

## **HINDUTVA AND MARGINALIZED CHRISTIAN RESPONSE**

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Hindutva is studied and analysed by different scholars today. The context evokes a certain consciousness to understand this ideology. In this article I portray how Hindutva has a hidden agenda towards the marginalized. Apparently Hindutva seems to identify itself with them and help them to grow in society; but as a long term achievement, I visualise Hindutva uses a certain matrix and utilises some people to project themselves as saviours of this country. What is our critique then and our Christian response?

### **I. Understanding Hindutva**

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966), A Maharashtrian Brahmin of the Chitpavan caste was inspired by the life and work of the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini. Savarkar founded a secret society in 1904 called *Abhinev Bharat* modelled after Mazzini's *Young Italy*. Kesha Baliram Hedgewar (1898-1940) founded the *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* (RSS) at Nagpur in 1925. RSS began as an explicitly upper caste Hindu organisation, promoting the *Hindu Rashtra*. It successfully crystallised the concept of Hinduism and Nationalism. M.S. Golwalkar (1906-1973) who succeeded Hedgewar found inspiration in Hitler, the Nazi leader. According to Golwalkar at the heart of Hindu culture is Hindu religion, and its noble ideas are from the Vedas. He also asserted that the diverse languages of India are offshoots of

Sanskrit, the dialect of the gods and Aryans the enlightened race. Golwalkar regretted the fall of the Brahmins in the Hindu society, which according to him, was deliberately brought about by the British. He had drawn the ideology of the *Hindu Rashtra* from the Nazi ideology and was against the theory of Nationalism by Congress, "that the nation is composed of all those who for one reason or the other happen to live at the time in a country" (Jafferlot, 1996:26). D.S. Deoras, the former president of *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) too advocates in a tone similar to that of Golwalkar: "Those who live in this country and accept the fact that this is an ancient nation with a long history and a hoary tradition and willing to share it are all covered by that word (*Hindu*); they are all members of the *Hindu Rashtra* and believers in Hindutva which is Hinduism. How then can anyone say that this concept is anything but national?" (Chitkara, 1997:166).

The Sangh Parivar's slogan 'one nation, one culture, one religion, one language,' is similar to the Nazi slogan '*Ein volk, ein Reich, ein Fuehrer*' (one people, one state, one leader). The incriminating notion of one state, one race provided the motivation to the Nazis to indulge in one of the most inhuman forms of destruction. The Sangh Parivar has created a 'we-ness' identity based on tradition and ritual. At the same time they have created 'the other'. The Muslims, Christians and Communists who become 'the other'.

The Sangh Parivar's ideology is based on Brahminical Hinduism. This ideology got the real flesh and blood with the consolidation of anti-Mandal sentiments. Thus the 'we' swung into a social action aggressively to guard its privileges and status. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) together with the religious emotive symbol and political agenda of keeping the interests of the upper castes, have gone into the action of demolition of Babri Masjid, anti-Muslims riots in Mumbai, the ghastly rape of Muslim women in Surat and the continuous attack and destruction of Christians and their institutions.

Hindutva intellectuals do propagate its ideology through high research. Around 180 frontal organisations make this Parivar a strong and well-structured group. One of the active organisations, the *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad* has proposed to

form a *Guru Sabha*<sup>1</sup>, which will rule the country. They want to redraft the Article 25 of the constitution dropping "propagate" religion, but to keep the freedom to practice and profess religion, which are linked with national security requirements. They propose mainly five points for the *Hindu Rashtra*: 1) Bringing about a Brahminical social order; 2) Majority (poor) shall lose their voting rights; 3) Reservation only for the elite; 4) Minorities become second-class citizens; and 5) Supreme Court will be made the servant of *Guru Sabha*. These ideas are floated to check the reaction of the people. It also reveals the game plan of different organisations of Sangh Parivar to continue the dominance by the powerful caste groups (*Indian Currents*, August 20, 2000:21).

Hindutva project has three essential characteristics:

- (a) It is **hegemonic** in the sense that Sangh Parivar imposes its values by force on others. Hinduism is the only religion that should grow and Christianity and Islam should not grow in this land and all people must accept the *Hindu Dharma*; otherwise it challenges to face the consequences to be other than Hindu in the country.
- (b) It is **homogenising**. It aims at national consensus based on a homogenised Hindu identity. The diverse, creative and critical impulses in the Indian tradition are negated. The multi-religious and pluri-cultural identities and their traditions are not recognised as part of Indian tradition, but promotes only one identity – Hindu identity.
- © It follows the pedagogy of recapturing and releasing the **power of symbols and deities** that catch the attention of the people. This attempts to show an illusion of solidarity and takes the persons into uncertainty and disorderly situation. The selection and use of these symbols, events and actors are also associated with pedagogic violence (Louis, 2000:76-77).

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<sup>1</sup> *Guru Sabha* members will be elected from an electoral college consisting of school and college teachers, research scholars, and professors who shall set the basic policies of the country. The prime minister and the cabinet would merely implement and monitor the policies.

The goal of *Hindutvawadis* is to form a *Hindu Rashtra* which is not a religious state. It is a 'modern phenomenon' to impose the pre-modern social hierarchies on all sections of society. *Hindu Rashtra* is threatening to engulf the society and continue a status quo vis-à-vis social position of women, workers, Dalits and Adivasis (Ram, 111).

They have clear-sighted aim to establish Hitler's Aryan rule in India, and impose *Manu Code* with its caste-norms. As for the Nazis, Jews were a great threat, the *Hindutvawadis* consider the Muslims, Christians, Dalits, socialists and modern Hindus as threats. For *Hindutvawadis*, speaking against the exploitation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is anti-national. In the recent earthquake (26<sup>th</sup> January, 2001) in Gujarat, a journalist was accused as anti-national by the BJP MLA Nalin Bhat, because of reporting the discrimination against the minorities in the relief that was distributed by the Government (*Indian Express*, 10 February, 2001).

Hindutva in essence is Fascism. Both share the commonality, the same social base. Hindutva is a sub-acute, chronic fascism of a caste-ridden, hierarchy structured, and oppressive ideology. Hindutva's core rests on the rich farmers; the industrialist and multiple segments of middle classes (bureaucracy, professionals, traders, etc.) latched on to the big capital. Hindutva has socio-economic and political agenda of dominance.

In 1947 Nehru wrote, "we have a great deal of evidence to show that the RSS is an organisation in the nature of a private army which is definitely proceeding on the strictest Nazi lines, even following techniques of the organisation" (quoted by Jafferlot 1996:87). Although we see the hidden agenda, an ordinary person can be confused by the message that they sent to people; one of the methodologies is double speak. Writing on the purpose of VHP, Pandya says, "The birth of Vishwa Hindu Parishad is for the unity and integrity of the country and the moral regeneration of Hindu society, its survival with self respect and uplift of Harijans, Girijans and other weaker sections." But the message is clear by the following appeal, "But it (VHP) cannot continue its work without physical and financial help from each of you" (Pandya, 28). Hence this approach of seeming unity is only to collect funds and the real motive of VHP is seen in its ideology.

The approach to Dalits, Tribals and Women is very complex and one sees a hidden script and hidden agenda in approaching them. Understanding the weak, non-people and oppressed people is a *dharma* of Christianity. Hence a brief understanding of Hindutva on these marginalized people are given below.

### 1. Dalits

From the ideology of the Hindutva, one denotes that the champions of Hindu nationalism, that is, Brahminical communal nationalism want to continue the Hindu hegemony over others.

The *Hindu Rashtra* campaign successfully took the social agenda away from the problems of Dalits - the untouchability, poverty, inequality and discrimination. By taking away from their rights and dignity, the Hindutva forces roused an intense campaign to co-opt Dalits into the Hindutva fold. Along with this they have started various programmes to impose the Brahminical culture and value systems on them. The complex machinations are being well orchestrated by different groups of the Sangh Parivar.

The Ayodhya movement has lured the Dalit participation in the program like attacks on Indian Muslims. The All Hindu Kamandal project is today promoted to woo the Dalits to become Bajrang Dal *shakhas* for arms training on salaries of Rs.5000 to 10,000 per month. The RSS and VHP leaders remembered the first anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya with the images of Ram and Dr.Ambedkar. These leaders praised Dr.Ambedkar in order to co-opt Ambedkarites into the Brahminical fold. This can be called 'Brahminization' process. This has apparently shown that the Dalits are part of the Hindu fold and the Sangh Parivar.

For the continuity of power in politics, the Sangh Parivar needs to get the support of the Dalits and Tribals. The assimilation and co-opting process is mainly to hold on to the power and not for any emancipation or equalitarian state. Appointment of Bangaru Laxman as BJP President is seen in this light of co-option, rather than accepting Dalits as equals in the Hindu society.

After 1993, the BJP had to admit low caste people because of their growing political consciousness. Uma Bharati, an OBC woman became the chief of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha. K.N.Govindacharya, a Brahmin was the main advocate of the

inclusion of an increasing number of low-caste people at all levels. To continue in power, they have to keep intact their regular vote bank.

Sangh Parivar has indulged in manipulation of Dalits in rural and slum areas. A youth in Munnusami Nagar of Chennai stated that the RSS renamed Ambedkar Night School into Hindu Samrajya School. He said, "They taught us to say that RSS is our mother and BJP our father. They also claimed that Ambedkar was a RSS activist and distributed key chains bearing the image of Ambedkar...When bomb blast took place in the RSS office we were offered huge sum of money to spread the rumour that the Muslims were responsible for the blast" (Anandhi, 1995:37). Among the slum dwellers of Chennai, the consistent effort of the RSS is to translate the Hindutva worldview as a popular perception. RSS has also succeeded to intensify Dalits' identification with collective 'Hinduness' as a way of subverting their marginality (Anandhi, 1995:41).

Shankaracharya of Govardhan Peeth in Puri Jagatguru Nishchalanda Saraswati has stated that 'low-cost' temples be built for the Dalits and Tribals who convert from Christianity and Islam. He has advocated that they should not enter the existing Hindu temples and they should not also marry other Hindus. They will have low-cost *Swastika* temples dedicated to Lord Ganesh (*Indian Express*, 9 June, 2000). Hence promoting the separation concept from dominant castes, he has clearly indicated where and how the converted Dalits and Tribals will be in Hindu society.

## 2. Tribals

In the lexicon of Hindutva, the word *adivasis* has disappeared. The Sangh Parivar prefers to call them *vanvasis* (dwellers of forests). By not calling them as *Adivasis*, an attempt is made to reduce the Tribals to a people without a history. The shift from *adi* to *van* is a change from having a history to a spatially fixed location—forests (Louis, 2000:133).<sup>2</sup> This metamorphosis is the

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<sup>2</sup> The difference between the terms *Jharkhand* and *Vananchal* in the political field is given in detail as a table by Prakash Louis, 134-35.

fallout of a deliberate policy of the Sangh to deny the Tribals the status they deserve. The *Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad*, an affiliated body of Sangh started in 1952, is part of their plan to rewrite the history. The reason why the Sangh denies Adivasis the status of the original dwellers is that it runs counter to their own Aryans, history of a *Vedic* civilisation of the country, and who dare to be the original inhabitants of the land (*Indian Express*, 8 March 1998).

There are many initiatives taken for the Hinduisation of Adivasis, the most important being the *Ramshila Pujan*, *Rathyatra* of Advani, *Ramjyoti* and *Kar Seva*. Adivasis are encouraged to light the fire from *Ramjyothi*, which was carried by a *minirath*. Speeches are given to instigate Adivasis to drive out Muslims and Christians from their areas (Pinto, 1995:2417). During the *Ramshhila Pujan* in 1984, a token collection of Rs. 1.25 was taken from Adivasis by asking them a question: 'Are you Hindus?' If you are, then prove it by contributing Rs.1.25 for *Ramshila Pujan*. If not, then prove that you have come from a Muslim womb!' (Pinto, 1995:2417). Sangh Parivar and some Adivasi politicians have succeeded in inculcating the Hindutva ideology in the minds of the Adivasis people. Adivasis "have seized the opportunity to embrace Hinduism, which is the religion of the majority and considered to be one of the oldest religions in the world. The adoption of a wider identity is the crux of the matter for the Adivasis, but Hindutva supporters on the other hand are aware of the importance of keeping the Adivasis within the Hindu fold in order to secure Hindu hegemony" (Patel, 1999: 204).

Hedgewar said that the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes should not be put on a pedestal. They should be treated equally (Malkani, 1980:73). By advocating their equality, a denial of their culture and identity is propagated. Activities from Hindu organisations have very systematically used Adivasis politicians, Bhagats, Sarpanchs, Police Patels and some primary school teachers to spread Hindutva ideology and to instigate communal riots. Expulsion and elimination of Muslims from Adivasis locations was proposed as solution.

Hindutva activists have founded in most taluk headquarters their *shakhas*, such as *Hindu Milan Mandir*, *Swaminarayan*, *Swadhyay*, *Ram Krishna*, *Radha Krishna*, etc. There are also *shakhas* of the RSS,

VHP, BJP, etc. They all propagate Hinduism and try to convince the Adivasis that they will benefit from Hinduism.

Moneylenders and forest officials oppressed the Tribals in South Gujarat, especially in the Dang district. They were organised by some leftist groups led by Irfan Engineer and companions, but the Government labelled them as naxalites. The NGOs too pulled out from the area because of Government harassment. Congress party was weak and corrupt and thus became inefficient in the Tribal belt. Then, the Sangh Parivar organisations entered the area and successfully divided the Tribals as Hindu Adivasis and others. The Sangh Parivar began to co-opt the Hinduised Dalits and Tribals for votes and also made use of them to attack the Christians and Muslims (Valiamangalam, 2000:7).

When the Tribals are Hinduised they are given generally a low caste rank, equivalent to untouchables in society. In South Gujarat, the *Hapliti* or *Dubla* tribe has been highly Hinduised and given a very low caste rank. They mostly work as bonded labourers for the dominant castes like *Patidars* and *Desais*. Hindutva forces insist that the Tribals are Hindus and keep them as a backward class in society to utilise them for cheap labour.

It is pertinent to deal with the question, 'Are Tribals Hindus?' In the revival of Hindu fundamentalism, the Sangh Parivar is trying all its strategies to make others believe that the Tribals are Hindus and goes on with mass conversion drives of Hinduisation of Tribals. John Lakra argues against this claim. He argues that on the basis of religious, cultural, and legal considerations, Tribals are not Hindus. The Hindus have Scriptures like the *Srutis*, *Smritis*, the *Epics*, the *Puranas* and *Darshanas*. The Tribals on the other hand have oral traditions in the form of *Creation Story*, *Karam Story*, *Asur Kahani*, etc. The Hindus believe in *Nirguna* and *Saguna Brahman*, the Tribes believe in the Supreme Being whom they call *Dharmes* in *Kurukh*, *Singbonga* in *Mundari* and *Ponomosor* in *Kharia*. Besides gods, Hindus also worship goddesses. But in the Tribal worldview, there is only one Supreme Being. They also have worship of spirits, ancestor spirits as well as guardian spirits. While the Hindus make pilgrimages to holy places, the Tribals do not have this practice according to their belief system (Lakra, 1999:5-12; Louis, 2000:135-36). Hinduism is based on *Varna* system on the basis of which the hierarchical system is established. But the Tribal society

is divided into different tribes and tribes into clans. There is no superior or inferior among the Tribals. They are egalitarian in ethos. Even constitutionally, the Tribals are different from the caste groups. Besides they have a provision for Scheduled Tribes, the *Hindu Marriage Act* and the *Hindu Succession Act* make it quite clear that the Tribals are not included within the class to whom the Act applies. The ploy of the Sangh Parivar is clearly to amalgamate all Tribals, their cultures and identity into one umbrella of Hinduism.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Women

Understanding the place of women in the Hindutva ideology is very complex. Gender discrimination can be understood only in the concepts of secularism and equality, because the Hindu right seeks to redefine these concepts in accordance with its vision of Hindutva. The Hindu right is seeking to reconstitute women in and through the image of the Hindu nation, and of reconstituting the nation in and through the image of Hindu women.

The Hindu right restates its patriarchal concepts. This assertion of the greater dignity, even the concept of chaste and good Hindu women covertly substitutes for, and ultimately displaces a demand for equal rights. One comes across several messages from *Hindutvawadis*. Mridula Sinha, ex-president of BJP *Mahila Morcha*, in an interview in 1993 stated: a) A woman should not work outside the home unless her family is financially very deprived; b) Give dowry and receive dowry; c) We oppose women's liberation, as it is another name for 'loose morals'; d) We oppose equal rights for both sexes; e) There is nothing wrong with domestic violence against women; very often it is women's fault; we advice women to try and adjust, as her non-adjustment creates

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<sup>3</sup> A personal interview with Louis Toppo of Rourkela (31 January 2001) reveals how the actual hinduisation of Tribals is going on in Sundergarh district. He expressed that Kisan tribe people are leaving their original Tribal surnames viz. Minz, Lakra, Ekka, Tirkey, Toppo, Rajhi, and adopting alien surnames like, Panigrahi, Rahopatro, Bhera, Das, Nayak, etc. Tribals are made to believe that if they adopt the upper caste surnames, they can improve from their tribal background. Once Louis Toppo asked a tribal boy, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Gomiha Khodia - I am a Hindu." There are many instances that show that the Tribal identity is being wiped out by many methodologies used by Hindutvawadis in that area.

the problem; f) Women's future lies in perpetuating the present, because nowhere else women are worshipped as we are in India; g) Women's liberation means liberation from atrocities, it does not mean they should be relieved of their duties as wives and mothers (Louis, 2000:88)<sup>4</sup>. Another BJP ex-President, Vijaya Raje Scindia, led a group of women in protest march against 'anti-sati' legislation, asserting that "it is the fundamental right of Hindu women to commit *sati*, as it is in preservation of our past glory and culture" (Louis, 2000:88).

BJP women leaders like Vijayaraje Scindia and Mridula Sinha have defended the practice of *sati*. The VHP woman leader of Krishna Sharma has demanded that women should return to their homes unless they are impelled by dire economic necessity. She has also defended dowry and polygamy as traditional resources and signs of cultural autonomy. The VHP leader Bamdavi has also promoted male polygamy and the abolition of divorce among Hindus (Sarkar, 2000). It seems that Hindu patriarchy has once again emerged as the embodiment of preferred values. It portrays that women must forget about gender rights to ensure community supremacy over others.

The film director Deepa Mehta says that the film "Water" tries to show how the Hindu tradition that prohibits re-marriage of widows leads to their abandoned women flocking to holy places for refuge and eventually to their exploitation. This includes depiction of pushing widows into prostitution. The Hindu fundamentalists did not want this truth to be portrayed. Finally the police officials asked the crew to leave Varanasi on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2000. (*Indian Currents*, 20 February 2000:28)

Sankaracharya Nishchalanda also has said, woman should not read the Vedas, and they should not be given the right to property because in every situation she lives under the guardianship of a man (*Indian Express*, 6 June 2000). In Pune, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevika Samiti* (Women's wing of the RSS) is

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<sup>4</sup> The interview in *The Telegraph*, 27 December, 1992 is quoted by Prakash Louis.

disciplining Hindu women into being good mothers, and good wives.

The question is whether this ideology helps women's empowerment or reflects a manipulated, falsely constructed consent and intentionality. One cannot write off the gender ideology of the Hindu right as unproblematically fundamentalist despite its overarching conservative patriarchal system that is prevalent in society. On the one hand, this has brought them to be activists, to assume public roles, to have more bargaining power within their homes, and to move beyond a purely domestic or feminine identity. At the same time, one notices unabashed fundamentalism in its approach.

Hindutva uses religious imagery, glorifies the 'golden past' of the rule of Hindu kings, sees women primarily under patriarchal control dictating their way of life, dress code, etc.. It co-opts all the sundry religious professionals and personnel to strengthen its ideology and political base and it uses religion to evoke sentiments creating national hysteria (Ram, 115).

Anandhi notes, "the important agenda of Hindutva has been of projecting in the public the militantly communal woman as a new woman by reversing the roles and images of Hindu womanhood. This reversal of roles seems to have equipped the communal woman with a new and empowering self-image" (Anandhi, 1995:37-38). One wonders what is the effect of this transformation in society. Women's right wing organisation, *Surakhsa*, does not want a revival of *Ram Rajya* because they feel that *Ram Rajya* will subjugate women and it would only boost the erstwhile patriarchal norms (*The Times of India*, 24 January, 2000). Many thinkers say that Hindutva has a ploy to subjugate women, and the equality, dignity and rights of women will be eroded in future.

#### 4. Why Violence?

Hundreds of books, booklets, pamphlets, documents and handouts are being printed and distributed to propagate the Hindutva ideology. Some of the widely circulated Hindutva literature can be summed up as follows: (i) missionaries' involvement in mass conversions by incentives, deceit, allurements,

coercion, (ii) denigration of Hindu deities and Scriptures, (iii) atrocities and torture of Hindus by Christians, (iv) Tribals being branded as Hindus and *Vanvasis*. The thrust of the entire propaganda is to create an atmosphere of hatred and abhorrence towards the Christian minority.

Hindutva is essentially an outfit of socio-economic and political fundamentalism that pretends to be an agent of Hindu revivalism. In effect, Hindu nationalism is the conflict between brahminical social orders and the outcasted Dalits, Tribals and women. It is a struggle between a patriarchal society and women; it is a long drawn out battle between the hegemonic and homogenising trends of the upper castes and the pluralistic tendencies of the downtrodden. It is a conflict of interests and human dignity between the dominant caste/class rulers and the working caste/class people. The entire Hindutva drive is aimed against the merging of backward castes, Dalits and Tribals as one powerful group.

Savarkar's slogan of "Hinduise all politics and militarise Hinduism" exposes the myth of Hindu tolerance (*The Statesman*, 26 February, 1999). Dilipsingh Judeb, a self-proclaimed 'liberator of Tribals', told the Hindu women at the prayer service in Sundargarh district on January 21, 2000, "Beat them (Christian priests and nuns) up with brooms wherever you see them." He also told them that out of 13 lakh people in that district 3 lakh are Christians and they should be converted to Hinduism.

They advocate revenge for the works being carried out in Tribal areas by the missionaries. Christians continue to work for the upliftment of the Dalits, organise Tribals to assert their identity, empower the women in society. Thus the integral approach of socio-economic and political growth is the one followed by the committed missionaries. Certainly this is not the interest of the *Hindutvawadis*. What to do? Violence seems to come as a strategy to flush out missionaries from the Tribal and Dalit area. One of the documents in Gujarat says, ". . . we should implicate the top authorities of the mission and if possible foreign missionaries also. They may not be convicted in the court in the end, but they should be made to go up and down in the court for months on end and thus their having to undergo harassment is also a type of punishment" (*Communalism Combat*, April 2000:20). Analysing the

situations of violence, Rawat says, "As long as assertion among the oppressed communities for their rights continues, as long as their fight for dignity continues, as long as they reject the existing social system, the attacks on Muslims and Christians would continue" (Rawat, 2000: 27).

Bajrang Dal promotes violence by their cadre and also organises camps to promote this idea. After one of the camps in June, 2000 Prakash Sharma, national Convenor of Bajrang Dal, said, "We are training them in handling firearms since 1996. Twenty five such camps were being organised in 25 states to inculcate chivalry among the youth." Asserting this violent nature one activist said, "if you don't do *tod-phod*, no one notices. But when people read that we have beaten up padres, every body sits up and takes notice" (*The Times of India*, 2 July, 2000). This explains the violent campaign in which they are engaged in to control the activities of the Christians.

VHP general secretary Giriraj Kishore said in Chandigarh on November 25, 1998, "Today the Christians constitute a greater threat than the collective threat from separatist Muslim elements." The Hindutva forces attack the Christian missionaries today because the work of Christian missionaries among the oppressed groups goes against the interests of the Hindutva ideology of dominance.

The events of 1998-99 in Gujarat and Orissa and the recent attacks on Christians confirm the Sangh Parivar's well-orchestrated campaign of violence. M.V. Kamath's recent article suggests that violence on Churches and missionaries are justified because of conversion activities (*The Times of India*, 13 October, 1999). Public order, morality and health are used to justify killings and physical attacks. These trends justifying violence and mobilising Dalits and Tribals for violent attacks are serious issues today (Stanislaus, 2000:176).

The distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism must be clear. Unlike Hinduism, Hindutva is an ideology of violence and a not merely a movement that happens to employ violence. As "an ideology of violence, it needs a hate-object to keep itself alive, and must express itself through aggression and vandalism" (*The Pioneer*, 30 January, 1999).

## II. Christian Response

The lower castes embraced Christianity to avoid the atrocities, ridicule, loss of dignity, and humiliations that they had to suffer under the caste system. They needed a new identity in order to escape exploitation. Even today, although by and large conversions from lower castes have stopped, they use the conversion threat as a tool against the oppression by upper or dominant castes. The recent examples of Meeknakshipuram in Tamilnadu and Mehesana in Gujarat will suffice. Lancy Lobo says, "Conversion is a bogey created by Hindutva. The negligible quixotic Christian outfits come handy to *Hindutvawadis* to smear the entire Christian body as seeking to convert, destroy local cultures, indulge in secessionism, and so on" (Lobo, 2000:164).

One subtle instrument of oppression of the Hindutva is their interpretation of the act of conversion itself. One can easily say that the entire propaganda and opposition to conversion of Dalits is that these oppressed groups should not attain equality or enjoy justice by conversion. The lesson given to Dalits is that they should not resort to conversion under any circumstances and, if they have done so, they must reconvert to avail themselves of the benefits of reservation (Stanislaus, 2000:137). The broader issue is how the whole marginalized group can get justice and live in harmony.

### 1. Actualising Just society

Christianity does not accept the ideal society of Hindutva. On the contrary, following the teachings of Jesus, it promotes a just society where everyone is equal and respected, enjoy human dignity and rights, value others' presence, and has just relationships. In a just society, there is no discrimination, manipulation, domination, and hegemony. Everyone becomes sons and daughters of the loving God. The Church needs to work towards this ideal where love reigns, peace dwells, and justice is upheld. Michael says, "The Hindu revivalism is based on the presumption that the ancient Hindus had already achieved an ideal society with the *varnavyavastha*... The oppressed masses on the other hand look for ways to demolish the *varnavyavastha*" (Michael, 2001:24).

In liberation of the Dalits, non-Dalits must realise that they are part of the problem. Being part of the oppressor group, they have to repent and apologise, and play a prophetic role with their

own castes/class. The Dalits are the crucified of our land, cast outside the mainstream of society and at times of the Church (Heb. 13:13; cf. 13:2-3). It is with them that Jesus the Crucified identifies himself today. The Church must enter into their *pathos*, and identify with their suffering and insert itself into their subaltern reality. That is the way of incarnation (Rayan, 2001:120; see Stanislaus, 1999:351-56). That is the divine plan and it should be our plan too. In this process, the Christians move to the margins listening to God through the struggles and experiences of the suppressed identities. "The vocation of Christians is to be permanently at the margins with God and the oppressed ones" (Wilfred, 2000:227).

The poor Tribals are denied access to ownership to land. Even the small plots of land that they own are alienated from them in the name of development. A.T.Thomas, Rani Maria, Graham Steins and Aruldoss were working for the Dalits and Tribals. Their faith commitment led them to organise and mobilise the people and free them from the clutches of the dominant castes. This led them to the cross and they were brutally murdered.

Working among the Tribals is our mission mandate. In contextualising the words of Luke 4:16-20, and the martyrdom of A.T. Thomas, Prakash Louis writes about him, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has sent me to *Chiropat* to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to *Jamuniat* and to heal the sick, he has sent me to *Jadugura* to give sight to those who are affected by the uranium mines, and to *Tarwa* to release those in bondage, and announce the eruption of the Kingdom of the Dalits and the Tribals" (Louis, 2000a:761).

Working for a just society demands four aspects: (a) analysing the social realities, especially those that dehumanise the Dalits, Tribals and women. Special study to understand the manipulative ideologies; (b) solidarity with people, i.e. being immersed in their lives; (c) Carrying constantly the conflicts, crisis and crosses of the people to faith reflection; and (d) commitment to for liberative action from Hindutva and other dominant forces, this leads to a cycle of action – faith reflection – action. (see Louis, 2000a:761).

The present state of Dalits and Hindutva ideology demands that the Church commit itself to work for the integral liberation of all the Dalits. The following are three important ways to participate

in liberation among Dalits: (i) promoting Dalit solidarity; (ii) emphasising education; and (iii) developing the Dalit consciousness (see Stanislaus, 1999:338-51).

The Hindutva organisations cannot stand with Amartya Sen and Mother Theresa who were for social change. "Meanwhile they (*Hindutvawadis*) are eloquent champions of socialism, preach *swadeshi*, mouth secularist formulae, cry hoarse about national interests and the security of the nation, and remain suppressors of minorities!" (Menamparambil, 2000:338). One needs to understand their hidden motives, double speak and appeasing attitudes. It is the leverage of power, which the ruling elite is still not ready to give up. V.P. Singh opened those closed doors of power for the Dalits and Tribals. The Church needs to continue empowering and mobilising the marginalized for a just society.

In society, lasting positive reforms do not come through revolutions, but through challenging beliefs, values, traditions and customs and enabling people to see true meaning in life. In the Asian context religion plays vital role in moulding ones' life style, values and ethos. Since metaphysics and morality legitimise the caste-hierarchy and related evils, our mission is to challenge this conglomeration and change them together with people. That is moving towards a just society (see Michael, 1999:111-16).

The Church in her mission of witness and service is called to bring peace and to resist all anti-peace forces because it has received the gift of peace from the Risen Lord. "We need to recognise that the forces of death and destruction will resist and create hurdles to the peace enterprise. Working for peace is a double task: building bridges, and struggling against anti-peace situations and structures of violence that dehumanise persons and communities. We do not work for any kind of peace but peace as the harvest of justice (cf. Is. 32:17)" (Arokiasamy, 2001:3). Continuous oppression of Dalits, well-orchestrated move to marginalize the Tribals and the ideologies of exclusion in the name of gender, caste, religion, culture, language, and ethnicity – all these forms of violence negate that peace is the harvest of justice. For peace without justice will not be real peace. This demands that we participate in the sufferings of the people and show solidarity with the victims in their struggle to achieve peace with justice. Working for a culture of peace demands that we engage in a

politics of peace. This involves collaborating with people's movements for human rights, justice, freedom, and solidarity. The Church has enormous responsibility to work with the people's movements to attain peace. The future of the Church in India will depend on its witness to the love of the divine and work for the equality of persons, thus build up a just society where the poor and the marginalised are deeply respected.

## 2. Asserting Identity

In the context of a monocultural identity propagated by the *Hindutvawadis*, the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of identity can be done in two ways: (a) a group renounces a historical injustice and announces a new identity to fight for justice, (b) a group joins the majority group and inherits their identity. The newly constructed identity of Dalits or indigenous people belongs to the second category of reconstruction of identity. Although we can find the first trend in the world, some groups and tribes want to identify with major religious identity or dominant groups' identity. A few marginalized groups do not appreciate their unique culture and in this process they too become part of dominance together with majority over others (Mathias, 2000:131).

The Church challenges the social reality of society. The missionaries question the denial of identity of the oppressed. Similar criticism that stirred Rammohan Roy, Tagore, Ranade, Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji, Nehru and many others and led them to action. Even today P.R.Ram, Justice Shekar, Teesta and many others are also stirred to change the existing fabric that is advocated as 'Hinduism' by the *Hindutvawadis*. Arun Shourie and others cannot blame the missionaries for the right questions they asked about the social traditions and denial of their identity. Wilfred says, "What Hindutva offers is an oppressive nationalism. It is oppressive, because it has no or little room for the various identities; no place for the aspirations of the various groups; no opportunity for the representation of smaller groups and minorities through their symbols" (Wilfred, 2000, 219). Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has stated that to define the Indian identity as a Hindu one would be to undermine the tradition of heterodoxy (*The Times of India*, 3 March, 2001).

The uprising of Jyotirao Phule and Ambedkar, and their movements in Indian society represent the effort of the

downtrodden masses to construct an alternative identity for themselves, based on the cultural values of equality, fraternity and social justice. Periyar, Sree Narayana Guru, Ayankali and others challenged the oppressive social practices, which are legalised by Hinduism. They also strived to assert the Dalit identity.

Analysing the realities and the struggles of Tribals, Tirkey observes, "the old and the new Adivasi identities harmonise well with nature and its resources, viz, *jal, jungle, jameen* (water, forest, land). With mutual dialogue, they are in search of a greater, inclusive, united and collective Adivasi identity with a strong sense of common *adivasisness (tribalness)* despite their differing religious affiliations and the vigorous campaign of making different cultures part of one single Hindu culture by the Hindutva force" (Tirkey, 2001:155). Adivasi culture has to be respected, preserved and developed. Their stories, myths, songs, dances and the whole way of life should be enriched. Inculturation demands promoting their identity and culture and at the same time the message of the Gospel is inserted in fulfilling their culture to realise the Kingdom of God.

Through the use of violence and imposing the Hindutva ideologies, even the good natured and open Hindus, Muslims and Christians shelve themselves in their ghettos and internalise the message of the dominant forces. "Identity and mobility are what people make of themselves and their lives, individually and collectively, in religion as in other spheres of life. A true democracy should enable people to be themselves and to be creative and yet to live together in larger communities recognising, respecting and accepting others" (Amaladoss, 2000:674).

Adivasi leaders allege that the Hindutva has imposed their beliefs, their faith and their culture on the Adivasis in the name of one nation, one religion and one culture. They have realised the upper-caste imposition, and hence they critically observe the day-to-day behaviour and attitudes of the upper castes. They feel that others politically manipulate them in the name of Hindutva.

The Hindutva forces become in the recent times "culture cops" who protect "Indian Culture" not allowing the Valentine Day or New Year celebrations, and use violence to stop any celebration which would be alien to them. RSS's Marital Code of Conduct decries the concept of honeymoon and RSS asserts

feminism is anarchic and the West inspires it. It seems any thing that is Western is evil or morally incorrect. This is absurd. One needs to analyse culture and take the good elements and leave the bad elements or resist the evils, which are coming from any culture, because culture is made by a society. Since RSS promotes so-called "Hindu Culture" or "Indian culture," society should not bow down to their aggression and their design of hegemony.

Among the many identities, which are striving for political space, 'Hindu identity' of Dalits is gaining more ground now. The Dalit identity emerges from history, pain and suffering, this is based on the progressive elements of the subaltern/Dalit common sense (Anandhi, 1995:43). Commitment to the liberation of Dalits and Tribals means to appreciate their identity and respect their culture, traditions and history, and also to empower them with a critical consciousness to discern the various ploys by others who seek to consume their identity.

While studying the identity issue of Madiga community of Andhra Pradesh, Jose Maliekal concludes that Madiga community has multiple layers of the cultural (social), the autonomous (psychological), and the identity seeking (political) problems. "They stand in dialectical, but symbiotic and synergetic relationship in the matrix of Madiga life" (Maliekal, 2001:36). When conscientisation process takes place, their subaltern identity is asserted and this in turn should give them a humane character to their community. The challenge of the Church is to show them a process that can enable them to assert their identity and with this to work their own liberation; this is a path of mission today (Stanislaus, 2000:187).

### **3. Empowering Women**

Both BJP and RSS discourses on women are characterised by internally inconsistent statements. Within the Sangh Parivar, we can see two distinct positions constituting the Hindu woman-moderate/conservative position and a fundamentalist position. Underlying these different positions is a common thread-of women as *matri shakti*, as wives and mothers, as strong Hindu women. The problem is the understanding of Hindu right in relation to dignity, right and equality of women.

Women's rights are at the centre of controversies. At the behest of Uniform Civil Code, an attempt is made to Hinudise the

laws in the name of a "national culture" which aims at confining women to their homes, isolates them from education and denies their freedom. Religious fundamentalism, communalism and caste chauvinism assert a control and hegemony that is antagonistic to women's interest in democracy or human dignity (Louis, 2000: 110).

Closer attention paid to the feminine face of the divine is a way to restore the dignity of women and would pave the way for empowering them as equal partners with men in the search for a just society. "As Indian Christians, we are called to foster solidarity with all women. Networking with secular women's groups and NGOs that work with women for their empowerment must form an essential part of our social programmes. This support, however, must go beyond an empathetic reaching out to the recognition of our human connectedness that transcends the gender divide" (ITA no.47).

Dialogue with other religions could move in the direction of respecting and liberating women. Wilfred says, "It is not enough to modify and re-interpret the tenets of religion so as to purge them of the patriarchal, sexist and androcentric elements. It is also very important that religions involve themselves and take position regarding concrete issues affecting the dignity and rights of women" (Wilfred, 2000:176). Feminists in the Church remind us, "In Jesus' community, there should be but 'discipleship of equals'. It is a question of drawing from this vision that leads to actual praxis in society" (Wilfred, 2000:177).

Through various women's movements we are witnessing the surge of women's empowerment and their political consciousness. The Christians need to join hands with these movements and work for empowerment of them. If need be social protest, *satyagraha*, and non-co-operation should be exercised to assert their identity and rights in society.

#### **4. Promoting Pluri-Cultures**

The age-old civilisation of India is pluralistic and India has diverse peoples, races, cultures, religions, traditions, and languages. Hindutva advocates an ideology of a monolithic culture based on a single religious tradition. Constitution of our country is drawn and promulgated after healthy debate on the pluralistic nature of Indian society. Citizenship is not defined on the basis of

an adherence to a particular culture or religion, but on the basis of common participation in secular nation irrespective of any culture or religion (Michael, 2000:24). Hindutva forces are hijacking Indian culture and their thesis on Indian culture has virtually brought the nation to the brink of chaos. The anthropological facts have been treated with some illusion to prove the concept of 'Hindu culture.' Today, the question raised is which is the mainstream culture? What is the place of the subaltern cultures?

The pluralistic Indian civilisation cannot be sacrificed on the altar of a monolithic religious nationalism. The nationalism propounded by Hindutva is distorted, and undemocratic. It rejects the identities of peoples other than Hindus. Even among the Hindus, only the Brahminical Hindu culture is considered as mainstream.

Understanding the importance of other religions and cultures, "Following the Second Vatican Council, the Church has been inviting all Catholics to a dialogue in an attempt to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral values found in other religions, in the society and Culture (NA 2; EN 53; RM 55; EA 31). It seeks to join hands with them to work towards a world of peace, liberty, human dignity, social justice and moral value" (CCBI Consultation 2000, 122-23). The Christians have to be rooted in their faith and also should know Indian cultures so that they "can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and the Asian Cultures" (EA 6). In the present day context, inculturation and dialogue would mean respecting the multi-cultural and ideological variety of Indian traditions.

Asserting the importance of pluralism Felix Wilfred says, "I think that pluralism in Asia is ultimately a question of justice. Denial of pluralism kills justice before destroying true unity. It is by affirming the 'difference that the poor have a chance to reclaim their very selves. *Pluralism is, thus, the defence as well as the hope of the poor against the powerful who stand for an agenda of pseudo-unity.* In this scenario, the hope-giving mission the Churches could play is to be active agents of pluralism" (Wilfred, 2001:104).

## **5. Participation in Nation Building**

The RSS strategies, the upper caste oppressive mentality, and the elite indolence, manipulate structures and systems to continue their hegemony. The aggressiveness against minorities is not to be

fought outside India with foreign forces, but we need to fight against them here together with the masses. The Hindus are not the 'Other.' We live with them and with other religions. Archbishop Thomas Menamparambil says, "It is within this (Hindu) great civilisation that we live and move, find our identity and carry out our mission. The Hindu civilisation is longing for fulfilment. It is to the realisation of that deep-rooted longing that we are committed. It is for that we strain our every nerve. What we need to do is not to declare a war on the high and mighty, or threaten them with fire and brimstone. What we need is constant interaction, creative and critical dialogue, mutual education, and collaborative effort" (Menamparambil, 2000:341).

RSS definition of nation is not acceptable. It is monocultural negating other religions and people. The struggle between the Brahminical forces under the disguise of Hindu nationalism on the one hand and the dream for an egalitarian, pluralistic and democratic Indian state and society on the other, will determine the direction and the destiny of Indian state and society.

Believers of different religions are "co-pilgrims guiding one another towards the one transcendent goal" (Pope John Paul II, Assisi, 1986). *Indian Theological Association* asserts, "It is on this common pilgrimage that we share our spiritual experience with one another, collaborate in the building up of our nation and in the promotion of peace, justice, and human rights, thereby demonstrating our total commitment to national integration. Thus believers of different religions enter an ongoing process of dialogue by which each religion is constantly helped to work out its liberative potential for the integral well-being of all humankind (Kingdom of God/ *Yogakshemam/ Lokasamgraha/ Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*)" (ITA, no.34).

The Church must pay closer attention to issues like cultural identity, national integration and development. Patriotism should not only be believed, but openly practised. Building our nation in the light of values of the Kingdom is our mission. The Church has to work with all strata of society. "Hence Christians cannot shy away from the thorny issue of diverse identities and nationalism, and they should give unambiguous support to any political, legal, or social measures in favour of the oppressed, marginalized and

other subaltern groups, including all religious minorities whose freedom is to be defended" (ITA, no. 39).

Mere statements may not carry conviction. Ultimately, the very causes of the poor for whom the Christians involve themselves have to be in the public sphere and in the ambit of the broader civil society (Wilfred, 2001:107). The Christian community must enter into the space of civil society where they meet, interact, debate, form opinions, etc. The Christian community must participate in the public discussion on contentious issues, and should benefit from the opportunities provided by civil society to make clear its motives and actions (Wilfred, 2001:107).

Taking the bull by its horns is spelt by Wilfred in the following way: "The type of Christianity that is conscious of the social and political implications of the Gospel and is committed to the transformation of society, to the emancipation of the lowest, transcending particular loyalties, and is in continuous dialogue with the civil society on all such issues, will be also the one which can effectively challenge the Hindutva" (Wilfred, 2000:207).

The Church needs to create a common form of dialogue with other religions and liberative action with other NGO groups, through which mutual misunderstanding, hatred, discord and discrimination will cease to exist and we could together build up a nation with justice, peace and harmony.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion I would like to present a vision of Mission; it envisages "a continuous dialogue with religions and civil society in general leading to the creation of wider human communities that transcend local and limited identities yet having their roots in them, such mission will indeed render them worthy inheritors of the legacy of their master, the suffering Servant, whose striking exhortation was that his followers become effective yet totally unpretentious agents of transformation in society in the manner of light, salt, and leaven" (*Conclusions of Research Seminar, 2000, no.42*). It is our Christian duty to make our own the manifesto of Jesus, "To preach good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free" (Lk 4:18). Notwithstanding all opposition and violence, are we ready to uphold this manifesto faithfully, effectively and efficiently? This is the real challenge to the Christians today.

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