

[Anti-Hindu Hindus](#)

Category : [June 1996](#)

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The Problem of Self-Alienation

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In this brief historical analysis of India's periods of domination, we begin to see how it came to pass that some of the most forceful opponents of Hinduism are Indians who claim to be good Hindus.

India has been under attack for a thousand years. The new attacks were not like the old raids India had known before. These were buttressed by an ideology of heavenly sanction, a permanent motive and system of ideas. Any economic and political gain--and it was in no way small--was merely a just reward for an activity which was essentially religious.

After the Muslim invasions came the European era. India's first major contact began when Vasco de Gama landed with gunboat and priests. The newcomers were not only pirates and merchants but also believing Christians. They had the pope's mandate to convert heathens in the lands they conquered. They found that the natives had a flourishing religion of their own. They took to destroying their temples in earnest. Within decades of their occupation of small coastal parts, they had

destroyed, according to their own records, 601 temples in 131 villages--all important Christian Orders taking part in this pious work. Franciscan friars destroyed 300 Hindu temples in Bardez, Jesuits 280 in Salsete. St. Francis Xavier, who participated in this meritorious work, wrote back home: "As soon as I arrived in any heathen village, when all are baptized, I order all the temples of their false gods to be destroyed and all the idols to be broken to pieces. I can give you no idea of the joy I feel in seeing this done."

Hindus got relief from this active religious persecution when the British came. But they too were not without a powerful missionary lobby of their own whose aims were no different from other Christian missions. Though the missions were not allowed to apply their usual muscular methods, they were free to propagate their religion. Their aim was conversion of heathens to the true faith, and to that end they began to attack Hinduism in different ways. They attacked it for having too many Gods while none of them was the right Biblical one. They attacked it for being idolatrous. They attacked all its leading ideas --karma, incarnation, moksha, compassion for all beings, etc.

The attack on the Hindu religion was supported by attack on the Hindu people and society. Hindu rites, customs, were all evil, and their morals and manners even worse, if that were possible. With so much depravity around and with such fine and disinterested teachers at hand, they looked forward to a Christian India in a not-too-distant future. Sir W.M. Williams, a Sanskritist with great missionary sympathies, prophesied, "When the walls of the mighty fortress of Brahminism are encircled, undermined and finally stormed by the soldiers of

the Cross, the victory of Christianity must be signal and complete."

The colonial administrator was not unsympathetic to the missionary attack. Though he discouraged its excesses, he found it useful. He knew that Hinduism was India's definition at its deepest and also its principle of unity and regeneration and unless this principle was attacked, India could not be successfully ruled. He knew that what upheld Hinduism also upheld India and its political struggle. A people who had lost pride in themselves, who were demoralized, were welcome to him.

Colonial scholars reinforced the missionary attack by their own from another angle. They taught that India was not one country, that it was a miscellany of people, that it had never known independence, that it had always been under the rule of foreign invaders. Their future native pupils learned their lesson well and even outdid their teachers. They were to find in these invaders the main principle of their country's renewal and civilization. This teaching became the refrain of the TV programs of a secular india.

The rulers had a clear motive, a clear goal. They wanted an India which had no identity, no vision of its own, no native class of people respected for their leadership. They were to be replaced as far as it lay in their power by a new class of intellectual compradores. Meanwhile, the concerted attacks succeeded. They were internalized, and we made them our own. There came a crop of "reformers" who wanted India to change to the satisfaction of its critics. Above all, there

appeared a class of Hindu-hating Hindus who knew all the "bad things" about Hinduism. Earlier invaders ruled through the sword. The British ruled through Indology.

The British took over our education and taught us to look at ourselves through their eyes. They created a class Indian in blood and color, but anti-Hindu in his intellectual and emotional orientation. This is the biggest problem rising India faces--the problem of self-alienated Hindus, of anti-Hindu Hindus.

Marx's Mark

The missionary-colonial attack was reinforced by another attack--Marxism. Its source, too, was Europe and it was even more Eurocentric than regular Imperialism. Marx fully shared the contempt of British Imperialists for India. He fully subscribed to the theses of colonial scholarship that India was not a nation, that it had no history and it was meant for subjugation. He said, "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history is but the history of successive intruders." Marx also said that India neither knew freedom nor deserved it. To him the question was "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." This also became the faith of his Indian pupils.

In India, Macaulayism prepared the ground for Marxism--early Marxists were recruited from Macaulayites. Marxism in turn

gave Macaulayism a radical look and made it attractive for a whole new class. While Marxists served European Imperialism, they also fell in love with all old Imperialist invaders, particularly Muslim ones. M.N. Roy found the Arab Empire a "magnificent monument to the memory of Mohammed." While the Marxists found British Imperialism historically "progressive," they opposed the country's national struggle as reactionary.

Marxism was Macaulayism at its most hostile. It blackened Indian history systematically. It gave to the Indian social and political system its own format, the one it had learned from its European teachers and the only one it knew. It saw in Indian castes--a cooperative, cultural and integrating principle--class-war and class-exploitation, the situation-somewhat relieved by intrusions of Muslims with an egalitarian outlook.

It is widely agreed that India's Independence struggle derives from Hindu renaissance, but it is not equally realized that it can also only be sustained by it. Hinduism is the principle of India's self-renewal. Anything that hurts that principle hurts India, hurts its civilizational role, therefore hurts future religious humanity. India rose through Sanatana Dharma, and it is also to rise for it.