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INSIGHT

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Hinduism Today's farewell tribute to Sri Ram Swarup: friend, contributing writer and Hindu renaissance seer, 1920?1998

The task before the Hindu society is immense. It consists in self-renewal and self-rejuvenation. it has to come into its own. It has to recover and reassert its civilizational identity. It must realize that Hindus are not just a community,... but a nation, a culture, a civilization. Similarly, it must realize that their awakening is not "Hindu Communalism," as the self-styled secularists describe it, but a great world-event, and the vehicle of a great good to the world. We can now see the beginning of this awakening.

Sri Ram Swarup

By Dr. Koenraad Elst, Belgium

In the long run, Ram Swarup will probably prove to have been the most influential Hindu thinker in the second half of the 20th century. He has, at any rate, been a crucial influence on most other Hindu Revivalist authors of the last two decades.

Ram Swarup, who peacefully left his body on December 26,

1998, was born in 1920 as the son of a banker in Sonipat, Haryana, in the Garg gotra of the merchant Agrawal caste. He was a good student and earned a degree in Economics from Delhi University in 1941. He joined the Gandhian movement and acted as the overground contact ("postbox") for underground activists, including Aruna Asaf Ali, during the Quit India agitation of 1942. He spent a week in custody when a letter bearing his name was found in the house of another activist, the later homeopath Ram Singh Rana. After his release, and until the end of the war, he worked as a clerk in the American office in Delhi, which had been set up in the context of the Allied war effort against Japan.

In that period, his wit made him quite popular in progressive circles in the capital. He was a declared socialist, a great fan of Aldous Huxley and a literary imitator of George Bernard Shaw. In 1944, he started the "Changers' Club," alluding to Karl Marx's dictum that philosophers have interpreted the world instead of changing it. The club was a discussion forum for a dozen young intellectuals, including future diplomat L.C. Jain, future Planning Commission member Raj Krishna, future Times of India editor Girilal Jain, and historian Sita Ram Goel. At that time Ram Swarup was a committed atheist, and in the Changers' Club manifesto he put it in plain words: "Butter is more important than God."

The Changers' Club published two essays, both by Ram Swarup: "Indictment," a highly critical review of the failed 1942 Quit India movement, and "Mahatma Gandhi and His Assassin," written immediately after the murder of the Mahatma by the Pune-based journalist and former Hindu Mahasabha activist Nathuram Godse on January 30, 1948.

Written from a purely Gandhian perspective, its main thesis was that a society of small men cannot stand the presence of such a great man for very long: martyrdom was only befitting a man of Gandhiji's greatness. He showed no interest in Godse's motives, but he did appreciate that after the disaster of Partition, the urge to exact some punishment somewhere, though misguided (and in targeting Gandhi, misdirected), was a sign that Hindu society was not entirely dead, for suffering a calamity like the Partition and swallowing it without reaction would be a sure sign of virtual death.

At that time, the Changers' Club was already disintegrating because its members plunged into real life. For example, L.C. Jain became the commander of the largest camp for Partition refugees and organized the rehabilitation of Hindu refugees from the Northwest Frontier Province in Faridabad, outside Delhi. In 1948?49 Ram Swarup briefly worked for Gandhi's English disciple, Mira Behn (Miss Madeleine Slade), when she retired to Rishikesh to edit her correspondence with Gandhiji. The project was not completed, but he was to remain close to Gandhism for the rest of his life.

Anti-Communism: Around the time of Independence, Ram Swarup developed strong opinions about the ideology that was rapidly gaining ground among the intelligentsia around him: Communism. His first doubts developed in connection with purely Indian aspects of Communist policy. When the Communist Party of India defended the Partition scheme with contrived socio-economic arguments, he objected that the Partition would only benefit the haves among the Muslims, not the have-nots.

In 1949, Ram Swarup and Sita Ram Goel set up their own anti-Communist think-tank in Calcutta, then, as now, the center of Indian Communism. It was called the Society for the Defence of Freedom in Asia. Among its first publications was Ram Swarup's book, Russian Imperialism: How to Stop It, written during the conquest of China by Mao Zedong, when the onward march of Communism seemed unstoppable. The book drew the attention of top Congress leaders worried about Jawaharlal Nehru's steering the country in a pro-Soviet direction.

His Gandhism and Communism, which emphasized the need to raise the struggle against Communism from a military to a moral and ideological level, was brought to the attention of Western anti-Communists, including several US Congressmen. Some of its ideas were adopted by the Eisenhower administration in its agenda for the Geneva Conference in 1955.

Later, Arun Shourie wrote about Ram Swarup's struggle against Communism: "In the 1950s when our intellectuals were singing paeans to Marxism, and to Mao in particular, he wrote critiques of Communism and of the actual--that is, dismal--performance of Communist governments. ....He showed that the claims to efficiency and productivity, to equitable distribution and to high morale--which were being made by these governments, and even more so by their apologists in countries such as India--were wholly unsustainable, that in fact they were fabrications. Today, anyone reading those critiques would characterize them as prophetic. But thirty years ago, so noxious was the intellectual climate in India that all he got was abuse and ostracism"

["Fomenting Reaction," in A. Shourie: Indian Controversies, p.293].

Hindu Revivalist: Initially, Ram Swarup saw Gandhism as the alternative to Communism, and he never really rejected Gandhism. He continued to explore the relevance of Gandhism to real-life problems, such as in his booklet Gandhian Economics (1977). Gandhian inspiration is also palpable in his The Hindu View of Education (1971). But gradually he moved from the Gandhian version of Hinduism to a more comprehensive understanding of the ancient Hindu tradition. He wrote his first booklet on the Hindu religion just after Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956: Buddhism vis-a-vis Hinduism (1958, revised 1984). It took a moderate view of the much-debated relation of Buddhism to its mother tradition, affirming that the Buddha was a Hindu (just as Jesus was a Jew), but conceding that Buddhism has a typical atmosphere setting it apart from the Hindu mainstream.

By the late 1970s, his focus had decisively turned to religious issues. A large number of his articles were published in the Organiser, in Hinduism Today (Hawaii) and in mainstream dailies (in the 1980s the Telegraph, the Times of India and the Indian Express; in recent years mostly the Observer of Business and Politics and the Birla family's paper, Hindustan Times). Ram Swarup's contribution to religious debate also consists of numerous books, including: The Word as Revelation: Names of Gods (1980), Hinduism vis-a-vis Christianity and Islam (1982, revised 1992); Christianity, an Imperialist Ideology (1983, with Major T.R. Vedantham and Sita Ram Goel); Hindu View of Christianity and Islam; Cultural

Alienation and Some Problems Hinduism Faces (1987); Hindu-Sikh Relationship (1985); and Hindu-Buddhist Rejoinder to Pope John-Paul II on Eastern Religions and Yoga (1995).

Departing: Ram Swarup was a quiet and reflective person. He never married, never went into business, hardly ever had a job, never stood for an election, never joined an organization or party. When I first met him in 1990, he lived in a rooftop room in the house of the late industrialist Hari Prasad Lohia, a sponsor of a variety of Hindu sages. He had been living with the Lohia family in their Calcutta or Delhi property since 1955. In 1996 he moved to his late brother's house. Empowered by his daily yoga practice, his pioneering intellectual work had an indelible impact on the destiny of India that is yet to be fully appreciated.

He had been in rather good health right up to the end of his life. His good friend, Sita Ram Goel, told Hinduism Today, "Our beloved Shri Ram Swarup expired peacefully while sleeping on the afternoon of 26th December. He suffered no illness." His was an ideal grand departure. Ram Swarup left no children, but many Hindus felt orphaned when the flames consumed his earthly remains.

A Farewell to Shri Ram Swarup

Christopher Gerard, Antaios, Society for Polytheistic Studies

Pagans all over the world should pray in memory of Sri Ram Swarup, as a thinker of the Hindu Resistance, as a friend. All our Indian friends know how important he was--and how important his example remains--but only a meleccha, a

European, can tell how big is this loss for contemporary Paganism. Ram Swarup was the perfect link between Hindu Renaissance and renascent Paganism in the West and elsewhere. Thanks to his remarkable culture, to his generosity and sense of humor, Ram Swarup was more than a link. He was a Pontifex, as we say in Latin, a man throwing bridges over different rivers. Vedic heritage and Greek Pagan thought, Hindu worldview and Germanic tradition, the period of the Raj and free India, old and new generations: Ram Swarup played the generous role of a go-between. He was also an important philosopher: his Names of Gods is a polytheistic manifesto. Ram Swarup told us many times he was looking forward to a Pagan Renaissance in Europe, Africa and America. He was convinced that all the Christianized peoples should go back to their pre-Christian, polytheistic, nondualistic heritage. He was an ally for all serious Pagan circles. He received me in Delhi like a son, gave me courage and strong advice and answered so many of my questions with such patience, such generosity. Like a real prince, he introduced me to some remarkable people. In a word, he "converted" me to India. Last but not least, he gave me my first lessons of Sanatana Dharma, not the tradition you read of in books, but authentic experience. How to thank such a man? Let us be faithful to this great figure of the Vedic Renaissance!

Poignant Insights

Excerpts from the writings of Ram Swarup

On Hinduism: "Hinduism satisfies man's deepest spiritual and ethical urges. It has developed different methods that facilitate growth into a more meaningful, unitive and intuitive life. It is humanist in approach, worldwide in outlook; it fully admits reason, admits experimental and speculative approach in investigation. It is pluralist, compassionate and nonviolent in

temper. In fact, it has all that man seeks in his deeper being, and it is the product of this seeking" (Hinduism vis-a-vis Christianity and Islam, 1992, p. 22).

On Hindu Identity: "Hindus learn to look at themselves through borrowed eyes. The two approaches, that of self-discovery and creative response and that of self-alienation and imitation, were both inherited from the immediate history of the freedom struggle, though they derive their strength from the deeper sources in the psyche....For one, the problem is of helping the society to find its roots, for the other to remake it in the image of a chosen pattern. The one serves; the other manipulates....[The first approach] once formed a powerful current, and the freedom struggle was waged under its auspices. But increasingly its hold became weak, and in our own times it seems to have lost altogether....Some see in this change a triumph of Nehru over Gandhi....Nehru represented, in his own way, the response of a defeated nation trying to restore its self-respect and self-confidence through self-repudiation and identification with the ways of the victors. The approach was not altogether unjustified at one time. It had its compulsions and it also had a survival value for us. But its increasing influence can mean no good to us. We, however, believe that deeper Indian nationalism, which is also in harmony with deeper internationalism, may be weak just now, but it has the seed-power and it is bound to come up again under propitious circumstances" (Cultural Self-Alienation and Some Problems Hinduism Faces, 1987, p. 4-5).

On Buddhism: "Buddhism is returning home to India after a long exile of a thousand years and, like the proverbial prodigal son, is being received with open arms. Religious tolerance of

the average Hindu partly explains the warm reception. But a more important reason is the fact that Buddha and Buddhism form an intimate part of Hindu consciousness. Buddha was a Hindu. Buddhism is Hindu in its origin and development, in its art and architecture, iconography, language, beliefs, psychology, names, nomenclature, religious vows and spiritual discipline....Hinduism is not all Buddhism, but Buddhism forms part of the ethos which is essentially Hindu" (Buddhism vis-a-vis Hinduism, 1958, p.1).

Communism: "Between August 15, 1947, and Hyderabad's accession to the Indian Union, the communists in the two districts of Warangal and Nalgonda alone murdered 2,000 persons....But most of the people either did not believe it at all or regarded them as isolated facts having nothing to do with 'true communism.' So, to put it differently, there are two communisms. One is True Communism, a personal version of individuals, the same as individuals might have a personal version of appendicitis. The second is the communism which is true to hundreds of millions of people, communism for promoting which...whole classes are liquidated, nations subjugated, a world war prepared for....To separate this communism from violence, terror and lying propaganda in the name of True Communism is not to know the communism that is true in Soviet Russia and communist parties everywhere....Ignorance amongst the democratic leadership about communism is the greatest weakness of Democracy in its fight against communism" (Communism and Peasantry, 1954, p. 120-121).

On Gandhism: "Gandhism succeeded because of Gandhiji. There are no Gandhian formulas which can be applied by

anybody. One must have Gandhiji's personality and charity and courage to apply Gandhism. Without these elements, Gandhism becomes a mere slogan, an expression of fear, appeasement, hypocrisy and moral indifference. ...Unless our minds and hearts are equal to the situation, we will only botch, blunder and opine" (Gandhism and Communism, 1955, p. 22-23).

On Truth: "The ancient sages studied man, and for that they started with themselves; they turned their gaze inward and found there a vast internal life. Going still deeper, they discovered, beyond their more external being, another life or principle which takes another language to describe it. They found it self-existent, bodiless, pure, luminous and conscious. They found that it is in some way unborn and undying; that it does not come along with the body; nor does it die with it; that it is beyond sorrow and decay; that it shines from within, and it knows itself as self-evident. They found that it is their very essence, their true Self. They called it atman, which is pure, immortal and untouched by evil" (Meditation on Sanatana Dharma, ca. 1995, to be published posthumously).

On False Religions: "Many creeds seemingly religious sail under false labels and spread confusion. As products of a fitful mind, they could but make only a temporary impression and their life could not but be brief. But as projections of a mind in some kind of samadhi, they acquire unusual intensity, a strength of conviction and tenacity of purpose which they could not otherwise have....The lower bhumis [levels]...project ego-gods and desire-gods and give birth to dvesha-dharmas and moha-dharmas, hate religions and delusive ideologies....But to reject is not to explain. Why should a god

have such qualities? And why should a being who has such qualities be called a god? And why should he have so much hold? Indian yoga provides the answer. It says that though not a truly spiritual being, he is thrown up by a deeper source in the mind. He is some sort of a psychic formation and carries the strength and attraction of such a formation" (Anirvan: Inner Yoga, 1988, p. 9-11).

On Monotheism: "A purely monotheistic unity fails to represent the living unity of the Spirit and expresses merely the intellect's love of the uniform and the general. Similarly, purely polytheistic Gods without any principle of unity amongst them lose their inner coherence....The Vedic approach is probably the best. It gives unity without sacrificing diversity....Monotheism is not saved by polytheism, nor polytheism by monotheism, but both are saved by going deep into the life of the soul....Depending on the cultures in which they were born, mystics have given monotheistic as well as polytheistic renderings and interpretations of their inner life and experiences" (The Word as Revelation: Names of Gods, 1980, p. 128-129).

Sage of the Vedic Renaissance, 1922-1998

By Navaratna S. Rajaram, Bangalore, India

Appearing at a time when the movement known as the Hindu Renaissance seemed to have lost its course, and Indian Civilization itself was under siege by destructive ideological forces, Ram Swarup inspired a movement and a school of thought that is the most important voice of India in the world today. Along with Sita Ram Goel, with whom his name will

forever be linked, he founded Voice of India, which has been a platform for publishing the most original and most significant works in the humanities in India.

Ram Swarup's work has been profound, original and influential. In his seminal booklet, Gandhian Economics, he introduced the concept of the "closed loop" in global industrial systems, which led him to foresee the problems plaguing capitalist economies today. Ram Swarup had foreseen and written on the crises that overcame both Communism and capitalist economies long before they manifested themselves. People have been awarded Nobel prizes in economics for work far less substantial than this.

The source of his thought was the Hindu tradition--the Vedas and the yogic insights. This allowed him to get to the heart of any problem and see the forces at work in their true state, free of any illusions or diversions. Long before Samuel Huntington produced his acclaimed Clash of Civilization, with its now famous "Islam's bloody frontiers," Ram Swarup had laid bare the true dimensions of the ideological struggle between freedom and theocracy. In Word as Revelation: Names of God, probably his greatest work, he exposed monotheism as a tool of materialism, one that could disguise the pursuit of wealth and power as a religious quest. This allowed him to distinguish between religion and true spirituality.

Though a profound student of the Vedas and yogic meditation, he was anything but insular. In the true Vedic spirit of a no bhadra krutavo yantu viswatah ("Let felicitous thoughts come to us from every source"), he studied all thought systems, from

Greek to Marxist. He had a special sympathy for the works of Plato and Apollonius of Tyrna. He was a man of the Vedic Renaissance in a real sense, in the spirit of Maharshi Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

For those who had the good fortune of knowing Ram Swarup and his work, he represented the fusion of the rational and the mystical that is the source of both Vedic and the Pagan Greek thought. Like the Vedic sage, Vishwamitra, who prayed to God to "inspire his intellect," and the modern sage Albert Einstein who asserted that mysticism was in the most profound sense the "source of all art and science," Ram Swarup sought to apply the wisdom of a more spiritual age to the problems of the everyday world. The highest tribute we can pay his memory is to continue the work he began, and never allow the dark forces of despair and destruction to engulf our spirit.