

# Dangerous Cacophony

Hindutva Consolidation and Conscription  
in Tamil Nadu through Celebrations

*Meena Kandasamy*

*I hate, I despise your feasts  
I take no pleasure in your solemn festivals.  
When you offer me holocausts and grain offerings  
I will not accept them..  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
And righteousness like an overflowing stream.*

(The Book of Amos 5:21-24)

In the transformation of the Hindutva agenda that has included hard cash and hate consolidation, you don't go in search of Gods, they come to your pavement, your doors. The city comes to a standstill, the juggernaut of the gods-and-devotees continues. The new-found religiosity is stifling and stunning and a little hard on your ears, but it is contagious. You are drawn into becoming a spectator, and not before long, the skeptic in you has put in the papers, you are part of the excited crowd, caught in the frenzy of fundamentalism that is caramel-coated with devotion. This one-after-another-after-another ensures that all days are holy days. Occasion is reduced to almost a routine. The weekend is downsized to being a jazzy, glitzy flamboyant festival. Like the kinky Osho once remarked, living becomes an eternal celebration. And, you are doing it everyday. Why worry if Hindutva is working on you 365/24/7? *Arrey*, nobody's complaining *yaar*. Yes, but little knowledge has never been more dangerous. There is

cause to complain only when we are made to realize (by none other than the Sangh Parivar) that this holding of festivals, this appropriation and hijacking of the public sphere is their programme in the project of Hindu consolidation, mass conscription and 'collectivization'.

In looking at the glamorous and much-photographed instances: say, the Vinayaka Chaturthi rituals in Tamil Nadu that occasionally result in loss of limb, or life, and waste of newsreel, we have ignored the larger, risky picture of what is happening the rest of the year. Choreographed Kumbh-melas and stage-managed rath yatras have their lesser known counterparts: itsy-bitsy Hindutva festivals that ravish daily calendars, that continue to be born everyday. Sociological analysis by Fuller<sup>1</sup>, Geetha and Rajadurai<sup>2</sup>, and Anandhi<sup>3</sup> have studied the Vinayaka Chaturthi celebrations in the state of Tamil Nadu at great length. Their independent researches has shed light on the imitation and replication of the Maharashtra example in the immersion of Ganesh idols [Fuller], of the recruitment of the subaltern sections in this event [Anandhi], and the engineering of the clashes with the minority communities [Geetha and Rajadurai]. Fuller's engaging thesis—the most recent study on the Vinayaka Chaturthi celebrations—describes of how the Sangh Parivar successfully appropriates local, traditional Hindu rituals to create a wider Hindu unity and establishes that “the primary goal for the Parivar in the utilization of such rituals is to persuade all Hindus to become conscious of belonging to a single, majority community.”<sup>4</sup> Alas, Hindutva doesn't stop with showing its might on the fourth day of the Bhadrapada. Hindutva celebrations are not once-in-a-year carnivals. Its like the local cinema screening sleazy films: there are four shows a day, and its almost always houseful. Or given the militant and deceptive posturing of the Orange Order outfits, here is a fitter illustration: Hindutva conscription is not always an imbecile Operation Shock Treatment (though that is resorted to during carnages, rapes, murders, and other cold-blooded

lunacies). It is Operation Slow Poison. Every day, every week, every year. It works like tiny doses of arsenic, it percolates and mingles with your bloodstream, and before you are aware, you are dying the little deaths, someone else dictates your life. Such an assimilation is an all-year project.

In this paper, I have attempted to analyze the importance the Sangh Parivar lays on festivals as an integral part of their agenda of action, this continuous process of Hindutva conscription and consolidation through celebrations and rituals that are organized (or sometimes, hijacked); the varied attempts to appropriate the public space; the targeting of the oppressed sections and the women, its subsequent effects and the overall grave threat this seemingly innocent program poses to communal amity.

### Sangh Parivar credo on festivals

The supreme ideologue of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), 'Guruji' M.S. Golwalkar believed that the festivals were a "medium of mass-awakening" besides the one-hour shakhas. In his *Bunch of Thoughts*, he wrote that "the tradition of national festivals that the Sangh has evolved is a potent medium of awakening the masses to our true and integrated national life."<sup>5</sup> So there dear readers, brace yourself for the first lesson we are to learn from a bunch of thoughts: *the tradition of national festivals is what the Sangh has evolved*. The festivals have not arisen out of centuries-old practice (how much more can they demean our 'golden heritage' that even according to their claims is five-thousand years old), or age-old traditions (*parampara* and *sanskriti*: where are they?). Instead the national festivals are mass-market products evolved by the Sangh.

Festivals differ largely from their one-hour-a-day meeting sessions. While shakhas are private bouddhik sessions for members only, Hindutva celebrations are sinfully different: they are bouddhik sessions for the public. It is an

indoctrination amidst bhajans, it is a seduction in the midst of festive processions. If the freedom of imagination allows one to compare the shakha to a training ground of the desi Nazis, then the festivals are their fishing grounds. Every citizen is baited with what is scrumptiously called 'cultural nationalism.' The RSS, the parent organization of the large, unwieldy Sangh Parivar officially recognizes and observes only six national festivals. They are: *Varsha Pratipada/ Yugadi* (The Hindu New Year's Day), *Hindu Samrajya Dinostav* (Coronation Day of Chatrapati Shivaji), *Guru Pooja*, *Raksha Bandhan*, *Vijayadashami*, and *Makar Sankranti*.<sup>6</sup>

But this isn't the norm for other members of the Parivar. Known for its dubious deviance from its claims, this issue is no different. Doublespeak arises out of their twice-born-ness. While the RSS recognizes only six days (please note the absence of the national independence day in this list), other organs of this large, fertile family have patented all calendar days for one festival or another.

It is widely known that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) carries the religious activities of the RSS, and is in charge of the festivals and celebrations. Let me attempt an analysis of the Hindutva Agenda of mass mobilization through a reading of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's statement on 'Fairs, Festivals and Yatras'. Here are some excerpts from its official website: [www.vhp.org](http://www.vhp.org)

"The man is a social animal. He does not like to sit idle or live alone. He even wants to share his personal feelings of joy and sorrow with others. That is why he is fond of Festivals and Yatras as *these are the main source of collectivization*. The celebration has become the part and parcel of the human life since long.

In India celebration of fairs and festivals has become like a ritual. They are being celebrated separately according to one's faith, religion and custom. The festivity has special significance in Hindu society as they are considered to be the real source., of imparting sanskara on the society. They are the reflectors of the

memories of our great culture and civilization. *In a Hindu house every day is a festival day.*

*Seeing the importance of Fairs, Festivals and Yatras, the V.H.P. started managing various Fairs, Festivals and Yatras to create the feeling of oneness and unity amongst various communities of Hindu society.*<sup>7</sup>

I hate to interpret the obvious, to explain what dances from words set down in black and white. But an essay requires logical coherence, and an author's indulgence now and then, to not only scream her ideas, but also to read out from between the lines.

The first statement is the recognition that festivals and yatras are *the main source of collectivization*. No wonder then, that the Sangh Parivar uses these festivals and yatras as the main tools in its political programme. Religion, is not the criteria now, nor is dear-old-damned-for-dead spirituality. In the game of numbers, in the question of mobilization, the saffron wing has selected its potent machinery.

The second statement that needs to be given weight, is that *every day is a festival day* in a Hindu house. This is almost like dressing the sacrificial lamb before leading it to a butcher. Underlining the fact that there exists an innate religiosity in the Hindu home, is a way of preparing for that religious, festive fervor to be tapped, and exploited.

Next, we are told of how and why the VHP started 'managing' various fairs, festivals and yatras (that we collectively call as celebrations in this paper). *Seeing the importance*, or so the VHP says. Seeing is learning. Seeing is replicating. The VHP's 'management' of fairs, festivals and yatras is not spontaneous, or devoted, or even remotely religious—it is a mere capitalization.

Now, we shall look at a mini-exposition by the Joint Secretary, Parva Samanvaya Vibhag of the VHP, Mr. Santosh Trivedy on the topic of *Festivals for National Integration* which finds its place in the same website. He writes,

“Our festivals *have a theme and a great continuity with our ithihasa or history*. Some of them are associated with nature. Many of them have *roots in scientific principles*. They are all of great social and cultural significance too. The *practice of religious fasts* is not only of great spiritual and religious significance but also of essential principles of *health and hygiene*. Ours is a philosophy of life propounding the omnipresence of paramathma, the immortality of Athma, the principle cycle of births and deaths etc. Our festivals are also an expression of that philosophy. They are very much inter-linked with music, dance, painting, and other arts. Devotion to God and society has been a main theme with many of our festivals. Thus our festivals have been *powerful instruments* of integration and exponents[sic] of unity in diversity.

*Celebration of these festivals on a large scale* and with the message of our Rishi will be giving us the impetus and smaskers[sic] to the society and *facilitate early realisation of the goal of national renaissance*. This requires, *a reorientation in the practice of our festivals*, keeping in view the times and requirements. The objective shall have to be integration and social awareness.

*So far most festivals are celebrated at the family level or at some limited sectarian or institutional level. The area has to be widened and they should be brought to mass and collective level.* Leaders of various sections and communities may be invited to explain the importance and relevance of each festival to the masses. There should be *mutual participation* in the festivals celebrated by individual sections. For example, a guruparva celebrated in a gurdwara may be attended by all the Hindus. The Buddh and Mahavir Jayanthi and others may be celebrated collectively. *Festivals observed by Harijans, Girijans shall have to be extended to all Hindus*. In addition to collective celebration of festivals *certain universal practices* on the festive and other occasions also would be helpful in *promotion of national integration*. Tilak Dharana on the forehead, cow worship, hoisting of 'om' and 'Bhagava (Saffron) flags are some of them.”<sup>8</sup>

Dissecting this manifesto is no more difficult or different. Their dream projects peep out from behind gossamer curtains. Their appropriation of religious beliefs to serve political agendas dictates itself out.

First, the contention of Trivedi that festivals *have a theme and a great continuity with our itihasa or history*. Look at the word 'have'. If any festival lacks a theme or historicity that is no problem. Leave it to the saffron brigade... The Sangh Parivar can rack its combined brains and invent themes and extrapolate in order to achieve continuity in history. The search for a linear, homogeneous Hindu history is part of their project anyway. [And regarding the choice of 'itihasa (epic) or history', the reader can pick out the correct answer.]

We now move to the second grandiose statement: the emphasis on a *scientific principle*. Except for the carnage in Gujarat, whose scientific principle was traced by Modi to Newton's Third Law, which festival of hate or love or whatever had any scientific principle? This invention of a scientific background is in order to steer clear of criticisms that arose from movements like Raja Rammohun Roy's Brahma Samaj and Periyar's Self-Respect movement that criticized the superstitious, dogmatic and utterly unscientific basis and origin of festivals. Or may be, they are speaking to the colonialists, the imperialists who have more than once pooh-pooed the irrational celebrations. Think of Whitehead, Elmore and other western scholars of the pre-independence era who were rudely taken aback by the atrocious nature of some of the festivals. So we find the VHP preening itself to announce of the scientific principles.

First Science, then Health. The Greater, Larger Things. Festivals buttress scientific principles, and scientific principles buttress fasts. The quid-pro-quo of political logic. The practice of fasts is connected with 'health and hygiene.' Since fasting has been developed into something of a national weapon, no one will have the audacity to question this claim. We condescend to understanding the health and hygiene (?)

factors. But in India with its seasonal starvation deaths and serious malnutrition in a major section of the population, fasting, like feasting, is a luxury that only a few can afford. And only very few, like the banal right-wing can make the most of it.

Having claimed that festivals are ‘powerful instruments’ (one has to emphatically agree, seeing the Hindutva experience), Trivedi moves on to talk of celebration on a *large scale*. When the Sangh Parivar speaks of a large scale, it sounds draconian: chills creep into my spine, and my fingers twitch instead of flying across the keyboard. We have seen what large scale has meant to them: the kar-seva in Ayodhya, the riots in Mumbai, the agitations against Mandal, the genocide in Gujarat. Terror is shape of largeness. And before you are done with dealing on their massive dreams, the next line sends another jolt: Not only large, but *early*. In his words: “facilitate *early* realization of the goal of national renaissance.” Translated into ordinary speech it is the impatience to declare the Hindu Rashtra. And towards this end, he calls for a ‘reorientation’. In the following lines, we learn that this reorienting is moving the festivals from the private sphere into the public sphere. So, religion is not religion is not religion. Religion is politics and vote-banks and mobilization and hatred and crimes.

‘Mutual participation’ is part of the project of foisting an Hindu identity on Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. So Hindus are required to flock to gurudwaras, and likewise Buddhist and Jainist festivals can also be appropriated. This is the ahimsa of assimilation. One also needs to wonder why, in this article on ‘Festivals of National Integration’, there is no mention of the festivals of the other religious minorities—Muslims and Christians, or of Hindus taking part in them. Will that not aid national integration?

So, having given the guidelines to woo the religions of revolt, here is the procedure for integrating the Dalits and the Adivasis who have never been part of the Hindu society. So,

all Hindus are advised to observe 'Harijan-Girijan' (forgive the arrogance of their rhyming words, almost like Humpty-Dumpty) festivals which is once again a project of mobilization and conscription. Observing subaltern festivals is an excellent entrepreneurial idea: minimum investment, maximum returns. As Lele notes in *Hindutva: The Emergence of the Right*, "Many of the tribal, low caste deities to which Brahminism had to adapt ended up as consorts or local incarnations of the pan-Indian patriarchal gods, thus investing these pan-Indian symbols with unprecedented power and potency for popular mobilization."<sup>9</sup>

There has to be some clarification about commonly confused words: it is the stark Hindu nationalism that is preferred to be substituted with the dreamy, grandiose project of national integration. Cow worship and om/saffron flag hoisting are meant to be *universal practices*. Which universe are they practiced in? Here, we are forced to read blatant instances of Hindutvaization as a step towards the 'promotion of national integration.' The picture that has evolved is clearly illustrative of the sinister designs behind the Hindutva celebration of fairs, festivals, and yatras. This is the reason why the Sangh Parivar is keen on filling up the calendar.

### Monopoly of the calendar

"Due to Vishva Hindu Parishad and others, there began a growing confidence among Hindus. A large number of saints and seers too took up the cause and came out of their seclusion and plunged into action in the society. The Ekathmatha Yagna, the Rama Janina Bhoomi Abhiyan changed the mood of the entire Hindu society. But the speed and vigour of progress is yet to rise, to cope up with the growing challenges and activities of the disruptionists and foreign agents.

The festivals and parvas are being celebrated with interruption although there is some adverse effect because of the political atmosphere or economic disparities. Holi Dipawali, Vijyadashami, Raksha Bandhan, Sankranti and the like have a great impact in

keeping the society [sic] intact and in promoting unity and integrity of the nation. The enthusiasm in pilgrimages from Kashi to Ramaswaram, to great centres like Prayag, Tirupathi, Nathadwara, Vaishnodevi, Sabarimalal etc. are on the increase. Special mention may be made of the increasing popularity of kumbhamela, in which Hindus from all over the world take part."<sup>10</sup>

So you see, they have blocked all the dates: either the VHP is coming on yatras or people are going on yatras, or they are all celebrating, here, there everywhere. Calling these festivals red-letter days would sound communist, or in a out-of-fashion sense, Freudian. Welcome, abroad to the saffron-letter days. This is the egalitarianism of the new holiness: you need to no longer look forward to sacred days that occur so rarely, no longer is Friday the traditional day for women to pray in temples. Everyone's learning saffronized Solomon-Grandy rhymes and a new version for every week. Ritual days don't any longer punctuate the weary life. The Sangh Parivar is doing it everyday. If the festivals are a way to expend your energies and stretch your budgets, the prescribed fasting for so many occasions shall set that straight.

First, the existing days that are remotely connected with anything holy-and-Hindu are made into occasions of celebration. Next, new days are invented to keep up the impetus and the momentum.

Think of the inventiveness and the range of rituals that are earmarked for celebration. Or the fact that conventional days of celebration are switched to something that suits the agenda. S. Radhakrishnan's birthday, September 5, is not Teachers Day in the Sangh-run schools. Despite the poor man having written the *Essence of Hinduism*. The day is advanced to July 25, the day Vyasa was born. Children's Day has nothing to do with Chacha Nehru, it is to be celebrated on Krishna Jayanthi. Workers Day is not the first of May, for the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (the Sangh Parivar's labor wing) it is the Vishwa Karma Jayanthi.

Then there are the birthday celebrations: Dr. Hedgewar's birthday, Nethaji Subhash Chandra Bose's birthday, Swami Vivekananda's birthday and a birthday observed for every possible holy saint.

Next is the great black-to-white money conversion day, otherwise called Guru Dakshina<sup>11</sup>. And remember the congregational celebrations of Durga Pooja, the Saraswati Pooja, the Ganga Pooja, Go Mata Pooja, the Karthigai Deepam, and so on and so forth. Or of the state-sponsored, the military-present-in-full-rigour Sindhu Darshan.

Every Amavasya and every Poornima has some background to call for a mass ritual. Every Avatar's birthday is celebrated. And one in two Chaturthis, Panchamis, Sapthamis, Ashtamis, Dashamis, and Ekadashis is sure to be celebrated. They merely need an excuse.

There are instances of festivals that border on insanity: the state-sponsored yagnas for rain, the wedding of 16 pairs of living beings (owls, cockroaches, donkeys, insects etc.) for rain, yagnas for India-Pak cricket matches, yagnas for world peace, musical concerts praying to the Rain Gods, yagnas for good performance in examinations where the Sankaracharya himself came to give his blessings, and so on.

For the women, they have the kirtan mandalis, the bhajan mandalis, the matri mandalis, the Ramayana mandalis, the Mahabharata mandalis, the we-will-find-out-more mandalis. And as followers of Toyota Hinduism there are (w)rath yatras. (If they run out of petrol, there's the back-up: pada yatras.) In Tamil Nadu VHP's rath's keep circling all through the state, zipping across from locale to locale. In the early years there was the Jnana Ratham, Shakthi Ratham, Jnana Deepaka Ratham. All this is part of the Reanimation of the Old Faith. Bring in the multimedia kits, as we watch Singhal and Kishore begin to 'reanimate the age-old faith.' Sure enough, most of the divinity would lend itself to animation, to 3-D flash and imaging, the works.

Besides, in the agenda of wooing women, there are the conservative *thiruvilakku poojas* (deepa poojas), the rath-yatras of Ma Sharada and the Mother of Pondicherry Ashram, bhajan mandalis, and of course a religion based consolidation of the Self-Help Groups that exist in villages.

In tune with being trendy there are fancy dress competitions that are dress rehearsals for future debacles, debate competitions and other such media of brainwashing the children. They are taught cultural samskars and their character is built through recitation, elocution and essay competitions. Offshoot organizations organize three months long 'Spiritual Culture Practice' camps for 16 to 35 year old youth, the food, stay, notebooks, brainwashing, everything is free. There is the complete religionization in the public sphere: in Tamil Nadu, kolu is arranged in State Banks, in shopping malls. Besides, we find a clear-cut cultivation of public insanity: buying gold on *Akshaya Tritya* brings back 100 times more gold by the end of the year, every magazine writes extensively of the starry gifts-and-hampers that Guru Peyarchi (the transition of Jupiter) brings to individuals or politicians, men rush to buy green saris to their sisters (to ward off evil, to safeguard them), women change their *mangalsutras* (not their husbands though) if the *mangalsutra* of a Goddess slips during prayer at any important temple. Of course, all this happens apart from the mind-boggling and calendar-filling festival routine.

### Celebrations in the Tamil Nadu context

"The Tamil Nadu fortress—that used to be called Dravida bhoomi (land), atheist bhoomi, Periyar bhoomi, Anna bhoomi etc.—has now been smashed to smithereens.

Whether it is the Sabarimalai yatra, or the yatra to snow-laden Kailash, only the Tamils participate in large numbers. Those who broke Vinayaka idols are now circumambulating the Thiruvannamalai mount, under the leadership of several persons. During Pradosham, the

Shiva temples are overflowing. Even the newspapers which voice atheism, have now started publishing rasi predictions. Papers that speak secularism, run separate magazines for astrology and spirituality. Whether it is the book fair or the book shop, everywhere only the spiritual books are first in sales.

These changes are not wonders that took place in the blink of an eye. These sweet changes are the result of a silent revolution by thousands.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, that was founded in 1925 saw great success all over the nation in creating awareness among the Hindus. But Tamil Nadu remained an impregnable fortress. But still, the RSS did not give up its efforts. In the end, victory was attained.”  
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Since Tamil Nadu was the land of Periyar and rationalism and atheism, the RSS has stuck with a vengeance. In Tamil Nadu, the major organizations that are engaged in the spread of Hindutva are: RSS, Rashtrasevika Samiti, Hindu Munnani<sup>13</sup>, VHP, Hindu Makkal Katchi<sup>14</sup>, Sewa Bharati, Mangaiyar Mangalam, Advaita Ashrama, Vivekananda Kendra, Akhil Bharateeya Vidyarthi Parishad, Jan Kalyan Samiti (bloodbank), Jan Jagran, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Vivekananda Kalvi Kazhagam, Vidya Bharati, Desiya Vidya Kendra Educational Trust, Samsrit Bharati, Samskar Bharati, Samskrita Kalvi Kazhagam, Malaviya Vidya Kendra, Media Centre, Vigil, Bharatiya Govamsa Rakshan Samvardhan Parishad, Vivekananda Vidya Kala Ashram, Shri Danvantri Ashram, Saraswathi Vidya Mandir, Acharya Sabha, Vishwa Dharma Prachara Iyakkam, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Akhil Bharateeya Matsya Mazdoor Sangh. Although leadership and membership among these organizations is fluid, nothing differentiates them but their banners. In order to understand the vigorousness that is applied to the Tamil Nadu situation, and to see how the tentacles of Hindutva seek to spread in their special project, let us analyze the use of festivals, fasts, fairs and yatras. Let us look at the Hindu Munnani’s calendar

of events for August and September 2004, the two months in which I research this essay, as a mere illustration. Their weekly official newsletter, the *Vijaya Bharatam*, specifies (as is their monthly practice) the festival days to be observed in August:

08 <sup>th</sup> and 9 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	:	Adi Kiruthikkai
18 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	:	Swarna Gowri Vrat
20 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	:	Nag Chaturthi
20 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	:	Garuda Panchami
25 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	:	Aavani Mulam
27 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	:	Sri Varalakshmi Vrat
29 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	:	Aavani Avittam
30 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	:	Gayathri Japam
15 <sup>th</sup> to 30 <sup>th</sup> August 2004	:	Bharata Mata Pooja

How amazingly cramped the calendar is! In a month of 31 days, 24 are allocated to festivals. The other seven, for all one knows, might be days with important engagements, say meetings, discussions and the like. Knowing the nature of the Sangh Parivar, the festivals and the many *vrats* are understandable. What makes this delectable and spicy is the *Vijaya Bharatam* recipe on how to observe the Bharata Mata Pooja.<sup>15</sup> Just reading it will show to the reader the ulterior motive of such celebrations and the misappropriation of the Mother India as a Hindu woman.

To perform the Bharata Mata Pooja, it is good to select places where all the people can come. If it is a temple, it is very good. The pedestal of Bharata Mata must be decorated. Those who do not get pictures can use pictures that have appeared in *Vijaya Bharatam* and *Hindu Sangha Seithi* magazines.

Near the decorated Bharata Mata picture, flowers must be kept in a plate. Those with the opportunity, can mix rice and turmeric and keep it also. It is very important to make arrangements that those who come

for the pooja can stand in a queue, sprinkle flowers and rice-turmeric.

It is a must to explain the objective of the Bharata Mata Pooja to those who visit the function. It is beneficial to make arrangements to speak on the cruelties that were heaped on the Hindus during partition. On the whole, the sad history behind the Indian freedom struggle must reach the people.

For fifteen days, wherever they can, the Sangh Parivar proposes to capture a public space in the name of Bharat Mata. Once she is adorned and set-up and the crowd starts tickling in, they begin to explain the objective. They plan to speak of the cruelties heaped on the Hindus. In other words, appeal to the religious sentiment. Now, the majority is portrayed as the victim, the oppressed, the poor-pitiable people. Those who came for worship go back home after hearing sad stories, with heavy hearts and heavier themes of vengeance and violation. What was meant to be a pooja, becomes a fest of Muslim, Christian bashing, a clever attempt to cultivate communal misunderstanding and hatred. Over to September:

6 <sup>th</sup> September 2004	: Srikrishna Jayanthi
18 <sup>th</sup> September 2004	: Vinayaka Chaturthi
19 <sup>th</sup> September 2004	: Rishi Panchami
24 <sup>th</sup> September 2004	: Vedantadesikar Nakshatra
25 <sup>th</sup> September 2004	: Vamana Jayanthi
27 <sup>th</sup> September 2004	: Anand Vrat
28 <sup>th</sup> September 2004	: Uma Maheshwara Vrat

Apart from these festivals and fasts that have been meticulously dug up (Most people I know, including a few devout Hindus have personally never heard of Rishi Panchami or Vamana Jayanthi at all—the same is the case with the fasts!), the *Vijaya Bharatam* prescribes the following festivals to be observed between the day of Vinayaka Chaturthi and the

day of immersion of the Ganesh idols: they have also given the prescribed mode of celebrations on these days.<sup>16</sup>

18<sup>th</sup> September 2004 : *Samudhaya Marumalarchi Dinam* (Social Renaissance Day)

The pictures of leaders like Doctorji and Guruji who worked for Social Renaissance will be unveiled, speeches on life-incidents of such leaders will be given.

19<sup>th</sup> September 2004 : *Hindu Ezhuchi Dinam* (Hindu Resurgence Day)

The picture-unveiling function for, and speeches on, Chatrapathi Shivaji who sowed the seed for Hindu resurgence will take place.

20<sup>th</sup> September 2004 : *Samudhaya Samathuva Dinam* (Social Equality Day)

Functions to unveil the photographs of leaders like Dr. Ambedkar, Narayana Guru who worked for social equality. Call couples of the Harijan society and honour them. The Nara Narayana Pooja will take place.

21<sup>st</sup> September 2004 : *Annaiyar Dinam* (Mothers' Day)

Bharata Mata Pooja and Thiruvillaku Pooja will be conducted. Competitions like Kola Poti (Rangoli)—in a way in which there will be female participation—will be conducted and prizes will be given.

22<sup>nd</sup> September 2004 : *Sirubar Sirumiyar Dinam* (Small Boys-Small Girls Day)

The photograph of Mahakavi Bharathi will be unveiled. Quiz and drawing competitions will be conducted for the small boys and girls and prizes will be distributed.

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2004 : *Ilaignar Dinam* (Youth Day)

Swami Vivekanada's picture will be unveiled. Several competitions will be organized for the youth and prizes shall be distributed.

24<sup>th</sup> September 2004 : *Suya Vazhipadu Dinam* (Self-Worship Day)

The public can themselves worship the Vinayaka idols.

25<sup>th</sup> September 2004 : *Ullur Urvalam* (Procession within the city)

On this day, Vinayaka idols will be taken in a procession within the city.

26<sup>th</sup> September 2004: *Visarjanam* (Final Procession)

The final procession will take place in every area as planned.

This intermediate celebration which is rooted neither in history, nor in religion extends the spectrum of operation of the Parivar. These new days blatantly reveals the sections whom they want to target: Hindus (apparently), Dalits (who are shoddily called Harijans), Mothers (note that the word is *mothers* and not *women*: which explains how the stress is on fertility, marriage and child-bearing credentials, rather than womanhood), Children (who are foisted with gender by being differentiated as small boys, small girls), Youth, in that order. While the cultural appropriation is alarming, so are the non-emancipatory tactics adopted and the deliberate choice of icons. Celebrating Guruji and Doctorji and SomeOtherji might be excused as an ardent display of loyalty. But, selecting Shivaji, the Hindu King of Muslim India, for the Hindu Resurgence Day is demonstrative of the intention of celebration. In the name of speeches, there would be attempts to polarize the communities, heap abuse on the Muslim Rule in India, invent new heights for the Hindu valour and manhood and courage and what-not. It would not end there, but extend to the dreams of a flamboyant, lusty Hindu Rashtra.

For the Dalits and other 'lower' caste sections of the society, their icons of liberation and emancipation are assimilated by the Sangh Parivar. Buddha has been transformed to a Vishnu avatar, Ambedkar to a Hindu-supporter since he didn't convert to a 'foreign religion', Periyar was named the 64<sup>th</sup> Nayanmar—public figures become public domain, and there's no stopping their incorporation into the Sangh Parivar's list. Not just ending with wooing the

oppressed sections through the memory of the leaders, the Hindutva forces have come up with the plan of honouring 'Harijan couples.' For what? But in a society that tramples upon Dalit interests at will, such a bogus show will ensure an eyewash. This is exhibitionism, plain and simple.

Or take the case of women. 'Competitions where there will be female participation,' writes the *Vijaya Bharatam* and goes on to cite the example of kolam drawing. What does this achieve apart from reiterating the status of women as good housewives in a patriarchal family?

We shall now proceed to analyze how these individual sections—Dalits and Women—are being targeted for conscription by the Sangh Parivar in Tamil Nadu.

### Assimilation and co-option of Dalits through Festivals

*Unga thalaivan pirandha naalup poster ottavum  
Unga oorvalathula dharmadi vangi katavum  
Enga mudhugu neenga erum eni aagavum  
Naanga irundha padiye irukanama kaalam pooravum...*

*[To paste posters of your leader's birthday  
To get beat up in your processions  
Our backs as the ladders for you to climb  
Must we remain as we were for the whole of time?]*

(Poet Inquilab, *Naanga Manushangada* (We are Humans))

"The massive nature can be gauged from the fact that over half the number of 5,000 Vinayaka idols installed in Chennai were in the slum areas."<sup>17</sup>

Urban slums are largely Dalit settlements. That is the case in Chennai. And it is such a Dalit bastion which the Sangh Parivar has stormed into. Note the confession of their agenda. Anandhi, in her study of the communalization process in the slums of Triplicane area in Chennai (where the Hindus often attack Muslims during the Vinayaka Chaturthi procession),

writes of how the communal organizations concentrate their efforts in mobilizing Dalit slum dwellers “on the basis of a newly constituted pan-Hindu identity and hatred against the Muslims.” She notes that the indoctrinated Dalits were “later used by the RSS to do graffiti, pasting posters, putting up saffron flags and launching hate campaigns against the Muslims.”<sup>18</sup> Inquilab’s revolutionary words, that are quoted above, echo true here.

Fuller notes of how in the Vinayaka Chaturthi processions, “for the appearance of unity” a token dalit flags off the immersion procession in areas as far flung as Triplicane in Chennai and Ramanathapuram in southern Tamil Nadu.<sup>19</sup> Such token exhibitionism of Dalit participation is a credulous attempt to accord them ‘identity.’ After all, even now the BJP is proud to reiterate that it was a Dalit who laid the foundation stone for the Ram temple at Ayodhya. But despite their every measure, they are all the time, consciously aware of an ‘us’ and ‘them’: the caste-Hinduness and the outcaste-ness. Sample the following excerpt from the VHP:

“The only way as we see now is to win the confidence of Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste people through Sewa and Social Equality Programmes and more and more interaction with them on our own. A feeling of oneness has to be created among them. They must realise that they are part and parcel of Viral [sic] Hindu Samaj and that the whole Hindu society is behind them.”<sup>20</sup>

Oneness is not to be created, what is necessary for the VHP is the “feeling of oneness.” The fake feeling, not a real action. Not an unification, but the sensation of oneness. Ahaa! that and the irony of the concept that “the whole Hindu society is behind them.” In fact, a study of society on any development index will show that Dalits are *behind* everybody else. That part of the meaning rendered useless, does the VHP seek to declare that the whole Hindu society is *behind* Dalits, in the sense of chasing after them, wooing them, the etceteras? And,

as usual, (mis)using them for achieving hideous agendas. Teltumbde in his study of the Hindutva onslaught on Dalits writes,

“In the last Hindutva experiment in Gujarat, the dalits and tribals were used as the foot soldiers of Hindutva brigade in a large number. Many people lamented this unfortunate development but there have been hardly any attempt to understand the causal linkages behind it. Dalits under the shadow of Hindutva is a symptom; there is no use lamenting symptoms. The cause of this drift can be found as much in the peculiarities of the contending politics vis-à-vis the dalits as in the caste ridden civil society that conditions it. While the Hindutva forces are found to strategically co-opt the dalits, the left has effectively denied them space. It is still wont to conduct ostrich like with Brahmanical chanting of the received wisdoms, while the reality passes them by.”<sup>21</sup>

The left despite being everybody’s favorite whipping horse isn’t the only party that needs to be blamed. The regional Dravidian parties aren’t any better, running their shows with token Dalits, and merely ‘using’ Dalits the way the Hindutva does. (In the Tamil Nadu situation the left is a political player with a vote-bank comparatively smaller than the Dalit parties.) The Dravidian movement has consistently sidelined the Dalits, and projected only non-Brahmin, and family interests. The Poona Pact has the drastic effort that Dalits have to remain puppets in the hands of the major parties in order to get elected even in the reserved constituencies.

This denial of space in the mainstream, this marginalization is being exploited by the Sangh Parivar. For instance, reliable sources claim that the Akhil Bharateeya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP—the Students Wing of the Sangh Parivar) has a large contingent of Dalit students, who are tempted into joining by the offer of ‘prestigious positions’ within that organization. Keeping an eye on future vote-banks and prospective card-carriers the RSS never makes a wrong

move in its political expansion. Towards this end, icons of Dalit identity are systematically brought into the pale of saffron. For instance, in Coimbatore, on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2004, the RSS-ABVP conducted an 'Ekalavya 2004' function to give free notebooks to poor Dalit students. Color photographs of Dr. Ambedkar adorn the covers of *Vijaya Bharatam* on April 14<sup>th</sup>. Remarking on this phenomenon, Teltumbde observes:

"The co-optation process started from the systematic inclusion of the greatest dalit icon-Babasaheb Ambedkar into the Sangh Pariwar icons. They made him *Pratah Smaraniya* and variously propagated as though he was a staunch Hindutvawadi. They started celebrating his birth anniversaries, organizing festivals and seminars; publishing books with systematic vision of saffronizing him. Although, they chose the day of his death anniversary for their infamous demolition of the Babri Masjid, they have been celebrating the demolition day with the images of Ram and Ambedkar placed alongside. For gullible dalit masses reared on symbolism by the degenerate post-Ambedkar dalit leadership, the cooptation of Ambedkar meant change in attitude of the Brahmin camp. If Ambedkar symbolized concern for dalits, Sangh Pariwar did not lack in resources in making exhibitionist demonstration of this concern. It helped certain eager dalit elites to cross over to the resource rich Sangh Pariwar. Although, dalit masses did not follow these opportunist dalit elites it certainly helped in softening the anti-dalit image of the Sangh Pariwar and at the same time blurring the dalit identity."<sup>22</sup>

The same has been true of the Tamil Nadu example too. Here the Sangh Parivar prides itself in its ability to fund movements led by Dalits who are made to speak of the need to return to Hindutva. Such disgruntled sections and breakaway minor leaders from a most-backward caste party or a Dalit party were immediately bestowed with BJP tickets to parliamentary elections: Two of the five BJP candidates contesting from Tamil Nadu in the 2004 General Elections had such a 'deserter' background. Though they had earlier

been models of militancy and staunch opponents of Hindutva, position and the dream of power could change their perspective overnight.

But people aren't as easily turn-coat as politicians, and overnight changes in the worldview cannot be incorporated into the masses. Their percolation into Dalit lives is slower, but nevertheless vigorous, as can be seen from the sudden spate of building separate temples in Dalit areas. This not only gives them new Gods to pray too, but also subverts the eradication of the remnant forms of untouchability. Estimates given by the VHP, peg this number of new temples at 120, but it is just the tip of the iceberg. All over Tamil Nadu, the actual number of made-by-Sangh-Parivar temples might be a hundred times more, for a temple is, more often than not an idol, holy ash and kumkum, and someone to attend to it on holy days.

We need to also mention here that such participation of dalits in Hindutva rituals/ celebrations has done nothing to remove untouchability or casteist oppression and discrimination. Caste crimes are as crude, and as stark as ever. This is because despite all the wooing of the Dalits, the Sangh Parivar always tacitly aligns with the oppressors. Its largest following and economic support<sup>23</sup> are from the castes that have a history of oppressive and caste-supremacist behavior. In southern Tamil Nadu, the RSS-VHP-Hindu Munnani finds its mutual counterpart in the Thevar community dreaded for its claims of aggressive masculinity and caste supremacy. That is why Praveen Togadia planned to do a Trishul Diksha at Madurai during the birthday celebrations of Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar organized by the Thevar Peravai. Similarly, Fuller notes that Maravars (another oppressor caste) had the maximum participation in the Vinayaka Chaturthi. This consolidation of caste-interests, also makes the Sangh Parivar a power block, giving the illusion of its being capable of swaying Hindu interests.

## Wooing the Women

Like all movements of religious fundamentalism, the Sangh Parivar uses women as tools and makes them upholders of morality and decency. Their teachings implore women to understand the greatness of chastity and the need for unswerving loyalty to their family. The family here is the central agent of control, and women are required to adjust and not revolt against its authority. Women are portrayed as the custodians of culture and upholders of tradition—so, women's liberation is to the Sangh a ghost of a riddle, an unasked question that anyway requires no answers.

In the Tamil Nadu context, the Rashtriyasevika Samiti and the Sewa Bharati are the women wings of the saffron brigade. Here too, festivals are the key to mobilization of women. The report of the International Initiative for Justice on the Gujarat carnage notes:

“The *Sangh* Combine has strategically drawn in large numbers of women into its campaigns by using religious festivals as a focal point. From such innocuous beginnings, it has systematically incorporated women into its hate-filled mobilization against Muslims and has even distributed *trishuls* among them. Violence against women from Muslim communities was unprecedented during the Gujarat carnage and women from Hindu communities participated actively in the violence.”<sup>24</sup>

The same thing has been happening in Tamil Nadu for the past two decades. I am not being portentous, although Gujarat has not yet been replicated, that day is not faraway in Tamil Nadu. Here is an excerpt from the book, *RSS: A Vision in Action*,

“[T]raditionally, Hindu women have been the repositories of piety and devotion. Tamilnadu VHP has made pioneering efforts in this respect and the response they are receiving is truly remarkable.”<sup>25</sup>

Now the back-scratching is complete. The RSS publication praises the remarkable VHP. Drum-rolls please, before we proceed to read the pioneering efforts.

“During the freedom struggle, Mahakavi Subrahmanya Bharati made use of this tradition for rousing national consciousness among women. Now, VHP has picked up the thread. During Navarathri, 1,008 *deepa-poojas* are regularly organized throughout the state. The spontaneous response from women-folk can be gauged by the fact that in 1987, 148,645 ladies partook in 2,842 *deepa-poojas* in 243 places.”<sup>26</sup>

Close to one and a half-lakh women had participated in such *deepa poojas* as early as in 1987. Imagine the numbers today, seventeen long years since then, with the Hindutva government at the centre, alliance with the ruling parties and other favorable circumstances. A similar festival is the *paal-kudam* (milk pot), where large numbers of women carry milk pots for the purpose of *abhisekha* to temples. The minimum number is 108, the maximum so far has been 1008. Such continued holding of *Deepa Poojas* (in Tamil they are called *Thiruvilakku Poojas*) gives the women the power to participate outside the domestic sphere. This entry into the public domain gains them additional respectability in their homes. Though women take active part in all the festivals, such unique, women-only festivals give them an enhanced sense of femininity and womanhood.

On the local level, women are consolidated using activities that require them to get together and meet often such as the *bhajan mandalis*. Also, the practice of observing fasts, is generally more incumbent on the women of the *Sangh Parivar*. Apart from the health and hygiene reasons to which they stake claim; fasting, is indicative of moving towards purity, towards an ideal of self-control and sense-control. Such an emphasis on the elimination of craving and desire,

aids in their project of the complete desexualization of women. They are wrapped up in protectionist discourses. Only the reproductive role is stressed time and again: *matri-shakti* underlines the womb: there is a control over the bodies for the project of begetting proud and valiant sons for the Hindu Rashtra.

The introduction of festivals like Raksha Bandhan into a state that had never heard of the custom, let alone practiced it, pinpoints the role of the Sangh Parivar in transforming an upper-caste North Indian tradition into a universal celebration.<sup>27</sup> The fact that it is one of the six-recognized celebrations of the RSS highlights its importance in their agenda of Hindu Rashtra. (Unfortunately for the Sangh, the introduction of the Rakhi culture, results in much hilarity. Popular girls buy rakhis by the dozen, which they tie to the hands of interested men whom they want to keep at bay. A simple piece of thread can transform prospective boyfriend into protective brother, a kind of magic that can otherwise never be achieved.) In the larger, real picture it seems a grim, painful tradition because it projects women as people who need protection.

Throughout the ideology of the Sangh, we find this constant reiteration that women, like children are weak people. So the patriarchy of the Parivar romps home with its protectionist policies. Perhaps this is aimed at according a greater masculinity to the men of the Sangh.

Children are enticed into the Sangh Parivar by the tinkering of the syllabus and the tarnishing of fresh minds. Schools run by the Hindutva forces are made to observe religious functions and rituals, students are made to stage patriotic (read Hindutva) plays.

One also needs to look at the maintenance of separate identities<sup>28</sup> for women: they are generally not included in the masculine Vinayaka Chaturthi processions but in the ultra-feminine *paal kudam*, the deepa poojas, the fasting, the bhajan mandalis. Nothing that will affect her, nothing that will allow

her to assert herself, or even assert her body. This perhaps arises out of the very low opinion of women that the reactionary Parivar holds. As an example, the then Deputy Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Hari Shankar Bhabra is reported to have said, 'Why talk of humans, even gods cannot be sure of woman's character.'<sup>29</sup>

If ideology can take the Sangh Parivar thus far, crucially cunning strategies can take them farther. Their newest targets are the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) run by women. In July 2004, 5000 women marched the streets of Coimbatore city under the banner of the Seva Bharati. All these women belonged to Self-Help Groups and are economically powerful, as well as being socially well connected. In 2003, 30,000 women running SHGs participated in an RSS function arranged for them at Kanyakumari.<sup>30</sup> Apart from such consolidation of women with social awareness, the orange order reaches out to the simple womenfolk too through rath-yatras. In Tamil Nadu, it is not the powerful Durga Vahini that woos the women, but softer icons of patriarchy like Sharada Ma and the Mother of Pondicherry Ashram.

Now we have seen how the Dalits and women are being enticed into entering the Sangh Parivar in the Tamil Nadu context. Such a massive project of Hindutvaization is possible only because of the active support of the state machinery.

### **State support for Hindutva: the Tamil Nadu example**

"During the 1984 December election to the State Assembly the Munnani launched a propaganda campaign against DMK which had all along aligned itself with anti-Hindu forces like the Muslim League, the Christian Church, the Communists and the DK and had been maligning Hindu Dharma and the Hindu gods and goddesses. ...[T]he press in Tamilnadu too took note of the new mood of Hindus and wrote that no political party would now dare criticise Hindu religion and

culture, since they no longer remained meek to take such things lying down. ... [T]he DMK had to change its tune. Soon the sporting of pictures of Ganesha, Murugan and OM and processions to Hindu temples by its candidates started taking place. The ruling AIADMK leaders picked up the tune and began criticizing the DMK for its pro-Muslim and pro-Christian and anti-Hindu stand! Now 'Hindu' loyalty has replaced 'Tamil' loyalty."<sup>31</sup>

If it was possible to replace Tamil loyalty by Hindu loyalty it was primarily because of the erosion of the ideology of the Dravidian movement. Political Hindutva may be the new face of Brahminism, but we don't have a Periyar here to point that out. Dravidianism too, is on the road of no-return, with documented instances of DMK and ADMK party workers accompanying the Vinayaka Chaturthi processions, adorning their respective idols with the party flags.<sup>32</sup> Ideology now, is not even taking the backseat, it has been left behind to look after the home. Hindutva forces merely capitalize on this trend, and in the minds of the masses, replace the received rationalism with religion.

Not being content with reaching out to the people, the VHP attempted to mobilize the *poojaris* in Tamil Nadu. Even according to dated reports,

"It has so far trained 1028 of them from the rural areas in the State through 14 camps. [...] So far, 20,000 *poojaris* have become annual subscribers to the organization named as GKP (Gram Koil Poojarigal Peravai) and more applications are pouring in for membership. As a result of the training, the *poojaris* have become proud in their Hindu identity determined to safeguard the interests of Hindus and stop conversions."<sup>33</sup>

Gods are rich, and India is really the land of gold and diamonds, and all the riches that we have read of in the Arabian Nights. Courtesy, the bounty of our Tamil Kings a great section of the land is owned by temples (Few estimates suggest figures as high as 1/3<sup>rd</sup> the total land area of Tamil

Nadu). In such a crucial, powerful lobby the consolidation by the Sangh Parivar has been complete.

In 1996, when the GKP attempted a massive show of strength with the participation of over 60,000 poojaris, the then Chief Minister Jayalalitha who attended the function accepted all the 9 demands of the GKP which included the provision of pension to retired poojaris.<sup>34</sup>

Hindutva has been on the fast-track since the beginning of the AIADMK rule in 2001. As if in a fulfillment of holy vows, the state government resorts to a “spiritual rule” and proudly pats itself for having renovated 2,822 temples.<sup>35</sup> Retired poojaris enjoy pension, and if you are feeling hungry and there’s a temple nearby, there are chances that you will benefit by the Annadhanam scheme that freely feeds Hindus at temples. The mutts are the political players here. Not that the DMK has been above board either. Cavorting with the Hindutva forces is the political pastime in Tamil Nadu.

This is a scary phenomenon. For all the systematic hard-work that the Sangh Parivar has put into Tamil Nadu, the state may soon be the next Gujarat.

### **What festivals could do in Maharashtra and Gujarat**

In the introduction to his book *An Agenda for Cultural Action and Other Essays*, K. N. Panikkar observes how the society “appears to be engulfed by a decivilising process” because of the adverse impact of communalism on the “three main features of Indian civilization: social accommodation, religious respect and cultural co-existence.” He attributes the social violence, including the Gujarat carnage to this decivilizing process, which, according to him “is not the result of a sudden and spontaneous upsurge of communal passion, but the outcome of long and sustained intervention in almost all spheres of social existence. Among the several strategies evolved by communalism to influence the civil society the religionisation of public sphere is perhaps the most vital.”

We can observe that not only does this mass mobilization using religion serve political and fundamentalist agendas but it also serves a distractive purpose by keeping away people from other venues of collective action. Jayant Lele, comments that the “control and dissipation of people’s cognitive competence, its deflection away from the real sources of the malaise, is the task that communalism seems to have been commandeered to perform.”<sup>36</sup> Often, new festivals have cropped up in order to displace people from their secular engagements. Instances when they have invented a religious function to displace a non-religious celebration galore.<sup>37</sup> Thus we can understand the domestication of dissent and why marginalized, oppressed groups like the Dalits who are striving to revolt and be reborn in militant avatars are posited with new enemies. Such an attribution of enemies, systematic brainwashing, economic buyouts and space for respectable identities ensured that Dalits could be used against Muslims in the Gujarat carnage. The very structure of religious festivals might also contribute to the increased militancy and riots that arise as by-products. The culture of public processions that accompany rituals has advanced to the extent that there is little left to imagination.

Gerard Heuze, in his seminal work on *Populism, Religion and Nation in Contemporary India: The Evolution of Shiv Sena in Maharashtra*, makes the following reflection:

“In certain respects similar to Brazilian carnivals, contemporary Indian pujas, moving between rioting, ritual, and mass release, also sometimes have a tendency to embody the repetitions of civil war. Muslim quarters are closed during large Hindu festivals out of fear of provocation connected with the passage of processions. Clashes have multiplied, despite increasingly strong police mobilization. The interest which an organization with para-military aspects, such as the Shiv Sena, finds in these particular and always more tense moments in social life is readily understandable.

Mass pujas have since the beginning been associated

with the relation to urban space, a majority of the poor and the migrants in particular experiencing in this regard a situation of permanent shortage, which is only equaled in the old commercial quarters. The pujas have made it possible to mark the positions of “communities” in the process of assertion by associating the geography of the sacred with the stability of social groups. They have expressed variations in the organization of socio-religious ensembles. They have also produced tensions and distinct claims of religious preoccupations by using the idiom of ritual status as well as that of precedence (the order of arrival at a given place). Since Indian independence, the development of the Shiv Sena has greatly accentuated this tendency, and the pujas have been inclined to express relations of power in an increasingly brutal manner. Considerations of rank (ritualo-brahmanic) and perceptions in terms of rights connected with precedence have been gradually eclipsed in favor of an immediate perception of the capacity for group intervention. In these conditions, the puja assumes the appearance of a general mobilization, and this is increased by the use of symbols such as the saffron flag of the Shiv Sena (the *bhaghva dvaj* of Shivaji) or the green flag of young Muslims. It is during pujas, by means of the disorder that invades the city, that one dares to provoke the adversary and transgress the usually accepted limits. One draws provocative pictures and covers walls of the enemy up to the windows with posters. The use of sound to occupy space plays a significant role in the exacerbation of mass pujas related to special issues. Music and sometimes firecrackers are used for that purpose.”<sup>38</sup>

He also notes how these mass pujas are capable of ensuring a kind of unity within the organization,

“More generally, it seems that the large mass pujas, which are increasingly often at the center of religious practice, exercise an uncontrollable effect on the organization, binding it to countless fragmented chauvinistic perspectives and bogging it down in the “culture of powerlessness” (*napunsakta*) of the popular quarters.”<sup>39</sup>

When Heuze speaks about pujas resembling civil wars, it might sound far-fetched to those who are not exposed to the reality. Tanika Sarkar documents of how even the war, the bloodbaths, resembled the pujas. She writes, “Bystanders and survivors during the days of maximal violence were struck by the festive, carnivalesque aspect of rampaging mobs. Indeed, one such mob looked like a 'barat', a wedding band, to unsuspecting Muslims on the fateful morning of February 28.”<sup>40</sup> The pujas alas don't end with the attainment of agendas, the harvest of death. They continue into the darkest of nights:

“The BJP has also been using a series of Hindu cultural festivals to further polarise the community on religious identities. It began with the Jagannath Rath Yatra in July, then the Shobha Yatra was taken out on Janmashtami day, August 31. The latter was organised mainly by Sangh Parivar members in Rajkot, Modi's constituency and had “Fight against Terrorism” as its theme. Several floats and exhibits had replicas of the Sabarmati Express burning. But there was no mention of those among the Sangh Parivar who orchestrated the killing of more than 1,000 persons after the Godhra incident. After that came the Ganesh festival which ended with violence and more tension.”<sup>41</sup>

Even after the genocide, for the tempo to be maintained, for the killings to continue, there are Hindutva yatras and festivals and displays of gaiety. It is really not an easy time to live in.

### Threatened Existence

“Everything now is Maha. Mahaaarati (which launches mass murders of Muslims), Mahashivaratri (heralds temple terror in Ayodhya), Mahajanmashtami (violence), Maharamnavami (viciousness), Mahajalabhishek (villainy), etc. These are Hindu Taliban nomenclatures. They are farthest from the Hindu festivals that were known, in an age gone by, as Aarati, Shivaratri, Janmashtami, Ramnavami. So, this new appellation Maha denotes death and hatred, violence

and degeneracy. Poles away from any religiosity of yore. How willingly and rapidly the "Hindus" were converted to this cultist perfidy and sectarian sordidness is a thing of extreme anguish and amazement.

But, since wonder, anger, and inquiry are now dead or verboten, here is an explanation. Just as the ugly and burdensome garlands (Mahamala) meant for today's leaders aren't for wearing, similarly *these are not festivals any more. These are communal mobilization events.* They lost their popular appeal and religious significance long ago because of this sacrilege.

This is the age of Mahabrahmans. They are the ruling clique. That is why there is so much death, destruction, violence, vice, deprivation and darkness, without respite, scarring and ravaging the land, bleeding it bone white. Today, it may be a term of honor. But in the recent past, as far as memory stretches, it was not so honorable or desirable a profession or title.

Mahabrahmans presided over obsequies, a funeral rite or ceremony, and collected offerings to the dead ones. Our Mahabrahmans are doing no less. What was limited to Hindus has now been extended to the whole of Bharat. This is Bharatising (read,brutalizing) India, the Hindutva way. Another feather in the Hindu Taliban cap: *The earlier Mahabrahman collected the harvest of death once in a while, and on individuals. The latter day Mahabrahmans are presiding over the death of a nation and collecting the tribute to Yama hourly and in a thousand ways.*"<sup>42</sup>

This is precisely what happened in Gujarat. Hindutvaization activities complemented hate campaigns. Modi, whose government connived with the carnage, sends out email invitations to whoever he can find to join the Navratri celebrations. There are the gory dances of destruction. The screams of the dying shakes the skies and the Gods wake up just to receive the dead. Remember, this is the age of the Mahabrahmans.

Singing "Let it be, Let it be" in the Beatles style might be a quick-fix, but an approach of complacency is akin to digging our own graves. And the secular state is always celebrating Hindutva too: every super-weapon of mass

destruction, the surface-to-air missiles, and other phallic aggressive weapons have a Hindu religious connotation: Agni, Trishul, et al. Everything about the Hindutva project is designed in terms of death, so its final victory will be our collective holocaust.

Globalization and the blood-sucking capitalism wouldn't be faraway too. One system of exploitation sends out the luncheon cards to another. Before long it is a merry party with merrier handshakes. One thing leads to another, but let us forget that. We, end up not with, but as, leftovers. And the espousers of the Hindu Rashtra fatten up, almost like on beef, and rise their strength from 2 to 182 in the Parliament in the period that exactly coincides with the coming of liberalization and globalization. Their India shines, shimmers, and sparkles like rhinestone, cousin to glass but akin to diamond. In her must-read work on *Globalization and Hindutva*, Marika Vicziany boldly remarks:

“Until now India has been a poor, developing country evolving in the context of a secular democratic political system. Persistent poverty has always been made more palatable by the fact of free elections, a free press and a free judiciary. Now India faces the risk of persistent poverty within the political framework of *hindutva*, the successes of which in 2002 were based on murder, pillage, rape, a new politics of anti-Muslim hatred and a political and media system that connived with violence.”<sup>43</sup>

If this shocks you, here's the bad news: We cannot look up to the state for support. The doors have been slammed shut against our eager, anxious faces. State terrorism is as entrenched as the other terrorisms. State machinery has long since trashed the obligations it owes the people. Neera Chandoke observes in her article *Security in the Times of Hindutva*,

“...[T]oday members of religious groups in an India that happens to be marked by the ascendancy of Hindutva, suffer multiple injustices, multiple deprivation, and

multiple insecurity, simply because they happen to belong to a minority. This is more than evident in the aftermath of the Gujarat carnage. [...] Such multiple injustices are unbearable if dominant groups in civil society terrorize religious minorities. But they are even more unbearable when they bear the imprimatur of the state. *There can be no greater insecurity than when states that are supposed to deliver security practice discrimination against their own citizens simply because they happen to be in a minority.*"<sup>44</sup>

Stop for a minute and think of the most recent terror that invaded us, that exterminated our minorities. Think of Gujarat that celebrated Hindutva every passing second, the consequent crimes, the complacency and the silence of the State. History isn't a solace, it is a sore reminder of the horror that once was, and now awaits us. Fundamentalism has won, so far. And it is being replicated, mass produced, the formula rigorously applied everywhere. I tremble to think of the directions it would take. Of the coming nights of knives. Of the plunder between the thighs. Of the possible partitions of human bodies. Of the vengeful invasion of inner, and sacred spaces. Of the strong men reduced to brittle burnt bones. Of the infants dying before they learn of death. Of the loss of all that is deeply loved. Of the tragedy, that in the end, every irredeemable loss of ours shall be a mere number, every carnage and pogrom an incident, to be looked over, flippantly. Of the mad justifications for the bloodbaths. Of the rush of the fanatic oppressors, to narrate their made-up stories of victimhood, amidst our mutilated, decaying corpses. And greatly, of planned, state-sponsored genocide that will be made to resemble a carnival of sheer hate—yes, the terror of the Hindutva doing it everyday.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Fuller, C J (2001): 'The 'Vinayaka Chaturthi' Festival and Hindutva in Tamil Nadu,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36, May 12, pp 1607-16.

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- <sup>2</sup> Geetha, V and S V Rajadurai (1990): 'Communal Violence in Madras: A Portent?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25, September 22 pp 2122-23.
- <sup>3</sup> Anandhi, S (1995): *Contending Identities: Dalits and Secular Politics in Madras Slums*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi.
- <sup>4</sup> Fuller, op. cit., p.1607.
- <sup>5</sup> Golwalkar, M.S., *The Bunch of Thoughts*, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, Bangalore, Reprint Oct. 2000 (First edition: 1966), p. 396.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 397.
- <sup>7</sup> *Fairs, Festivals and Yatras*, Dharmaprasaar Dimensions of VHP: [http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/d.Dimensions\\_of\\_VHP/cDharamPrasaar/fairsfestivalandyatras.htm](http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/d.Dimensions_of_VHP/cDharamPrasaar/fairsfestivalandyatras.htm) Accessed on: 12 September 2004.
- <sup>8</sup> Trivedy, Santosh *Festivals for National Integration*, [http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/d.Dimensions\\_of\\_VHP/hHindu%20Parv%20Samanvya/festivalforationalintegration.htm](http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/d.Dimensions_of_VHP/hHindu%20Parv%20Samanvya/festivalforationalintegration.htm) Accessed on: 12 September 2004.
- <sup>9</sup> Lele, Jayant (1995): *Hindutva: The Emergence of the Right*, Earthworm Books, Chennai, p xviii.
- <sup>10</sup> Trivedy, Santosh, op. cit.
- <sup>11</sup> This is generally a kind of fund collection drive for the RSS. Everyone worships the *bhagava dwaj* (saffron flag) and place the donation under the flag. Members of the Sangh take pride in saying that even beggars who are sympathetic and connected with the Parivar, donate money on Guru Pooja.
- <sup>12</sup> 'Aayiram Pirai Kanda Suriiji', *Vijaya Bharatham*, September 17, 2004, p. 4.
- <sup>13</sup> Hindu Munnani (Hindu's Front): This organization was started by the Parivar under the leadership of Ramagopalan. He was at that time at the top echelons of the RSS. Having realized that it was impossible for them to foster the growth of RSS in a stringently anti-Brahmin state, Ramagopalan was given charge of a new organization.
- <sup>14</sup> A minor breakaway faction of the Hindu Munnani, it makes its presence felt in the Vinayaka Chaturthi celebrations, when the members of this party take a separate procession.
- <sup>15</sup> 'Eppadi Seivadhhu Poojai,' *Vijaya Bharatham*, July 23, 2004, p. 6.
- <sup>16</sup> 'Ovvoru Naalum Ovvoru Vizha,' *Vijaya Bharatham*, September 3, 2004, p 6.
- <sup>17</sup> Seshadri, H V (2002), *RSS: A Vision in Action*, Sathya Sindhu Prakashana, Bangalore, p. 147.
- <sup>18</sup> Anandhi, S, 'Constructing Identities: Discourses of the Dravidian Movement,' in. *Secular Challenge to Communal Politics*, Ed. P.R.Ram, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 1998, Mumbai, p. 219.
- <sup>19</sup> Fuller, op. cit., p. 1613.

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- <sup>20</sup> Singhal, Ashok, *Sewa: Why and For Whom*, VHP website on Sewa international.  
[http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/d.Dimensions\\_of\\_VHP/aSewa/NSNS/sewa/whyandforwhom.htm](http://www.vhp.org/englishsite/d.Dimensions_of_VHP/aSewa/NSNS/sewa/whyandforwhom.htm) Accessed 12 September 2004.
- <sup>21</sup> Teltumbde, Anand (2003) *Onslaught of Fascist Hindutva on Dalits: Impact and Resistance*, paper presented at the AILRC Seminar on the Onslaught of Fascist Hindutva at Mumbai on December 22, 2002.  
[http://www.ambedkar.org/vivek/ailc\\_speech.pdf](http://www.ambedkar.org/vivek/ailc_speech.pdf) Accessed on: 10 September 2004.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> One dreary exception that deserves mention is the caste of Nadars (who are not Dalits) who were deemed unseeable. While a majority of them converted to Christianity in the early days, present day Hindu Nadars take pride in their Hindutvaness. Having metamorphosed into a strong business community, they form the economic foundation for the Sangh's activities in Tamil Nadu. This might perhaps be a success story of the Sangh's Hindutvaization programmes.
- <sup>24</sup> *Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat*, Chapter Two: The Context, Report by the International Initiative for Justice, December 2003.  
<http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/ijjg/2003/chapter2.pdf>  
Accessed on: 15 September 2004.
- <sup>25</sup> Seshadri, H V(2002), *RSS: A Vision in Action*, Sathya Sindhu Prakashana, Bangalore, p. 145
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 146.
- <sup>27</sup> Panikkar, K N, *An Agenda for Cultural Action and Other Essays*,  
<http://www.knpanikkar.org/books/An%20Agenda%20for%20Cultural%20Action%20and%20Other%20Essays%20-%20introduction.html> Accessed on 15 September 2004.
- <sup>28</sup> CJ Fuller identifies this segregation but emphasizes this on the self-respect of Tamil women. He writes: "Although the young men's support is wanted and needed, Munnani leaders know that noisy and aggressive public events are completely unattractive to most Tamil women with some self-respect, and that very few women will ever join the processions if there is any risk of violence." Though chastity and the cartel of associated nonsense has since long been imposed/ understood as a part of the identity of Tamil women, this is not the only, or main reason why women don't participate in public meetings of the right-wing. (DMK and ADMK meetings have their share of women, who are, and have the capability to be, as 'noisy and aggressive' as the men). It is part of the patriarchal policing by the Parivar, that keeping their women out of such functions keeps out interaction and the imagined risks arising out of such chance

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encounters! Patriarchy and class considerations, not personal choice is the matter here.

<sup>29</sup> Bhabhra, Hari Shankar, quoted in *Communalism Combat*. November 2001, in an article by Teesta Seetalvad.

<sup>30</sup> 'Sakthi Sangamam,' *Vijaya Bharatam*, February 27, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Seshadri, H V (2002), *RSS: A Vision in Action*, Sathya Sindhu Prakashana, Bangalore, pp. 100-1.

<sup>32</sup> Vishwanathan, S., 'The Spread in the South,' *Frontline*, Vol. 21, No. 6, March 13-26, 2004

<http://www.flonnet.com/fl2106/stories/20040326004900900.htm>

Accessed on: 10 September 2004 Fuller also cites the example of the local DMK and ADMK party branches installing large Vinayaka images in Sowcarpet, a Marwari dominated suburb of Chennai.

<sup>33</sup> Seshadri, H V (2002), *RSS: A Vision in Action*, Sathya Sindhu Prakashana, Bangalore, pp. 347-8.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.348.

<sup>35</sup> Vishwanathan, S., op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Lele, Jayant (1995) *Hindutva: The Emergence of the Right*, Earthworm Books, Chennai, p. xx.

<sup>37</sup> Teltumbde notes of how in Mumbai, Satyanarayan Pujas take place on Republic Day.

<sup>38</sup> Heuze, Gerard, *Populism, Religion, and Nation in Contemporary India : The Evolution of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra*, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Vol. XX, No. 1, 2000, p. 25-6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Sarkar, Tanika, 'Semiotics of Terror: Muslim Children and Women in Hindu Rashtra,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 13, 2002, Commentary.

<sup>41</sup> *What Happened in Gujarat? The Facts*.

<http://www.jagori.org/pdf/what%20happened%20in%20gujarat.PDF>

Accessed on 12 September 2004.

<sup>42</sup> I. K. Shukla, *The Sarcophagus of F*, South Asia Citizens Wire (SACW), 13<sup>th</sup> January 2002, emphasis mine.

<sup>43</sup> Vicziany, Marika, *Globalization and Hindutva*,

<http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/mai/mas/hindutva.doc> Accessed on: 14

September 2004. pp. 35-6.

<sup>44</sup> Chandoke, Neera, *Security in Times of Hindutva*,

<http://www.apcss.org/Publications/Edited%20Volumes/ReligiousRadicalism/Pages%20from%20Religious%20Radicalism%20and%20Security%20in%20South%20Asia%20ch21.pdf> Accessed on: 13 September 2004,

emphasis mine.