

Busting the myth spread by Shyama Prasad loyalists



The RSS-BJP-Sangh Parivar is found to be desperate to project Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the Hindu Mahasabha leader and founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (the ancestor of the BJP) as “a selfless patriot”, “the first martyr for the unity and integration of India after Independence”, a “great parliamentarian,” “one who fought against the British during the 1943 Bengal famine,” “the architect of the Bengal Partition scheme” and also credited to have laid the foundation of India’s industrial policy and prepared the ground for the nation’s industrial development in the post-independence years. Above all, he is portrayed as someone who erected the first steps

on which today’s “shining” India is perched on. Amit Shah, Union Home Minister has been of the opinion that “*If anyone writes the history of India impartially and neutrally, then he [Shyama Prasad] will find an important place.*” (The Wire 07-07-16) PM Modi in his speech to the nation had even emphasized that the scrapping of Kashmir’s special status fulfils a dream of one of the Jana Sangh’s founding fathers, Syama Prasad. Thus there is an all-out attempt to resurrect Shyama Prasad from the forgotten folds of the past. Of late, the BJP government in West Bengal has been trying to outshine the esteemed position of Netaji Subhas held in people’s mind by giving too much importance to Shyama Prasad. But does history corroborate the claims of the Hindutva brigade? Let us look into the pages of history.

Responsive cooperation with the British rulers

Shyama Prasad is being described as great patriot. But did he participate in the glorious freedom movement of the Indian people against the British imperialist rulers? No. Instead he supported the British rulers and wanted them to crush the movement. When the country was in ferment during the Quit India movement in 1942, he expressed the apprehension that the movement would create internal disorder and endanger internal security during the war by exciting popular feeling against the British government. He was clearly of the opinion that “*...anybody, who during the war, plans to stir up mass feeling, resulting in internal disturbances or insecurity, must be resisted by any Government that may function for the time being*”. (Shyama Prasad, *Leaves from a Dairy*, Oxford University Press. p. 179.)

But why did he take such a stand? Because, he was an ardent follower as well as close associate of V D Savarkar, the Hindu Mahasabha founder and a great admirer of M S Golwalkar, the RSS ideologue. Golwalkar held that the Indian freedom movement was reactionary as “*The theories of territorial nationalism and of common danger, which formed the basis of our concept of a nation, had deprived us of the positive and inspiring content of our real Hindu Nationhood and made many of the ‘freedom movements’ virtually anti-British movements. Anti-Britishism was equated with patriotism and nationalism. This reactionary view has had disastrous effects upon the entire course of the freedom struggle, its leaders and the common people.*” (Golwalkar- Bunch of Thoughts)

In his address to the twenty fourth session of Hindu Mahasabha at Kanpur, Savarkar outlined Hindu Mahasabha’s ‘policy of responsive cooperation’ with the British rule. In his words: “*The Hindu Mahasabha holds that the leading principle of all practical politics is the policy of responsive cooperation. And in virtue of it, it believes that all those Hindu Sangathanists who are working as councillors, ministers, legislators and conducting any municipal or any public bodies with a view to utilize those centres of government power ...are rendering a highly patriotic service to our nation. ...The policy of responsive cooperation which covers the whole gamut of patriotic activities from unconditional co-operation right up to active and even armed resistance, will also keep adapting itself to the exigencies of the time, resources at our disposal and dictates of our national interest.*” (Cited in Savarkar, V. D., *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya: Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, vol. 6, Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, Poona, 1963, p. 460-461.)

He also observed that “*So far as India’s defence is concerned, Hindudom must ally unhesitatingly, in a spirit of responsive co-operation with the war effort of the Indian government in so far as it is consistent with the Hindu interests, by joining the Army, Navy and the Aerial forces in as large a number as possible and by securing an entry into all ordnance, ammunition and war craft factories...*”(ibid p 460) Shyama Prasad was of the opinion that “*The question is how to combat this movement (Quit India) in Bengal? The administration of the province should be carried on in such*

a manner that in spite of the best efforts of the Congress, this movement will fail to take root in the province” (Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, *Leaves from a Diary*, OUP, 1993, p.183)

Overdose of loyalty to the British rulers

It bears recall that Shyama Prasad became the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University in 1934. As Vice-Chancellor, he introduced military training for the students under the University Training Corps. During the Foundation Day march-past, he issued a directive making it mandatory for students to salute the Union Jack, the British flag. On the day of the march, students protested the directive, with one student from Vidyasagar College refusing to salute the British flag. Shyama Prasad ordered to whip the protesting student. In response to the ensuing student strikes and protests, he ordered rustication of two key student leaders, Dharitri Ganguly and Umapada Majumdar, from the college and the university. Such was his obedience to the British imperialist rulers. (Goutam Chattopadhyay: *Bharater chhatra andolonar itihās*. 1978 edn.)

Coalition of Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League

One of the main features of so-called Hindutva propaganda by Sangh Parivar leaders is spewing venom against the Muslims. The BJP holds that the All India Muslim League and its leadership were primarily responsible for the partition of the country. (caffedisensusblo.com) A new history book for Class IX, prepared by the Board of Secondary Education in BJP-ruled Haryana blamed the Muslim League’s “sectarian ideology,” in addition to Mohammed Ali Jinnah’s “stubbornness” and the British divide-and-rule policy for the Partition. (The Wire 12-05-22) The book additionally lauds the “positive” role that RSS (the ideological fountainhead of BJP) and its founders played in “*awakening cultural nationalism and freedom struggle*.” In February 1941, Shyama Prasad told a Hindu rally that if Muslims wanted to live in Pakistan they should “*pack their bag and baggage and leave India ... [to] wherever they like*”. (Legislative Council Proceedings [BLCP], 1941, Vol. LIX, No. 6, p 216)

Savarkar mooted the two-nations theory

It warrants mentioning that it was not Muslim League or the Congress, but Savarkar who mooted the theory of two-nations. In his 1923 book *Essentials of Hindutva*, written under the pseudonym of A Maratha, Savarkar says India belongs to only those who have it as their holy land and fatherland. “*Our Mohammedan or Christian countrymen ... are not and cannot be recognized as Hindus. For, though Hindustan 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.*” In the 19th conference of Hindu Mahasabha in 1937, Savarkar articulated his proposal in the following language: “*There are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India. Several infantile politicians commit the serious mistake in supposing that India is already welded into a harmonious nation, or that it could be welded thus for the mere wish to do so.... India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogenous nation. On the contrary, there are two nations in the main: the Hindus and the Muslims, in India.*” (The Week-24-01-16) Three years later, the All-India Muslim League, led by Jinnah, adopted the concept in its Lahore session. On 15 August 1943, Savarkar said in Nagpur, “*I have no quarrel with Mr. Jinnah’s two-nation theory. We, Hindus, are a nation by ourselves and it is a historical fact that Hindus and Muslims are two nations.*” (ibid) As a follower of Savarkar, Shyama Prasad also toed that line.

Savarkar’s theory of “responsive cooperation” enabled the Hindu Mahasabha to ally with the Muslim League and form coalition governments in Bengal, Sind and North-West Frontier Province. Fazlul Huq of the Muslim League became the chief minister of Bengal, and Shyama Prasad of the Hindu Mahasabha, the finance minister.

Shyama Prasad promised the British rulers that the government led by them would make every effort to suppress the movement in Bengal. “*It should be possible for us, especially responsible Ministers, to be able to tell the public that the freedom for which the Congress has started the movement, already belongs to the representatives of the people. In some spheres it might be limited during the emergency. Indians have to trust the British, not for the sake for Britain, not for any advantage that the British might gain, but for the maintenance of the defence and freedom of the province itself.*” (Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, *Leaves from a Diary*, OUP, 1993, p.183) Is this act by any stretch of imagination commensurate with that of a true patriot in those turbulent days of Indian freedom movement?

It is pertinent to mention that the Hindu zamindars, landowners and the usurious money lenders were then leaning to the Hindu communal politics for their own interests. And knowing it very well, Savarkar continually attempted to decry the ‘class contradiction’ between the zamindars and the peasantry. On the other hand, in Punjab, the Hindu communal force tried their best to ensure that the commercial interests of the usurious money lenders are untrammelled! (Frontier 18-07-2019) Shyama Prasad also shared these views

Partition of Bengal

To woo the sentiment of the Bengali-speaking Hindus, the Hindutva brigade is now propagating that had not there been Shyama Prasad, West Bengal would not have been a part of independent India. What a travesty of truth! Following the people’s upheaval centering on the trial of the captured Azad Hind Fouz of Netaji Subhas, naval mutiny of 1946 and Indian freedom struggle rising to the peak, war-ravaged British rulers could sense that it would no more be possible for them to sustain their colonial regime in India. At this point, the British rulers decided to vivisect India before leaving. It was decided that there would be two dominions whom the British would transfer power to. But the issue of dividing Punjab and Bengal did not feature there. The decision of which parts of Bengal and Punjab would go to Pakistan and India respectively was left to the then elected assemblies of those two provinces. When elections to the undivided Bengal assembly in 1946 took place, the question of partition of Bengal did not arise. The prime issue then was whether India

would be partitioned or not. The Congress fought the election on the demand for retaining undivided India while the Muslim League contested, raising demand for separate Pakistan. The Muslim League bagged 113, the Congress 87 and undivided CPI 3 Hindu Mahasabha contested in 26 seats but only Shyama Prasad won, uncontested, from the Calcutta University seat.

On 20 June 1947, in keeping with the British proposal, there was a vote on whether Bengal should be divided or not. All Muslim League members voted to include entire Bengal in Pakistan. Then the members from the districts where Muslim population was in minority held a separate conclave where it was decided by 58-21 votes that Bengal should be divided and West Bengal would be part of the Indian republic. Muslim League wanted entire Bengal to be part of Pakistan. So, they voted against the resolution. On the other hand, the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha voted in favour. Out of 58, the Congress had 55 members, the CPI 3 and the Hindu Mahasabha only 1. It is evident that had the Congress favoured accession of undivided Bengal to Pakistan, the Hindu Mahasabha could not have resisted it. So, how could Shyama Prasad be upheld as architect for retaining West Bengal in India?

Similarly, the members of Muslim-dominated districts in a separate meeting passed a resolution based on 106-35 votes that division of Bengal would not be correct. If at all Bengal is partitioned, then East Bengal should be annexed to Pakistan. (Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics—Sugata Bose 1986)

Shyama Prasad's role in 1943 Bengal Famine

Hindutva brigade, as stated earlier, credits Shyama Prasad of fighting the British during the 1943 Bengal famine. Yet, his fanatic Hindu communal outlook was evident here also. One of the major concerns of the Shyama Prasad-led Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal was that government canteens, employing Muslim and lower caste cooks, made it impossible for many Hindus to eat without breaking caste – an amazingly petty consideration to have during a disaster in which around 30 lakh Bengalis died of hunger. (scroll.in-16-07-16)

Netaji Subhas and Shyama Prasad

As we stated above, there is a move by the BJP-led West Bengal government to project Shyama Prasad by shrewdly comparing him with, if not placing above, Netaji Subhas. Earlier, the Kolkata Port Trust hitherto called was officially renamed as the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 12 January 2020. One of its primary operational facilities in Kolkata—the former King George's Dock—was renamed the Netaji Subhash Dock in 1973. But with renaming of the entire Kolkata Port Trust after Shyama Prasad, the two of the port's major dock systems (the Netaji Subhas Dock and the Netaji Subhas Dry Dock) has no doubt overshadowed the legacy of Netaji. A few days back, a road spanning from the Rampurhat five-point crossing to Jhanjhaniya bridge in Birbhum district, hitherto called Netaji Subhas street, was proposed to be renamed after Shyama Prasad. But why so? Because Netaji was staunchly opposed to the communal Hindutva politics.

Netaji wrote in Forward Bloc weekly on 4 May 1940: "*a long time ago, ...prominent leaders of the Congress could be members of the communal organizations like Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League. But in recent times, the circumstances have changed. These communal organizations have become more communal than before. As a reaction to this, the Indian National Congress has put into its constitution a clause to the effect that no member of a communal organization like Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League can be a member of an elective committee of Congress.*" Opposing Savarkar and the Hindu Mahasabha, Netaji in his political weekly *Forward Bloc* in December 1939 said: "*The Hindu Mahasabha has been doing incalculable harm to the idea of Indian nationhood by underlining the communal differences—by lumping all the Muslims together.... We cannot oblige Mr. Savarkar by ignoring the contributions of nationalist Muslims to the cause of India.*" In a meeting in Jhargram, West Bengal, he warned: "*Hindu Mahasabha sends Sanyasis and Sanyasins with trishul (trident) in their hands to beg for votes. Hindus unhesitatingly bows down on seeing trishul and the saffron. Hindu Mahasabha has thus appeared on the political scene by using religion and thus contaminating it in the process. Every Hindu should condemn this. We want that all freedom-loving men and women of the country serve the country unitedly and intently.*" (Ananda Bazar Patrika, 14 May 1940)

Of late, West Bengal BJP President Samik Bhattacharya sparked a major political controversy by stating that "*Syama Prasad was giving a speech at Md. Ali Park. Forward Bloc goons pelted stones at him and made him bleed from the wound. Had Shyama Prasad given any statement to incite the crowd, Forward Bloc members wouldn't have survived that day. But Syama Prasad...had asked people to give a befitting reply in the ballot paper.*" (Times of India 08-07-26) There is, however, no documentary evidence of any such incident. Fact is that during Calcutta Municipal Corporation election in 1940, Shyama Prasad tried to divide the people of Bengal on communal lines. Netaji repeatedly warned Syama Prasad against making statements that could inflame communal passion. (ibid) So, for establishing Shyama Prasad as a national figure, the RSS-BJP have no alternative other than undermining Netaji.

Shyama Prasad and industrialization in post-independent India

The RSS-BJP is crediting Shyama Prasad for India's industrialization. In an *ongoing exhibition at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML)*, an attempt has been made to this end. The exhibition bestowed on him the credit for establishing the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works Factory, the Sindri Fertilizer Factory, Hindustan Aircraft Factory and the Damodar Valley Corporation. According to the exhibition, Shyama Prasad "*had also conceived the plan of establishing the steel plant of Bhilai. Besides heavy industries, Dr. Mookerjee (Shyama Prasad) also understood the importance of developing India's small-scale and handloom industries. During his tenure, the All-India Handicrafts Board, the All-India Handloom Board, and the Khadi and Village Industries Board were set up. The Textile Research*

Institute and the Industrial Finance Corporation were also set up at this time. For the improvement of the age-old Indian silk industry, he established the Central Silk Board in 1949 and also promoted the idea of the Central Cottage Emporium in Delhi 'to market and advertise the goods made in the provinces.' (The Wire 07-07-16) But fact is, as elaborated by Balakrishnan, author of *Economic Growth in India: History and Prospect*, which is widely regarded as an exhaustive account of India's industrialization drive of the 1950s, "*Indian industrialization was launched as part of the 'Nehru-Mahalanobis Strategy', originally conceived in 1938. My reading of the records of the time shows next to no mention of the involvement of Shyama Prasad*". Since Shyama Prasad was inducted in the Nehru cabinet as Industry minister, the Hindutva quarters defend themselves by arguing that as India's first industry minister, he must have played some role in India's industrialization. But this is only a surmising, without any proof.

Article 370 and Shyama Prasad

Not a day passes when the name of Shyama Prasad is not invoked by BJP to oppose Article 370, which guaranteed special status to Jammu and Kashmir, hitherto a separate monarchical state and not part of British India, as a conditionality enshrined in the document of its accession to India. Based on authentic documents, letters, memorandums, white papers, proclamations and amendments, it is now evident that Article 370 was a product of negotiation between PM Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah, the undisputed leader of the liberation movement of Jammu and Kashmir from the monarchical regime and had a stamp of approval from both Sardar Patel and Shyama Prasad, then a minister in Nehru's cabinet.

But, Shyama Prasad spearheaded a nationwide movement opposing Article 370, summarizing his stance with the slogan: "*One country cannot have two constitutions, two flags, and two prime ministers.*" (scroll.in 23-06-20) What is strange in this regard is that Shyama Prasad himself wrote to PM Nehru on 17 February 1953: "*Both parties reiterate that the unity of the State will be maintained and that the principle of autonomy will apply to the province of Jammu and also to Ladakh and Kashmir Valley. Implementation of Delhi Agreement—which granted special status to the State—will be made at the next session of Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly.*" (News Click-11-08-19)

Nehru replied that he had agreed to the proposal for autonomy to the three provinces (with concurrence of Abdullah) in July 1952. If Shyama Prasad had realized his mistake, he should have withdrawn the agitation unconditionally. But Shyama Prasad was unwilling to do it as it amounted to surrender. The deadlock was prolonged in order to provide what may be called a 'face-saving' to the Jana Sangh. (ibid)

However, in his letter dated 9 January 1953 to both Nehru and Sheikh Abdullah, Shyama Prasad wrote, "*We would readily agree to treat the valley with Sheikh Abdullah as the head in any special manner and for such time as he would like but Jammu and Ladakh must be fully integrated with India.*" (ibid)

While Nehru rejected the idea, straightway warning against its repercussions in Kashmir and its international implications, Abdullah sent a detailed reply in which he said, "*You are perhaps not unaware of the attempts that are being made by Pakistan and other interested quarters to force a decision for disrupting the unity of the State. Once the ranks of the State people are divided, any solution can be foisted on them.*" (ibid) What is thus normally missed is that Shyama Prasad had initially accepted the inevitability of Article 370—a fact the RSS-BJP keep in the dark.

Questionable motive behind projecting Shyama Prasad

Right from the day the country was partitioned, the Hindutva brigade was trying to spread Hindu communal feeling among the uprooted Hindu populace from East Pakistan. But they did not succeed as Shyama Prasad could not leave a mark in Bengal, both before and after independence. The soil of West Bengal had been different. It bore the legacy of freedom movement particularly the uncompromising revolutionary trend of that time and thereafter the glory of anti-Congress leftist movement.

Now the BJP has captured the governmental seat riding on that anti-TMC wave, coupled with a slew of manipulative exercises like deleting lakhs of voters' names under the garb of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) with a pliant Election Commission in tow. Hence, is the all-out effort to spread Hindu communal thoughts. Eulogy of Shyama Prasad by distorting history is a part of that grandiose design.