

## **Hindu Nationalism and Rise of majoritarian Democracy**

A discussion on Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of majoritarian Democracy was organised by the Dravidian Professional Forum. The Panelists were honourable Palanivel Thiagarajan, the Minister for Finance, Human Resources Government of Tamil Nadu, who before entering politics was the senior managing director of the Standard Chartered Bank; Shashi Tharoor former international diplomat, politician, writer and public intellectual who has been serving as Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, since 2009 and Prof. Christophe Jaffrelot a French political scientist and Indologist specialising in South Asia, particularly India and Pakistan. Puhazh Gandhi and Dharanidharan moderated the session.

Puhazh illuminated the topic by stating the core of India as a country that is a union of states. It is sovereign, socialist, secular and republic. Despite the diversity in languages, culture, beliefs, religion, etc. it builds a nation that has been flourishing and developing with peace and harmony over the last seven decades. Article 25 is there in our constitution to allow all religions to practise, profess and propagate and freedom of conscience which implies not to believe in any particular ideology is one of the stepping stones of this nation's unity in diversity. But in the last year, the propagation of Hindu nationalism is against the constitutional moral values and undermines the basic feeling of equality in the country giving rise to majoritarianism. Many countries like Afghanistan and Turkey had failed as a nation-state as the leaders didn't understand the importance of secularism and propagated a single religion of the state. Hence, for a country like India with a diverse section of people, this is an issue of utmost importance and needs intellectual discussions to ideate solutions for the same.

Shashi Tharoor clearly defines the ideas of civic nationalism, ethnic-religion nationalism, nationalist movement and patriotism. Civic nationalism promotes a feeling of inclusivity of all differences in compliance with the constitution. Ethnic-religion is exclusionary in nature and is dangerous for a country with differences. He called it a malignant form of nationalism that prepares the ground for religious propaganda and movements like the Hindutva Movement. Nationalism movements are divisive in nature and promote a belief that religion should determine a nation and believes that colour, religion, ethnicity and all other differences are irrelevant for example Pakistan. Patriotism is the love for the country and a patriot can even die for his/her country. It is a devotion to a place and these people do not force others to believe the same. Nationalists are so extreme who can kill others for their state and they are inseparable from the desire for more power and prestige. Nationalism certainly has negative outcomes.

He stated George O'Well's lines who calls Patriotism a devotion to a particular place which one believes to be the best and not force others to believe the same. Rabindranath Tagore had once defined the idea of the nation as one of the powerful, systematic programs of self-seeking and self-rule and not forcing and threatening others to follow their ideology or beliefs. According to an American scholar, there is good and evil nationalism. Positive nationalism is a constructive force, an ideology that organises a community more systematically, and promotes and protects democratic institutions. Negative nationalism is chauvinistic in attitude and there is lust for power and prestige.

Civic nationalism embraces all religions or castes and doesn't judge anyone being a nationalist or a patriot. Shashi said that the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act has been the task of introducing religion as a litmus test and it is also an indication of the beginning of the regime of absolute policies. Recently, there has been an increase in authoritarianism and the undermining of institutions. The very idea of Parliament is to ensure accountability of the government to the public at large. He gave an instance of the case of Pegasus where the officials didn't show up during an enquiry process and gave excuses of some personal commitments which is an assault on the basic parliamentary tradition and unimaginable in any other society. Majoritarianism is a part of The Hindutva project or rather the Moditva project it should be called as it is just a personality cult. This project is preparing the ground for gender, caste, language and much more differences. India has always been a country where minority has always been in the nation's mainstream and it believes in a land of belongingness rather than of blood. Subnational identities had been exploited for a long period in India's history but the aggregation of Hindutva and Moditva is a new phenomenon and there is pretty prejudice and politics concerned about it.

The imposition of Hindutva in southern states is a synonym for the cultural and political ethos and the communal majority is a fundamental assault to self-respectful participation in the country. Hinduism is not Hindutva. It is a religion that is inclusive and non-judgmental while Hindutva is a political doctrine and has its roots in India's politics and social extension. He openly announces his indifference to either soft or hard Hindutva and said religion is a personal concern while Hindutva is a political doctrine that is anti-Hindu ideology. Hinduism is all about reforms and progress while Hindutva is reactionary and regressive. The majority community and majoritarianism is misleading. In India, most Hindus, Muslims and Christians respect each other's religion and faith which has been evident since independence. Hence, with optimism, he said that Indians cannot be moulded into an ethnic, nationalist or majoritarian project as at present many parties are trying to do.

Prof. Christophe Jaffrelot said that Modi poses a threat to India in three ways which he seems to exemplify in his book which is the rise of Hindu nationalism, the rise of national populism and the rise of authoritarianism which is the most disturbing these days and a sign of democratic decline and decline in the checks and balances system. The way bureaucrats have been appointed in government institutions is very difficult to decipher and lacks transparency. The silence of judiciary since 2017 on the government's decisions like the Abolition of Article 37; the end of the space for deliberations, discussion and dissent in the parliament over pertinent issues like the farm laws and the dominance of government's decree on media through various sedition laws on the journalists and recent IT laws are some of the evidence of rising authoritarianism in India and this phenomenon is not unique to India but is prevalent in everywhere in the world. In history, authoritarianism could be occasionally spotted due to military rule but mostly it is promoted by the elected members in politics. Populist belief is that the ruler is above all the people in a country and hence they have a natural tendency to rule in an arbitrary manner. Therefore, the idea of elections is important as a way to renew this rigidity. Electoral authoritarianism has almost distorted the functioning of various institutions including the Election Commission. Elections are not an equal playing level field anymore because of electoral bonds. Not only this there is political economy behind the scene and crony capitalism which is in a give and take relationship agreement with the ruling parties. The recent idea of Privatisation is one of the techniques to pay back these cronies. Majoritarianism of Hindus is equivalent to a nation for example

Israel where there is a democracy with a civil class of citizens and democracy in India has a patrimonial dimension. India also suffers from the problem of the kind of privatisation of violence where the vigilante groups as old as Bajrang Dal play a major role in articulating patriotic campaigns, acting in a systematic manner and in coordination with the politicians. The sustainability of the authoritarian regime in India has been possible as the rest of the world never interfered despite these internal problems and the west also know they need to maintain a balance between China and India and hence can't be close to any one of them.

TKS Elangovan gave his remarks on the topic as well. He said that BJP and RSS have always propagated the Hindutva regime and had challenged the court that Hindutva and Hinduism are the same. Hindu people in India opted for Congress for so long in the past as they had no alternative at that point. He said that Modi during the campaigns never talked about Hinduism and religion rather talked about the growth, development and economy while the party had been ruled and governed by the ideology of the RSS which openly promotes Hindutva. People do not believe in majoritarianism but rather in economic development and welfare. He also told that if opposition with similar secularist views unites the centre can never practice majoritarianism. People do not vote for the candidates on the basis of religion but do let down the ruling party when they do not stand by the promises made in their manifestos while campaigning. Indians want a peaceful social and economically stable life and regional parties seem to fulfil this objective.

## **Q and A**

Q1) The rise of ethnic-nationalism and Hinduism is so rhetoric and ethnic division had always been latent in a country but in recent times it is in the manifesto. Is there identity-based politics in India and why do the political parties seem to promote the same?

Shashi Tharoor answered saying there always existed ethnic groups in India and ethnicity sometimes goes beyond the constitution and the space for ethnicity in the manifesto is a challenge for democracy. For 70 years we observed ethnically, linguistic, religiously equal groups in India and the beauty of India is that most of the people work together and get together. Some of the instances of communal violence happened as these groups deliberately sought to be manipulated in a conscious set of polarisation. In many instances, majoritarian religion had been advocated. Also, by 2026 the proportion of seats in the parliament would not be on the basis of the 1971 census and hence, reduce the proportion of South ministers in the parliament and lead to the majority of the people sharing opinions in a house which will ease the way to pass bills and amendments easily.

Christophe added that the idea of nationalism is the result of the groundwork of RSS for 100 years. Emotions also play a huge role in political propaganda making the minority vulnerable. The rise of Dalits, OBCs in North Indian politics is also a political way for ethnocentrism. He also commented upon the failure of congress and the reason for the same which was the policy which they had adopted and the arrival of politics of fear at right time.

Q2) A S Panneerselvan asked India is a single country with two forms of nation-building coming together and holding together. In recent years how the idea of coming together has been corroded?

Shashi addressed his question and he said the idea of coming together automatically collapses when people identify themselves separately and hence exclusionary.

Christophe here talked about the deterioration of the fundamentals of federalism in India which is built on the grounds of holding together. Various decisions like the revival of the centrifugal forces in Kashmir, Demonetisation, lockdown without consulting with the other members in the parliament paves a path to reignite the centrifugal forces again.

Q3) The copying of BJP's election strategy to combat BJP by other parties and to win elections is a way to or to any other problem in the democracy?

BJP has efficiently and effectively used social media like Whatsapp as a first-mover advantage in politics for spreading propaganda and was able to shape the perception of the people by their own single ideology. The amount of BJP spending is almost 55% of the total campaigning spending by all the parties and following BJP most of the parties used social media and funding to a large extent but Congress decided and tried to influence the people with other methods and multilayers of political activities.

Christophe talked about the irrationality of the BJP and the unaccountability of the charismatic leader which is not good for any democracy. He also criticised the populist belief which is mainly favouring the elite. He also condemned the caste politics done by BJP in a sophisticated manner wherein Hindutva has emerged as a reaction to reservation who could not be benefitted from the reservation.