**What is Hindutva?**

 ‘HINDUTVA’ sums up the ideology that moved champions of Hindu nationalism for decades before Partition. In 1923, V.D. Savarkar coined the term in his essay, Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? As an atheist, he took pains to emphasise that Hindutva was not synonymous with Hinduism. It is important to understand the term, in all its nuances, because of its past and present significance.

Hindutva is the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The election manifesto of the Bharatiya Janata Party — the party in power and political front of the RSS — has sworn by it since 1996. What is more, Hindutva provides ample warning for what is in store for the future of India’s democracy and secularism. It splits the nation into ‘us’ and ‘them’, and discards Indian nationalism in favour of Hindu nationalism.

Savarkar wrote, “... Hindutva is not identical with what is vaguely indicated by the term Hinduism. By an ‘ism’ it is generally meant a theory or a code more or less based on spiritual or religious dogma or system. But when we attempt to investigate the essential significance of Hindutva we do not primarily — and certainly not mainly — concern ourselves with any particular theocratic or religious dogma or creed”. His concern was politics; the political mobilisation of Hindus into one nation.

If not religion, what, then, is the basis for the divide? With crystal clarity, he wrote, “To every Hindu … this Sindhusthan is at once a pitribhu and a punyabhu — fatherland and a holy land. That is why in the case of some of our ... countrymen, who had originally been forcibly converted to a non-Hindu religion and who consequently have inherited along with Hindus, a common fatherland and a greater part of the wealth of a common culture — language, law, customs, folklore and history — are not and cannot be recognised as Hindus. For though Hindusthan to them is fatherland as to any other Hindu yet it is not to them a holy land too. Their holy land is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and god-men, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. Consequently their name and their outlook smack of a foreign origin”.

**Modern hatreds are supported by ancient (real or not) wrongs.**

The divide cannot be bridged except by obeying Hindutva’s demand for conversion to Hinduism. Savarkar exhorted, “Ye, who by race, by blood, by culture, by nationality possess almost all the essentials of Hindutva and had been forcibly snatched out of our ancestral home by the hand of violence — ye, have only to render wholehearted love to our common mother and recognise her not only as fatherland (Pitribhu) but even as a holy land (Punyabhu), and ye would be most welcome to the Hindu fold”.

Gandhi’s assassination put paid to Savarkar’s ambitions, but the RSS picked up the baton. Its supremo, M.S. Golwalkar, drew inspiration from Hindutva and coined its synonym, ‘cultural nationalism’, in contrast to ‘territorial nationalism’ in his book, A Bunch of Thoughts (1968). Everyone born within the territory of India is not a nationalist; the nation is defined by a common ‘culture’ (read: religion).

Golwalkar wrote, “... here was already a full-fledged ancient nation of the Hindus and the various communities which were living in the country were here either as guests, the Jews and Parsis, or as invaders, the Muslims and Christians. They never faced the question how all such heterogeneous groups could be called as children of the soil merely because, by an accident, they happened to reside in common territory under the rule of a common enemy … The theories of territorial nationalism and of common danger, which formed the basis for our concept of nation, had deprived us of the positive and inspiring content of our real Hindu nationhood ...”

This explains the RSS’ ghar wapsi (‘return to your home’) campaign, simply a repeat of the past shuddhi (‘purification’) movement. Nothing has changed; an unbroken ideological thread binds Savarkar’s Hindutva, Golwalkar’s ‘cultural nationalism’ and the RSS-BJP policies today. On Sept 24, 1990, BJP president L.K. Advani launched “a crusade in defence of Hindutva”, which culminated in the demolition of Babri Masjid, in his presence, on Dec 6, 1992.

Since 1996, the BJP’s election manifestoes for Lok Sabha elections pledge to espouse Hindutva in these terms: “The cultural nationalism of India … is the core of Hindutva.” This explains the Modi government’s systematic purge of educational and cultural institutions. It is a quarrel with history. As scholars Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph remarked, modern hatreds are supported by ancient, remembered wrongs, whether real or imagined. The RSS-BJP combine rejects the concept of composite culture that Jawaharlal Nehru and others propounded.

The writer is an author and a lawyer based in Mumbai.

Published in Dawn December 10th, 2016

A.G. Noorani