

HINDUISM IS ALIVE AND KICKING

• By Dr. M.N. Buch

On 28th February, 2010 the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (R.S.S.) organised a Hindu Samagam, or conclave, at Bhopal, which was addressed solely by the Sar Sanghchalak of R.S.S., Shri Mohan Bhagwat. The main theme of Shri Bhagwat's speech was that every Hindu is necessarily an Indian and that every Indian is a Hindu. I am not too sure whether the governments of Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom or United States of America would agree that Hindu citizens of those countries would automatically remain Indians. Regarding all Indians being Hindu, was Shri Bhagwat referring to Hindu in terms of how the Arabs call all Indians regardless of religion, or did he mean that every Indian automatically converts to Hinduism? Could he mean that a person who is not a Hindu is no longer an Indian? Shri Bhagwat's statement, therefore, is open to many interpretations, all of them fraught with danger.

Those who live in India are bound by the Constitution, whose very Preamble defines India as a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic". Part II of the Constitution which refers to citizenship makes no mention of religion being one of the factors which determines citizenship. Article 14 of the Constitution mandates equality before law and Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste sect or place of birth. Article 19 gives the fundamental right of freedom of speech, etc. but sub-clause (2) of Article 19 permits the State to apply, by law, reasonable restrictions on this right. Article 51 A makes it a fundamental duty of every citizen to abide by the Constitution. Shri Bhagwat's statement in the Hindu Samagam at Bhopal questions the very basis of citizenship and it certainly creates a divide between Indians who happen to be Hindu and those who happen to be from some other religion. He cannot do this unless the Constitution is amended and India becomes a theocratic republic. This can only be done if Parliament agrees to amend the Constitution accordingly under Article 368 and I am absolutely certain that such an amendment would be struck down by Supreme Court because it has already ruled that the basic features of the Constitution are not amenable to amendment. To advocate that the Constitution should be scrapped would be tantamount to sedition and would invite penalties under section 124 A, IPC. I hope Shri Bhagwat realises this while making statements of the kind he made at Bhopal.

I have very little knowledge of our scriptures, but from what little I do know the word 'Hindu' is not used in the Veda, Upanishad, Purana, Jataka Tales, the Gita or any other ancient religious tract. The religion which the Aryans followed was Sanatan Dharm and Jean Le Mee, in his book 'Hymns from the Rig Veda' writes "Hinduism, according to its own tradition and belief, is not a religion belonging to a particular people or country but is what remains of an ancient system of knowledge, the Sanatan Dharm which, in another age was the inheritance of the whole of mankind. It, therefore, sees itself as the holder of a tradition common to all men, encompassing all that revelation and man's efforts have produced in terms of knowledge". What we call Hinduism, therefore, is the Sanatan Dharm which, being universal, excludes no faith or the follower of any faith. It is not the narrow Hinduism which R.S.S. advocates.

The word 'Hindu' or Hindvi was first used by the Arabs when they came in contact with India to describe the people who live on or beyond the Sindhu River. My contention is that the word is of Arab origin rather than of Sanskrit origin. Surprisingly Sanskrit does not have a translation of the word 'religion' which, in Arabic, is Mazhab. Dharma transcends religion because it is a way of life, a code of conduct, a search for truth. An atheist whose conduct is ideal is dharmic, a believer who indulges in

wrongdoing is an adharmi. When the language of Hinduism, which word is used in its present day context of being a religion, does not have a word for religion, how can we pronounce dogma?

The other major source of strength is the fact that built into the religion is a self-healing process whereby whenever the Sanatan Dharm has moved towards orthodoxy, there have been internal revolts. Jainism and Buddhism were such a revolt against Brahmanical tyranny. Adi Sankara led a revolt against orthodoxy. Ramkrishan Paramhansa and Swami Dayanand Saraswati were great reformists who pulled the religion back from the brink. Such a religion has no room for orthodoxy and even less for bigotry. Does Shri Bhagwat realise this?

In the context of the Samagam I would like to put a few questions to Shri Bhagwat, in the almost certainty that he will not reply. My questions are: (1) Can you quote the scripture in which the word 'Hindu' is used? (2) Because Sanskrit has no word for religion how do you define Hinduism? (3) If only a Hindu can be an Indian national, what happens to those who follow other religions? Is it the case of R.S.S. that such persons will be deprived of citizenship, or treated as second class citizens or, in the worst case scenario, thrown out of India? (4) If a person is born a Hindu and subsequently becomes an atheist, will he lose his citizenship rights? In Islam and Christianity abandoning the religion is tantamount to apostasy. Hinduism has no concept of either heresy or apostasy because, as already stated above, what is important is that we should be Dharmic and not that one should be a believer. How does Shri Bhagwat intend to reconcile this contradiction?

Respected Bhagwat Saheb, you are head of an organisation which wields great influence in India. You should be concerned about peace, harmony, the well being of every Indian, the welfare of the country, its development, economic strength and respect in the world polity. Please shun postures which may divide rather than unite, cause strife rather than peace, weaken rather than strengthen India. In that lies the good of the nation.
