

**Cultural Self-Alienation
And
Some Problems Hinduism Faces**

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Cultural Self-Alienation Among the Hindus*

When two cultures meet on unequal military terms—as the Hindu culture met the West and earlier met Islam—it gives rise to grave problems of self-identity for the defeated party. When India finally realized that she had lost in the military and diplomatic contest and that the British were supreme, she was overwhelmed and filled with a deep sense of inferiority. Under such circumstances, as it usually happens, other non-military forces came into play. Different people sought psychological rehabilitation in different ways. Some retired into their shell and became apathetic; a majority met the situation by self-repudiation and wholesale imitation. They disowned their nationhood and their culture and adopted the ways and attitudes of the victors whom they regarded as their superiors. They saved their self-respect through self-alienation.

This self-alienation was an important component of the intellectual ferment that followed the British conquest of India. It was very pervasive and attacked all strata of the society, particularly the intellectual elites. Even people who eventually came to fight the British politically surrendered to them culturally. This surrender gave rise to what may be called the politics of self-alienation and, fed by many sources, it became increasingly more powerful. Today it seems to dominate.

Reawakening

But when the initial shock was over, and the military presence became less obtrusive though not less real, and some kind of civic life returned, and we also became more familiar with the victor, a maturer reaction and strategy emerged. A military-political inferiority was accepted but reassertion took place at the religious-spiritual level.

This reassertion was the beginning of greater things in

* An edited version of an article that appeared in three instalments in the Times of India, July 2-4, 1987.

future. It was to sustain us even in our political struggle.* Leaders like Dayananda, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi went deeper into the truths of their spirituality and felt renewed by it. They saw in Hinduism an incomparable truth, or, at least, a truth by which alone India could rise.

For them, India's struggle was more than political; for them, it had a rich spiritual content and had a deeper intent. India was fighting for *svarajya*, for *svadharma*, for self-recovery. To many it was sufficient if the British political control was withdrawn and replaced by a Government controlled by the Indians themselves. But to these leaders, this was not sufficient. They wanted the country to realize its full potential, to wake up to its soul-life. Aurobindo thought that India was rising for the *Sanatana Dharma*. Gandhi said that he would not like to live in an India which had ceased to be Hindu.

In this concept there was no parochialism and there was no rejection of any truth the West had to offer. In fact, the West could not be wished away and it had to be fully taken into account. What they opposed was mechanical imitation. In the place of this imitation, Aurobindo taught what he called "assimilative appropriation" (*atmasaat-karana*). We borrow whatever is necessary but what we can assimilate and transform in the light of our own *svadharma*. This keeps out bastardisation of the culture. Let it be made clear that this view is not syncretic which says that we should create a new entity by borrowing and combining what is good anywhere, and for anyone. Cultures like individuals are organisms and do not behave that way.

Though these people presided over India's national struggle, their spirit was universal in the highest degree. Even Sri Aurobindo who saw in India the very image of the Divine Mother said at the peak-time of the struggle that "we do not recognize the nation as the highest synthesis." A nation is the

* It had happened earlier also. During the medieval ages, religious revival preceded military revival (or defence). Kabir, Nanka, Tulsi, Chaitanya, Ramdas gave birth to Shivaji and Govind Singh. Saints paved the way for heroes.

highest synthesis in the European thought, but in the Indian thought, as he said, there is a still higher synthesis, *humanity*. Beyond this lies another synthesis, the synthesis of the living, suffering and aspiring world of creatures, the "synthesis of Buddhism", as Aurobindo called it. He yet recognized another synthesis, the "highest" one, "the Hindu synthesis", the synthesis of Vedanta.*

Thus nationalism to these leaders of the nation was only a temporary phase. "We must live as a nation before we can live in humanity," said Sri Aurobindo. In traditional Hindu spirituality, it was all God, compassion and humanity, and the truth of its own self-identity was neglected. The new leaders came and provided a corrective. And thus was born Indian nationalism. It was carved out of a larger truth and it retained the impress of its original source; it remained rooted in the Hindu vision of human and cosmic unity.

It is obvious that in such a conception of Indian nationalism, there could be no place for rancour against the British, nor any unthinking rejection of the West. India's struggle for freedom was rooted in Hindu spirituality which has a universality of its own. This universality of course has nothing to do with the universality of the multi-nationals or with the universality of hedonistic consumerism; nor has it to do with the universalism of crusading and proselytizing religions; nor has it to do with the vague internationalism under Marxist auspices made popular by Nehru. Indian world-view is not economic or political or ecclesiastical. India's message, to itself as well as to the world, as propogated by its leaders, ancient and recent, was that of their spiritual self-recovery and self-discovery.

* Semitic religions have no concept of *man* or *humanity*. They divide humanity into *believers* and *non-believers*, the *faithful* and the *infidels*. No wonder these religions also lack the concept of *jiva-daya*, compassion for all living beings, a conception which is such a living part of all Indian traditions, Buddhist, Jain and Vaishnava. Vedanta goes still further. It teaches us to see God in the visage of all, to regard them as our own *Atma*, to serve them as the manifestations of Vasudeva. It teaches us not to be put off by human suffering but to accept it too with a glad heart and see in it the *leela* or play of Narayana.

II

Hindus Learn to Look at Themselves through Borrowed Eyes

The two approaches—the approach of self-discovery and creative response and the approach of self-alienation and imitation—both were inherited from the immediate history of the freedom struggle though they derive their strength from the deeper sources in the psyche. The two views are basic and their impact can be seen all along the line. They inform our thinking, our way of regarding ourselves and others. One ideology regards the society culturally; the other economically. One regards it as a community and as an habitat; the other as a guild and a mart. For one the problem is of helping the society to find its roots, for the other to remake it in the image of a chosen pattern. The one serves; the other manipulates.

Illustrating the difference between the two approaches, when Gandhi toured the country, he saw in the lives of our villagers a hidden nobility and dignity; but when Chandra Shekhar did his *pad-yatra*, he saw in the same people nothing but illiteracy, poverty and deprivity. Aurobindo illustrates the same difference. He did no *pad-yatra* but in the inmates of his jail, most of them poor and illiterate, he saw the visage of Narayana, putting to shame by their humility and simplicity his own intellectual achievements.

Once the approach of Aurobindo and Gandhi formed a powerful current and the freedom struggle was waged under its auspices. But increasingly its hold became weak and in our own times it seems to have lost altogether. The earlier revolutionaries were inspired by the *Gita*; the gospel of the latter-day would-be revolutionaries was the *Manifesto* of Karl Marx. Some see in this change a triumph of Nehru over Gandhi. They, of course, do not mean Nehru as a person for Nehru was merely a symbol and he represented, in his own way, a typical response, the response of a defeated nation trying to restore its self-respect and self-confidence through self-repudiation and identification with the ways of the victors. The approach was not altogether

unjustified at one time. It had its compulsions and it had also a survival value for us. But its increasing influence can mean no good to us.

We, however, believe that deeper Indian nationalism, which is also in harmony with deeper internationalism, may be weak just now, but it has the seed-power and it is bound to come up again under propitious circumstances. Meanwhile, let us try to understand the forces which give strength and sustain the politics of self-alienation.

Satellite Ideology

A dominant ruling people or race also creates a dominant ideology. It gives birth not only to economic and political compradores but also to intellectual compradores. In India, too, we developed a local satellite ideology derived from the dominant imperialist ideology. It believed what it had been taught, namely, that India was not a nation but only a name for a geographical region occupied by successive waves of invaders, that its past was dark, its religion degraded and superstitious, and that its social system was a tyranny of castes and creeds.

This Western-Missionary view of India was increasingly adopted by a growing intelligentsia and became a veritable part of its intellectual equipage. The intellectual and cultural conquest of the West has proved more spectacular and durable than its military conquest.

Started by the British, this intellectual programming received powerful reinforcement from Marxism, a new ideology arising in the West. In fact, it was old imperialism establishing itself under new slogans. It was a new name for old facts. In the new dress, it became even more effective; it remained about the same in its larger aims, yet it acquired a radical look into the bargain.

Little do we realize how completely European is the orientation of Marx and Engels. In the *Capital* of Marx or the *Selected Works* of Marx and Engels, the great civilization of China is not mentioned even once though one might say that China is lucky in this indifference. India appears only as an appendage of the

British Empire. Taking his cue from die-hard imperialist writers, Marx tells us that India is no nation and it has no history. She is "the predestined prey of conquest," he says. "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of successive intruders," he adds. Here we have Macaulay, Mill and Bishop Heber in their most uninhibited form.

With this kind of understanding, the next step was inevitable. To Marx, the British conquest of India was a blessing. The question, as he puts it, "is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton."

The Indian Marxists have borrowed this thesis wholesale except that while Marx preferred a British conquest, his Indian disciples prefer a Turkish conquest. This is part of the compulsion of their secular conscience—a conscience which accepts no other compulsion. Read M.N. Roy and other Marxist historians (they dominate our universities) who tell us how Islamic conquest brought a new message of brotherhood and equality to a degraded Hindu India, and how it completed the work begun by Buddhism.* Here anything can be anything and imperialism is a beautiful thing if the victim is Hinduism.

Here we find a complete convergence of Imperialism and

* Marxist writers are not "indiscriminately" anti-imperialist. They are selective in their anti-imperialism. They have their favoured imperialisms about which they can be very lyrical. M.N. Roy calls the "Arab Empire", a "magnificent monument to the memory of Mohammad." According to him, Islam had already "played out its progressive role before it penetrated India." Here its flag was planted on the "banks of the Indus and the Ganges not by revolutionary Saracen heroes, but by Persians demoralised by luxury and the barbarians of Central Asia who had embraced Islam." But, for M.N. Roy, even this corrupted Islamic imperialism was good enough for degraded India, for he tells us that "it was welcomed as a message of hope and freedom by the multitudinous victims of the Brahmanical reaction which had overthrown the Buddhist revolution and had consequently thrown the Indian society into chaos." (*The Historical Role of Islam*, Delhi Reprint, 1981, Pp. 88-89).

Marxism. We should keep it in mind. Today, Marxism represents the most systematic and sustained attack on deeper India, on the India of Gandhi, Vivekananda and Aurobindo.

III

Politics of Self-alienation

The present political analysis divides Hindu intellectuals into two categories: liberal and communal. But this division is falsely flattering to one and unfair to the other. For if we closely examine the names that sail under the two categories, we find that many of the so-called "liberal" Hindu intellectuals are plain Hindu-baiters while many of the so-called "communal" Hindu intellectuals are plain patriots.

Nor is this categorization exhaustive. It does not take into account even the more important shades. For example, where will we place in this *schema* persons like Dayananda, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi who, though they led the movements of the day for national awakening, yet spoke for the whole humanity and its future? They were more than "liberal"; they were seers.

And where will we place Nehru, the "only nationalist Muslim" of Sardar Patel's description? He will have to belong to the category of liberal Hindus—we owe it to his importance and position. But where will we place the prolific crowd of P.N. Haksars, Mulk Raj Anands, Nikhil Chakravartys, Romila Thapars, Inder Gujrals, Rajni Kotharis, Kuldip Nayars, etc., a class by themselves waiting to be named, a class of Hindus by accident of birth but anti-Hindu by their freely chosen role? The role may not be as freely chosen as it looks at first thought, for it may be the result of an equally accidental Marxist or secularist conditioning. But it is there.

We also come across a further and related distinction between two types of Hindu communalism—negative and positive. Negative communalism, we are told, consists in being merely anti-Muslim in varying degrees, while positive Hindu commu-

nalism consists in appealing in the name of a positive Hindu identity. But since the positive Hindu identity is extremely shadowy due to lack of internal homogeneity among Hindus, positive Hindu communalism is not viable. Therefore, as an inescapable conclusion, for a viable communalism, the Hindus are left only with the negative kind; this however is not desirable.

In this way of thinking, not only positive Hindu communalism, however free from anti-Muslim bias, but even Indian nationalism which has any Hindu orientation is *a priori* condemned to failure; for, it is argued, Indian nationalism makes "contradictory demands". In order to mobilize the people in a Hindu land, it needs to invoke Hindu symbols. But that is "bound to further alienate the Muslims."

Under the circumstances, it has been seriously propagated that Hindus should give up their symbols and even Hinduism itself in order to placate the Muslims. In fact, many Hindu elites go about condemning Hinduism in order to prove their Indian nationalism and make it more convincing to the Muslims and to themselves. Thus we have another variety of nationalism—the super-positive nationalism of those Hindus who hate Hinduism for and on behalf of Muslims as well.

But there were others like Gandhi and Aurobindo who saw and acted differently. They did not feel that their Hinduism contradicted their nationalism. In fact, it gave them strength to be great nationalists and great humanists.

Sri Aurobindo was a trenchant exponent of both Hinduism and Indian nationalism. He invoked Hindu symbols, comparing India with Mother Goddess. There is no evidence that he was ill-disposed towards the Muslims, but he refused to give up his Hinduism simply because it might make the Muslims feel crossed. Nor was there any question of his ignoring the Muslims, but there was also no intention on his part of giving them a veto either. His position on the Muslim question was clear. "We do not shun, we desire the awakening of Islam in India even if its first crude efforts are misdirected against ourselves; for all

strength, all energy, all action is grist to the mill of the nation-builder. In that faith we are ready, when the time comes for us to meet in the political field, to exchange with the Musalman, just as he chooses, the firm clasp of the brother or the resolute grip of the wrestler," he had said.

Aurobindo had probably another reason for his stand on Islam. He believed that Islam's role in the deeper destiny of India was peripheral. In this sense, he had a vision of India very different from the one that holds the field today. He believed that *Sanatana Dharma* represents the soul of India and that India was rising for the sake of the *Sanatana Dharma*. Vivekananda held a similar view and had expressed his belief that India means Hindu and Hindu means India. Such a vision of or role for India is now unmentionable.

Homogeneity

It has been observed that Hindus are not a homogeneous community in the same sense in which the Muslims are. It is probably true. It is not that the Muslims do not have their internal conflicts—in fact they are quite cut-throat; but they do have a keener sense of belonging to a Muslim brotherhood.

On the contrary, a Hindu, generally speaking, belongs to a caste before he belongs to the Hindu community. This places him at a disadvantage vis-a-vis societies which have a keener sense of fraternity.

The difference arose because Hindus were organised on different principles. Hinduism was organised for peaceable and harmonious internal co-existence, not for continued confrontation with external enemies in the shape of unbelievers. It is no accident of history that though Hinduism knew internal feuds like any social polity, it never crossed its borders to wage wars against people simply because they worshipped different Gods. By its very philosophy and organising principles, the Hindu society was not conceived as a Church Militant or as an *Ummah* on the march in the service of Jehovah or Allah. In fact, its very conception of deity is fundamentally different—but that is a question we need not discuss here.

Organised on such non-military principles, there is no wonder that Hinduism did not even have a name for itself. This agreed with its nature and genius. In this sense, it was like many "pagan" societies which are taught to live their spirituality, good or bad, unconsciously.

While leaving Goa for farther East, Francis Xavier said : "I want to be where there are no Moslems or Jews. Give me out-and-out pagans." Here, Francis Xavier was formulating his experience that pagan societies without self-conscious identities are an easy prey of crusading and proselytizing fraternities with their divinely conceived roles. This realization is being forced on the Hindus. They are realizing that they are at a disadvantage vis-a-vis those fraternities which have self-conscious identities. Therefore, the Hindus too are now in the process of acquiring as much self-conscious identity as is necessary for their survival. Whether they will succeed is another matter. But this has already made the opposed parties with vested interest in a weak Hinduism cry, *Hindu Baklash*. Marxist and secularist writers, whose work is convergent with Muslim politics and designs, are full of this cry.

Unassimilable Identities

The lack of homogeneity in the Hindu society may be admitted and it is a sorry lack in the present context. But this lack is not, however, the main problem. Indian society allows a unity in which the principle of diversity finds full place. In Indian society, different communities followed their own customs and usages. True, there were certain dominant ideas and values but there was no forced conformity. In Indian society, the problem has never been of diverse communities and diverse customs. But after the advent of Islam, the problem has been and is of unassimilable elements.

We are often told that the Muslims in India are "a self-conscious minority" and that they are convinced that "they have a religious-cultural-linguistic heritage which is worth defending whatever the price". But is this all that this Muslim "self-consciousness" amounts to—just defence of its religious-cultural-

linguistic identity? If we believe this, we are fooling ourselves. This Muslim "self-consciousness" has already led to one partition of the country, and it is preparing for another. This "self-consciousness" has greater aims and convictions and greater historical dynamism. It is supported by a deeper and far-reaching ideology, it has at its back the whole theology of *dar'l-harb* and *dar'l-islam*. Its unfolding takes time but its aim is fixed. To think of "Indian" Muslims without taking into account the Islamic theology and ideology, without taking into account Arabia and Pakistan, is like thinking of "Indian" Communists without taking into account the Communist ideology and the Leninist-Stalinist tactics and the "vanguard role" of Soviet Russia. Refusing to see the problem in its larger perspective is to deceive ourselves, in which lies great peril for the future of the nation.

Some Problems Hinduism¹ Faces and Some Remedial Measures²

1. Hinduism faces some grave problems that need serious attention :

- (a) it lacks ideological cohesiveness ;
- (b) it lacks leadership. Its elites are becoming illiterate about their spiritual heritage and history and indifferent about their future destiny ;
- (c) it is weak organizationally. It has no recognized centres where it could take stock of its sorry situation and think of remedial measures ;
- (d) it is poor financially. Great poverty has overtaken its religious institutions. Most of its temples are in a state of near-destitution. Its religious priests and *Acharyas* (scholars) have hardly any prestige left and they are badly neglected ;
- (e) Hindu society is badly divided into castes and denominations. Once when Hinduism was spiritually vibrant and politically strong, these divisions expressed natural and healthy diversity ; but now in its present weak state, they are used by its enemies for its disintegration. Election politics is being utilized for the dismemberment of the great Hindu society ;

1. *Hinduism* is a comparatively recent but now popular name for ancient *Sanatana Dharma*. In its comprehensiveness, it includes many spiritual traditions, disciplines and denominations ; it includes what the Gita calls the two *Nishthas* of Samkhya and Yoga, both equally ancient and both taught by the same divine teacher ; it includes what the Buddhist and Jain sacred literature so repeatedly and lovingly mention—the two traditions of *Shramana* and *Brahmana* ; it includes Saivaism, Saktivism, Vaishnavism (which includes Sikhism of Guru Nanaka), and many other paths, *pantha* and *sampradaya*.

2. A paper circulated among concerned friends in September (1st) 1981.

- (f) Hinduism is ceasing to be a practising religion. Awareness of a larger God-life is becoming dim ; worship, studies, *Sadhana*, *Japa*, spiritual meditation and reflection are fast declining.

In short, it is a situation painful for the lovers of Hinduism and pleasing for its enemies.

2. There are many great Hindus (like Vinobha) who accept and cherish Hindu scriptures, the Gita and the Upanishads, but they have little use for its history, its national and corporate life. They forget that this side too is important and needs nourishing. Upanishads repeatedly speak of the physical and mental vehicle or abode of a spiritual truth, the *Adhishthana* that holds that truth. How can the Hindus contribute anything to the world, if they lose their national life and identity ?

3. The problems of Hinduism are internal as well as external. The attack comes both from inside and outside. While the forces of self-alienation are increasing within the society, external enemies have intensified their attack. The two forces interact and reinforce each other. All unfriendly elements like Communism, Islam, Christianity have powerful international links, ideological, financial and organizational. The entry of Arab money on a large scale in the last few years spells a most ominous development—it spells the return of Medieval days.

II

1. India has been held together by Hinduism. But now this bond is under great ideological attack and is weakening. As a result, the social fabric of the nation is falling apart and fissiparous forces are on the increase. The moral quality of the nation is also deteriorating. *Ashramas*, religious orders, temples, *keertans*, *kathas* pilgrimages are still doing useful work. They generate spiritual life at the grass-roots. But these institutions are losing their elan, inwardness and vision. A general rootlessness is growing, and these institutions are not drawing the new generation. This puts into jeopardy the very future of Hindu society.

2. The Hindu philosophy and *Sadhana* are individual. Hindu mode of worship helps an individual ethically and spiritually, but it does not raise his collective consciousness. For example, one could go to all the temples of the land, listen to *keertans* and *bhajans*, read all the scriptures without ever hearing the word 'Hindu'. But it is different with religions like Islam and Christianity which are organized round the idea of a tribe, a church, an *umma*. They may help one very little ethically and spiritually, but they do give him a sense of communal solidarity. Their social organization is also aggressive, in keeping with their aggressive philosophy. This puts deep and universal but passive religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism at a disadvantage vis-a-vis those ideologies which are aggressive in their philosophy and tribal in their social organisation.

3. But with all its lapses and shortcomings, Hinduism is the only adequate religion of the Spirit. In contrast, Islam and Christianity are not religions; they are ideologies and, in their true essence, political creeds. They are not based on any deep truth of the spirit but are built on a passionate and fanatic idea. If Hinduism awakens to its own truth, it can defeat these irrational and unspiritual forces. But while Hindus sleep the thieves are on the prowl.

III

1. While a Hindu has a truly cosmic sense, his neglect of the social dimension and corporate life is stupendous. Hindus do not have a sense of belonging to a larger whole. The Communist movement is frankly world-wide. There is a strong ecumenical movement among the Christians. Whatever may be their differences in Europe, they work with real co-operative zeal in the lands of the heathens. If there is any competition, it is in the interest of selling the same product. Similarly, there is a powerful pan-Islamic movement among the Muslims. And in spite of their mutual cut-throat conflicts sanctioned by their history, there is a real ideological appeal; they readily rally against infidel countries, particularly if those countries are weak. Islam teaches its adherents to hate *Kafirs* and to keep exerting against them (*Jihad*), collectively and individually and under all

circumstances.

2. All these ideologies have their World-Centres. Communists have their Comintern working overtly or covertly. The Catholics have their Vatican, a much older centre, having much expertise in and long tradition of subverting non-Catholic societies. The Protestants with about similar aims and strategies in the Third World are also united in their World Council of Churches. The Muslim Caliphate was abolished after the First World War and the Muslim powers have been in bad shape for over a century. But a very active and aggressive pan-Islamic movement is emerging. An Islamic International, a kind of Muslim Vatican, *Rabitah al-'alam al-Islamiya*, is in the offing. It is oiled by petrodollars. Because of its present military weakness and dependence, it cannot do much mischief yet in Europe and America, but its immediate targets are the poor and weak countries of Africa and Asia. All these totalitarian ideologies are a threat to pluralist and democratic societies.

Hindus, however, have no centre, no common platform where they could meet together, take stock of the situation and take united counsel. Hinduism is just a sprawling body without a head. How long could it hope to continue to exist in that way under the new threats that are maturing?

3. These international forces work through local agencies. Decisions taken at their World-Centres are converted into local plans and programmes. They sponsor "liberation fronts", demands for separate "home-lands". They work in the name of civil rights, human rights, minority rights, democracy and freedom. They float political parties and maintain an extensive agit-prop apparatus. They create entrenched interests, and privileged enclaves. They bribe, buy and blackmail. They train and finance local propagandists, ideologues and terrorists.

They infiltrate the universities and the media. In India, they already control our academic and intellectual life; they define for us our national ideology and write our history. Thanks to their work and their eminent position, Hinduism has already

become a dirty word and the Hindu elites have learnt to be apologetic and ashamed of their identity.

IV

1. Communists run many Schools, in India and abroad, where they train their followers in their philosophy and ideational framework. Christians maintain hundreds of Seminaries where they teach Christian "apologetics"; they also maintain Missionary Seminaries where they train their recruits specifically for Missionary work in native lands. Muslims too have their *al-Zahar* and their *Deoband*; many new Madrasas are also coming up and a lot of *tablighi* work is going on.

2. Hindus, however, do not have even a single centre like this. Let them fill up this lacuna. Let them have at least one good and well-endowed Study-Centre or Seminary for self-training, for studying and projecting Hindu ideation and Hindu values and to defend them against the onslaught of inimical forces. At this centre, let them study themselves and study others. Let this centre identify problems facing Hinduism ; let it draw the attention of different Hindu leaders, monks, Scholars, and teachers to these problems. This Centre should initiate, activate, energize and coordinate ; in short, it should work as a gad-fly and play the role of an ideological vanguard.

It should discuss the dangers that Hinduism faces and suggest remedial measures. It should engage in the task of meeting such dangers as are posed by such ideologies as Communism, Islam and Christianity. It should aim at developing what Sri Aurobindo calls an "aggressive defence".

3. The scope of work of the proposed Study-Centre or Seminary could be as wide and various as the problems that Hinduism faces.

V

Let us, here, name some of the more empirical problems for illustrative purpose without any claim to completeness.

1. Temples

- (a) Hindu temples have been under unprecedented attack for a thousand years. They suffered desecration, destruction, confiscation of their property and iniquitous taxation under the Muslim rulers. Under the British, the more physical methods ceased but fiscal methods were adopted for undermining "heathenism". A large part of the land and properties of the temples were taken away under all kinds of pretexts.
- (b) After independence, the temples have fared no better. Their properties have not been restored to them and they continue to exist in deepening poverty. In the South where there are still many noble structures left, the temples are under the control of a Government which takes pride in being "secular", and whose secularity is thoroughly anti-Hindu in orientation.
- (c) Hindus should study the problem of the temples in all its ramifications. They should run their religious institutions themselves. They should build temples once destroyed, and build new temples where they are needed. They should rejuvenate the temple life and they should take all measures to put the temple institution on a sound financial footing.
- (d) Temples should become more active in the teaching of the culture which upholds them. They should become more than mere places of formal worship. They should become centres for promoting Hindu *dharma*.
- (e) Wherever possible, the temples should have more open space, more halls for such religious activities as *keertans* and *kathas* and religious discourses. Such activities make a religion more living.
- (f) With these activities is connected the institution of wandering monks, bards and *bhajan-mandalis*. Once this was a very living institution but like other religious institutions of the Hindus, it is also declining now. Let us do our best to revive it too."

2. Priests

Inevitably the priests too have suffered along with the temples. They have become indigent and illiterate. Thanks to their indigence and illiteracy, they have suffered in prestige too. It is a great national loss. Effort should be made to rehabilitate them and raise them educationally and financially.

3. Other Functionaries : Hindu Samskaras

What is happening to priests in the temples is happening all along the line to all the priestly functionaries connected with such events as birth, wedding, death, *shraadhha*, etc. Illiteracy and poverty have overtaken them. Many times these functionaries are not available at all. They are dying out fast as a class. Hindu leaders must give their attention to this problem too.

Hindu *samskaras* are profound and deeply significant. They teach one to see the infinite and the eternal in the finite and the perishable. They widen the vision and they are deeply integrative. Their profound significance should be explained and every effort should be made to make the Hindus familiar with them, reflect on them and perform them.

The performance of Hindu *samskaras* need not be costly at all for they can be performed "internally" as well. But their outer performance is also important, particularly for educative and social purpose. Therefore, means should be found whereby not even the poorest have to go without having to perform them for lack of even small funds.

4. Foreign Funds

- (a) While we have said that the Hindus should re-build their temples and look after their priests, we know it is easier said than done. There are sharp limitations. Here we come up face to face with a political question. While Hindus have no Government of their own, they have to compete with the so-called "minorities" who have scores of Governments and rich nations at their back. As a result, while even many of the most renowned

temples remain in a dilapidated condition and cry for most urgent repairs, it is possible for hundreds of thousands of mosques all over India to get a face-lift almost simultaneously. Similarly, while most of the temples go without proper daily *puja*, it is possible for a million mosques to acquire a public address system from one corner of India to another, literally in one morning. Common sense will tell us that some great planning is at work and simple arithmetic should show that huge funds are involved.*

- (b) Hindus suffer a similar disadvantage vis-a-vis Christian missionaries. According to Government figures, 4,340 million rupees came openly last year alone for subverting Hindu culture and the country's political set-up. The missionaries have already monopolized several important spheres of national life. And since money begets money, a lot of property is passing into the hands of Christian institutions.
- (c) Hinduism in India is a target of a cold-war. The aggressor is well-equipped. Hindus have hardly any defence. They do not have even a Government of their own. They should raise the question of "foreign funds" and even the question of the nature of the Indian Government in a big way.

5. Social Evils

- (a) They are a galore ; here we mention only a few of them. Vulgarity is creeping in the celebration of our festivals like Deepawali, Holi, Ramaleela, Durga Puja. These have become occasions for gambling, drinking, vulgar film music. Vulgarity is also creeping in celebrations connected with wedding.

* One million mosques (only a portion of the total number of mosques) multiplied by Rs. 5000 (cost of a public address system on the lower side) gives us the figure of five hundred crores.

- (b) Cinemas are becoming great moral and social pollutants. They teach crime and cynicism. New literature and journalism wallow in obscenity. There is great vulgarity in advertisements.
- (c) Our women are not receiving due respect. The old are being neglected. The spirit of cherishing and reverence are on the wane. Faith and fidelity are going out of relations. The sense of meaninglessness is on the increase. The spirit of excellence, vocation and *sadhana* is yielding place to commercialism, cynicism and nihilism.

The spiritual leaders of the society have to meet these problems as best as they can.

6. Beautification of our Land

The spiritual values Hinduism teaches are comprehensive. They include in their ambit social and ecological values too. Hinduism teaches simplicity and *shuchi* ; it teaches us reverence for the elements, for animals and plants. We have been taught to see life in rivers and woods ; taught to see even divine figures behind the Himalayas, the Ganga, the Yamuna, the Godavari, the Kavery. Let us accept them as symbols and start a movement for keeping them clean. Let us start reforestation ; let us see that our mountains are not denuded.

7. Ideational, Cultural and Educational Work

- (a) A great spiritual culture also throws up a great system of ideas. A great spiritual truth also seeks an ideational vehicle. When the ideational work is neglected, spiritual truths also become weak.

Hitherto Muslims, Christians and Communists have been writing for us our history, philosophy and religion--and increasingly we are accepting their version. Let us, for a change, look at Islam, Christianity and Communism—their religion, philosophy and history—from the Hindu angle. It is a great task, a necessary task. Let us look at their scriptures, their revelations, their concepts of God and Prophetism from the vantage point of the

Yoga. We should not accept them at their words. Let us look at them a little more critically.

- (b) Since we have neglected the role of ideation, hostile ideas have taken possession of our intellectuals. Therefore, there is great need for more intellectual understanding of ourselves and of our opponents. Deeper and more sustained ideological and spiritual work alone could meet the challenge of hostile ideas.

The absence of self-understanding and self-articulation is doing havoc. For example, our history was once written from the British-Christian view-point ; now it is being written from a "secular" viewpoint, adding another source of distortion. Similarly, galore of books are coming on "Hindu" castes as if Hinduism has nothing else and as if Christians and Muslims had and have no castes of their own. But to promote this view of Hinduism is part of a larger mischievous plan.

8. Vanavasis and Harijans

Mischievous elements are active amongst them. Christians were already active in the field. Now Muslims, armed with Arab money, have also joined the game. We must give our best thought to the problem. More work is needed amongst them.

9. Islam, Christianity and Communism

- (a) All of them pose a danger. They have their own quarrels, but they all unite in subverting India. Islam has already taken away a big chunk of the Indian land and population; it is now coveting the remaining part too. Muslims are fanning our differences ; they are buying up our politicians and intellectuals.

- (b) Throughout 500 years of Muslim domination, we fought Muslims, many times bravely ; but we never fought Islam. We never studied it. And yet it is not Muslims but Islam that is our problem. And it is a continuing problem. We must look at it more closely. We must study its origin, its history, its inspiration, its founder, its scriptures more critically.

- (c) We should understand the Muslim society, its castes and creeds, its *Ashrafs* and its *Arzals*. We should find out who came from outside as invaders and who became converts under compulsion from the great Hindu society. While isolating the foreign elements, we should help the local converts to come back to their ancestral fold and accord them a warm welcome, as Gandhiji desired.
- (d) Muslims love to talk of their grievances. Let us for a change also talk of ours. Let us make a directory of the temples they have destroyed ; let us prepare an account of the nations they have enslaved and exploited and millions of men and women they have slayed ; let us tell them about their predatory imperialism.
- (e) For ourselves we must also realize that these facts of their history are not incidental, but they are related to the basic tenets of their religion ; they are the natural expressions of an undeveloped and distorted spirituality.
- (f) Let us also become aware of what is happening in the far-away corners, in Assam, Arunachal, Meghalaya, Ladakh ; what silent nibbling is going on there ; the large-scale conversion and infiltration.
- (g) We must show determination in stopping large-scale infiltration of men and women numbering into millions from Bangladesh. It is a planned invasion—there is no doubt about it.

10. Conclusion

These are some examples of the kind of problems that demand our attention. It is obvious that these problems are not temporary but they have a deeper source. It is also obvious that they need more than agitational approach. No *ad-hocism* or temporizing will do. The situation demands not sentimentalising but realistic appraisal. It demands deep-sighted and far-looking work. It demands vision, faith and perseverance. It requires a mind which is not seeking quick results and push-button solutions, but can work for distant aims. It demands work at a deeper level ; it demands spiritual and ideational preparation.

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