

# Challenges of Religious Fundamentalism in India: A Critical Evaluation

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**Abstract:** *Religious fundamentalism is a danger in a secular nation like India. It creates space for the growth of communalism and criminalization. India is a nation which people of different faith lives and work together as a single community. But in recent past all religious people became fundamentalists. It challenges the peace and harmony of the nation. Therefore there is a need to every citizen should work for the religious harmony to strengthen the secular foundation of India.*

**Key Words:** *fundamentalism, religious extremists, Hindutva, Religious.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Fundamentalism is a way of believing and reacting to a given context. It is a challenge to deepen one's own faith and practice to read the religious texts in a responsible way to preach in a fresher, more enthusiastic and more appealing way. It is danger when people are manipulated met with superficial answers and practices and kept immature. The present day Indian context fundamentalism is a religious phenomena. Religious fundamentalism creates space for the growth of criminalization. It also is the enemy of pluralism.

The term 'Fundamentalism' originally referred to a particular movement of conservative protestants in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America. But in recent decades, they have been frequently applied far beyond this context. However today's usage, often applies the term 'fundamentalist' to militant movements to use religious claims to justify the use of indiscriminant violent force.

### 1.Hindu Fundamentalism

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hinduism developed a large number of new religious movements, partly inspired by the European Romanticism, nationalism, scientific racism and esotericism (Theosophy) popular at the time. These reformed movements led to the Hindu revivalism.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.1 Arya Samaja

Arya Samaja is a Hindu reformed movement in India that was founded by Swami Dayanantha in 10<sup>th</sup> April 1875. He was a renouncer who believed in the in fallible authority of the Vedas. Dayanantha advocated the doctrine of Karma and reincarnation, and emphasized the ideals of Brahmacharya (Chastity) and renunciation. Dayanantha climbed to be rejecting all non vedic beliefs altogether. Hence the Arya Samaja unequivocally condemned idolatry, animal sacrifices, ancestor worship, pilgrimages, priest craft, offerings made in temples, the caste system, untouchability and child marriage, on the grounds that all these lacked vedic sanction. It aimed to be a universal Church based on the authority

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mahesh Vikram Singh and Dr. Brij Bhushan Srivastava, *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi; Centrum Press, 2011), 31.

of Vedas. Dayanantha stated that he wanted to develop a missionary Hinduism based on the universality of the Vedas. To this end, the Arya Samaj started Shuddhi Movement in early 20<sup>th</sup> century to bring back to Hinduism people converted to Islam and Christianity, set up schools and missionary organizations and extended its activities outside India.<sup>2</sup>

### **1.2 Shuddhi Movement**

The socio – political movement, derived from ancient rite of purification was started Arya Samaj and its founder Swami Dayanantha Saraswathy Shuddhi had a social reform agenda behind its belligerent rational and was aimed at abolishing the practices of untouchability by converting outcasts from other religions to Hinduism and intergrating them into the mainstream community by elevating their position, and instilling self – confidence and self – determination in them.<sup>3</sup>

In 1923, Swami Shraddhanand founded the Bharatiya Hindu Shuddhi Mahasabha (Indian Hindu Purification Council) and pushed the agenda of reconversion peacefully, but ultimately created a flashpoint between Hindus and Muslims as it offended Muslims exceptionalists, who agreed that Hindus being dhimmis, do not have any right to convert other to their faith unlike the Muslims, who are munim.<sup>4</sup>

### **1.3 Principles of Arya Samaj**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> June, 1877, the second major Arya Samaj was established at Lahore. However the original list of 28 rules and regulations drafted by Dayananda for the Rajkot Arya Samaj and used for the Bombay Arya Samaj were deemed to be too unwieldy. Therefore it was proposed that the principles should be reduced and simplified, while the bylaws should be removed to a separate document. Everyone present, including Swamy Dayananda Saraswathy, agreed and the 10 principles of the Arya Samaj as they are known around the world today came into existence. All subsequently established branches of the Arya Samaj have been founded upon the ten principles. However each new branch of the society has a degree of freedom in determining the exact by laws under which it shell operate everyone who wishes to become a member of the society must agree to uphold these principles in their entity. However nothing beyond these to principles has any binding force on any number of the Arya Samaj. For this reason, the early Samaj proved to be attractive to individuals belonging to various religious communities, and enjoyed a notable degree of converts from segments of the Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Muslim populations of Indian society.<sup>5</sup>

Dayananda Saraswathy, Vivekananda and Sarvarkar were three persons whose ideas on religion, culture and politics had significantly strengthened the foundation of revivalist fundamentalist politics in India. Hindus were deeply moved by Dayananda's uncompromising opposition to foreign rule and his militant reformism as typified in the Arya Samaj, the organization Dayananda had established to implement his ideas.

### **1.4 Nationalistic Fundamentalism**

Hindu fundamentalism is also fuddled by a psychological malaise. Christianity has been considered a threat to the complacency of Hindu militancy a threat to the Hindu spirituality, socially and politically. They have always been on the defensive in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The nationalist sentiment led them to feel that there are a few elements essentially for the progress of the Hinduism.<sup>6</sup>

India's fabric of religious ethnic and cultural diversities could be destroyed by religious extremists. India underwent a traumatic experience in the independent era itself. Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non – violence fell victim to a Hindu fundamentalist. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was shot dead by her bodyguard in the after math of the Sikh fundamentalistic movement Rajiv Gandhi succumbed to a fundamentalist group from Sri – Lanka. Shattered to bits by a suicide bomber. Many poignant traces of fundamentalism are growing irrepressible in various parts of the country today.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Mahesh Vikran Singh and Bij Bhushan Srivastava, *Communalism in Modern India*. . . .,35.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Mahesh Vikram Singh and Brij Bhushan Srivastava, *Communalism in Modern India*. . . ., 35.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Mahesh Vikram Singh and Brij Bhushan Srivastava, *Communalism in Modern India*. . . .,36.

<sup>5</sup> Mahesh Vikram Singh and Brij Bhushan Srivastava, *Communalism in Modern India*. . . ., 43-44.

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Thomas D'sa, *The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium* (Bangalore; NBCLC, 2005), 105.

<sup>7</sup> Fr. Thomas D'sa, *The Church in India in the Emerging Third Millennium*. . . ., 106.

In analyzing the growth of Hindu fundamentalism one has to take into consideration some basic issues which are apparently contradictory. Some social scientists have held that as economic development advances or when a feudal or agrarian society moves towards the path of capitalist development the way of religion will diminish and the urge to protect economic interests will gain primacy. When that happens, tensions on the basis of religious loyalty will decline, economic interdependence will increase and, in order to protect the economic interests of each individual or community, society and government will accord religious issues only a secondary place.<sup>8</sup>

The Indian experience shows that significant sections of the middle and upper classes in urban areas have in recent years have become supporters and propagators of Hindu fundamentalism. The Hindu fundamentalism is based on a certain philosophy and praxis. First and foremost is what is called Hindutva. Savarkar, founder of the Hindu Mahasabha and advocate of Hindu ideology. His book in English (1924) was titled 'Hindutva'.

According to this ideology, the real meaning of Swaraj (self – rule) is not merely the geographical independence of the bit of earth called India. To the Hindus independence of Hindustan can only be worth having if that ensures their Hindutva – their religious racial cultural identity.<sup>9</sup>

Historians in India have been understood that fact the Hinduism as a religion is a conceptual creation of 19<sup>th</sup> century, middle classes who chiefly wanted to resist proselytizing Christianity. It has no central organizational structure or strict dogmas. The word 'Hindu' is the result of an earlier Persian inability to say 'Sindhu,' the river. The people who lived beyond the river became Hindus. The attempt today is to unite Hindus around the mythical character 'Ram,' making him a national Ayodhya has become the symbol of this unity.<sup>10</sup>

Another element of Hindutva philosophy is that the religious minorities have got preferential benefits in independent India because of its secular constitution. Their argument is that because of the 'appeasement of minorities' the majority community is at a disadvantage. In fact the fundamentalists are successful when they create a division between 'us and them' on imaginary rather than real issues. Hindutva's efforts at uniting all Hindus is aimed at homogenisation of the hitherto heterogenous, loose Hindu community.

### 1.5 Hindutva

Hindutva can also be seen as a dangerous attempt to subsume all the little traditions of Hinduism under a single great tradition. The little traditions are those of the people, rich in secular cultural context. All these have led to a dangerous mix of religion with nationalism. Golwalker's Hindu nationalism envisaged the re-establishment of a 'chaturvarnya' (hierarchically organized caste system) society. In short, Hindutva is hostile to all who challenge Manu Dharma (Manu was the law-giver of traditional Hinduism) in the social order. It has been not only hostile to Islam and Hindu sects formed by its impacts, but in the modern period also to Christians and the Hindu reform movements from Brahma Samaj as Gandhism and even to secular humanist ideologies like democracy, socialism and communism.<sup>11</sup>

The Hindu nation create myths not only about Babar destroying a Ram Temple in Ayodhya to build a Masjid and the need to undo that history. But also about recovering other traditions and symbols of Hindu self identity and unity destroying by foreign rulers and invaders. These myths are created by re-interpreting archaeological and historical half - truths and emotive symbols serving ideological purposes. They are proclaimed as matters of faith and therefore as beyond rational questioning. But the Hindutva myth overlooks the complex historical process by which a composite culture developed in India. The two popular stereo types they have developed of the 'tolerent Hindu' and the bigoted and aggressive Muslim overlook the less than cordial relationships Hindus developed towards Buddhist and Jains.<sup>12</sup>

The increasing trend of fundamentalism is resulting in the Fascist tendencies. Historians in India agree that most of the Hindutva myths are more or less on the line of what Nazi in Germany and the Fascist in Italy propagated in their quest for power<sup>13</sup>. Golwalkar was enthusiastically appreciative of Hitler's purge of the Jews to keep up the purity of the race and its culture, and also Hitler's readiness to risk a world war for the purpose. Golwalkar displayed these Fascists

<sup>8</sup> George Mathew, "Fundamentalism in Indian Experience" in *Christian Fundamentalism Today* Edited by H.S. Wilson, (Geneva; World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1994), 11.

<sup>9</sup> George Mathew, "Fundamentalism in Indian Experience" in *Christian Fundamentalism Today ...*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> George Mathew, *Fundamentalism in Indian Experience . . . .*, 15

<sup>11</sup> George Mathew, *Fundamentalism in Indian Experience . . . .*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> George Mathew, *Fundamentalism in Indian Experience . . . .*, 17.

tendencies in his hostility to any composite nationalism or culture and in his characterisation of those who advocated Hindu Muslim unity as necessary to fight for 'Swara,' as the perpetrators of "the greatest treason in our society." Hindutva reflects a pro-fascist yearning for uniformity and order on the part of Indian middle class intensified by the imbalance in the distribution of the fruits of material and social developments of higher education and bureaucratic jobs.<sup>13</sup>

## **2. Islam Fundamentalism**

### **2.1. The Emergence of Muslim as a Parallel Community**

Before the Muslim invasion from the North-West, Hindu society was sufficiently homogeneous, despite the heterogeneity arising out its social set up and the continental character of the country. These had earlier been invaders and immigrants from outside, the Hunas, Scythians, Bactrians and others. Invariably, they brought with them their own faiths and cultures. They were all absorbed and lost their separate identity in course of time. As in the case of meeting of the Aryans and the Dravidians, the religio-cultural ex-changes were a two-way traffic, though the predominance of the older indigenous Hindu culture was maintained. Whatever may have been the socio-political problems encountered, they were transitory. There were only a few minor cases of non-absorption – the Syrian Christians of Kerala who date back to the first (or) second century AD, the Arab settlers in the south from the ninth century AD onwards, and the Parsi refugees who came to India at the close of the tenth century. They were, however, acculturated and indigenized to a great extent, and fitted neatly into society.<sup>14</sup>

A drastic change occurred in the situation with the invasion of Muslims and the rise of Muslim power in India. The beginnings are associated with the Arab invasion of Sind under Muhammad-bin-Kasim in 712 AD. After the initial success, the Arabs could only maintain a precarious foot hold over the frontier towns of Multan and al-Mansurah. Even the raid of Muhammad of Ghazni, three centuries later only gave the Muslims a good base for operations in the Punjab, which came to be a frontier province of Ghaznavid empire. The real conquest of India began at the close of the twelfth century. By the second quarter of the fourteenth century, the Ghurids, the Mamluks and the Khaljis succeeded in shattering Hindu power everywhere. Although a well - knit empire did not emerge at once, the Delhi sultanate symbolized Muslim political predominance throughout the land. It is the Mughuls who consolidated the gains of the past, and founded an empire which lasted in good strength for over two centuries. This political predominance lasting over nearly six centuries was of seminal importance for the growth of Muslims as a large parallel community.<sup>15</sup>

As regards the formation and composition of the community, only the Arab traders came by sea, and settled down in Kerala and other parts of the West-cost. For the rest, whether they came as invaders or migrants, the entry was through the north-western passes. All of them came from the Islam countries mostly Arabia, Western and Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan. Of them, the Turnis, Turko – Mongol by race, "were far more numerous than any other foreign Muslim people who settled in India." The Pathans too formed a substantial part of the community everywhere.<sup>16</sup>

The immigration reached its peak during the thirteenth – fourteenth centuries in the wake of pressures from the Mongols. By 1911, Muslims constituted 21-26 per cent of the population of India. By the time of Mughuls, the Hindus and Muslims formed a composite community everywhere, their destinies being linked together at all levels, local, regional and national.<sup>17</sup>

### **2.2. Heterogeneity, Tensions and Problems**

Though the concept of Muslim brother-hood (Quam) was central to Islam, Indian Muslims were as divided as the Hindus in the social structure. The immigrant Muslims came from different lands and Tribes, and the differences arising there from priest-hood. Linguistic and regional factors were also of important for the divisions.

<sup>13</sup> Sukumar Muraleedharan, "Mandal Mandir our Masjid: Hindu Communalism and the Crisis of the State" in *Social Scientist* (October 1990), 16.

<sup>14</sup> S.V. Desika Char, *Caste, Religion and Community* (Hyderabad ; Orent Longman, 1993), 76.

<sup>15</sup> S.V. Desika Char, *Caste, Religion and Community* . . . ,71.

<sup>16</sup> S.V. Desika Char, *Caste, Religion and Community* . . . , 77.

<sup>17</sup> S.V. Desika Char, *Caste, Religion and Community*. . . ,78.

### 2.3 Muslim Communal Separatism

Nationalism of the Maharashtra and Bengal school antagonized the Muslims of India and was a potent cause behind the rise of Muslim Communal Separatism. It should be pointed out here that neither of these two schools of aggressive, popular and uncompromisingly anticolonial nationalism was by intent directly against the Muslim interest or meant to hurt their sentiments. As a matter of fact, in the early stages of militant nationalism in Bengal Muslims could be found in the ranks of the militants through not in large numbers. They were also appreciative of the uncompromising hostility towards British rule and did not oppose the swadeshi movement at its inception.<sup>18</sup>

It is true, however, that the intense religious symbolism of both the schools was bolstered by references to Shivaji who fought against Muslim rule as well as by Bankin Chandra Chattergi's novel 'Ananda Math' which hinted at a revolt and the missionary zeal which the author of the novel lent to this effort did provide grounds for uneasiness and a sense of alienation in the minds of the Muslims. Of equal importance was certainly the desperate and political and Reeldon on concerted efforts on the parts of the British Indian Government to bring about a rift-modern India: the interfiles in the nationalist forces, by pulling back sixty two million Muslims from the fold of nationalism. Under the instructions of Lord Morley who was the Viceroy, and Minto and egged on by the bureaucracy a representative delegation of the Muslim upper classes was invited to be entertained by the Viceroy in his garden at Simla on October 1, 1906, to press on him the urgent need to protect the interests of the Muslim community, ostensibly against the possible onslaught of the Hindu majority.<sup>19</sup>

The Muslim upper classes who were to a large extent dependent on the colonial government readily obliged. The Viceroy sympathized with the claims made by the delegation for state patronage. This had affected India and Indian history for many a long year. Similar views were expressed by both Morely and Minto. In 1906 December 30, the All India Muslim League was founded to promote feelings of loyalty to the British government and to protect the political and other rights of Indian Muslims. In 1908 and in the following year, the League demanded the extension of representation on communal basis. In the year 1909, the Morely - Minto Reforms brought forward the divisive doctrine of minority representation on the basis of religion.

The efforts of the British to divide Indians and to use one against another was given another expression through the doctrine of communal representation. It was designed to strengthen communalism, introduce political discrimination and create endless complications. In the analysis of this highly regrettable and regressive development in the struggle for freedom, proper weightage should be given to the religious symbolism of militant nationalism, the role of the Muslim upper class as well as the malicious and mischievous policies of the British government.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Christian Fundamentalism

Christian Fundamentalism is one form of the widespread need among Christians to find and hold on family to fundamental confidences in the face of modernity. It is a response to the longing to break through the bewildering variety of available meaning systems and of so many religious/anti religious a – religious/ moral/ a moral claims; to find a buttress against social instabilities, marginalization and dislocations, and against perceived moral even physical 'ends-of- the world,' and in this disarray, to possess God's revealed clear answer and have an earthly authority to voice it.<sup>21</sup>

#### 3.1 Fundamentalist Christianity in India

Fundamentalist Christianity is seen as a product of the West. Christian fundamentalism came out of the closet in the 1970s. They immediately got public attention and media coverage when they had displayed enough galvanized bodies and votes to exercise public political and economic power.

Modern fundamentalism is an expression among Christians to be 'serious' to meet the needs for fundamental confidences in the face of modernity, the struggle to find a firm foundation in life; the longing to break through bewildering variety of religious/anti religious claims; the search for a buttress against social instabilities and marginalization, democratic dislocations and perceived moral, even physical ends – of the world. In this disarray, the

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Mahesh Vikram Singh and Brij Bhushan Srivastava, *Communalism in Modern India* . . . .4.

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Mahesh Vkrum Singh and Brij Bhushan Srivastava, *Communalism in Modern India* . . . .5.

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Mahesh Vikram Singh and Brij Bhushan Srivastava, "Communalism in Modern India". . . .5.

<sup>21</sup> John S. Augustine, ed., *Religious Fundamentalism: An Asian Perspective* (Bangalore; SATHRI/CCA/WARC, 1992), 105.

hungers for God's revealed clear, not – to – be disputed answer, and for an earthly authority to voice it. Not necessarily always an answer to every problem or dilemma or doubt, but at least a direction on how to live with them, a bridge between who they are and what they want to be.<sup>22</sup>

Fundamentalists, whether protestants or catholic firmly believes that God has given that answer to modernity. Here one have an interpretation of Christian Faith in which charismatic leaders locate with easy certitude in chosen words, doctrines and practices the miraculas actions of a strict God who is saving an elite from an evil world. The fundamentalists believe that God has given them both the message and the tractics. The tractic is that God needs fighters, and Christian fundamentalists are the fighters. Fighting is what shapes their theological substance, principles, and methods, also their political strategies. They fight under God. They are convinced that the strict God calls them to be disciplined – no – nonsense soldiers on a battle field. A warriors of Christ in crusade, they proudly bear God's flag to carry out Christ clear purpose and undisputed will, even if that means being a scandal to liberal intellectuals and a stumbling block to sceptics. They fight for, with words, ideas public protests and ballots, they fight for that world-view which shapes the core of their social and personal identity, and inspires corporate actions in the public areas. They fight with a chosen repository of weapons. Their scenarios are highly selective. First they select what in a community is evil to characterize the entire modern times, and them they compare with a reconstructive idealized earlier golden age, by selecting and emphasizing one or other of its traits, which they regard as doctrinal and practical fundamentals for the present.<sup>23</sup>

Fundamentalists claim authority over a sacred biblical and / or Church tradition which they perceive all other Christians are corroding. They fight with an armoury of absolute, authoritative proof texts. The texts are so arranged as to be most effective to sustain courage in themselves and to weaken the opponents.<sup>24</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion:**

The increase of fundamentalism in all religions is a matter of great concern to all who commit to build a just and secular society. A fundamental ideology in any religion generates abhorrence, distrust and suspicious in the minds of its followers towards other religions. The communal strife and bloodshed caused by this have inflicted a deep wound in the national mind which cannot be solved by easily. In spite of the progress in education and scientific knowledge, regrettably, religious communities are becoming exclusive and intolerant. Short sighted religious leaders and politicians are using religions to attain their selfish ends. In this context, it is the head of the time to seek different forms of relationships. Hence every citizen should work for the unity among diverse religious people and strengthen the secular democratic foundation of India.

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas F. Stransky, "Fundamentalists, Protestant and Catholic an Ecumenical Challenge," in *Christian Fundamentalism Today*, edited by H.S. Wilson (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1994), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas F. Stransky, "Fundamentalists, Protestant and Catholic an Ecumenical Challenge," in *Christian Fundamentalism Today*, ...27.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas F. Stransky, "Fundamentalists, Protestant and Catholic an Ecumenical Challenge," in *Christian Fundamentalism Today*, ...27.