

Why Does Mohan Bhagwat Insult Hindus?

■ Dr. M.N. Buch

Mohan Bhagwat, the Sarsanchalak of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh(RSS) has made repeated statements that Hindus must unite, that if Hindus unite the country will be safe and that India must develop along the lines of Hindutva. According to him everyone living in India is a Hindu, which means that a Hindu is a Hindu-Hindu, a Muslim is a Muslim-Hindu, a Christian is a Christian-Hindu, a Sikh is a Sikh-Hindu, etc. In other words, Bhagwat is trying to separate the idea of Hindu as a follower of a particular religion and instead make the word territory specific. What this virtually means is that everyone residing within the territorial limits of India is by definition a Hindu, though he may profess a religion other than Hinduism. Of course this has been strongly objected to by the followers of religions other than Hinduism, including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Parsees. All of them look upon themselves as Indians but refuse to accept the connotation of Hindu being a territorial definition rather than a religious one.

I do not intend to be drawn into a prolonged debate on the metaphysics of religion, but it is necessary for us to have a look at the word Hindu. To the best of my knowledge the roots of this word do not lie in Sanskrit, nor does the word Hindu appear in any of our scriptures. In fact Sanskrit, which Hindus look upon as the language of the religion because that is the language of the Vedas, does not have a word for religion. We broadly look upon dharma as religion, but dharma transcends religion as formally defined and has to be read in the context of our belief in the right of every living soul to salvation, or moksha, with a cycle of birth and rebirth being followed till a stage of beatitude is reached in which the Atma merges into the Brahmatma. Judgement in this behalf is given on the basis of one's karma or deeds and thought and even an atheist who rejects the concept of divinity will be entitled to moksha if his karma is dharmic. In such a scheme of things formal religion becomes irrelevant. As it is the religion that we Hindus follow is actually the Sanatan Dharma, which is so inclusive that it looks on all creation as belonging to one great family. An inclusive religion cannot differentiate between people merely on the basis of their religious belief and, therefore, where is the room for specific reference to the word Hindu?

It is not clear why Mohan Bhagwat feels that Hindus today are not united and, therefore, need to be enjoined to come together. Are Hindus not united in patriotism? In fact are not all Indians united in patriotism, regardless of their religion? The Chief of Army Staff when India fought Pakistan in 1971 and Bangladesh was liberated was a Parsee. One of the finest officers we had, who as GOC-in-C, Eastern Command died in an unfortunate helicopter accident, Lt. Gen. Jamil Mehmood was slated to be the Army Chief and it should be noted that his religion was Islam. So many Muslim, Sikh and Christian soldiers have died fighting India's wars and there has never been even the slightest doubt about their loyalty. For the sake of the nation we are all united.

Are Hindus not united in the observance of religious festivals? Do we not come together to celebrate Dussehra, Diwali, Holi, etc? Do we not accept the Adi Sankara, Swami Vivekananda, the twelve Jyotirlings, the four Dhams which unite the country and do we not accept the sanctity of the Ganga? Then why keep reminding us that we need to unite? For what and against whom? The turmoil in the Islamic world at present seems to be targeting only the Muslims and whether in Iraq or in Syria Muslim is killing Muslim. So far as Pakistan is concerned, in case it persists in exporting terror to India the State is more than capable of giving a

suitable reply and in this every single Indian, including every Hindu, will support the State. Therefore, one is forced to believe that the real target is the so called Hindutva. R.S.S has tried to project Hindutva not so much as a religion as being the unified national culture of this country. In this behalf some questions must be asked. If Hinduism is united in that there is a single unified culture, then why is it the worship of Vithoba (Vishnu) at Pandharpur very different from the ritual of worship of Balaji (Vishnu) at Tirumala-Tirupati? Why is the caste mark on the forehead of a Shaivite Iyer horizontal and why on that of a Vaishnovite Iyengar vertical? If Mohan Bhagwat would carefully look at the so called common culture of India he would find so many shades and nuances of difference that he would have to accept that the real picture of India is “Bhinnata mae Ekta”, or unity in diversity. In physique, physiognomy, dress, language, diet, social customs India is full of diversity and neither religion nor the concept of Hindutva can force this diversity into a mould of commonality. Would Mohan Bhagwat like to clarify whether a Muslim, wearing the signs of the Sunnat, including a beard, will be allowed to use his status of being a Muslim-Hindu to offer namaz in the Mahakal Temple at the time of Bhasma Arti? Would a woman be allowed to become the priestess of a Hanuman Temple? Therefore, it is about time that RSS moved away from its obsession with what the Arabs called the land which lay beyond the Sindhu River and instead accepted that the Indo-Gangetic Plain apart, India consists of so many river valleys and so many different people and cultures that we cannot even begin to talk of a single Hindu culture. My most respectful submission to the Sarsanchalak would be that he should stop insulting Hindus by calling on them to be united when they already are.

One last comment. If the call for Hindu unity is political so that all Hindus vote in perpetuity for a party supported by R.S.S, then India will not be a democracy and instead will degenerate into a single party dictatorship, which is another definition of Fascism. In politics as in culture, diversity is the name of the game, because diversity alone can add that spice, that taste, that vigour that makes life interesting, amusing, exciting. Monochromes, total uniformity, absolute conformity, the bleakness of only the colour grey, would make India so bland, so dull, so utterly sluggish as to render life not worth living – in fact the world of R.S.S and Mohan Bhagwat.
