

The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism

THE HATE-MINORITIES MESSAGE OF THE 'RSS BIBLE'

“The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must loose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment — *not even citizen's rights*. There is, at least, should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation; let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races, who have chosen to live in our country”.

-- Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar's, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*

THE RSS BIBLE

The scholar Jean A. Curran characterized Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar's book, *We or our Nationhood Defined*, as the RSS's 'Bible' in his sympathetic book, *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A Study of the RSS* (1951). Golwalkar's 77-page book was written in 1938 when he was appointed RSS General Secretary by Hedgewar (whom he succeeded as *Sarsanghchalak* in 1940).

So brutally candid is *We or Our Nationhood Defined* that a desperate attempt was made by the RSS to distance itself from it - the RSS claimed that the book was merely an English translation of the Marathi work *Rashtra Meemansa* by Babarao G.D. Savarkar, brother of V. D. Savarkar. However, in his Preface to *We or Our Nationhood Defined* dated March 22, 1939, Golwalkar described *Rashtra Meemansa* as 'one of my chief sources of inspiration and help. An English translation of this is due to be shortly out {sic}, (1).

Rajendra Singh and Bhaurao Deoras made an authoritative statement on that book in Para 10 of their 1978 application: 'With a view to give a scientific base to propagate the idea India being (sic) historically from time immemorial a Hindu Nation, late Shri M.S. Golwalkar had written a book entitled, "*We or Our Nationhood Defined*";' In Para 7 they 'placed on record' his book *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966) in order 'to clarify and understand the true purpose, the exact nature, the ambit and scope of the RSS work... and its activities.'

The RSS appeal thus affirmed the continuing validity and relevance of Golwalkar's writings, specifically of those two books.

Sample these extracts from *We*:

'Ever since that evil day, when Moslems first landed in Hindusthan, right up to the present moment, the Hindu Nation has been gallantly fighting on to shake off the despoilers. . . . The Race Spirit has been awakening.'

Referring to the secular nationalism of Gandhi and others, Golwalkar asserted that 'Effort was made to put the race on the wrong track' by propagating the concept of *territorial* nationalism. He went on to say:

The idea was spread that for the first time the people were going to live a National life, the Nation in the land naturally was composed of all those who happened to reside therein and that all these people were to unite on a common 'National' platform and win back 'freedom' by 'Constitutional means'. Wrong notions of democracy strengthened the view and we began to class ourselves with our old invaders and foes under the outlandish name - Indian - and tried to win them over to join hands with us in our struggle. The result of this poison is too well known. We have allowed

ourselves to be duped into believing our foes to be our friends and with our hands are undermining true Nationality.

This 'scientific' study lists five factors which make a Nation — geography, race, religion, culture, and language – and mentions the Jews as an instance of a Nation deprived of its land by the Romans and later by 'the engines of destruction loose under the name of Islam.' In other places,

where religion does not form a distinguishing factor, culture together with the other necessary constituents of the Nation idea become the important point in the making up of individual Nationality. On the other hand in Hindusthan) Religion is an all-absorbing entity. Based as it is on the unshakable foundations of a sound philosophy of life (as indeed Religion ought to be), it has become eternally woven into the life of the Race, and forms, as it were, its very Soul. *With us, every action in life, individual, social or political, is a command of Religion. We make war or peace, engage in arts and crafts, amass wealth and give it away, indeed we are born and we die—all in accord with religious injunctions. Naturally, therefore, we are what our great Religion has made us. Our Race-spirit is a child of our Religion and so with us. Culture is but a product of our all-comprehensive Religion, a part of its body and not distinguishable from it.*

Politics is to be conducted 'as one of the commands of Religion.'

Every Nation 'does profess and maintain a National Religion and culture, these being necessary to complete the Nation idea.'

What of the non-Hindus?

All those not belonging to the national, i.e. Hindu race, Religion, Culture and Language, naturally fall out of the pale of real 'National' life. We repeat: in Hindusthan, the land of the Hindus, lives and should live the Hindu Nation - satisfying all the five essential requirements of the scientific nation concept of the modern world. Consequently only those movements are truly 'National' as aim at re-building, revitalizing and emancipating from its present stupor, the Hindu Nation. Those only are nationalist patriots, who, with the aspiration to glorify the Hindu race and Nation next to their heart, are prompted into activity and strive to achieve that goal. *All others are either traitors and enemies to the National cause, or, to take a charitable view, idiots.*

The 'idiots' can be cured, though:

The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must loose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment — *not even citizen's rights*. There is, at least, should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation; let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races, who have chosen to live in our country.

Golwalkar left none in doubt as to the techniques of cure he favoured:

To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her (sic) purging the country of the Semitic Races — the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.

Educated Hindus are sneered at:

This 'educated' class of Hindus became in truth slaves of the English, as the late Dr S.V Ketkar has aptly described them. They had cut their traces, lost their footing in the National past, and become deculturized, denationalized people. But they also formed the bulk of the 'Congress' and found no difficulty in eagerly gulping down the extra-ordinary absurdity, that their country was not theirs, but belonged to strangers and enemies of their Race equally with them.

Is this 'communalism'? Of course not. Golwalkar cries in hurt: 'How can we be "communal" having, as we do, no other interests but those relating on our country, our Nation?'

When one turns to his book *Bunch of Thoughts*, published a quarter century later, one is amazed at the continuity of the refrain. If anything, it is more strident. It is the grand world-unifying thought of Hindus alone that can supply the abiding basis for human brotherhood'. Their history 'stands in glowing contrast to the bloodstained pages of the history of expansion of Islam, Christianity and now Communism....'

He condemned democracy and communism with equal fervour. Democracy? 'The high-sounding concept of "individual freedom" only meant the freedom of those talented few to exploit the rest . . .'. Democracy 'is to a very large extent only a myth in practice.' He approvingly recalled 'our forefathers' who said 'the Hindu People, is our God'. Why, 'a comparative study — even by the foreign historians and travellers of those days — tells us that the average man of this country was at one time incomparably superior to the average man of the other lands. . . long before the West had learnt to eat roast meat instead of raw, we were one nation, with one motherland.'

Difference from others begins at the very birth of a Hindu.

Some wise men of today tell us that no man is born as Hindu or Muslim or Christian but as a simple human being. This may be true about others. But for a Hindu, he gets the first *samskar* when he is still in the mother's womb, and the last when his body is consigned to the flames. There are sixteen *samskars* for the Hindu which make him what he is. In fact, we are Hindus even before we emerge from the womb of our mother. We are therefore born as Hindus. About the others, they are born to this world as simple unnamed human beings and later on, either circumcised or baptized, they become Muslims or Christians.

The RSS seeks to reclaim people who are born inferior at birth.

'Everybody knows that only a handful of Muslims came here as enemies and invaders. So, also, only a few foreign Christian missionaries came here. Now the Muslims and Christians have enormously grown in number.' This was either by force or deception. So, 'it is our duty to call these our forlorn brothers, suffering under religious slavery for centuries, back to their ancestral home . . . come back and identify themselves with their ancestral Hindu way of life in dress, customs, performing marriage ceremonies and funeral rites and such other things.'

The concept of territorial nationalism is rejected:

They forgot that here was already a full-fledged ancient nation of the Hindus and the various communities which were living in the country were here either as *guests*, the Jews and Parsis, or as *invaders*, the Muslims and Christians. They never faced the question how all such heterogeneous groups could be called as children of the soil merely because, by an accident, they happened to reside in a common territory under the rule of a common enemy.

The Congress was the villain of the piece, since it accepted *territorial* nationalism.

Most of the tragedies and evils that have overtaken our country during the last few decades and are even today corroding our national life are its direct outcome . . . In their phantom chase of achieving new unity and new nationality, our leaders raised the slogan of 'Hindu-Muslim unity'. . . The first thing they preached was that our nationality could not be called Hindu, that even our land could not be called by its traditional name Hindusthan, as that would have offended the

Muslim. *The name 'India' given by the British was accepted.* Taking that name, the 'new nation' was called the 'Indian Nation'. And the Hindu was asked to rename himself as 'Indian'.

That Gandhi was singled out for attack is understandable. The ground for the attack reveals a lot.

But here, we had leaders who were, as if, pledged to sap all manliness from their own people. However, this is not a mere accident of history. This leadership only came as a bitter climax of the despicable tribe of so many of our ancestors who *during the past twelve hundred years* sold their national honour and freedom to foreigners, and *joined hands with the inveterate enemies of our country* [read Muslims] and our religion in cutting the throats of their own kith and kin to gratify their personal egoism, selfishness and rivalry. No wonder nemesis overtook such a people in the form of such a self-destructive leadership.

Not that others are spared. 'The framers of our present Constitution also were not firmly rooted in the conviction of our single homogenous nationhood (as) is evident from the federal structure of our Constitution.'

Golwalkar was amazed that his call to the Muslims and Christians to embrace Hinduism should have aroused a furore. In an interview (*Nawakal*, January 1 and 2, 1969) he explained that it was an appeal 'to return to their home.' They might, he graciously conceded, offer prayers 'on re-entering the Hindu fold, in the way in which one was doing earlier.' But, 'no room should be left for disharmony.' In everything else, they must conform and look upon only '*persons of our country as our ideal.*'

There was nothing new about his appeal. In a speech in 1960 he had characterized Muslims, Christians, Jews and Parsis as '*guests, but they are not the children of the soil.*' It was published in a pamphlet titled *Why Hindu Rashtra?* He amplified: 'Unfortunately in our country our Constitution has equated the children of the soil with the aggressor, and given equal rights to everybody, just as a person without understanding may give equal rights to his children and to the thieves in his house and distribute the property among all.'

'HINDU' OR 'RASHTHIYA'?

This is the ideological legacy which Deoras acquired when he became *Sarsanghchalak* in 1973. He stuck to the line doggedly and was able to ward off pressures from Jayaprakash Narayan and some in the Janata Party to discard the legacy in 1977-79 by skilful prevarications.

In an interview published on January 14, 1974, Deoras drew 'a distinction between religions which have risen from the Indian soil like Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism on the one hand and those like Islam and Christianity which have come from outside.' On November 7, 1982 he defined 'Hindu' in identical terms and then said, 'Indeed, Hindu is National'.

In between, he had made much play about widening the meaning of the word Hindu. On December 19, 1979, he went so far as to assert that the definition of the word *had been widened* and a large number of people of various religions were RSS volunteers. How this could have been done without amending the RSS Constitution, which restricts membership to Hindu males, he did not explain. The RSS has always kept its membership records secret; this despite the promise it made when the ban was lifted after the Gandhi assassination.

But in classic RSS doublespeak, he would use the word in two different senses in *one and the same pronouncement.* 'All those who feel attuned to this life current of our national culture – *irrespective of their religious creeds* are Hindus', he said at Nagpur on September 30, 1979, only to qualify it thus: 'The guarantee for (India's) secular character is not to be found merely in our Constitution nor in the assurance of a couple of leaders. It lies in the Hindu society which forms the overwhelming majority in this country.'

Several instances of such double talk can be cited. For instance, on October 19, 1979, on the eve of the 1980 census, he appealed to all sections of Hindus to indicate their religion as 'Hindu' and also their castes within brackets. This would help in retaining the majority character of the Hindus which the RSS

would fight for, he explained. Exactly a month earlier, he said that the word had been widened to include others as well. And again: 'We consider all the natives of this land as Hindus, irrespective of religion'; but the RSS's 'main stress is on organizing traditional Hindus' (*Organiser*, April 6, 1980).

Deoras kept steadfastly to the Golwalkar line. On January 15, 1983 he proclaimed in a manner reminiscent of Golwalkar: 'We reject geographical nationalism.' 'Nationalism has its roots in people's minds, in their ways of thinking, their sentiments. That is why we stick to the word "Hindu" . . . Life here revolves round the Hindu Society.' The minorities need not feel insecure living in a strong Hindu India because Hindus are known for their tolerance.

On September 11, 1983 he remarked, 'Some people say we should replace the expression "Hindu Rashtra" by "Bharatiya Rashtra," a reference to the BJP President, Atal Behari Vajpayee's plea to that effect in a recent issue of *Panchjanya*, the RSS Hindi weekly. 'There is no objection to "Bharatiya." But if anybody wants to change it because he is ashamed of the word "Hindu" we cannot accept the suggestion. After all, the word "Hindu" is more current than the word "Bharatiya."'

It was a sneering retort but not a surprising one. For, Golwalkar had said in his *Bunch of Thoughts* that while Bharatiya 'connotes the same meaning' as Hindu, 'it is commonly used as a translation of the word "Indian" which includes all the various communities like the Muslim, Christian, Parsi, etc. residing in this land. So, the word "Bharatiya" too is likely to mislead us when we want to denote our particular society. The word "Hindu" alone connotes correctly and completely the meaning that we want to convey.' Further: '*In this land of ours, Bharat, the national life is of the Hindu People. In short, this is the Hindu Nation.*'

Golwalkar reveals that when the RSS was given its name some felt it should bear the prefix 'Hindu', not 'Rashtriya', lest its 'doors should have to be left open to all other people in the country.' Hedgewar ridiculed the idea. 'Doctorji used to say that in our land the word "Rashtriya" naturally means "Hindu" and, therefore, the word "Hindu" need not be used.'

Such an exclusive concept can be inspired by hate alone and can only generate yet greater hate. To say that Hinduism 'despite the degenerating contact with the debased civilizations of the Musalmans and the Europeans, for the last ten centuries, is still the noblest in the world' is, surely, to promote group hatred.

As for the Muslim, 'if we glorify woman as a symbol of sacred motherhood he (the Muslim) would like to molest her. He was tooth and nail opposed to our way of life in all aspects - religious, cultural, social, etc.' (*Bunch of Thoughts*). The Muslim can be reclaimed only if he reverts to 'the original dress, language, view of life etc.' The form of worship may be retained but 'Muslims should have no objection to bringing Islam in line with reason and so' facilitate their passage back to the mother society.' Deoras repeated the stereotype of the marauding Muslim, on April 4, 1980: 'History says that Muslim conversion was by force all over the world'; and again: 'Christians and Muslims have had wars of religion, has anybody ever heard of any religious wars among Hindus?' (September 11, 1983).

HOLDING AN EMPIRE WITHOUT BECOMING EMPEROR

Golwalkar had bared the RSS's ambitions and technique as far back as 1949: 'If the Congress completely disintegrates and anarchy rules the country and there is nobody to take over. . . we may sacrifice part of our normal cultural activities and accept the responsibility.' Asked point blank 'Is it a fact that the Sangh plans to capture power?', he replied: 'We have kept before ourselves the ideal of Bhagwan Shri Krishna who held a big empire under his thumb but refused to become an emperor himself' Or, as Rajendra Singh and Bhaurao Deoras said in Para 38 of their Application, 'The RSS desires to dominate the world by cultural conquest by a great process of true national regeneration'. The ideal can be fully realized if the BJP, kept under the RSS thumb, captures power as the 'national alternative.'

Interestingly) the British had, after careful deliberation, made sound assessment of the RSS. A circular sent by the Home Department of the Government of India to the Bihar government (No. F 201/44 Ests. Dated March 16, 1944) said: 'After a protracted consideration of the question in which the Governments

of the C.E. and Berar and Bombay were also consulted, as the organization was strongest there, it was decided that the RSS was a politico-commercial organization which concentrated on the formation of a militant body on fascist lines....'

The word fascist was aptly chosen. As Donald E. Smith says in his classic *India as a Secular State* (1963): 'The leader principle, the stress on militarism, the doctrine of racial-cultural superiority, ultra-nationalism infused with religious idealism, the use of symbols of past greatness, the emphasis on national solidarity, the exclusion of religious or ethnic minorities from the nation-concept -- all of these features of the RSS are highly reminiscent of fascist movements in Europe.'²

The 1978 Application proudly claimed, as we have noted, that one of the RSS's distinctive features is 'the limited democratic form and machinery,' This is a breach of the solemn assurance on the basis of which the ban on the RSS, imposed after Gandhi's assassination in 1948, was lifted by the Government of India in 1949. On July 17, 1949 Patel wrote to Nehru: 'It was only after I had made him agree to a satisfactory constitution for the RSS and got some assurances and undertakings in regard to the Sangh policy for the future that I thought it safe to release [Golwalkar].' What were those 'assurances and undertakings'? The Government communique of February 4, 1948 announcing the ban said:

The professed aims and objects of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh are to promote the physical, intellectual and moral well-being of the Hindus and also to foster feelings of brotherhood, love and service amongst them . . . Government have, however, noticed with regret that in practice members of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh have not adhered to their professed ideals.

Undesirable and even dangerous activities have been carried on by the members of the Sangh. It has been found that in several parts of the country individual members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh have indulged in acts of violence involving arson, robbery, dacoity and murder and have collected illicit arms and ammunitions. They have been found circulating leaflets, exhorting people to resort to terrorist methods, to collect firearms, to create disaffection against the Government and suborn the Police and Military.

On February 6, Golwalkar gave a directive to 'disband the RSS till the ban is there' while 'denying all the charges.' He claimed that the RSS was law-abiding and would 'carry on its activities within the bounds of law.' Golwalkar was released on August 6, 1948 but his movements were restricted to Nagpur. Five days later he wrote to Nehru and Patel complaining against the restrictions. On September 27, A.V. Pai replied from the Prime Minister's Secretariat that Government have a great deal of evidence in their possession to show that the RSS were engaged in activities which were anti-national and prejudicial from the point of view of public good. . . Even after the ban we have received information about the undesirable activities of the old members of the RSS. This information continues to come to us even now. You will appreciate that in view of this, the Government cannot consider the RSS as such a harmless organization from the public point of view.

Golwalkar demanded an enquiry on November 3. By now the restriction had been lifted for the sole purpose of permitting him to visit Delhi and lay his case before the government. However, his request for an interview with Nehru was refused. Nehru made a telling point:

It would appear that the declared objectives have little to do with the real ones and with the activities carried on in various forms and ways by people associated with the RSS. These real objectives appear to be completely opposed to the decisions of the Indian Parliament and provisions of the proposed Constitution, anti-national and often subversive and violent.

And Patel, who was otherwise not hostile to the RSS, had earlier written to his Hindu Mahasabha colleague in the cabinet, S. P. Mookerjee on July 18 that

our reports do confirm that, as a result of the activities of these two bodies, particularly the former [the RSS], an atmosphere was created in the country in which such a ghastly tragedy [Gandhi's]

assassination] became possible. There is no doubt in my mind that the extreme section of the Hindu Mahasabha was involved in this conspiracy. The activities of the RSS constituted a clear threat to the existence of Government and the State. Our reports show that those activities, despite the ban, have not died down. Indeed, as time has marched on, the RSS circles are becoming more defiant and are indulging in their subversive activities in an increasing measure.

Patel, however, did meet Golwalkar, but remained unconvinced that the ban should be lifted. Golwalkar was arrested on November 14, but he had issued a call the previous day to *swayamsevaks* to revive the organization and flout the ban. On December 9, he issued a call for *satyagraha*. This was withdrawn on January 14, 1949, after Patel and he had resumed contact through intermediaries. The principal demands that the government made in these negotiations were that the RSS constitution be reduced to writing and be made public, and that the RSS declare its allegiance to the Indian national flag.

Golwalkar forwarded a written constitution to the government on April 11, 1949. The government was, however, not satisfied. On May 3, the Home Ministry replied through H.V.R. Iyengar who said the government wanted a 'specific declaration, under Article 4 (of Golwalkar's draft) of allegiance to the Constitution of India as established by law and an explicit acceptance, in Article 5, of the National Flag.' The government also insisted on 'the democratic elective principle' in the RSS. Golwalkar replied angrily on May 17 claiming that these demands were 'wholly out of place in the matter under consideration', and urging the government to 'recognize the difference between a constitution and an oath of allegiance.' This is highly significant and touches the core of the RSS credo.

However, discussions continued between the RSS and the government directly as well as through intermediaries, and finally the government issued a communique on July 11, 1949 announcing the lifting of the ban. The ban was being lifted, it was made clear, because

the RSS leader has undertaken to make the loyalty to the Indian Constitution and respect for the National Flag more explicit in the constitution of the RSS and to provide clearly that persons believing in or resorting to violence and secret methods will have no place in the Sangh. The RSS leader has also clarified that the constitution will be worked on a democratic basis.

Further:

In the light of the modifications made and clarifications given by the RSS leader, the Government of India have come to the conclusion that the RSS organization should be given an opportunity to function as a democratic, cultural organization owing loyalty to the Indian Constitution and recognizing the National Flag eschewing secrecy and abjuring violence. 3

The assurance has been cynically flouted. The RSS was accused even by Sardar Patel - who would have liked it to join the Congress - of spreading 'communal poison'. He wrote to Golwalkar on September 11, 1948: 'As a final result of the poison, the country had to suffer the sacrifice of the invaluable life of Gandhiji. Even an iota of the sympathy of the Government or of the people no more remained for the RSS. In fact opposition grew.

Opposition turned more severe, when the RSS men expressed joy and distributed sweets after Gandhiji's death.' Gopal Godse later revealed that 'all the brothers were in the RSS, Nathuram, Dattatreya, myself and Govind.' Nathuram, the assassin 'did not leave the RSS.' L.K. Advani's disclaimer of the Godse-RSS link reflected 'cowardice', Gopal Godse said (*Frontline*, January 28, 1994).

The Nehru-Patel rift on the RSS continued to haunt Indian politics and the RSS profited by the ambiguity. To Patel, the RSS men were 'patriots who love the country' (January 6, 1948). His letters to Golwalkar were warm ('Brother Golwalkar'), even after his arrest, in contrast to Nehru's curtness. In the very letter in which he condemned the RSS, Patel told Golwalkar that 'The RSS men can carry on their patriotic endeavour only by joining the Congress.'

Golwalkar was willing (November 5, 1948) to collaborate - as he put it, Congress 'in the political field' and RSS 'in the cultural field'. But he refused to merge the two. In 1950—51, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee accepted those very terms to set up the Jan Sangh.

On October 7, 1949, during Nehru's absence abroad, Patel was able to get the Congress Working Committee to open the Congress membership to RSS men. Nehru had the decision rescinded after his return on November 7. RSS men could join the Congress only if they gave up its membership. It is a measure of Patel's softness for the RSS that he should have gone so far despite the fact that even while the correspondence was on, Golwalkar 'tried to smuggle out of jail two letters in order to get the [RSS] Satyagraha campaign restarted.' Patel complained to D.R. Mishra about Golwalkar 'abusing confidence'.

It is also a measure of the depth of Nehru's commitment to secularism - and of his foresight - that he refused to have anything to do with the RSS. 'I remember Bapu telling me after his first meeting with Golwalkar that he was partly impressed by him but at the same time did not trust him. After his second or third meeting he expressed a very strong opinion against Golwalkar and the RSS and said that it was impossible to rely upon their word. They appear to be highly reasonable when talked to but they had no compunction in acting in exact contradiction to what they said. My own impression has been the same', Nehru wrote to Patel on October 27, 1948. 4

(Excerpt from A. G. Noorani's, *The RSS and the BJP: A Division of Labour*, {Pgs. 18-39} Leftword Books).