

India's post-colonial politics is largely determined by two celebrated publications, one being Nehru's "The Discovery of India" and the second being Savarkar's "Essentials of Hindutva" (later republished as Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?) Despite both the books emphasising on the rich civilisational history of the subcontinent, they strongly contrast and contradict each other. While the former influenced Indian National Congress's secularism and unity in diversity motto, the latter has been influential in propagating the Hindutva ideology, which has been in the limelight forecasted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). However, what makes Savarkar's work relevant even after a century of his writing is the rise of Hindutva, and its gripping roots in India since the 2014 general elections.

Throughout this book, Savarkar attempts to define and differentiate Hindus from Hindutva. Consequently, this hardly 150 pages work dives deeper into the historic, civilisational and Vedic richness of the Indian subcontinent. With a culmination of various minute sections and no defined chapters, this book has two prominent objectives; one is on defining who is a Hindu and the second is to establish the essentials of Hindutva. For Savarkar, the word Hindu is more of a geographical, racial, national and a cultural connotation, than that of a religious one. And this observation is for multiple reasons.

First being the geographical expression: The region of Sapta Sindhus (seven rivers) or Sindhustan (land of seven rivers), stretched almost all over the entire Indian subcontinent. And Savarkar exclaims that the languages of Prakrit and Persian often substitutes the word 'S' with 'H'. Consequently, when the Sanskrit word of Sapta Sindhu was replaced by Hapta Hindu and Sindhustan with Hindustan, people residing in the region were recognised and identified as Sindhus or Hindus. Nonetheless, this geographical expression evolved into a racial and cultural expression. As, the Aryans and Un-Aryans (non-Aryans) of the region interacted with each other, forming a common Hindu race and inhibiting common cultural practices.

Following it, Savarkar emphasises that the term Hindu evolved into a national and political unit when Lord Ram (a deity) unified the Aryan dominated North and Un-Aryan South India (i.e. the land in between the Himalayas and The Indian Ocean) under his Rama Rajya. He also supplements this argument with another example from the formation of Bharatkanda under another legendary ruler Bharata. By providing a racial, geographical and national connotation, Savarkar argues that the term "Hindu" consists of religions that are born in Indian soil and are linked to Puranas. This includes Hindu dharma (religion) followers, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, Lingayats, Ajivakas etc. who have all lived peacefully and have enjoyed a common culture, blood, country and polity regardless of race, varna and caste.

With this definition of Hindus, Savarkar introduces his readers to “Hindutva”. He calls on the former as a unifying bond amongst the Hindus, as their lives, culture and peace were suppressed all alike from the Islamic invasion, and foreign religions and cultures that succeeded it. He calls on Hindutva as a unifying bond amongst all the Hindus, who should forget their internal differences and build a strong Hindu Rashtra (nation), Hindu Jati (race) and Hindu Sanskriti (civilisation) to be a sheer force to dominate the world. Consequently, he puts forth three essentials of Hindutva and frames Christians and Muslims as internal others of the nation.

The first essential of Hindutva is a person being born in Hindustan and the second essential is a person descending their blood from the Sindhu/Hindu race. With these essentials, the book affirms that despite Christians and Muslims being born in India and having descended blood (due to conversions) from the Hindu race; they cannot be considered as Hindus. To supplement this argument he further introduces the third essential of a common Sanskriti or civilisation. He argues that Hindus share common literature, art, laws, festivals, heroes, history and places of pilgrimage, which is different for most of the Muslims and Christians. Similarly, Hindustan is a land of *punyabhumi* or holy land for all the Hindus and their deities, however having their deity, religion and heroes of worship elsewhere, the loyalty and love of Muslims and Christians are questioned by Savarkar.

He asserts that these internal others can only be Hindus if they acknowledge Hindustan as their only holy land, as a successful stone of Hindu nationalism is built by indigenous culture, custom and practices of the Hindus. He concludes that Hindus need to contribute for the past, present and future of India, constitute the foundation and should act as a reserve force of the Indian state, as the loyalty of Muslims and Christians are questionable. Thus, asking the internal others to either adapt to the majoritarian way of life or (as inferred) be treated as the second class citizens. Having written in the 1920s, this book soon became a blueprint for the RSS and its affiliated organisations including India’s current ruling party of BJP.

Nonetheless, the book isn’t free of its criticism. First, being its generalization of non-native religions and constantly attempting to segregate and differentiate them from the others. Second, the book derives its various generalised conclusions by using Puranas, epics and legends as its primary source. His consideration of Hindu being a nationality due to the endeavours of mythological characters and heroes (fantasy) such as Rama and Bharata, poses severe questions to the inference he derives, as fantasies cannot be used to supplement facts. Similarly, considering Hindus as a unified race seems inappropriate, as a race has not only been considered as phasing out concept but even if Hindus were a unified

race as the book claims, then Hindus or Indians today didn't have to face incidents of separatism, ethnic loyalties, North-South differences and even protests against Hindi imposition.

Besides, Savarkar also comes to another easy conclusion of Hindus living in peace and freedom. This observation doesn't only ignore the discrimination, resistance and problems of people from the lower castes, but also sidelines wars amongst Hindus; say for example just one Kalinga war had cost over 150,000 Hindu lives, which seemed to have been an easy exemption for Savarkar, as it contrasts his argument. Finally, even after reaching to a conclusion over the essentials of Hindutva and alienating the internal others, he contrasts himself by stating that these rules shouldn't be too rigid or too elastic. Consequently, providing some exemptions to prominent personalities to Sister Nivedita or Annie Besant, while no exemptions are applicable to most of the subaltern internal others.

Nonetheless, the book does succeed in providing a wider geographical and cultural definition of Hindus with rich historical pieces of evidence. However, what makes this book more interesting is its coming to life since the 2014 general elections. So if anyone who is either interested in critiquing or even finding a case study for Huntington's clash of civilizations, this is an innovative read. Nonetheless, this book is a must-read if you were to understand why BJP is alienating a community or forcing someone to chant Vandemataram or Jai Shri Ram; or even to assess why the Citizenship Amendment Act applies to certain minorities of certain countries (Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan) only. Finally, this book can also be recommended as a non-traditional read to infer the basics of BJP's current hard-line stance against Pakistan and Kashmir and BJP's concern for Madhesis and demands of change in Nepali constitution.

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