

RIGHTS

Fellow Citizens, India Is in Peril. We Must Rise to the Occasion.

The brand of politics that Modi and Shah have invented is only inadequately described as politics of communal polarisation. We Indians must beat back this surging national calamity.



Students wave Tricolours during the 72nd Independence Day celebrations, at Jamia Naeemia Madarsa in Moradabad. Credit: PTI



Swami Agnivesh



I entered politics as a part of my *sanyasa*, my spiritual discipline. There are two contrasting models of spirituality. The more familiar one becomes with worldly affairs, the more risk one carries of corrupting oneself. Spirituality requires that saints keep their hands unsoiled from mundane activities. Within such an outlook, participation in politics is unthinkable. We may classify this as the mystic model of spirituality.

The second is the ‘activist’ model of spirituality, according to which renouncing the world is an easier and futile option. It is not in the depth of forests or heights of misty mountains that one seeks proximity to God; God is everywhere. What matters is not physical proximity, but ethical oneness with God.

God’s self-revelation in this world is in the form of universal values: love, truth, justice and compassion; all of which involve practical relationships with fellow human beings. It is in making these values prevail in the world that one truly becomes spiritual. I embraced this model. To me, world-denial is God-denial – for it abandons the world to the wolves who claim the world as their freehold.

To me, politics, *rashtra-dharma*, is dharma in action. For that reason, it is a serious concern for me that the practice of politics – increasingly hijacked by the lust for power and pelf – is assumed as a *dharmic* undertaking. I endorse Gandhi’s listing of ‘politics without principles’ among the ‘seven deadly sins’. If such politics is a deadly sin, how is it not a spiritual duty to resist it, and, if need be, to even risk one’s life for it?

I entered the minefield of Haryana politics in the 1970s with a nightingale of idealism singing in my soul. I did not last long. In a short while, I was forced out of my position as the minister of education in the state. I thought I had seen the worst of politics. I was wrong. In comparison to how it is practised today, politics from three decades ago was endearingly humane.

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So, where have we reached now? I am not a political scientist. I belong to the sphere of religion. The analysis I offer below is from that angle of vision. I am now 80 years old, and I don’t know how long I will live. I consider it my duty to highlight the extreme danger that is already breathing down upon us.

Let me name the peril that I see looming large over the immediate horizon of India. I see the secular, democratic fabric of India in serious jeopardy. Already the core values on which our democratic republic was founded – justice, liberty, equality and fraternity – are under strain. The democratic space – where these values are meant to prevail – is communalised, polarised and poisoned with hate. We are teetering on the edge of extinction as a secular democracy and of being ‘twice-born’ as a Hindu *rashtra*, if Modi succeeds to secure a second term in office.

I see a radical and dangerous paradigm shift being effected with sinister intentions. That paradigm shift, which political theorists are yet to reckon, may be stated as the shift from ‘communal politics’ to ‘mystical politics’. The brand of politics that Modi and Shah have invented is only inadequately described as politics of communal polarisation. It is something far deadlier vis-a-vis secular politics. If in the previous model which held good till 2014, people’s religious sentiments were misused for political gains, the emerging model casts politics itself in the mould of religion.

Consider how Modi is being projected. Never before in our history has a politician been projected in this fashion. The direction it is taking was indicated presciently by a lady in Varanasi when she was interviewed by a TV journalist the other day. She placed Modi in the line of the avatars. She can’t be blamed for this.

Given the supernatural aura conjured up around Modi, it is only natural that the masses get brainwashed into believing that he is their saviour. This transfers Modi and the voters from the realm of politics into the realm of religion. In comparison with this, the erstwhile ‘communal politics’ was a minor rash on the skin; whereas this is a killer version of galloping cancer.



BJP supporters in Rajasthan. Credit: PTI

Democratic politics leave a wide margin for ‘doubt, debate and dissent’. Debating what a political leader says, even dissenting with him, was never an unforgivable crime. In religion –

especially soteriological or salvation-centred religion – distrusting the saviour is heresy. It is a bounden duty to be intolerant towards heresy. The heretic has no place in a community of faith – and no place at all, if it is a theocratic state, within the country.

Also read: [We Are Living in an India That Has No Connection With Its Modern Political Past](#)

It is only too evident that intolerance has been mounting ever since 2014, towards any kind of disagreement with what Modi stands for. Dissent is now treated as heresy. This is not politics; it only seems to be. It is a religion of a perverse kind. If in religion, heretics are to be dispatched to hell, Pakistan is the prescribed destination for the political heretics of Modi-land.

The Indian constitution enjoins on us the duty to propagate and consolidate a culture of rational-critical thinking and a scientific bent of mind. Poor Sam Petroda – he is still living in the pre-Modi era! He says he is a scientist and, as a scientist, is obliged by his training and bent of mind to ask for proof and to exercise the right to examine data and come to well-considered conclusions.

He was even reckless enough to say that information about Balakot strikes is contrary to the ‘official’ version that was made available to him from ‘credible sources’. He can discount them only if evidence to the contrary is provided to him. Had he said so five years ago, his words would have sounded eminently reasonable. His stand would have been hailed as rational and legitimate. But not so, now. It was rubbished and discredited as anti-national; that is, heretical in the current lingo.

The blind faith required of us today in whatever we are being fed from day to day exceeds even the requirement of religion. Blind faith is germane only to popular religiosity; the sort of religiosity that the priestly class indoctrinates the masses with, to lead them by the nose. The core of light in religion is spirituality.

Every spiritual tradition – especially of religions of Indian origin – affords substantial leeway for responsible scepticism. Blind faith is harmful to the believer. It enslaves him and renders him mentally challenged. Spirituality, as Lord Buddha and Maharshi Dayanand insisted, is all about seeking the truth. No set way or settled dogma merits unthinking faith. The Modi brand of politics insists that we accord blind faith even to the army.

No army in history, anywhere in the world, has consisted of a rank of saints. Falsehood is integral to the propaganda that armies use in warfare. Propaganda is the art of lying like it’s the truth. But now the Indian army, going by Adityanath, is ‘*Modi ki sena*’. To that extent, it has become imperative to accord blind faith even to the army. No government in our history has interfered with, and compromised the independence of, the Indian army as Modi has done. It is a terrible disservice to this country to spread the impression that the army is an appendix to a party.

The most critical difference between salvation-religion and politics is that, while politics stays focused on ‘here and now’, religion deflects the attention of the masses from the pain

and suffering they endure by dangling before them, rewards in the world to come. Modi's version of this mendacious pattern is, "short-term pain, long-term gain".

Demonetisation spawned its gallery of martyrs: over a hundred of our fellow Indians perished on serpentine, unending queues. It did not raise any hackles because 'there is a pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die' for such people. How eagerly the poor people lapped up this cold-blooded lie, and how ardently they believed that they'd live to see the 'long-term gain'. Now Modi says not a word about the long-term gain, which is nowhere in sight. Like in supernatural situations, he owes no explanation to anyone.

Also read: [BJP Has Insulted My Hinduism](#)

This pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die sort of religion is an invention of the hypocritical purveyors of religion, who were hand-in-glove with the rich and the mighty. You cannot proffer the pie in the sky to a corporate giant. He will laugh you out of the court if he doesn't set his German shepherds on you. He doesn't care how short, or long, your short-term pain is. He is happy so long as he has all the short and long-term gains. By now it is abundantly clear that the common man's pain has been converted into the corporates' gain. It's a small wonder how the number of billionaires is increasing like in a fairy tale in India. The poor are left with their pains.



Modi supporters. Credit: Reuters

All the promises that Modi has made to the people of India till date are ridiculous in the sphere of 'politics-with-principles', but are smart in the sphere of religion. To see this in perspective, consider Modi's counterpart in conventional religions: the miracle-worker. You go to a thaumaturgist – or a miracle-healer. He promises to heal you of your ailment. The promised miracle doesn't happen. But the godman hasn't cheated you.

He blames you, instead, for your lack of faith, or the bad faith of those around you. The current situation is similar. If Modi has not been able to deliver, it is because of the opposition parties, or

because the voters did not give him a two-thirds majority. What can a prime minister do with a simple majority?

There are other aspects of this Modi-Shah driven dangerous paradigm shift currently underway. All of them need not be inventoried here. The process is real, and one has to be willfully blind to miss it. Why should this worry us?

The genius of religion is the polar opposite of the spirit of democracy. No god is democratic; not even a puny priest or pujari. Everyone of them is, in his own sphere, a potentate. If we as citizens and voters endorse what Modi and Shah stand for, we shall aid and abet the murder of democracy in India.

India is a genuine, vibrant, unique polity distinguished by religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic plurality. A theocratic state will impose, by brutal force, all-round homogenisation, with a mindset of brutal intolerance. This is sure to plunge India into bloodshed and anarchy, the likes of which we have never seen before. This is no longer in a zone of mere speculation. Given the trends and patterns, the outcome is foreseeable.

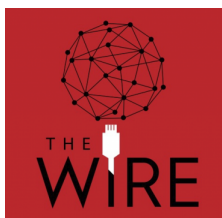
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I belong to a generation that straddled India's independence and the birth of this country as a sovereign republic. We believed ardently that the hopes and aspirations raised in 1947 would be fulfilled; that India will go from strength to strength as a tolerant, diverse, robust nation, bolstered by a culture of tolerance and mutual respect. India dying into a Hindu rashtra could not be imagined, even as a nightmare, in the heydays of our freedom.

That freedom is now already under the wheels of the juggernaut. To me, this is a spiritual issue of supreme importance. I would belittle all that I believed in, and struggled for, these many decades, if I fail in my duty to urge my sisters and brothers all over India to beat back this surging national calamity.

I have, with this, done my duty to our country. It is now up to you; my fellow citizens, irrespective of gender, age, culture, religion, region, language, to rise and erect a bulwark against the forces that seek to vandalise the holy temple that our country is, to attain some petty gains which will be, for all the horrendous doom and gloom they usher in, like castles erected in sand on the seashore. The rolling waves of time will sweep them away... and the sky will mock these sandy achievements as anthills of hubris installed by grown-up infants.

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