

ASIAN
HORIZONS
Vol. 12, No. 3, September 2018
Pages: 514-531

Indian Theological Association (ITA) Statement 2018

CHALLENGES OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN INDIA TODAY A Theological Response

Introduction

1. We, the members of Indian Theological Association (ITA) gathered at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK), Bengaluru for the 41st Annual meeting cum Conference from 26 to 29 April 2018, to deliberate on the theme “Challenges of Religious Nationalism in India Today,” searched together for an adequate theological response to the implied potentials of this phenomenon threatening the harmony and integrity of India. Presentations, deliberations and discussions endeavoured an in-depth analysis of the problematic, taking into account of its religious, cultural, political and economic implications and intricacies. We sensed an ethnocentric ideology of Hindutva virulently being advocated and enforced through covert and overt politics of polarizations, social divisions, cultural and religious chauvinism, which would radically attack India’s fundamental credentials and legacies of religious tolerance, inclusive pluralism, and path of ahimsa. Thereby, the destiny of our country which was envisioned in justice, peace and harmony, would be jeopardized irrevocably. As concerned citizens as well as true followers of Jesus, we felt the resolve to respond to this ominous scenario in utmost earnestness resonating with the wisdom and vision of the Indian Constitution which has upheld and fostered India as a federated fellowship of people of multiple cultures, religions, and ethnic groups, living in peace and harmony since the Independence of our country.

Hindutva Movement and Ideology

2. The Hindutva brand of nationalism had been taking root well over a century ago. The Hindu revivalist movements of the late 19th century like the Arya Samaj started by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875 with its *Shuddhi* movement in the early 19th century, as well as Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta sowed the seeds for the restoration of a seemingly lost Hindu pride. Later, through the 20th century, Hindu nationalism gained ground with the birth of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 founded by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, and its following Sarsanghchalacks like M.S. Golwalkar and B.S. Deoras. Though Golwalkar is known to be the one who gave philosophical foundation to the Hindutva movement, much of his thoughts are in fact based on the writings of V.D. Savarkar who had outlined the fundamentals of Hindutva in his work known as *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923). Golwalkar in his works, *We or Our Nation Defined* and *Bunch of Thoughts* clearly defined and delineated who belonged to the envisioned Hindu *Rashtra*, and who would be treated as 'second class' citizens, at best, or as aliens, traitors, foreigners, etc., at worst. The political stance of the RSS had always been a two-nation theory. The frequent engineered communal conflicts were convenient reason to legitimize their political advocacy in this regard and it oft offered them rich dividends in political terms.

3. The political enforcement and cultural appeal of religious nationalism is a misleading political ideology as well as a process contrived in Hindutva ideology to reconstruct India as a Hindu *Rashtra*. It goes against the basic tenets of the Indian Constitution: democracy, secularism, pluralistic values, social equity, cultural egalitarianism, gender equality, human rights, and religious freedom. Moreover, the Hindutva ideology is a dire deterrent to the legacy, and wisdom of India and its civilization which is all inclusive and all embracing. The way it is advocated and imposed evidently shows that it is basically a political ideology; it is deviously construed and constructed in the ambit of 'cultural nationalism' by the rich and the powerful. The poor and the oppressed have not any space or role in its mandate or practice as it evolves now in the political process and resolves. It is both by design and dynamics, a fundamentalist political ideology, conveniently churned out through religious and cultural nationalism by devious politicians to serve their political avarice in the garb of Hindu nationalism. The implicit design of Hindutva is the establishment of a utopian "Hindu *Rashtra*" which is exclusive and violent because it does not offer any political, social and cultural space or respect to the discourses and advocacies which do not

resonate with Hindutva politics. Thus Hindutva turns out ironically an antithesis of the basic tenets of Hinduism: tolerance, inclusiveness, *advaita*, etc.

4. The Hindutva ideology is brazenly schemed through economic policies, polarized politics, social engineering, religious hegemony, choreographing media through political pressure, and craftily discrediting democratic institutions through inordinate ordinances and brutal majority by the present political dispensation. It is thus imposed on the people against their will and wish in deceit and deception. It poses, thus, a comprehensive threat not only to the secular and democratic fabric of our nation but also to the well-being of teeming millions who are still in need of liberation from economic exploitation and social and cultural discriminations. The advocacy of 'one religion, one culture, one language' of the religious nationalists will erase the very character of India which is nurtured and fostered in its practice and vision of religious and cultural pluralism from time immemorial.

5. The scholars of ancient history, based on archaeological and linguistic evidence showed that the Aryans had migrated to India in small groups during 1200-800 BCE. Therefore, the tall claim that the Aryan-Hindus were the original inhabitants of this land and that the mainstream culture was that of the upper caste Hindus would become untenable. While one could trace the Hindu Nationalism from 1906 onwards and political nationalism from 1947, the nationalism of *Adi Jan* (Dalits) and Adivasis could be traced back to 5000 years. Together they constitute approximately 25 per cent of the population of our country. Though they were some of the original inhabitants of this land, they continued to suffer due to unjust distribution of wealth and resources and were pushed to the periphery without human dignity and rights. The caste system, which had been the backbone of Hinduism, was reinforced in many ways so that the dominant castes could enjoy economic, social, cultural and political privileges.

Strategies used for Promoting Religious Nationalism

6. Though the RSS was banned, first, after the murder of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, second, after the Emergency in 1975-77, and more recently, after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, it still holds sway in the political and cultural discourses. The RSS and its affiliates continue to be in the mainstream politics by imposing its will and wit covertly and overtly through Bharatiya Janata party. They rely on diverse strategies and policies like rewriting India's

history by historicizing the Hindu myths, saffronizing political policies, Hinduizing economic agenda, marginalizing democratic traditions and making democratic institutions defunct, manoeuvring politics of polarizations, idealizing the past Hindu eras and recouring it into the politics by undoing history, constructing the utopia of Hindu Rashtra and indulging in a militant political praxis of dharma *yudh*.

7. One of the subtle strategies employed for promoting religious nationalism is distorting history; thereby the historical process is deconstructed and reconstructed in tune with premeditated political agenda in a Hindutva perspective. The followers of Hindutva ideology try to portray themselves as embodying India's Hindu identity and consider non-Hindus as 'anti-nationals' and outsiders. It endeavours to reclaim an imagined golden era of Hindus some 12,000 years ago. The falsification of facts regarding the statistics of conversion, is part of the strategy to further the policy of Hindutva.

8. Revisiting history is always a convenient tool and a strategy to construct or deconstruct new political ideologies and appeals; it will have an enduring impact as it targets young impressionable minds. The school textbooks and Indian history are being rewritten from the Hindutva perspective. Alternative story is being told about the Father of the Nation. Insignificant or less prominent personalities are brought to limelight. It would not be surprising if the proponents of Hindutva find a way for portrayal of Nathuram Godse as a national hero.

9. Misleading historicization of mythic figures, unwarranted Hinduization of tribal gods, and brahminization of local gods and goddesses of Adi Jan (Dalits) are other examples of falsifications to promote the inviolable legitimacy of Hinduism. For instance, attempts are made towards an alternative interpretation of Mahabali myth where he is portrayed as an evil king. Similarly, the Hindutva forces are appropriating local gods like Murugan and Mariamman and incorporating them into the Hindu pantheon and thus Hindutvize Dalit and tribal gods; thereby they promote a Hinduism to suit their Hindutva politics.

10. Politics of renaming is a crafty praxis of Hindutvizing politics. Roads and ports acquire a new appeal when they are renamed after the ideologues of Hindutva. To cite a few illustrations, a section of road, which was known in the name of Mahatma Gandhi, is renamed after Hedgewar; the Kandla Port in Gujarat is now called Deendyal Port and Mughal Sarai Railway Junction is changed to Deen Dayal Upadhyaya.

11. Some of the misguided proponents of Hindutva seem to be aggressive, thereby disrupting the religious harmony with their distorted interpretation of history. It vitiates people's emotions and leads to virulent outbursts, which endanger the religious cordiality and social cohesion. Oft, these proponents are promoted and supported by the dominant Hindutva politicians through their intriguing political silence and taciturn support. Hatred against Christians is kept alive by maintaining certain symbols like the Inquisition pillar in Goa.

12. Another devious strategy to divide people on religious lines is to celebrate certain festivals which were never celebrated in the locality previously. For instance, Ramnavami was not a major religious festival in West Bengal until recently. Under the patronage of Hindutva ideologues this year Ramnavami procession was held in Asansol leading to the clashes between the Hindus and Muslims.

Politics of Economy at the Service of Religious Nationalism

13. Following the neo-liberalist vision, India began introducing a number of economic reforms from 1991. Since then India's growth has been impressive in terms of economic growth. The growth rate of the economy doubled in 2000s compared with what it was in 1960s. By 2015, India emerged as the third largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity value, with about \$8 trillion next only to China and the US. Today India has become the fastest growing major economy in the world. By 2050 India may overtake the GDP of the US and by 2060s, India may overtake China, in terms of GDP. Yet, the World Wealth Report released in September 2016, rates India as the second most 'unequal' nation in the world. The poorest 10% living in villages spend 15 times less than the top 10% living in cities.

14. Unfortunately, this phenomenal growth did not engender an equitable distributive justice owing to Hindutva politics which support always the upper caste and class, the rich and the powerful. The poor have to remain ever poor in the systemic of Hindutva political dispensation per se. This happens not by default but by political design for it suits the Hindutva politics in the sense that the poor should ever depend on an economics mandated by politics of polarization. What is deviously strategized is that they can only survive on the fake largesse of the upper-castes and thus they become 'slaves' of the politics of Hindutva economics. Besides, lasting loyalty and docility of the rich is assured as the political dispensations side with them. It has always been a sociological truism that the rich and

the fundamentalists co-opt each other and indulge in an unholy alliance for their political and fiscal interests.

15. It is always true that social justice and economic parity is possible only through a participative economics in which each and every citizen will have space to contribute his or her resources and creative talents. It should fundamentally be an inclusive economy both in terms of people's participation and economic parity achieved through policies and projects which uphold distributive justice and equitable growth. Such a vision and wisdom are outside the vision and wisdom of the exclusive politics and economics of Hindutva. It is revealing that, though, India is one of the top ten richest countries in the world in GDP, ironically poverty is its prime problem and India is still home of the teeming millions of poor! The poor and poverty are necessary evils to maintain politics of polarizations and division in terms of class and castes.

16. To further the argument, today, under the present government, the market economy has clearly focused on enriching only certain docile Corporates. Hindutva political policy is to support corporate economics thereby the Corporates will support Hindutva ideology in return. It has a devious *quid pro quo* Hindutva politics of economics. The unhealthy link between the fundamentalists and capitalism is obvious in the industrial and agricultural policies of the present political regime. For example, instead of manufacturing goods and thus creating employment, the government is keen on importing finished goods. Villages are not developed; agricultural sector is neglected though 50% of the population still depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Farmers are the worst hit, and many commit suicides when they cannot repay loans while the rich run away to safe havens without paying back huge loans taken from nationalized banks under the protégé of the present political dispensation.

17. As a matter of fact, the political strategy of Hindutva conjures that by placating the rich who generally belong to the upper class and caste, they hope, they can procure a solid support of the rich and the powerful to advance the advocacy of Hindutva nationalism. Indeed, religious nationalism feeds a politics of polarization which might give good dividends in the electoral arithmetic. But the politics and economics of religious nationalist forces is only a dishonest strategy of the power-hungry politicians to win elections and thus to perpetuate their political hegemony. There is really no religion in this dishonest politics and economics of Hindutva.

18. The Hindutva politics and economics sustain themselves by misappropriating the religiousness of the illiterate and simple people for political and economic gains. What we infer is the sinister strategy of politicization of economics through a politics of polarization to further the Hindutva ideology; thereby the economic and political interests of the rich and the powerful are primarily safeguarded and fostered. India as a nation cannot survive if it is not people participative and people specific, and if it does not foster and sustain the wellbeing of people in terms of social justice, economic equity, distributive justice and religious tolerance especially in the case of India whose social and political fabric is historically multi-cultural and multi-religious to the core.

Biblical and Theological Reflections

19. The wisdom, vision and advocacy of Jesus' God's Reign is, *per se*, a wholesome critique of nationalistic, exclusivist and ethnocentric politics on the one hand, and on the other, it unveils an alternative vision and praxis of an inclusive, and peoples specific politics of equity, peace, sharing, service; thereby it fosters an all-inclusive polity in which the poor who are marginalized on various accounts, whether be it cultural, social, political, or religious, have a decisive role and space in the political and social processes and policies. "Thy Kingdom Come!" the prayer that Jesus taught is a radical critique of his contemporary political and religious dispensation which was oppressive, regressive, exploitative and exclusive. He poignantly introduced God as the Author of life and streamlined a political dispensation grounded in divine justice and jurisprudence. Jesus' vision of God's Reign was a counter narrative of the contemporary political dispensation.

20. God's Reign is not construed as a domain of power politics in the name of religion, class, caste and culture but a poly potential space to nurture and foster a fellowship grounded in *agape* (love), *diaconia* (service) and *liturgia* (worship), where God would be loved and confessed as the "Prince of Life" (Acts 3:15), and all people would be regarded as brothers, sisters and friends (Mk 1:15; Mt 12:46-50; Mt 20:28; Jn 13:1-17). This God is to be sought in the "griefs and sorrows" right in the occurrences of the world (GS, no. 1). The very idea of God acquired a new rendering as the Sacred in the secular; God is figured out verily as Immanuel who is ever present in the daily struggles, trials and tribulations of the people at the margins. God is no more a monad in a holy aloofness but the One ever present with the humans in their miscellanea daily struggles here-now. It

implies that a polity of liberty, equality and fraternity can be constructed and sustained in an enduring way only when human endeavour is bridged with the Divine dispensation; the core of Incarnational dynamic and design is this bonding of the Divine and human for the liberating struggles. The political vision, wisdom and path of God's Reign as envisioned and put in practice in the Kingdom ministry of Jesus is to promote and foster a fellowship of "righteousness, peace and the joy of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17)

21. Jesus was creative, joyful and down-to-earth in his approach to God and to all people. His mission Manifesto (Lk 4:16-18) proclaimed in the synagogue of his hometown, Nazareth, was clearly directed towards loving and serving the poor, the blind, the captives and the 'least' of society. Jesus' words and works, and the witness of his life should be the model and measure of any mission initiatives that we, Christians, must adopt today. Any form of exclusivism, ritual rigidity, legalism and sanctimonious superiority creates divisions and strife, going counter to the Good News of Jesus. These must be severely critiqued especially in our times when we ourselves point accusing fingers at others who indulge in religious practices of this type.

22. God's Reign is people centric and life affirmative especially for those who are side-lined owing to century old social and cultural ostracizing, and inordinate regressive religious sanctions. The political governance of God's Reign embodies an emphatic politics of a preferential option for the poor, the blind, the captives, the foreigner and the 'least' and 'lost' of society. This option for the poor is not optional but a fundamental option in the political praxis and policies. Jesus' fundamental commission is to continue the mission of bringing out life and life in abundance to all (Jn 10:10; Jn 20: 21). It is an innovative governance which is not of political polarizations and exclusions as of today's divisive politics, but of tolerance, networking, building bridges of understanding grounded in ahimsa, mutual appropriations and approximations, mutual recognition and appreciation of diversity, and pluralistic claims. The core of the political dispensation of Jesus' vision of God's Reign is, fundamentally, of harmony of life in which everybody is a celebrant of life; thereby the fullness of life is verily the celebration of life in the 'Joy of the Gospel' which is grounded in love, peace, goodness, compassion and righteousness.

23. The early Church nurtured, by and large, this inclusive approach of loving and embracing all. The Cornelius episode conclusively mandated the inclusive vision of God's Reign. Peter

declared: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). The Reign of God is God's benediction to all so that everyone is the citizen of equal right and responsibility.

24. The Logos Christology of the early fathers of the Church like Justin, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria which has delineated God's salvific presence in the pursuits of the religions of the world (Justin, 2 *Apol.* VIII, Celement Stom. 1, 15) is a potential source to develop an inclusive interpretation of the Reign of God though it needs innovative rendering in the present scenario of religious claims and advocacies.

25. Leaving behind the negative positioning towards the religions of the world, the Church creates a very creative and proactive mode towards them. In this regard the dialogue with other religions in positive perspective that the Second Vatican Council initiated is promising. The *Lumen Gentium* says that "Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel and given by him who enlightens all that they may at length have life" (LG 16). *Dignitatis Humanae* of the Vatican Second Council is revolutionary in character when it figures out religious freedom in an interfaith paradigm. It forthrightly argues that it is upon the human conscience that religious obligations fall and exert their binding force. For truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth (DH no 1).

26. Referring especially to situations where people of different religions fear one another Pope Francis states that "an attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian [other] religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides" (EG n. 250). Indeed, today the unfolding scenario worldwide is increasingly becoming complex and is full of intrigues and deceptions for often political or economic motives overlap with cultural and religious differences; history is distorted to suit the politics of mistrust, hatred, lies; polarizations in the name of religion, ethnicity and caste politics is unashamedly indulged across the spectrum of party politics to serve the political ambitions of greedy politicians. This engenders divisions, communal suspicions and fears which lead to violence and riots frustrating communal harmony and social amity. Pope Francis figures out, there is only one road for conquering this fear; it is dialogue and encounter marked by friendship and respect. When we take this path, it is a human one

(Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 28 November, 2013).

27. The Church is prophetic by nature in the vision of Jesus. A prophet takes a stand against everything ungodly and speaks out even at the cost of personal suffering. At times he/she is moved by 'prophetic anger' whose function is to challenge and to purify. The Church is responsible by its call to challenge exclusive religious nationalism which preaches intolerance and thereby to deconstruct the many myths it tries to propagate and make her voice heard on platforms that count. To be passive and to keep quiet out of fear or other reasons is to quench the Spirit that continually works to transform the world.

28. Evidently, the Church's identity is rooted and fostered in the Easter event. The Church is fundamentally a fellowship of hope, and lives, moves, exists, (Acts 17:28) in the promise embodied in the peace and joy of the New Life and New Light brought about by the Risen Christ. The Lord says: "Let not your hearts be troubled.... Shalom, Peace!" (Jn 14:27; Jn 20:21). What is heartening and self-assuring in the thick of the present turbulent times of violence, and divisive politics, is that the Risen Lord never fails in making all things new (Rev 21:5) by his engaging presence as the Church involves in the Kingdom ministry. He is the Lord who comes! (*Maranatha* 1 Cor 16:22): "He comes, comes and ever comes. Every moment, and every age, every day and every night, he comes, comes, ever comes..." (Tagore, *Gitanjali* no.45). The Risen Christ is the Shepherd (Ps 23) who steers and empowers the Church through the inscrutable ways of his Spirit in the present tempestuous times of intolerance and mistrust to green pastures of the Joy of the Gospel. The Church has every reason to take courage to witness the Gospel (Acts 23:11) in today's world of divisions and dissension for the Risen is our co-pilgrim till the end of time (Mt 28:20).

Reinvigorating the Credentials of 'Indian-ness'

29. The ongoing overt and covert advocacy of Hindutva nationalism through the nationwide virulent political, social and cultural discourses is strangely an antithesis of Hinduism *per se*. Evidently, the menace of an exclusive religious nationalism orchestrated through an ethnocentric interpretation of the mainstream religion of Hinduism in the compass of inward looking Hindutva politics ominously disrupts the cultural, social and political text and texture of India's collective identity, and is disastrously capable to fragment and disintegrate the Indian polity. The fact of the

matter is that such a crisis is engineered by dishonest and power-hungry politicians to accomplish their selfish political and fiscal ambitions. Such a political and social ambiguity is viciously and intentionally built up in and through a misconstrued and misread historiography in the fabric of Islamic and British hegemony. This nationalistic re-reading of India's history deceitfully justifies the construct of a nation in terms of territory, language, and religion as well as polarized politics by indulging hatred towards minorities; thereby an oppressive and aggressive homogeneous nationhood is thrust on a heterogeneous polity of many religious pursuits, cultures, traditions, vernaculars and races. This is a regressive reversal and undoing of history of a nation that has thrived on religious tolerance and harmony.

30. Hence, firstly, the present compelling political and cultural situation is that Indian historiography is to be re-read comprehensively from its resources and roots to meaningfully take on these divisive forces and thereby to substantiate the fallacy of the Hindutva ideology; it is more of a national conscientization process through which the obliterated and forgotten cultural consciousness is reconstructed and thereby it becomes a comprehensive referral for an inclusive political dispensation and social transformation.

31. Secondly what is imperative is a competent and credible political praxis of an inclusive vision which proactively enables and ennobles India's pluralist legacies and heritages so much that India's identity and integrity is emphatically reconstructed in a people centric and people participative policies and processes resonating with its core cultural legacy of pluralism and tolerance.

32. Thirdly, the counter advocacy of intolerant Hindutva can surprisingly be sought in the very root paradigms of genuine Hinduism as well as the core polyvalent constituents of Indian identity, which are inbuilt in India's age old primal, tribal patrimonies and legacies from time immemorial. The core and feel of 'Indian-ness' that bonds and binds people of India of amazing diversity of caste, creed, cult, colour, conviction, cuisine, costume, customs and language, is fundamentally a live cultural consensus built upon an inclusive spiritual consciousness and welcoming societal fabric, in which every Indian is unaware socialized and nurtured in a compelling social and cultural space. Such a layered identity construct and ideal is primarily celebrated in the sundries of daily lives of common people (*am-admi*) rather than in abstract equations and syllogisms. Harmony of life lived out in the astounding diversity of discourses and debates has always been

existential and experiential right in the public spaces, and in the daily struggles on the inter-faith third-spaces where common people celebrated their lives on inter-sight rather than exclusive ethnocentric referrals.

33. While delving deep into this inherent cultural consciousness built upon an innate undefined but live consensus it would be obvious that a linear approach will not be helpful to fathom the richness of the 'core experience' of Indian identity of multiple profiles. What is imperative is a multilinear approach to figure out the texture of Indian identity. The phenomenon of 'India' is not a monolithic idea or an exclusive territorial entity (construed on *pitrbhumi* or *punyabhumi*) as often deceitfully argued in the present discourses on religious nationalism. It is a profound living 'experience' celebrated in the miscellanea of common people who live out a consciousness of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* "the world is one family" (Maha Upanishad 6:71-73). This makes the people of India to pray spontaneously everyday irrespective of caste or creed or cult: *lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu* (may all beings everywhere be happy).

34. Moreover, the heritage of the *Adivasis* (Scheduled Tribes), the primordial inhabitants of the land, who comprise a substantial indigenous minority (8.2%, 84.14 million, 2001 census) has been a vital formative constituent in the evolution of the selfhood of India from time immemorial. According to Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, at present, there exist 697 notified tribes. According to the Anthropological Survey of India, the population of India is derived from six main ethnic groups: Negritos, Proto-Australoids/Austrics, Mongoloids, Mediterranean/Dravidian, Western Brachycephals, Nordics or Indo-Aryans who had been immigrants. Immigration of people to India from different corners of the world contributed largely the peopling of India. Based on certain genetic research, Negritos were the first humans to colonize India, likely 30-65 thousand years ago! What is to be inferred is that India has always been an inclusive home and haven to people of all kinds. These amazing poly dimensional roots of India's ancestry should be evoked and appreciated as a resourceful referral in the advocacy of a multilinear and heterogeneous nationhood of India to take on the monolithic and homogeneous nationalism of the Hindutva politics.

35. To further the argument on the Tribal dimension of Indian identity in the present context of divisive nationalist politics, Tribal values, patterns, and ethics have always been the coordinates of Indian culture and intrinsic components of social life. Even the

mainstream Hindu religion has incorporated the tribal ideals, morals, and nuances into their beliefs and rituals. The *Adivasi* origins of Maharishi Valmiki, who composed the Ramayana Hindu religious epic, is widely acknowledged in the circles of scholars. Tribal deities and customs, creation myths and a variety of religious rites and ceremonies are incorporated into the Hindu life. The ancestor worship, worship of fertility gods and goddesses (as well as male and female fertility symbols), totemic worship which we find in the *Adivasi* tradition have ubiquitous presence in the Hindu religious practices. Renowned Bengali writer Mahashweta Devi argues that both Shiva and Kali have tribal origins as do Krishna and Ganesh. In the 8th century, the tribal forest goddess or harvest goddess was absorbed and adapted as Siva's wife. Ganesh owes its origins to a powerful tribe of elephant trainers whose incorporation into Hindu society was achieved through the deification of their elephant totem.

36. The tribal themes of birth, life, harvest, journey, marriage, death etc. resonate with rituals, and ceremonies of the mainstream religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. The tribal vision of life in complete harmony with nature by preserving their resources and blending with the environment is grounded in an all-inclusive wisdom and life pattern. This tribal insight deep in the trajectory of the India as a nation is an inherent salvaging critique of the present advocacy of exclusive Hindutva ideology. Especially, Tribal egalitarianism', its vibrant ecological and cosmic consciousness which are verily vital constituents of Indian identity should be brought into the ongoing discourses, and debates to interrogate the politics of polarizations.

37. To configure further and elaborate the texture of India's self-understanding, the root paradigm of Indian identity is an experiential consensus of "diversity in unity" which is fundamentally a 'way', vision and wisdom which fosters 'harmony of life'. This identity consciousness manifests itself in a praxis of life which is rooted in an inter/multi-religious consciousness in which religious frontiers are porous and diffusive in the incidents and events of the day to day struggles and aspirations of the common people, especially in the public space. The integrity of Indian identity is, first and foremost, grounded in the perennial wisdom which is an epistemology of inclusion rather than exclusion. This inclusive construct of Indian identity is built upon communion of beings nurtured by 'hospitality', 'ahimsa', 'advaita', 'middle-path', 'tolerance', and 'pluralism' which are the DNA of *Pax Indica* which is in contrast to *Pax Britanica* or *Pax Americana* of toleration, which primarily nurtures colonial interests.

In sum the root paradigm of Indian identity is grounded in a consciousness that 'wholly is holy' which is translated in the 'inter/multi-faith of religiousness/spiritual life in a Parliament of religions in the political and cultural praxis right in the secular space. It is more a public reasoning than a private practice.

38. The inclusive consciousness of harmony which is the core of the genuine Indian-ness is expressed in several Hindu religious texts. The Bhagavat Gita aptly figures out the profound vision of harmony when it describes an awakened person as the one who sees 'one's self in everything and everything in one's own self (Bhagavat Gita 6:6). The *Peace Prayer of Isa Upanishad* is expressed in an astounding way: *Om poornamadah poornamidam poornaat poornamudachyate, Poornasya poornamaadaaya poornamevaavashishyate*. It invokes a fullness (*poornam*) of life which is all-inclusive, processual, and evolving; thereby ever exuberant fellowship nurtured in justice, respect, recognition, and a pluralism grounded in religious tolerance. Social amity is the heart and soul of Indian idea of nationhood.

39. The social applications of the inclusive construct of Indian identity are figured out in Gandhian vision of welfare of all (*sarvodaya*) through the welfare of the last and the least (*anttyodaya*). Its political praxis could be "*sabka sath, sabka vikas*" (collective efforts, inclusive growth) as envisioned in the present political discourse. It seems quite appropriate in this context to quote the preamble of the Indian Constitution which succinctly figures out the core of Indian Identity as delineated above : "We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation". It is also relevant to mention that these values are enshrined in various UN resolutions, to which India is a signatory. India is a leading member of the UN discourses and resolves because of Indian Constitution's inclusive vision and wisdom.

40. Indeed, present political realism should lead us to a resolve that the Indian Constitution should be relied as the credible, consensual and inclusive 'referral' and a reasonable recourse for all the people of India while we engage in our identity construction in the present turbulent divisive politics. The sovereignty of the socialist, democratic republic of ours is to be resolved fundamentally in a constitutional nationalism which is socially textured and

politically textured and religiously resolved in a federal polity and is lived out in a tolerant pluralism of ahimsa, middle path, and *advaita* on a domain of secularism in which “*Sarva Dharma Sambhava*” (all religions are equal) is upheld and honoured. In sum, the enduring solution of the present Hindutva politics of mistrust, polarization and division is to be sought primarily right in the resourcefulness of the genuine Hinduism, the creative imagination of the pluralist cultural heritage, the inclusive religious harmony and the immense social tolerance of India ever present down through the centuries.

Ways of Responding to Religious Nationalism

41. **Religious Realm:** It is time that we come out of our ghetto mentality and learn to be fully part of the larger society by participating in the work for common good thus exhibiting authentic unity in diversity. It is important that we move out of our comfortable zones and enter into the peripheries and to understand the emerging Indian reality through the exploited teeming millions on the margins. Let us learn to practice faith in the secular space in the way Jesus did it. Let the devotion and discipleship be brought into a mutually clarifying equation through a meaningful engagement in the public spaces which is vitally ridden with discourses and debates in building a *Bharata* of peace and justice.

42. When faced with many challenges Jesus withdrew to pray (Lk 6:12; Lk 22:42). Mahatma Gandhi fasted and prayed before every satyagraha to rid himself and his followers of anger, greed and such other internal bondages. Faced by the onslaught of religious fanaticism and having to counter it we turn to God in prayer, seeking his help to create a country of love, after his own heart. We believe that “nothing will be impossible with God” (Lk 1:37). Let our prayer be in these turbulent times: “From the unreal, lead me to the real; from darkness lead me to light, from death to life.” As our age-old Indian legacy reveals, the bonds that unite us are stronger than the bonds that divide us. So, we can join hands with all people of good will and work for creating an India in the vision of God’s Reign of love, justice and peace.

43. **Socio-political Sphere:** We, Christians must join with people of other faiths for the common cause using legal advocacy and public campaigns. As responsible citizens we bring people at the grass root levels to discuss relevant issues related with Religious Nationalism. Taking cue from initiatives such as Karwan-e-mohabbat (Harsh Mander), we build a civil society supportive of preserving and carrying forward the vision of the Constitution of India which

embodies an inclusive vision and upholds a participative and substantive democracy. We shall collaborate with people's movements who fight against communal politics in the hope of establishing a society of equity, social harmony and political honesty. In this regard an inclusive prophetic and discreet political stance should be an indivisible dimension of our Christian life in the present context to procure a wider application and appeal of the nation which is inclusive and people centric.

44. **Cultural Spaces and Formation:** Let all those who are under formation be given ample opportunities on a regular basis to get exposed to hard facts of life, the poverty of the masses, the injustice meted out to the poor and the marginalized. The public discourses and debates on the current issues of religious nationalism should be incorporated in the discussions and deliberations in the formation space and in the dynamic of formation.

45. Further, we must: *Retrieve* the great Indian fascination for celebrations in our formation domains and worships. India is considered as the land of festivals, music, dance and celebrations through which social amity and inter-faith fellowship are promoted in our cultural space. *Celebrate* the feasts of different religions with great enthusiasm, and love towards the people of other faiths so that our formation embodies interfaith intersights. *Include* the study of other religions and their faith traditions in our seminaries/religious houses/ parishes; thereby the riches of our fellow pilgrims are integrated in our religious mind-space; *Explore and experiment* the social media, Face-Book, Twitter, Whatsapp as a creative tool to spread the dangers of Hindutva nationalism; the people of all faiths in a locality are to be included in the modern media circles for critical discourses and discussions on the divisive forces damaging national integrity and unity. Initiate new ventures with regard to genuine inculturation and contextualized theology right in the formation spaces.

46. **Education Field:** An overwhelming majority of the students and staff in the educational institutions run by the Church belong to other religions. This provides a conducive opportunity for us to make them aware of the dangers of the divisive politics of the day. Discussions and debates on various topics of local and national importance would prepare our students to brace up for a mature response. Present the various aspects of the Indian Constitution with a special emphasis to the preamble to our students.

47. Further, we must: *make* Legal literacy compulsory in all our institutions; *practice* justice in our institutions especially with the supporting staff; *provide* critical and scientific historical approach to the heritage of India. While teaching in regular schools and colleges, one can find ways of integrating one's mission in the formal school with that of regular ministry to the poor in the vicinity; *Inter faith fellowships* shall be organized in the formation of the students; thereby the human values, morals and ethics of a life of integrity and honesty present in all religions are brought to the very life and formation of people; it implies that educational institutions are not to be treated mere domains of academics but spaces of formation of good citizens in building a nation of peace and justice.

48. Media is being used as a tool to propagate divisive Hindutva ideology and often unleashes half-truths to the minds of students. Media literacy must be one of the important concerns of education; thereby young minds can be trained to assess, interrogate and discern the 'media truths' so that they may not be carried away by media hype.

Conclusion

49. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family) scripted on the portals of the house of Indian Parliament is the ultimate and comprehensive critique of Hindutva's nationalistic politics of division, mistrust, violence, dissension and polarization. The Indian Constitution is the source, path and vision of the prevailing Constitutional Nationalism because it is comprehensively inclusive in the sense that it recognizes, respects and appreciates every aspect of the amazing cultural, religious, social and ideological trajectories, debates, discourses and domains; thereby it mandates a federal political cohesion of tolerance, correlation, mutual appropriations, and appreciations.

50. India's is not an aggressive nationalism resolved in terms of one language, one religion, one territory, and one ideology but it is figured out and fostered in harmony of life; it nurtures and fosters an inclusive, open, and welcoming political, social and cultural space. India's nationhood is construed and constructed through a polity of peoples' fellowship of *ahimsa*, *maitry* and *karuna* on a broad perspective and spectrum of diverse religious pursuits and divergent social patterns.

51. Moreover, the abiding root-paradigm of Indian identity is a social harmony built upon a spiritual vision of *isavasyam-idam-sarvam* (Divine Omnipresence), in which the Divine and human are

covenanted inextricably. This underlying vision of the India's nationhood is an enlightened consciousness which infers 'Wholly as Holy'. The very meaning of *Bharatas* (*bha*-light and *rata*-revel) is those revelling in the light of Consciousness which is inherently *Sat-cit-ananda* (the bliss of communion of being and consciousness).

52. The resources that empower us to interrogate the logistics and agenda of Hindutva centric Hindu *Rashtra* are verily the credentials of genuine Hinduism, the holistic wisdom of India's tribal heritage and the vision and path of Jesus' vision of the Reign of God. Hindutva nationalistic politics of intolerance, ethnocentrism and polarization challenge the disciples of Jesus to practice and live out the vision and wisdom of the Reign of God right in the public space of political discourses and cultural debates; it calls for a radical prophetic rooting and engagement in a prophetic imagination so that Christian praxis becomes creative and innovative and responsive to the divisive and violent politics of the present political dispensation. The present turbulent political scenario increasingly reminds us that our faith can become competent and credible when the followers of Christ participate in the nation building with the vision and praxis of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* of non-violence, peace, solidarity, harmony and equity, which inherently resonate with Jesus' vision of the Reign of God.

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