

## The Needle's Eye



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# The Perpetual Victim Syndrome of Hindutva

How far can you reach back in time if you want to right wrongs, real or perceived? Look back through history and nearly every nation can point to traumatic events that affected the lives of its people forever. Where do you stop though? The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its cohort seem determined to snatch back Muslims and Christians it claims were coerced by force or lucre by 'them' – conquerors, colonizers and proselytizers.

But who exactly are 'they', and how far back can you go to search for the 'original' Hindus? Who do you demand reparation or remorse from? Where did it all begin – with Mohammad of Ghazni or one of Christ's apostles?

The notion that all of us born within the mythical boundaries of Bharat Mata sprang from the same primeval Hindu soup, and that all other faiths rode on our backs, is bizarre enough. So is the perpetual victim syndrome that 'resurgent' Hindus suffer from, the notion that Hindus were always set upon and subjugated and converted and it is time to rise. Yet few of us ask ourselves: re-convert our lost brethren to which Hinduism? Which caste will you belong to if you forsake the cross or the crescent? Which of the ten million Hindu gods will you worship? Where will you turn if you

are discriminated against by fellow Hindus?

Where responsibility for troubled histories can be clearly defined, other countries have tried to make amends. Germany has apologized for the horrors of the Holocaust and spent billions of dollars in reparations to its victims; Chancellor Willy Brandt even went down on his knees at the Warsaw Ghetto in 1970 in atonement. Australia's then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made one of the most heartfelt apologies in history in 2008 to his country's indigenous peoples, the Aborigines: "...for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture" and promised a future of equal opportunities.

Not always has there been contrition. Japan still refuses stubbornly to acknowledge the atrocities it visited upon several Asian countries during World War Two, and has been divided over the issue of women forced into prostitution, especially in Korea, to service its soldiers. A senior Japanese official did make a rather subdued apology in 1993, but Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who has just been re-elected with a thumping majority, wants to retreat from that admission about 'comfort women', as the government insists on describing the victims.

Spain, too, does not seem to be convulsed by regret about the Inquisition, especially the royal decrees of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492 and 1501 that ordered Jews and Muslims to convert to Christianity or leave. A direct result of the re-con-

quest of the Iberian peninsula from over five centuries of rule by the Muslim Moors, things came to such a pass that Torquemada, the chief inquisitor, asked his spies to report homes where smoke did not emerge from chimneys on Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath. Tens of thousands of Jews were tortured, executed or forcibly baptized on pain of expulsion from the country because they sought to "seduce faithful Christians from our Holy Catholic Faith".

It is a good time to refresh our memories about religious persecution as we move from the eight days of Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of lights, to the twelve days of

Christmas, the season of giving. Whether or not 5,000 Christians and Muslims are 're-converted' to Hinduism on Christmas day in Aligarh, we in India have given ourselves the gift of rising Hindu bigotry through most of this year.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, who increasingly seems like the alter ego of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is unabashed about Hinduism's new power. Last Saturday in Kolkata he issued a clarion call to battle. "Hindu society is awakening... We have grown from this soil; this is our nation, this is our Hindu Rashtra," he said. "Our gods teach us not to take it any more after a hundred injustices. A hundred sins have been committed: how many more do we need to endure? We are taking back what was taken from us. If you don't like it (conversions) then change the law. If you don't want Hindus to convert (others) then Hindus too should not be converted."

Fired by so explicit a summons from their supreme leader, it is not surprising that Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti, or Yogi Adityanath, or Sakshi Maharaj are ratcheting the tension up. Yet somehow, somewhere, we have been beguiled by the image of a truly development- and reform-minded prime minister who is waging a grim and silent battle against

the hardliners in his own party and its affiliates. That image is pure tosh and fiddlesticks, as Bertie Wooster would say.

There are consequences, but it appears that the Bharatiya Janata Party is sanguine about profiting in the swings and roundabouts. The party did not win a single seat in the Kashmir Valley in the latest elections, although Modi led an expensive and expansive campaign. BJP candidates lost their deposits in all but one of the Jammu and Kashmir's 57 Muslim-majority constituencies. Only one Muslim BJP candidate won – from the Jammu region. The party has an infinitesimally tiny number of Muslims among its legislators nationwide. The uproar over religious conversions has also spoilt Modi's reforms agenda in parliament.

All this will only dent India's image. Investors are not running for the exits, but they are not beating down our doors either. The government just slashed healthcare spending by 20 per cent as the fiscal deficit balloons. What does the government have to lose if it can point to a year of electoral triumph and growing political and religious strength? Power is all that matters.

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**It's About Power**  
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