Abstract:
Some days before I set down to write this introduction, I was leafing through a volume of poems by the Soviet era Russian versifier Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930). I was suddenly stricken by nostalgia, you see. It is my age, when you are in your thirties you sometimes wistfully look back upon the lost golden twenties. I used to be quite fond of Mayakovsky as a young student. Being a romantic idealist, I had allowed myself to be snared by a leftist students’ organization and found in Mayakovsky’s poetry the promise of a new world. Now I would see him as a rhapsodist and legitimizer of the cruel Soviet totalitarianism, but in those days I wished I were like him – a dashing young man penning verses that could change the world while earning him the affections and admiration of a few young women. As I turned the pages, going over poems that pumped up my blood once but find rather juvenile now, the following lines caught my attention –

“Old geezers in moss grown brigades
Drool the same drool as of old,
Comrades, off to the barricades,
Barricades of hearts and souls!”[i]

Outgrown Mayakovsky I have, but I see no problem in acknowledging that the above lines contain a profound wisdom. It is a wisdom that the inimical to lived culture reactionary elite (commonly known as the ‘left-liberals’) have thoroughly internalized and their culturally rooted challengers have just about begun to grasp. This wisdom, simply put, is this – if you wish to change or challenge how people think (wipe ‘old drool’ of chins) your battleground are the hearts and souls wherefrom ideas and sentiments issue. What weapon(s) does one use on this battleground? I believe, the most potent weapon that one can deploy or arm oneself with on it are narratives – facts (or semblances thereof) strung into stories that evoke sentiments and generate ideas. The reactionary elite have done this for decades now through their control of the media and academia. Before the internet and social media empowered everyone to tell a tale, those were the only bastions from which narratives could be launched. Hence the elite monopolized their production. This enabled them to enjoy great power, as they sat in the newsrooms or lived an idyllic life on the leafy campuses of our elite public universities. They could determine how a lot of people thought and acted, because, in my view, after music humans react the most spontaneously to narratives.

Human beings eagerly take to narratives because they are the bearers of morals. Hayden White, author of an abstruse volume on the relationship between narrative and historiography, terms “narrativity” an outcome of the “impulse to moralize reality.”[iii] Narratives have a spontaneous appeal for us because we humans are fundamentally moral beings. We, in visible numbers, seek fulfillment and to ennoble ourselves by submitting to values, ideas and beliefs. And then we try to shape the world in accordance with them. Narratives as bearers of morals appeal to our agency and freewill. This was understood very well by Jean Paul Sartre, the first philosopher to enjoy truly celebrity status. The act of writing, he thought, was an address “to the freedom of readers....”[iii] Further, he argued that writing meant “both to disclose the world and to offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader.”[iv] That is, to write is to present before the readers a version of reality and then expect them to react to it, or do something about it. Even more simply, writing or the act of producing narratives could be an act of furthering an
agenda. Once again, the reactionary elite, the ‘left-liberals’, have done this brazenly for decades. For example, they have always presented the numerically dominant lived culture of the land, commonly termed Hinduism, as a caste ridden chamber of horrors. Further, they have variously and consistently suggested that Hindutva is an artificial and nefarious construct that has got nothing to do with this lived culture.

References

[i] “Order of the day to the Army of Arts”, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Selected Works in Three Volumes, 1, Selected Verse (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1985), 76.


[iv] Ibid., 45.

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