

A Book Review

I could not be Hindu an Autobiography by Bhanwar Meghwanshi



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Introduction

Bhanwar Meghwanshi a renowned Ambedkarite activist, writer and journalist from district Bhilwara, Rajasthan. Who belongs to dalit family and The book is an autobiography of the author where he shares his experience how he suffers in RSS being its part and parcel and reasons to quit. He divides his life between overseeing the Ambedkar Bhavan in Sirdiyas and his political work that takes him across the country. He describes his travel how he hates muslims with a passion without having met one. He joins thousands Karsevaks to Ayodhya. He mocks Mulla-Yam singh, He participates in riots, He finds Hindutva intoxicating, He is ready to die for the Hindu Rashtra. And yet he remains a lesser Hindu. How he turns into a critic of the Sangh, becomes an Ambedkarite and makes his life mission to expose the hypocrisies of Hindutva. After the final judgment by Supreme Court the Ayodhya disputed land has to be handover to build Ram Temple. This book came to the limelight. First the Hindi version, named Me Ek Karsevak Tha launched and then translated by JNU Professor, feminist writer Nivedita Menon in English version. He went to many publishers but no one is ready to publish this because it is a direct chalanging the RSS, which is the largest sangh of Hindutva ideology. This book has been written by a Dalit, Bhanwar Meghwanshi, who aware the reader about the situation of the Scheduled Castes within the Sangh parivar and in today's Indian society at large. He tells us what it means to be an untouchable in the RSS. And what it means to become Dalit.

True Hindu Nationalist Meghwanshi tells us that, like so many other Swayamsevaks, he joined the Sakha at a very young age, 13, thinking it fun and plays traditional games. The RSS has gradually tried to attract Hindus from

all kinds of caste backgrounds in order to be the "Hindu Rashtra in miniature". In his village, low caste people joined the RSS in large numbers: "Of the fifty or so children who attended the shakha in my village, most were OBCs—Kumhar, Jat, Gurjar, Mali and so on. From among Dalits, there were Bunkars and Dholis, and also a couple of Bhil Adivasis. They came because of the sanskritisation process mentioned above and because of the games they played in the shakha, but they remained for ideological reasons too as, gradually, they learnt that their culture was threatened by others, primarily by Muslims and Christians. (28)". The shakhas were supposed to welcome youngsters from all social origins, including Dalits, the reason was that all the participants should wear the same uniform, irrespective socio-economic distinctions. Gradually he participating in all events of Sakha and devoted his life to its ideology, without knowing the aims and target of RSS, despite his father opposition. According to his father. "People like us did not own any pace in the Sangh it is purely belongs to the upper castes. This party of Baniyas and Brahmanas will never be with us farmers and lower castes, they just use to us to start fights with muslims. They themselves can never fight, the cowards. They use us" (77). He wants to be true Hindu nationalist. "I wanted to become a true Hindu nationalist who could do anything to save religion and nation, he added he started taking pride in his Hindu identity and hatred for muslims, as they are not Indians." He recalls that getting rid of the Babri Masjid was like "a second battle for independence". Meghwanshi took part in the Ramjanmabhoomi movement in the early 1990s with a great sense of pride, as if this was the fight of his self respect. He was part of the first attempt at building the Ram temple, in 1990. Then, he was "exhilarated", chanting

“To die for Ram-ji is such an honour”. Mulayam Singh indeed proved to be a ‘Mulla’-‘Yama’ for the karsevaks.(23) Then he went to jail and felt proud to be Hindu as he expresses “Somehow we got through our first ten days of jail life. But still, we felt immense pride that we had been jailed for Shri Ram. We were karsevaks, the real goods.” (22) His father would say again and again, these Janata Party people (these days BJP) are only making us fight with each other for votes. “They only want to use us to attack the Muslims; otherwise we did not matter at all”. Meghwanshi reacted to these words by putting up two stickers on the front door of the family house: “Garv se kaho hum Hindu hain” (Say it with pride, we are Hindu) and “Bade bhagya se hum Hindu hain” (We are blessed to be Hindu).

Hate for other faith: He shares the incident when they were travelling in the train; there were also a few muslims in our compartment. Seeing them, they started shouting: “if it is in India that you want to stay/ Vande Mataram is what you must say.” We glared at them menacingly. (19)Who attended the Sakha and believe in Hindutva have right to live here in our India not place for other faith. Only Hindus are patriots others all traitors.

Hindu Social Hierarchy- He says that Sangh want to preserve the hierarchy of caste system. According to Sangh the caste system is not drawback but glory of hindutva and integral humanism. Without castes Hindus will no longer in existence. In 1939, for instance, in ‘we or our nationhood defined’, M.S Golwalkar, who considered that it was “none of the so called drawbacks of the Hindu social order, which prevents us from regaining our ancient glory”. They believe in Manusmriti and want to implement it to whole nation. Deendayal Upadhyaya defended the original varna vyavastha even more explicitly, in Integral Humanism, a text that is still considered as its ideological charter by the Sangh parivar. He wrote in 1965: “In our concept of four castes, they are thought of as an analogous to the different limbs of Virat-Purusha [...] these limbs are not only complementary to one another, but even further, there is individuality, unity. There is a complete identity of interest,

identity of belonging. [...] If this idea is not kept alive, the castes instead of being complementary can produce conflict. But then this is distortion.” He came to know that how they wanted to maintain the existed social hierarchy which is based on inequalities. Indeed, the RSS has never explicitly denounced the caste system but they want to reform it without changing its basic structure.

The confession of Dalit in RSS- My progress was unexpectedly rapid. From gananayak (a ground level ‘leader of people’) I became the chief teacher at district. While he had been appointed *vistarak*, he expressed the desire to become *pracharak*. The district *pracharak* discouraged him because of his caste background which would have made his job complicated. District Prachark said: “Brother, your ideals are indeed very high-minded. But our society is very complicated. Tomorrow someone ask you your name, your village, your community and the moment he realizes that Pracharak ji from a marginalized community his attitude to you might change. You will be upset, want to retaliate. Arguments will follow. All this will weaken the work of sangh not strengthen it.(64-65)” He was told to go and visit the rural India, village by village , and enlighten the Hindu people about Sangh and devote the life to Sangh. Soon after Meghwanshi fully realised the resilience of caste in the RSS on another occasion: while he had prepared food for Sangh parivar members who were touring his district, they refused to come to his home for eating; but said that ‘you just pack the food we will eat it in the next village, as we are running out of time.’ I packed the food for them, I later learnt that they threw it out on the road. As the district chief, I got angry with them and asked the reason, but did not get satisfactory answer. After this incident he met other swayamsevaks and pracharaks, and discussed his case. They counsel him not to be negative, there is no matter of caste discrimination and untouchability in the Sangh. Finally in low voice they said, “Friend, you are aware of the inequalities in our society. Despite all the efforts of the Sangh, Hindu society has not become one. As far as we ourselves are concerned, we would sit down

with you any day and eat from the same plate, but today there are sadhu-sants and others also here. They will be really upset if without informing them, we give them food from a lower-caste home. They could be so angry they might leave.” He was shocked: he felt inferiority of lower castes, small and worthless. “How can the Sangh do this to me? They don’t believe in untouchability, in caste discrimination, they believe all Hindus to be one; they talk of a united Hindu society, and then this kind of hypocrisy?” He remains a lesser Hindu. Note that by “becoming” untouchable, Bhanwar ceases to be Hindu or the Hindu at lowest stage as the title of the book itself reconfirm -, as if this religion was associated only to upper castes. This is the religion of upper castes which existed in the society. He was the Hindu not of self respect but for humiliation and second class, first class were they? Meghwanshi’s sense of belonging changed immediately: “For the first time in my life that day, I stepped aside from my Hindu identity and started seeing the world like a person from a lower caste”. He thought he is disciplined swayamsevak, a passionate swayamsevak, a district office chief if this can happen with him what kind of intolerable behavior must the rest of his community face? For the RSS, to include members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and OBCs were a good way to defuse anti-Brahminism and to maintain social hierarchies. He was reminded of his father’s statement that people like us did not own any place in the Sangh it is purely belongs to the upper castes. This was the incident he regularly question mark on the situation of lower castes in Sangh, and on their Hindu rashtra. He shared much internal information about the sangh, the sangh is fully controlled by Brahmins and Baniyas ideologically, financially and structurally. Dalit has no place in it. the money which is collected through donation is kept in Baniya’s home not in banks. Once he had access to a confidential letter of the RSS exhorting upper caste members of the organisation “to make the caste system of Hindu society even stronger. It was only because of this caste system, the letter said, that Hindu society had survived. If not for the caste

system, everyone would have become Muslim or Christian”. The Ramjanmabhoomi for which I took part in the 1990 karseva, for which I suffered police brutality, went to jail, was ready to die for now everything had been changed.

Women in RSS- Meghwanshi says that the existence of Dalits in sangh is very far even they cannot tolerate the existence of women in sangh. An organization for women Rashtriya Sevika Samiti was founded by RSS. Before this no entry of women in sangh they think that women will be caused of destruction. Meghwanshi was wondered why the word self Swayamsevak was missing from its name. He asked about it to the senior people but no received satisfactory answer. He shows that senior people did not in favour of the entry of women in sangh. They thought “Did writing by permitting women into the sangh that it was a good strategic move, because women in Sangh would have by now ensured its destruction.”(45) He read Sita Ram pamphlet: *Hindu society in danger* which disturbed him greatly. It reveals that Muslims, Christians and communists plotting against Hindus. He asks to a members how we are in danger we are in majority in India but he had not answer yet.

Ambedkarism in Sakha and in reality. As the author said he usually go to Ambedkar hostel when Sanghi people came to know about this they advise me not to go their because this hostel will corrupt our ideology. There are many excerpts which forced him to introspect. Most of queries belong to him in sangh and was never satisfied. He was in ideological dilemma. He feels worthless, inferior in the company of sangh people. First, he had to cope with huge psychological problems, revealing of the challenges that Dalits face in many parts of India, especially when they feel betrayed and rejected by the rest of society – and Bhanwar Meghwanshi had been both by RSS. He tried to commit suicide, but was saved and the next steps he followed took him to Ambedkarism, through his quest for humanity. When he tried to leave Hinduism Meghwanshi was attracted by Jesus Christ, like so many other Dalits, but he resented the way Christianity, like any other religion, tried “to expand its followers and control the world”. Finally, the first book he

read, Riddles in Hinduism, blew his mind. After that he found everything he could that Babasaheb had written. *Annihilation of Caste* gave him a clear understanding of how Brahmanism was responsible for the establishment of the hateful system of caste hierarchy and discrimination. Gradually he also study Kabir, Phule, Periyar, Kanshiram and other Dalit Bhujan thinkers who led Dait socio-political movement in India. The book 'Why I Am Not a Hindu' influenced him greatly. This is for all who are working reading and writing and suffering from Brahmanism and its subjects. It shows that what Bhanwar Meghwanshi had learned about Ambedkar when he was in the RSS was a completely adulterated version of the man: as he confesses "I had read about Babasaheb Ambedkar here and there in Sangh publications like anchjanya, Pathey Kan, Rashtra Dharma and Jahnvi, from which I learnt that "Babasaheb was a great nationalist, and had contributed to writing the Constitution of India. That he had wanted to make Sanskrit the national language and the saffron flag the national flag. That despite every temptation, he had not converted to Islam or Christianity but to Buddhism, which was part of Hinduism. And that he was opposed to the continuation of Article 370 in Kashmir, which gave the state a special status." (114) In fact, the RSS was partly a reaction to the rise of Dalit politics under the aegis of Ambedkar whose first anti-caste mobilisations also took place in what is today Maharashtra. Now I was reading Ambedkar himself, and found that his views on everything were the exact opposite of what the Sangh claimed. He says that this is a challenge that an 'untouchable' caste can go on the highest constitutional post. But cannot be considered for the highest post in the unconstitutional RSS. "If one studies the All India Working Committee even after 2000, most post holders are Brahmin, some Baniya or Kshatriya and a couple of people from Backward Castes; there is no single Dalit or Adivasi. The reason for this is clear- not Dalit or Adivasi was managed to reach the national level of the organization. How then will Dalits and Adivasi be a part of Hindu Rashtra? (44)"

A manual on how to escape the RSS- In the end he expresses the consequences of his revolt against RSS and being an Ambedkarite, Phueist, or supporter of the egalitarians. When he raises his voice against RSS, VHP and other related organization, he faces many problems as he express in the book. He was horrified by the way a VHP leader, Acharya Giriraj Kishor, justified the fact that Dalits had been burnt alive in Haryana on the suspicion of cow slaughter. Kishor, according to Meghwanshi, had said that **"the life of one cow is more valuable than the lives of five Dalits"**. His fight is a difficult one. Like all those who have decided to defend Ambedkar's trilogy, Equality, Liberty and Fraternity, he has been subjected to all kinds of pressure and intimidation: "Members of my family faced life-threatening physical attacks; false cases were slapped on me, cooked up complaints led to probes. The police, CID, CBI, and IB, all carried out multiple investigations. These forms of extreme harassment carry on till today",

Long Live Revolution

Finally he quits the sangh and exposes the real face of RSS and its duplicity. He came to know the true nature of the RSS. How, through their claim of *samrasata* or harmony, is fake. They were subverting the chances of equality, justice and social transformation. He breaks up with Sangh and decides to reveals hypocrisy which they claim to be as he says "I decided not only to make a clean break with the Sangh, but that I would widely publicise their casteist behaviour towards me. It would be my life's work now to expose the reality of this dishonest Hindu Rashtra and Hindutva. I resolved to tear the veil of fake harmony from the face of the Sangh and its family of institutions and expose their real face in public." To continue his fight against Hindutva and to emancipate himself from the caste system, Meghwanshi created his own organisations and publications, before getting closer to secular movements, like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan – which, at that time was advocating the need for a Right to Information Act. In 1992 the demolition of Babri Masjid came back this time his destination was not Ayodhya. The battle now was for my

self-respect. This time, no one from his family or village joined the karseva. He aware to many people to speak, especially those who belonged to Scheduled Castes, on these incidents he tried to aware lot about his experience in RSS and want to save from the fire of violence but fail. He also began work with some friends to establish a students' outfit (that eventually became Vidyarthi Adhikar Rakshak Sangh or VARS). Like Ambedkar, he considered that "to convert out of Hinduism" was the best option. The fact – emphasised by Ambedkar long ago – that Hinduism and caste (even untouchability) could not be separated became obvious for him. Meghwanshi compare Sangh with Talibani terrorist. As a journalist he wrote an editorial in Diamond India, "Talibani Hindus, listen!" He says that in fact the Sangh is quashi-military organisation, which promotes the arming and militarizing of the Hindu community. Meghwanshi realised that "Much of the violence had been conducted by Dalits and Adivasis" because, in the case of the former, "Dalits attempt to prove themselves pure Hindus by taking a leading part in riots and violence against Muslims". He further writes: "I wrote that every Dalit and Adivasi who has suffered casteist insult and untouchability sees casteist Hindus as the Taliban, as cruel oppressors. Far more painful and unbearable than bullets and bombs is the question, what is your caste, and the sudden change of behaviour upon learning it." (179) He says in the conclusion of the book. But the last words of the book suggest that he remains fully determined and he will be no longer tormenting the atrocities against the human being he decides to write against injustice, inequalities and exploitation of human by human, he reveals all agenda of Sangh as a journalist and as humanitarian. As he raises his voice in these words "Nevertheless I will speak, I will write, and I will always stand up, speak out, and fight the battle against injustice, oppression, exploitation and inequality. Inquilab Zindabad-Long live the revolution! (236)

Reference

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