

# HINDU FUNDAMENTALISM AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSE IN INDIA

Rev. Shadakshari T.K.

(Bangalore, India and Pastoring Divyajyothi Church of the Nazarene)

## *Introduction*

One of the purposes of religion, humanly speaking, is to enable people to live a responsible life. One desire is that religious people may not disturb the harmonious life; rather, they may contribute towards it. Today, religions have become a source of conflict and violence in many Asian societies. This is very evident in India where the inter-relationship among religions is breaking up. The contemporary problem in India is the question of nationalism and the issue of marginalized identities. Christians are caught between two: participation in the nationalism in the one hand and commitment to the cause of the marginalized on the other. There is an awakening of nationalism, which bears strong religious stamp, which is strongly promoted by the Hindutva ideology. At the same time there is a strong awakening of the Tribals and Dalits. In this context, the question comes to our mind: how do Christians in India serve both nationalism and marginal groups when both of them are opposing each other? I am not promising the absolute answer for the question raised. However, this article provides some clues by analyzing the historical development of religious fundamentalism and suggesting an appropriate response for Christians. Though there are several religious fundamental groups in the history of India (including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, and others), this article limits its study to the religious fundamentalism of Hinduism. The importance of Hindu fundamentalism lies in its very contemporary and nationalistic scope, compared to other, more regional expressions. Therefore, this article analyzes the ideological development of Hinduism to bring India under a monolithic cultural nation namely Hindu-India, its fundamentalist tendencies, and its post-colonial expressions. The text begins with a working definition of fundamentalism, the writing

reviews the rise of Hindu fundamentalism and its relationship to a post colonial India, and closes positing a response in light of this broad, diverse, yet nationalistic movement.

### *The Meaning of Religious Fundamentalism*

The word religion comes from Latin word *religio*, which means the sense of binding together, but also provides them with a system of beliefs, rituals, institutions, traditions and a sense of sacred. It also gives meaning to their life and the way of relating themselves to the universe and its creator.<sup>1</sup> *New Webster's Dictionary* defines the religion as “man’s expression of his acknowledgement of the divine, a system of beliefs and practices relating to the sacred and uniting its adherents in a community.” For people, religion means much more in practice. Many people claim that religion is a way of life and encompasses all aspects of their lives.

Theorists previous used the concept of fundamentalism a more restricted sense to refer to evangelicals in USA. The word is now used in Asia to identify extremists: Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims especially in the countries where there are majority. They are claiming the right of their religion in such a way that they deny the equal place of other faiths. Fundamentalists would like to prohibit the conversion of their own people to another religion.<sup>2</sup> The actual meaning of the fundamentalism is trying to return to the fundamentals of their religions. Today it has taken the different direction. For example, fundamentalists often use violence on religious minorities. The article defines fundamentalism in this popular sense of militantly excluding other religious traditions, often opposing alternative views by force. This type of fundamentalism often equates a religion with a national identity. For this reason some people say that if you are a true Indian you should be a Hindu. Sometimes ethnicity is included in this form of nationalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Asgar Ali Engineer, “Religious Fanaticism and Communalism” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32, April 5-11, 1997, p. 701

<sup>2</sup> Ajith Fernando, *Relating to people of other Faiths* Mumbai: GLS Publishing, nd., p. 25.

### *Historical Development of Hindu Fundamentalism*

The contemporary nature of Hindu fundamentalism can be traced back to a renaissance in different parts of India, especially in Bengal in nineteenth century. This was the time when Hindu intellectuals started reforming Hinduism as a result of the knowledge they gained from the western education. In the light of nineteenth century renaissance there were several religious reform movements arose in India. These movements express the mixed kind of response of Bengali intellectuals to the cultural impact of the west.

#### *Brahmo Samaj*

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772 – 1833), the founder of Brahmo Samaj (the Society of Brahma) tried to reform Hinduism by eradicating erroneous religious beliefs and degenerate social practices among the Hindus.<sup>3</sup> Roy's views contributed to Hindu fundamentalism through two dimensions. (a) He provided an ideological framework to strengthen one's religion by critical evaluation of their own and open to other religions. He wanted reconstructed Hindus to recover the original purity of their religious thought and knowledge. Roy used the Vedas and Upanishads as the true source of Hinduism. (b) Roy's involvement in social reformation roused many conservative Hindus to strengthen their orthodox view. Certainly, Roy was not fundamentalist, but his successors used his ideology and the society to interpret religion that influenced to fundamental approach.

After the death of Roy in 1833 Debendranath Tagore (1817 – 1905), who was consciously more Hindu became leader of Brahmo Samaj.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the idea of Roy, Tagore's approach was more close to present fundamentalists. This is evident in the disagreement between Tagore and Keshub Chandra Sen (1838 – 84). Sen completely rejected the Vedas and Upanishads as

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<sup>3</sup> T. N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 205

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206

infallible scripture. With regards to the contribution of Bramho Samaj to today's Hindu fundamentalism, Madan says that Roy and following leaders were not directly fundamentalists but there were some fundamental elements in Brahmo Samaj.<sup>5</sup> "The key element in the Indian reaction under discussion was a deep sense of frustration with the contemporary state of culture, religion and society and a compensating adoration of the past. Brahman priests were seen as representatives of degeneration and Brahmanical scriptures stood for ancient greatness. A concern with scripture – its character and authority – would have made one suspect a fundamentalist streak in the movement initiated by Ram Mohan Roy."<sup>6</sup> However we cannot ignore other issues that caused to take up religious reformation. (a) The missionaries attacked the Hinduism very aggressively; they condemned Hindu gods as gods of lust injustice, wickedness and cruelty. (b) Having had superiority over their culture western missionaries considered Indian culture as uncivilized and immoral. (c) Hindus saw that the missionaries operated under the support of Colonial rulers. (d) Orientalists made possibility to rediscover Indian past heritage began in the late eighteenth century with translation of Sanskrit classics into English.<sup>7</sup> This provided self-esteem to enlighten Hindus and they decided to use this for the reconstruction and reformation of their religion and society.

In the last quarter of nineteenth century there were several Hindu revival movements by various religious leaders. The Hindu reformation that was started by Ram Mohan Roy came to climax during the period of Vivekananda. He represented Hinduism at the parliament of religions held in Chicago in 1893. Vivekananda founded the Vedantha Society (Vedas are ultimate), which won many converts to Hinduism. He believed that the Advaita Vedantha (Veda that talks of One Reality) is superior to all the religions of the world. He became missionary of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 207

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

Hinduism to so called Christian- west, thus it was a counter attack to Christian Mission work in India. Moreover he endorsed validity of practice of *Shuddhi* (re-conversion) and gave tremendous inspiration to re-conversion. Thus the re-conversion was more forceful method used by fundamental Hinduism.<sup>8</sup>

The political consciousness that was started during Bengal renaissance became stronger under the leadership of Vivekananda. There was an idea of new political consciousness among the Hindu intellectuals. They started stirring the sentiments of the mass by combining national thoughts with religious symbols. The notable person in this direction was Bankimachandra Chattopadhyay (1839 – 1894). For him political regeneration and cultural and religious reconstruction were two sides of the same coin.<sup>9</sup> Having learned by western political philosophy Bankimachandra started attacking both British rulers and Christian missionaries. He considered Vedas and Upanishads are invalid. Thus he preferred Puranas and Epics (part of Hindu Scriptures) in which heroes like Krishna, Rama provided a model to establish the nation. He aimed at national-cultural regeneration in which patriotism (*Svadeshpriti*) was considered as highest value. From here on we can see the clear development of fundamental ideologies.<sup>10</sup>

From the end of nineteenth century religious activism started shifting from Bengal into western and northern India. The next important movement was Arya Samaj (Society of Noble) in Punjab.

#### *Arya Samaj*

Dayananda Sarasvati founded Arya Samaj in 1875 at Bombay. His main concern was to purify the religion and reform the society. He started preaching against blind beliefs, idolatry,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 204

<sup>8</sup> C. V. Mathew, *Neo-Hinduism: A Missionary Religion*. Madras: Church Growth Research Centre, 1987, pp. 31-32.

<sup>9</sup> Madan, op., cit., p. 208

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 210

social evils, etc. In 1872, he met the leaders of Brahmo Samaj and it is likely that they must have influenced him, especially Tagore.<sup>11</sup> The two fundamentals of Samaj were belief in God and in the Vedas as the true source of knowledge. In 1877 Dayananda moved to Punjab where he stayed for 16 months. Within two months he established Arya Samaj in Punjab. There is a reason for this success. The Hindus in Punjab faced lot of challenges, first by emergence of Sikhism in Medieval period, Islam for almost 600 years and British rulers in that time. There were also mass conversions to Christianity in many parts of India including Punjab.

Muslims, Sikhs, and British made the Hindus in Punjab powerless. They were looking for an opportunity to challenge these and they found it when Dayananda came there. Soon after he arrived in Punjab, Dayananda started the process of purification (*Shuddhi*) that re-conversion of people who became Christians. The Samaj produced tight written statement of 10 basic principles (*niyam*). Madan rightly observes that those 10 niyams were never altered and all of them have character of fundamentals.<sup>12</sup> Dayananda rejected the revelational claims by Christians and Muslims. “He concluded that only the Vedas and self-evidently true (*Svatah pramana*) or independently authoritative.”<sup>13</sup> In the process of defending the tradition, Vedas and orthodoxy of religion, Arya Samaj became offensive to other religions. They opposed Muslims and Christians vehemently. To achieve this they aroused the mass by starting the protection of cow *Gaurakshini Sabha*. To defend Hinduism Dayananda mixed religion with politics. He advocated Hindu nationalism and gave an attractive slogan “India for Indians,” which for him meant India for Hindus.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 211

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 214

<sup>14</sup> Mathew, op. cit., p. 28

Within Arya Samaj there was a group of people who were militant in nature. They affirmed and propagated exclusive religious orientation. “They sought to create a new person, the “Arya Hindu.” These groups attracted, if not all, at least like-minded Hindu people. In order to avoid conversion, Dayananda created nationalistic sentiments among Hindus. Dayananda died in 1883, two years before the founding of Indian National Congress. The help of M. K. Gandhi and Lala Lajpat Rai actively drew Arya Samaj drawn into national politics.<sup>15</sup> However, within national movement it remained a strong Hindu movement. The movement that was started by Dayananda was very fundamentalist in approach. “Dayananda carried these ideas forward to a Vedic claim of monopoly over the Truth, since the Veda alone was, according to him, the word of God. He thus denied other religions any legitimacy to exist.”<sup>16</sup> Though there were other fundamental groups like Sikhism, Islam and others they remained in regional level whereas Hindu fundamentalism took the shelter of nationalism, which ultimately aimed at Hindu-nationalism.

### *Hindutva and the RSS*

Arya Samaj surely laid a foundation towards Hindu fundamentalism with two main ideologies: ‘return to scripture’ or ‘canonical authority’ and ‘purification and reformation.’ Later arose the third idea that was the “quest for power.” In this context the Hindu Mahasabha was established in 1915, which was distinct from Indian National Congress.<sup>17</sup> The main agenda of this group was to promote the Hindi as the national language. Madan Mohan Malviya, the founder of Benaras Hindu University and Lala Lajpat Rai, the prominent Arya Samaj leader, (both of them were Congress leaders) involved in the effort to make the Mahasaba a strong political force. The significant development of this was the Publication of a book *Hindutva: who*

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<sup>15</sup> Madan, op. cit., p. 215

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

*is a Hindu?* written by a notable Mahasabha leader Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923. He rejected non-Vedic faiths such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. “Savarkar emphatically favored the term “Hindu,” tracing it back to the geographical designation Sindu-Hindus being the people who lived in the lands between the river Sindu (Indus) and the high seas, and whose original scriptures were the Vedas. For them, the country so defined was both their fatherland (*pitribhu*) and their Holy Land (*punyabhū*), and they constituted one nation, the Hindu nation. The acknowledgement of a common nationality (*rashtra*), a common race (*jati*), and a common culture or civilization (*sanskriti*).”<sup>18</sup> In this, we can see clearly, the Savarkar’s ideology of Hindutva.

**Hindutva:** Savarkar claimed that the term Hinduism includes all religions of Hindus, such as Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and even tribal communities. He was almost close to the idea that if anyone wants to be an Indian he or she should be a Hindu.

**RSS:** Dr. Keshava Balirama Hedgewar further strengthened the idea that was started by Savarkar in the modified form when he started *Rashtriya Swayam-Sevaka Sanagha* (RSS) that is the national organization of volunteers in 1925, two years after the publication of Savarkar’s book. The identity of his organization was national (*rashtriya*) rather than Hindus.<sup>19</sup> However one cannot ignore the particular context in which the RSS was started. There were conflicts between both Muslims and Hindus and Brahmins and non-Brahmins in the national movement. In this context the RSS was started to strengthen the power of Brahmins (Caste-Hindus). The more numbers of people who joined RSS were Brahmins. Hedgewar systematically emphasized the physical culture and ideological instruction that is the supremacy of Hindu cultural tradition. As the RSS grew more and more the Hindu – Muslim relationship became worsened. In 1934

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 218

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 219

Congress had to debar the members who associated with the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS and the Muslim League because they were communal in nature.

After the death of Hedgewar in 1940 Madhav Sadashiv Golwalker became the leader of RSS.<sup>20</sup> Under his leadership the RSS was spread across the nation and he gave clear ideological framework. They rejected the political activity, they emphasized the idea of nationality based on “fatherland” and “Holy Land” and they excluded Muslims and Christians from the nation.

Golwalker, under his leadership led the organization towards the nation of monolithic culture.

The following quotation from the writings of Golwalker clearly explains their objective.

The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu religion, that is they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ingratitude towards this land and its age-long tradition but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment not even citizen’s rights.<sup>21</sup>

The above is unambiguous and ideologically enforcing Hindu monopoly. The emphasis of RSS is about culture, which is based on religion. “From Dayananda to Golwalker, there is a clear shift from the critical importance of the ‘canon’ to that of ‘culture’” or particularly national culture.<sup>22</sup> Nationalism and fundamentalism went on hand in hand in the ideology of RSS. It calls everyone to follow one culture called national culture of India. The RSS gradually developed its objectives in relation to political activities that today it is a strong supporter of Bharatiya Janatha

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 221

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 222

<sup>21</sup> Cited by Madan, op. cit., p. 223

<sup>22</sup> Madan, op. cit., p. 224

Party (BJP) and the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Thus RSS has a significant place among those movements, which have been trying to rejuvenate Hindu Dharma (religion) and Hindu Nationalism. It is one of the most disciplined voluntary forces in India and a major political force as well. The aggressive militancy of the RSS is threatening to religious minorities like Christianity and Islam. The main objective of the RSS was and is to take the nation to glorious past and establish “*Hindu Rashtra*”(Hindu nation). The RSS involved actively, also in conversion and re-conversion process.

#### *Vishva Hindu Parishad*

The VHP (Parliament of Universal Hindu), the world Hindu congress is often regarded as a front organization of the RSS because both of them share the same concerns of establishing Hindu nation and attacking other religions. The VHP was founded on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1964 at Sandeepany, Sandyalaya, and Bombay.<sup>23</sup> The main objective of VHP was to consolidate and strengthen the Hindu society, to protect, develop and spread the Hindu values of life. The conversion and re-conversion constitute a major aspect of the VHP's task. They claim that they reconverted good number of Christians and Muslims to Hinduism. Their ultimate aim is not just to convert or reconvert but also to bring all religious faiths in India under the monolithic culture of Hinduism.

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<sup>23</sup> Mathew, op. cit., p. 44

### *Post – Colonial Reflection of Fundamentalism*

Beyond individual movements, Hindu fundamentalism occurred within an historical context of colonization often propagated through missional activities. A post-colonial review of these influences reveals that fundamentalist Hindus appropriated certain western concepts in creating a “counter” identity. The result is a form of Hindu nationalism quite close to its western predecessors.

#### *Colonialism*

Colonialism fabricated an “Oriental other” to legitimate the dominance of the Western ‘self.’ Clark writes,

With regard to the knowledge it was driven by a twofold agenda: circulating forms of knowledge that “proved” the passive, irrational, traditional, immoral, backward and exotic nature of the Oriental (Eastern) world, and routinized the active, rational, modern, moral, progressive and realistic nature of the Occidental (Western) world. The logic of this body of knowledge implied that it was natural and beneficial that the self (West) overcome the ‘other’ (east) for the sake of humanity’s progressive evolution.<sup>24</sup>

Colonizers educated Indians with kind of attitude and knowledge to dominate them. Rudolf, who studied the diary of Amar Singh that was written from 1898 to 1942, says that there was clear mention of the idea called “Selfness” of colonizer and the “otherness” of Orientals.<sup>25</sup>

In the process of colonial construction, India started developing its identity in two ways:

(a) It constructed a “homogeneous identity” in order to bring different people under single Umbrella (Hinduism) (b) At the same time it used the essence of colonial construction

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<sup>24</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, “Religious Liberty in Contemporary India: The Human Right to be Religiously Different” in *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 52, No. 4, October 2000, p. 480.

<sup>25</sup> Lloyd Rudolph, “*Self as other: Amar Singh’s diary as reflexive ‘native’ ethnography* in Veena Das, et al, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1999, p. 421.

simultaneously.<sup>26</sup> They tried to form India as one homogeneous category, religiously one. They emphasized that the essence of Hinduism was the universality of religion. Thus the religion played a major role in the formation of India. The regional term *Sindu* became the religious term “Hindu” by which they tried to bring whole area towards the East of Sindu to be a religiously homogeneous identity that is Hinduism. Clarke by quoting David Ludden says that this kind of Indian religion supported the colonizers.<sup>27</sup> For V. D. Savarkar, Hindu is a person who regards the land of Bharatavarsha (Bharata was a Hindu mythological figure), from the Indus to the seas as his or her Fatherland as well as a Holy Land, (the cradle of their religion).<sup>28</sup>

### *Missionaries and Colonialism*

Of course, the missionaries during colonial period in India had different goals and purposes other than that of colonizers. However, they did share the ideology of the British imperialist. Missionaries, especially under the renewed Charter of 1813 and 1833 worked hand in hand with the British Govt. The Protestant theology justified the expansion of British imperialism as God’s providence. The British missionaries thought that the Christianity of the west has to be transported in India. Anything outside of Western Christianity was condemned and rejected.

Clarke explains the theology of missionaries under three themes: (a) The immanent presence of God, through the incarnation of Christ into human history, pervades all realms of life; thus the cosmic Christ unites all human beings in an invisible whole. (b) This incarnational view gathers up all of creation into a natural, organic social structure, which evolves towards order and fulfillment. The immanent divine presence initiates trajectories of coherence. Unity is stressed as the mark of divine work over the tendency towards plurality, which would inject the

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<sup>26</sup> Clarke, op. cit., p. 480.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 481.

spirit of disharmony. (c) There is a tacit assumption that British Empire embodies, under providential guidance, the manifest process of such an historical evolution. The following quotation cited by Clarke from the first report of the General Wesleyan Methodist Society of 1818 expresses the mission theology of the missionaries.

For what are all the missionaries employed among the millions even of British India? As men immortal and accountable, living in the practice of idolatry, “that abominable thing which the Lord hateth,” they are objects of deep commiseration; but they have a special claim to regard as fellow subjects (all those) inhabiting portion of the earth, which Almighty God, in his providence has now made a part of the British Empire. The new and awful discoveries made of the polluting and murderous nature of their superstitions in writings of unquestioning authority, with the success of the missionary labors of the excellent men of other denominations already employed there, the committee think ought to be considered as special calls upon British Christians to increase the means of acquainting their natives of India with their divine religion; and to preserve in the glorious toil, until the name of Christ shall be sounded throughout the vast extent of our oriental domain, and one God and Savior shall be worshipped by every subject of the British throne.<sup>29</sup>

It is true that the missionaries were the products of that period and theology. They tried to be faithful in whatever knowledge they had. However, it does not mean that we have to accept everything they said or did. Since we are living in the post-colonial period it is necessary for us to use newly developed methodologies to understand, analyze and explain why it happened. As a challenge to the colonizers’ attitude of India as “other,” the Hindu reformers tried to assert their

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<sup>28</sup> Madan, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

“self.” This was appropriate as the reformers directed their ideology against the colonial rulers. Unfortunately, they started using the same ideology and power against religious minorities in India, becoming another colonial power within the nation.

### *Hindu-nationalism*

The Hinduism of nineteenth century tried to recover the glory of ancient past; ignoring the rich contribution of cultural varieties and religious manifestations. To achieve this they used the notion of Hindu religion and Hindu community. The question remains to what extent these notions are historically valid? There are challengers. Pannikar writes, “Hinduism cannot be described as a historically evolved religion. The historicity of Hinduism is a relatively recent as a part of the reformist -revivalist movements.”<sup>30</sup> Present day Hinduism assumes that Indian culture is a Hindu culture and Indian nationalism is Hindu nationalism. It overlooks the complex historical process by which a composite culture developed in India.

The early purpose of nationalism in nineteenth and first half of twentieth century was to gain independence from colonialism. Unfortunately, this version of nationalism was like another imperialism. Breckenridge and Vander Veer say “Nationalism is not the answer to Orientalism as implied in Said’s book. Rather nationalism is the Avatar of orientalism in the later colonial and post-colonial period.”<sup>31</sup>

Nationalists of India used religion to unite the nation as one. They wrongly assumed that India was one homogeneous Hindu nation. G. Aloysius rightly points out that the religious renaissance was used for nationalistic purposes. With different religious forms such as reformation and revivalism, the Brahmanic ideology created a monolithic dominance and

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<sup>29</sup> Clarke, *The First Report of the General Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1818*, London: Wesleyan Methodist Society 1881, p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> K. N. Pannikar, *Communalism in India: History, Politics and Culture*, New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1991, p. 2

reincarnated itself as pan-Indian political-national Hinduism. “This group as the dominant and leading class, reworked and recast Brahmanic ideology of state power, simultaneous to their claim to appropriate the state itself ... (thus) the emergent Hinduism was at once Brahmanical as well as national.”<sup>32</sup> This view clearly indicates that the nationalist leaders completely failed to understand the heterogeneous pluralities in India or they deliberately trying to bring everyone under one religion Hinduism. To achieve this end they used the Hindutva as their both ideology and weapon. The ideologies of Hindutva include the following:

- 1) It devalued the various cultures of India and made an attempt to establish pan-Indian religion called Hinduism, which was primarily classical, Brahmanic and Vedanthic.
- 2) Newly defined Hinduism was more an ideology than faith and this use of Hinduism became an instrument of political mobilization. Their sole concern was to bring all Indians into a single nation through the ideology of Hindutva.
- 3) Having had articulated Hindutva ideology of Hindu nationalism, Hinduism started to martialize the community. They justify this by telling it was for the purpose of defense from colonial rulers but in the post-colonial period it is used as offensive against religious minorities, especially on Christians in recent years.
- 4) Hindu nationalism became another colonial power within India. They are using their power and ideology to homogenize the Indian population beyond religious nationalism (Hindutva)

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<sup>31</sup> Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 12

<sup>32</sup> Cited by Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

In this context the whole purpose of Hindu Nationalism (with the support of Hindu revivalist groups such as Arya Samaj, RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, etc.) was to keep other people wherever they were and rule them.<sup>33</sup>

### *Nation-State*

The nation state *institutional* symbols and rituals such as flag, national anthem, and parade with the ritual exhibition of weapons are incorporated into third world colonies by the west. This gave rise to religious nationalism as we see today.<sup>34</sup> It is important to distinguish between the terms “state,” “nation” and “religion.” State is a matter of equality where as nation is an issue of identity. Nation is essentially bound to a particular territory, whereas the religion can be professed in different nations. Thus the agenda of the Hindutva to have a religious nationalism is far from the reality. The reality in India is a civilization entity, which has divergent cultures, traditions and religions. These various identities have their own history, traditions, language, etc., and they are integral part of the definition of India and understanding of it as a nation.

### *Communal Feeling*

In order to achieve their goal the present version of Hinduism created communal feelings in the people. The restoration of temples, destroyed during the medieval period is the most sensitive communal method is being used. BJP and VHP have selected various sites such as Ayodhya, Madura and Benaras for religious agitation.<sup>35</sup> They are identifying these places to arouse the religious sentiments of the devotees of Rama, Krishna and Shiva. These groups have realized that the restoration of temples is a means for creating a sense of solidarity among Hindus. By showing Muslims and Christians as their enemies Hindus tried to bring all under

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<sup>33</sup> Clarke, op. cit., p. 483

<sup>34</sup> Felix Wilfred, *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope: At the Dawn of the Millenium* Delhi: ISPCK, 2000, p.216

Hinduism. “The BJP is well aware that Hinduism is too amorphous to admit of homogeneity and therefore the only way to bring the Hindus together is to create a feeling of “us” and “they.”<sup>36</sup> So the demand for restoration of temple is a clever political play to achieve Hindu solidarity.

The monolithic nature of religious nationalism is clearly seen in the new education programs. Kancha Ilaiah says that the symbols like Saraswati, Lakshmi are introduced and imposed as national symbols, which is threat to many variations. He proposes that, instead of these cultural symbols of mythical texts, the civilization symbols such as pot, wheel, sickle, hammer, etc. could be used as national symbols. The imposition of monolithic cultural symbols will lead to the fragmentation of society, whereas civilization symbols unite people of different religion, caste, and class.<sup>37</sup> The Hindutva nationalism is oppressive in nature because it has no or little room for various identities. There is no place for the aspirations of the various groups, any opportunity for the representation of smaller groups and minorities through their symbols. Anyone who does not go with their ideology is branded as anti-national.

### *Hindutva and Violence*

One of the aspects of Hindutva is to attack others either ideologically or by cruel physical violence. Clarke calls it as “the pen and the stick work in concert.”<sup>38</sup> Ideologically they claim that India is Hindu nation with one culture, religion and language. Hence it denies the possibilities for religious and cultural differences. Arun Shourie, who is proponent writer of Hindutva ideology, denies the identity of Indian Christians and Dalits because they are not under the hierarchical Brahmanical Hinduism.<sup>39</sup> They are using physical violence against those who are not coming under their ideology, especially Christians and Dalits. Many atrocities

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<sup>35</sup> Pannikar, op. cit., p. 5

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Wilfed, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>38</sup> Clarke, op. cit., p. 484

committed against them. “Between 1994 and 1996, a total of 98,349 cases were registered under the Atrocities Act. A further 1660 were for murder, 21814 for rape and 13,671 for hurt.”<sup>40</sup>

Though there were anti-Christian workers in the past it was not so severe as these days. “In the last fifty years there have been only fifty instance of physical violence against Christians. But in the last one year (1999 – 2000) there have been 110 cases of atrocities against them.”<sup>41</sup>

### *The Christian Response*

A Christian response can be seen in three stages. (a) Indian national struggle for independence was very complex in nature. Different groups of people and forces contributed to it. This cannot be reduced to the traditional nationalistic historiography because the nationalist movement was the work of innumerable battles and struggles by simple and heroic groups such as peasants, tribals, the working class and of course caste leaders. With respect to the Christians, some individuals participated but there is no evidence to show the involvement of most Christians. (b) Though India got independence in 1947 the wave of nationalism continued in post-independence period. Wilfred says that the main concern of this period was nation building.<sup>42</sup> As far as the Christian community was concerned it did contribute much in this stage by way of widening its educational, health care and developmental work. Further it started paying greater attention to plight of the backward classes. (c) The main concern of third stage is “the creation of a national community by forging new relationships among the various collective identities.”<sup>43</sup> This stage is more challenging for Christians because many sensitive and politically complex issues are involved. At this juncture, Christians have to respond very carefully and they must know what they should and should not do in this circumstance.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Clarke, op. cit., p. 41. Broken people: *Caste Violence against India's Untouchable*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999.

<sup>41</sup> T. K. Oommen, “Evolving the Real Nation”, *The Hindu Magazine*, 18 July 1999, p.1. cited by Clarke, Ibid, p.484

To start with, Clark and others say Christians should not succumb to the general temptation to attack one fundamentalism with another competing fundamentalism.<sup>44</sup> O. V. Jathanna, in his report of the College day of UTC on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2001, stated that Christian must not respond to Hindu fundamentalism with Christian fundamentalism, rather fundamentally we have to have new approaches. In the context of pluralistic society like India, the traditional exclusive approach is not advisable; rather Christians must use the inclusive approach in their mission. This enables a Christian to have positive attitude to people of other faiths and it helps them to avoid unnecessary attack on other religions. Clarke puts the same thing in a different way by telling that the Christians have to come out of the colonial and national models those reject the plurality of religious expressions.<sup>45</sup> We have to find alternative models that provide possibility for all religions to live together in harmony.

One of the commonest criticisms brought against Christians is the overt but improper use of persuasion as a goal in evangelism. Persuasion is not bad in itself because the advertisers persuade people to buy their products and politicians persuade people to accept their policy and vote them. But particularly disrespectful ways of persuasion must be avoided. Inappropriate forms of persuasion may include several approaches: (a) **Cultural Imperialism:** The cultural imperialism is one of the disrespectful persuasions. In this one group forces its culture upon another culture. This is what happened when missionaries converted most of the people in India. Unfortunately, some Christians in India today, also practice this. (b) **Imposition:** The imposition takes place when authority and power are used to force people to follow Christianity. (c) **Manipulation:** This takes place when we use things alien to the heart of the gospel to induce

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<sup>42</sup> Wilfred, op. cit., p. 214

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Clarke, op. cit., p. 485

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

others to accept Christianity. For example, manipulation can take place when people's emotions are roused so that they accept Christianity in a way that does not involve the proper use of mind. Christianity has to become self-reflective and self-critical so that it may not fall prey to either imperialistic or to Hindutva ideology.

### *Conclusion*

The Hindu religious fundamentalism that was started with reformative measure, in the course of history, as a result of ideological development became national in scope and monolithic in culture. It was appropriate to react against colonial rulers. The historical development of fundamentalism proves, however, that the ultimate response was no better than western imperialists as Hinduism became another imperialistic power within the nation. They completely ignored the diversity of Indian culture and religious tradition. In the name of Hindu-nationalism they are trying to bring all other cultures and religious faiths under a monolithic nature of religion and nation called Hindu-India. All those who are not coming under their ideologies are threatened both orally and physically. This calls the Christians in India to think and act appropriately.

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