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“hindutva and Development” by S L RAO

BJP’s ‘Hindu’ image, dependence on the RSS, and motor mouths among its Leaders at all levels who demanded recognition of their religious demands and restrictions on priveleges of Muslims amnd oter minorities. Bjp got a communal look. The media looked for communal undertones in all government policies. International media predicted India;s decline despite a development oriented Prime Minister. Yet most elections since 2014 have made the bJP the biggest party. Even minorities seem to have voted for it.

The ‘Hindutva’ (Hindu way of life) brigade could also point to exceptions made for Muslims (the Haj travel subsidy, resistance to a uniform civil code, ignoring women’s rights ceven when contrary to law, putting religious loyalty above loylty to nation, etc). They demanded that national laws be applicable to all.

It is in this background that the question is asked whether the demand for Hinutva may hamper development for all, the major promise of Narendra Modi.

Here we must recognize the role of the Indian judiciary and its relative independent , more so of superior Courts. It can be expected albeit slowly, to protect civil rights including religious practice and gender. After all, even During UPA rule the judiciary at the highest level exonerated Narendra Modi of any guilt for the 2002 Gujarat riots. So we have to be restrained in questioning recent lower Court exoneration of Swami Aseemanand of guilt for the ghastly crimes of many deaths by bomb explosions at the Ajmer dargah, the Samjautha Express, and at the Hyderabad Mecca Masjid. By contrast, a 90% paralyzed academic, Dr Sai Baba was sentenced to imprisonment for life for his association with Naxalites. We must await the completion of the full judicial process before final verdicts. It is obviously speculativeto conclude that many more such crimes will go unpuniahed under a BJP government. We must repose faith in India’s independent judiciary. Discriminatory government polcies for or against any group can be expected to be modified by the judiciary. They are also against development.

A media report points out that when he visited Surat recenrly the Prime Minister got a huge welcome including from Muslim males and burquah clad women. A city that has seen many Muslims killed over the years in communal riots has Muslims living there in fear. They probably see no better choice for their safety and well-being than the Modi-led BJP. Fear is said to dominate them all over India. Development demands that this be assuaged. All citizens and residents must feel secure if development is to be consistent.

Many believe that the BJP is modelled on Veer Savarka’s ideas. (He died in 1966 at ). Savarkar believed in using violence to eliminate the Bitish from India. He made a daring escape from jail in the Andamans. He was an atheist who propagated dismantling of the caste system and reconversion of converted Hindus. Savarkar used the term “Hindutva” to describe the Hindu identity. Savarkar’s ideas (and of the BJP), are not against developmt. He did not propagate violence against the minorities.

Can ideas that place Hinduism at the apex of Indian society have negative effects on development? Before the British came, India was ruled by many kingdoms, a large number of which were Hindu. Many were very prosperous and engaged in international trade. Before the British came, India was, with China, one of the two largest economies in the world (Angus Maddison). Hindu kingdoms obviously developed their kingdoms and made India peosperous.

A recent article in the EPW suggests that “Brahminism ..has been the ideology of the ruling classes. The state irrespective of which party is in power, has always been the same- pro capital, pro-Hindu, pro-upper caste and plutocratic”. The article suggests that virulent Hindus were responsible for the murder of the Reverend Graham Staines, a Christian missionary suspected of converting Hindu tribals to Christianity, Dalits being lynched in Dulina in 2002, the murder of Akhlaq suspected beef-eating by his Hindu neighbours, the flogging of 4 Dalits near Una, the murders of the rationalists Dabholkar, Phansare, and Kalburgi. Over the years there were many such individual crimes. They did not constitute a national or organized movement.

Develpment requires vision, clear ideas, an efficient implementing mechanism through the administration, law and order, a population that also wants development with more jobs, quality education and health services, support to all the poor to rise, and improving living standards.Above all there must be peace among different groups and communities. Recent Assembly elections suggest that all communities and castes want the same. It may not have been just fear that made Muslims vote for the party that could give them protection and development. But no citizen or resident must have any fear of vuilence because of his life style. For this, all and especially governments and the parties in power, have to ensure peace and harmony.

Mr Modi clearly is passionate about development. It is unclear that the RSS which gives the foot soldiers that bring out the vote, equally shares this passion. There are many who want the promises and appeasements by earlier Congress governments, to be eliminmated.

They will not recognize the data (painstakingly collected by NCAER from over 30000 randomly selected households all over India) quoted by the Sachar report. Muslims were poorly off in every way: literacy, education, higher skills (apart from making hand made products), housing, sanitation, the ghettoes they lived in that were poorly serviced for water, roads, power, health services, with inadequate scholarships and other aids.

Hinduism is a complex of many beliefs and practises. It is about peace and tolerance. No government especially in the very diverse and pluralistic Indian society, can govern if it shows undue preference for long to one group of citizesn over others on grounds such as race, religion, caste, etc.

The BJP government led by Mr Modi has emphasized that it stands for all round develoment for all. The government has to shed the baggage of its past image into which Opposition partiers are constantly painting it. It must muzzle those in its party who push anti-minority statements and actions. Policies that appear to interfere with minority beliefs and practices must not be rushed, and must experience much consultation and even judicial interpretation. The BJP’s full focus must be on good govertnance for development. If it can show results it could stay in power for decades,

(1071)