

## EXAGGERATION LEADS TO EXAGGERATION

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### Abstract

Fundamentalism, in its original meaning in the Christian world, refers to adhering too closely to a literal interpretation of sacred texts. Of late fundamentalism has assumed a wider meaning: a fanatic loyalty to one's own community invoking the scriptures or tenets of one's tradition; refusal to listen to other points of view including proposals of modernity and science; hostility to other communities to the point of violence; attitudes that are exclusive, authoritarian and repressive. The present form of religious fundamentalism is partly a reaction to the radical and insensitive secularism that in some parts of the world made bold to mock faith-expressions in their own religion and in others. Things became more complicated when such reactions got mixed up with local tensions in different parts of the world, with historic memories, colonial wounds, ethnic strife, resource competition, and geo-political struggles. Respectful conversation between people who differ has become an urgent need today. What our age needs above all are bridge-builders, who, despite all difficulties, clashes and confrontations, are eager to search for areas of agreement in view of the common good. They should listen to these words of wisdom, "Your

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speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and you should know how to give the right answer to everyone" (Col 4:6).

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## 1. Definition of Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism, in its original meaning in the Christian world, refers to adhering too closely to a *literal interpretation* of sacred texts. Such an attitude arose in the context of a sense of insecurity that some believers felt in confrontation with modern science, philosophy, and the historical-critical method of studying the Scriptures which seemed to challenge traditional Christian beliefs. It was the less enlightened members of Churches that expressed their Faith in this exaggerated manner.

Of late fundamentalism has assumed a wider meaning: a *fanatic loyalty* to one's own community invoking the scriptures or tenets of one's tradition; refusal to listen to other points of view including proposals of modernity and science; *hostility to other communities* to the point of violence; attitudes that are exclusive, authoritarian and repressive.<sup>1</sup> Expressions like secular fundamentalism, cultural fundamentalism and nationalist fundamentalism are coming into use, when one becomes fanatic about the theory one supports.

Fundamentalism, in this sense, is fast emerging as a universal phenomenon: Hindutva groups against Muslims and Christians; Muslim radicals against minorities where Islam is dominant; similarly with Buddhists; Confucians manifesting a majoritarian attitude towards the non-Han Chinese in China; aggressive religious minorities expressing fidelity to their beliefs in violent ways.

## 2. A Reaction to Radical Secularism

The present form of religious fundamentalism is partly a reaction to the radical and insensitive secularism that in some parts of the world made bold to mock faith-expressions in their own religion and in others. The intensity of reaction has sharpened in recent times when a community's religious self-assertion combined with a nationalist revival, and when it also got linked with a feeling that their natural resources were being exploited by dominant nations. In some places, political leaders began making use of religion for their own vested interests as well.

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Küng, *Christianity*, London: SCM Press, 1995, 641.

The pendulum has often been swinging between secular exaggerations and religious exaggerations. Historians say that it was the exaggerated religious zeal of the Reformers and Counter-reformers leading to prolonged tensions and *Wars of Religion* that was the cause of secular voices in the western world growing shriller. In fact the Judeo-Christian tradition had always recognized the validity of the secular perspective. Thomas Aquinas was one of the earlier teachers to affirm the *autonomy of reason* and the independence of the empirical which was to lead to the Renaissance, exploration, discovery, experiment, research, new sciences, and today's technological advance. But, whenever there were exaggerations on one side, they led to similar exaggerations on the other.

Looking at more recent history, during the Cold War the Communist societies were considered aggressively 'atheistic;' and democratic nations claimed to be defenders of religious freedom and cultural diversity. Such hollow claims were exposed with the fall of the Berlin Wall, when democratic nations that opted for crude capitalism proved to be as materialistic and godless as the erstwhile Communist societies. Gradually spokespersons for the 'human and the reasonable' began, not only to affirm the 'human' but to deny the 'divine' sometimes in the strongest terms. A few like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins chose to be eloquent representatives of 'militant atheism.'

Moving further, some have gone so far as to *ridicule the sacred* writings and prophetic persons associated with certain religious traditions. A reaction was bound to come to provocations like *Satanic verses*, Danish cartoons, or Charlie Hebdo, mocking of religion, or to the public burning of the Quran. This time the reaction was not expressed in words only, but in violent deeds. Things became more complicated when such reactions got mixed up with local tensions in different parts of the world, with historic memories, colonial wounds, ethnic strife, resource competition, and geo-political struggles. This is possibly what has been happening in West Asia and North Africa in recent years.

### **3. A Humiliated Enemy Grows Stronger and Stronger**

There are reasons for worry. Taj Hashmi in his *Global Jihad and America* argues that a committed enemy that feels wronged and humiliated is bound to grow stronger and stronger. Every blow adds to his strength. In an asymmetrical war, the weak feels justified to strike back in unexpected places and in unexpected ways.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup>Taj Hashmi, *Global Jihad and America*, New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2014, 20.

desperate look for desperate remedies. What shocks the world is the *lack of accountability* of Jihad-inspired activists who want to impose justice in their own irrational terms. It is not the help of the legal machinery that they are seeking, it is not the persons who are directly guilty of a misconduct they are striking... they are rather mowing down the weak, the poor, women, children, passers-by.

But the greater shock for Hashmi is that the mighty men that control the fates of powerful nations are behaving not differently. If the 9/11 strike carried away the lives of 3000 innocent persons, the 'War on Terror' in Iraq has taken away at least half a million lives, clearly more than Hiroshima and Nagasaki put together; and 9-14 million in Afghanistan, many of whom were erstwhile US allies against the Soviet bloc.<sup>3</sup> Noam Chomsky has described war in the globalized world as a means to open out the markets of 'unwilling nations' for the products of the advanced world.<sup>4</sup>

If ordinary soldiers took sadistic pleasure in torturing prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, more enlightened persons rejoiced in painfully immature manner when Saddam Hussein or bin Laden was brought to a cruel end. After all, Saddam himself had been enlisted to serve US policies when it suited them, to be sacrificed when it no longer suited their purpose.<sup>5</sup> And unexplainably, when Weapons for Mass Destruction were not found in Iraq, no apology was offered to the victims or to the world-community, nor a speedy withdrawal ordered. The rest of the world could only keep watching these events in total helplessness.

#### **4. World Order Run by Unaccountable Agencies**

There seem to be no UN agency nor international structure that can restrain the sturdier nations from getting involved with 'regime changes,' proxy wars, ethnic tussles, and even direct interventions in weaker countries. How do these things differ from absolute colonialism? And they are taking place in our times when colonial memories are still fresh, the wounds left behind are still raw, and when the perceptions of unfairness in aliens' tapping their mineral resources are strong.

Many countries that were artificially created to suit colonial interests or those with borders arbitrarily drawn are caught in internal struggles due to ethnic diversity, social injustice, army atrocities. Such internal hostilities have thrown up a large number of

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<sup>3</sup>Hashmi, *Global Jihad and America*, 23.

<sup>4</sup>Hashmi, *Global Jihad and America*, 20.

<sup>5</sup>Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads*, London: Bloombury, 2015, 485.

*stateless people*: Kurds, Palestinians, Kashmiris, Pashtuns, Tamils, Balochis, Thai Muslims, Mindanao Muslims<sup>6</sup> who are ready to join any radical outfits in the cause of Islam. Add to this list Afghans and others who were specially trained to fight the Soviets during the Cold War, who became unemployed and began offering their services to the Taliban or ISIS, or any group of Islamic warriors in any country. Thus, colonial power-game, oil-treasure hunt, anti-Soviet training, and internal rivalries have churned out any number of transnational rebels, insurgents, and terrorists who represent every form of ideology ranging from fascism and anarchism to *nihilism*. Most of these wars are waged in the name of religion.

### 5. Demographic Trends that Cannot be Ignored

There is also the additional fact that West Asia and North Africa have today one of the *highest youth bulges* of the world. While Malthus had identified population growth as a major cause for wars, Huntington singled out youth bulge as the more immediate cause, when, for example, 30-40% of the male population is of the fighting age, between 15 and 29. The western world today has less anxiety of conflict within their areas, not only because they have learned a hard lesson from the World Wars and have greatly benefitted from the concepts of liberal democracy, but also because the age pattern has changed. Northern Ireland has been as much the beneficiary of the change.

Meanwhile some of the heartlands of Islam are exploding with human growth, and people are in search of a 'living space' *lebensraum* (first coined by Friedrich Ratzel 1897).<sup>7</sup> Spontaneous migrations and forced migrations are the result, with various responses from peoples as these trends affect them. At the same time, arms keep moving, as various interests and concepts clash. One must not forget also that Islam today is the fastest growing religion in the world. Pew Research Centre says it will grow 35% in 20 years. The world is going to be a lot different in one generation.

However, Islamic communities are very conscious of their own internal divisions: between Sunnis and Shias, Arabs and Turks, Pakistanis and Afghans. They are jealous of each others' mineral wealth, and aware of their respective political clout and individual and collective ambitions. But the cause of Islam unites them all. Religion is used as a tool by individuals and groups with their diverse agendas to rally fighters together for a common cause. Mark

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<sup>6</sup>Hashmi, *Global Jihad and America*, 18.

<sup>7</sup>Hashmi, *Global Jihad and America*, 21.

Lilla is stunned by these trends, “Though we have our own fundamentalists, we find it incomprehensible that theological ideas still stir up messianic passions, leaving societies in ruin. We had assumed this was no longer possible.”<sup>8</sup>

Those who die quoting the Quran are often brain-washed new converts, unemployed youth, least instructed in true Islamic teaching. But Islam serves as a binding force across nationalities, ethnicities, political loyalties, sectarian interests. It serves as a motivating force. People are ready to die for Islam, for its rich heritage, and to restore its ancient glory. It is the duty of every believer to do so, especially when the Prophet is being insulted, the Holy Book is being dishonoured, Islamic interests anywhere in the world is being compromised.

## 6. Even in Difficult Situations, Intelligent Thinking is Possible

It is in the context of this religious aggressiveness that many people see Religion itself as an aggressive force, a negative energy in human history. If, in this situation, there were enough leaders who were capable of understanding diverse cultures and sensitivities, and who would be ready to address the problems with openness and sympathy, the world would be different.

In any case, it is never helpful to generalize. It is unfair to make *stereotypes* of all Muslims as fanatical, extremist, violent, obscurantist, irrational, oppressive of minorities and women, feudalistic, archaic in ideas, and uncivilized. Anti-Muslim politicians often find scapegoats for their failures or try to create a common enemy through the media e.g. war against terrorism, to keep people of various opinions and interests together.<sup>9</sup> After all, it is easy to write a ‘criminal history’ of any particular nation, community, or religious group. The failure of a few should not be attributed to all. Prejudices may be spread also by Muslims themselves who have become rootless and westernized, and who handle the media.<sup>10</sup> Comparing the best in one’s own tradition with the worst in another is unfair. Further, every tradition is best understood from within.

On the other hand, if adherents of a tradition were always to idealize everything in their faith forgetting inadequacies, failures, and incoherence, they may neither be truthful nor fair to themselves. While we are interested in the ideal Islam, we also need to know the

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<sup>8</sup>Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016, 8.

<sup>9</sup>Hans Küng, *Islam*, Oxford: One world Publications, 2007, 4-5.

<sup>10</sup>Koenraad Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2001, 517.

real Islam to be helpful. What are required are not uncritical admirers, but truthful friends of Islam.

## **7. The Origin of the Problem: An Eagerness to Recover Islam's Lost Greatness**

We have to admit that Islamic society is going through an identity crisis. A perception of helplessness, alienation, weakening of self-confidence and self-worth before western domination has come upon them. Muslims look back with pride at their great contribution to culture and civilization in the past. They feel that the Islamic message of equality had brought timely relief to the dying civilizations of Greece, Rome, Persia, China and India.<sup>11</sup> Historically speaking, in West Asia Jews and oriental Christians like the Nestorians, Syrians and Copts who felt oppressed by the Byzantine emperors welcomed Muslim conquerors.<sup>12</sup> In India the lower castes accepted Islam as an escape from their degraded status.<sup>13</sup>

Muslim historians feel that their community had introduced an era of religious and ethnic tolerance and initiated a dialogue of civilizations. They brought into existence centres of learning like the one at Cordoba with a library of 400,000 volumes. We may say that a Muslim thinker like Al-Ghazali had anticipated Descartes by six centuries.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Aquinas profited from Averroes' introduction of Aristotle to the West.

But what happens often to early achievers also happened to the Islamic community. Proud of the past, Islamic education moved on to the repetition and veneration of the past. Perpetuation of this outdated paradigm (Ulama-Sufi) was the cause of Islamic stagnation. Creativity died in consequence. The separation of state and Church did not take place in Islam and a non-clerical intelligentsia of writers, thinkers, poets, lawyers, doctors, teachers, judges, officers did not emerge.<sup>15</sup>

In Turkey, which was the leading Islamic nation in those days, printed books were allowed only to minorities, Jews, Greeks and Armenians. Only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were printing presses generally allowed. There were no Turkish newspapers. In World War I the Ottomans found themselves on the losing side. And with that defeat, Wahabism came into existence seeking the rebirth of Islam.

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<sup>11</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 395.

<sup>12</sup>Küng, *Islam*, 7-8.

<sup>13</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 394-395.

<sup>14</sup>Küng, *Islam*, 357.

<sup>15</sup>Küng, *Islam*, 394.

Gradually a western-educated critical class arose, with modern nationalistic ideas who attempted reforms. When they failed to capture power through progressive programmes, they shifted to conservative ideals trying to win a following. That is how a call for return to pure Islam developed into a political strategy. The fear is that an orthodoxy allergic to sound sense and modern values can block the development of open-thinking, self-criticism, social reform, and genuine human development.

New ideas and innovations can come up only in a culture of intellectual freedom. This is what is missing in many countries where Islam dominates. When there is no internal dialogue within a community, external dialogue becomes impossible. A fast growing community of 1.2 billion people can afford to be self-critical. However, today the lesson taught to the younger generation seems to be like this: "If you win fighting (for Islam), you will be honoured by victory; if you die, you will be honoured by God."<sup>16</sup>

## **8. Self-Criticism towards a Non-Violent Solution to Problems, Intelligence Counts**

According to Huntington, an aggressive Islam replaces an aggressive Communist world to confront the West. Recent instances of violence have been causing international anxiety: in Bali, Casablanca, Riyadh, Istanbul, Madrid, London. To these may be added the more recent tragedies in Kabul, Paris, Libya, Istanbul, Peshawar, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Ankara, Nigeria, Brussels, Lahore, Nice, Munich, Ansbach, Normandy, and other places. Israel occupying Arab lands have embittered the entire Islamic world.<sup>17</sup>

It is one thing to be anti-West in certain areas of one's choice; but the strange thing is that western weapons seem to be welcome, but not western concepts of democracy, equality, autonomy of the secular, and other ideas. In several Muslim countries Islamic schools drill into boys verses of the Quran and hatred against the West, especially America.<sup>18</sup>

We need today people who can demolish walls of prejudice, build bridges of dialogue.<sup>19</sup> Recently (12-13.2.04) some 71 Muslim countries committed themselves to a dialogue of civilization in Istanbul. Individuals and groups should come together: politicians, business

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<sup>16</sup>Mark Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism*, Florida, 2002, 109.

<sup>17</sup>Küng, *Islam*, xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>18</sup>Rush Dozier, *Why We Hate*, New York: Tata McGraw-Hill, 2002, 136.

<sup>19</sup>Küng, *Islam*, xxiv.



leaders, the media, educators, clergy, students, associations. All must help. Memories of the past have hardened the images, but they can be changed. What is most important to cultivate is sensitivity in sensitive matters. Islamic anxieties should be addressed.

Most Muslims merely want to assert their cultural and religious identity. Some take to violent methods when they are driven to frustration by the political, social and economic abuses that they see, and the corruption of elites supported by the West for promoting western interests. Sincere Muslims are calling for spiritual, moral and religious values.<sup>20</sup> They are open for a conversation. Islam's renewal can come only from within.

### **9. *Hindutva* Fundamentalism: Violence and Obscurantism to Serve Political Interests**

Though the Hindus claim that they cannot be fundamentalist if the literal interpretation of the scriptures is the criterion, the unyielding resistance to reform on the part of a section of them has earned them the title fundamentalists.<sup>21</sup> Of late, adherents to an obscurantist version of Hinduism have been gaining strength. Enjoying political patronage, cases of violence against the minorities have increased.

For example, 'cow protection' has emerged as a *Hindutva* stratagem for harassing harmless Muslims, and accusation of 'conversion' for picking on peaceful Christians. Intelligent society in every part of the world is holding their breath as they hear of Indians with 'Super Power' ambitions holding their fellow countrymen below the level of animals. History will hold it against this generation of Indians how they tolerated this "Reign of Unreason," how the people who claimed to be past masters of 'Intelligence Industry' allowed Obscurantism to dominate the scene in 2017.

Not all understand the reason. If obscurantism is turned into a religion and thrust upon the lower-caste-masses (dalits and tribals) to keep them blind and content, the upper castes can have a free ride to scientific education and better jobs. In the same way, the lower castes and tribal people are invited to worship Hanuman (the monkey god), and Hanuman temples are multiplying in the tribal belt. The higher deities are for the higher castes. There are very few who can see through this pedagogy of deception. The humbler society can be 'used' for unpleasant tasks, especially for facing the painful consequences of the rulers' negative strategies.

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<sup>20</sup>Küng, *Islam*, 540.

<sup>21</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 13.

The *Hindutva* call is for the return of India to Vedic orthodoxy. That is precisely where they fail. We know for certain that people in the Vedic period ate beef (*Rigveda* X.86.14, X.85.13, *Aitareya Brahmana* III.4). But *Hindutva* advocates prefer to go by self-created mythologies. Anthropologists will tell us how the symbol of the cow, which was a totem for some Aryan tribes acquired a religious significance in periods when an agricultural society became heavily dependent on the food and economic security that cattle-ownership provided. Cow-protection was an acute social need when it was given a religious sanction.

On the international stage, the following account may sound ridiculous, even embarrassing. But there are states in India that allot huge sums to *gaushalas* (sheds that accommodate cows). Rajasthan has a Government Department devoted to cows, in addition to a Cow-*sewa* (service) Commission and Cow Conservation Directorate.

'Cow Protection' vigilantes are growing in number day by day, composed of unemployed youth, school-drop outs, and other misfits in society, ready for action, indoctrinated to the use of hate-words, prepared to adopt provocative poses and prompt action against all those they consider 'alien' (by caste, community, culture, religion, conviction, lifestyle). These radical groups feel protected by the Administration, keep digital contacts with each other, and go round eager to initiate a quarrel. New wayside shrines are opened to keep unemployed Brahmin youth busy.

Intellectuals and media men with independent thought are abused in the Twitter and Facebook, and/or are physically threatened. Scholars like Amartya Sen or Romila Thapar are marginalized. What would you think of a *Hindutva* leader who said that Ram was ruling in Ayodhya 800,000 years ago, a long while before even *homo sapiens* emerged?

## **10. Searching for the Psycho-Social Reasons of an Aggrieved Community**

However, in all fairness we ought to give even these radicals a hearing before we take a final stand in judging their public position. What is usually done is to trace an extremist group to its historic origins, study the statements of their most radical leaders, list the horrors that they have inflicted on others, and sit back in helplessness wondering how to approach this gigantic problem or how to equip oneself for a prolonged struggle for mere existence.

What I suggest is another approach. I would propose that we explore the psycho-social reasons for the emergence of this terrible phenomenon in modern times, observe the emotional content of what is being said and done, attempt bringing down the anger by making an effort to remove some of the causes, and engage them in a dialogue once the emotions are down.

It is only right that we pay attention to the collective psyche of an aggrieved community first of all. In fact I am choosing a Hindu-sympathizer Koenraad Elst as my reference. He reminds us, for example, that for nearly a millennium Hindu society has been humiliated through the political, ideological, and psychological domination of Muslim and European powers.<sup>22</sup> At one stage the Hindu society seemed to be declining numerically too. In 1909 U.N. Mukherji predicted that in less than 420 years Hindu race would disappear.<sup>23</sup>

Further, they were culturally humbled. Under the British rule, educated Indians were growing embarrassed about their identity and culture and were eager to westernize themselves. Mahatma Gandhi himself confesses to have earnestly tried to develop a British figure. Motilal Nehru wanted his son Jawaharlal to be brought up as an English man. Aurobindo's father wanted the same. At the early stages of his life Aurobindo was trying to distance himself from his culture with absolute contempt for its obscurantist elements.

## **11. A Sense of Self-Alienation, of Inferiority Complex**

Such self-alienation has led many Hindus to what may be called "self-hatred," and an inferiority complex.<sup>24</sup> Many Hindu leaders feel that their mind still remains colonized, suffers from a colonial psychology. They are all too eager to live by the standards set by others: to pretend to be modern, secular, socialist, spiritual, and tolerant. And they feel that they are always falling short.<sup>25</sup> There is an evident lack of self-confidence, self-respect, and an overload of inferiority feelings. That explains why several of the Hindu movements began as 'self-respect' movements, pride-affirming movements. Vajpayee has often referred to the "Hinduism under siege" mentality, a majority community with a minority complex.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 9.

<sup>23</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 130.

<sup>24</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 237.

<sup>25</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 239.

<sup>26</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 146.

On the contrary, Hindus can be legitimately proud that their religion succeeded to survive more than seven centuries under Islam, whilst the great civilizations of Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Persia and vast areas of Byzantine empire were just absorbed into that religion. That itself speaks eloquently for the sturdiness of genuine Hinduism. The *Hindutva* sense of insecurity demeans their very faith. Brahminism always used the tactic of co-opting the enemy as they perceived best. They co-opted the Buddhist and Bhakti movements, and Marxism in recent years. A Brahminic leadership took over these movements and re-brahminized their direction.

In spite of these many reverses in history, most people have remained balanced and optimistic. However, some tried to compensate for their inferiority complex by lashing out against the West and against minorities (Muslims and Christians). They keep borrowing from the western anti-Church literature of the last two centuries.<sup>27</sup> Thus they plunge heartily into the very thing they want to avoid, i.e. they keep their minds colonized by appropriating concepts and attitudes from western anti-clericals and aggressive western ideologies. Savarkar took his idea of the *Mitra Mela* from Mazzini's 'Young Italy.'<sup>28</sup>

When Hindu activists claim superiority over Semitic religions because of their own tolerance, universalism, spirituality, and having the final solution to every problem, they manifest the same instincts which they denounce in their rivals. Nehru did not mince words when he said, "The Hindu is certainly not tolerant and is more narrow-minded than almost any person in any other country except the Jew."<sup>29</sup> The *Hindutva* leaders accuse Nehru in turn of having ruled India with the help of other self-alienated Hindus.<sup>30</sup> They call those Indians who are skilled in English Macaulay's children (since, it was he who introduced English into India), forgetting that this specific skill opened out an entire world to Indians, including the expanding universe of information technology.

The *Sangh Parivar* calls on the Muslims and Christians to Indianize themselves.<sup>31</sup> Minorities consider this as a part of the majority community's efforts to homogenize Indian society on *Hindutva* terms. *Hindutva* leaders identify Christianity, Islam and Marxism as their

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<sup>27</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 273-74.

<sup>28</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 133.

<sup>29</sup>Letter to Kailash Nath Katju 17.11.1953, See Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 471.

<sup>30</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 27.

<sup>31</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 589.

enemies.<sup>32</sup> Savarkar conceded the Indian identity only to those who considered India as their fatherland and holy land.

## 12. Intellectual Poverty, Thought-Phobia

Having heard fully the *Hindutva* point of view, it may be legitimate to offer a mild criticism. In this too I take various points of view from Elst, an enthusiastic Hindu sympathizer. The problem may not be that the Hindu mind is over-influenced by the colonial thought or that it needs to be de-colonized or de-westernized. After all East-West dialogue had gone on all through history with great advantage to both sides. Such mutual influence is not hurtful.

The tragedy is that mediocre minds control the *Hindutva* movement.<sup>33</sup> The *Sangh Parivar* is known for its intellectual poverty, with too little evidence of literary output or a genuinely critical think-tank.<sup>34</sup> That reveals its absolute weakness when it comes to gathering and analysing information, formulating and publicizing viewpoints.<sup>35</sup>

Elst says, "... boy scout attitude of preferring mindless action to 'sterile' intellectual work, the *Sangh Parivar* provides the pitiable spectacle of a "big dinosaur with a small brain."<sup>36</sup> I would certainly avoid such harsh comments. But when we see the *Hindutva* effort, for example, to rewrite Indian history with hopelessly inferior material including mythologies, combined with clear bias, one-sidedness and falsehoods, one wonders whether the remark was totally wrong.<sup>37</sup>

Today it is not boy scouts and village volunteers that scour the countryside, but 'cow protection' vigilantes who kill Muslims and 'conversion prevention' squads that pull down churches. They are unembarrassed that they are damaging India's image on the international stage. They should not wonder then that the *Hindutva* voice gets marginalized in all kinds of debates.<sup>38</sup>

The *Hindutva* failure is not lack of spirituality but lack of thought-power; there seems to be a thought-phobia. Even Sati and Dowry deaths are being defended.<sup>39</sup> While taking a strongly anti-western position, why do they allow their minds to be colonized by out-dated western ideologies like exaggerated nationalism, a form of nationalism that has no Indian precedent?

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<sup>32</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 591.

<sup>33</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 234.

<sup>34</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 225-26.

<sup>35</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 234-35.

<sup>36</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 234.

<sup>37</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 137.

<sup>38</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 74.

<sup>39</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 516.

### 13. Mutual Criticism can Give Way to Intelligent Self-Criticism

There is one contribution that religious Fundamentalists have made to contemporary world consciousness. Their powerful emergence on the world scene argues that religion is still a living force, it influences people and society. But the debate continues. When people exaggerate their own position either on the secular side or the religious side, they are bound to collide. Over-confidence on either side must be corrected by self-criticism. We have to bring a bit of balance into everything. That is the answer to the supporters of both secularization and fundamentalism.

The social order will improve a great when one decides to “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God,” give to every sphere of human activity what is its due and central attention to what is central to humanity. Replacing religion with politics will be ruinous to society’s future. The BJP is doing exactly what Milosevic did in Serbia, manipulating religion for politics.<sup>40</sup> Fully supported by NRIs who suffer from alienation in a foreign land, they are determined to build up a Hindu *Rashtra*. Savarkar had cried, “Hinduize all politics and Militarize Hindudom.”<sup>41</sup> That is their agenda.

Girilal Jain considers *Hindutva*’s eagerness to impose uniformity on the entire nation a childhood disease.<sup>42</sup> They should realize that those who criticize their society are not necessarily enemies of Hinduism. Mahatma Gandhi did it. Tagore did it. When minority communities like the Muslims or Christians express their grievances against the majority community, they do not intend to be anti-Hindus.

Vivekananda identified the core values of Hinduism and recognized similar values in other religions. Such a respectful attitude is typical of most Hindu intellectuals.<sup>43</sup> That clearly shows that when *Hindutva* groups take radical positions, they are cutting themselves off from the sober Hindu society. Ram Swarup said, “For me that alone is foreign which is foreign to the truth.”<sup>44</sup>

We must not be quick in concluding that the Christian community is totally free of fundamentalism. The multiplication of sects that are strong on the literal interpretation of the Bible and preach in

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<sup>40</sup>Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Harvard, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press 2007, 515.

<sup>41</sup>Pankaj Mishra, *The Age of Anger*, London: Allen Lane (Penguin), 2017, 261.

<sup>42</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 477.

<sup>43</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 116-17.

<sup>44</sup>Elst, *Decolonizing the Hindu Mind*, 475.

aggressive tones may be classified under that category. They have gained additional strength of late in opposition to the aggressiveness of the propagators of atheism and of crude materialism. The Pentecostals are the fastest growing religious group in the world today. Everyone stands in need of self-criticism.

#### **14. Searching for Areas of Agreement in View of the Common Good**

Respectful conversation between people who differ has become an urgent need today. What our age needs above all are bridge-builders, who, despite all difficulties, clashes and confrontations, are eager to search for areas of agreement in view of the common good. Neither Godless materialism nor fundamentalism seems to be able to convince the world today. People are waiting for more inspiring voices. All should learn to deal with each other with greater sensitivity.

More and more people in society are calling for tolerance and respect for other views than their own. They would not like to prevent anyone from holding on strongly to his/her own convictions and presenting them. Those who have religious convictions too have the freedom to explain themselves. But, we should listen to these words of wisdom, "Your speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and you should know how to give the right answer to everyone" (Col 4:6). "Be ready at all times to anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15).