

“Tasks before U.P. Chief Minister” by S L Rao April 13 2017a

Except Madhya Pradesh under Sadhavi Uma Bharati, perhaps no other democratic government in the last century has been headed by a person in priestly garb. Will Uttar Pradesh now behave like a Hindu rashtra? Have minorities accepted inevitability of Hindu dominance in government provided there is law and order and development, i.e. jobs and rising real incomes? Commentators the world over and in India predict that government attention will be diverted from such core objectives.

Few countries have a state religion or socioeconomic ideology. The Queen of the United Kingdom combines Church and state. The USSR had the state ideology of socialism. Few other countries have followed these examples for long.

At partition in 1947 84% of medians were Hindus. now almost 80%. But India decided not to have a state religion, nor declared India as a Hindu rashtra (nor adopted a state ideology). Gandhiji would have been against a Hindu state. The Indian Constitution imposed no theocracy, no religion, nor ideology.

Dr Ambedkar explained it when talking of our Constitution: “In the first place the Constitution, ..., is merely a mechanism for the purpose of regulating the work of the various organs of the State. It is not a mechanism whereby particular members or particular parties are installed in office. What should be the policy of the State, how the Society should be organised in its social and economic side are matters which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the Constitution itself, because that is destroying democracy altogether. If you state in the Constitution that the social organisation of the State shall take a particular form, you are, in my judgment, taking away the liberty of the people to decide what should be the social organisation in which they wish to live. It is perfectly possible today, for the majority people to hold that the socialist organisation of society is better than the capitalist organisation of society. But it would be perfectly possible for thinking people to devise some other form of social organisation which might be better than the socialist organisation of today or of tomorrow. I do not see therefore why the Constitution should tie down the people to live in a particular form and not leave it to the people themselves to decide it for themselves.”

The people must decide through debate and discussion whether Hinduism should be the state religion or whether India should be a socialist state. The Constitution should not also lay down that India will be a secular (use with no state religion) or a socialist state. Indira Gandhi amended the directive principles of the Constitution to add these words through the 42nd amendment.

The 42nd Amendment changed the description of India from a "sovereign democratic republic" to a "sovereign, socialist secular democratic republic". However the Constitution had safeguarded religious practise and was for improving socioeconomic conditions for all.

Experience of governance shows that governments can impose laws and regulations that are favourable to one religion or socioeconomic ideology, without changing the Constitution.

What are the indicators of governments being influenced by their theology or ideology? Decades of Congress rule created a perception of their favouring the Muslim community (though the Sachar report showed Muslim deprivation). Congress governments were also for government ownership and control of all resources, and unfavourably inclined to private enterprise.

Uttar Pradesh is the first government to be headed by a Hindu holy man. What might it do without any change in the Constitution? It could ban cow slaughter and the selling and eating of beef, (thus depriving many poor of cheap meat, destroying livelihoods of many Hindus and Muslims), and adversely affecting exports. (Hinduism has no known ban on beef). Government could build a temple on the site of Babri Masjid, without judicial clearance. Social benefits especially to poor Muslims could be curtailed. Muslim areas could be deprived of good roads, policing, sanitation, etc. (The Sachar report showed this happened under earlier Congress governments). The Haj travel subsidy could be stopped. Government job opportunities could be deliberately reduced. There could be hurdles in the way of inter-communal gender relations. Loud muezzin calls to prayer might be hindered. Chants associated with Hinduism, exercises like yoga, might be made compulsory for all. There could be other such actions. Some might cause no resentment, but many such actions might cause a communal divide. This will divert government and public attention from dealing with U.P.'s pressing problems.

The state is too big to govern and must be split into three or four. This is an enormous task. The bureaucracy, police, local bodies, is inefficient and corrupt. Social benefits do not reach many for who they are intended. Infrastructure (roads, housing, sanitation, safe drinking water, piped water, transport, etc) are grossly inadequate and poorly kept. U.P. has India's holiest and most prolific river. The government has used it as a drain for industrial and human effluents. The education system has badly deteriorated. Health services are in poor shape. Both are inadequate. Every function of government is poorly performed.

The BJP has a unique opportunity and a young and popular leader. Instead of playing with peripheral issues it must focus on the problems and resolve them fast.

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