**Khushwant Singh and Hindu Nationalism**

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Being a sceptic about random press reports defining “Hindu Nationalism,” I always try to ascertain what the Indian Intelligentsia think about “Hindu Nationalism,”, particularly in the light of the ramifications put on this entity by its PM Narinder Modi. Earlier, in my previous pieces, I had discussed at length the views of two current Indian icons, namely Arundhati Roy and Shashi Tharoor, both writers of international repute and have earned several accolades from the western world.

Today I propose to discuss the views of a still greater luminary, namely Khushwant Singh, a world-famous writer and journalist, whose entire gamut of writings is replete with his illuminating description of Indian soil and its people. But, I have contented myself with only one of his books, namely “The End of India,” published in 2003, which covers the subject at some length. It was Khushwant Singh who foretold the rise of fascism in India, as early as the Gujerat communal riots where Narinder Modi, the then CM of the state, unleashed a preplanned pogrom for the mass killing of Muslims under his direct command where the Police were ordered not to intervene on behalf of the Muslims. As a journalist and a political commentator, Khushwant Singh’s views hold sway even eight years after his passing away. Since he always stood for justice and fair play and wrote without any religious or racial prejudices, his views were greatly respected and were often far ahead of his time. His book “The End of India” is replete with numerous Hindu excesses against the Muslim minority, which he wholeheartedly condemned.

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Khushwant Singh has very passionately described India’s communal violence in Gujarat in 2002; the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the targeted killings by terrorists in Punjab and Kashmir, and the absolute corruption of religious fundamentalism, which has less to do with religion (as propounded by their Founders) than with politics, which made Mr Singh think that India’s future is doomed. He regretted noting the caste wars in Bihar, the ghettoization of minorities, and India’s obsession with caste, regional and racial identity, which, according to him, would rip it apart one day as a nation. This brave and passionate book by Khushwant Singh was written in 2003 (i.e., 11 years before the ruling BJP seized power in India under PM Modi when its regional and racial identities took their ugly face). These dark forces, Khushwant Singh predicted, if remained unchallenged, will, indeed, bring about the end of India. India may not “end” in the literal sense, but it would lose its internal peace and security. Khushwant Singh writes, “the country will break up. It will not be Pakistan or any other foreign power that will destroy us; we will commit hara-kiri (a ritual suicide).”

Hence this book is a wake-up call for all Indian citizens. In Europe, the secular forces had to fight off Christianity to develop, a process that had not happened in Islam, resulting in backward and non-democratic societies. According to Khushwant Singh, “In India, Hinduism has to be countered by secularism among its 80% Hindu population rather than by any of its minorities.”

It is ironic that the founders and the architects of India like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel, Dr Rajendra Prasad and Dr Ambedkar etc., wanted to make India a secular state, and accordingly, the Indian Constitution was given a secular character by inserting various laws and policies that prevented discrimination based on religion and provided equal opportunities for all Indian citizens. Hinduism is the name given to the ancient religion of India, while Hindutva is a retrogressive ideology asserting the rights of Hindus only as represented by the BJP. More clearly, it meant how to galvanize masses using the religious rhetoric.

Khushwant also defines the Indian version of secularism, which basically means the state acknowledges all religions residing within its territories. Thus, he sums up the book by presenting a new religion for India with the motto, “work is worship but worship is not work.” He argues for democracy, secular society and rule of law. Khushwant Singh was deadly against India’s march to a racist theocracy which is the principal theme of this book.

As a true Secular Citizen of India and as a scholar and journalist, his newspaper column, “With malice to one and all” was keenly read in India. His Political Prophecies written decades ago when BJP Party was not in power came true. He regarded both the BJP and RSS as retrogressive and thought that if they persisted in their policies they would soon take India to the Dark Ages. As a great scholar of comparative religions, he could see fascism ruling India. He wrote, “The only religion these fundamentalists have in common is the religion of hate and abuse.”

The abrogation of Articles 35A and 370 of the Indian Constitution, changing the status of Indian-Occupied Kashmir, is another significant incident related to the expansion of Hindutva ideology under the Modi regime. This move was seen by the world as an attempt to impose Hindu nationalism on the region. The decision was followed by a clampdown on dissent and a communications blackout, which lasted for several months.

The amendment has been widely criticised as discriminating on the basis of religion, in particular for excluding Muslims. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called it “fundamentally discriminatory.” Critics express concerns that this amendment would be used, along with the National Register of Citizens, to render Muslim citizens stateless. Commentators also question the exclusion of persecuted religious minorities from other regions such as Tibet, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Scholars describe Muslim minorities in these countries, such as Hazaras and Ahmadis, as also facing persecution.

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