28 September 2015, night-time in Bisara village in Uttar Pradesh, India – a Hindu mob lynches a Muslim man and his son for allegedly consuming beef. The man dies while his son is severely injured. They had been guilty of killing the sacred “Go-mata” (Mother Cow) of the Hindus.

Morning of 30 August 2015, in the Kalyan Nagar locality of Dharwad, Karnataka – a man knocks on the door of the famous Indian scholar and vice-chancellor of Karnataka University, M.M. Kalburgi. Kalburgi’s wife answers the door and leaves them to talk, assuming the man to be Kalburgi’s student; she then hears gunshots. Moments later, she discovers that the man has fired two shots at point blank range through her husband’s chest and forehead. Kalburgi’s fault lay in raising questions to understand that the colonial reading of history had simply presented, in a non-academic way, as ‘History’. Political parties writing history therefore don’t interpret the past as historians, but force it to be bent in the ideological direction they want. Writing history therefore don’t interpret the past as historians, but force it to be bent in the ideological direction they want. The two cannot be confused.

And then the government fell. But the books continued!
they have not taken an interest in the methods used by this discipline. What is interesting is that people don't ask these questions from scientists, because they do not understand the discipline, and because they expect scientific knowledge to change and be up-to-date. They also don't question economists because they can't handle economics. They are a little unsure with sociology because they are a little unsure with the terminology. But history is very easy in their minds because it is about their identity, their past, and it can be incorporated in any way that they want.

SS: Is there a solution then?

RT: I think we can solve this problem to some extent by making our first attempts at teaching history properly in schools. Children are mostly taught to just repeat information for get- ting good grades. It seems to me that the Catechism of religious organizations – you already know what the questions are and you even know what the answers are. I am not suggesting that whatever is being taught is rubbish. There is a method of teaching students to question in a creative way so that knowledge is opened up and further questions can be asked. Otherwise you are dealing with dead knowledge. The characteristic of knowledge is that it is constantly being tested and if need be, being renewed and taken forward. This kind of thinking that the denominations, the Muslims and Hindus, etc., are not equal, or these (Muslim schools) or that of the shul/midrash (Hindu schools) inhibits students from questioning knowledge. Unless this is repressed, public opinion will be based on just repeating information, and this will continue without it being questioned.

SS: Coming back to these Hindu-Muslim nationalisms you just talked about; let's focus on the recent里面 news report for its rising intolerance debates. Don't you think that it is more of a universal problem of ‘Islamophobia’ in all places, and not just particularly India?

RT: It is, and one has to analyse it not just in terms of Christians against Muslims or Hindus against Muslims. It is not a uniform kind of violence and suppression of dissent with regard to this matter. The Netherlands, where one of us works, takes pride in being called a ‘tolerant country’. It is similar to the 'Unity in Diversity' kind of nationalist message proclaimed in India. These kind of debates raise questions about what in fact tolerance means, and why should we exist at all? It isn't a dichotomy to preach tolerance where one should suppose diversity to be a natural factor and accept it that way. The word ‘tolerance’ is not in any way equated terms with subtle implications in that sense. Do you agree?

RT: An insistence on the concept of tolerance indeed foretells the existence of intolerance. You do not keep talking about the need for tolerance and how good it would be to be tolerant, unless somewhere there is some riddling little evidence of intolerance. It is therefore a deep-seated belief. Now, are we making such a fuss about it in India? I think we have to go back a little into the anti-colonial nationalist ideology where tolerance and non-violence were to be the difference between the West and the East (or India in this case). The West used stereotypes of Oriental Despotism and anti-democratic societies for the East. The Indians depicted themselves by accident the Westerners of being materialistic, unlike the spiritual East. It is therefore a double edged word. Now why are we so concerned? Unless somewhere there is some niggling little evidence of intolerance. It is similar to the ‘Unity in Diversity’ kind of nationalist message proclaimed in India. What goes wrong is when certain aspects and ideas during the twentieth century get emphasized and remained ingrained in public opinion. The religious cause in this case has geared the widely held opinion. In that light we think that you have raised a very daring and important question.

SS: The Netherlands, where one of us works, takes pride in being called a ‘tolerant country’. It is similar to the 'Unity in Diversity' kind of nationalist message proclaimed in India. These kind of debates raise questions about what in fact tolerance means, and why should we exist at all? It isn't a dichotomy to preach tolerance where one should suppose diversity to be a natural factor and accept it that way. The word ‘tolerance’ is not in any way equated terms with subtle implications in that sense. Do you agree?

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