

THE POLITCS OF SANATAN DHARMA

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On September 2, 2023 Mr. Udhaynidhi Stalin, the son of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Stalin and the Minister for Youth Welfare and Sports Development, in his address at a meet of Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers and Artists Association said that, "Sanatan Dharma is against equality and social justice....The very name Sanatan is from Sanskrit. What is the meaning of Sanatan? It is eternal, that is, it cannot be changed; no one could pose any question and that is the meaning....Sanatan divided people on the basis of caste, and so uprooting Sanatan Dharma is upholding humanity and human equality....Sanatan Dharma is against social justice and it should hence be eradicated." But his likening Sanatan Dharma to coronavirus, malaria, and fever caused by dengue virus and mosquitoes, and an appeal that such things should not be merely opposed but needs to be destroyed has shook the upholders of Sanatan Dharma and those who are engaged in the business of politicisation of Sanatan Dharma.

On September 4, 2023 the Tamil Nadu Minister remained defiant in his ideological position and reiterated, "Whatever I said, I will repeat the same thing again and again...I included all the religions and not just Hindus...I spoke condemning the caste differences that's all..." further he said, he stood firmly by every word he had spoken on behalf of the oppressed and marginalised people who suffer due to Sanatan Dharma and ready to present extensive writings of Periyar and Ambedkar, who conducted in-depth research on Sanatan Dharma and its negative impact on society in any forum.

Continuing the same stand further he stated, "Let me reiterate the crucial aspect of my speech: I believe, like the spread of diseases like COVID-19, dengue, and malaria by mosquitoes, that Sanatan Dharma is responsible for many social evils. I am prepared to confront any challenges that come my way, whether in a court of law or the people's court. Again attacking on evil practices of Sanatan Dharma he said, "What did Sanatan do to women? It pushed women, who lost their husbands, into fire (the erstwhile practice

of Sati), it tonsured the heads of widows and made them wear white saris. Child marriages too happened." Finally he did not forget to remind the people by saying that, "'Let us take a vow to win in all the 39 Parliamentary constituencies in Tamil Nadu and the one segment in Puducherry (in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls). Let Sanatan fall, Dravidian win."

Mr. Stalin argued that Sanatana Dharma has its root in the caste system and discrimination, a statement that sparked significant backlash. But an undeterred Udaynidhi by adopting further more aggressive campaign against the BJP, and also to substantiate his accusation of Sanatan Dharma, on the issue of no invitation to the President of India to inaugurate the newly constructed parliament building by the PM Modi government, Udhayanidhi Stalin, once again criticized the BJP for not inviting President Droupadi Murmu by pointing out that the BJP had invited mutt priests from Tamil Nadu for the ceremony but excluded the President of India, due to her status as a widow and her tribal community background as the reasons for her exclusion. He also added that, while Hindi actors were invited to the new Parliament building, President Droupadi Murmu was not, and he attributed this decision to Sanatan Dharma. The notable absence of the Indian President on the historic occasion was also emphasized by Congress leader Mr. Rahul Ganshi during the discussion on the "Women Reservation Bill" by saying that "the President of India is a woman representing the tribal community and her presence would have been fitting during this transition" though he has maintained the neutrality over the controversy of Sanatan Dharma.

In the background of the proximity of 2024 general election in the country and in the beginning of bi-polar division of the national politics between the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and its opponents uniting under the banner of Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (I.N.D.I.A.), the two speeches of Udhaynidhi Stalin animating Tamil Nadu's longstanding Dravidian movement's social discourse and tradition of non-Brahmanism has not only created the national storm but also divided the whole nation into two camps of the supporters of the Sanatan Dharma and its opponents, besides the political game of social polarisation on the basis of religion.

On the other side, the so called believers-supporters of Sanatan Dharma raising hue and cry has declared it as the war on Hinduism, that may lead to

genocide of Hindus, arguing that, the Sanatan Dharma has survived for ages, it has no end, it has sustained the barbaric attacks of Mughals and Britishers, conveniently forgetting that crores of Ex- Hindus have renounced Hinduism and embraced other religions and the process is still on, besides the fact of the matter that, the inhuman-evil practices of the Sanatan Dharma also resulted into several reformist movements, even within the fold of Hinduism, such as, “Arya Samaj” in the north and Basaveshwara, in south India.

Consequently, the Indian politics is calculatedly dominated by the Hindutva forces, such as Bhartiya Janta Party and Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (BJP-RSS), political narratives promise to restore its lost but glorious ancient civilisation¹ of “Sanatan Dharma” in place of the present Secular India. The “Sanatan Dharma is also understood as, the Vedic Dharma, the Arya Dharma. The cry and advocacy of Sanatan Dharma is ancient since the period of Manu Smriti and Bhagwat Gita. Although the concept of Sanatan Dharma is limited to the Indian Hindu’s world, it is without any specific connotation yet largely it means some eternal principles-code of conduct of “ideal living” for Hindus. In the history, therefore, it means different things at different times. However, Jawaharlal, Nehru, has defined “Sanatan Dharma” “meaning the ancient religion, could be applied to any of the ancient Indian faiths (including Buddhism and Jainism), the expression has been monopolized to-day by some orthodox sections among Hindus who claim to follow the ancient faith.”².

According to the Wikipedia, much before, V. D. Savarkar’s Hindutva and RSS propaganda of Sanatan Dharma, in 1830, in reaction to reformist movements, such as, Brahmo Samaj in Calcutta, Raja Radhakant Deb started the Dharma Sabha to combat the challenges of Brahmo Samaj and western values. It was for keeping intact the Hindu socio-religious order and practices and so opposed the anti-sati legislation brought by Lord William Bentinck’s in 1829 and to Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) too, because he founded Brahmo Samaj in 1828 to fight against Hindu orthodoxy, idolatry, caste tyranny, sati, polygamy, child marriage and supported female education. Burning a widow on the funeral pyre of deceased husband, Sanatani’s considered this as an act of piety. The Sanatan organisation also opposed the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. To create hardline Hindus, the Dharma Sabha created organisations like, Sanatan Dharma Sabha (1895). In 1902 several Hindu fundamentalists organisations unified

under the banner of The Bharat Dharma Mahamandala with its capital in Varanasi a new place of Hindu political identity.

Despite the claims of glorious Hindu or Brahmanical civilisation, in India, there have been more than approximately 200-250 social protests or revolts against its essence and spirit. The Prarthna Samaj founded by Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884) in Bombay in 1863 condemned caste prejudices and Priestley dominance. Mahatma Jotiba Phule's (1827-1890) socio-cultural revolt in western parts of Maharashtra not only questioned the foundational pillars of the Sanatan Dharma-Brahmanism but it strongly advocated for the women rights, education, and power to the Shudras and ati-shudras to empower them. In 1875, Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) founded Arya Samaj that opposed caste structure, animal sacrifice, priesthood, inequality and campaigned for social equality, women rights, etc. Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj (1874-1922) of Kolhapur princely State with his radical anti-Brahmanical and pro Shudras and atishudras policy he produced a new era in his own state. The Britisher's liberal and egalitarian perspective and actions gave death blows to Sanatani culture through several legal reforms like anti Sati legislation. In India, very few people know about the system of slavery. But in 1843, the Britishers abolished slavery in India, despite the protests from caste and land lords who argued that it would ruin India. The Britishers passed the Caste Disabilities Removal Act, 1850, Widow Remarriage Act, 1856, The Special Marriage Act of 1872, which terrorised the Sanatani Hindus. Consequently, in 1881, a Sanatan (orthodox Hindu) Dharma Association was formed in Trinidad and Tobago (USA) to consolidate Hindus and to counter the challenges posed by the reformist Arya Samaj

The ancient and medieval India has a dismal record of Varna class-caste wars. Lokayat philosophy, Buddhism and Jainism were essentially the revolts against the Sanatani Brahmanical-Vedic social order. In the 14th century, we witness the anti-caste Brahmanism movements spearheaded by Sant Kabir (born in 1399), Guru Ravidas (born in 1398) and Guru Nanakji,(1469-1539). In 1973, American scholar, Gail Omvedt's doctoral thesis, named, "Cultural Revolts in a Colonial India"³ has focussed sufficiently on anti-Brahmanical movements in Maharashtra by Mahatma Phuley-Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj characterising them as non-Brahmin movements. Similarly, in British Madras Presidency, mainly in the times of Dr. T. M. Nayar, Periyar, Rao Bahadur Rattamal Srinivasan and Sree Narayana Guru, the Sanatani Brahmanical or Vedantic culture received several body blows.

Thus, the history of today's India is full of records of dissent, protest, ably summarised by several authors.⁴ A 19th century British historian, scholar-educationist Thomas Macaulay (1800-1859) viewed India as a culturally and intellectually inferior society that needed modernisation and westernisation. He called "Sanatan Dharma" as "Pernicious" in the highest degree....unfavourable to the moral and intellectual health of our race." In modern India, the "Sanatan Dharma" due to its oppressive nature, in the environment of liberal democratic civil society has faced stiff opposition from the socio-cultural revolts of social rebels and reformers and with the advancement of time lost its relevance, despite some sporadic non-cognizable efforts by its revivalists.

But in the recent past, in India, the revivalist forces of "Sanatan Dharma" having acquired a new strength and vigour with the backing of RSS-BJP combine governments in the centre as well as in the states seems to have tightened the grip over the secular Indian fabric. The anti-Babri Mosque-Ram Ayodhya movement, Kashi-Madhura temple movement, construction of a statue of Manu before the Rajasthan High Court, Godhra riots and massacre in Gujarat, the saffronisation of education system, introduction of a new course on Hinduism and culture under the banner of Hindu Studies at Bharat Adhyayan Kendra of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) with a handsome amount of fellowship to attract the student, also in June 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was accompanied by Hindu priests at the inauguration of the new parliament building heading the 20 *Adheenams* in Tamil Nadu installed the *Sengol* near the chair of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, as the symbol of Dharmasatta to control Loksatta, governmental preference of 'Bharat' over 'India', opening of the new Parliament building on Ganesh Chaturthi on September 19, 2023, the increasing presence of Hindu Sadhus-rituals in governmental functions, including the first special session of the new parliament building held in Delhi on September 18 to 22, 2023, installation of 108-feet tall statue of Adi-Shankaracharya, the revivalist of Sanatana Dharma, by the MP BJP-Shivraj Singh Chauhan government on September 20, 2023, writing in English daily's column by RSS-BJP functionary under the caption Ram Rajya⁵, and above all 24x7 electronic media religious propaganda by Hindu Sadhus and Sadhvi's on TV channels, all these factors have led to the strengthening of the advocacy of Sanatan Dharma.

Strangely, the Prime Minister Modi himself has joined the chorus of Sanatan Dharma. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi's advocacy of Sanatan Dharma and his appeal to all his colleagues to counter strongly any opposition to Sanatan Dharma has infused new spirit among the Sanatan forces. The description of PM Modi as, "the God avatar by the Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) Gulab Devi, "the incarnation of god" and like Ram-Krishna by the Madhya Pradesh Agriculture Minister Kamal Patel and the "king of gods" by the BJP President J. P. Nadda - all these are suggesting a journey of secular India towards a Hindu-Sanatan Rashtra with Brahminical orientations, though the task of which is not easy.

According to several leading historians, sociologists and other scholars, varna-caste culture has been the age-old disease of Indian society that has caused an irreparable damage to India by butchering the manhood and womanhood of crores and crores of men and women, especially from the disadvantaged classes, forcing them to live like beasts. In Maharashtra, Lokhitwadi-Gopal Hari Deshmukh, although born in Brahmin community himself, courageously went on record by saying that, " the Brahmins ruined the country."⁶ Swami Vivekanand in great anguish declared the upper classes in India as mummies of ten thousand years old, dead body of past India.⁷ Dr. Babasaheb-B. R. Ambedkar in his several speeches and writings, especially in his one of the finest discourses, "Annihilation of Caste", after appealing for the bursting of the citadel of casteism have warned the countrymen by stating that, "Hindus are the sick men of India and their sickness is causing danger to the health and happiness of other Indians,"⁸

Yet, it is pitiable that even today we find some blind followers and diehard upholders of Sanatan Dharma mostly from the RSS-BJP camps who continue to charge the opponents of "Sanatan Dharma" with Macaulayist mindset, but without advancing the justifications for continuation of Sanatani traditions.⁹ Horrible enough that they all ignore the existing terrible caste-untouchability, caste rape-killings, discrimination mechanism, gender injustice, exploitation and subjugation, like Murlya or jogtinis of Hindu God in the name of Hindu religion and yet go on shamelessly beating the drums of Sanatan Dharma. Cleverly such scholars advance the argument that, "in the Sanatan tradition, birth-based division was never accepted in ancient times nor was any hierarchy codified." This is nothing but an intellectual dishonesty, simply an eyewash due to the mountains of evidences on other side to rubbish it.

The protagonists of the Sanatan Dharma cleverly try to maintain an abstract form and content of Sanatan Dharma to benefit them conveniently. Therefore, they do not have the courage to define the precise and exact text or the pillars of Sanatan Dharma and do not work for the eradication of those parts which are not the pillars of Sanatan Dharma. Simply, whether they uphold the Varna-caste hierarchy, oppose child marriages and practice untouchability, and without all these will the so-called eternal Dharma exist? For the better India and in an era of basic human rights to each human being, and in the modern civilised state governed by a Constitution and Rule of Law, if the Sanatanis come out with what and what not constitutes the Sanatan Dharma, it will be possible to avoid such conflicts in near future.

The South India, especially Tamil Nadu, has a long opposition tradition to Sanatan Dharma since pre-independence period with its solid roots in non-Brahmin movement led by leaders like Periyar E. V. Ramasamy and others. Thanthai Periyar called Manu-Dharma a code of injustice to non-Brahmins.¹⁰ In tune to that and to carry forward the same socio-cultural legacy, DMK leader, Sports Minister Mr. Udhayanidhi Stalin on September 2, 2023 equated Sanatan Dharma to “mosquitoes, dengue, malaria and corona”, and called for its eradication, while addressing a meeting of the Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers and Artists Association. In a 2024 poll bound charged environment it has greatly provoked and enraged Hindutva forces, who interpreted Mr. junior Stalin remarks as a “call for genocide of Hindus” to make it a poll issue declaring that the next Lok Sabha Elections as a “civilisation fight” to protect Sanatan Dharma.¹¹

In this battle of ideology, the centrist party like Congress is trying to uphold the principle of “Sarva Dharma Sam Bhav” but from BJP-RSS combine several leaders have come out sharpening the weapons on Udhayanidhi Stalin. This also included the modern Hindutva leader and trader-Baba Ramdev, who on September 17, 2023 went one step ahead and predicted the end of all anti-Sanatanis in 2024. Reacting over the controversy of India over Bharat-a brainchild of BJP-RSS, the yoga guru said that “the people who have problems in their DNA like the word India.” forgetting conveniently the command of Article 1(1) of the Indian Constitution¹² besides the fact that until the united opposition named their alliance as “I.N.D.I.A.” all Sanghis and Baba’s were singing and dancing to the tune

of “India”. Yet, the RSS-BJP combine, it seems that, they have made a well-designed plan to use the Hindu pride to address their political constituencies and poll prospects. However, let us not forget that, the Hindutva parties who now claims to be the self-declared champions of Sanatani Dharma or the Hindu Nationalism chanting the mantra of Bharat and not India, have also allied with Dravidian parties at one point or the other and there is no guarantee that they will not align in future also.

The reaction to the statement of Udaynidhi Stalin on Sanatan Dharma was so strong and sharp from Hindutva forces that, on September 5, 2023 Mr. Junior Stalin received a death threat from Ayodhya seer Paramhans Acharya that announced a reward of Rs 10 crore for beheading Udhayanidhi Stalin over his alleged remarks. The Acharya, in his insane intellectual display also argued that, "Sanatan Dharma neither has a beginning nor an end. It had never been destroyed and can never be destroyed," with a warning that “anyone trying to destroy Sanatan Dharma will be destroyed.” Similarly, the Tamil Nadu BJP President in quest of pursuing an aggressive Hindutva agenda, Mr. K. Annamalai-a backward class, the IPS turned politician went on to oppose Stalin’s remarks by adopting a very hard line and even by insulting the icons of Dravidians movement such as, Periyar and C. N. Annadurai. Many frontline BJP-RSS leaders have expressed their outrage over the statement.

However, let us not be mistaken by the remarks of junior Stalin and their opposition to it by few sadhus and politicians, it is a fight between them only. It should not be viewed merely as the clash of ideas amongst few individuals. In India it is an age-old conflict and there are tons and tons of records of different times to prove it. In-fact it is a clash of two cultures, the Brahmanical Aryan and Non-Brahmanical Dravidian. Therefore, it calls for a deep pondering by each right-minded people on the earth who look towards India for betterment. It is not merely a clash-conflict of social ideas-norms but in fact it is a conflict between two long standing socio-religious-cultural forces represented by different names and identities. And therefore, viewing and analysing it purely from the political perspective is superficial and myopic.

The remarks by Stalin not only antagonised modern fundamentalist-Hindutva crusaders, such as, Amit Shah, the Home Minister of India, the Union Minister Mr. Jotiraditya Scindia-a recruit in BJP from Congress

party but also some of the hardcore Congressmen such as, Kamalnath from Madhya Pradesh on one side and Arvind Kejriwal, the proponent of new politics of Aam Admi Party on the other. However, the most astonishing part of this dual was that the RSS-BJP leader and Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi, who never reacted so promptly on several national issues, whether it was a murderous attack on Indian soldiers at Pulwama in 2019 or rapes and killings in BJP ruled Manipur in 2023, in public meetings at poll bound states, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh roared that, “opposition wants to crush Sanatan Dharma, seeking to push country back into 1,000 years of slavery, need to stop them” claiming the legacy for Sanatan from Tilak, Gandhi, Vivekanand and others.¹³ The PM not only spoke positively of Sanatan Dharma but also asked his ministers to strongly defend Sanatan and counter the opposition with a general appeal to the people to be vigilant against such “attacks on us (Sanatanis) across the country”. Pathetic....

The PM while addressing public rallies at Bhopal and Raipur made the above remarks in a poll-oriented election political meetings and hence does not deserve a detailed academic scrutiny. Yet, since ignorantly by relying on Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda, the PM also claimed the legacy for Sanatana traditions, which was a political blunder. While saying so, PM Modi seems to have forgotten the sane advise of Mahatma Gandhi who had openly said that, “Hindus if they want unity among different races must have the courage to trust the minorities” and “free India will be no Hindu Raj, it will be Indian Raj based not on the majority of any religious sect or community but on the representatives of the whole people without distinction of religion.”¹⁴ Gandhiji’s viewpoint is diametrically opposite to the BJP government’s viewpoint in Uttar Pradesh with a slogan of 80% (Hindus) verses 20% (Muslims). Yet, PM Modi was seen pitiably justifying the Sanatana culture by invoking rather misappropriating the names of Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, and others.

Swami Vivekanand never advocated for inhuman, oppressive Sanatan culture or dharma. On the contrary, his scorn and hatred for the parasitic exploiting upper classes of India, mainly the feudal classes and upper castes to whom he considered to be unnecessary, outdated ornaments of the society, dead souls, and “living corpses”, and his prophecy about Shudra Raj is also well known to the Swami readers. And certainly, how can anyone forget the strong and forthright advise of the Swami when he thundered against the dogmatic Hinduism by saying that, “our religion is in

the kitchen. Our God is the cooking pot, and our religion is ‘Don’t touch me, I am holy. If this goes on for another century, every one of us will be in lunatic asylum.’¹⁵ Equally, let us not forget, after having seen the madness and nakedness of Hindu religion, an empire of casteism and its inhuman evils, the slave trade of Shudras-atishudras-women in open slave markets of South India, Vivekanand had also declared, the then Kerala a “lunatic asylum’.

Conveniently the bunch of Sanatanis suffer from the disease of amnesia (loss of memory) Swami Vivekananda’s writing in 1897, that categorically told us the neglect of the masses was one of the causes of our downfall. He said, the millions of masses are practically our slaves and as long as they remain a slave, I hold every man a traitor. While accusing the exploiting class, all guilty men of India, Swami courageously blasted on those who were busy singing the song of ancient glorious civilisation of India by saying that, “However much you may parade your descent from Aryan ancestors and sing the glories of ancient India day and night, and however much you may be strutting in the pride of your birth, you the upper classes of India—do you think you are alive? You are but Mummies ten thousand years old, it is among those whom your ancestors despised as ‘walking carriages’ that the little of vitality there is still in India is to be found; and it is you who are the real ‘walking corpses’....In this world of Maya, you are the real illusions, the mystery, the real mirage in the desert, you the upper classes of India! you represent the past tense with all its varieties of form jumbled into oneYou are the void, the unsubstantial nonentities of the future. Denizens of the dreamland, why are you loitering any longer? Fleshless and bloodless skeletons of the dead body of past India that you are—why do you not quickly reduce your selves into dust and disappear, and let new India arise in your place.”¹⁶ I hope that each and every Hindutva or Sanatani a genuine devotee or a thekedar will have to rehear these historical words of at-least the great Swamiji, if they do not have the will and capacity to understand and digest the ideologies and the struggles of Mahatma Jotiba Phuley, Periyarji and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar for the reconstruction of primarily Hindu society on the pillars of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice with a culture of human rights.

The Sanatan Dharma or for that the RSS-BJP supporters have been guilty for misunderstanding the people of this land to Hindus only. There is a befitting reply to such intentional mistake in Discovery of India by Jawaharlal Nehru. He wrote “the word ‘Hindu’ does not occur at all in our

ancient literature and in a Tantrik work of the 8th century, Hindu means a people and not the followers of a particular religion.” Further he has said, “Hinduism, as a faith, is vague, amorphous, many-sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed say whether it is a religion, or not, in the usual sense of the word. In its present form, and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest often opposed to or contradicting each other....It is therefore, incorrect and undesirable to use “Hindu” or “Hinduism” for Indian culture even with reference to the distant past....”¹⁷

Today, Sanatana Dharma is associated only with Hinduism. In India, the present form of Hinduism has been the collective product of Vedic culture, Varnashrama Dharma, Manu Dharma, or called as Sanatan Dharma that has preserved and perpetuated the supremacy and hegemony of Bramhinocracy in all spheres of human life. Consequently, Hinduism is not represented by a single authority, that is God, Religious text-document, etc. To the celebrated British academician and historian Monier Williams, therefore, “Hinduism is far more than a mere a form of theism resting on Brahmanism.” The great scholar of Hindu religion, Dr. Radhakrishnan, while admitting the fact of inability in providing the precise version of Hinduism admitted and stated that, “When we think of the Hindu religion. We find it difficult, if not possible, to define Hindu religion. It may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more.”

One of the great champions of the Hindutva religion and philosophy Mr. V. D. Savarkar defined a Hindu in a sense of geographical and inclusive sense stating that, “every person is a Hindu who regards and owes this Bharat-Bhoomi—this land from the Indus (river) to the seas, as his fatherland and Holyland—the land of origin of his religion and the cradle of his faith”, though principally he opposed Buddha and Buddhism. The irony of Hindutva Sanatanis is that even in Savarkar’s India, in casteless society all citizens are entitled for all rights and obligations, without distinction of caste, creed, religion, race etc. and presence of minorities with effective safeguards.¹⁸

In this background, the first reference to Hindutva was recorded by the Supreme Court of India in the case of Ismail Farooqui V. Union of India,

popularly known as the Babri Masjid demolition case¹⁹, by saying that, “Ordinarily, Hindutva is understood as a way of life or a state of mind and it is not to be equated with, or understood as religious Hindu fundamentalism.” After two years, in another decision-Ramesh Prabhu case²⁰, the three judges Bench of the Supreme Court of India, after going through all earlier judgments and in-depth enquiry ruled that, Hinduism “indicate that no precise meaning can be ascribed to the terms ‘Hindu’, ‘Hindutva’ and ‘Hinduism’; and no meaning in the abstract can confine it to the narrow limits of religion alone, excluding the content of Indian culture and heritage. It is also indicated that the term ‘Hindutva’ is related more to the way of life of the people in the sub- continent. It is difficult to appreciate how in the face of these decisions the term ‘Hindutva’ or ‘Hinduism’ per se, in the abstract, can be assumed to mean and be equated with narrow fundamentalist Hindu religious bigotry....”.After the judgment, strong efforts were made to reverse it but it failed.

In February, 2023, in a petition filed by an advocate with BJP ideology praying for the issue of directions for renaming roads, places with their ancient names but called after names of foreigners, a bench of two justices on February 26, 2023, rejected the Petition by observing that, Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life and that there is no bigotry in Hinduism. The Hon. Court also warned the Petitioner by saying that, do not dig up the past. India is a secular country and the history of the past cannot be allowed to haunt the present generation. Legally, therefore, it is now settled that, Hinduism is not a religion and Hindutva, is a political ideology that promotes Hindu nationalism and emphasizes the need to establish a Hindu identity in India which is also founded on the belief that this is the only land of Hindus. Consequently, who so ever challenge this belief he is declared as the enemy of not only Hindus but the entire country.

In fact, the Hindu society is a collection of castes, a system of gradation and degradation. Without caste Hindu community cannot sustain. And therefore, the RSS ideologue M. S. Golwalkar held both the systems of varna and caste as peculiar to Hindu society and so was the strong votary of varna and caste systems. According to him the Varna system was supreme and God gift. By this logic, he was very sure about the existence of Hindus till the existence of caste system.

But Strikingly Mr. Golwalkar’s position is exactly opposite to another Hindutva leader Mr. Savarkar’s Hindu nationalism without varna and caste.

And Dr. Ambedkar took another extreme position by holding that unless we kill the inhuman monstrous system of Varna and caste, India cannot be one nation. On this he has fundamental difference with Mahatma Gandhi, because he too believed in Ram Rajya of Hindu mythology and so favoured the varna as a natural division and was opposed to the caste and untouchability. Gandhiji held the four varna system to be fundamental, natural, and essential.²¹ This view of Gandhiji was so irrational and unscientific like his remark in 1934 on earthquake in Bihar when he said, “that earthquake had been a punishment for the sin of untouchability.” On the other hand, Dr. Ambedkar held the view that unless we annihilate the varna system the system of caste will not vanish.

Sanatan Dharma controversy in Tamil Nadu has also affected the poll prospects of the BJP due to ouster of the AIADMK from the NDA led by the BJP. The debate over the Sanatana controversy led to an objectionable remark by the BJP Tamil Nadu State President Mr. K. Annamalai about the Dravidian icon Mr. C. N. Annadurai. He accused the late Chief Minister C. N. Annadurai of making disparaging comments about Hinduism back in 1956 and for that Annadurai had to seek refuge in Madurai and issue an apology. During a demonstration against the “Sanatana Dharma” eradication conference, Annamalai on September 11 had criticized Annadurai for his alleged remarks against Hindu religion by claiming that Anna’s remarks against Hindu religion were opposed by Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar.

This sparked another controversy and several AIADMK leaders were prompt to deny occurrence of any such incident. The AIADMK leaders claimed that AIADMK party cadre will never accept the insult of Anna (Annadurai), and Periyar and has announced that it will be contesting the 2024 election with its other allies.

Therefore, in the background of such social and political turmoil, in the 21st century India, there are few takers for Sanatani Dharma. Yet a bunch of Sanatanis are trying to sell and inject the “Sanatan Dharma” in the entire body politic of India. Probably they perceive that this is the right time to inject and articulate it. With the backing from the RSS and BJP’s power

structure they must have calculatedly thought that it will give them a rich dividend in terms of a political power and social control. Let us see.

The Sanatan Dharma controversy has also resulted into the legal battle between its supporters and opponents. As a result, in a legal action over the remarks on Sanatan Dharma by Mr. Stalin, for the hate speech, the first FIR under sections 295-A (outraging the religious feelings of any class) and 153-A (promoting enmity between two groups) of Indian Penal Code, Britishers legislation again, was registered on September 6, 2023 in Uttar Pradesh and since then till September 29, 2023, several FIRs have been filed in different parts of the country and more than 40 writ petitions have also been filed. Consequently, on September 22, 2023, the Supreme Court of India had issued notice to TN minister Stalin and others over their remarks against Sanatan Dharma and thus the Sanatan Dharma has taken the shape of a legal battle. Naturally the DMK and Mr. Stalin and others will contest the issue before the Supreme Court with full force and strength. Therefore, soon, it will be interesting to see how it takes a legal and political turn in shaping the new “Bharat” recently discovered by the BJP and RSS.

However, one thing is certain that, in the agenda of Sanatan Dharma or the Hindu Rashtra loaded with Brahmanical supremacy, the Indian Constitution and democracy are viewed as the roadblocks by the Hindutva forces and there lies the biggest danger. In fact, in January 1993, the then RSS supremo Rajendra Singh writing on this issue clearly wrote that, “The present conflict can be partially attributed to the inadequacies of our system in responding to the needs of the essential India, its tradition, values and ethos....Certain specialities of this country should be reflected in the Constitution. In place of ‘India that is Bharat’, we should have said ‘Bharat that is Hindustan’....A Constitution more suited to the ethos and genius of this country should be adopted in the future.”

Therefore, in the changed political scenario, when at the all-India level political opposition is weak and fragmented, the RSS-BJP gameplan is to gain the absolute parliamentary majority in 2024 general election to implement its age old-agenda of destruction of secular India and construction of Hindu Bharat or Sanatan Dharma by using the constitutional methods of parliamentary democracy, as it was done by Adolphe Hitler, in August 1934 in Germany. Of course, in India, it is not so easy like other countries. It is Himalayan task. Yet, let us see who wins and who losses.

Notes & References:

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20. Ramesh Prabhu V. Prabhakar Kunte (1996 (1) SCC 130.)
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