

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Girilal Jain, *The Hindu Phenomenon*, UBSPD, New Delhi, 1994, vii+ 170 pp.**

India is a great nation. Apart from the nature having been bounteous to India, the genius of a series of its outstanding leaders has significantly contributed to its greatness since its independence in 1947. Mahatma Gandhi, the fourth most illustrious son of India after the Buddha, Ashoka and Akbar, shall be remembered for ever as a pioneer of Hindu-Muslim unity. While Jawaharlal Nehru was more successful in the realm of Indian politics, his daughter, Indira Gandhi, was among the first to realise the necessity for the Indian economy to open up. This was followed up by her successors, including Rajiv Gandhi, her son. With the end of the Cold War and with Manmohan Singh as Narasimha Rao's Finance Minister since 1991, India's economic liberalisation has been put on a fast track, and thus India has gathered enough momentum over the last few years to take off as an economic power house. However, the gathering storm in the form of the rising head of *Hindutva* looks set to cast its evil shadow on and pull back the country otherwise poised to take a giant leap forward.

Indeed, there has been a marked rise in Hindu fundamentalism in India since the 1980s symbolised not only by the ever increasing spurts of Hindu-Muslim communal violence

and the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi controversy, but also by the steady political ascendancy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), apart from the growing militancy of some other Hindu organisations, reflected in its phenomenal electoral gains over the last one decade at both the Union and state levels. The significance of all this for India and others beyond is all too evident from the fact that it is engaging the attention of and at times dominating the discourses in political, intellectual and academic circles. Much has been published and is being written on the tenor, texture and implications of *Hindutva* (Hinduness) that is sought to inform the making of the personality and the functioning of the State of India, which is projected to be essentially a *Hindu Rashtra*.

Girilal Jain's book, entitled *The Hindu Phenomenon*, is a significant addition to the corpus of literature on the background, course and direction of the resurgence of Hinduism in India. The distinctiveness of the book lies in the fact that, unlike many others, the author displays an uncommon gallantry in laying all his cards on the table with the confidence that no other hand shall have the power to challenge his. In other words, he is bold and candid to the extent of being rather blunt in arguing his case, which is championing the cause of *Hindutva*.

The central thesis in Jain's book reads like a ballad of a *bhakt* (ardent devotee), eulogising Hinduism in the manner of Vedic hymns chanted repeatedly for the purpose of driving home a message to a formidable combination of cultural, intellectual, social and political forces in India willing to and near-capable of undoing the socio-economic-political-cultural *status quo* in the country. He contends that Hinduism is a civilisation, and not a religion in the 'narrow' Semitic sense of the term; that the Indian state should be founded on this civilisation reflecting Hindu ethos and personality. Jain maintains that only Hindu civilisation is

capable of self-renewal and self-affirmation on its own terms and that Hindus have won the millennium-old 'civilisational contest' with Muslims in India. The author goes on to say that the Hindu recovery has acquired such power and momentum that it cannot be content any more to operate in disguise, and that the demolition of the Babri-Masjid is to be seen in that light. He argues that Hinduism is an all-inclusive system, allegedly unlike Islam which he brands as narrow and stagnant due to its rigidity and immutable nature. And last but not the least, Jain holds out carrots for the Muslims of India as he contends that they would be better off in a situation in which the primacy of Hinduism has been established.

The book under review is divided into six chapters, the essence of which is buttressed by four lengthy, essay-type appendices. In the first chapter, called the **Civilisational Perspective**, the author tends to believe that it is the failure of the Indians to view themselves as a civilisation and to formulate the tasks for the Indian state accordingly that lies behind many of the current problems facing India (p.1). He tends to grumble for "the beginning of the millennium witnessed the beginning of the assault [by Muslims] on Hindu India and as we approach its end, we can clearly see the approach of the end of that assault" (p. 3). Jain reassures his target readers: "we are set on the path to Hindu *rashtra*" (p.6).

To be precise, in Jain's view, "a process of [Hindu] self-affirmation...began with the establishment and consolidation of British rule " (p.7) as "a significant and fundamental shift took place [in favour of Hindus] in the power balance between Hindus and Muslims [under the Raj] (p.10). According to him, the "Raj constituted a challenge to Islam, while it served as a stimulus to Hindus for self-discovery and recovery" (p.8).

One has reason to pause here for a moment to have a second look at what Jain has already said because some of his contentions are not borne out by historical facts. The Muslim rulers throughout the whole world are on record since the days of the Holy Prophet to have meted out even-handed justice and treatment to non-Muslims, such as Jews and Christians. History is replete with evidences that the Muslim rulers of India, be they Sultans or Mughal Emperors, were mostly tolerant towards Hindus as well as other religious minorities as they kept the socio-cultural-economic patterns and life styles of Indians by and large intact. Except for acts in the heat of battle, violence did not normally characterise the relations of Muslim and Hindu. It is mainly because of the British policy of 'divide and rule', most often favouring Hindus, which actually soured the Hindu-Muslim relationship during their rule.

On the contrary, it is not only Akbar the Great, the darling of the exponents of the concept of composite culture in India, but also many other Sultans and Mughal Emperors who richly contributed to the essence and fabric of Indian civilisation as well as to peace, prosperity and harmony in the land they ruled. That they left an indelible imprint on the culture-civilisation of India is evident almost in every branch of human endeavour, be it literature and language, architecture, music and even richness of cuisine. Two of India's architectural marvels that dazzle the viewers' eyes belong to non-Hindus, the Taj Mahal to Muslims and the Golden Temple to Sikhs. Even Aurangzeb, who is the most hated of the Muslim rulers of India in the eyes of the Hindus, is recorded to have built several Hindu temples. Any attempt to deny Muslim contribution to and influence on India on either side of the Vindhya would be travesty of truth as well as corrupting the country's historiography. Therefore, Jain's assertion that the Hindu India came under Muslim assault from the early eleventh century

is not only ahistorical, but also deliberately malicious. Here, one may also remind the author that the concepts/words, such as 'Hindu', 'Hinduism'/'Hindustan', owe their origin to references made by the Arabian and Persian Muslims.

If Jain has Mahmud of Ghazni in mind, who raided India seventeen times in the very beginning of the eleventh century and who is notorious in history for having sacked the famous Somnath Temple in Gujarat, he cannot but know that these were not assault on Hindu India as such but attempts of a ruler to amass wealth and riches which incidentally were usually kept in temples in those days. Religion had no significant role to play here. For example, Harsha, a contemporary of Mahmud of Ghazni and one of the kings in Kashmir, anxious to replenish his treasury, also ordered the confiscation of valuable idols and the destruction of temples.

Jain's contention that the British Raj served as a stimulus to Hindus for self-discovery and recovery is largely valid, because many Hindus collaborated with the new, European masters and were favoured in return. The British and Hindus were natural allies to each other *vis-a-vis* Muslims of India. And indeed, the Hindu behaviour was in keeping with the Kautilyan tradition, i.e., the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

The second chapter, called **A Unique Phenomenon**, highlights the so-called *sui generis* nature of Hindu nationalism which is based on Hindu civilisation, and as such something altogether different from other types of nationalisms (p.14). The uniqueness of Hinduism, according to him, flows from its all-encompassing nature unlike Christianity and Islam. But it is not comprehensible how can Hinduism be exclusivist with its sanctified system of **chaturvarna** (four-fold caste system), which is supposed to have been created by none other than Lord Brahma himself and which is one of the most important parts of the *Dharmashastra* or Code

of Manu Swayambhuva (Book 10) that set up rules of conduct for all castes and consequently for nearly 3,000 recognised sub-castes in today's India? One has to be born a Hindu, particularly in order to be bestowed upon the status of *dvija* (twice born), the first being physical birth and the second the initiation into caste status.

What caste would then a would-be convert belong to? If no conversion is necessary to become a Hindu and if Hinduism is intrinsically tolerant to any other paths of comprehending the Creator and His Creation, and man and his salvation, why all this big communal tragedy that has dominated the life of an Indian for so long? In fact, conversion is seen to take place from Hinduism to other religions, particularly to Semitic ones and largely to Islam including in the 'free and rational' West, and not the other way about. Moreover, if Hinduism were all-inclusive, whence came the concepts of 'mlechcha' (impure, alien, barbarian etc.) and 'asprishya' (untouchables)?

The author seems to taunt when he writes that "along with the doctrine of uncompromising monotheism, heresy hunting, proselytization and holy wars became integral parts of Semitic religions" (p.18). It is simply not true that there has not been any heresy hunting in Hinduism. Buddhists were persecuted by many Hindu kings for having 'deviated' from the Vedic orthodoxy and defying the stranglehold of Brahmanism. In the sixth century A.D. the Huna king Mihirakula destroyed monasteries and killed monks. A fanatical Saivite king of Bengal, Sasanka, in the course of an attack on Kanyakubja at the very beginning of the seventh century A.D., almost destroyed the Tree of Wisdom at Gaya. That Buddhists were persecuted and their monasteries vandalised is mentioned in one of the poems of Rabindranath Thakur. There are also many references to the antagonism between Saiva Hindus and Jainas in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, an antagonism which took violent turns with the destruction of Jaina

temples or their forcible conversion to Saivaite shrines and the persecution of Jainas. Hostilities between the Virasaivas and the Jainas seem to have been particularly acute.

It is equally not true that there has not been any proselytization in Hinduism. It is rather inconceivable that the Dravidians and other indigenous people of ancient India succumbed to the spell of the Upanishadic philosophical accomplishment or to the dizzy height of refinement and excellence of any other Vedic literature. After all, India, supposed to be the land of *ahimsa*, was never without wars and violence of some sort.

For all practical purposes, there is no difference between the concepts of 'holy war' and 'just war'. The wars that were fought by or with the help of Lord Vishnu, in His incarnated forms of Rama and Krishna, could never have been termed unholy by Girilal Jain. Needless to say that a major portion of the Bhagvat Geeta is devoted to the concept, meaning and necessity of waging a just war (*Dharma yudhya*) against Duryadhana, the evil incarnate born into the Kaurava clan, in the course of dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna. The Bhagwan took a long time convincing the third of the Pancha Pandavas and best of the warriors of his time about the duties of a true Kshatriya when his *Dharma* was about to be eclipsed by *adharma*. The Kurukshetra war was a holy/just war. Jain's own 'war' to establish a state in India based on Hindu civilisation is a contribution to a sort of holy war against the Muslims and secular forces of India.

The author writes that "Buddhism and Jainism are not separate religions" (p.24). And indeed the Constitution of India has bracketed these two religions together with Hinduism. As such, should one consider countries like China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Myanmar, and the three Indo-Chinese countries as Hindu countries?

Chapter 3 (pp.34-58) is devoted to the first phase of Hindu nationalism, for which Jain demarcates 1757-1947 as his time-frame. He acknowledges with a deep sense of indebtedness the invaluable contributions to this process made by the Brahmo Samaj of Raja Rammohan Roy in Bengal, the Arya Samaj of Swami Dayanand in north-western India and the Prarthana Samaj of Mohadev Govind Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale in western India.

The author takes hats off to Ramakrishna Parmahansa, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, Maharishi Raman, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda, Lala Rajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal for the great part they played in the process of Hindu revivalism. He also has words of praises for Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, but he faults the Indian National Congress for sidestepping in its deliberations the cultural-civilisational framework (p.47).

Not surprisingly, the Indian Muslims are more familiar with the names of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda for their anti-Islamic attitudes and writings. Although Jain says, like many others including many Muslims, that Bankim Babu was not anti-Muslim, in essence he was nothing less than that. Although Bankim should be duly credited for his anti-imperialist role as he raised the status of patriotism to the level of religion and for which he advocated militancy (read armed struggle), his anti-Muslim credentials are in no way obscure. A good reader of his novel *Anandmath* written in 1875 cannot possibly miss this point. And this is to be found not so much in the song *Bande Mataram*, in which the novelist embodied the Mother Goddess, as in the dialogues between Bhabanand, Brammo, Mahendra and Kalyani, the main characters in the novel.

Similarly, even a casual glance through the multi-tomed *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* would convince a reader



that Vivekananda, the darling of Indian secularists, believed that the essence of India lay in the Hindu *Dharma* and that he actually held the Muslims and Islam in contempt, despite his more publicised few words of recognition for egalitarianism in Islam. He was contemptuous of Islam for its, what he called, unscrupulousness, fanaticism, intolerance, incivility, violent nature, using the sword for conversion, cruelty to enemies etc.

In chapter 4 (pp. 59-88), the author deals with the 'retreat and rage' of Muslim power and civilisation worldwide, including India. Here, Jain is obviously making the mistake of equating the disintegration of Muslim empires like Mughal and Ottoman with Islam's 'retreat'. Islam has never ever stopped expanding since the days of the founding of the Islamic state at Medina by the Holy Prophet in 622 A.D., as is evident from the number of Muslim countries as well as of Islam's adherents. Islam is not stagnant even in terms of ideas as the author tirelessly and repeatedly tries to make out. Certainly, he won't say that the on-going conversion to Islam in very many parts of the world is taking place by way of using sword. Islam is indeed 'stagnant' in so far as it cannot allow itself to be informed by utter sensuality and consumerism, for which some non-Islamic cultures-civilisations appear to be more 'attractive' and 'appealing'.

Even in the context of undivided India, the view that Islam has been on the retreat is not empirically valid. The Muslims here had to struggle but did succeed in carving out two separate Muslim states from Mother India. Jain asserts that it was independent India which "offered Indian Muslims a unique opportunity to share power with non-Muslims, which is something Muslims in no country have ever done" (p.86). If it were so, why didn't/couldn't the Congress avoid dividing India in 1947 by accepting the Cabinet Mission Plan under which the Muslims would only enjoy certain autonomy within one undivided Indian state?

**The Nehruvian Framework** is the fifth chapter of the book under review (pp. 89-112). Here the author apparently compliments Nehru for actually furthering the cause of Hinduism. But that is the most he had to say about the first Indian Prime Minister. Jain mercilessly attacks the tripod of Nehruvian order, secularism, socialism and non-alignment; the first one for actually being pseudo-secularism because of Congress' alleged minorityism, the second for not creating wealth and power, while the third for inordinately antagonising the West.

As Partition did not settle the civilisational contest that according to Jain began with Muslim rule in India, forces intent on making India a Hindu *Rashtra* began to crystallise as they regrouped in the wake of independence and to work devotedly towards that end. As such, Jain writes that "it is possible...to conclude that L.K. Advani [of BJP], with his quiet but confident assertion of the primacy of Hindus and Hinduism in India, fits in this unfolding progression" (p.103). He goes on to say that BJP is good for Muslims as they would be better off under *Hindutva* (p.108).

Nothing could be further from the anticipated *Ramarajya* under the 'Hindutva forces' if one considered the events like the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Bombay communal riots in 1993 and the unenviable fate of the Bombay Muslims under the rule of the BJP-Shiv Sena combine (1995). There seems a recrudescence of Bankim Babu's idea when Jain says that "the Kshatriya element is to be reintroduced in the Hindu personality" (p.104).

The title of the sixth and last chapter of the book is self-explanatory, as it is **Ayodhya: A Historical Watershed**. The author triumphantly declares that "...she [India] has taken another big step towards self-affirmation" (p.114). Now, if tearing down of

a historical mosque is considered by the majority community in that spirit, it is not too difficult to imagine what would happen to the other 3,000 mosques throughout India listed to be demolished in order to 'right certain historical wrongs'. In a style of finale, he reminds all concerned that "we are, as it were, witnessing the enactment of a modern version of Balmiki's Ramayana" (p.120), implying a warning that Lord Rama is already back in Ayodhya to regain his lost kingdom.

*Appendix 1* only elaborates on the theme of Indian unity as the author arrogantly attempts to rewrite Indian history insofar as he claims that Sanskrit was the only language spoken by all and sundry in ancient India. Jain continues his deliberate and irrelevant attacks on Islam in *Appendix 2*, with his usual doses of venom, sarcasm and abhorrence for it. *Appendix 3* is essentially a repeat of chapter 5. In *Appendix 4* he stresses on the salutary combination of *Bhakti* (love, devotion, liberalism) with Power for the Hindus to work for. In real life it may mean resorting to *machtpolitik*. Jain has risked being repetitive in his appendices with a view to driving home his basic points.

It is apparent from the above that apart from a lack of a formal framework in the book under review, there are few other methodological problems. First, the author seems to have selectively chosen his literature to enable him to make his pre-conceived contentions and reach such conclusions. This is more prominent when he deals with the history of Aryan race and language, of the unity in Hinduism in terms of territory, language and people, and of strengths of Hinduism and weaknesses of Islam. Second, what flowed naturally from the first is that there have been frequent distortions of history. The author rather chose to remain silent on the causes of decline of Hinduism in South East Asia and even in India for about a millennium, and corres-

pondingly on the causes of ascendancy of Islam in India for so long a period in the sub-continent's history.

Third, the writer sees Islam only in the negative, devoting unwarrantedly the biggest of the chapters to it. He is unashamedly open about his bias against Islam, which appears to have blurred his judgement and his otherwise brilliant mind and for which he recurrently stung on Islam with venom. Fourth, the author's concept of civilisational state is rather obscure, although significant. It is not clear whether one civilisation should have only one state/nation or may have more. How many states/nations should there be in Muslim and Christian civilisations? Jain seems to remain deliberately vague about the implications of his definition of Indian civilisation. It seems to mean not only *Akhand Bharat*, but by extension practically the whole of South Asia.

Fifth, Jain's idea about the place of religious minorities, particularly of Muslims, is equally unclear, even after so much of labouring on the subject of the need to achieve primacy for *Hindutva*. The proverbial 'Muslim question' seems to remain unresolved as ever. And lastly, it seems that Jain's research is loath to draw from the benefits of experience. He does not seem to address the question whether the Muslims of India have been or are, and not would be, better off or worse off since the process of Hindu resurgence began gathering pace.

It is discernible that Jain essentially has worked on three themes. First, he advocates for the emergence of a Hindu *Rashtra* in India, which has to be based on Hindu civilisation. Its implied implications for Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan cannot be less than ominous. This Hindu *rashtra* has to be a major world power, for which it has to be internally strong. This in turn calls

for economic-military power and national unity. That explains why Jain criticises Nehru's socialistic economic policy and wants to reintroduce the Kshatriya element in the Indian personality. That equally explains why he tries to forge national unity even by distorting history and indoctrinating the masses with the idea that India has been peopled with one single race which has had Sanskrit as their common mother language since millennia. According to him, Hindi should now play the role Sanskrit is purported to have once played.

Although India is a plural society, Jain does not seem to follow a pluralist national integration approach; he rather appears to advocate for an assimilationist method. He writes: "...The small society has had to give way to larger ones as small economies and polities have had to give way to larger ones....This is the true significance of secularism. It may be called the 'midwife of Hindu nationalism'....The triumph of Hindutva can help create a milieu which obliges them [Muslims] to try and overcome the inertia of tradition reinforced by the ulema" (pp.106-107). The implications of this policy particularly for the Indian Muslims are not difficult to imagine. Jain's apparent magnanimity towards Muslims in his opposition to enacting a common civil code is actually anachronistic to BJP's ideology and policy, and of course to praxis in India.

Second, Islam-bashing informs his second theme, as is evident from his spiteful comments about the Holy Quran and Sunnah. His scathing attacks on Islam betray biting sarcasm. According to Jain, the immutable nature of the Quran allegedly thwarts philosophical speculation and therefore stunts rationality. As against this, one might argue that the basis of reason itself is unreason or intuition. One might also argue, as far as the epistemology of Islam is concerned, that all theories of knowledge

that are devoid of an Absolute Reference Frame (in case of Muslim civilisation it is the Quran and Sunnah) can lead only to conflict and confusion: there are no objective truths that can be discovered by reason alone. And as philosophical theories cannot be tested by observation either, they need an Absolute Reference Frame in order to be judged.

And third and last, in keeping with the much-talked-about Huntingtonian thesis about the clash of civilisations, Jain seems to make a common cause with the West in terms of the basis of civilisation, history of philosophy, economic-political ideology and common future in the post-Cold War world. He may have three points in mind: one, an improved relationship with the West is necessary for India's developmental needs; two, the desire to cultivate the West more actively may have positive implications for India in the realm of its foreign policy and security; and isolation of Islam may be the third unspoken agenda of the author, to be achieved in tandem with the like-minded ones.

Indeed there has been a debate going on in India for quite some time regarding its political order (secularism or 'Hindu secularism'), its economic philosophy (unbridled market economy or mixed economy or market economy with human face), its foreign policy orientation, its cultural personality (composite culture/synthesis or *Hindutva*), and the Muslim question (how to deal with it). Girilal Jain appears to be an ideologue (although he abhors the term itself) of the burgeoning Hindu right wing, championing the cause of *Hindutva* in India in full consciousness of its consequences in India's domestic, regional and even global arenas. He has taken recourse to using the concept of civilisation in order to legitimise the communal ideology of the majority Hindu community.

The book reads well with its lucid English and fine print. The get-up is also handsome. The book is a good read for both Jain's fellow adherents and his detractors, for the former would rejoice over it while the latter would know for sure that beneath the veneer of the author's candid exposition there lurks a sinister design coupled with a stratagem to denigrate Islam.

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