

With Compliments  
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Mobile: 8121898440. 17. HINDUISM

The greatest war of Indian history, the war between the liberal and the fanatical in Hinduism, has raged for 5,000 years and more and its end is not yet in sight. No attempt has been made, as it should have been, to make of this war the loom on which India's history could be woven. Even incidental mention of it is rare and sketchy in books of history. And yet it is the continuing motive of much that moves in the country.

All religions have in the course of their career suffered from a conflict between the liberal and the fanatical. But with the exception of Hinduism, they split up and have often drawn blood and, after a long or short period of slaughter, succeeded in overcoming the conflict. With Hinduism, a perpetual see-saw between the liberal and fanatical goes on and, while open slaughter has never taken place, the conflict remains unsolved to this day and a haze covers up the issues involved.

Christianity, Islam and Buddhism have all had their schisms. The fanatical elements that the Catholic faith had at one time accumulated led to what was then the liberal challenge of Protestant Christianity. But every body knows the Reformation led to the Counter-reformation. Catholicism and Protestantism still differ in many of their doctrines but it would be hard to call one liberal and the other fanatical. If Christianity stays split on doctrinal and organisational issues, the Shia-Sunni schism in Islam relates to a detail of chronology. Buddhism likewise split into the two sects of Heenayana and Mahayana and, although they never drew blood from each other, their differences relate to doctrine and have nothing to do with the ordering of society.

Hinduism has known no such split. It has indeed continually

disintegrated into sects. The innovating sect has as often come back to it as an additional unit. Doctrinal issues have, therefore, never been sharply defined and social conflicts have stayed unresolved. While Hinduism is as prolific as Protestantism in giving birth to sects, it casts over them all an undefinable mantle of unity as is secured by the Catholic organisation through the prohibition of sects. Hinduism has thus become a system of expanding exploration as much as it is the hunting ground of the irrational and the fanatical.

Before an attempt could be made to discover why Hinduism has so far been unable to work this conflict between the fanatical and the liberal out of its system, it is necessary to recall the broad differences of view that have always prevailed. On four major and concrete issues, those of caste, woman, property and tolerance, Hinduism has suffered from a perpetual swing between the liberal and fanatical attitudes.

Over four thousand years ago and more, molten lead was poured into the ears of some Hindus and their tongues pulled out by other Hindus, for the caste system ordained that no untouchable shall hear or read the Vedas. Over three hundred years ago Shivaji had to agree that his dynasty shall ever choose its ministers from among the Brahmins in order to be crowned king according to the Hindu custom. Around two hundred years ago when the last battle of Panipat was fought, and the crown of India passed into British hands as a consequence, one Hindu general quarrelled with another for he wanted to pitch his tent on higher land corresponding to his caste. Nearly fifteen years ago a zealous Hindu wished to save Hinduism by throwing a bomb at Mahatma Gandhi, for he had then set out to destroy untouchability. Until recently, and in certain areas to this day, the Hindu barber would not shave untouchable Hindus, while he would be only too willing to serve the non-Hindu.

At the same time two formidable revolts seem to have taken place against the caste system in ancient times. A whole Upanishad is devoted to the complete and entire demolition of the caste system. From the nature, tone and compass of



attacks made on the caste system in ancient Indian literature, these appear to belong to two different periods—a period of criticism and another of condemnation. While this question may be left to future investigations, it is obvious that the two bright periods of the Mauryas and the Guptas follow a comprehensive attack on the caste system. But caste never quite dies out. It is at times severely rigid while it loosens during other periods. The fanatical and the liberal continue intertwined in respect of the caste system and the difference between any two periods of Hindu history consists in the dominance of one or the other strand. At the moment, the liberal is dominant and the fanatical dare not become vocal. But the fanatical is seeking to preserve itself by entering into liberal thought. If it is too late in the day to talk of caste by birth, people are talking of caste by vocation. Even if men will not argue for the caste system they rarely act against it, and a climate grows in which the reasoning mind and the habitual mind of the Hindu are in conflict. Caste may slacken as an institution in some of its forms, but as a habit of mind it has not yet been dislodged. The conflict between the liberal and fanatical in Hinduism in respect of the caste system threatens to continue unresolved.

While modern fiction has made us aware of the woman alone knowing who the father of the child is, Jabala, 3,000 years ago or more, was not herself sure who the father of her child was and her name is remembered with pride as a truthful woman in ancient literature. In parenthesis it may be remarked that the caste system, swallowed her up by turning her son into a Brahmin. Literature of the liberal period has warned us against too close an enquiry into genealogies of families, for like the sources of rivers they too are muddy. Rope under coercion which could not be fought successfully brings the woman no harm nor dirt, for, as this literature says, she renews herself every month. The woman has also the right to divorce and property. While this liberal attitude towards woman prevails in the luminous periods of Hinduism, fanatical periods reduce her to a bit of property to be taken care of by the father, the husband or the son.

At the moment the Hindu woman finds herself in a strange situation, both liberal and fanatical. She finds it easier than anywhere else in the world to rise to positions of eminence. But her claim to a single standard with men in respect of marriage and property continues to be assailed. I have read fanciful leaflets denying the claim of Hindu woman to property on the plea that she might fall in love with a man of another faith and so change her own, as if this could not happen perhaps even more frequently to a Hindu man. That land should not be further fragmented is quite another question and applies both to male and female inheritors, and some way should be found to keep a holding, under the permissible maximum, intact. As long as law or custom and habits of thinking discriminate between man and woman with respect to property and marriage, the fanatical in Hinduism will not quite die out. The hankering of the Hindu to see in his woman a goddess who never descends from her pedestal opens the most liberal among them to dull and dubious wishes. The fanatical and the liberal shall remain intertwined as long as the Hindu refuses to accept his woman as a human being same as he.

The sense of property in Hinduism is liberalised by its faith in non-accumulation and non-attachment. Fanatical Hinduism, however, so interprets the theory of Karma as to give the men of wealth and birth or power a superior status and to sanction as right whatever exists. The question of property in its present form of private versus social ownership is a recent one. But in its old form of non-attachment versus sanctioned order, it has continually been present in the Hindu mind. As with the other issues, the Hindu has never been able to carry his thinking on the question of property and power to its logical conclusion. Hinduism has varied both in time and with the individual only insofar as the one or the other concept of property holds primacy.

Tolerance is commonly reputed to be an unfailing feature of Hinduism. That is not so except in the sense that open slaughter has hitherto been abhorrent to it. The fanatical in Hinduism has



always tried to establish unity through uniformity, through the suppression of sects and faiths other than the one that was seeking to dominate, but such attempts have never achieved success. These have in the past been treated more or less like the antics of little children, for Hinduism until recently was called upon to apply the principle of unity in diversity only to its own sects. The element of tolerance in Hinduism has, therefore, been almost always stronger than the element of coercion. But this tolerance must be distinguished from a similar attitude of mind which European rationalism has brought into the world. Voltaire knew his opponent to be wrong and yet he was willing to fight the battle for tolerance, for his opponent's right to say what he wanted. Hinduism on the other hand bases its case for tolerance on various possibilities of what is right. It concedes that doctrines and usages may vary with climes and classes and is not prepared to arbitrate among them. It wishes for no uniform pattern in the conduct of men's lives, not even a voluntary uniformity and what it wishes for is that undefinable unity in diversity which it has in the past so successfully threaded through all its sets. Its quality of tolerance, therefore, rises out of the creed of non-interference, out of the belief that variations need not necessarily be wrong, but are perhaps different expressions of what is right.

Fanaticism has often tried to impose the unity of uniformity on Hinduism. Its motives have not always been suspect. Its driving power may well at times have been the desire for stability and strength, but the consequences of its acts have always been disastrous. I do not know of a single period of Indian history when fanatical Hinduism was able to give India unity or well-being. Whenever India has been united and prosperous, the liberal in Hinduism in respect of caste, woman, property and tolerance has always predominated. The upswing of fanatical fervour in Hinduism has always led to the social and political break up of the country, to the disintegration of the Indian people as a State and as a community. I do not know if all those periods when Indian got broken up into

numerous states and kingdoms were characterized by fanatical zeal, but it is undisputable that the unity of the country took place only when liberal Hinduism held sway over the Hindu mind.

Some great failures of modern history to integrate the country stand out. What started as the liberal faith of Gyaneshwar reached its climax in Sivaji and Bajirao but fell just a little short of ultimate success by degenerating into the Peshwa fanaticism. Again, what started as the liberal faith of Guru Nanak reached its climax in Ranjit Singh but degenerated early into the fanatical squabbles of the Sikh confederacy. These efforts that once failed have also sought bitterly to repeat themselves in contemporary times, for some deep and dark stirrings of the soul connect them with the fanatical streams now flowing out from sources in Maharashtra and Punjab. To a student of Indian history, all this is rich material for study from various angles such as the close connexion between the teacher of the religious world and the political effort to build an Indian union or the problems of where the seeds of degeneracy lie, whether right at the beginning or as the result of a later mix-up and of the drive that impels groups to repeat their fanatical failures. A similar study of the Vizianagram effort and whether it has its roots in Shankar or Nimbarak and what rotten seed lay beneath the glory that Humphi once attained would be of great interest and benefit. Again, what lay at the source of the liberal efforts of Shershah and Akbar and why did they lose to the fanaticism of an Aurangzeb?

The recent most effort of the Indian people and Mahatma Gandhi to integrate the country has succeeded, but only partially. Undoubtedly, all the liberal streams of five thousand years and more have pushed forward this effort, but what lies at its immediate source, whether Tulsi or Kabir and Chaitanya and the great line of the Sants or the more modern religious politicians like Rammohun Roy and the rebel Maulvi of Faizabad, apart, of course, from the liberalising influences of Europe. Again, all the fanatical streams of the past five



thousand years seem to be combining to deluge this effort and, should fanaticism meet its defeat, it will not rise again.

The liberal alone can unite the country. India is too ancient and vast a country. No force can unite it except the voluntary human will. Fanatical Hinduism cannot by its nature mould such a will, while liberal Hinduism can, as it has often done in the past. Hinduism, of course, is not a political religion, in the narrow sense, a religion of doctrines or organisation. But it has been the eminent medium and inspiration for the great impulsion of the Indian political history towards the unity of the country. The great war between liberal and fanatical Hinduism may well be called a conflict between the two processes of unification and disintegration of the country.

Liberal Hinduism has, however, been unable to solve the problem completely. Within the principle of unity in diversity lies concealed the seed of decay and disintegration. Not to talk of the fanatical elements which always sneak into the most liberal of Hindu concepts and which always hinder the achievement of intellectual clarity, the principle of unity in diversity gives rise to a mind which is both rich and lethargic. It is tiresome to watch Hinduism continually splitting into sects, each with its own jarring noises, and, however much liberal Hinduism may seek to cover them with the mantle of unity, they inevitably produce a weakness in corporate living of the state. An amazing nonchalance comes to prevail. No one worries about the continual splitting, as if every one is sure that they are parts of one another. This is what gives fanatical Hinduism its chance and driving power, the desire for strength, although the result of its endeavour produces further weakening.

The great war between liberal and fanatical Hinduism has at present taken the outward form of their differing attitudes to Muslims. Nevertheless let it not be forgotten even for a moment that this is only an outward form and all the old unresolved conflicts continue and are potentially more deciding. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi was not so much an episode of the Hindu-Muslim fight as of the war between the

liberal and the fanatical in Hinduism. Never had a Hindu delivered greater blows on fanaticism in respect of caste, woman, property or tolerance. All the bitterness was accumulating. Once before an attempt had been made on Gandhiji's life. It was then obviously and openly for the purpose of saving Hinduism in the sense of saving caste. The last and successful attempt was outwardly made for the purpose of saving Hinduism in the sense of protecting it from Muslim engulfment, but no student of Hindu history can be in doubt that it was the greatest and the most heinous gamble that retreating fanaticism risked in its war on liberal Hinduism. Gandhiji's murderer was the fanatical element that always lies embedded in the Hindu mind, sometimes quiescent and sometimes pronounced, in some Hindus dominant and in others passive. When pages of history shall try the murder of Mahatma Gandhi as an episode in the war between the fanatical and the liberal in Hinduism and arraign all those whom Gandhiji's acts against caste and for woman, against property and for tolerance had enraged, the composure and nonchalance of Hinduism may well be shattered.

Why the liberal and fanatical have continued intertwined in the Hindu faith and have never hitherto challenged each other to a clean and decisive battle is a subject rich in exploration to students of Indian history. That the complete cleaning of the Hindu mind in respect of the fanatical never took place is beyond doubt. The disastrous consequences of this unresolved conflict are also beyond doubt. As long as caste is not completely erased from the Hindu mind or woman treated as an equal being with man, or property dissociated from the concept of order, the fanatical will from time to time play havoc with Indian history and also impart to it a continuing lethargy. Unlike other religions, Hinduism is not a faith of doctrines and the church but a way of social organisation, and that is why the war between liberalism and fanaticism has never been fought out to its end and the Brahmin-Bania combination has ruled India for good or evil through centuries, a rule alternating between the liberal and the fanatical.



Mere liberalisation of the four issues will not do; they have to be once for all resolved of the conflict and eliminate completely from the Hindu mind.

Back of all these unresolved conflicts is the metaphysical problem of the relationship between appearance and reality. There is indeed little difference in the attitudes of liberal and fanatical Hinduism with regard to this problem. Hinduism by and large seeks to go beyond appearance in search of the reality, does not indeed decry phenomenon as false, but only of a lower order to be submerged in the mind's ascent to the higher reality. All philosophy in all lands has indeed concerned itself with this problem. What distinguishes Hinduism from other faiths and theologies is that, while this problem has been largely confined to philosophy in other lands, it has in India seeped into the faith of the mass of the people. Philosophy has been set to tunes of music and turned into faith. But in other lands, the philosopher has generally denied appearance in search of reality. His effect on the modern world has, therefore, been very limited. The scientific and secular spirit has hungrily collected all data of appearance, sifted them, tabulated them and discovered laws that hold them together. This has given the modern man, his type being pre-eminently the European, a habit of life and thinking. He accepts ardently facts as they appear. The ethical content of Christianity has furthermore lent to the good acts of man the status of the works of God. All this works towards a scientific and ethical exploitation of the facts of life. Hinduism, however, has never been able to get rid of its metaphysical basis. Even the common faith of the people goes beyond the visible and sensible for a glimpse of that reality which appears not. The middle ages in Europe had also shared such a perspective, but, let me repeat this was confined to the philosopher and denied appearance altogether or took it as a reduction of truth, while the mass of the people accepted Christianity as an ethical faith and to that extent accepted appearance. Hinduism has never denied facts of life altogether, but only concedes them the status of events of a lower order

and has always, so to this day, tried to go in search of reality of the higher order. This is the common faith of the people.

A vivid illustration comes to my mind. On the great but half destroyed temple of Konark, one can see thousands upon thousands of sculptured images carved on the stones of the building. There is no miserliness nor coyness in the artist's acceptance of appearance; he has indeed accepted them in all their rich variety. Even here there seems to be a certain order of arrangement. From the lowest to the highest block, the sculptured images run in the series of unassorted variety to that of the hunt, to the love play, to music, then to power. Everything is rich movement and activity. But, inside the temple is almost bare and such images as there are speak of stillness and peace. From a moving and active exterior to a still and static interior seems to have been the basic design of this temple. The search for the ultimate reality was never abandoned.

The comparative development of architecture and sculpture as compared to painting might well have its own story to tell. In fact, such paintings as are still available to us from ancient times are more architectural than otherwise. Man has probably greater scope to project his notions of ultimate reality into architecture and sculpture than painting.

The Hindu has, therefore, acquired a split personality. At his best, a Hindu accepts appearance without losing insight into the ultimate and is ever striving to enrich his insight, at his worst, his hypocrisy is matchless. The Hindu is probably the world's greatest hypocrite, for he not only deceives others as hypocrites all the world over do, but he also deceives himself to his own disadvantage. His split mind between appearance and reality often encourages him to do so. What an amazing spectacle has Hinduism presented in the past and does so today. Hinduism has given its votaries, the commonest among them, the faith of metaphysical equality or oneness between man and man and things, such as has never fallen to the lot of man elsewhere. Alongside of this faith in metaphysical equality goes the most heinous conduct of social inequality. I have often



wondered if this metaphysical Hindu when he is well placed, does not treat the poor and low caste as animals and animals as stones and everyone as everything else. Vegetarianism and non-violence obviously degenerate into concealed cruelty. While it can be said of all human endeavour hitherto that truth at some stage turns into cruelty and beauty into profligacy, this is perhaps more so true of Hinduism which has attained scales of truth and beauty unsurpassed in their lands, but which has also descended into pits of darkness unplumbed by man elsewhere. Not until the Hindu learns to accept the facts of life in the scientific and secular spirit, facts relating to work and machine and output and family and growth of population and hunger and tyranny and the like, is there any hope for him to overcome his split personality or to deal a death-blow to fanaticism which has so often been his undoing in the past.

This is not to say that Hinduism must give up its emotive basis and the search for oneness of all life and things. That is perhaps its greatest quality. The awareness and universalising of that sudden onrush of feeling, which makes a village boy pick up the kid of the goat and clasp it as if it were his life, when the automobile speeds along or which sees the tree with its gnarled roots and green branches as part of oneself, is perhaps a quality common to all faiths, but no where has it acquired a deep and abiding emotions as in Hinduism. The God of Reason is completely without the God of Mercy. I do not know whether God exists or does not, but this I know that the feeling that makes one kin of all life and things exists although as a rare emotion yet. To make of this feeling a background for all activity even of strife is perhaps an unrealisable adventure. But Europe is dying of strife born out of a too one-sided acceptance of appearance and India is dying of stagnation resulting from an equally one-sided acceptance of the reality behind things. I have no doubt that I would prefer to die of strife than of stagnation. But are these the only two courses of thinking and conduct open to man? Is it not possible to adjust the scientific spirit of enquiry with the emotive spirit

of oneness without subordinating the one to the other and in full equality as two processes of like merit. The scientific spirit will work against caste and for woman, against property and for tolerance and of course yield the processes of producing wealth such as will dispel hunger and want. The creative spirit of oneness may secure that ballast without which men's highest endeavour turns into greed and envy and hatred.

It is difficult to say whether Hinduism is capable of acquiring this new mind and to achieve adjustment of the scientific and the emotive spirit. But then what exactly is Hinduism? To this there is no one answer, but a series of answers. This much is certain that Hinduism is no precise doctrine nor organization, nor can any one article of faith or conduct be considered indispensable for Hinduism. There is a whole world of memories and mythology, of philosophy and customs and practices, part of which grossly evil and another which can be of service to man. The whole of it makes the Hindu mind, an essential quality of which some scholars have seen in the principle of tolerance or of unity in diversity. We have seen the limitations of this principle and where it needs to be revised so as to dispel mental inertia. A common error, however, in the understanding of this principle consists in the belief that liberal Hinduism has always been open to good ideas and influences no matter where they came from, while fanatical Hinduism is not. This is to my mind an illiterate belief. I have not come across in pages of Indian history any period when the free Hindu searched for ideas and objects in foreign lands or was willing to accept them. In all the long connection between India and China, I have only been able to list five fancy articles, including vermilion, imported into India, and of imports of ideas there is nothing at all.

Free India had essentially a one-way traffic with the outside world, no import of ideas and very little of objects, except silver and the like, unless when the communities of foreigners settled in India and tried to become a Hindu sect or caste with the passage of time. On the other hand enslaved India and with it Hinduism have shown a remarkable alacrity to ape the



conqueror, his language, his habits and ways of living. Self-sufficiency of mind in freedom is matched with its total supineness under slavery. This weakness of Hinduism has never been recognised and it is unfortunate that liberal Hindus in their illiteracy are spreading contrary ideas for propagandist purposes. In the state of freedom, the Hindu mind is indeed open, but only to events taking place within India's frontiers, but remains closed to ideas and influences from outside. This is one of its major weaknesses and a reason for India to fall a prey to foreign rule. The Hindu mind must now become open not only to what happens in India, but also to the outside world and it must apply its principle of unity in diversity to all the achievements of human thinking and practice. Strenuous effort must be made to rid it of its habit to alternate between outright indifference to and uncoordinated acceptance of foreign thought.

The war between the liberal and the fanatical in Hinduism has today taken the surface expression of the Hindu-Muslim conflict, but no Hindu who is aware of the history of his faith and country will fail to take equal notice of the other unresolved conflicts ranging for 5,000 years and more. No Hindu can be genuinely tolerant to Muslims unless he acts at the same time actively against caste and property and for woman. Likewise, a Hindu who is genuinely against caste and property and for woman will inevitably be tolerant to Muslims. The war between liberal and fanatical Hinduism has reached its most complex stage and it may well be that its end is in sight. Fanatical Hindus, no matter what their motives are, must break up the Indian State, should they ever succeed, not only from the Hindu-Muslim point of view, but also from that of caste and provinces. Liberal Hindus alone can sustain this state. This war of five thousand years or more has, therefore, entered a stage in which the very existence of the Indian people as a political community and a State depends upon the victory of the liberal over the fanatical in Hinduism.

The religious and the human problem is today eminently a

political problem. The Hindu is faced with the serious choice of accomplishing a complete mental revolution or else of going under. He must be a Muslim and a Christian and feel like one. I am not talking of Hindu-Muslim unity, for that is a political, institutional or at best a cultural problem. I am talking of the emotional identification of the Hindu with the Muslim or the Christian, not in religious faith and practices, but in the feeling that I am he. Such an emotional identification may appear difficult to achieve, for, often it may have to be one-sided and bear the pain of murder and slaughter. I may here recall the American Civil War in which brother killed brother for four years and six hundred thousand died, but Abraham Lincoln and the American people crowned their hour of victory with precisely such an emotion between the Northern and Southern brother. No matter what the future has in store for India, the Hindu must turn himself inside out to achieve this emotional oneness with the Muslim. The Hindu faith of emotive oneness of all life and things is also the political necessity of the Indian States that the Hindu shall feel one with the Muslim. On the path may yet lie setbacks and defeats, but the direction that the Hindu mind should take is clear.

It may be suggested that the best way to put an end to this war between liberal and fanatical Hinduism is to combat religion. That may indeed be so, but the process is tardy and where is the guarantee that the clever old rogue might not swallow up the anti-religious as one of its numerous sects? Furthermore, the fanatical elements in Hinduism obtain their systematic supporters, when they do, from the semi-educated and from the townsmen, while the illiterate village-folk, however, much they might get excited for the moment, cannot be their steady base. The long wisdom of centuries makes the village-folk as much as the educated, tolerant. In their search for sustenance from anti-democratic doctrines like communism and fascism that base themselves on somewhat similar concepts of caste and leadership, fanatical elements in Hinduism may as well assume the anti-religious garb. The time has come when the

Hindu must bathe his mind and cleanse it of the dirt that centuries have accumulated. He must indeed establish an honest and fruitful relationship between the facts of life and his awareness of ultimate reality. Only on this base will he be able to crush for ever the fanatical elements in Hinduism in respect of caste, woman, property and tolerance, which have so long vitiated his faith and disintegrated his country's history. In the days of retreat the fanatical has often sneaked into the liberal in Hinduism. Let that not happen again. The issues are clear and sharply defined. Compromise will once again repeat the errors of the past. This hideous war must now be brought to a close. A new endeavour of the Indian mind will then start which shall combine the rational with the emotive, which shall make of unity in diversity not an inert but a vital doctrine which shall accept the clean joy of the sensible world without losing insight into the oneness of all life and things.

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