

National Security - Nationalism :We Cannot Reverse History - But Prepare To Maintain Freedom

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“Leaders of the Society should have the moral strength to proclaim truth fearlessly”

Rig Veda

Introduction

Peace and harmony have been sought by humanity ever since the dawn of civilization.¹ And yet the whole of human history, from the very earliest times is replete with wars and violent conflicts from the tribal rights upto the international level. Indians, however, tend to believe that conflict is unnatural, that peoples from all nations are basically alike, that differences are product of misunderstanding and that permanent peace is a reachable goal. For ages the Indian psyche has been geared to devoting ones life to the welfare of all, ‘Sarva Bhute, Hite Raha’. It has also been focussed not on individual self but on the entire globe, ‘Vasudheva Kutumbakam’ was always the objective. History disapproves each of these propositions. As mentioned, the causes of the conflict have been many and varied. Some wars have resulted from the ambition of individuals or groups to dominate society, others from an attempt to fight injustice and tyranny, and there have also been wars of national liberation, freedom and religion. All religions preach peace, but in fact it has been one of the major source of violent conflict down through the centuries and remains so even today. Science was supposed to establish peace but it has created deadly weapons of mass destruction. Only when the countries have accepted the existence of conflict and sought to manage it have enduring periods of general peace resulted.

Unfortunately, we Indians lack confidence to revisit our history with a degree of candour. Although we can not reverse history, we must examine our past in order to prepare for the future. Availability of facts will lead to informed debate and a great consciousness. History can be used to create trauma or to apply creative ideas from the past; ‘forewarned is forearmed’. We have suffered heavily in the past because we were disunited. The concept of nation state was non existent in earlier feudal times when loyalty of the masses was extended to their king and not to the country. When we study a large number of battles that we lost, it is possible to discern the recurrence of three main shortcomings which contributed to our misfortunes. In the technology of the contemporary weapon system, we invariably lagged behind the invading armies. For example, for centuries we relied on slow and unwieldy elephants against the more nimble and versatile horses which were used to advantage by the invaders. With the advent of gunpowder, we were also slow to catch up with the latest advances, the same weakness continues to date in the manufacture of modern weapon systems. And, finally a lack of aggressive spirit, planning ahead to meet the danger, coupled with treacherous defections remained the root cause of misfortunes that befell the Country.

Military History

Let us examine the chronicle, of our Indo-Islamic past and the British conquest and post Independence conflicts, which is filled with the debris of the tides of war.² India was lost first to Arab followers of the Muslim faith inspired by their religious and military enthusiasm at the beginning of 8th Century. Mohammed Bin Qasim, a young man of 17 years, under orders of the Caliph led a well trained force of Syrian horse and Bactrian soldiers, few heavy artillery catapults with adequate baggage train of camels. A large number of Jats and Meds who were discontented with the rule of King Dahir of Sindh also joined the invaders. King Dahir took up defensive positions at the head of a large force of men and horses but lost due to superior tactics of the invaders combined with disaffection among population of his Kingdom.

Three hundred years later Muslims again started knocking at the gates of India, this time persistently (1001-1026) under Mahmud of Gazni from another direction - North West. Mahmud’s expedition to Somnath is one of the greatest feats of military adventure in the Medieval Indian history. His march with 30,000 regular cavalry and a large retinue of local volunteers and 30,000 camels loaded with supplies including water as a reserve for an emergency over a distance of nearly 1000 miles from Multan testifies to his boldness of conception. The campaign involved overcoming determined fight by Bhatti Rajputs, about 10 miles North West of Jaisalmer, and another battle against sizeable Rajput force at Mundher, West of Ahmedabad, before laying siege of Somnath town fortress. The defenders who numbered over 50,000 in all, organised strong counter attacks but were overwhelmed by better tactics of the invaders. The sack of Somnath continued to be remembered right upto 1947 and thereafter, as an event of great humiliation and significance. Al Baruni, the historian who followed in the train of Gazni writes of a letter from King Anandpala to Mahmud, “Turks are rebelling against you in Khorasan and I offer to send 5000 horsemen, 10,000 foot soldiers and 100 elephants. I have been conquered by you and I do not wish that another man should conquer you”. Such was the level of hypocrisy and sycophancy - almost slave mentality devoid of any self respect.

While the 11th Century had witnessed the passing of Punjab into the hands of invaders, the next century saw the expansion of their power further East. Like a resolute Commander Muhammed Ghori inspite of a near rout at the first battle of Tarain at the hands of Prithviraj Chauhan in 1189, planned another expedition in 1192 to establish his superiority at the head of 1,20,000 cavalry consisting of the best Turkish, Afghan and Tajik horsemen. They were all trained in shooting their arrows while on the move. Prithviraj mustered the support of 150 rulers

along with their contingents estimated at 3,00,000 cavalry, 3000 elephants and a large number of infantry. However, Jaichand of Kannauj did not join the confederacy. The two Armies met once again at Tarain. Gori employed better tactics by keeping sizeable reserve and surprised the Rajputs before they could organise themselves properly. At a critical juncture when both sides were wearing out due to fatigue, Muhammad employed his reserve of 12000 horses and inflicted heavy casualties. Prithviraj was taken prisoner and is reported to have been killed. Prithviraj lacked foresight and committed the grave error of giving second battle again within his dominion and permitting the invaders so far forward unhindered. After the battle, the Turks extended their frontiers further into North India, thus laying the foundation of Muslim rule for the next 300 years until the arrival of the Moghuls. Having established themselves in the Country, they ruled with a strong hand, almost like an army of occupation and they never identified themselves with the local population. The Sultans were opportunists and ease loving; and at times even slaves became kings. They too failed to keep abreast of the times and neglected the security of North West of the Country when Timur and Babar were knocking at the gates of India. So when Babar came into India at the head of a small force of 12,000 men and horses with few guns, he was faced with a muslim army at Panipat - a virtual mob of over a lakh men, horses and large number of elephants. The battle began on the morning of 21 April 1526 and was over in less than six hours. Ibrahim Lodi was himself killed in the battle and Afghans were completely beaten by highly trained and motivated cavalry archers, flank attacks and artillery.

The first battle of Panipat is a landmark in Indian history - it meant the end of Delhi Sultanate and ushered in the Moghuls who ruled the Country (except for a short interlude of Afghan adventurer Shershah) for the next 300 years. After the success of Babar at Panipat, a new power threatened the Rajputs who had been dreaming of establishing their supremacy. Mewar's battles were entirely defensive, they defended their land against Muslim onslaught; on everything that Hindus held sacred to their faith, Gods and women. Rana Sanga hero of Rajput national revival fought 18 battles against the Sultans of Delhi, Malwa and Gujarat and could never enter into an agreement with alien Moghul power under Babar. This resistance culminated in the famous battle of Kanwa, the Rajputs fought heroically but were defeated due treacherous desertion of Sillaidi who led Sanga's Vanguard with his force of 30,000 men and horse to the Moghuls. With the Moghuls installed in Delhi and aggressively expanding their empire, Akbar won over the allegiance of Rajputs - Kachwahas of Amber, Rathores of Jodhpur and Bikaner, and Bhatias of Jaisalmer. But the Maharana of Mewar would just not do so. They preferred liberty and 'Vanvas' to dishonour and humiliating subordination, and thus the epic struggle continued under Rana Pratap.

The 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries witnessed the greatest amount of mental awakening directed towards the uplift of the masses and their urge for freedom from the invaders bondage and rising of the moral stature. Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) the Tenth and last Guru brought a tremendous change in the religious, military and political life of the people. His most important contribution was to infuse a sense of fighting spirit in the peasantry. Like Shivaji in the South he had first to forge the sword with which he was to fight. Taking up the sword of righteousness against Moghuls' oppression, addressing the almighty he said, "Grant me O Lord this boon that I may not falter doing good. That I may entertain no fear of the enemy when engaged with him in battle. And I may always be sure of my victory. May my mind be trained in the desire to dwell upon the goodness and when the last moment of my life should arrive, may I die in the thick of battle." This wide awakening of peasantry led to remarkable socio-political organisation in the North. Ranjit Singh rose from the status of a petty Chieftain to become one of the most powerful Rajah of his time. He was the first Indian in thousand years not only to stem but to reverse the direction of invasions from the North West frontier. Also, he was the first person to persuade Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims to become the willing instrument of his expansionist policy; extending the borders upto Tibet and Afghanistan in the North to the deserts of Sindh in the South. Unfortunately, this situation did not last long after his demise in 1839 because of parochial quarrels, intrigues among his military commanders and determined expansion of British empire in India. We may skip the British conquest and subsequent rule in India, which came about more due to weakness of Indian character than to the bare effects of their brilliant achievements, when they were merely contemplating the protection of their trade. A brief mention of the first war of Independence in 1857 would further highlight the role played by the Indians to help the British in stabilising their empire in the Country. The mutineers were initially Muslims and Hindus of Bihar and Oudh and Marathas. As all these men came from land holding classes, this feeling was diffused among the civilian population where it received a sympathetic ear and support. This National uprising, to get rid of alien rulers, was suppressed brutally by the British with the active help and cooperation from numerous chieftains and some natives.

In the post Independence era, our Army has just about managed to maintain the territorial integrity of India, discounting the loss of Aksai Chin to China and areas of Kashmir occupied by Pakistan.³ Stephen Peter Rosen of Cornell University in his book 'India and its Armies' writes, "After the difficulties experienced during the 1962 border war with China, the Indian Army was enlarged and its funding was increased. Greater attention was paid to military affairs by civilian officials. In most of the accounts of the 1965 war Indian writers say that by then the Indian Army had reformed, that the territorial gains made by the Army in 1965 wiped out the shame of territorial losses in 1962, that the war had a profoundly unifying effect on India and the Pakistani efforts to raise the Muslims of Kashmir against the Indian Government at the outset of 1965 war failed completely." The detailed military account of that War by the Commander of Indian forces opposite West Pakistan, Lieutenant General Harbakhsh Singh, indicates that Major General Sukhwant Singh was correct when he wrote that, "Lavish praise for all the Services and image building by the propaganda media: clouded an objective analysis of the War which would have taught many lessons for the future and the Official Secret Act hid many sins". About Indian victory in 1971 war against Pakistan, he writes, "The Indian advances into East Pakistan from the North East, North West and South West did lead to a quick Indian victory at a low cost to India." However, writing almost 20 years later, Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw reviewed all the functions of war that had to be integrated in India to produce successful military operations in wartime. He then wrote, "Now do not tell me that I did all this in 1971. I must tell you that there was a difference then. The military operation in erstwhile East Pakistan was not worth talking about, China could not operate due to the time of operations (winter) that we had selected and we had planned on strategic defence for the Western theatre of operations. A mutual defence treaty was signed with the Soviet Union in August 1971 to secure Indian strategic flanks". In a nutshell, while the Pakistani threat bears watching,

there is some sort of consensus for shifting our focus on China - a big military power and increasingly also an economic one. However, both these countries pose chief security threats to India in the foreseeable future. Hence, we have to prepare ourselves to maintain our freedom.

Nationalism

History is supposed to be the basis of Nationalism. If people reject their own history for the history of another people, then in what way, they can be patriotic or Nationalistic. Patriotism is not linked to religion, culture or tradition but to the feeling of National unity, independence and interest; and hence the paramount importance of bringing minorities into the mainstream of National development. Otherwise communalism of minorities can manifest itself in the separatism, exclusivism, withdrawal and anarchism. Sri Aurobindo in his message to the youth of India said, “There are times in a Nation’s history when providence places before it one work, one aim to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our Motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end.” 4 The first and foremost pillar to achieve the Seers vision is to develop a sense of National identity. We have not found it even after 60 years of Independence. We have millions of Bengalis, Maharashtrians, Northerners, Southerners but very few Indians. Parochial loyalties based on region, caste, religion are the order of the day. They are sure prescription for National disintegration. Indiscipline is somehow ingrained in our character. Therefore, patriotism today should be about doing our duty conscientiously. It stems from getting recognition based on merit and from getting ‘justice’ that is timely and not purchasable. It comes from fairplay, a good civic sense, social awareness and law abiding attitude. Patriotism is about integrity, honesty and uprightness. It is about down to earth living rather than lofty rhetoric. To sum up, this is what Frederick Max Mueller wrote about our Motherland :-

“If I were to look over the whole World to find out the Country richly endowed with all the wealth, power, beauty that nature can bestow - I should point to India. If I was asked under what sky the human mind has fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life and has found solutions of some of them which deserve attention even of those who studied Plato, Kant - I should point to India. And if I was to ask myself from what literature we hear in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks, Romans and of one semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life not for this life only, but transfigured and eternal life-again I should point to India”.

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