

Statement before the USCIRF

V.D.Savarkar is the ideologue of the Rightwing which forms the central government in India today. His best known book 'Hindutva! Who is a Hindu?' constructs a national identity based on the religion Hinduism alone. His brand of citizen was a person who regards India as his fatherland as well as his Holy land. This when extrapolated meant that non-Hindus couldn't call India their nation.

"It is clear that though their (Muslims and Christians) original Hindu blood is thus almost unaffected by an alien adulteration, yet they cannot be called Hindus in the sense in which that term is actually understood, because we Hindus are bound together not only by the tie of the love we bear to a common fatherland and by the common blood that courses through our veins and keeps our hearts throbbing and our affections warm, but also by the tie of the common homage we pay to our great civilisation - our Hindu culture, which could not be better rendered than by the word Sanskriti, suggestive as it is of that language, Sanskrit, which has been the chosen means of expression and preservation of that culture, of all that was best and worth-preserving in the history of our race. We are one because we are a nation a race and own a common sanskriti."¹

The Rightwing therefore believe in the concept of 'sons of the soil' and 'others'. Islam and Christianity are constantly referred to as 'outsider religions'. The Rightwing believe that partition of India in 1947 was to create Muslim Pakistan and Hindu India. This is wrong. India rejected the idea of a Hindu India; and chose to be a secular, all-inclusive India.

The CAA captures Savarkars idea of Muslims not being 'sons of the soil' and Islam not being an indigenous religion. In arguing about why the CAA is not discriminatory, arguments raised by Rightwing leaders include "Muslims have other countries to go to."² The humiliation is targeted at the religion, attempting to reduce it to a second class religion.

The specific choice of just 3 Muslim countries in the CAA2019; and the deliberate exclusion of other neighbouring non-Muslim countries which are witnessing persecution, suits a narrative of Muslims being the persecutors always, and of non-Muslims being the persecuted. This is furthered by the omission of Muslims - the Shias, the Ahmadiyahs, Hazaras and Sufis- from the 3 countries. This again is part of the Rightwing's age-old narrative of projecting Muslim men as sexual marauders of Hindu wombs.

The CAA2019 appears to be about helping certain persecuted minorities from certain neighbouring countries. This could have been achieved without the discrimination and humiliation written in the CAA. On closer analysis, the CAA2019 can be seen to be yet another tool to devalue the association of Islam with India.

Simultaneously there is a whipping up of xenophobic sentiments around the country. 300 homes of the poor were destroyed overnight by the City corporation of Bangalore based on a rumour that was circulated widely on whatsapp that the residents were all 'Bangladeshis'. It was found later that all were Indian citizens - Muslims and the poor. Instead of containing the xenophobia, the government is misusing it to target particular religions. In a recent speech in a southern District of the State of Tamilnadu a senior BJP leader make a hate speech about Christians, their next targets.³

India is one of the largest melting pot of cultures. Our nation is founded on the principle of 'unity in diversity'. India is too big to be allowed to fail in this idea. It will have far-reaching consequences

¹cf 'The RSS -Icons of the Indian Right'; Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay; 2019 Endnote 22 of chapter on V.D. Savarkar

² <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/muslims-have-150-countries-to-go-hindus-have-only-india-gujarat-cm-1631267-2019-12-24>

³ <https://www.kalaignarseithigal.com/tamilnadu/2020/03/02/bjp-leader-pon-radhakrishnan-hate-speech-inciting-violence-against-christian>

globally. Our institutional check and balance mechanisms have failed and are unable to help this downward slide into authoritarian majoritarianism.

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