

## Was Guru Golwalkar a Nazi ?

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### 1. Guruji's first book

It is routinely alleged in press articles and even in scholarly publications that Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, second *sarsanghchalak* ("chief guide of the association") of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ("national volunteer association") from 1940 till his death in 1973, and colloquially known as *Guruji*, was an open admirer and emulator of Adolf Hitler. Thus, according to Sudip Mazumdar (*Newsweek*, 27-5-1996), Golwalkar was "a supremacist who openly admired some of Hitler's ideas on racial purity".

However, from his fairly copious writings, public statements and interview transcripts during his term at the head of the RSS (1940-73), no indication of such Hitlerian sympathies has ever been quoted. The case is based entirely on a few lines in Golwalkar's first book: *We. Our Nationhood Defined*, published by Bharat Publications, Nagpur 1939, self-described as "this maiden attempt of mine" (*We* 1939, p.3), and completed "as early as the first week of November 1938" (*We*, p.4/p.3; where two page numbers are given for the same quotation, the first refers to the original 1939 edition, the second to the 1947 reprint of the second edition).

#### 1.1. Story of the book

In his foreword to *We*, Golwalkar explains that this 77-page book is largely an adaptation from *Rashtra Mimansa* ("reflection on the nation"), a Marathi book by Ganesh Damodar Savarkar, brother of the then president of the *Hindu Mahasabha*, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, which in turn acknowledges the influence of 19th-century European liberal nationalists like Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-72) and Johann Kaspar Bluntschli (1808-81). We should not explain Golwalkar's reference to Savarkar as a kind of disclaimer, as some defensive RSS sympathizers do: like most ideas which people have, the nationalist vision expounded in *We* was largely borrowed from others but interiorized by the author. It was very much Golwalkar's own conviction eventhough it was not invented by him.

The book had all the marks of an immature first publication. Apart from being largely second-hand in contents, it was often confused in its reasoning and intemperate in its language. This criticism is even made in the preface of the book itself, completed on 4 March 1939 by M.S. Aney, a Hindutva-oriented Congress activist and member of the Central Assembly: "I also desire to add that the strong and impassioned language used by the author towards those who do not subscribe to his theory of nationalism is also not in keeping with the dignity with which the scientific study of a complex problem like the Nationalism deserves to be pursued." (*We* 1939, p.xviii) In the revised edition, some of the strong language has been toned down -- and Aney's foreword left out.

The revised edition of *We* went through several reprints, the last of them brought out in 1947. Not long after that, Golwalkar and his closest lieutenants in the RSS decided to withdraw the book from circulation. References in the present paper are to both the first edition, published in 1939, and to the final 1947 reprint of the revised edition.

## 1.2. Two popular quotations

Most critics who devote half a page to Golwalkar (e.g. *Frontline* editor N. Ram: "The fascist basis of Hindutva", *Observer of Business and Politics*, 19-1-1993; and CPM politburo member Sitaram Yechurey: *Pseudo-Hinduism Exposed*, CPI(M), Delhi 1993, p.2-3, and "What is this Hindu Rashtra?", *Frontline*, 12-3-1993, or p.14 of its republication as a separate booklet: *What Is this Hindu Rashtra?*, Frontline, Madras 1993) never miss the opportunity to quote the following two passages from Golwalkar's book *We. Our Nationhood Defined*:

- "From this standpoint, sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu nation, and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race; or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment -- not even citizen's rights." (*We*, p.47-48/p.55-56)
- "To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races -- the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by." (*We*, p.35/p.43)

In the present paper, we will discuss these quotations in their proper context, and the typical and trend-setting use made of them by N. Ram and by Sitaram Yechurey. But to give an idea of just how routinely these two quotations are employed to build the Hindutva movement's image, let us first mention their presentation in a BBC documentary on the *Bharatiya Janata Party* ("Indian People's Party"), broadcast on 17 June 1993.

Typically, the speaker announcing the documentary, who spent no more than two sentences on its contents, already said that it would "reveal the connections of the organization behind the BJP with Nazi Germany", this organization being the RSS. In the documentary, an actor dressed and made up to look like Golwalkar in his younger days, read out the two paragraphs. However, no actual *connection* between the RSS and Nazi Germany was revealed. In fact, the entire 45 minutes did not contain any other information about or quotations from the RSS's ideological classics: not from Golwalkar's later publications, nor from any other Hindutva ideologue. Till today, and even in academic publications, it is very common to see the anti-BJP rhetoric built entirely on these few sentences in Golwalkar's pamphlet of more than sixty years ago.

When this "information" trickles down to journalistic publications, we get something like this statement from the leading Flemish daily *De Standaard* (5-3-1998): "In the 1930s, one of the RSS leaders, Gowalkar (sic), made a plea for 'racial purity' and called Hitler's campaign against the Jews 'a source of inspiration'." Note that Golwalkar's text mentions "racial purity" as Germany's concern but does not "make a plea" for it, and that he never described Hitler as "a source of inspiration". The latter are Christophe Jaffrelot's words of interpretation, for this passage is obviously based on Christophe Jaffrelot: *The Hindu Nationalist Movement* (Viking, Delhi 1996, now by far the most-consulted source among Western India watchers), p.54: "Here Golwalkar claims inspiration from Hitler's ideology: 'To keep up the purity of the race..'".

That alleged Golwalkar quotations turn out to be excerpted from the invective of his critics, is symptomatic of Hindutva-watching in general: first-hand information is spurned in favour of hostile second-hand claims made by unscrupled commentators. In most journalistic and academic publications on Hindutva, the number of direct quotations is tiny in comparison with quotations from secondary, hostile sources.

## **2. The RSS and ethnic cleansing**

### **2.1. No privileges for the minorities**

The single ofttest-quoted Hindutva statement in the whole Hindutva-watching literature is definitely the first one quoted above from Golwalkar's *We*, about non-Hindus being requested to "glorify" the Hindu culture, and otherwise "stay in the country" though "without privileges, not even citizen's rights". While certainly open to criticism, the meaning of this passage is by no means as terrifying and inhuman as the critics insinuate. It has nothing to do with genocide or ethnic cleansing, for it says explicitly that the non-Hindus "may stay in the country".

Further, it says that the religious minorities must "not claim any privileges", something with which any democrat and secularist would wholeheartedly agree: privileges on the basis of creed are against the equality principle which is fundamental to the law system of a modern state. It is one of the absurdities of Indian "secularism" that it contains a number of communal inequalities in law:

- Separate family law codes for Muslims, Christians and Parsis, epitomized by the Muslim right to polygamy; this constitutes the denial of the very first defining principle of the secular state, viz. legal equality of all citizens regardless of religion;
- exemption of mosques and churches (as opposed to Hindu temples) from intervention in their management and appropriation of their funds by the secular authorities;
- special safeguards of the communal character (in recruitment of teachers and students, in the contents of the curriculum) of Christian and Muslims schools all while retaining their subsidies, which are denied to Hindu denominational schools (Art. 30 of the Constitution);

- a large number of occasional advantages for the minorities in everyday political practice, e.g. subsidies for the Muslims who perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, as contrasted with pilgrimage taxes to be paid by Hindus going to Amarnath and other Hindu places of pilgrimage.

Before independence, the situation was even worse, with separate electorates and highly disproportionate privileges conceded to Anglo-Indians and other Christians and to the Muslim community. It was perfectly legitimate for Golwalkar in 1938 to champion the cause of genuine secularism by denouncing the system of privileges on the basis of religion. Indeed, the remarkable phenomenon is not that Hindus stand up for legal equality and against the Muslim privileges, but that supposedly scholarly and objective India-watchers, almost to a man, decry equality before the law (esp. a Common Civil Code, that long-standing Hindu demand) as "communal" and support minority privileges on the basis of religion as "secular", in blatant disregard for the dictionary meaning of "secularism" and "communalism".

## 2.2. The Muslims as non-citizens

The only disputable part in Golwalkar's ofttest-quoted line is that the minority people must "not claim even citizen's rights". This would mean that Muslims would get the same status in India which Christians and Jews (and sometimes Pagans) "enjoy" under the *Zimma* (charter of toleration) dispensation in an Islamic state: they may "stay in the country" (the native country of the hospitable Hindus c.q. the native country of the dispossessed *Zimmis*, who are suffered to stay in *their own* country which Islam took from them), but far from claiming any privileges, they do not even enjoy citizen's rights.

Indeed, the *Shari'a* prescribes, as a matter of consensus between all the Islamic schools of jurisprudence, that Jews and Christians can be tolerated by the Islamic state, on condition of the payment of a high toleration tax, the *jizya*, plus the observance of more than twenty humiliating restrictions. It is an intrinsic part of this status that they are excluded from the political decision-making process. To a greater or lesser degree, this inequality has been reinstated in most Muslim countries after decolonization.

So, at worst, one could interpret the controversial paragraph in Gurujii's book as amounting to a proposal for *reciprocity* with the treatment which non-Muslims get in Islamic states. Any indignation about the paragraph should therefore imply the same indignation about the treatment which Islam prescribes to the non-Muslims. Conversely, protest against Golwalkar's line without protest against the Islamic provisions, which are not an individual writer's little idea but actual law enforced in Islamic states for thirteen centuries as well as in several dozen "modern" states, would demonstrate hypocrisy and double standards.

But Golwalkar doesn't even say that he wants to go as far as to inflict on Muslims the same treatment which the *Shari'a* prescribes for non-Muslims. The expression "not even citizen's rights" strictly means that he would give Muslims the same status which residents with a foreign passport have: protection under the law, but no participation in political decision-making. But he would not prohibit them from riding a horse, or from bearing arms, or from keeping communal meetings where non-members are excluded, to name some of the restrictions which the Khilafat imposed on *Zimmis*.

The denial of citizen's rights to Muslims who claim separate nation status is criticized by M.S. Aney in his foreword to Golwalkar's book: "No modern jurist or political philosopher or student of constitutional law can subscribe to the proposition which the author has laid down in Chapter V. (...) No person born in the country, of parents whose ancestors enjoyed rights of citizenship for centuries together, can be treated as a foreigner in a modern state on the ground that it follows a religion different from that of the majority population which naturally dominates and controls it." (*We*, p.xiv-xv)

Embarrassing as Aney's remark may have been for Golwalkar, he does confirm our thesis that Golwalkar was basically applying to the Muslims an arrangement developed by Islam itself: "Except perhaps in States following Islam which has as one of its articles of faith the supremacy of the true believer over the infidel, and which precludes the possibility of any true national fellowship between the convert to Mohammedanism and an infidel follower of another religion, one can not expect recognition of such a fanatic position in the constitution of any civilised state." (*We*, p.xv-xvi) Aney reprimands Golwalkar for stooping to the uncivilized level of the intrinsically "fanatic" position of the Islamic states.

Of course, Golwalkar's scheme does not live up to modern standards of secularism. That is why it was never reiterated in later RSS or BJP documents. Maybe it is also why Golwalkar's booklet was withdrawn from circulation. But those who say that it amounts to "fascism", will only sound convincing if they add that by these standards, the *Shari'a* is far more consistently "fascist".

### **2.3. The context: the Two-Nation theory**

In judging Golwalkar's position, one should keep in mind the political atmosphere in 1938, when the book under discussion was written. Though the Muslim League had not yet officially adopted the Pakistan resolution (which it would in March 1940), the talk of a separate state for the Indian Muslims was already very much in the air. The basis for this Muslim demand was the so-called Two-Nation Theory, which held that Muslims and Hindus are two separate nations, to whom the principle of the "self-determination of nations" should apply. This principle was internationally accepted since it was applied in the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian, Czarist and Ottoman empires; it was also verbally supported by Lenin and theoretically applied in the establishment of the Soviet Union. Therefore, these two nations, Hindu and Muslim, would each have a right to its own "nation-state".

To the British rulers, this view seemed eminently reasonable: as Jinnah had pointed out, the Muslims were distinct from the Hindus by religion, language, dress, food habits, marriage customs, inheritance laws, holy days, arts, and they often lived in separate neighbourhoods, so that they lived an entirely separate life and were fit to be considered a separate nation. And while it was reasonable to the modern British rulers, it was equally self-evident to the guardians of Islamic orthodoxy (from Abul Kalam Azad to Abul Ala Maudoodi): the Quran and Hadis unambiguously describe and define the Muslim community as a separate nation (*ummah*). It is a different matter that in the orthodox view, the Muslim nation should lord it over other nations the way they had done in the Middle Ages, so that, rather than fleeing the Hindus by creating a separate state, they should try to capture power in the whole of united India. Fact remains that the orthodox

agreed with the modernist Jinnah and with the latter's British allies on the theoretical principle that the Muslims constituted a separate nation.

The "fascist" aberration which Golwalkar made in the paragraph under discussion actually consists in accepting the Muslim-cum-British view of the Muslims' separate nationhood, and thinking through its implications for the status of Muslims in a Hindu state. To him (at least at the time of writing), the Muslims were indeed, in accordance with their own self-definition, a nation separate from the Hindu nation, and it logically followed that they could not be full citizens of a state constituted by and for the Hindu nation. Most Muslims supported the two-nation theory (the overwhelming majority of the Muslim electorate voted for the Muslim League in 1946, while no sizable section of the non-enfranchised lower-class Muslims expressed its opposition, on the contrary), so it was on their own premise that they could not be full citizens of a non-Islamic Indian state,-- *unless* they changed their attitude and chose to identify with India rather than with the *Ummah*.

Golwalkar explicitly gave them that option: the Muslims may glorify Hindu culture, and only "*otherwise*", in case they refuse to identify themselves as Indians rather than as Muslims, does he explicitate the alternative option of staying within the country without citizen's rights. If giving the Muslims a choice between their country and their religion seems unjustified, it may be noted that the same choice was given to President Kennedy, the first Roman Catholic president of the USA, and for this reason suspected by Protestants of being an agent of the Popish Plot for world domination. He was asked whether his loyalty was primarily with his country or with his Roman Catholic religion, and he replied without hesitation that in case of conflict between the two, "I would choose my country". This is exactly what Golwalkar expected of the Indian Muslims, in which case he would treat them as full citizens. It is only in case they refused this first loyalty to India that he provided for a second-best option of *staying* within the country in a kind of Zimmi status, without citizen's rights.

### **3. Did Golwalkar applaud Hitler?**

At first sight, Guruji's seemingly laudatory reference to Nazi Germany is embarrassing. We will first look into the matter using only that information about his book *We* which those who are fond of quoting it, are willing to put at the reader's disposal. For now, let us accept the CPI(M)-BBC reading that he held the Nazi Germany of October 1938 up as an example to be emulated by the Hindus.

#### **3.1. Outside perspectives on Nazi Germany**

In 1938 Hitler was immensely popular worldwide as an economic miracle-worker and as a challenger to the supremacy of the colonial powers. The bad press he received, including the stories of his oppression of the Jews, was ascribed to the propaganda of the colonial powers, themselves veterans of many a massacre.

Those who remembered the British "information" about the Germans in World War 1 had reason enough to be skeptical. The world had been told about how German soldiers bayoneted Belgian babies and cut off the breasts of Belgian women, and how German factories had made soap out of the bodies of prisoners. In November 1918, when the Germans left Belgium, humanitarians came to the country to help the suffering

population, but found to their surprise that after the initial brutalities of the conquest, the German occupation there had been fairly benign. The British depiction of the Teutonic furor turned out to be crass war propaganda. Consequently, for Indians struggling against Britain and out of touch with European politics, it was perfectly normal to ignore the British version of the facts concerning Nazi Germany.

In 1938, the mortal victims of Nazism were a thousand times fewer than those of Communism, yet numerous Western and westernized intellectuals could applaud Communism and call for its implementation in their homelands. Some of them knew they were lying, e.g. *New York Times* correspondent Walter Duranty privately estimated the death toll of the Ukrainian famine genocide of 1932-33 at ten million, but in his journalistic despatches he denied the genocide completely. Others, well, were they really that stupid? Jawaharlal Nehru could come home from a propaganda trip around Moscow as a zealous convert, blind to the omnipresent repression. The same wilful blindness afflicted numerous Western intellectuals. Against this background of widespread collaboration with the most monstrous political system in human memory, Golwalkar's alleged blindness to the horrible potential of pre-war and pre-Holocaust Nazism, even if verified, should warrant only limited censure.

It would have been different if he had defended Nazism while the Holocaust was taking place, which he didn't; or afterwards, which he didn't either -- unlike numerous Leftists with posh position from Harvard to JNU, who denied the crimes of Communism while they were taking place, thus thwarting effective protests and thereby helping the crimes to continue, and who often go on denying or minimizing them till today. Moreover, it can be shown that even in 1938, Golwalkar was by no means defending Nazism.

### **3.2. Hitler's popularity**

Hitler was very popular in India. Elderly Indians have told me that in 1938, it was common among Indian boys to describe something brave and impressive as *Hitlerwala*. Both Hindus and Muslims were enthusiastic about his aura of effectiveness, and both also had their own special reason for sympathizing with him.

Hindus, who already had a soft corner for the German pioneers of Sanskrit studies, heard that Hitler was a vegetarian and a celibate (not wasting his precious fluid but transforming it into spiritual energy), and that he had given a pride of place to the Indian term *Arya* and to the Hindu symbol, the *Swastika*. Certain sections of the freedom movement also saw Germany as a potential ally, regardless of its regime. Before 1918, the revolutionary terrorists often dreamed aloud of taking German help in their struggle against Britain, and it is no coincidence that the Congress leader who ended up collaborating with Germany in World War 2 was one who had been close to this movement: the Leftist Subhash Chandra Bose.

Muslims had been aroused into solidarity with their Palestinian co-religionists, who were increasingly in open conflict with the Jewish settlers, and supported Hitler's anti-Jewish line. There was also the *Khaksar* Muslim militia, founded on the model of the Nazi *Sturmabteilung* (SA, "storming department") by Allama Inayatullah Mashreqi, who had returned from Germany full of enthusiasm for the national resurgence he had witnessed there.

The Muslim League, while in alliance with the British, also had a soft corner for Hitler: "When Nehru returned after a brief visit to Europe in 1938, he was struck by the similarity between the propaganda methods of the Muslim League in India and the Nazis in Germany: 'The League leaders had begun to echo the Fascist tirade against democracy... Nazis were wedded to a negative policy. So also was the League. The League was anti-Hindu, anti-Congress, anti-national... The Nazis raised the cry of hatred against the Jews, the League [had] raised [its] cry against the Hindus.'" (B.R. Nanda: *Gandhi and His Critics*, OUP, Delhi 1993 (1985), p.88)

In spite of this Hitler craze, Golwalkar chose not to tap into this facile enthusiasm for a foreign model. In the circumstances, the remarkable thing is not that he mentioned Germany, but that he did not utter even one sentence of praise for Hitler, or the Nazi Party, or any specific Nazi policy. If he had been a Hitler fan, he could easily have said so in public: England was not yet at war with Germany (these were the days of "*peace in our time*" euphoria), and Indian public opinion would not have been scandalized. Yet, all he said was that developments in Germany proved that two nations living in one state are bound to come in conflict sooner or later, or "how well-nigh impossible it is" for two nations to co-exist within one state. The statement may be wrong (though the general tendency to conflict between peoples forced to coexist in one state is regularly verified by events, as lately in ex-Yugoslavia), but cannot honestly be read as an endorsement of the crimes of Nazism.

### **3.3. Golwalkar and the democratic ethnostate**

And it is not just that Nazism was a foreign doctrine, which Golwalkar refused to entertain simply because of its foreignness. For, to the satisfaction of all those Hindutva-watchers who allege that Hindu nationalism is but a cask on Western ideologies, Golwalkar explicitly writes that Hindus should learn from the West. When introducing his discussion of the definition of "nation", Guruji explains that the Indian political class is confused about it, that their "notions today about the nation concept are erroneous" and "not in conformity with those of the Western Political Scientists", whom he implicitly accepts as normative. (*We*, p.16/p.21)

He summons the Indian nationalist leadership to ponder the question: "What is the notion of Democratic states about 'Nation'? Is it the same haphazard bundle of friend and foe, master and thief, as we in Hindusthan understand it to mean? Or do the political thinkers of the democratic West think otherwise?" (*We*, p.16/p.21) The "haphazard bundle of friend and foe" is a reference to the Congress position of denying the Hindu-Muslim conflict except as a British "divide and rule" ploy. Against this, Golwalkar's position is that the Hindu-Muslim disunity is very serious and a threat to India, which will either become homogeneous or get entangled in a civil war or some other sad fate awaiting multi-communal states. In practice: to avoid civil war and partition, the Muslims must be assimilated or somehow politically neutralized ("not even citizen's rights").

What Golwalkar is looking for, is the opinion of the *democratic* Westerners, and in particular those who have articulated the connection between democracy and the need for a homogeneous population, e.g. John Stuart Mill (*Considerations on Representative Government*, 1861, p.292-294): "Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. (...) it is in general a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of governments should coincide in the main with those of

nationalities." (Mill is mentioned as a source of inspiration for Hindu nationalists by M.S. Aney in his foreword to Golwalkar: *We*, p.ii.) That Golwalkar was so particular about looking to *democratic* authorities for advice is of course never mentioned in the secondary literature seeking to portray him as a Nazi.

To Golwalkar, the guidelines for steering India away from the looming abyss of Partition and civil war are not to be found in Nazi sources (of which he doesn't quote or mention any), nor in more traditional Rightist authors, nor of course in the confused and pseudo-democratic Congress leadership, but in the theorists of successful Western democracies. Underlying successful democracies is either a relatively homogeneous nation, as in the 19th-century unification of Italy (which was a democracy before the rise of Mussolini), or a strong mechanism of homogeneization, as in the American "melting-pot". Indeed, M.S. Aney (*We*, p.ii), who also mentions a long list of inspiring thinkers on nationhood in his foreword (and again none of them a Nazi), includes Israel Zangwill, the Anglo-Jewish playwright who was both a Jewish nationalist and the author of *The Melting-Pot* (1908), a parable on assimilation.

As M.S. Aney writes (*We*, p.ii), the most important Western influence on the Hindu nationalist movement was the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, "by common consent still regarded as the greatest interpreter of Nationality". Indeed, Lala Lajpat Rai wrote a brief biography of Mazzini, Surendranath Banerjee also wrote about him, and V.D. Savarkar himself translated Mazzini's autobiography into Marathi in 1907. Aney (*We*, p.iii) quotes Mazzini to give the flavour of his integrationist and harmonious vision: "Humanity is the association of peoples; it is the alliance of peoples in order to work out their missions in peace and love. To forget humanity is to suppress the aim of our labours, to cancel the nation is to suppress the instrument by which to achieve the aim."

This was hardly a fascist vision, on the contrary: "Fascism no longer believed as Mazzini did in the harmony of various national interests. It dedicated itself to the preparation for the 'inevitable' struggle that forms the life of nations." (Hans Kohn: *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*, Krieger Publ., Malabar CA 1982 (1965), p.79) While the Hindu nationalists rejected Mahatma Gandhi's passive pacifism and envisaged the necessity of preparing for confrontation, they never entertained the nihilistic or vitalistic belief in *war for war's sake* which is so typical of Fascism.

Nor did they nurture grand schemes of empire, to name a related trait of Fascism, which had been born from Italy's demand for a larger share in the spoils of the Austro-Hungarian empire after World War 1, and which had embarked upon a policy of conquest in the Balkans and Africa. Nazi Germany, of course, pursued a *Lebensraum* policy; though at the time of Golwalkar's writing, it had only been limited to bringing German-speaking territories (Austria and Sudetenland) *heim ins Reich*, Hitler's sabre-rattling in preparation of larger conquests was widely audible. Fascism and Nazism believed in a permanent struggle between nations, bringing out the strongest on top; by contrast, RSS literature frequently mentions as one of Hindu India's glories the fact that no Indian ruler ever set out to conquer territories outside India. The Hindu nationalists had a vision of India taking its place in the comity of nations, not some high-strung dream of world conquest or other negative excesses of nationalism.

That is why Golwalkar (*We*, Ch.3-4) repeatedly invokes the authority of the League of Nations in explaining his vision of nationhood and international relations. This would be

rather odd for a "fascist" in 1938, considering that Fascist Italy had left the League of Nations in 1937, defiantly turning its back on the very principles which Golwalkar was extolling.

### **3.4. Golwalkar and the Holocaust**

Hitler became a symbol of absolute evil by the Shoah or Holocaust, the attempted extermination of the Jews and, in additional order, the Gypsies and other groups. Without that, he would have been just one of the warlords who take turns in their hundreds at brutalizing sections of humanity. In fact, he would have been one of the most successful dictators in history, considering his near-abolition of unemployment by means of public works, his restoration of national sovereignty and his unification of most German-speaking people within the borders of his Reich. At the time of Golwalkar's writing, Hitler's "final solution" only consisted of legal discriminations and vague plans to banish the Jews either to Madagascar or to Palestine (there were secret negotiations between Nazis and Zionists, as pro-Palestinian authors keep reminding us, *vide* Lenni Brenner: *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators*, Lawrence Hill Books, Chicago 1983), i.e. removing them from Germany rather than killing them.

Though the oppression of the Jews was already serious, in 1938 it was "only" of the same order as the oppression and expulsion of non-Muslims in Islamic states today. The leading opinion among World War 2 historians, the so-called "functionalist" school (as opposed to the "intentionalists" who believe that the Shoah had been planned since before Hitler's take-over), is that various policies vis-à-vis the Jews were tried out by Hitler, and that the decision to exterminate them was only developed in stages and in reaction to changing circumstances, in particular the war with the Soviet Union (from 22 June 1941) and with the USA (from 11 December 1941). Had the war somehow been averted, it is quite conceivable that a master plan for the resettlement of the Central-European Jews in some colonial domain would have been agreed upon between the European powers, and implemented. In 1938, the Shoah was not yet a reality, not even an articulate project, and by no means an inevitability.

When Golwalkar wrote that Germany was proving (in a way which he explicitly considered "shocking") the impossibility of culturally distinct nations to live together, he was not referring to the Shoah, which was still three years in the future, but to the removal of Jews from office, their loss of citizenship and their resulting exodus from Germany, phenomena paralleled by the treatment of non-Muslims in Muslim countries even today. And even these pre-War Nazi policies vis-à-vis the Jews were by no means recommended or approved by Golwalkar. At no point did he say that "pogroms are the answer" or that in India, on the German model, "expulsion of minority professors from the universities is the way to avert Partition".

Golwalkar neither applauded the fact that Germans were staging a struggle against Jews, nor the German perception of why the Jews were unwelcome to stay, much less the specific methods adopted by the Nazis vis-à-vis the "Jewish question" in any phase of their term in power. All he did was point out that the co-existence of two nations within the German state had led to conflict, and that this was an intrinsic liability of any such co-existence, proving the need to make nations homogeneous by assimilating the minorities into the national mainstream.

### 3.5. Golwalkar's assimilationism

Nothing indicates that Golwalkar understood the exact nature and antecedents of the anti-Jewish policies in Germany and other countries. The intricate story of anti-Judaism in Europe was beyond his politically uneducated intellect. Though many RSS people consider Guruji a great thinker, his assessment of contemporary political phenomena including Nazism was amateurish and poorly conceived when not downright mistaken. Rather, it seems he simply projected his Indian concerns on a world situation of which he knew little and understood less.

In particular, if he assumed that the cultural distinctness of the Jews in Germany could be equated with that of the Muslims in India, he was way off the mark (along with all the anti-RSS polemicists who keep on making that same equation). First of all, historically there was simply no comparison, for Germany had never been conquered and ravaged by the Jews the way India had been brutalized and oppressed by Islam. Coming to particulars, the Jews had become less and less distinct from the 18th century onwards, more and more assimilated, and therefore more and more part of German society including its upper layers. Without benefiting from any institutional privileges (another contrast with Muslims in India), they had worked their way to the top or at least to well-to-do positions in society.

Meanwhile, the Muslims in India had, ever since their ancestors' conversion from Hinduism, been increasingly dissimilating themselves from their mother society. Under British rule, when they were no longer in a position of power and prestige, they had been wilfully ghettoizing their own community, and this assertion of a separate identity had gained in intensity with the *Khilafat* (Caliphate restoration) and *Tabligh* (Islamic-purist propaganda) movements of the 1920s. In the 1930s, a new political articulation was given, viz. Muslim separatism crystallizing around the demand for Partition. This had no parallel at all in the situation of the Jews in Germany.

While Golwalkar wanted the Muslims to identify with India rather than with their transnational community, Hitler wanted to dis-identify the assimilated Jews with the German nation and to push them back into their transnational communal identity. The contrast can be illustrated with the aspect of physical recognizability. Hitler forced the Jews, who had long given up their distinctive clothing and hairstyle, to make themselves visible again by wearing the yellow David star. This was a practice modelled on the enforced recognizability imposed on the Jews in the medieval Islamic empire, typically by means of a yellow strip of cloth. (This is not a thing of the past: in October 1998, the Taliban government in Afghanistan imposed on the fifty remaining Hindu families in Kandahar the following dress code: "Under the Taliban decree, every Hindu in this southern Afghan city has to wear a yellow piece of cloth", according to *Indian Express*, 24-10-1998.) But in India, the vast majority of Muslims were readily recognizable as such, and every *Tabligh* sermon led to the sprouting of beards or the donning of veils on the faces of those Muslims who had not yet sufficiently dissimilated themselves from the Hindu mainstream.

Golwalkar says in so many words, in the very line which is always quoted to prove his Hitlerian leanings, that he wants "the foreign races in Hindusthan" to "adopt the Hindu culture and language" and to "lose their separate existence to *merge* in the Hindu race". His words indicate that he had swallowed the common Indian Muslims' self-definition as

"foreign", which they have traditionally buttressed with faked genealogies leading up to the Prophet and his companions, and with Arabic names and dress codes and other wilfully foreign cultural elements. But the point is that he wants them to abandon these transnational affectations and to assimilate themselves into the majority culture, the very opposite of what Hitler wanted from the Jews.

If at all we need a comparison, Golwalkar's position is closer to that of the Jacobin rulers in Revolutionary France, who wanted the non-French (Basque, Breton, Corsican, Flemish, German) minorities in France's conquered border regions to assimilate. Their methods included prohibiting minorities' self-organization and the use of their languages in education; the latter prohibition is still in force in France. A related Jacobin streak in Golwalkar was his plea against the administrative division of India into linguistic states (grudgingly conceded in the 1950s by Jawaharlal Nehru), and in favour of a strictly unitary state. This is in stark contrast with the current decentralizing and federalist position of the BJP, e.g. its carving a new state Uttaranchal out of Uttar Pradesh. Mercifully, Golwalkar had no stated intention of using the French Revolutionary methods of oppression and terror.

At any rate, Golwalkar can be fully exonerated of the one thing which N. Ram, Sitaram Yechurey, the BBC and the whole host of India-watchers insinuate against him: support for National-Socialism in its historical meaning of a genocidal authoritarian regime. Whether he ever praised Hitler before the full facts became known, we shall examine shortly, but even the professional critics of the RSS have to admit implicitly that he never praised Hitler after the Nazi crimes had become known to the larger public: apart from the worn-out 1938 quote under consideration, they have nothing to show.

#### **4. Golwalkar vs. Hitler**

But *did* Golwalkar in 1938 see Nazi Germany as an example to be followed? If we do not just focus on the selected quotation (as we are led to do by those who made the selection in the first place), but read the whole book, we find that Golwalkar is definitely *not* asking the Hindus to emulate Nazi Germany.

##### **4.1. Golwalkar's role models**

When faced with embarrassing quotations (e.g. from the Quran), people often allege that these have been "quoted out of context", mostly without saying what that context is and how it would change the meaning of the quoted part. In this case however, the context does change the meaning of Golwalkar's offensive line considerably. It is not without good reason that those who quote the offending passage, from the CPI(M) to the BBC, keep the entire context outside the reader's view. So now, we will go beyond the limits which they have tried to impose on this debate (and which the RSS has unwittingly accepted by its refusal to re-examine and discuss the book), and see what information about Golwalkar's relation with Hitler is offered in the unquoted paragraphs.

The third chapter of *We* is devoted to demonstrating that five attributes are present in all successful nation-states: country, race, religion, culture, language. It is in this context that Golwalkar verifies his criteria for a number of countries, including Germany but also England and the Soviet Union (where "socialism is modern Russia's religion" and "their

prophet is Karl Marx", *We*, p.37/p.45), with the Nazi pre-1939 situation being just one variety of nation-building among others.

What strikes the educated reader is the clumsiness of Golwalkar's attempt to straitjacket the rather different situations in these countries into his preconceived scheme, as well as his confused and defective knowledge about them. For an example of the lack of clarity in his argument: while being opposed to English imperialism and specifically complaining about the "notorious" British propensity to impose the English language, in Ireland and Wales as much as in Calcutta and Mumbai, he still upholds "the Englishman's pride in his 'national' language" as a model for the Hindus. (*We*, p.34/p.42)

For an example of his lack of factual knowledge: he claims that "the Russian nation adheres with religious fervour" to Communism, at a time when Stalin had just murdered millions of Russians and Ukrainians, and when popular enthusiasm for Communism fell short of "religious fervour" by a rather large margin. (*We*, p.37/p.45) This alleged anti-Communist did not even know that Russia had been turned Communist by brute force (the October 1917 *coup d'état* a.k.a. "Revolution") rather than by the people's will. Not misguided political sympathies but utter amateurishness in his analysis of world politics is the verdict which we can deduce from a close reading of his book.

Golwalkar's opinion on Hitler should be read against its own background, just like that of an American student who travelled around Europe in the 1930s and who wrote in a letter to his parents that Communism is the right system for Russia, fascism is right for Italy and Germany, and democracy is the thing for England and the US; his name was John F. Kennedy. That "the real is rational", that somehow the existing order is God-given and right, that somehow all nations have got the regimes they deserve, is unfortunately a very common prejudice. At that time, Communism's victims were counted in millions, Nazism's in hundreds, yet both JFK and Golwalkar didn't even think of questioning the legitimacy of the Bolshevik regime. The most reprehensible thing about both JFK's and Guru Golwalkar's utterances, taking into account the information then available to them, was their unquestioning acceptance of Stalinism as the legitimate and fitting political system for Russia.

## **4.2. Golwalkar on Czechoslovakia**

Some parts of the book conclusively refute the thesis that Golwalkar was a Hitler supporter. First of all, one of the countries in his list of models of nation-building to be studied by Hindus is Czechoslovakia, one of Hitler's first victims. And there, his sympathies, unlike Hitler's, are divided between the Sudeten Germans and the Czechs.

Here again, selective quoting has done the job of misleading the readers and creating a different impression. What is sometimes quoted is the following: "Austria for example was merely a province [in] the Germanic Empire. Logically Austria should not be an independent kingdom, but be one with the rest of Germany. So also with those portions, inhabited by Germans, which had been included, after the War, in the new state of Czechoslovakia. (...) This natural and logical aspiration has almost been fulfilled". (*We*, p.35/p.42-43)

Is this not terrible, Golwalkar openly supporting the *Anschluss* of Austria and Sudetenland? Actually, no. If Hitler became a synonym for horror and evil, it is not

because he fulfilled the wish of the Austrians and Sudeten Germans of joining Germany. After World War 1, the Austrian parliament had voted with the largest possible majority in favour of joining Germany. This democratic choice was overruled by the victorious powers in the unilateral treaty of Versailles. Such are the complexities of history, that the killer of democracy in Germany implemented the democratic will of the Austrian people with his annexation of Austria.

As for Sudetenland, its separation from the Czech region was likewise applauded by the vast majority of the population concerned. It was entirely in keeping with the principle of "self-determination of nations". This principle had been conceded in the case of the Czechs' separation from Austria, but overruled by the victorious powers in the case of Sudetenland because they wanted to create large buffer states around Germany (also in the case of eastern Upper Silesia, annexed by the new state of Poland in spite of a plebiscite showing 60% support for accession to Germany).

If Hitler got as far as he had gotten by 1939, it was not purely by leaning on the forces of evil, but by occasionally and selectively allying himself with forces of reason, justice and democracy. Anyone with a sense of fairness could see that the Versailles treaty was anything but a peace treaty; its premise that Germany alone was responsible for World War 1, was factually incorrect, and its practical conclusions were likewise unjust. This is a decisive reason why the Western powers felt inhibited from stopping Hitler when he started undoing a number of Versailles clauses: restoration of German sovereignty over the Rhineland, annexation of Austria, de-annexation of Sudetenland from the new state of Czechoslovakia. Conquering colonial powers like England and France knew well enough that in similar circumstances, they themselves would have done the same thing.

However, Gowalkar's support to the Sudeten Germans' reunification with Germany is counterbalanced by his support to the cause of Czechoslovakia's unity and integrity. Golwalkar argues quite correctly that established nations victorious in the Great War do not concede to their ethnic minorities the "minority rights" devised by the League of Nations as binding on the newly created states. Thus, an American ambassador to the League is quoted articulating the principle of "*completely natural assimilation*" as the great unifier of the American nation, and asserting that this renders the League principle of minority rights inapplicable. (*We*, p.46/p.55; emphasis in the original)

This provides a background to Golwalkar's oft-quoted stricture against minority privileges, justified explicitly with reference to the assimilative approach of the major Western powers: "Naturally, there are no foreigners in these old Nations, and no one to tax the generosity of the Nation by demanding privileges as 'Minority communities' in the State. It is this sentiment which prompted the United States of America, England, France and other old nations to refuse to apply the solution of the Minorities problem arrived at by the League of Nations to their states." (*We*, p.46/p.54)

Golwalkar quotes with approval the warning against the principle of minority rights uttered in a speech at the League Council on 9 December 1925 by French delegate Paul Fauchille: "the recognition of rights belonging to minorities as separate entities, by increasing their coherence and developing in them a sense of their own strength, may provoke them to separate themselves from the state of which they form a part; and in view of the right of peoples to dispose of themselves, the recognition of the rights of these minorities runs a risk of leading to the disruption of states." (*We*, p.48-49/p.57)

To Fauchille's warning, he comments: "Prophetic words! How true they sound today after the recent developments in Europe, under the very nose of the League of Nations! The disastrous fate of the unfortunate Czechoslovakia (to which, as promised, we now refer) proves beyond the faintest shadow of a doubt, how hollow were the League's hopes and how justified the fears of Paul Fauchille." (*We*, p.49/p.57)

The alleged fanatic Golwalkar admits that there are two sides to the argument: "And yet the decision of the League on the minority rights was the most equitable and just that could be conceived of. But even this just and equitable arrangement, instead of fostering the assimilation of the minorities into the National community, only served to increase their coherence and create in them such a sense of their own strength, that it led to a total disruption of the state, the Sudeten German minority merging in Germany, the Hungarians in Hungary, in the end leaving the national Czechs to shift for themselves in the little territory left unto them." (*We*, p.49/p.57-58)

To Golwalkar, the lesson to be learnt from the "disastrous fate of unfortunate.