

The Manmohan Bunker

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The Vivekananda International Foundation is basically an intellectual think tank where experienced administrators, diplomats, high ranking soldiers, officers who have handled law and order and intelligence put their heads together, cogitate on issues which affect the nation at large and in an environment which is politically neutral try and suggest various policy options which are available which, if implemented, would help in making India a powerful, prosperous and progressive nation. The question arises whether it would be legitimate for the Foundation to accommodate a paper which might, by stretching a point, be considered as tilting towards a bias. Normally the answer should be 'No'. But in the run up to 16th May 2014, when the votes in the 2014 general election will be counted and results declared, there have been some extraordinary developments which do call for comment and, therefore, it is respectfully submitted that perhaps VIF would be justified in carrying a paper in this behalf.

H. Trevor-Roper, a British historian, wrote a seminal book called "The Last Days of Hitler". Hitler and his close colleagues were sheltered in the Hitler bunker buried deep within the bowels of the earth in Berlin. From the West the British and American Armies had swept through Germany and from the East the Soviet Forces under Marshal Zhukov had entered the outskirts of Berlin. Germany had virtually lost the Second World War and Hitler, the megalomaniac, no longer held sway except over the bunker itself. Yet he still thought that there were imaginary armies, actually nonexistent which he could throw into battle and defeat the Allies even at this late stage. Trevor-Roper's description of the last days of Hitler is graphic in the extreme and shows how, despite Armageddon and the biblical Apocalypse hours away, Hitler still lived in his world of make believe. We all know the ultimate fate of Hitler, his colleagues and his Nazi regime, but before they ended the road to their defeat was laid over millions of bodies and entire countries were reduced to rubble.

India is not a Nazi dictatorship because it is a deeply entrenched democracy. The difference between a democracy and a dictatorship is that whereas a dictatorship ends when a dictator is removed, democracy is a continuing process of government in which periodical elections are held, sometimes one party or group of parties gains power and sometimes another one does. Governments change and when a new government comes to power it tries to govern according to its ideology, policies and programmes. In the United States of America, because there is very little major ideological difference between the Republicans and the Democrats, a change of government only brings about marginal change of policy. In Britain, by contrast, when in 1945 the Labour Party led by Clement Atlee defeated the Conservative Party led by Winston Churchill, it introduced socialism and radically changed the economic and social structure of Britain. Despite this in a democracy there is a thread of consistency which is continuous and ensures that there is a flow from one government to another in terms of political approach and the commitment to the principles of democracy and the provisions of the Constitution. In Britain the supremacy of Parliament in legislation and of the Judiciary in adjudication, as also neutrality of the Civil Service remained unchanged even when Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives came back to power. Because of the neutrality of the Civil Service and the effectiveness of the Election Commission, Indira Gandhi and the Congress Party lost and the Janata Government came to power in 1977. Morarji Desai was a very stern and firm administrator, but he eschewed the path of vendetta and gave complete space to Indira Gandhi

and the Congress Party not only to function but also make a bid for power, which happened in 1980. This brought Indira Gandhi to power in the general election of 1980. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the NDA Government continued with the basic decency of a democratic system and Sonia and her family were given a place of honour, provided facilities of residence, movement and protection and treated with respect. That is why in 2004 as the lead party in the UPA coalition the Congress could return to power.

2014 is a different story because suddenly an alternative to the Congress has appeared on the horizon in the shape of a resurgent BJP and a strong leader, Narendra Modi. In 2002, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was Prime Minister Gujarat witnessed the horrible scene of an entire coach load of Ram bhakts being burnt alive at Godhra with the consequential communal riots which engulfed Gujarat. Of course when we view the events from a distance we find that the six (now eight) districts of Saurashtra, three districts of northern Gujarat and Kutch District were either free of rioting or there was very quick intervention by the district administration, which maintained peace. In the central and southern districts of Ahmedabad, Mehsana, Kheda, Baroda, Panchmahals, Bharuch, Balsar there was a great deal of violence which took about a week to put down. Here the district administration reacted slowly and it is said that in Ahmedabad and Baroda ministers of government prevented the police from doing its duty. Surat, because of a competent Collector and an active Police Commissioner in the city and S.P. in the rural areas remained relatively calm, which proves that if the administration at the district level functions effectively, law and order will be maintained.

The consequences of 2002 was that Narendra Modi, who was then a novice in government, was painted as the devil incarnate, an image which Modi initially did nothing to counter because some of his speeches were definitely intemperate and could be considered provocative. Since that day the demonisation of Modi by the Congress, the liberals and the so-called secularists has continued apace and no effort has been spared to try and incriminate him in the riots, in cases of encounters and generally to try and book him for criminal offences. All such efforts, including investigation by a Special Task Force supervised by the Supreme Court, have failed to turn up any evidence which could lead to the prosecution of Modi, but that has not deterred people who are trying to vilify him. The fact that BJP under Modi's leadership has won three successive State Assembly elections in Gujarat, largely on account of the performance of government in the matter of development, law and order and the steady rise of the Gujarat economy has not in any way moderated the continuing attacks on Modi by his opponents.

Why is this happening? Narendra Modi, the RSS pracharak, Narendra Modi, the party apparatchik, was hardly visible and was largely ignored. Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat was another matter. The 2002 riots gave an opportunity to the Congress and the liberal lobby to attack Modi, but in the process what was brushed aside was the manner in which Modi and his government handled the disastrous earthquake of 2002. This is perhaps the most successful example of disaster management ever witnessed in India. Nor have the achievements of the Gujarat Government in improving education, health care, enrolment of girl children in school, the continuing improvement of agriculture and the development of physical infrastructure, especially power and roads, the massive industrial growth have all been either ignored or denigrated. Clever use has been made of statistics to show, for example, that there is poverty, malnutrition and ill-health in Gujarat. Because statistics are not presented longitudinally those presented by Modi's opponents do not compare what was with what after comparative charts are presented. Only then should judgement be pronounced on whether or not there has been progress. Presenting an incomplete picture is a well known tactic in spreading misinformation and people like Jairam Ramesh and Kapil Sibal seem to excel at it.

That is but natural if the objective is not the truth but the demonisation of a person seen as a potential rival.

Why is this happening? One has to look at the Congress as it is today. This is the party which, because of Mahatma Gandhi's self-abnegation, asceticism, total submergence of self, emerged as a party in which there was a wide based leadership. This survived Gandhi's death because Nehru himself was innately decent. It ended when Indira Gandhi came to power because she, either because of some unexplained sense of insecurity, perhaps because she had an authoritarian streak in her makeup, perhaps because she could not brook rivals centralised all authority in herself and every tall leader was cut down. The culmination of this was the replacement of the party as such by the hegemony of Indira Gandhi and her family, initially Sanjay, then Rajiv and now Sonia and Rahul Gandhi and, from time to time, Priyanka. The focus of Sonia Gandhi is her son, Rahul, to whom she would like to leave the Congress as a legacy and the Prime Ministership as an inherent right. The net result is that today there is no identifiable Congress Party in terms of grass-roots organisation and a democratically elected leadership. There is only Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, which is further proved by the fact that in the 2014 election campaign it is only Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka who seem to be canvassing. There is no big name leadership which participates in an active campaign, so much so that in Madhya Pradesh no one can point out who is actually the leader of the Congress Party for the 2014 elections. D.P.Mishra, Arjun Singh and Digvijaya Singh were leaders in their own right, but the team which is fighting the elections in 2014 has no leader. It is almost as if the Congress has gone into battle with no hope of winning, a belief further strengthened by the fact that the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and the Minister for Information and Broadcasting have stayed away from the hustings, thus sending a message that they are not confident of winning.

A multi-party democracy in the Westminster model of parliamentary government makes it almost mandatory for there to be political parties with their own ideologies, on which foundation they make policies, programmes, agenda of work. Political parties are supposed to fight elections on the basis of their respective ideologies and programmes and in fighting the election in a mature democracy each political party tries to convince the electorate that it should support that party whose ideology, programmes and practices appear to be best suited to promote the national interests. A positively run election campaign would highlight what the party stands for and also, if the party has ever been in power, tell the electorate where it went wrong the last time, what were the high points of achievements and how does it intend to go about promoting public welfare if elected to office. In the process it would be legitimate to point out the mistakes, shortcomings and failures of the party in power and state how this party would avoid these pitfalls. If the electorate is convinced that what is being presented is a fair picture it might decide to vote for the party making the election pitch. What is not desirable, if not positively illegitimate is to only go on running down the rival party, abuse its leaders and engage in public slanging matches. It is legitimate for the Congress, therefore, to present its own agenda and inform the public why in the opinion of the Congress a BJP government would not be in the interest of the people of the country. But calling Narendra Modi, who is leading the BJP election campaign, a mass murderer, a rank communalist, a wife deserter, a liar and worse has no place in a decently run election campaign. To present facts only partially, to allege that land has been gifted to industrialists by Narendra Modi at throw away prices without simultaneously pointing out that this policy has prevailed in Gujarat even under the Congress Government, to try and mobilise a community on account of religion against Narendra Modi and the BJP by fanning fear psychosis are all tactics which have no place in a democracy which calls itself free.

Unfortunately that is about all that the Congress and the so called liberal lobby seem to be doing in the 2014 elections. Why is this so?

One could attempt to answer the above question by looking at the background in which the 2014 election is being fought. The UPA Government has been in power for a decade. In the first five years it had the Left as an associate partner and whatever the other faults of the Left may be, it is still relatively honest, has a genuine concern for the poor, has not surrendered to the business lobby and in international relations is not prepared to permit either the United States or the European Union to enjoy a hegemony in India which virtually subordinates our foreign policy to western economic and political priorities and objectives. Till the Left fell out with the Congress over the nuclear agreement with the United States, the Left ensured that the Congress led coalition was kept in check in the matter of labour policy, industrial policy and government's attitude towards private business. This was a very healthy check on what is now described as crony capitalism. By parting with the Left the Congress itself has lost its moorings and today one is not sure where the party stands ideologically. The net result is that in the past few years the Congress has made horrendous and unforgivable compromises in matters which brooked no compromise and that has resulted in corruption, crony capitalism and a virtual breakdown of purposive government. That is why the Congress is in trouble and is panicking because the prospect of a BJP run government coming to power with the consequences thereof for the Congress has horrified the party.

The collapse of the Third Reich actually began with the two major battles of Stalingrad in the Soviet Union and El Alamein in the Western Desert. These two battles proved that the Nazi armies were not invincible and could be defeated and though it took another three years of very hard fighting, the road for Germany was continuously downhill. Germany had committed such atrocities in the conquered countries, the hatred had reached such levels, that forgiveness could neither be expected nor given. Perhaps Hitler's increasing megalomania and the panicky reaction to the progress made by the Allies was partly a result of the feeling that defeat meant annihilation of the Nazi Party and the German State. The first sign of panic was the determination not to retreat, even if it meant the destruction of Germany's Third Army commanded by Field Marshal Paulus. When defeat followed defeat a panicked German regime first thought of super weapons such as the V-1 and V-2 rockets, a search for the ultimate weapon which would obviously be nuclear, campaigns like one in the Ardennes which ultimately ended in disaster and in the last moments in the Hitler bunker, orders to nonexistent armies and ultimately mass suicide in the bunker, with only Martin Bormann escaping. To give the Congress credit, it has not indulged in the kind of genocide practised by Hitler, even metaphorically, but in a democracy that is in any case not possible. Even taking as gospel all allegations made against Narendra Modi in connection with the 2002 riots, the institutions of government are so strong that sooner rather than later the law and order machinery would have swung into action and, if the worst came to the worst the Centre would have intervened, including with military force. There is also an innate decency in the makeup of the average citizen so that the saner elements of society would have stepped in and in fact did. But the fact is that Gujarat had rioting confined to seven districts. After the initial inertia government did step in and within a week order was restored. Worse things have happened in States administered by the Congress such as Maharashtra and Assam, U.P. where there is a Samajwadi Party Government and Delhi in 1984 when it is the Congress which had the Union Territory of Delhi under its administrative control. In all these cases no attempt was ever made to carry out anything like the decade long campaign against the Chief Minister in person as has been done by the Congress in the case of Narendra Modi. This despite the fact that the Supreme Court controlled STF, CBI and various agencies of the Government of India have failed to find any

evidence of the complicity of Modi in the 2002 riots. If anything, Gujarat's post 2002 performance in maintaining law and order is better than that of other States and in the last eleven years there have been no communal riots in that State. In all these eleven years Narendra Modi has been the Chief Minister and if he were the ogre which the Congress has painted him to be there would be no communal peace in Gujarat. Can we not deduce from this that Narendra Modi is not evil, is a good administrator and has run a tight ship?

Actually the liberal lobby's attacks on Modi are driven by a perverse logic which owes its origin to the kind of panic which prevailed in the Hitler bunker. The objective is to keep Modi out of power lest he prove that a BJP led government is not to be feared, in fact is to be welcomed because it promises to perform adequately well to bring about a genuine transformation in Indian polity, society and economy. If that happens then what will be the future of parties like the Congress which have been long on promises and somewhat short on delivery, especially in the matter of minority welfare? It is to ensure that this never happens that the Congress and its liberal allies have continued with their programme to paint Modi black and thus ensure that the electorate does not choose him for power.

The UPA Government is now in the last ten days of office. This is the stage of winding up, on thinking about the post electoral organisation, agenda and programme of the Congress Party. This is not the time for panic, but in the Indian equivalent of the Hitler bunker, which we may call the Manmohan bunker for want of a better phrase, the atmosphere is still one of panic. That is why there was a harebrained proposal to order a Commission of Inquiry against Narendra Modi for alleges illegal tapping of the telephone and other electronic facilities of a lady architect and to bring her under surveillance. The fact that the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952, is meant for setting up a Commission which will look at issues of prime public importance is conveniently forgotten. What is equally forgotten is that illegal tapping of telephones is an offence under the Indian Telegraphs Act and also the Indian Penal Code and an alleged offence cannot be the subject matter of enquiry by a Commission of Inquiry. Cognisable offence have to be reported under section 154 Cr.P.C., a FIR recorded, investigation done under law and subsequently either a challan be presented before a competent court or the matter be reported to the court for permission to close the investigation because no prima facie case is made out against anyone. All that is brushed aside in the Manmohan bunker, which was busy ordering nonexistent Commissions of Inquiry to halt Modi in his track. The fact that the lady in question not only refused to make a complaint but has actually approached the Supreme Court for a direction to government not to set up a Commission or to hold any other investigation did not deter those in the bunker from pressing for a Commission. Even the allies of Congress such as the National Conference and the NCP were horrified at the insistence of Congress to order such an inquiry. Ascertaining the truth was not the purpose of the Congress, but embarrassing Modi was. Luckily Manmohan Singh, who is a decent person and a gentleman to boot, ultimately decided against setting up such a Commission, thus saving the Congress from some embarrassment at a subsequent stage. To that extent the Manmohan bunker is different from the Hitler bunker, but only because Manmohan Singh is no Hitler. One is not too sure whether a similar difference applies between today's Congress party, which is single family oriented and the Nazi Party. In any case, for the Congress to use every dirty trick in its armoury to keep Modi out of Parliament and the government does not go down well in a democracy.
