

THE HUMAN AS RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR

A Search into the Religious and Secular Ideologies of Our Time

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“The earth is like honey to all beings and all beings are like honey to the earth. The shining immortal person who lives in the earth lives in your body” (Br. Up. II.5.1).

“The Lord God formed man from dust and breathed into him his spirit and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7).

These two texts from the Hindu and the Christian traditions show how a human person is both mundane and divine. The human being is born of the earth and at the same time participates in the divine nature. He/she is a wonderful combination of the earthly and the heavenly. This is the reason why the humans feel a constant tension between these two poles of their existence.

Here is a description of the Hindu *rath yatra* scheduled to end at Ayodhya where a Muslim Mosque exists for 300 years. The *yatra* begins from Somnath on 25 September 1991.

... As the roar of the ocean on the morning of September 25th 1991 mingled with the chanting of vedic hymns and cries of *Har Har Mahadev* and *sougandh Ram ki khate hai, mandir wahim banayenge*, Shri Advani lifted a bow, its arrow pointing to Ayodhya. It was presented by the tribals of Ambaji. The priest of Somnath temple presented him a saffron *dgarna dgwaha*. The fisherman from Dwaraka, after presenting a conch, blew it to mark the occasion. The Gohil Samaj of the Kshatriyas presented Advaniji with a sword. The

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mood of the milling crowd who came to wave-off the BJP President on his 36-day-long *dharma yuddha* had one clear message to convey – that they expected him to succeed and that they would even lay down their lives in the fight for the cause.¹

Thus, it is said, except for the female grace, Advani looked like the goddess Durga who came down from heaven with numerous weapons received from different gods in her march to kill the evil king Mahishasura. Advani was the then president of the Indian nationalist political party called BJP (Bharathiya Janata Party, meaning “Indian People’s Party”) and is the present Home Minister of India where his party together with other parties in coalition governs India. The *rath yatra* symbolises Hindu triumphalism, purportedly, redeeming the historical wrongs once done by other religions, especially by the Muslims. Since then there had been different marches and *yatras* taken up by the “elite” Hindus to arouse the sentiments of the common people and extending to all of them a clarion call to be a nation of Hindu theocracy destined to reign India. These programmes sent shock waves all through the country, especially to the believers in non-Hindu religions and thus became another call for their own self-defence. Hinduism trying to gather energy from all over India marches forward with the obvious intention to rule the country with an ideology that is religiously characterised. This takes us to the problem of religious ideology in contrast to secular ideologies. Religion and secularism confront each other as political ideologies. This is the background in which we are studying the contemporary world and the role religions and ideologies play in it.

It should, however, be said in all fairness that the whole Hindu India is not for such a political reign of Hindu theocracy all over India. So many prominent Hindus, like K. N. Panikkar, Shrivastsava and many others, boldly condemn such theocratic approaches in politics. In a democracy like India, they maintain, we shall never envisage the rule of the majority determined by religious affiliation, rather the majority shall always be made on the basis of the people’s adherence to a party in the parliament. Before we come to an analysis of the theocratic Hindu ideology in

¹V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, Delhi, 1989, cited in K. N. Panikar, *Communal Threat and Secular Challenge*, Madras: Earthworm Books, 1997, 157-158.

contemporary India, let us briefly compare and contrast religion and secularism.

In the history of humanity we witness the tension between religion and secularism rising and receding. We like earth, garden and mountains. We relax in woods, on riverbanks and retire to forests. We find ourselves happy in the heart of nature. Born of the earth time and again we return to earth, relish earthly fruits, take earthly medicines. Our health is very much dependent on our relation to the whole world, to nature and to the earth. When earth is in danger it is our life that is in danger. When the plants of the earth are contaminated by the greedy operations of the scientific man, our food from the earth becomes poisonous. Our health is in danger. However, neither a lot of land nor a large quantity of food does make us happy beyond a limit. We want also to rise above all material things at our disposal. Above all these, we are blessed with self-awareness that makes us capable of self-determination and self-transcendence. We transcend ourselves, and all that we are surrounded with. This is an indication that something great, something spiritual, something divine is within us. Therefore, there is an innate urge for self-transcendence and a quest for the Divine. This is a search into the unuttered and the unbound reality which is reflected in everything what we see and what we are. Hence, there is the scope for an open dialogue between religion and secularism.

1. What is Religion?

Religion can be so naïve and even crude as a blind worship of an object, an idol, which is somehow related to Divinity. Religion can also be so subtle and elevated as a refined faith-commitment to Transcendence, beyond the flux of space and time which influences one's thought and way of life. Oscillating between these two extremes, religion is usually presented to us as a historical reality with a belief system and worship patterns, with a communitarian consciousness and a set of behavioural rules. The above-mentioned definition takes us to both dimensions of human reality, namely the secular and the religious.

Religion is never in the abstract. It is lived here and now. Hence, however trans-temporal it may rise up to, any true religion wants to take us to this earth too. It should have relational attitude to this earth: this can be acceptance of the earth in which we live and transcendence of the same in our orientation to the Divine. If acceptance of earthly bliss alone is seen

without a certain degree of transcendence, religion fails in meeting its ultimate goal. In the same way if transcendence is stressed to the neglect of the earthly dimension, it may give rise to a counter culture of religionless secularism.

Karl Marx described religion as “the opium of the people.” His intention, however, is also explained along with it. He says: “religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, the soul of the soulless environment.”² In other words, according to Marx, religion is a kind of escapism, an illusory happiness in which we are neither happy with the real nor ready to face it directly.

2. Religionless Secular Ideologies

Many of the secular ideologies are a-religious or even anti-religious. Anti-religious ideologies are mainly motivated by the failure of religion. By drawing the human attention totally to the supernatural world, religions may fail to look into the heart of reality in which we live, suffer and struggle. This is not an authentic religion. Religion is true and authentic, when it makes this world worth living and helps us to march forward to higher and higher realms of our existence. The decree of the Vatican Council II on *The Church in the Modern World* warns the faithful followers of the Church against the rise of atheism for which the believers themselves may be responsible:

Yet the believers themselves frequently bear some responsibility for this situation. For, taken as a whole, Atheism is not a spontaneous development but stems from a variety of causes, including a critical reaction against religious beliefs, and in some places against the Christian religion in particular. Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of Atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, to teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.³

Time and again, religionless movements have tried to replace religion by their ideologies. Marxian communism is perhaps the champion among them.

²Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, 39.

³Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*,/19.

Since the 19th century, religions, including Christianity, did not adequately respond to the agony of the suffering masses; accelerated through industrial revolution, Marx sought a solution for this predicamental situation outside the realm of the Church. Here faith in the supernatural was replaced by faith in reason and in the dignity of the human. The study of sacred scripture was replaced by the social analysis of the structure of the human society and its economic power-centeredness. The meditative, personal realization of one's faith was replaced by the collective action programme of the oppressed masses. In short, religion was replaced by secular ideology.

It was years later that Russia, where the traditional grip of religion was very strong and the suffering of the poor masses very enormous, accepted this philosophy as the political ideology of the erstwhile USSR.

3. Religion and Ideology

Paul Tillich, in his work *Christianity and World Religions*, calls the secular ideologies *quasi-religions*.⁴ This means that ideologies to a certain extent answer the challenges of the time and meet the needs of humanity in its living context. The commitment to an ideology is some way comparable to one's commitment to a religion. In fact, quite often, we find a deeper and genuine commitment in many a great-minded secular ideologue. This reminds me of the days Jawaharlal Nehru spend in his prison cell, though he would have lived a glamorous life in the outside world, if he opted for that and gave up his campaign for the freedom of the Indian people.

Nehru was not extraordinarily religious; nor was he anti-religious. He was a liberal, secular ideologist. However, though blessed with wealth and learning, he preferred to remain in his prison cell, with tiny creatures and reptiles, for the sake of freedom and welfare of his people. When a secular ideologue pushes forward his ideal he is not sure whether he will be crowned with success. As everyone else, he too is in agony of realizing the envisaged vision in the future. As Albert Camus, in his book *The Rebel*, writes:

⁴Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964, 5.

Who is a rebel? A rebel is a person who, after many years of search and struggle, comes to a final decision that this situation cannot continue any longer. But the rebel too thinks whether he is justified! He feels that in the long run his position is somehow justified.⁵

Karl Marx was an anti-religious ideologue. But the suffering he had to undergo and the price he had to pay for his ideology was very high. He was expelled from his own country on the grounds that he disturbed peace. Escaped to France, remaining committed to the same ideology, he was again expelled from France on the same grounds of disturbing peace. Marx left France and took refuge in England where he wrote his famous work *The Capital*.

Many secular ideologues are very sincere in their vision and commitment. They become a-religious or anti-religious. The background in which they were born and bred, the education they received and the religion at work among them, all influenced the making of a secular ideologue. It might be said that, to a great extent, we all are responsible for the making of our companions and their ideologies.

4. Difference between Religion and Ideology

Ideology is a goal-oriented vision to be realized in this world, within an immediate future. On the contrary, religion is an ultimate and all pervading value of life with its inherent relatedness to the trans-temporal. Religion focuses on the things pertaining to the next world while ideology lays emphasis on the things of this world. Thus, an ideologue will demand justice and reasonable wage from the employer and is ready to fight for it. The religionist, on the other hand, may fail to see the real misery of the people, because of his or her emphasis on the supernatural. This does not mean that a decent human living is outside the range of religious vision and attention. It only means that religion is ready to give a spiritual strength to overcome the physical anomalies of life. Similarly, religion fosters faith in God's transcendence and power whereas ideology trusts in human dignity and creativity. This is the reason why secular ideologies have more appealing programmes to create a new society with a promising future. Religion preaches the kingdom of God and ideology works for the immediate realization of a welfare state. The truth is that the kingdom of

⁵Albert Camus, *The Rebel*.

God which religion preaches has already begun on earth, as Christ himself says. It is the duty of every true religion to see that this kingdom is really operating in this world, with its spiritual power and temporal concerns. Religion gives great importance to God's plan of action and asks the faithful to accommodate themselves to the providential arrangements of events. But ideologies believe in human action and target-oriented programmes. The tension between providence and human planning is to be solved with a responsible mind characterized by a filial trust in the Lord and genuine interest in human development. Neither abstract religious ideal – not in touch with real life on earth – nor an indulgence in worldly success alone is an ideal to be followed. What religion wants to emphasize is this balance of life. But while it stresses this value it may miss the counter value of the liberation of the oppressed. While religion extols the spiritual power the ideology depends heavily on mind power. Hence, ideology comes forward with a rigorous social analysis. When religion proposes and encourages acts of charity in favour of the oppressed, ideology demands justice and equality for all. In fact, these differences are matters of emphasis differently placed. Both religion and ideology stand for the prosperity of the people. Both may fail to have a comprehensive vision of the society and this results in divergent emphasis of values and action programmes. A dialogue between true religion and authentic ideologies are always welcome.

5. Religion and Secular Ideologies

It is obviously clear that every authentic religion is meant to liberate its believers from the clutches of unjust structures and from the bondages of unholy desires. Religion can, however, become oppressive when it imposes on the simple faithful heavy material laws and prescriptions, especially those that stand to the advantage of the rich and the powerful. This calls us to make a distinction between the religion of the poor and of the rich. The rich often look at their religion as a reward for their endeavour in this world. They even consider their works to amass wealth and property as sacrifices and services to the people. On the contrary, the poor and the oppressed look at their religion as a consolation for their suffering due to the inordinate power structure in the society. If this is true, both rich and the poor are enslaved by their own way of looking at religion, the rich enslaved by their own puffed up ego and the poor by the

oppressive structures that the reigning ego (of the rich) has set up for others. Several prophets repeatedly come up at this juncture of religious history and condemn the misuse of religion and religious power for the benefits of the rich and the powerful. Jesus himself is an excellent exemplar of this.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel (Mt 23:23-24).

Jesus was a critique of religion. But hardly we see Jesus criticizing other religions. The few comments he made about other religions were in praise of the deep faith he witnessed in the believers of non-Jewish religion. Thus, he extolled the faith of the Roman centurion and exclaimed: "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such a faith" (Lk 7:9). Jesus was, however, a severe critique of his own religion. So he did not approve the self-justifying understanding of religion by the Jewish religious leaders of his time and questioned them firmly and uncompromisingly. To the religious elite of his society Jesus clearly said: "On the outside you appear good to everybody, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and sin" (Mt 23:28). Seeing the oppressed masses he said: "they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6:34). Further, he narrates the divergent attitudes of these two classes of people. "Look, he said, two men went to pray, a Pharisee and publican." Then, Jesus describes their prayer. The Pharisee praised God for himself being an elite of the society, for having blessed him with riches of this world that he could pay the tithes and other gifts to the temple, that he could fast once a week after his sumptuous meals every day. The publican, who was unacceptable in the society, because he was collecting tax for the Roman Empire, with a spontaneous awareness of unworthiness and simplicity, earnestly pleaded God that he would be accepted by his merciful God, though he is unacceptable in the society. Jesus concluded: "I tell you the tax collector and not the Pharisee was right with God when he went home" (Lk 18:14). The elite who sees his high status as a reward from God should scrutinize his thinking and see whether it is really so, or whether it is the accumulated result of the exploitation of the poor and the marginalized. In fact, the religionist will basically agree

with the ideologue that the masses are not objects of the historical forces, but the subjects of the historical processes.

No human being is ever an 'object' of some others' exploitation or satisfaction. All sorts of objectifying (looking at a person as an object) of a human being is sin, whether it be in prostitution, where woman is looked upon as an object of pleasure, or in slavery where the humans are looked upon as machines of cheap production and profit. The human is always an inalienable subject, a unique person, basically equal to every other human being, be it his master, Lord, Bishop or King. This dignity, which ultimately points to the hidden jewel of divinity in the human, makes his works and services infinitely rich, not to be bought by money, but something freely rendered for a common development, in appreciation of which the employer shares part of his wealth with him or her for a humane and decent living. Seen from this perspective religion need not be in any way against a human ideology even if its tenets are secularly worded, nor can ideology be against religion, though religiously worded. But often we see that religion and secularism have pitched their tents in opposing camps. This is partly because the failure of religion to look into the socio-economic and political factors of life and the contemporary movements which give shape to them and also partly because of the one sided thrust of secularist ideologies which oppose and even eradicate religion.

Jawaharlal Nehru who believed in religionless secular ideology for the progress of India later confessed his change of mind and said that a secular ideology should not leave the humans in a spiritual vacuum. What we learn from this is that the inner principle of ideological or religious claims need not necessarily be mutually opposing. It happened to be so only on accidental reasons. Mahatma Gandhi was well aware of this fact. Even in the height of his ideological war against the British Empire in India, Gandhi was careful not to alienate people of India from their deep religious sense. Instead, he combined religion and prayer very well with his political agitation for freedom and independence of India. The international English weekly *Time* has acknowledged Gandhi as the man of the millennium and also salt-*satyagraha* march which Gandhi lead in

protest against the British rule as one of the greatest event of the millennium.⁶

The freedom movements in almost all colonies in Africa and Latin America were largely anti-religious, because the social ideologues did not expect much help from those religions which were, in fact, reigning the country. They also identified the religious power with the power of the elite who were controlling the economy of the nation. Thus, they became anti-Christian. It was a great exception in India's freedom movements that, under the eminent leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the movement ever remained religiously characterized and was never anti-religious. On the contrary, Gandhi appealed to the religion of the masses, convoked prayer meetings, and channelled the force of prayer and human dignity together into the ultimate cause of India's political liberation. Nehru, too, though he did not share very much in the religious enthusiasm of Gandhi, was never anti-religious, but was open to give free expression to the religion of the masses, whom he wanted to liberate from the slavery of the foreign rule. These examples, which were also historically successful, invite us to look afresh to the essence of religion and ideology.

Religion is an ultimate and all pervading value of life with its inherent relatedness to the trans-temporal. It is an "ultimate concern," as Paul Tillich maintains. It is also an all-pervading value of life, that is, we cannot exclude any action or value of a person from his religion. These values are not limited to the realities of this world alone, but has always an inherent reference to something beyond, ultimately leading us to the Beyond and the Boundless.

In contrast to the above-mentioned understanding of religion, ideology can be defined as a goal-oriented vision of life well targeted to be realized in this world, within an immediate future. Ideology is not simply a vision to be relished in the air without the agonizing pain of realizing it here and now. This world is to be transformed in the light of the ideals we perceive and for which we stand determined. Hence, the ideologists have programmes to be worked out immediately and task forces for the same purpose. The real tension is not between the ideal envisaged, but the time gap between the present and future state of things. In fact, religion too

⁶*Time*, January 1, 2000.

demands a change of the present world in the light of the ideal envisaged. The only point the religionists keep emphasizing is that the perfect realization of the ideal will be obtained only in the world to come. According to the Christian perspective, for example, *the kingdom of God which Jesus preached is to be realized here and now as a world of selfless love and service to one another, though the fullest and spotless realization of this is not possible on this earth, as long as we humans are imperfect.* The struggle to create a more human and holy world, however, should continue everyday as long as we are alive on this earth. Religionless ideologies emerge as a living challenge when religions fall short of this striving for the ideal, relegating it to be something realizable only in the world to come. The answer for this challenge is neither a flat denial of the ideology nor of religion, but a penetrating look into the inner essence of both, where both religion and ideology meet and merge.

Religion vs. Ideology

| Religion | Ideology |
|--|---|
| 1. Related to the next world | 1. Related to this world |
| 2. Faith in God’s transcendence and power | 2. Faith in human dignity and creativity |
| 3. Search for the kingdom of God | 3. Search for a welfare state |
| 4. Trust in God’s plan of action | 4. Trust in human action programme |
| 5. Extols spiritual power | 5. Depends heavily on mind power |
| 6. Prone to acts of charity and generous self-giving | 6. Bent on demanding justice and equality |

6. The Secular Ideologies of Our Time

Drawing inspiration mainly from the Marxian analysis several leftist political parties have come to exist all over the world and many of them have their offshoots in India. They are CPI, CPM, CPML and other

socialist parties. In this article we are not going into the details of each of them. The mainstay of their thinking can be summarized as follows:

1. A perceptive reading of historical processes that create unjust power structures in this world and impose them on the powerless for the benefit of the few.
2. A careful and meticulous social analysis to unveil the under-currents of these historical processes that brought us into this present situation.
3. An uncompromising demand for transformation of values and re-distribution of world's wealth for the making of a just and egalitarian society.

7. Religious Ideology as a Political Phenomenon

We have begun this article with the narration of an incident, the *rath yatra* to Ayodhya. This was mentioned in the beginning to call our attention to the current situation in India and elsewhere. More and more nations, especially in the Muslim world, are moving from democracy to theocracy. Inspired by that, the Hindus in India are also on a similar move of establishing a Hindu India where the religion of the majority will be declared the religion of the country. This is a recent phenomenon as far as India is concerned, and points to the overwhelming growth of a religious ideology with a great political ambition. Here ideology and religion positively coalesce and this fusion brings about a lot of confusion as well as genuine suspicion to those who do not belong to the religion of the majority but live in the country. This combination of religion and political ideology can win followers as far as it promises a politically bright future for them. In a country of high degree of secularisation it will not work successfully. But as I mentioned, in many Muslim countries and perhaps, as being witnessed now in India, it may have a so-called temporal success.

8. The RSS/BJP Ideology in Religion and Politics

Today India is governed by a Hindu majority party, the BJP, in coalition with other minor parties. This is the upper crust of a long time brooding of Hindu nationalism in the minds of many a high caste Hindu. The roots of this feeling goes back to pre independent India. The British, taking a safe stand for their political ambition, left the religion in India practically untouched and unfostered. The religion was left aside in favour of a secular world, which, they thought, would guarantee their reign for a

longer period of time. The British-educated Indian intellectuals largely participated in this view of secular, political government which is a-religious (not anti-religious), and thought that this will be ideal for a country of many faiths and religious sects. When India became independent, and later a Republic, this ideal was integrated into the constitution and India was declared a secular state, meaning that in India no religion has any preference or any ban whatsoever. It meant that all are free, all are equal, and all are welcome to participate in the common culture of variety and beauty. This ideal was not satisfactory for the Hindu 'elite' who thought that the Hindu ideals must be highlighted in the life of every Indian citizen.

In course of time the Hindu dynamism of this intellectual wave was finally articulated by V. D. Savarkar in his famous book *Hindutva*, in 1923. Savarkar's *Hindutva* was not an isolated voice. It represented a widespread feeling, an enthusiastic self-assertion of a group of people to overcome the socio-religious threats they faced from other religions, the Muslims and the Christians, for example, and religionless secular movements such as the communist. Savarkar pleaded for a united Hindu nation, which would eventually be ruled by a Hindu government. Two years later, in 1925, a revolutionary socio-religious association was founded for Hindus under the name *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, who was the president of this association during 1925-1940. The ideal envisaged was a Hindu theocratic national unity instead of a a-religious secular unity of all who live within the geographical boundaries of India as promoted by the All India Congress, an Indian organization which took the lead in the freedom struggle against the British rule. This group of people thought that the secularism of Nehru and the Western trained Hindu 'elite' could not achieve the objective they have in mind and, thus, could not respond to the religious pride and quest of many high caste Hindus in India. Their claim was based on *majoritarianism*, a political state based on a religious majority. Instead of the secular nationalism of the then popular political leaders, they demanded a cultural nationalism of Hindu India where culture of the nation as a whole was practically identified with the religious culture of high caste Hindus. The speedy spread of RSS all over India in a short period of time shows that these sentiments were shared by many Hindus at that time. But the promoters of this movement did not then realize that

governing a multi-religious country with a Hindu theocratic reign would be very difficult. They did not also understand the inner nature of democracy in which majority is not a given fact before the parliament is constituted, but is something to be made in the parliament based on principles applicable to all citizens. In course of time, when the BJP, a close associate of RSS, came to power they were forced to mitigate the cultural nationalism of Hindu India and presented a more inclusive stand in which cultural nationalism included also other faiths and religions with a basic commitment to what is genuinely Indian ethos and culture, irrespective of religiosity as such.

RSS/BJP Ideology +Politics

- = Roots in pre-independent India
- = The Nehruvian secularism and the Hindu pride of religious tradition
- = V. D. Savarkar's *Hindutva*, 1923
- = RSS founded by K.V. Hedgewar in 1925 (President: 1925-1940)
- = Madhav Sadashiv Gowalker
(RSS President: 1940-1973)
(Book: *We, Our Nation Defined*)
"Non-Hindus do not have citizen rights"
- = B. S. Doeres: Next President
(Book: *Doeres Answers Questions*)
"Non-Hindus are outside the ambit of Hindu nation"
- = Balraj Madhot: First President of Janasangh
(Book: *Indianization: What, Why and How?*)
"The Religion of the majority must be the Religion of the State"
- = BJP, the successor of Janasangh invokes "Cultural Nationalism,"
i.e., Hindu Nationalism in which Ayodhya becomes the
Symbol

9. A Critical Review of Hindutva Ideology

The adherents of RSS and, later, of BJP have tactically proposed Hindutva as a patrimony of India's cultural nationalism. Savarkar made a distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism. Hindutva was considered to be a common denominator unifying all sections of Hindu community including Sikhs and Buddhists, all religions which had their origin from the Indian soil. Hinduism, according to him, is only a part of Hindutva, which is eternal and all pervading. This may sound wonderful if Hindutva is understood as the Indian genius and its basic non-denominational religiosity in which all religions participate. But, according to the promoters of Hindutva ideology, Hindus are not simply any Indian living in the country, but only those prominent ones who inherit the blood of the Vedic fathers:

All residents of India are not Hindus, for the Hindus are not merely the citizens of the Indian state because they are united not only by the bonds of the above of the love they bear to common motherland but also by the bonds of a common blood. All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers, the Sindhus.⁷

Moreover, Hindutva has two dimensions, cultural and political. In the cultural heritage Hindutva ideology is a continuation and perpetuation of the Aryan line of Sanskrit culture. In the political arena, it is rise and reign of the Hindu political consciousness, its struggles and ambitious plan to wield and exercise political power over the whole nation. In his second book, *Glorious Epochs*, Savarkar outlines the Hindu attempts to liberate the country from foreign rules. Once again, concerted effort is being made to identify Hindutva with Hindu religion. In fact, he had a different and more universal outlook in his pre-*Hindutva* thinking, for example, when he wrote *War of Indian Independence*. Here he beautifully describes how inter-religious harmony was the ethos of the pre-independent India.

The five days during which Hindus and Mohammedans proclaimed that India was their country and that they were all brethren, the days when Hindus and Mohammedans unanimously raised the flag of

⁷V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, First published 1909, New Delhi: 1970 edition, cited in Panikar, *Communal Threat and Secular Challenge*, xi.

national freedom at Delhi. Be these grand days ever memorable in the history of Hindustan.⁸

The Hindutva ideology proposed and worked out by Savarkar is further interpreted and developed by the Hindu ideologues. M. S. Golwalkar, the next president of RSS from 1940-1973, defines Indian nation as a Hindu *Rashtra* (a Hindu political state). India is seen as a tree with the heterogeneous appearance. Golwalkar, however, maintains that it is the same life sap that flows through all its branches and leaves.

The national life of Bharat is an ancient one. The social life here has been woven round a cultural tradition imbued with common life-ideals stemming out of a common comprehensive life philosophy. This has been a living tradition since ages, well before the Islamic and Christian invaders stepped on this soil. The thread of internal unity has never snapped in spite of apparent destruction and dissensions among castes, creeds, sects and even political kingdoms. The human group which has been expressing this unified current of life has been popularly known as the 'Hindu'. The national life in Bharat is therefore the Hindu National life.⁹

The religio-cultural nationalism as advocated by Savarkar and Golwalkar, thus, takes us to the formation of a Hindu communalism, which is fundamentalist in nature. A closed, Aryan, blood-based Hindu community is envisaged as the ideal people of India. This calls for vehement criticism from different parts of the country. First of all, the vast majority of the Indian people, living in remote villages and tribal belts do not know what Sanskrit or Vedic culture is. Their religion, their gods, their worship patterns are entirely different from the Aryan tradition which is prominently present in the Hindutva ideology. Moreover, they are very likely the first inhabitants of India. If they are excluded, Hindutva can never embrace the heart of India. It will be only a wishful desire of a few upper-caste Hindus cherishing the Brahmin superiority over all other people of India. On the other hand, the initial Aryan domination of the northwest provinces of India had its cultural emanations to many other

⁸V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, cited in Panikar, *Communal Threat and Secular Challenge*, xiii.

⁹M. S. Golwalkar, *We, Our Nation Defined*, cited in Panikar, *Communal Threat and Secular Challenge*, xiv.

parts of India. In the same way, the Aryan culture with its Sanskrit heritage, supposedly migrated to this country from Middle East was also deeply influenced by the then existing Mohan-jo-daro culture, which is definitely non-Aryan. R. C. Zaehner, in his book *Hinduism*, says:

Much that is typical of 'classical' Hinduism derives not from the invading Aryans, but from indigenous populations they conquered.¹⁰

This means that the religion of the pre-Aryan people in Indus Valley 'conquered' the religion of the Aryans who came to India later. The excavations of Harappa and Mohan-jo-daro show us the figures of a *yogi* in meditation surrounded by cows and damsels. Yoga and *linga* worship were religious traditions of this non-Aryan community, which have entered into the blood of the Aryan stream of cultural nationalism in India. Though these hypotheses could be discussed, we cannot brush them aside, unless we present other reliable arguments based on research and excavations.

On the other hand, we have to understand that the Hindu revivalism sponsored by RSS and BJP is a legitimate protest against the humiliations and the ill treatment suffered by the foreign rulers of this country who belong to non-Hindu religions. Hindus thought that followers of other religions, which are more aggressive in character, are exploiting the religious tolerance that was the common patrimony of native religions in India. Though this aggressive character was totally against the core of any religion, obviously the then foreign rulers of India did not care very much for it. Hence, the wounded pride of educated Hindus fomented to give rise to the formation of a Hindu self-defence movement. This resulted in the emergence of RSS, and later the political party BJP.

As a political party, religiously characterized, BJP is a combination of religious idealism and political ideology. Mixing religion with politics is harmful to any religion in the world. In all such cases the political leaders misuse their religion for political advantages, no matter what religion they belong to. Hence, the world consciousness slowly moves to secular indifference to all religions in matters of political power and government. To reduce religion to a pure political ideology, to be realized

¹⁰R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, 16.

on this earth within a limited period of time, will do only violence to the sane principles of any religion, in order to reap greater political advantage for the immediate future. This is the greater threat to Hinduism than any other threat it faces from outside.