

# THE SOUL OF INDIA

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*'Eka Dharmarajyahabe a Bharate'.*

(Let there be one Dharma Rajya in Bharatvarsha.)

—*Rabindranath Tagore*

Religion has been the soul of India. As Swami Vivekanand put it: “In every nation you will have to work through their methods. To every man you have to speak in his own language. If you want to speak of politics in India, you must speak through the language of religion.” In pre-Muslim India, Hindu kings also fought wars. But the first thing the victorious king did was to go and worship the gods of the vanquished king. Gods were above and beyond kings. Even the Muslim rulers of India understood the centrality of religion in India. When the British offended the religious susceptibilities of Indians by greasing bullets with cow and pig tallow, they had the revolt of 1857 on their hands. Never again did they dare to tamper with the religion of Indians. When the freedom movement started in India, it did so on a religious note. The appeal centred on Desh and Dharma. Bankim Chandra’s Vande Mataram set the tone for the movement. And Rabindranath Tagore called for: Eka dharmarajyahabe a Bharate (Let there be one Dharmarajya in Bharatvarsh). A major reason why Mahatma Gandhi came to stand head and shoulders above other leaders was that he saw the centrality of religion in life. Declaring himself a ‘staunch Sanatani Hindu’, he said: “Politics divorced from religion was a corpse, fit only to be burnt.” His whole idiom, from Satya and Ahimsa to Brahmacharya and Aparigraha was religious and moral. The legitimisation of the religious content of nationalism continued for some time after Independence. The National Flag had the Dharma Chakra inserted in its centre. The Nehru cabinet decided to rebuild the Somnath mandir, desecrated and converted into a mosque by Mahmud Ghazni. But the general election in 1951-52 saw the entry of the term ‘secularism’ in the Indian political vocabulary for the first time. The relevant philosophy here was Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava—equal respect for all creeds—ensuring justice for all. The importation of an alien concept has led to much misunderstanding. Hindus think that in ‘secularism’, Muslims have got something special, and they resent this ‘appeasement’. Muslims find that ‘secularism’ is sound and fury, signifying nothing. They, therefore feel cheated. The Congress party is losing elections because it has lost much of both, Hindu and Muslim votes. And it has lost them both in a big way because it has abandoned the profound call of Desh and Dharma, which alone can move the masses, whether Hindu or Muslim, and opted for a place like secularism which is suspect in the

eyes of both. It is religion, says Toynbee, that “enables people to cope with the difficulty of being human, by giving spiritually satisfying answers to the fundamental questions about the mystery of the Universe and of man’s role in it and by giving practical precepts for living in the Universe.” The function of religion is “to ritualise man’s optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of ritualised man's optimism to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear.” Kingsley Davis in his *Human Society* writes: “Religion gives the individual a sense of identity with the distant past and the limitless futures. It expand his ego by making his spirit significant for the universe and the universe significant for him.”

It is only when the devout feel threatened that they become fundamentalist. Basically, ‘fundamentalism’ is a reaction against indiscriminate Westernisation and western support of autocratic regimes. In such a situation, the common Muslim can only invoke the mosque as the instrument of mass mobilisation, and as the symbol of moral authority. It is only because society feels besieged in several Muslim countries—and besieged as it is by western military, economic and cultural domination—that it throws up fundamentalism as a defence mechanism. Islamic fundamentalists, will no doubt relax and become their natural, native, national selves.

Likewise, critics need to understand the nature of ‘Hindu communalism’ or ‘fundamentalism’. Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios, first metropolitan of the Delhi Diocese, says that the two schools of thought in the British government of India represented by Macaulay and Duff wanted Hinduism out. Macaulay’s interest was to destroy Hinduism in order to overcome Indian resistance to colonialism. Alexander Duff’s was to destroy Hinduism in order to plant Christianity in its place. The intention of both was to destroy Hinduism through English identity crisis in their soul's. ‘the educated elite nurtured a major identity crisis in their souls for several generations.’ This English education, writes Dr. Paulos, has ‘culturally castrated’ India. The key factor, he says, in restructuring the economy to make it strong, and restoring cultural vitality of the nation, can be nothing but the human factor and people’s identity. Basically, the Sangh Parivar is a national striving in that direction.

United India having failed in 1947, and divided hostility having failed ever since, let us try peaceful and purposeful co-existence. Let Hindus in Pakistan not mind the Islamic appeal. And let Muslims in India not mind the Hindu appeal. That way we could have the best of both worlds, temporal and spiritual. We could live in peace as friendly neighbours; and we could also have our respective religious appeals.

(यह लेख केवलराम रतनमल मलकानी की पुस्तक “India First, Ocean Books” से लिया गया है।)