

The Needle's Eye



CHAITANYA KALBAG

Will India Shake Off Its Grand Delusions?

charitably described as selective intellectualism. This is happening alongside a continual re-telling of history. Both strands converged in a column by the BJP's national general secretary Ram Madhav titled 'Coming Full Circle at 70'.

Madhav wrote about the "genius of our country, which is rooted in its religious-social institutions like state, family, caste, guru and festival", and went on to rubbish Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership after independence, comparing him unfavourably with strongmen like David Ben-Gurion in Israel, Mao Zedong in China and Kemal Ataturk in Turkey.

Quoting from a sharp exchange of letters in 1945 between Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru over 'native wisdom' and village life as the centrepiece in new India, Nehru was peddling his colonial masters' views, Madhav said. He ignored the fact that the two men may have differed, but were extraordinarily close—Gandhi did not disavow Nehru as the best choice to lead independent India or waver from naming

Nehru his political heir.

Nehru may have been westernised, but he certainly had deep connections with rural India, travelling often into the countryside from his 20s. In the first years after independence, he wrestled with food scarcities, a better deal for farmers, and the abolition of the zamindari system so the sharecropper would get to till his own land.

Ironically, to underline his point Madhav quoted a Western writer: "The liberal unease is palpable. Their plight is best described by Edward Luce in his book through a less-used Greek word demophobia—fear of the mob. The mob, humble people of the country, are behind Modi. They are finally at ease with a government that looks and sounds familiar. They are

people in the West, who are doing better than they've ever done before, are feeling way more demophobic".

When there was dismay at his apparent endorsement of vigilantism, Madhav responded that he had meant the humble masses, "not the mob in conventional sense".

In another celebration of cultural nationalism, Delhi University profes-

been a tyranny of the majority in India. True—but that was because the subcontinent had allowed itself to be ruled by tiny minorities—the Mughals and the British—for four centuries. In the Assembly, Hussain fought long and hard against a proposal to set aside reserved constituencies for Muslims. This was understandable—he was the only Shia among 31 Muslim representatives from the provinces. On 26 May 1949, for example, Hussain argued that no 'speck of separatism' ought to be permitted in the new Indian constitution: "Other minorities will also be encouraged to demand it. Minority within a minority must be logically entitled to it and thus, far from adding and aiding unity, it will only serve to promote separatism and create sectional strife, leading to untold religious, social and political complications."

The makers of our constitution decided wisely in the end against constituencies reserved for minority religions. That has stood us in good stead. The same Nehru who is now being air-

brushed out of our history and political discourse said in the Constituent Assembly on August 14, 1947, hours before independence: "At a time when we are on the threshold of freedom, we should remember that India does not belong to any one party or group of people or caste. It does not belong to the followers of any particular religion. It is the country of all, of every religion and creed. We have repeatedly defined the type of freedom we desire. In the first resolution, which I moved earlier, it has been said that our freedom is to be shared equally by every Indian. All Indians shall have equal rights, and each one of them is to partake equally in that freedom."

Seventy years after independence, we are still struggling with many of the fundamental questions the Constituent Assembly grappled with. We have still not fulfilled Article 44 in our Directive Principles of State Policy: "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India." Bigotry and bias still stalk our land. But we deceive ourselves that we are an egalitarian democracy. I remembered Adi Shankaracharya, the genius who in his very brief life (788-820 CE) cemented Advaita philosophy and *sanatana* dharma (eternal duties) and wrote numerous treatises while criss-crossing India. In his *Maya Panchakam* (five verses on delusion) the refrain is: "Aghatita ghatana patiyasi maya" (that is the unique effect produced by deceptive delusion). When will we emerge from our delusions?



ANIRBAN BORA

NO END TO THE WAIT

The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout India



"For the Congress the agrarian question was the dominating social issue and much time had been given to its study and the formulation of policy," Nehru wrote in *The Discovery of India*. Twelve years later, the then prime minister wrote to a chief minister: "I would repeat that the key-stone of our planning is agricultural production. We can never have surpluses for industrial growth unless these come from agriculture."

enjoying it," Madhav wrote.

Madhav is being disingenuous. Luce has used 'demophobia' in his new book *The Retreat of Western Liberalism* to highlight the anxiety of the elites in western democracies. In a recent interview on Vox.com, Luce says that the United States and Britain are more vulnerable to populism because of their triumphalist and complacent stand on their economic and political models, "so it's not a surprise that wealthier

sor Rakesh Sinha criticised Ansari's 'binary' view of majority and minority and noted: "From 2014 onwards, there has been a marked consolidation of saffron politics as India's political executive is completely Congress-mukt—the offices of president, vice president and prime minister are held by RSS men."

He quoted Tajamul Hussain, a lawyer and member of the Constituent Assembly, as saying there had never

STILL STRUGGLING

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