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'Don't compromise on scientific search of historical truth'

STAFF REPORTER

CHENNAI: "The rising tide of majoritarian Hindu religious nationalism that now seeks to alter the orientation of our national identity is a deeply unsettling force at work beneath our political landscape," Dr. Malini Parthasarathy, former Editor, *The Hindu* and whole time Director, Kasturi & Sons Ltd, said on Monday.

Delivering the Indira Gandhi Endowment Lecture organised by the Department of History and Tourism at the Stella Maris College here, she observed that "a coercive definition of patriotism is being forced upon Indian citizens even as the public sphere in this country is being bombarded with unsolicited political definitions of what is correct national behaviour and what constitutes national loyalty."

'Resist re-writing'

Urging the young historians in the audience to resist re-writing of history and encouraging selective amnesia about the past, she said that Hindu cultural nationalism's claims of prior antiquity that seeks to establish Hindus as first occupants of this country and the idea of 'Hindu sacred geography' need to be contested.



Malini Parthasarathy, former Editor, *The Hindu*, at Stella Maris College in Chennai on Monday. — PHOTO: R. RAGU

"It is our duty as students of history and politics to ensure the scientific search for historical truth is not compromised by ugly battles in the political arena," said Dr. Parthasarathy.

Underlining how the nation was founded on the basis of Indian citizenship, in which multitude of identities — religious, social and cultural — were subsumed, she said that "liberal democratic nationalism has served our country well".

She pointed out that the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1990s could have been fashioned by an impatient middle class, which could

have been dismayed by Nehruvian secularism — that sought to banish cultural activity from public sphere — as it was seen as inexorably linked to Nehruvian socialist command economy.

"Modernity was no longer seen as only achievable through what was seen as the dry doctrines of secular nationalism, emptied of cultural affiliations," she said.

She also answered several questions from students present and urged them to ensure that their pursuit of truth in "unravelling our multifaceted past is rigorous, unswerving and disciplined".