

Inclusiveness of Jesus: An Antidote to Hindutva Exclusivism

*Fr. Justin M.Th.
St. Paul's Seminary
Tiruchirappalli*

Introduction

“Hindutva wave”, not Modi wave, was the credit given by Subramanian Swamy to the Lok Sabha Election 2019 results.¹ Prior to the general election, *Time Magazine* came out with an issue with Modi on the cover page (20 May, 2019), with the title “India’s Divider in Chief” raising the question, Can world’s largest democracy survive another five years of Modi? Issues like holy cow, Ram temple, ghar wapsi, centralization of the power of the government, trampling the autonomous institutions, gradual undermining of the democratic institutions, abolition of article 370 in Kashmir, Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Register of Citizens (NRC), growing communalism in dividing the society, and creating an intolerant atmosphere are a clear-cut warnings that nearly seven decades after we got independence, India is faced with the challenges of preserving the inclusive values of freedom movement and the constitution. So there is an urgent need to protect and safeguard India from the Hindutva wave.

It is not a battle of one entity against the other (or) Modi against Rahul Gandhi, it is an issue of what India is. As such today, people are

facing the choice between the “idea of India”—on the one hand, the inclusive India which emerged from freedom movement, and on the other hand, the Hindu Rashtra, the idea which is emerging out of Modi-BJP whose agenda is Hindutva. Keeping in mind the responsibility of safeguarding the democracy and the rights to equality, dignity, and wellbeing of the poor, marginalized, and subalterns, the choice should be a counter to Hindutva movements.

The ultimate question is what theological response can the Christian community in India make especially with reference to its mission? Reading the present resurgence of the militant Hindutva movements as the signs of the time, our missionary response cannot be made in a single formula or that of a conquering army going around our land and eliminating all before us. Rather it has to be the life-response of the little flock transforming everything from within. In order to realise this supreme cause Jesus is the best model and guide because Jesus had defined his mission on the basis of inclusion, not exclusion. Therefore this article sheds light on how exclusive is Hindutva, how inclusive was Jesus, and how Christians has to respond to Hindutva in the light of inclusiveness of Jesus.

I. HINDUTVA: AN IDEOLOGY TOWARDS EXCLUSIVISM

1. Social Exclusion in India

René Lenoir was the first person to use to the term “social exclusion” in his book *Les Exclus* in the year 1974.² Even though social exclusion has been practiced from all times, its theoretical framework and academic importance began to grow in the early eighties of last century. Social exclusion is a process which involves denial of rights and opportunities which the majority enjoys, resulting in the inability of individuals from excluded groups to participate in the basic political, economic, and social functioning of the society. In India, social exclusion is practiced on the basis of caste and

untouchability. Indian society is structured by a hierarchy based on Varna System.³ This exclusionary system and text (*Manusmriti*) are indispensable among the components of the Hindutva ideology.

2. The Construction of Hindutva Ideology

At the outset, it is important to make clear that Hindutva is not the same as the religion of Hinduism. Subhash Anand notes that Chandranath Basu (1844–1910) was probably the first person to use the term “Hindutva”.⁴ V. D. Savarkar, in his book, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* laid the foundation for the growth of the Hindu nationalist movement and the rise of the term “Hindutva”. He articulated the ideology of Hindu elite (Zamindars, Brahmins, Kings) by integrating Brahminic Hinduism with nationalism, called it Hindutva.

For Savarkar, Hindutva was the fundamental essence of being Hindu. He argued that a Hindu is the one who considers India to be his motherland (*matrbhumi*), the land of his ancestors (*pitrubhumi*), and his holy land (*punyabhumi*). In other words, the acknowledgement of a common nationality (*rashtra*), a common race (*jati*), and a common culture or civilization (*sanskrit*) constitutes in Savarkar’s opinion, the ideology of Hindutva.⁵ Around 180 frontal organizations make a strong and well-structured group called Sangh Parivar (SP)⁶ which propagates Hindutva ideology.

3. The Characteristics of Hindutva

It is well-nigh impossible to define Hindutva because the organizations and the political parties embracing this ideology tend to interpret it differently and exhibit different degrees of commitment to it. What Hindutva is or is not—depends, quite obviously, on how the concepts “Hindu” or “Hinduism” are used.

Cultural Movement: Today the Hindutva is claiming to be the saviour and protector of Hindu culture. Hindutva makes exaggerated claims of

superiority of Hindu culture in its mainly Brahminised version over other forms of culture, indigenous or foreign. In its construction of Culture, Vedas, Acharyas, Sanskrit (language of God, *Devbhasha*) and Ram have a central place.⁷The culture that the Hindutva wants to protect is not the culture of Dalits, Bahujan, and Adivasis.⁸ This is very evident from the fact that Hindutva has been brought to the forefront through upper-caste and upper-class people, as giving reaction to the social changes of caste and gender equality in the decade of 1980s.

Religious Movement: The concept of Hindutva would have made no sense unless it was explained in relation to the religion of Hinduism. Many of Hindutva supporters today would be surprised if they learn that, for Savarkar, Hindutva is an indefinable inherent quality of Hindu race, which could not be identified directly with the tenets of Hinduism.⁹ But the communal propaganda machinery today relentlessly propagates Hindutva as the communal word. Consequently, anyone who comments on Hindutva is named “anti-Hindu”. But, what Indian Supreme Court judgment of 1995 says on Hindutva is,

“Ordinarily, Hindutva is understood as a way of life or a state of mind and is not to be equated with or understood as religious Hindu fundamentalism... it is a fallacy and an error of law to proceed on the assumption... that the use of words Hindutva or Hinduism *per se* depicts an attitude hostile to all persons practicing any religion other than the Hindu religion...”¹⁰

Contrary to this, the word “Hindutva” is manipulated today by the BJP and SP organizations, articulating with religious connotation to achieve their desired task. Hindutva adopts the Hindu religion not as a way of seeking the divine but as a badge of worldly political identity and thus the direction in which Hindutva pushes Hinduism looks alien to most Hindus. Ultimately, the failure to distinguish between Hindutva and Hinduism serves Hindutva to be identified as a religious movement.

Political Movement: India's current ruling party, the BJP, officially adopted Hindutva as its defining credo in 1989. At present the biggest challenge to our democracy, and perhaps to the very integrity of our social fabric, is political Hindutva. Political Hindutva finds the diversity of India an unwelcome and disturbing presence. It wishes to trample underfoot India's pluralist ethos that believes in dialogue, exchange, and debate. As a political philosophy, it does not confine itself to adherents of the Hindu faith rather uses religion to capture political power.¹¹ Therefore the political project of Hindutva is nothing less than an assault on Hinduism from within.

An Exclusionary Ideology: Expressing grave concern over the thought guiding the current ruling establishment, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen said that "there is a connection between Hindutva psychology and exclusion."¹² The SP has created a "we-ness" identity based on particular tradition and ritual. At the same time, they have created "the other". The Muslims, Christians, and Communists are the one who become "the other" and now Pakistan is added to it. Hindutva has no resemblance with the inclusive nature of Hinduism. Hinduism is an inward-directed faith. On the contrary Hindutva is aimed at creating social and cultural distinctions for a political purpose. It has no universal appeal. It has no power to assimilate, localise, mutate, evolve, and grow according to the circumstances. It is uncomfortable with diversity and believes in one language, one culture, one religion and even one leader. There are so many traditions, culture, and religions, including Christianity, believe in one religion but they have grown to value and respect other religion, tradition, and culture. But Hindutva continues to be exclusionary in all respect.

4. Exclusions as Challenges Posed by Hindutva

Hindutva is projected as committed to societal transformation in the form of a so-called Hindu Renaissance. To achieve this end, Hindutva has

been infiltrating into education, culture, and almost every other aspect of public life. But wherever Hindutva has entered, we see division and exclusion and they are the great challenges for the peaceful existence of our society.

With highly patriarchal understanding of what and where a woman's place should be, Hindutva excludes women. It also opposes any ideology about women's liberation saying India has already given women a high place in the society as goddesses.¹³ Their attitude towards women is so unfair that in Savarkar's opinion raping the Muslim woman as a retaliatory measure is justified. His advice was well taken by the people of Surat in the massive riots of 1992–93. But, in Vedic period women were in respectable position: they authored poems and their presence was valued as husband cannot fulfill religious duties without wife.¹⁴

Hindutva excludes cultural diversity in the name of Hindu Nationalism. The emergence of Hindutva as a political and cultural force since the 1980s has brought to centre stage the issue of nationalism in our country. Three areas in which country is struggling due to Hindutva nationalism are struggle for democracy, attempt to live and practice secularism, and the struggle for social equity.¹⁵ The nationalism being 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.¹⁶

India is one of the most religiously diverse countries in the world with Hindu at 79.8%, Muslim (14.2%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.7%), Buddhism (0.7%) and Jainism (0.37%).¹⁷ Yet, religious tolerance which is an important feature of Hinduism has been excluded by Hindutva. Most of the recent interreligious riots are not spontaneous rather well-organized by fundamentalist organizations aimed to weaken the economic base of the other community. Anti-conversion attitude of Hindu fundamentalists is based on the impossibility of conversion within the Hinduism. The main problem is

to find a place for the convert in the social life of the community—where to place the convert, in what caste? Similarly a low caste can't ascend to the state of high caste. Therefore Dalit emancipation would not be possible within the Hindu social order. Hence, Ambedkar's search for a new religion was based on his quest for social justice to Dalits.

Hindutva excludes linguistic diversity¹⁸ and imposes Hindi on the people of different languages. If Hindi is declared as the national language of India, the diverse languages will suffer a slow death. Death of a language means death of a particular viewpoint, identity, previous life experience, and social history. Languages have a collective wisdom. If a language dies, wisdom dies with it. The imposition of Hindi will not only create challenges to the federalist system of government but may also pose a direct threat to the very unity of the nation.

Hindutva excludes subalterns and extends favouritism to rich. Speaking at the launch of a book *A Quantum Leap in the Wrong Direction?* Amartya Sen argued that the social inequality inherent in Hindutva translates into an acceptance of economic inequality also.¹⁹ Thus there is a connection between Hindutva, and the idea that numbers don't matter, and worse than that the idea that some people don't matter like lower castes and tribes. They are ignored just because of their very identity and what they are. The present financial crisis that India undergoes, is due to the favouritism shown to the rich and corporates.

Hindutva saffranizes the history and excludes truth and science. RSS is making lot of efforts to promote its views through *Shakhas*.²⁰ The ideology of Hindu nation, the upholding of caste and gender hierarchy and the glorification of Fascism, have been blatantly propagated through text books. Its main goal is to instill the Brahminical norms, to promote orthodox medieval mindset and to undermine the scientific temper in the thinking pattern of the coming generations.

Secularism is a basic feature in the preamble of our Constitution which had been added by the 42nd constitutional Amendment Act 1976. Secularism in India does not mean separation of religion from state. Instead, secularism in India means, a state that treats all religious groups equally and favours none.²¹ But Hindutva wants to exclude secularism from our Constitution and aims India to be identified itself with one culture, one religion and one law. Therefore it is the time to wake up and protect the constitutional values from the threats of Hindutva.

Hindutva extols cow at the cost of human dignity. Ever since the Modi government came into power in 2014, cow lynching incidents have been on the rise.²² The cow obsession of the BJP always targets Muslim minorities as part of deeper agenda of brahmanizing the society. Ultimately, in our plural democratic society, faith of one religious community should not dictate the policies of the state.

II. Inclusiveness of Jesus

Exclusions in Indian communities today is coloured with the externals of law and religion, caste and class, language and culture, hurt and resentment, marginalization and the sense of powerlessness. To address this issue of exclusions by Hindutva, Jesus is the best model because Jesus was born amidst exclusions and encountered them with his inclusive attitude. He did not limit himself to any specific ethnic or religious group. He was inclusive and was a prophet of counter-culture. Before we enter into how Jesus was inclusive, let us see in brief the presence of inclusiveness in the Old Testament writings.

1. Inclusiveness in the Old Testament

Election of Israel as the chosen people of God is one of the central themes in the Bible around which other beliefs evolve. The self-understanding

of Israel as chosen people of God got intermingled within Israel's unique history, geography, and culture. Yahweh selected Abraham and Sarah for the purpose of blessing all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3). Leaving out everyone, Israel is chosen, not for their own advantage but to be the vehicle through which Yahweh would act favorably toward the whole earth's inhabitants. The election, though by all means exclusive, was designed to be inclusive in terms of its ultimate goal.²³

God promised Israel (Gen 15: 18–21; 26:3; 28:13) to give a land and make it a nation. It was fulfilled through the instrumentality of Moses and Joshua, liberating Israel from Egypt to Canaan, the Promised Land (Josh 3–5). When they left Egypt, along with them “mixed crowd” followed (Ex 12:38; Num 11:4). Thus the group that entered Canaan was indeed not an undifferentiated ethnic unity. While entering this group was further added with a group of people namely *Habiru* who were desperate marginal group, consisting of disenfranchised persons²⁴ such as rebels, radicals, mercenaries, bowmen, servants, slaves, and migrant labourers. The “prevailing academic opinion is that the Israelites were a mixture of peoples”.²⁵ Thus, the formation of Israel was inclusive even though it was the exclusive promise to Abraham and his descendants.

Inclusiveness of the prophets is clearly seen in their invitation to Israel to maintain the covenantal responsibilities. Hence, authentic relation with God is linked to social justice and it is strongly addressed by various prophets in different contexts: Prophets accused Israel for their injustice, violence, bribery, and extortion (Mic 3:9–12); condemned the hypocritical worship (Hos 8:1–14); warned of the worship without genuine social concern is meaningless (Isa 58:1–12); depicted their unfaithfulness through the imagery of unfaithful wife (Hos 1:2–3:5).²⁶

Amos vehemently condemned the rich for oppressing the poor (Am 6:4–7) and the corrupted judicial system which failed to do justice to the

poor (Am 5:7, 10, 12).¹ Jeremiah asks his hearers to run, see, know, and seek for a single honest man in the city (Jer 5:1). For their sin he invites them to return to God with obedience and righteousness.² Inclusiveness of the prophets further strongly expressed and validated by their concern towards stranger or resident alien: individuals or families who were non-Israelites from the surrounding countryside. God cares for them (Ps 146:9) and they should not be exploited or oppressed (Ex 22:20; 23:9; Lev 19:33; Deut 27:19; Jer 7:6; 22:3; Zech 7:10). Mal 3:5 declares that anyone who deprives a stranger is in line with sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers and they have no fear of God because “you were aliens in the land of Egypt (Lev 19:34).

Nevertheless, the OT reveals that Yahweh is God not only of Israel but also of the whole world and displays benevolence towards non-Israelites as well Israelites. Malachi expresses a very positive view of the religious faith and cultic practices of the “others” (Mal 1:11). Amos makes it clear that Yahweh is the God of all nations (Am 1:3–2:16). Through Jonah God made it clear that the divine love extended beyond any covenant, to embrace every creature in the universe (Jon 4:1–11). As Israel suffered at the hands of other nations, it developed an end-times vision in which all nations would come in pilgrimage to Zion (Isa 2:1–4, 45:14, 60:3; Ps 96:7; 72:10; Zeph 3:9). Thus prophets mediated the intention of Yahweh by establishing social justice, in the form of defending the powerless, recognizing the foreign nations, and never letting the sinful powerful go unpunished, to make Israel an inclusive nation. But the covenant people after the prophetic age, during the Second Temple Period 516 B.C.E.–70, were more exclusive, contradicting the inclusive call of God.

2. Exclusion in Judaism

The chosen people were more exclusive at the time of Jesus. First of all Jewish identity itself drew a strong divisive line. Jews in their minds and

actions erected a boundary between themselves and the rest of the humanity.²⁹ Purity practices were fundamental part of common Judaism. They were initiated with great intention of preserving the holiness of the chosen people (Lev 20:24–26). They were also maintained to prevent impurity from coming into the temple in Jerusalem, but also consecrated food.³⁰ But they became the main cause of exclusion. Purity regulations went to the extent of stigmatizing people for the contact with a corpse (Lev 13:45–46), for ordinary reasons (menstruation, intercourse, and childbirth Lev 12:1–8; 15:16–24), and excluding the lepers, Gentiles, pagans, Samaritans and sinners. This consideration of holiness as exclusion of particular people dehumanized their fellow human beings and contradicted the purpose of their election.

In the Bible, disability is viewed as a disease. The most common diseases mentioned in the Bible are blindness, deafness, dumbness, leprosy, and paralysis. The general view of the OT writers is that God brings disability as punishment for transgressions for sins or as an expression of God's wrath for people's disobedience. Consequently, the people with disability and their family were excluded from the social, economic, political, and spiritual spheres of Jewish society.

Tax collectors or revenue contractors, working for the Roman publican, were viewed as traitors and were called "sinners" in the generalized term. They were grouped with murderers and robbers. Money in the pocket of a tax collector was considered stolen property.³¹ Ritually clean and observant Jews were forbidden from taking up the job of collecting tax since it was considered as one of the despised trades.³² Many self-respecting Pharisees and Scribes would not associate with them.

Observance of Passover ritual (Ex 12) and dietary laws (Lev 11) separated the Israelites from all the peoples surrounding them. Here established a boundary between Jews and Gentiles. Gentile nations, from the Jewish perspective, were often seen as pagans who did not know the

true God, did not have access to the knowledge of God's laws, and they usually broke God's laws repeatedly and in reprehensible ways (Gen 6:5; 18:20–21; Judg 19). The Samaritans³³ according to Jews were foreigners, half pagans or mixed Judeo-Gentile race. The Jews did not share things in common with Samaritans (Jn 4:9). J. Jeremias observes that "the Samaritans were considered from the cradle as impure and as causing impurity."³⁴

Shepherds stood on the bottom of the Palestinian social ladder and were deprived of all civil rights. Their profession made them impure before the law. They belonged to that class of people who did not know the law, as the Pharisees used to say.³⁵ Women in Judaism experienced exclusion at every stage of their life in different realms of the society, culture, and religion. The status of woman and slave was similar. Jewish women had absolutely no part in public life and were not recognized as official witnesses because women were considered liars (Gen 18:15). Further, ordinary people faced political and economic exclusion based on severe taxation and debt. Exclusion at all spheres of Judaism disrespected the dignity of the people.

In such an environment of exclusion, Jesus was inclusive in his words and deeds.

3. Inclusiveness of Jesus Expressed in Words

Jesus' teaching need to be understood as not so much as religious teaching (coming from a person of religion) but as a spiritual and prophetic teaching meant for the socio-political well-being and wholesome development of the human person.³⁶ Thus, we could discover inclusiveness from his teachings that he preached and practiced. Jesus is very much tied to those considered as outcasts in the Jewish society and was sent precisely to the religiously marginalized and the classless.³⁷ They are the first ones to hear the joyful message of liberation. By announcing Jesus' birth to the shepherds, God established that there was no one too lowly to receive God's salvation.

The Mission manifesto of Jesus includes everyone as one of announcing good news to the poor, releasing the captives, freeing the oppressed, proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:16–19). The Gospels give us clear insights that Jesus came to establish not a formal religion but the Kingdom of God. It cannot be tied to any particular group of nation but it embraces everyone and everything.³⁸

Jesus, an excellent teacher, knew that stories are powerful tools for teaching. Jesus often employed a type of story called a parable—a story with religious meaning drawn from ordinary life or a story with a moral. The parable of the prodigal son goes beyond any ethnic and religious frontiers and portrays God's love and its essential characteristics: forgiving, welcoming, life giving, and the trigger of real and lasting joy. He spoke of God not as the God of exodus but as the loving Father (*Abba*) who constantly cares for all his creatures (Mt 6:25–34) and blesses with his rain and sunshine all human beings, even the wicked and the unjust (Mt 5: 43–48).³⁹

In a culture, where the prosperous and socially respectable were considered to be the sole recipients of God's favor, Jesus makes a point of saying in the beatitudes (Mt 5:3–11; Lk 6:20–26) that those who don't fit into those categories (poor, meek, sad, downtrodden, etc.) are included. Jesus' beatitudes are radically inclusive statements of invitation to participate in the Kingdom of the Heaven and surprisingly counter cultural.

4. Inclusiveness of Jesus Expressed in Deeds

Jesus was a strategic leader. He did not move aimlessly or in unplanned reaction to events and occurrences but purposefully toward a clearly defined goal. The goal of Jesus was the realization of Kingdom of God. Jesus did not regard all elements of his heritage as equally important. He easily dispensed some customs⁴⁰ which excluded people. Jesus's relationship with the excluded people broke the walls of exclusion in Judaism and laid foundation for inclusive life.

Technically, Jesus' contact with non-Jews starts with the Magi, or Wise Men (Mt 2:1–2). So, this was His first interaction with Gentiles. During Jesus' three and a half years of ministry, there were a couple more notable interactions with Gentiles. There was the Roman Centurion with the paralyzed servant (Mt 8:5–13). There was also the Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon possessed (Mt 15:21–28). Jesus changed lives in both stories. Cleansing of the temple indicates that the action primarily had to do with opening the worship of temple to non-Jews. The action was perceived to be primarily against the temple officers and the Sadducean party. There is another interpretation that Jesus' action symbolized inclusion of gentiles.⁴¹

The attitude of Jesus toward the tax collectors was in stark contrast to that of the Rabbis. Jesus reverses the fortunes of tax collectors by associating and dining with them (Mt 11:19; Mk 2:13–17; Lk 5:27) and by forgiving their sins (Lk 7:36–50; Lk 19:1–10; Jn 8:1–11). Jesus was even accused of being “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Mt 11: 19). Jesus surprises his hearers by announcing that it is these tax collectors and prostitutes who will enter the Kingdom of God before the Jewish religious leaders (Mt 21: 31).

Luke and John recall in different ways the openness that Jesus showed to the Samaritans. Through the parable of the Good Samaritan in Lk 10:25–37, Jesus demolishes the old myth that the Samaritans were lesser beings. By asking the lawyer to imitate the example of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells him that holiness is not external ritual purity but compassion to the needy.⁴² Unlike other rabbis, Jesus did not avoid speaking in public with a woman and a Samaritan woman (Jn 4:9, 27).

Despite the male-dominated culture in which he lived Jesus treated women well. The most striking thing about the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus is the simple fact that they are there.⁴³ The foundation stone of Jesus' attitude towards women was his vision of them as persons to

whom and for whom he had come. Jesus did not see them primarily in terms of sex, age or marital status; he considered them in terms of their relation to God. It is this axis which explains how Jesus was unaffected by the prejudices of his day. So in many of Jesus' illustrations, women are presented as positive role models of faith.⁴⁴ But this is in stark contrast to the rabbis of the day.

When the Jewish society excluded the sick to its fringes, Jesus saw his mission was to the sick: to the physically, mentally, and spiritually deceased (Lk 13:32). Through healing Jesus not only cured people from illness also restored them into the society with dignity. The law clearly stated that touching an unclean man was forbidden (Lev 5:3). Attempts to go against the law created a chaotic situation among the elite of the society.

Jesus' table-fellowship was an acted parable. During his ministry Jesus not only attended numerous banquets (Mk 2:15–17; Mt 11:18–19; Lk 7:36–50; 14:1–15; 19:1–10), but also used such meals with his fellow Jews as a vehicle for his ministry. By eating with sinners and Gentiles, Jesus signals that God shares life with them and extends an inclusive invitation to non-observant Jews and sinful outsiders for covenant membership and for status as forgiven persons.

For the Pharisees, the purity laws regarding table fellowship is to strengthen and safeguard the group identity at the exclusion of neighbours like Gentiles, women, sick and disabled. Whereas for Jesus, the new interpretation of the law of purity means inclusiveness in table-fellowship. Jesus' table fellowship is so radical that no prophet would have dared to do it. It is one of the decisive factors that led Jesus to violent death. Jesus promoted social inclusion through non-judgmental attitude. He teaches that persons must be seen as persons with dignity and nothing should be an obstacle to recognize the others. Thus he affirms that his mission was mission of embracing all sections of society.⁴⁵

As we make all effort to picturize the inclusiveness of Jesus there are surprising exclusions as well. Jesus responded to a Canaanite woman, who came with a request to heal her demon-possessed daughter, saying “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24). It was a test of her faith. Jesus was, “ready to respond to faith wherever he found it”.⁴⁶ The fact is that the woman needed to grow in her faith and to learn step by step that Jesus is the Lord. His seemingly exclusionary statement brought from her public expression of her faith in his unlimited power (Mt 15:27).

When Jesus sent his disciples he expressly told them, not to go to Gentiles and Samaritans cities” (Mt 10:5–6). We may wonder how Jesus would utter such an exclusionary statement. But Jesus was deliberately excluding. Because he needed time to prepare both himself and his disciples for the end. Jesus did not forbid their preaching to all Gentiles; He did, however, to narrow their focus to the areas which should be most receptive—those who knew the Law and were expecting the Messiah. Paul, in his missionary journeys, followed the same priority of preaching to the Jews first (Rom 1:16).

Jesus’ vision for founding a new family is open, “whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mk 3:35). He did not say Jews who do the will of God. Any man or woman who did what God wanted to be done, qualified for admission to his new community. Further, Jesus also outlines who can’t be a member in his family, “not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father” (Mt 7: 21). This is precisely to enhance the possibilities of genuine repentance. Some exclude themselves, Collins says, by refusing to accept the message of Jesus.⁴⁷

Jesus’ “exclusions” have to be understood in the sense of inviting repentance of those who at the moment are not a recipient of a graced gift,

though it is offered. This invitation takes freedom seriously. An invitation is given, to respond, to repent, to turn back, to accept the offer of God's unconditional love.⁴⁸

III. Re-Orienting Christian Identity and Responding to Hindutva

Christianity must be aware of twin poles of its identity. Missionaries' work among the poor and the most deprived sections of the Indian population indirectly contributed towards the alleviation of poverty and the upliftment of the downtrodden masses. The pioneering work that the Christian missions initiated in the field of education, health, and social rehabilitation remains a landmark and it has no parallels in history. This gives Christianity an exclusive (unique) identity. Contrary to this Christianity has also got an excluded identity, because of the attack on religious freedom with the growth of exclusionary extremist narrative, inadequate police investigations and prosecutions over mob violence against Christians,⁴⁹ and defining all those who did not belong to religions of Indian origin as "outsider or foreigners". Beside this, Dalit Christians are excluded from the benefits reserved for the Scheduled Castes by paragraph three of the Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order 1950. All these make Christianity feel excluded.

Hindutva context in India necessitates Christianity to reorient itself based on Christ's inclusiveness and respond to the Hindutva exclusivism in a following manner.

- As Hindutva with divisive politics is excluding people from the frame of India, it is time to reset the goal of Christian unity from being defensive to liberation. Christians need to come together not only to protect their minority rights but also for the rights of those who are excluded in the society.

- Christians should not be mere spectators but protagonists in all the matters of human progress.

- Witnessing the spirit of Christ's inclusiveness against Christian fundamentalism by throwing away the superiority claims and accepting that we are no longer the only ones to be listened is to be lived out as the life of *kenosis*.

- Eliminating the symptoms of colonialism—increasing the numbers—in evangelization by focusing on living the values of Jesus in the multi-religious context.

- The role of priests and religious has to change from being service providers to being animators and leaders with inclusive character.

- Holistic empowerment and building inclusive Christian communities as role models has to be the top most priority of the Church in India

- Having caste differences how can the Christians come together as one unified community. Therefore shedding down caste identity is to be addressed. There is also a provision in the law to be certified casteless.⁵⁰ As Church denounces caste discrimination, the Church personnel should come forward as model to be casteless.

- “If the Asian churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future”.⁵¹ In this regard, becoming truly local churches is an urgent task. Treating conversion as the Spirit's work and inculturation constantly accompanied by interculturatonis the way to overcome foreignness of the Christianity.

- One of the most important reasons for the rise of saffronization is the failure to educate people about the Indian Constitution. The Preamble of the Indian Constitution shall be exhibited at prominent places especially in all Christian places of worship and institutions. It shall be printed on the back cover of the parish family book, school diary, note books and other

publications. It would be a fitting gesture to have a swearing on the Indian Constitution by the bishops, priests and religious on the great solemn day of their ordination or final profession.

- Empowering the excluded is the need of the hour. Whomever the Hindutva excludes, (Dalits, women, minorities) are to be supported and brought into power structures.

- The greatest strength of the Christian community in India is the large number of educational institutions through which they are in direct contact with millions of students and parents. If the Indian church intends to be relevant today, it must instill in students the values of Indian Constitution, humanism, religious pluralism, and universal solidarity.

- Christians have to take lead in addressing the issues of women and establishing justice for them. Mutuality and egalitarian treatment of men and women, boys and girls could be included in the curricula of Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, small discussion groups, Bible classes, and every available teaching faculty.

Conclusion

The Hindutva ideology has grown in India dividing the society and polluting the mind of people with hatred and intolerance. Responding to such a situation is a prophetic call for every Christian and particularly living an inclusive life like Jesus is very much relevant and demanded of the hour. Working for peace in India is, to resist and eliminate Hindutva exclusion which is based on gender, caste, religion, culture, language, and ethnicity and to create an inclusive society where everyone lives with dignity.

It is said that in every crisis there is a hidden opportunity. The Pluralist context of India always remains as a source of opportunity and challenge for Christians to live their call. Exclusions that effect from the Hindutva

forces are to be accepted as an opportunity by the Christian community in India for a deep introspection and reinventing itself, being faithful to the inclusive values and teachings of Jesus, being sensitive and appreciative of the pluralistic culture and heritage of India, and responding to the needs of the people of India.

Christians have to overcome all the socio-cultural identities that hinder them doing mission and establishing fraternal relationship with people of different culture, religion, and language. Inclusive life of Christians should be like leaven which makes whole dough leavened, transforming the walls of exclusions into the bridges, making one inclusive society where everyone is recognized, accepted, valued, and celebrated.

Therefore, life centered on the inclusiveness of Jesus is an antidote to Hindutva exclusivism. It is evidently proven in the defeat of BJP with Aam Aathmi Party in Delhi election and expressed by the words of Kejriwal “As we complete five years, it’s a matter of highest satisfaction for us that we have tried to run the government on the path shown by Jesus Christ,”⁵²

Footnotes

1. Cf. Betwa Sharma, “Not Modi Wave, Hindutva Wave: Subramaniam Swamy On Election Results”, [article online] (accessed 17 February 2020), available from https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/2019-results-hindutva-wave-not-modi-wave-subramanian-swamy-says_in_5ce62d3ae4b0547bd1323d41; Wikipedia, “2019 Indian General Election”, [article online] (accessed 17 February 2020), available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Indian_general_election: Internet.
2. Cf. Nabin Rawal, “Social Inclusion and Exclusion: A Review”, *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* vol. 2 (2008), 162.

3. When the Aryans invaded India about 1500 B.C., there were no discriminatory practices between the different ethnic groups living here; nor was there any institutionalized form of inequality. The Aryans were different from the inhabitants of the sub-continent in appearance, language, and religion. As the differences between the Aryans and native people increased, the Aryans became more and more involved in priestly occupation to keep themselves away from the rest of people. In order to keep their separate identity, they discovered the Varna system—dividing people into four castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. This system developed at the end of the Rig Vedic period about 100 B.C.E. In the beginning caste system was flexible to choose their occupation, later became exclusive units with prescribed norms and rules. The teachings of Manu (Manusmriti), the Hindu lawgiver lays down rules and regulations for all castes. Cf. A. John Peter, *Social Exclusion: Concepts and Analysis* (Tiruchirappalli: Vaiharai Publications, 2010), 39.
4. Cf. Subhash Anand, *Hindutva: A Christian Response* (Indore: Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, 2001), 108.
5. Cf. T. N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 219.
6. It is the progeny of RSS. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is its political wing; Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is the organization translating the Hindutva political agenda on the emotive, religious front; Bajrang Dal is a group of youth who are active on the streets; Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram is engaged in promoting 'Hindu norms' amongst *Adivasis*; and Rashtra Seviva Samiti is its women's wing. In addition, there are other organisations like Saraswati Shishu Mandirs, which inculcate the young minds with its social, cultural, and political understanding. These all are collectively called Sangh Parivar. Cf. Ram Puniyani, *Hindu Extreme Rightwing Groups* (Delhi: Media House, 2004), 58.
7. Cf. Ram Puniyani, *Contours of Hindu Rashtra* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2006), 247.
8. Cf. Ram Puniyani, *Caste, Hindutva and Dalits* (Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2018), 105.

9. Cf. Shashi Tharoor, *Why I Am a Hindu?* (Delhi: Aleph, 2018), 144.
10. Ram Jethmalani, "Hindutva is a Secular Way of Life", [article online] (*The Sunday Guardian*, accessed 22 November 2019), available from <http://www.sunday-guardian.com/analysis/hindutva-is-a-secular-way-of-life>; Internet.
11. Cf. A. Pushparajan, "Mission of the Christian Community in the Emerging Context: Hindutva Ideology", *Third Millennium* XIX/3 (2016), 25.
12. "Hindutva and Exclusion Connected: Amartya Sen" [article online] (*TheHindu*, accessed 2 December 2019), available from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/hindutva-and-exclusion-connected-amartya-sen/article26390631.ece>: Internet.
13. Cf. R. Puniyani, *Contours of Hindu Rashtra*, 268
14. Cf. Ellison Banks Findly, "Hinduism: An Overview", in *Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion*, ed. Serinity Young (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1999), 419–421.
15. Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Nationalism in a New Avatar and Challenges to Christianity", *Vaiharai* (2001), 121.
16. Cf. L. Stanislaus, "Hindutva and Marginalized Christian Response", *Vaiharai* 6/3&4 (2001), 103.
17. Cf. Ministry of Home Affairs, *RGI Releases Census 2011 Data on Population by Religious Communities*, 25 August 2015.
18. According to the Indian Constitution, India does not have a national language but has two official languages, Hindi and English. Instead of one national language, the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution listed 14 regional languages. That list has now grown to 22. All these 22 scheduled languages have an equal status. Cf. Ministry of Minority Affairs, *Report of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, 35.
19. "Hindutva and Exclusion Connected: Amartya Sen" [article online].
20. The core activity of RSS is structured around *Shakhas* (Branches). In these *shakhas* young boys are given the physical training, one component of training is wielding *lathis* (batons). This is what the most visible part of its activities is. Parallel to this, the ideological training sessions are conducted. This is where the real agenda of RSS gets itself manifested. In these *shakhas*, which are backed

up by long training camps leading to three year training program, the outcome of which are the *Swamyamsevak/Pracharak*, who is ready to take on the mantle of RSS programs in an independent way. Cf. Ram Puniyani, "What to Believe in", *Indian Currents* 30/4 (2018), 12.

21. Cf. S. Tharoor, *Why I am a Hindu*, 200.
22. According to *indiaspend.com* (a data journalism site), 86% of those dead in cow-related violence since 2010 are Muslims and 97 per cent of the attacks took place after 2014. Since 2014 till 2019, 122 incidents of cow-related violence took place in India. Cf. Ram Puniyani, "Holy Cow: Faith and Contemporary Politics," *Indian Journal of Secularism*, 19/3 (2015), 5–8.
23. Cf. Frank Spina Anthony, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 6.
24. David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the OT Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 73.
25. Norman Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (USA: Orbis Book, 1979), 433.
26. Cf. Scaria Kuthirakattel, "The Role of Prophetic Theologizing in Jesus' Dharma" *Jnanadeepa* 18/2 (2015), 83.
27. Cf. George Kudilil, "Prophet Amos and his Plea for Social Justice in a Globalized World", *BibleBhashyam* 38/3 (2012), 161.
29. Cf. Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1999), 13.
30. Cf. Hannah Harrington, *Purity Texts* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 9–12.
31. Cf. Craig Blomberg, "Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship", *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19/1 (2009), 46.
32. Cf. J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation in to Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 302–312.
33. The inhabitants of the region called Samaria were the Samaritans: (a) who worshiped the God Yahweh, (b) but who, in distinction from the mainstream

Jews, revered mount Gerizim instead of mount Zion in Jerusalem as the one valid place to build an altar or temple for the public worship of Yahweh, (c) who maintained that their line of Levitical priests functioning on mount Gerizim were the legitimate priests of the Mosaic dispensation, as opposed to the priests functioning in the Jerusalem temple, and (d) who accepted only the five books of Moses (The Pentateuch) as authoritative Scripture. Cf. John Peter, "The Historical Jesus and the Historical Samaritans", *Biblica* 81/2 (2000), 204–205.

34. Cf. J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 357.
35. Cf. Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator* (London: SPCK, 1980), 171.
36. Cf. M. Amaladoss, "Public Theology in a Multi-Religious Society," in F. Wilfred, ed. *Theology to Go Public*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 97.
37. Cf. Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 171.
38. Cf. Roy Lazar, "Jesus' Approach to the Subaltern Issues", *Jeevadhara* 44 (2014), 78.
39. Cf. Gerald O'Collins, "*Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).90–91.
40. Cf. Scott Hahn, *The Fourth Cup* (New York: Image, 2018), 26.
41. Cf. E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 69.
42. Cf. Varghese Abhilash, "Jesus' Spirituality of Inclusion and Societal Concern", *Jeevadhara* 44/261 (2014), 47.
43. Cf. James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 82.
44. For example, the Queen of the South, who was wiser than the first-century Jews (Mt 12:42), the woman mixing yeast into dough (Mt 13:33), who is presented as an illustration of the way that the Kingdom of God works, women working when Christ returns (Mt 24:41), ten virgins, of whom five were prepared and five were not (Mt 25:1–13), the widow of Zarephath, as an example of a Gentile that God favored (Lk 4:26), the woman who found the coin she had lost (Lk 15:8–10), a persistent widow (Luke 18:1–8), a model for disciples to imitate in prayer, a widow who gave everything she had (Lk 21:1–4).

45. Cf. Augustine Lourdu, "Jesus: A Strategist for Social Inclusion", *Vidyajyoti* 78/11 (2014), 819.
46. G. O'Collins, *Salvation for All*, 79.
47. Cf. G. O'Collins, *Salvation for All*, 96.
48. Cf. John Chathanatt, "Option for the Poor", *Vidyajyoti* 75/3 (2011), 203.
49. *The Annual Report of USCIRF 2019*, [article online] (accessed 5 February 2020), available from <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>; Internet.
50. Sneha, an advocate from Tiruppattur, has remained without any caste or religion. Whether it was her birth or school certificate, the columns on caste and religion remained blank. The T N government issued her a formal certificate that she is a caste and religion-less person. Perhaps she is the first one in the country to be formally certified so. Cf. "Meet India's first officially certified caste-less and religion-less person" [article online] (*News in Asia*, accessed 23 February 2020), available from <https://newsin.asia/meet-indias-first-officially-certified-caste-less-and-religion-less-person/>; Internet.
51. Gaudencio Rosales and Arevalo, C. G, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia: FABC Documents from 1970–1991*, vol. 1 (Manila: Claretian Publications, 1997), 70.
52. "We have tried to run the government on the path shown by Jesus Christ: Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal", [article online] (accessed 19 February 2020) available from <https://www.opindia.com/2019/12/delhi-arvind-kejriwal-aam-admi-party-aap-jesus-christ/>; Internet.