

## Hindutva

Hindutva is the essence of what it means to be Hindu. There is deliberate deviance from the term “Hinduism” because of the common association with “isms” as Western manifestations (Bhatt 85). Hindutva seeks to define a Hindu not through religiosity (as most would identify a Hindu as one that practises Hinduism) nor through geography; as India is the home to the largest population of Hindus, but rather on ideals that are an aggregate of the two concepts.

There are four fathers of Hindutva: Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and most formidably, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (Sharma 4). They prescribed six elements of Hinduism that needed modification in order to unify Hindus under a common cause, Hindutva. Hinduism is inherently diverse; there are endless variations within the faith. To the fathers of Hindutva this was seen as a weakness. Hinduism needed to be transformed into a rigid and codified belief system. “To admit to infinite variations within the faith was seen as a sign of weakness” (Sharma 9). It was also imperative that Hinduism abandon its adherence to non violence; the second element of modification then is to take up a masculine, aggressive, and violent faith. “Hindus had to learn to live and die for an ideal” (Sharma 9). The third characteristic of the Hindutva vision was to place “Hinduness” relative to other faiths. It was a common thought among these founders of Hindutva that Hinduism was the oldest and most perfect faith. It was in essence the “mother of all religions.” As such, Hinduism only had wisdom to share with others and nothing to learn from them (Sharma 10). This was an attempt to subordinate all other faiths and reinforce Hindu supremacy. This plays into the fourth element; a constant sense of threat to the survival of Hinduism. Perhaps because of the colonial past of India and the seemingly endless threats coming from all angles; Christianity/Western influence, or Islamic fundamentalists from within the country it was thought that the constant sense of

threat would revitalise Hindus to be defensive to perceived threats of dilutions to their faith (Sharma 10). The fifth feature of the ideal Hindu nation was the end of theology. “Hinduism had been perfected in the Vedas and the Upanishads. The question of discussing doctrinal issues therefore did not arise. Answers to every question about modern life, science and technology were to be found in the Vedas” (Sharma 11). The last characteristic of the Hindutva ideal was brutal honesty. Abuse and contempt were legitimate tools of conversation and discourse. “Everything had to be stripped to its basics and presented” (Sharma 11).

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the self proclaimed father of Hindutva furthers his recommendations with four additional essentials to Hindutva. The first essential to Hindu identity was “a citizenship of paternal decent within a physically bounded territory” (Bhatt 94). India’s physical geography is one that is defined by boundaries; the Himalayas in the North, the Bay of Bengal to the East, Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea to South and West respectively. However, as was mentioned previously, geography alone cannot define a Hindu. The second criterion is one that Savarkar deems the most important: “the bond of common blood” (Bhatt 94). He argues that Hindus were not only a nation (*rastra*) but a race (*jati*) (Bhatt 94). The third essential to membership of the Hindu nation is the idea of a common culture and civilization that Savarkar claimed bound all Hindus, regardless of caste. This clause has Vedic roots inasmuch as a civilization is by definition composed of a common history, literature, laws, customs and festivals which share the same mother tongue [in this case Sanskrit] hence the common civilization was *sanskriti* (Bhatt 97). This would seemingly include the Muslim and Christian population within India; however, they are effectively excluded in the fourth and final criterion of Hindutva. Savarkar’s concluding definition of a Hindu is one who “looks upon” and “considers” the land that is India as his Fatherland (*pitribhu*) and Motherland (*matribhu*) (Bhatt

99). The Muslim and Christian population within India would obviously consider India a homeland because that is where they live but the foundations of their faith would lay outside of the Indian subcontinent [Motherland and Fatherland in this sense essentially make reference to the exact place where the various religions were created E.g. Christianity would be said to begin when and where Jesus was born].

The ideal of Hindutva has been a political issue in India since its inception in the early 1920's [V.D Savarkar's book of the same name was published in 1923] (Bhatt 78). The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS] was founded in this time period and will become the foundational organization in the Sangh Parivar [the "family" of nationalist organizations] (Bhatt 4). In the decades to come the Sangh is thought to become a formidable force in Indian politics. Democracy is believed to be a by-product of British colonialism in India. However Hindutva and a democratic political system are conflicting ideologies. Religion and politics are said to not function symbiotically; India is no exception; "democracy in India is perceived to be in danger because the Sangh Parivar" (Bhambri 3). The foundational principle of democracy is rule of law and equality. The Hindutva ideology is one that is committed to "One Country, One Culture and One Nation" (Bhambri 4). The Sangh Parivar reinforces this motto and is hostile to the idea of guaranteed rights for all groups in society (Bhambri 4). The very constitution of India is rejected by the followers of Hindutva [ergo the Sangh Parivar]. They believe that Christians and Muslims have a homeland that is outside India, and therefore should not be granted the same concessions regarding equal citizenship. In Sangh ideology, "India belongs to Hindus and other minority groups should win over the goodwill of the majority and will willingly accept their minority status" (Bhambri 4). The Sangh Parivar believes that a pure Hindu state shall mean the total destruction of the culturally pluralist and diverse society of India. The forces of Hindutva will

not be able to achieve their goal of establishing a Hindu nation-state without a violent civil war within the country (Bhambri 5). India is an inherently pluralistic society, with over 500 seats in its legislature [Lok Sabha]; India has made considerable efforts to ensure that all groups are represented. Hindutva's ideal of eliminating all cultures that are not associated with Hinduism would prove to be a daunting task considering the constitutionally entrenched features of India. The nationalist movements do, however, pervade the system. A particularly contentious issue among Hindu nationals and the government of India is the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya (Bhambri 21) The Sangh Parivar was successful in reviving this movement which was described by the Prime Minister as an "initiative that reflected national sentiment" (Bhambri 21). The Prime Minister clarifies that it was not the temple construction that would be particularly contentious, but the rights to perform *puja* on the site (Bhambri 21).

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) [a frontal organization in the Sangh Parivar] openly communicated with the Prime Minister regarding these rights. They also sent a warning to the government not to create obstacles in the way of constructing the temple at Ayodhya (Bhambri 21). Communications between the VHP and the Prime Minister came to a halt when the VHP confessed that they did not have the authority to negotiate matters pertaining to temple construction; that decision was made by the Dharmacharyas [Hindu religious heads] (Bhambri 22). On the surface, this issue seems quite benign; a religious movement wants the rights to perform their rituals without government involvement. What is disturbing is the infiltration of religiosity into politics especially in the area of policy making. It would seemingly be a step backwards to have religious heads paramount to government functioning. The Dharmacharyas are Saints and Sadhus that have been elevated to the position of real decision makers by the Sangh Parivar (Bhambri 22). The Sangh has a Hindutva agenda which, was previously described

as being counteractive to democracy, yet the very those principles of democracy have enabled the Sangh and its various entities to pervade the system and push through very undemocratic policies. The constitution has created a sovereign, democratic, republic state which is the legitimate guarantor of the rule of law and the rights of the citizen. The basic structure of the Constitution is threatened if priests and not an elected Parliament become the representatives of the will of one particular group of people in India (Bhambri 23).

The foundations of Hindutva, by nature are confounding. In essence, Hindutva can be interpreted to be a reaction to British colonialism posing a threat to the distinct society that is India. Hindutva's nationalist appeal does not permeate throughout the country; some of its more aggressive policies do not have the breadth of appeal that is necessary to drive a uniform nationalist movement. It was British rule over India that introduced some of the country's most unifying principles. Innovations such as transportation and communication technologies between regions as well as literacy in the populous were all facilitated by British colonialism. These features knitted together the vast political and economic region that is India, for the first time in its history (Krishnan 129/130). It was through the dynamic influence of Christianity and Western domination over the subcontinent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a sense of unity and national consciousness developed among Indians (Krishnan 133). Without the influence of the West, it would seem that Hindutva has no premise. The religion that is Hinduism is one that reflects a polytheistic system of worship. Hindutva seeks to undermine that important facet [if not defining feature] and move towards a more monotheistic, Judeo-Christian system of belief. The extreme nationalist movement that is Hindutva is greatly indebted to the influence that it seeks to abolish. While the issue of Hindu nationalism and the ensuing movement has many more underlying

comprehensive features it is a contentious issue that will continue to infiltrate all aspects of Hindu life.

## References

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## Noteworthy Websites

<http://www.hinduunity.org>  
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