolved with times, while continuing to preserve the most ancient truth.

Hinduism is very important to define India; we are united by the fact that we have shared Hindu present or Hindu past. At this juncture, it is important to define who is presently Hindu. The constitution draws a distinction between three categories of legal Hindus:

- (a) Hindus Category One (consisting of all those who can still be categorised as full-fledged Hindus within the Hindu religious fold, including members of sects having antecedents traceable to mainline Hindu religious texts or individuals),
- (b) Hindus Category Two (consisting of members of the three sects, namely Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, founded by Hindu individuals, which originated as sects within the Hindu religious fold, but, in the course of history, came to acquire a more distinctive religious identity), and
- (c) Hindus Category Three (consisting of members of indigenous religious groups native to India, not founded by any particular individual, following ancestral forms of belief or worship not specifically having antecedents traceable to mainline Hindu religious texts or sects).

Even religion practiced by Parsis is very close to Vedic religion. In any case as per our tradition, Parsis and Jews who sought refuge in India have pride of place in India.

If we accept India as a Hindu nation, what happens to secularism? Secularism is not about supporting multiple religions, rather pluralism is. Pluralism is a core tenet of Hinduism. Secularism is about keeping religion away from Governance at the level of detail. If a state looks up to religious books to formulate laws without contextualizing for present times then that becomes the anti-thesis of secularism. We have such an anomaly in India with separate personal laws of Muslims based on Sharia. Secularism is ability to free up nitty-gritty of governance from religion yet it does not stop us from drawing upon ethos and values of native/common tradition at a philosophical level. For India it should be Hindu tradition.

It is important for Hindus to reassert their right to celebrate our own tradition. Just because we accepted a pluralistic society, it cannot be a Damocles' sword that falls on us every time we say OM or promote our traditions in a public setting. Why should we be shamed for promoting Sanskrit, which is one of the richest languages in Indo-European tradition? Today voices rise if we revert to a name like Gurugram, whereas there is no hue and cry when Madras becomes Chennai. Bhagvad Gita as a scripture can guide our life in both day-to-day living as well as towards spiritual enrichment. Yoga looks at life in a holistic manner should be celebrated without any reservations. All this is possible in a Hindu nation than in today's confusing mix. We have also seen that those who oppose Hindus are also more likely to join those who oppose India as a nation. Secularism, democracy, freedom of expression or rights of animals cannot be selective. Only anti-nationals cannot have right to get angry or express themselves.

Every country needs to have ethos, value system and a set of philosophical underpinnings to decide on policies, laws and strategies for it. Our religion, traditions and culture can provide the required guidance in such matters. Hinduism is uniquely positioned here because it has constantly evolved, accommodated variety and in general flexible and open. The practices have changed from time to time while continuing to retain important remnants going back to millennia. In some sense old systems and rituals continue, new ones come in and many get transformed for modern times. Our own value systems and context should guide us on what is right rather than blind copying of the west in matters profane to profound. We need our ethos and value system to define philosophical underpinnings of our Governance as well as social life. Right now we blindly follow the west saying whatever they do is the right thing. Some of the western practices are out of sync with Indian society. Excessive reliance on state to do the heavy-lifting whether it is health, education or welfare has simply not worked for us. Rather we should leverage and liberate our communities to do it. At the same time we need to leverage individual initiative or free market orientation much more. Entrepreneurship is also part of our culture and it needs to be celebrated. It should be our decision whether there should be death sentence, use of abuse in movies and art, encouraging homosexuality, laws against marital rape or whatever. These decisions should depend on our context, culture and values and not that of Europe or USA. It should also be our decision to fashion stance on protecting foetus or allowing abortions, protecting cows by not trivializing it as right to food or right to butcher and rights of animals. Indian tradition respects all life including plants and mother earth and other forces of nature. It should also be our decision how to deal with bomb blast perpetrators.

To succeed in Governance we need philosophical underpinnings and strategic orientation that is in harmony with our society. Blindly saying state should do this and that when communities can do it better does not make sense. We have to stop looking at everything using western binoculars. Hindutva and Development are not contradictory. You need ethos and traditions to define values and philosophical underpinnings of a nation. Pride about the past and enthusiasm about the future, depends on sense of belonging.

We need to embrace modernity in our own way. We should promote human rights and have uniform laws for everybody. Crimes against women and children should be dwelt swiftly. Each community should have choice to maintain its own traditions. The courts should not stretch the definition of human rights and interfere in traditions while maintaining a balance. In general religious rituals should be out of purview of courts as long as there are no crimes against humanity. Even if gender rights have to be protected it needs to be done uniformly across all religions without getting caught up in detail. Government should not intervene in Hindu temples unless there is no other way.

Today India is more often than not behaves as a soft state. This is both regarding internal forces that game the legal system, pressure groups try to enforce veto, businessmen who loot and scoot or while dealing with other countries. Terrorists, their cheer leaders and apologists who deny all rights to Hindus including right to life exploit the openness of our judiciary repeatedly ad nauseam. Those who bomb parliament, those who kill using bombs are projected as heroes. Democracy has also meant vote banks and pressure groups riding rough-shod over rights of common citizens who are not organized. Bandh on one pretext or other, protests violent or otherwise will allow organized groups to punch far above their weight. The violent and vocal minority dominates peaceful and silent majority. State's relationship with any citizen should be direct. Individuals suffer when communities throw their weight as it happened in repeal of Shah Bano judgment. We have to reassert Hindu tradition of not tolerating injustice. Hinduism is not pacifist. It is about acceptance and co-existence with honour.

India being a Hindu nation has global implications. There will be a voice to raise issues of Hindus in global forums, like Christians and Muslims have. We need such a voice especially now when Hindus are spread across large number of nations. When the last time an issue related to Hindus was raised in the UN? We need ability to raise issues related to treatment of Hindus as well as Hinduism in non-Hindu nations. People get killed on minor issues. Western leaders ask questions even if a few Churches face stone attacks whereas remain quiet even when hundreds of temples have got destroyed over the years in different parts of the world including Kashmir in India. We need ability to provide refuge to Hindus without being questioned. As India is the only Hindu nation, it should be natural home for all Hindus. This does not preclude providing refuge or help to any other community. Rather all Dharmic countries, i.e. Hindu and Buddhist countries should unite to protect all Dharmic religions.

Many do not want to acknowledge the Hindu identity of India and they claim there was no nation called India till the time of British. This flies in the face of fact that as early as during 200 BCE, Mauryan Empire stretched from Kuba River in Afghanistan to Ganges in the East and Madhurai in down south. The geography described in Vedas itself spans today's Afghanistan to plains of Ganges, with common culture. On top of this, the boundaries of all major countries have changed over last few centuries whether in Europe or Asia. Compared to other countries India has continuity of civilization for thousands of years. The concept of Hindu India or Bharat had physical and philosophical manifestation. Physically country was surrounded by Himalayas in the North and three oceans in the South. Philosophically it was one country even when the kingdoms or units of governance may be numerous as people moved freely from one Kingdom to other bound by common culture, tradition, values and beliefs. The size of different kingdoms varied and there was always some kind of federal structure where local governance was always important even within a Kingdom. Philosophically different tribes and groups maintained their own sub-culture as also many communities broke up into sub-groups and evolved their culture as they moved from place to place in India. There was never any doubt that India was one country, it was just that conception of India was limited only by the perspective of individuals. We also need to realize that territory alone does not define a nation, rather people and values do.

Hindus also practiced a unique belief system that accepted and respected every tribal custom and incoming culture with great flexibility. They promoted certain core beliefs and simultaneously accepted improvisation at local levels with high degree of openness. While Christianity and Islam have done a cultural aggression and eliminated traditional practices, Hinduism has incorporated new groups under its umbrella with maximum freedom and flexibility, with very few core beliefs many of them at a higher plane. They also have assimilated practice of new groups into the larger Hindu religion.

Authentic and complete account of Indian History is important. Today India is projected to the world as an English speaking off-spring of colonial power. It needs to be projected as a nation with a rich civilization that has set very high standards in abstract thinking, systematic thinking and creativity. We owe it to our ancestors for whatever success we have in Science and Technology than merely British who taught us English. More broadly thanks to our historians, we are taught history as if Hindus were fit only for slavery and invasions. Reality however is different. Whereas all of Europe and Iran got converted and lost their Indo-European religions, India managed to protect and preserve Hinduism. Hindu Kings fought hard to regain territory and rebuild temples. They managed to fight treachery of their own people while continuing to fight outsiders. A pride in our ancient account where India was teacher to rest of the world should inspire us to regain that intellectual leadership. It is also important for India to develop that self-belief.

Our elite who scorn achievements of ancient India should be challenged. One classic example is of River Sarasvati. Our journalists continue to call it mythical and mystical, even when there is adequate remote sensing data about existence of river that dried up around 1900 BC. They even decry efforts of Haryana Government to reactivate water flow system to a limited extent. Both rivers and cows were sacred to Hindus because they nourished them, but not for journalists. Media attacks any attempt at cow protection or revival of river saying Government can do better things. But then why should “better” come in the way of doing “good”. Why Governments so far and Governments in other states are not doing that “better” thing?

Hinduism continues to be under attack due to conversions and ethnic cleansing even within India. It is a penchant of elite to attack Hinduism from within and from outside. Many times their narrative is fashioned by what westerners or Leftists want to hear. Unfortunately that narrative is much skewed against Hinduism. It is cool to attribute most of the problems to caste system even when poverty and distress can affect anybody. It is cool to project any common problem a Dalit has as “Dalit problem” or problem of all Dalits. It is cool to accept even most regressive things like Hijab, child marriage and triple-talaq but even if handful temples among millions of temples does not allow women that becomes the worst blot on Hinduism. Even if many years ago Hindu mobs did something it should be remembered and repeated as a counter to incidents that happen probably every 24 hours due to Islamic terror in some part of the world or other. They brush away incidents when Hindus are victims. They ask for evidence when Hindus are victims and stubbornly persist with false evidence to paint Hindus as villains.

The stance of media is generally unfair to Hindus. They decry Ghar-Vapsi i.e. reconversion to Hinduism and at the same time become cheer leaders for conversion out of Hinduism. It is high time all conversions out of Hinduism are stopped. They over-play non-Hindu angst and ignore Hindu angst. They underplayed the issue of love jihad and most recently we have Hindu girls getting converted and joining ISIS. We pretty much have a well-funded industry to convert Hindus to Islam and Christianity. Over and above that foreign funding is used to develop an extremely regressive version of Islam on one hand and organize Christians against Hindus in particular and India at large. Dalits are used as a convenient tool to attack Hindus from inside, in the name of caste system. Ironically converted Dalits continue to face discrimination. Many even after conversion do not record that to draw benefits as SC and ST. All this happens with patronage of Churches. The Christianity as in rest of the world annihilated tribal culture in the name of conversions causing social unrest. This is in contrast to Hinduism which follows a synthetic approach. Thousands of articles were written about Gujarat Riots but hardly anybody shed a tear for the pilgrims who were burnt in the train. On top of that the main accused of train burning incident was absconding for 14 years and even his name is not popularly known and nobody in the media was tracking to ensure justice for Hindu victims. The issue of Kashmiri Pandits is hardly spoken off as if they are the wrong Kashmiris who deserve only to be wronged. Even when it comes to nationalism, freedom of expression is celebrated when voices are against the nation and frowned upon when the voices are nationalistic. Even courts have got into both sides of this muddle.

Overall there is lack of reciprocity and asymmetry in the narrative. The Muslim countries with few exceptions do not allow practice of Hinduism nor do they allow conversion of Muslims to other religions. At the same time we are expected to allow proliferation of Mosques, propagation of radical teaching and funded conversions in the name of freedom of religion. The Christian countries hardly take cognizance of Hindu communities in religious matters nor give them any special rights/allowance. They would simply not allow if Christians get converted to Hinduism the way large scale conversions of Hindus happens in India.

Another pet attack of media is related to cow protection. If a dog is killed it is murder, horse is killed it is murder but if cow is killed it is food. Even death sentence to a terrorist is considered uncivil as state is not supposed to kill. Section of media along with co-conspirators tried all tricks in the book to save killers of innocent people in the name of mercy but why are they cruel to deny legal protection to innocent cows. Then they talk about economics and death by other means. I suppose it is only ethical to look after somebody till their natural death, why cows should be exception? Is death through Halal any less painful than suffocating on plastic? Rather both kinds of deaths should be prevented and not traded with each other. Then there is an argument that West eats beef, we should also. But then countries like Korea consume dog meat. Will West follow them? Will India follow them? Each society has right to have its own taboos. One of the SC judgements said, "Hindu religion is marvellously catholic and elastic. Its social code is much more stringent, but amongst its different castes and sections, it exhibits wide diversity of practice. No trait is more marked of Hindu society in general than its **horror of using meat of the cow**". One more convoluted logic if people are not free to eat what they want and speak what they want, investments will stop. Middle-East even with ban on Pork has not suffered due to lack of investments nor China. Rather China is preferred 5 times more than India in manufacturing. We should do what is right for us. In reality Investors get put off by our terrible infrastructure than anything else. They want stability to engage in business in locations of their choice.

Hinduism has been pilloried for Caste System and singled out for discrimination. Those who do act as if racism, slavery, class divisions and tribes based on professions are not prevalent in other countries. Caste system has two aspects- Varna System and Jati System (Professional/Social groups) that practise endogamy. Coming to Varnas while India had four Europe had three namely Royalty, Priestly Class and producing class or commoners. Even today class differences prevail in European societies. The practice of endogamy based on profession, language, culture or any other unifying characteristic is not unique to India. It is human tendency to form such groups without which language, culture and tacit professional knowledge would not have survived. The other angle is about discrimination. India has taken steps to promote social mobility, but it is still a work in progress. We need to inculcate greater respect to dignity of labour. For those who are supposedly fighting discrimination, their villain is Manu. Can they explain how caste based discrimination of Dalits is practiced by OBC Tamilians who call themselves Dravidians far removed from the North Indian Manu. How can one explain pecking order even among castes and sub-castes? Can it all be blamed on Manu, who simply spoke about four Varnas?

On the positive side Varna system ensured reduction in conflict of interest by isolating pursuit of power, pursuit of knowledge, pursuit of wealth and service orientation, which made it possible for society to work together in a harmonious manner. There was acceptance of importance of role played by each section and no section could do without the other. The focus also was on personality and character than just competencies to do a given job. While there is a strong narrative against the caste system, but our laws and actions have converted the social construct to political and governance construct thus further perpetuating it. The caste system was never rigid as people had to pursue different professions to make a living. In fact, there were also Shudra Kings and even today there are Brahmins taking up farming . Overall there was focus on one's Dharma – noble duty in the service of society.

At a sociological level we have to accept the reality of communities. For a modern person, a club may be acceptable but not caste, while both are exclusive. We should rather leverage communities to achieve welfare. We have to liberate communities so that they can help themselves. It is also important for state to engage with individuals directly than through community barriers. As Rahul Gandhi correctly said, poverty is a state of mind and it can only be overcome through self-confidence. It is important for Government to encourage individual initiative.

Hinduism comes under attack because of quota politics. That is the single-most factor that blocks unity of Hindus. Instead of being in denial about castes and communities we should encourage communities to work towards self-development and welfare. Let them set up educational institutions, health-care facilities and community asset such as water bodies on their own or in collaboration with other communities. Let Government focus on setting standards, model institutions and promote professionalism and leave it to the communities and private individuals to run the institutions. To ease the matters we should extend the right of setting one's own institutions to all communities and not just minorities that way reduce the stress on the system. The communities which are economically sound but educationally backward can set up their own institutions. The communities which are educationally forward can reach greater heights through their own initiative. The Government can focus its support where communities cannot step in. In addition the Government can support through scholarships all the communities. The organizations who want to promote Hindu culture should set up institutions for all Hindus.

On one extreme we have lot of barriers to access and on another extreme we have excessive inclusiveness. Rather we should go by reasonable and adequate entry criteria that are needed to perform a professional role may it be that of a Doctor, Lawyer or Engineer. Even for admission to courses we should set up recommended standards through common examinations and then give institutions full freedom to decide whom to teach, how to teach and what to teach. The Government can control quality through rigorous exist tests that include interviews, which should be used to give ratings to the institutions. The quality of institutions should be monitored through the learning outcomes of students than counting anything else in the institutions. As a philosophy we should encourage people to earn their right and own their path to success than give a legal right that is delivered on platter.

Today there are special provisions for minorities to set up their own educational institutions and run their places of worship. Instead such laws should be extended to all communities. So any community should be free to set up educational institutions for its own benefit and run temples. The differential approach among religious institutions of Hindus vs. others should also stop. Anything like financing travel for Haj should be left to the community members. The Government in general should not intervene except in the matter of public infrastructure, security and welfare. The Government should also leave alone peculiar traditions of individual temples, as long as men, women and children have adequate access to places of worship. Nor should Government provide legal cover to any discrimination. The role of the Government should be limited to maintaining public order.

Today there are special laws to protect Dalits from violence or any kind of abuse. Such laws should be expanded to address any community. We have journalists and opinion-makers that cannot sleep well unless using some pretext they indulge in Brahmin bashing and abuse Hinduism. In the name of Dalit assertion they attack broader Hinduism in particular and weaken India at large. Any divide is a matter of delight for Christian Missionaries, caste based parties, leftists and Islamists.

Hinduism comes under attack from multiple fronts. It comes from elite who demean religious practices in the name of atheism and rationality, whereas more open-minded approach would have been to be agnostic. It comes from cheer leaders who celebrate Dalits getting converted to other religions as if discrimination will not continue there. Ironically if an effort is made to convert people back to Hinduism all hell breaks loose. The Ghar Vapsi was questioned but not religious conversions, by foreign funded Christian and Islamic organizations which induce to convert. There is also conversion under duress when Hindus are in minority. Hindus were in double digits in many Muslim majority areas may it be Pakistan, Bangladesh or Kashmir, now they have come to single digit. There is invasion and takeover of districts due to migration or population explosion which results in

adverse demographics for Hindus. This has happened in Kerala, West Bengal and UP. The denial of right to worship as it happened in Malda. Forcible conversion or conversion under the guise of love popularly known as love jihad also happens. Conversions are also effected through Social Media using propaganda on vulnerable women already emotionally attached to Jihadist men. Finally general population explosion of minorities as they practice child marriage, polygamy and lack of adoption of family planning induces a degree of insecurity among Hindus. Abusing Hindu practices and attacking Hindu beliefs through Beef Parties is applauded by so called liberals.

Hinduism needs to change its stance from non-missionary religion to one that accepts new followers. So far this happens at most at the individual level. This should be expanded to include families and communities. The caste groups should be open to welcome converted to come back. In Kashmir Pandits denied re-entry to converted brethren and now are paying for that. In addition the higher learning on religion and philosophy of Hindus to be thrown open to all Hindus without any barriers. The majority of people in India to Europe practised a variant of Vedic religion just few millennia back. There is no reason why they cannot be welcomed back. In summary, Hinduism should be more open and not non-Missionary. Hindus should propagate actively, and attract commoners as well as those who are looking for Vedantic knowledge. They should build communities of followers so that the religion takes root far and wide. Hinduism should be open to welcome back aall those who got converted for one reason or other, all Indo-Europeans and others in Asia to come back to Hinduism that has maintained their traditions even now and all those who want to find a new home in Hinduism

In India lot of policies as well as demands are justified in the name of the poor. More often than not this is less than honest. As per Hinduism and as well as Gandhian view, poverty is neither to be celebrated nor wealth to be scored. The whole point of Karma Yoga in Bhagvad Gita is for each person to do his duty without focus on rewards. In that sense it is perfectly respectable to add value and earn the fruits of action. Encouraging people to be dependent on Government in every possible manner through proliferation of subsidies and schemes instead of empowering them to stand on their own feet is hardly in sync with Hindu values. However supporting even the poorest so that they live with dignity with basic needs being satisfied is very consistent with our traditions. The main point is that we should avoid welfare being self-perpetuating cottage industry. In summary every person should earn by adding value to society and at the same time be guided by finest value system. The Government after Government pamper the poor and humour the rich, core middle class values of debt as a sacred obligation and ethic of hard work and morality are abandoned. Importance of ethics in public life needs to be reemphasized. If the country aligns to core middle class values and aims to expand the middle class that is better than perpetuating poverty and inequalities. Middle classes are forgotten after polls. The rich get a say by contributing to parties and funding politicians.

Indian citizenship should be a privilege that comes with certain responsibilities. Those who attack nation, its security forces and those who wait for the day where it gets further partitioned and those for whom nation is secondary should not have such privilege. Those supporting terrorism and violence and expressing selective anguish and continually trying to exploit fault lines in Hindu Society through conversion and terrorism should be exiled.