

## Image Or Reality?

■ Dr. M.N. Buch

The Hindu faith accepts God as *nirakar*, or He who has no shape. It also accepts God as *sakar*, or One who has a recognisable form. Being totally catholic in its approach Hinduism or, the Sanatan Dharma, allows worship both of the *nirakar* and of the *sakar* and in the case of the latter it permits each of the faithful to cast God in the image of his choice. That is what has created the Hindu pantheon in which it is said that there are thirty-three crores gods and goddesses. The followers of the Semitic faiths, especially the Christians and the Muslims, consider Hinduism as a religion of idol worship, which is polytheistic to the point of paganism. In reality Hinduism is monotheistic, though not monolithic. It ultimately focuses on the single Brahmatma, or Great Soul. Every human soul has the right to moksha, or oneness with the Brahmatma, which is the Sanatan's idea of salvation. This faith has no concept of hell because it believes in rebirth till such time as one is entitled to ultimate salvation or moksh.

This is not an article on religion but rather the translation of the concept of *nirakar* and *sakar* into politics and governance. Every political party fights an election on the basis of its ideology, its programmes, plans and promises. The ideology determines the programme and the programme is supposed to consist of what the party will deliver if voted to power. This is the stage of *nirakar* in politics because ideology is abstract and the programmes as enunciated are also mere words and have no concrete shape. This ideology, this programme, these plans are formless until they are converted into specific projects, properly budgeted and assigned to an implementation agency which will take suitable action to give concrete shape to the projects. In other words, the formless or *nirakar* god of ideology is valid only up to the time of election. When the party comes to power it has to give form to the formless dreams of that party and in a way the actions of the party in power have to be judged by the extent to which it is able to convert the *nirakar* into the *sakar*. In religion we deal with the abstract world of faith, but in government one has to deal with the real world and with concrete reality.

The BJP government, of which Narendra Modi is the Prime Minister, came to power on a very specific agenda and programme, which was to provide firm government after ten years of a coalition which had spent almost its entire period of power in making compromises. This was still an idea, but the people accepted it and after thirty years of coalition politics they voted a single party to power with an absolute majority. No doubt in the Rajya Sabha the new ruling party did not have a majority, but even in the matter of legislation it does have the option of convening a joint sitting of both the Houses under Article 108 of the Constitution so that controversial legislation need not be stuck because the Upper House does not approve it. On

taking over Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a number of new initiatives for which he made public announcements from time to time. He said that his agenda was:-

1. To clean the Ganga.
2. To rid all settlements of filth, to provide a toilet in each house and ensure that all settlements were kept clean under a programme which he termed as Swachh Bharat.
3. To encourage skill development, formally through the education system and informally through other types of vocational programmes and thus give India a highly trained labour force.
4. To encourage manufacture in India so that the secondary sector becomes the driving force of the economy and creates a huge number of employment opportunities, thus helping in eliminating poverty.
5. To create a hundred new smart cities.
6. To have a foreign policy which, whilst extending the hand of friendship to our neighbours, including Pakistan, also ensured the security of the State.
7. To use the soft power of India to project it internationally as a country to be reckoned with.

All these ideals would remain formless till such time as the departments of government dealing with them come out with specific programmes and projects for implementation. Has that happened? Has the *nirakar* become *sakar* or is on the way to achieve form?

Deepak Parekh, the highly respected banker and economic thinker, has recently stated that nine months into his regime Narendra Modi has still not been able to create an environment in which one would feel comfortable in doing business in India and with India. The message necessary to assure industrialists, both domestic and foreign, that India has shed its former political inhibitions about private enterprise, that the bureaucracy will help rather than hinder business, that while insisting on fair play industry will have a level playing field vis-à-vis labour, that the legal system will ensure that every case of civil dispute is decided in the shortest possible time, is still not coming through clearly. Of course India cannot afford to give the kind of carte blanche to the industrialists which China has done, but nevertheless industry does expect a clear-cut set of rules which will determine the behaviour pattern of industry, government and labour. By now government should have come out with a very specific policy paper, spelling out the role of industry, the financial institutions, government and organised labour so that every participants in the policy of developing a strong secondary sector clearly knows what is expected of him. One sees no evidence of this.

Let us take another sector, power. Electricity is the prime mover of almost all activities in which man participates. Agriculture needs power for all its operations, especially for lift irrigation. The transport industry needs power in the form of electricity for rail traction and an energy source for the automobile engine. Telecommunication needs power for the operation of the system. Industry needs power virtually for every single operation that it undertakes. Citizens need domestic power and commerce needs power so that it can run its business houses, its shops and hotels, its warehouses and cold storage facilities. The social sector needs power so that schools, colleges and hospitals can function. Defence forces are themselves massive users of energy, be it in terms of electricity or in terms of petroleum products. Power is produced conventionally through use of fossil fuels, relatively clean hydro power, through nuclear energy and now, increasingly, through such nonconventional sources as solar and wind energy. Many of these energy sources, when converted into forward motion or into electricity, exude pollutants which can adversely affect water, air and soil. This government must produce a holistic policy paper which spells out exactly how it intends to generate adequate power to propel India forward into affluence which, in turn, is equitably shared so that there is general prosperity. The paper has to be very specific in its programmes and projects, their funding and scheduling and the manner of implementation through properly empowered agencies. The abstract, which is what power is, would then be turned into reality, quantitatively and qualitatively, to be measured by productive use which creates industries, gives gainful employment and results in a product which is tangible, whether it be in terms of agricultural produce or manufactured goods, in the additional tonnage carried by the transportation system and the ultimate consumption of the end product by the average citizen. Is there such holistic thinking in government?

Let us take the agricultural sector. Two recent examples are quoted of how there is a significant improvement in agriculture. One is that of Gujarat where production is undoubtedly increasing at a healthy rate. What is overlooked is that the extension of the Narmada Irrigation System has brought large areas of Gujarat under irrigated farming and it is the significant improvement of water availability to the farmers which has brought about a sustained increase in yield. In a way this parallels the story of East Punjab after partition when the canals flowing out of the Bhakra Nangal complex brought large areas under irrigation and created the green revolution. Does government intend to replicate these examples in the States where monsoon conditions are inhibiting agriculture?

The second example quoted is that of Madhya Pradesh where government claims a 24 to 25 percent annual increase in yield. One finds this claim to be highly dubious because there has been no revolutionary increase in the irrigated area of Madhya Pradesh in the last ten years and, therefore, one is not too sure whether or not to believe what the government claims, awards from the Central Government notwithstanding. The outreach of the agriculture universities in the State has not significantly increased. The research output of the universities is not

remarkable, there are no new varieties of crops which have brought about a dramatic increase in yield and, therefore, doubt continues to linger. It is claimed that the State has made remarkable progress in horticulture. Horticulture is so small a component of agriculture that by itself horticulture cannot give us a 25 percent growth of the whole sector. The statistics put out by government in this behalf are interesting. In the State diary for 2013 the net sown area, the total cropped area and the double cropped area figures are given in terms of gross for the State. In the 2015-2016 diary, however, the per capita gross cropped area figures are given and these indicate a doubling between 2005 and 2006 and 2012 and 2013. However, comparative figures of shift of population from agricultural to nonagricultural occupations during this period are not given. If fewer people are working in agriculture obviously the per capita cropped area would surely increase because fewer people are now cultivating the same area of land. The use of misleading statistics is a very old game which governments tend to play and, therefore, without a more detailed study one finds it difficult to accept that Madhya Pradesh is today a State which has revolutionised agriculture. It is the duty of the Central Government and the State Government to give a detailed analysis of MP's claim in the field of agriculture so that we are not lulled by a statistically created myth. Anyway we need a major policy paper from the present government on what sort of holistic planning it is doing for agriculture so that in the entire chain from land and the people who cultivate it right up to the consumer who uses agricultural products, a logically interconnected policy is generated which will substantially enhance the role of agriculture in our economy.

Education is another sector which needs a very strong policy framework within which we can bring about an education revolution in India. Our school base from the village primary school all the way up to the higher secondary school is extremely weak, resting as it does on a foundation of the village school which has very little infrastructure, almost no teaching aids and teachers who are themselves only semi literate. Can we build a strong middle, secondary and higher secondary system on such foundations? It is also a fact that in the hierarchical society that we are, we consider general education to be at a higher plane than vocational education and, therefore, the infrastructure for imparting practical training is virtually nonexistent except in the odd vocational school, industrial training institute or polytechnic. Vocational education as a parallel too and part of normal education is not even a concept in this country. What does government intend to do to rectify this? Will a village school, whilst imparting education or, rather, literacy, also be a centre for training the child to be a better agriculturist so that his input at farm level improves agriculture as a whole?

The system of higher education is also caste bound. The college at mofussil level is at best a poor quality teaching shop which barely assists the students in obtaining a degree. Most State universities are a joke in which there is very little teaching and less research. We have a few centres of excellence. Our institutes of national importance and the occasional university which

has enjoyed a good reputation even in British times are excellent, but where is a policy paper which aims at ensuring that the general level of collegiate education is raised to an extent where it genuinely imparts education to students, increases the knowledge threshold and develops their mind to an extent where the students raise questions and then do the research necessary to push forward the frontiers of science, technology, management, the humanities and social sciences and the liberal arts? A government which allows 15 Central Universities to be without Vice Chancellors for the better part of a year, or six Indian Institutes of Technology, four Indian Institutes of Management, the School of Planning and Architecture at Bhopal and the National Institutes of Technical Teachers Training and Research in Bhopal to be without Directors can hardly claim to be doing any serious thinking on improving education in India. We cannot afford to have such a casual attitude to education.

One of the major announcements of the present government is that it will seriously tackle the problem of pollution and contamination of the Ganga and restore its water quality so that it becomes pure. The logic of tackling pollution in a river whose length is about 4000 kilometres, whose basin covers approximately one million square kilometres of area and which contains about 40 percent of India's population is one of such great national importance that it must be accorded a very high priority in any scheme of development. Because of the sheer magnitude of the problem we need first and foremost a policy frame within which the work will be undertaken. The formulation of this policy frame means the complete involvement of the Chief Ministers of the States which contribute water to the Gangetic system and, in particular, the Chief Ministers of U.P, Bihar and West Bengal. What steps has the Prime Minister taken to bring all these States on board and to arrive at a consensus, rather an unanimity, in which there is complete agreement on what need to be done and what are the broad priorities? We need the institutional arrangement of a Council headed by the Prime Minister which prepares a broad policy frame, to be assisted by a very high powered Ganga Development Authority headed by a scientist of note, a technical expert or an administrator with a proven track record of achievement. It is this Authority which will draw up a list of priorities, prepare detailed plans for every segment of the Ganga and for every area of action, do the budgeting and obtain the financial allocation, identify and empower specific agencies for implementing each project, monitor their activities and then lay down the ground rules for maintenance. Whether or not government is working on the issues raised above, the people of India now need to be taken into confidence about the plans, the structure of the agencies involved and the programme of implementation. It is only then that we can expect the citizens to participate in the cleansing of the Ganga and for this also we need the ground rules of how to make the citizens of each segment of the Ganga partners in the exercise. Apart from the occasional statement from Uma Bharti, the Minister Incharge, that she would clean the Ganga in two years, one sees little evidence of actual action on the ground which will convert the dream of a clean Ganga into the reality of a clean Ganga. To give one small example,

the entire filth of Uttar Kashi town located in the higher reaches of the Bhagirathi empties into the river. It is argued that this does not pollute because by the time the river reaches the plains all this has been neutralised through dilution and aerobic and anaerobic action coupled with oxidation through velocity of flow. Do we intend to buy this argument? Has the influx of sewage at Uttar Kashi been intercepted, diverted and treated? If not, can anyone believe that the filth which goes into the river in such large towns of Allahabad, Kanpur and Varanasi would actually be stopped from entering the river? Cleaning the Ganga is a policy decision and will remain just that, an idea which is a phantom. Actually cleaning the Ganga by undertaking the projects which would achieve the objective would give flesh and blood to the phantom and make it a reality. Dreaming is in the realm of politics but doing is in the realm of governance. When are we going to see any governance here?

What applies to the Ganga applies to the dream of Swachh Bharat also. It equally applies to the question of tackling Naxalism. About 25 percent of our districts are under Naxalite control where the writ of the government does not run. The Naxalites are violent, ruthless and have constantly targeted the police and other government agencies. We talk big about tackling Naxalism, but when will we realise that they are an even bigger threat to our national security than the intruders from Pakistan who are performing acts of terror in the country? When will we realise that platitudes about development of backward districts which are the victims of Left Wing extremism can only deliver results when at least a reasonable semblance of security and law and order has been restored to these districts? One does not want operational details, but certainly we the citizens are entitled to know what is the publicly pronounced stance of government towards such violence and what are the steps that government intends to take to eradicate the violent manifestation of Naxalism in these 150 districts within a given time frame. This is the least that can be expected of a government which has been given a clear mandate to govern and which claims that it will give firm government to India.

More than anything else one needs to know how government intends to restore civil service morale, ruthlessly eradicate corruption, weed out all the dead wood from government, reward merit and achievement and sack those who are useless. In other words, how does government intend to give us a delivery mechanism which can translate the *nirakar* into the *sakar*. If Narendra Modi succeeds in this he will prove himself to be a great Prime Minister. If he does not then he will enter the hall of infamy in which the mediocre jostle with the worthless for primacy of place.

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