

## A Critique of 'Hind Swaraj' and 'Hindutva'

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### Abstract

This article reviews the last book written by U R Anantamurthy titled 'Hindutva or Hind Swaraj'. Rather than being an academic research work, it is more of a well-considered essay or propaganda material against the right-wing political hegemony unleashed by Bharatiya Janata Party and personified by Narendra Modi. The reviewer has looked at the whole book with open mind so as to present intent of the author in an unbiased manner.

**Keywords:** Hindutva, Hind Swaraj, India

### *Hindutva or Hind Swaraj*

by U.R. Anantamurthy,  
Harper Perennial, Noida, 2016;  
Pp. xxii + 122, Rs 350/-

### Political Prologue

'Hindutva or Hind Swaraj' is a 'self-political manifesto' against the rise of political Hindutva elements in the guise of Narendra Modi, who became the Prime Minister of India on behalf of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government after the 2014 general Parliamentary election, i.e. Lok Sabha. The author U R Anantamurthy compared 'two political manifestos' of Gandhi and Damodar Veer Savarkar: 'Hind Swaraj' and 'Hindutva' respectively.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the present volume is an outcome of the deliberation upon these 'political manifestos'. Ananthamurthy, one of the highly distinguished literary personalities from South India composed this short, precise manifesto based on his political conviction. The author expressed his deep agony over the crisis of liberal secular democracy in India, which got a threat, in the author's view, due to the rise of Narendra Modi to the position of Prime Ministerial candidature range, within the right wing BJP.

In-fact, there were many persons and sections in India who expressed deep agony, fear and concern over the elevation of Narendra Modi's candidature to the Prime Minister of India, since 2012 or so, in view of the scheduled 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the shadow backbone organization of BJP took active interest in ensuring that Narendra Modi gets elevated to the position of Prime Minister of India for the 2014 election much ahead. There was also a section of silent opposition within BJP when this decision was brought to the forefront. One of the prime BJP leader who opposed this move and step was Lal Krishna Advani (L K Advani), a towering personality of BJP, who was believed (or hoping) to be the Prime Ministerial candidate till then. L K Advani took objection to this move of RSS, and as a protest gesture he resigned to all the party positions in 2013. L K Advani had a strong bloc of followers within BJP. So, the move of Advani was a significant one. But, in due course of time Advani withdrew his resignation and kept silent (albeit, in

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a diplomatic manner). Thus, this indicates that there was a kind of opposition to Narendra Modi's elevation to the position of Prime Minister for 2014 election within BJP. But, BJP and RSS were successful enough in ensuring smooth transition in BJP in favor of Narendra Modi's candidature and leadership.

### **Narendra Modi as a Modified 'Hindutva' Variant**

Surprisingly within BJP, Narendra Modi emerged as a hard-core Hindutva person. This made the ranks and files of the RSS and BJP to believe and project within the BJP and in the Indian political class that Narendra Modi would be the suitable person to lead the Indian nation as a true nationalist, by citing the glorious development path of Gujarat under his esteemed Chief Ministerial position. As a result of romanticized glorification of Gujarat model of development under the leadership of Narendra Modi by the Hindutva forces and media; a pro atmosphere in favor of Narendra Modi's candidature as Prime Minister of India was created across India before 2014 general election.

Narendra Modi had been having long association with RSS and BJP for long and he was able to emerge systematically in these two organizations over the years. One of the most politically recognized and cherished peak of Narendra Modi in his professional political career was occupying the position of Chief Minister of Gujarat. During the 2002 Godhra communal clashes Narendra Modi was at the peak of the State of affair in Gujarat as Chief Minister. It was highly reported, accused, proved on some grounds that Narendra Modi was one among the prime people behind the communal violence in 2002, in which Muslims were massacred en-mass at many places across Gujarat. The large scale violation of human rights against Muslims attracted the attention of the whole world and brought a kind of negative impression to Narendra Modi from certain quarters like liberals, human rights organizations and activists, media, etc.

Until 2002 Gujarat violence; only L K Advani was seen as a hard-core Hindutva person within BJP. But, due to the range and nature of 2002 communal violence against Muslims in Gujarat, this hard-core Hindutva title in BJP was rechristened on Narendra Modi. Thus, Narendra Modi was able to capture the position of L K Advani in two senses; as a hard-core Hindutva icon and as a potential Prime Ministerial candidate.

Since 2002 onwards due to communal violence in Gujarat, Narendra Modi had become a controversial personality, albeit in two contrasting positions (just like L K Advani): category one was in favor of his potential active leadership and another category stood drastically against his leadership, etc. These two sections can be categorically recognized as 'pro Hindutva' and 'anti Hindutva'. The present author Anantamurthy belongs to the second category of 'anti Hindutva' section. And, same time the author, in the present volume expressed his deep agony over the rise of Narendra Modi on the Indian political scene as potential Prime Ministerial candidate on behalf of the Hindutva forces.

### **Visualizing Renewed Threat to the Indian Secular Democratic Tradition**

The two consecutive electoral set-backs to the BJP during 2004 and 2009 general Lok Sabha elections made RSS to revamp the leadership of BJP. As a result, a political wave in favor of Narendra Modi was created across the country, since 2012-2013 onwards in view of the 2014 general election to the Lok Sabha. From this point onwards, a new wave of pro and anti Narendra Modi sections started to express their views once again.

The present volume by Anantamurthy is one such deliberation against the rise of Narendra Modi in the Indian political discourse, whose candidature, in the author's view, is a kind of serious threat to the foundations of the liberal secular democratic traditions. In fact, the author Anantamurthy expressed a kind of self panic that he would not be interested to live in India, which would be ruled by Narendra Modi. Right wing sections verbally attacked him for this statement and gone to the range of suggesting him to leave to neighboring Pakistan, branding him as an anti-national. Ironically, within a few months after the victory of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India, the author Anantamurthy passed away!!

The present volume is a kind of self manifesto based on the author's ideological political convictions, which got published in the present version posthumously. The prime version of this volume was produced in his native language Kannada. The present English version was translated by Keerti Ramachandra along with Vivek Shanbhag. One of the unique features in the present version is a lucid 'forward' composed by Shiv Visvanathan. Shiv Visvanathan not only presented a lucid introduction to the author Anantamurthy's present work, but attempted to reorient 'why and how' Anantamurthy envisaged this manifesto.

The author chose the style of aphorism to make his point clear to the readers, in the initial pages. Many suitable aphorisms were presented by the author to substantiate his arguments. The translators were good enough in discharging their task to the best of professional recognition. The author's writing style had some implied senses and meanings, which should be filled by the readers, based on the narration presented by the author till then. This is a kind of literary style, which he used in this Manifesto, presented in prose format. Though, this is a political writing, the author, as a literary personality used literary characters from various novels, scriptures, etc to make his point simple and clear in a concise manner for denouncing Hindu fundamentalist elements in the Indian political discourse and highlighted the need for liberal secular perspective to adopt.

#### **'Hind Swaraj or Hindutva': An unusual Comparison**

The author attempted to project and/or re-builds the image of Gandhi's political relevance in the Indian political society, which got a huge threat in the form of Narendra Modi. From Gandhi's 'anarchist' political ideological convictions he brought-out some key essential elements which can safeguard the Indian nation's liberal secular democratic foundations.

Anantamurthy was silent towards the Indian electoral political process without providing any analysis. But, in terms of ideological political convictions he expressed deep sorrow over the lack of unity among liberal-left and identity movements in countering the rise of Hindu extremist fundamental forces like Narendra Modi. He even expressed lack of faith on INC in a few concise words over its failure in protecting the liberal secular democratic foundations, and observed INC as a weaker variant for Savarkar's political manifesto.

This volume attempts to shift in political ideological terms from Gandhi and Damodar Veer Savarkar to Narendra Modi. The author attempted to compare the two nationalist ideas of Gandhi and Savarkar. The author extensively compared Gandhi's treatise (manifesto) 'Hind Swaraj' with Savarkar's treatise 'Essentials of Hindutva', primarily. But, it should be understood that there was no direct reference to Savarkar's 'Hindutva', always. Savarkar's ideological convictions were highlighted by the author and went on to curtail such fundamental thinking as dangerous to humanity and nation building; while comparing with Gandhian path of ideological convictions, which would be very relevant for building a non-violent secular India.

In certain political terms this is an interesting comparison, if one visualizes from certain vantage point, like; in the Indian political intellectual discourse Gandhi is considered as an 'anarchist', and Savarkar was seen as a 'fascist' or 'communist' or 'cultural nationalist', etc. Thus, the author was brining two unusual political ideological thinkers to the forefront to present a new political manifesto based on his self conviction, which got inclined towards Gandhian path.

Gandhi's 'Hind Swaraj' and Savarkar's writings on 'Hindutva' are mostly denounced by the liberal and left intellectuals. In-addition to this, Gandhi's ideas were not followed seriously even by his own political platform INC!! And, increasingly Gandhi was shown in symbolic co-option mode by the Hindutva elements like BJP, etc.

Anantamurthy visualized Gandhi as a person, who was inclined towards transformation based on 'non-violence'. But same time perceived Savarkar as a 'violent variant' for achieving transformation, as he showed lack of proper tolerance for 'diversity' in the Indian cultural society. Also Anantamurthy observed that Gandhi felt that 'no religion in the world is perfect', but Savarkar stood

for 'superiority of Hindus'. Ultimately, Anantamurthy favored Gandhi's way of 'all religions should survive with equal respect'. Thus, he denounced superior complexity of the Hindu fundamental forces like Savarkar, Narendra Modi, etc.

At last, the author concluded that the best solution to the present political crisis in India would be adopting Gandhi's mode of 'Sarvodaya', against the Narendra Modi's perceived 'corporate model of development'. The author was critical towards the romanticized Gujarat model of development, which was projected as a solution to the rest of India ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha election.

### **Conclusion**

The present volume is a serious deliberation and contribution in the Indian political ideological literature from 'nationalistic' perspective; as two strands of nationalistic ideas of Gandhi and Savarkar, in relation to the present rise of Narendra Modi is dealt with. The uniqueness of this volume lies at comparing two kinds of manifestos of Gandhi and Savarkar, i.e. 'Hind Swaraj' and 'Hindutva' and produced an alternative manifesto in the present format, which tilted towards Gandhian path of 'Sarvodaya', against cultural, religious and development oriented Hindu fundamental forces triumph in the form of Narendra Modi.

### **End Notes**

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<sup>i</sup> By 'Political Manifestos', here in this context, it should be understood that the author is just comparing the writings of both Gandhi and Savakar. But, he was going beyond their specific writings, if required, and was trying to compare their actions also.