

Calcutta Notebook

Charubrata

Sangh Parivar never gives up, although it changes tactics. Remember the offer of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's to co-operate with the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during the Emergency. Seems the saffron storm troopers wanted to coalesce with Sanjay Gandhi more than with Indira Gandhi who cold-shouldered the offer. The political -rather parliamentary- arm of RSS, Bharatiya Janata Party, embraced Barun Gandhi who proved himself to be more fanatic than a Bajrangi. Nayantara Saigal lamented that Barun's gravitation towards obscurantist Hindutva was due to the fact that he was not groomed at the Nehru-Indira filial ambience. But Saigal, arguably a good fiction writer, has flaws in her reasoning too. Sanjay Gandhi (Nehru knew him as Sanjib Gandhi) was born in the same ambience. Had he strong secular or broadly democratic temperament?

RSS has scored again. Its poster boy Prabhu Chawla is now editorial director, *New Indian Express*, operating from New Delhi, although NI Express is basically a multi-city daily from south India. Came along with him elements like Ravi Shankar (real name- Ravi Shankar Etteth) as executive editor. He discovered that the first Mughal emperor of India Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur killed 'millions of Hindus'. Seems he forgot –assuming that he knows– how many zeros make a million. "Hindus have a historic reputation for national passivity, having endured religious persecution for centuries. Thousands died in Somnath and Kasi in the 11th century; hundreds of Rajput women immolated themselves to avoid rape by invaders; Babur killed millions and Aurangazeb walled thousands up in the name of God". Ancient history, indeed and irrelevant to modern India—except that major Delhi roads are named after these despots. The article in his Sunday column on 13 February—captioned 'Equality of Oppression' (<http://expressbuzz.com/biography/equality-of-oppression/247549.html>). He did not care to read Romila Thapar's *Somanatha :The Many Voices of History* (Penguin, 2005). Mahmud of Ghazni, Thapar wrote in *Frontline* in April 1999, "is said to have desecrated their places of worship at Multan and Mansura. His claims to having killed 50,000 kafirs (infidels) is matched by similar claims to his having killed 50,000 Muslim heretics. The figure appears to be notional. Mahmud's attacks on the Hindus and on the Shias and Isma'ilis was a religious crusade against the infidel and the heretic". Political scientist C P Bhambri, reviewing the previous edition (2004) of the treatise in *Business Standard*, penned, Prof Thapar. "The destruction of the temple of Somanatha occupies a central position in the Sangh Parivar's politics of history and it is not an accident that L K Advani launched his journey to Ayodhya in 1990 from Somanatha. The destruction of the temple was projected as a great historic event of Hindu trauma when a believer of another religion wanted to convey the message that muslim religious believers were superior to Hindu believers. In her painstaking research work, Thapar, while appropriately rejecting the menopausal explanation of a historical event, analyses Turko-Persian sources, the Sanskrit inscriptions from Somanatha and its vicinity, biographies, chronicles and epics."

Ravi Shankar, reflecting the abominable cavalier-fashion commentary, did not seem the urge even to go through the book for a critical objective. For such jurors with tendentious mindset, Marx's rationale of rejecting manuscripts looks appropriate-'journalistic'. Those who are committed to canons of journalism, take Marx's rebuke spiritedly.

Let's come to Chawla who doesn't hide his RSS connections. When the present RSS chief Mohanrao Bhagwat took over in April 2009, he wrote in his blog, while functioning as the editorial head of *India Today*: "The 58-year-old bachelor from Chandrapur, born 10 years after the death of Hedgewar, is the 21st Century face of an organisation that has often been accused of being steeped in a mythological make-believe. His new role as a moderniser (a

word that doesn't sit well with the image his organisation has acquired in urban India) is daunting, for he has to strike a fine balance between the challenges of future and the burden of heritage. When the generational shift took place in Nagpur on March 21, it was pretty evident that Bhagwat wanted to be different. The meeting began with Bhagwat's request that, after nine years as general secretary, he would like to pass the baton to someone else.... Bhagwat thinks the BJP- or for that matter any other front organisation- should be left to its own devices. (His predecessor, though, was fond of giving sagely advice to leaders like L K Advani and Atal Bihari Vajpayee.) Still, he wanted the pracharaks to be familiar with other family members like the BJP, VHP, ABVP and BMS. Under his initiative, some pracharaks were given six-month internships in these organisations. The RSS for him is essentially a cultural organisation with a social responsibility." □□□

(for reading it in full click <http://prabhuchawla.blogspot.com/2009/03/new-rss-chief-india-today-april-06-2009.html>)