1 Introduction

India is known for its religious plurality and cultural multiplicity and thus has come to characterize unity in diversity and harmonious co-habitation. However, in recent times, Hindu fundamentalism aided by the ruling dispensation, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), a far-right conservative nationalist party and its ideological nerve centre Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) premised on the credo of ‘Hindu majoritarianism’, is set to realize its vision of making India a ‘Hindu nation’. In order to realize its vision, BJP-RSS is engaged in polarizing and fuelling hatred against those who belong to other religions and cultures. Consequently, human rights and human dignity of minorities, the subaltern communities particularly the Dalits, the (Untouchables) have increasingly been violated and trampled upon. Plurality and inclusivity are undermined, posing serious threat and contestation as the country keeps witnessing a spate of incidences leading to intolerance and indignation. Moreover, spewing venom, fuelling religious and communal hatred against those who have different belief systems, political ideologies, value orientations, traditions, and cultures, has become the order of the day.

Against this backdrop, this paper brings to the foreground the ways with which the fundamental tenets of religion vis-à-vis Hinduism are abused and subverted. And in the process, the paper examines and analyses the forms of intolerance perpetrated by the ruling party BJP, its cultural wing RSS and far-right Hindu outfits who are engaged in the program that violates the fundamental and constitutional rights of the citizens of India enshrined in the Constitution and UNDHR Charter. More importantly, this paper invokes, argues and essentializes one of the core theological and ethical principles of human dignity within broader notions of human rights.

2 Positing Plural and Diverse India

India is a constitutional democracy. For a Republic to function, the Constitution plays the most crucial part. India as a constitutional democracy is expected to adhere to the principles enshrined in the Constitution prescribed to all its citizens. Nonetheless, a question that arises at this juncture is: Do all the citizens of the Indian Republic enjoy the fundamental principles enshrined in the Constitution? India’s Constitution starts with “We the citizens of the Indian Republic” which is unique and distinct. However, the enshrined principles of the Constitution in spirit and practice are losing their essence and relevance and are under intense contestation. The word ‘citizens’ that appears in the preamble of the Constitution is under serious threat to those who
belong to minorities, Dalits and other vulnerable communities. For the government to run and to govern, basic requisites – principles, mechanisms, and processes – are meticulously elucidated in the Constitution. Therefore, the Constitution is the light house or sacred book that elucidates each and every aspect of governance in a comprehensive manner.

India’s democracy is still alive by virtue of having its Constitution securing to all the citizens of the country – the fundamental and constitutional rights. The architect of India’s constitution, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar warned that however good the constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad if those who are called to make it work are a bad lot. For Ambedkar, those in power and authority are expected to put the constitution into practice through their governance, and in the process the people are transformed and thus become citizens. Citizenship and democracy go hand in hand and complement each other. But, in recent times the citizenship of those belonging to other communities and identities are being increasing questioned and threatened. The current impasse sends signals that amplify whether the Indian republic is clouded with misplaced religious, political, and cultural aberrations, fear, and insecurity.

3 Shifting Terrains – Rising Populism and Hindu Fundamentalism

The majority of Indians are Hindus, but live side by side with others respecting each other’s differences. Since 2014, we have been witnessing a radical shift taking place due to the fact that the ruling dispensation is engaged in divisive politics pitched on binaries: majority versus minority, us versus them. It has spread its tentacles against select communities spewing venom and hatred throughout Indian society. The emergence and rapid rise of the political ideology, Hindutva, is perhaps the most striking feature of contemporary Indian politics. An understanding of the origin of the discourse on Hindutva is imperative in understanding the phenomenon as it is presented today. The discourse on Hindutva has to be located in the complex set of processes in motion with the onset of colonial rule in India.

The ideology of Hindutva was founded and constructed on ‘Hindu nationalism’. The idea of a homogenous ‘Hindu’, ‘nation’, and ‘culture’, transcending caste, class and sectarian differences is a product of the ideology of Hindutva. By homogenizing the Hindutva ideology, it hegemonizes the interests of certain castes and classes. The ideology of Hindu nationalism is becoming an ideological tool that absorbs, assimilates, articulates as well as rewrites, reinterprets and reconstructs the nation’s history in furthering its agenda of ‘one nation’, ‘one culture’, ‘one language’, and ‘one religion’. It has even gone to the extent of opening its fold to Dalits and Tribals to establish a majoritarian democracy to further their own interests in creating Hindu Rashtra vis-à-vis pan-Indian raj. The construction of a nation based on the ideology
of Hindutva in its definition, consolidation, and articulation underlines “Hinduness”.

Over the past few years, a series of lynchings, inflammatory speeches, desecration of mosques and churches and a distribution of highly provocative literature against minorities, Dalits and Tribals, reconversion drives, the bid to saffronise educational materials, an attempt to rewrite Indian history, and a tampering with the Constitution clearly portrays a well-planned political project of the Hindutva forces. It is deeply rooted in BJP-RSS ideology and political praxis. For instance, Savarkar, an ideologue of this tenet articulates, “Hindutva entails the religious, cultural, linguistic, social and political aspects of the life of Hindus” (Baird 1981, 466). It believes in establishing “one nation, one people, one religion, one language, one culture and one executive”. (Baird 1981, 466) This ‘Hindu-ness’ seeks to establish the political, cultural, and religious supremacy of Hinduism and the Hindu nation (Ganguly 1999). At the same time those who are outside the ambit of Hindutva, Christians and Muslims are labelled and identified as ‘aliens’, ‘infiltrators’, ‘aggressors’, and ‘enemies’.

Golwalkar, one of the architects and ideologues, reiterates that “[t]o keep up the purity of [the] Nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races. […] Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by” (quoted by D’Souza 1999, 185). For Golwalkar, Hitler’s Germany and an anti-Semitic stance became tools for pushing the ideology of Hindutva. He was against pluralism and secularism enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Instead, he spoke for nationalism¹ and the preservation of the pure Aryan culture engrained in Hinduism. The same ideology and political project are being transplanted by the BJP-RSS: combined using religion and politics for the wrong reasons. For example, Golwalkar emphasized that,

[t]he non-Hindu people in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the

¹ Conceptions and notions of nationalism by Hindutva forces contravene the majority consensus of nationalism. “True, nationalism as the embodiment of collective aspiration can move people and inspire them to engage in meaningful social reconstruction. […] But the real essence of nationalism, it has to be realized, is the tangible experience of togetherness, the ability to fight internal inequalities and divisions so that the unity of people can be felt in every sphere of life. In other words, true nationalism means, as Gandhi sought to argue, real Swaraj: creating a society that is egalitarian and free from inequality, exploitation, and violence. Nationalism is not, as Tagore repeatedly warned us, chauvinism: a narcissistic assertion against the ‘external’ enemy. Nationalism is not wild passion. Instead, it is a sincere, honest, committed practice for constructing a just society. The irony is that the crude logic of election politics has killed this humanistic spirit of nationalism. Nationalism has become particularly after Pokhran 11 and Kargil, a mighty weapon the ruling party need to assert the power of the narcissistic nation” (Pathak 1999, 10).
Hindu nation [...] but also cultivate the positive of love and devotion [...] they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights. (Quoted by D'Souza 1999, 186)

4 Changing Templates of India – Hindu Nationalism

The Indian Constitution acquires secular character and credentials not only in letter, but also from the collective reality of many provisions that appear in the constitution that guarantee citizens and community in letter and spirit. Indian society is secular meaning that religions tend to co-exist side by side with other ideologies, belief systems, cultures, and traditions. These principles are increasingly in contestation in recent times. For instance, on December 24, 2017, in a public address, Minister of State for Employment and Skills Development, Ananthkumar Hegde said, “Secular people do not have an identity of their parental blood” and we, the BJP, he added “are here to change the constitution” (this appeared in all the dailies the following day). By this statement the fundamental guarantees such as right to freedom, right to religion, right to equality and right to dignity of those who belong to the other are to be negated and under contestation.

What is happening in India is the absorption of religion into the ideology of Hindutva. The synthesis of religion and politics is becoming deeply entrenched into the plural kaleidoscopic milieu. When the State attempts to prioritize and hegemonize Hindus of different shades of Hinduism in a religiously plural society like India, minorities are bound to suffer. Since communal political parties and organizations are prioritizing Hinduism over other religions, the secular fabric of Indian society is now cracking up. This is a most disturbing trend, which gravely affects the fine balance, which India as a country has maintained thus far. A secular democracy is bound to have the presence and practice of many religions and they can co-exist without any conflict if the nation-state maintains its plural character by equally respecting, protecting and accommodating all religions. The Indian State under RSS-BJP is pushing its project of majoritarian politics as its point of governance.

The present scenario has created insecurity amongst the minorities who feel threatened by state-sponsored religious fundamentalism and cultural nationalism. What is happening now is the polarization of communities on the basis of the religious persuasion to which they adhere. The communal parties, in order to secure Hindu votes, are polarizing society and in the process creating a Hindu vote bank. The Hindutva phenomena should not be reduced to political battle between “majority” and “minority” or be assumed that the problem has been exaggerated and therefore is not an immediate threat. What is at stake is India’s constitutional democracy – a project in which a wide range of social, cultural groups and identities, have peren-
nially interacted and been juxtaposed. Added to this, the capacity of the Indian nation to retain its character vis-à-vis a plural entity, is in jeopardy.

It is also equally important to observe that the secular character and composite nature of the Indian Constitution, which is democratic in its entirety, is in grave danger. The reason being: the very words that are being used by the proponents of Hindutva such as nation, culture, language, and religion imply uniformity and division. But in reality, it is diversity and plurality that brings richness and beauty to the world and to the human family. It is not unity in uniformity but unity in diversity. As time and space in which Indian people live becomes increasingly constricted and conformed in the current political and cultural space, it is apparent that the domains of inter-relatedness, cultural diversity, plurality, and inter-dependence between one another become obsolete and redundant. BJP-RSS’s notions of the homogenization and unification of Hindu culture are being promoted and preserved, and in the process their vision of a Hindu Nation will be realized. BJP-RSS is using religion and culture effectively in order to realize its vision.

5 De-Coding the Terrains – the Complex Web of Lynching

The spate of lynchings across India since 2014 is on the rise. The social conditions presently prevailing, characterized by intolerance and hatred, is horrifying. Those involved in such dastardly acts keep committing them without any fear and restraint, because the current social and political climate favours them. Groups involved in lynching are well-connected, highly organized, and politically influential. Those who defy their political, socio-cultural, and moral views have to face their wrath. Mob lynching stems from its core ideological underpinning that the other ought to be eliminated by all means. Mob killings have become the new normal in India. The mob quickly gathers, executes their lynching, and then disappears. The ruling dispensation keeps spreading the idea that Hinduism is under attack and for this the minorities are responsible for spreading hatred. This has reposed ‘majority Hindus’ to create the ‘other’ and treat them as outsiders of the Hindu society.

97 percent of the incidents occurred after BJP came to power in 2014. 84 percent of those killed in the related mob lynching incidents were Muslims. The rest, 16 percent, accused of cow slaughter are Dalits and marginal sections (Parambil 2018, 29). The word “lynching” has occupied centre stage in all areas of Indian society. This leads us to ask: what then is lynching? It is best described as “a pre-mediated extra judicial killing by a group. It is most often used to characterize informal public executions by a mob in order to punish an alleged transgressor, or to intimidate a group. It is an extreme form of informal group social control and often conducted with the display of a public spectacle for – maximum intimidation” (quoted by Prakash 2018, 26). Mob lynching is horrifying and creates frenzy and horror for the vic-
tims surrounded by a mob who systematically take on the victims who belong to the other.

Grotesque brutality once again hit the national headlines when cow vigilantes lynched a 31-year-old Muslim man from Haryana’s Mewat district in Rajasthan’s Alwar on Friday the 20th of July 2018. Rakbar Khan was attacked allegedly by a group of 8–10 cow vigilantes. He succumbed to his injuries in hospital after a few hours. In his dying statement, Rakbar told police that he and his friend Aslam were walking back with two cows they had bought when they came under attack in Alwar’s Ramgarh area by the mob which accused them of being smugglers taking the cattle for slaughter. It is an irony that for a distance of 5 to 6 kilometres to the nearby hospital which usually takes less than 30 minutes, the Rajasthan police had taken more than 3 hours. He could have been saved if they had brought him a little earlier. Two ministers of the BJP Government honoured those accused of lynching; one stood vigil over the body of a lynching accused draped in the national flag, and the other garlanded several people accused of lynching. Both were honoured due to the fact that they went all out in defence of the cows (Arun 2018, 16).

Junior Union Home minister Arjun Ram Meghwal justified lynching as being due to the rising popularity of Prime Minster Narendra Modi. Cow Politics continues to polarize Indian society with clear messages that until there’s a total ban on cow slaughter, lynchings will continue. Lynching of Muslims, Dalits and vulnerable identities and communities is certainly a large plan of the ruling dispensation and should not be viewed through the prism of the letter of the law. Instead, these chauvinistic nationalists should be dealt with severely for blatantly defying and violating the basic rights of the citizens. As Satwana Bhattacharya (2017) rightly asks: “Who’s this threatening to usurp my identity? Tainting and twisting my faith and beliefs? Destroying the values I hold dear? Who’s this who kills mercilessly? [...] How did they become the law unto themselves and the order of the day and arbiters of destiny and life and meaning, deciding what shall be eaten, how one has to dress, what health care to opt for.”

When mob lynching grows and becomes toxic, India’s democratic and secular fabric is undermined. In such context-specificities, the citizens are to invoke moral revulsion and seek justice under the provisions of basic and fundamental human rights. Nonetheless, “We see a macabre festival of violence around us, a relapse into the baser human capacities, whether it is in Kashmir or Kerala or Jharkhand ... where the usual constitutional niceties do not apply and everything goes—is now beginning to be applicable everywhere” (Bhatcharya 2017). In the pretext of protecting the cows, attacking Christians, Muslims and Dalits is rapidly spreading and becoming toxic.

² For an in-depth analysis read the Bhatcharya column (2017). Bhatcharya is political editor of the Indian Express.
6 Essentialising Human Rights

In recent times, India’s democracy and the rule of constitutional law is increasingly contested by the self-styled cow protectors conveying a clear message that cows have more value and are more precious than minorities such as Muslims, Dalits, Tribals, and Christians. According to the data released by IndiaSpend, 28 people were killed and 123 were injured in the attacks unleashed by the ‘cow vigilantes’. What is more disturbing is that out of the 28 deaths, 24 were Muslims, which is a whopping 86 percent of the total fatalities. 97 percent of these attacks were reported after BJP took over the government at the Centre in 2014. On a similar vein, about half of the cow-related violence – 32 out of 63 cases were reported from states governed by BJP, eight run by Congress and the rest by other political parties (The Hindu 2018). India has drastically changed and now symbolizes binaries based on religion, ideology, and culture. Santawana Bhattacharya (2017) aptly characterizes that: “Is the Indian cow just an empty symbol then, an instrumental token for a society that is angry and brutalized? A society that does not know how to find legitimate mechanism to voice its angst—all the angst produced by the modern living and its alienating effect [...] has to resort to violence merely to find a sense of power and meaning?” Basic rights of humans have been violated and throttled.

The gap between the rhetoric and practice in letter and spirit that we find in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) evokes concern and dismay to the citizens as we look around the happenings in the world that we live in. In all the spheres of our existence, particularly political and religious spheres, we cannot undermine or ignore the alacrity and gravity of human rights violations that manifest daily in the form of torture, genocide, social and economic asymmetries, custodial deaths, ethnic cleansing, political prisoners, suppression of democratic rights and expressions and a host of others. Although all the countries of the world are signatories of UDHR, the gap between words and action creates a sense of optimism and a feeling of pessimism. However, optimism and hope continue to ignite the simmering light/spirit. Discourses and actions should continue on human rights in the areas of historical, philosophical, legal, political, theological or ethical domains.

For more than sixty years discourses at different levels on the legitimate claims for universal human rights have been justified and sustained (Chandran 1997, 138).

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3 Some opine that the Declaration as a resolution of the General Assembly has no legal binding effect, while others view that the Declaration is a living document that has acquired credible authority. In general, there is an expression of hope, cf. Bajwa (1995, 136) and Dutta (1998, 275). For example, cf. Panikar (1959) and Adas (1989). Hence, we see a number of works that describe the colonial and imperial motif woven into the structures of popular culture, fiction and the rhetoric of history, philosophy and geography.

4 The division of Human Rights into the three generations, namely the first world, second world, and the third world was initially proposed in 1979 by the Czech jurist Karel Vasak at the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg. His divisions follow the three great watchwords of the French
At the same time, it should be noted that the thrusts and foci of these discourses kept changing at each historical epoch. As the context changes, the conceptual, definitional, and perspectival understandings should change. In the twenty-first century, new forms of atrocities and rights violations are taking place. Given the ambiguities and ambivalences of rights discourse, rights’ discourse needs to be nuanced so that the responses that are offered will be apt and relevant. We live in a world in which the perpetrators of injustice inflict all sorts of violations and yet justify their actions. Particularly, the State uses its machinery to silence those who use the provisions extended by the human rights’ charter. However, it is important to invoke human rights at this juncture because,

Analytically, a right is considered a ‘remedial’ category, a deterrent against the possibility, or a redressal of the fact, of some wrong being inflicted upon its bearer. As such, rights cannot but be relational since they imply, at the very least, a link between the bearer of rights and the state. Moreover, since rights never take shape in a social vacuum – other, competing rights are always already present in society – they are contextual in a readily visible fashion. Thus, when considered as theoretical categories, rights are not the essence-like, intrinsic attributes that they are often made out to be, but products of their milieu. In a different, less obvious sense, rights can be shown to be context-dependent even when considered as historically-specific phenomena. Contrary to the universalistic claims [...] all rights involve explicit (and more often implicit) exclusions. In other words, every historically-specific instance of a right carries within itself its own apparatus of inclusion/exclusion. These devices defining those endowed with or denied rights are the products of the particular conjunction of historical forces obtaining at the time, and it is in this sense that every right is inevitably contextual. (Deshpande 1998)

Any discussion on the challenges to human rights in the twenty-first century will be meaningful only when we look at the historical-contextual processes in which each society’s search for equality and human dignity are taken in realistic ways. The forces of equality, freedom and dignity countered by the ideological propaganda that there is no alternative (TINA) is a clever strategy to push the matter into subjugation and could perhaps be considered to be the greatest challenge of the twenty-first century to the theory and practice of human rights. In a world of populism and nationalism the conceptual understanding of basic and fundamental rights, democracy, and freedom seems to be in danger. In a scenario where rights are violated, we need to have clear understanding of the following:

Revolution: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity (Ife 2001, 2006; Shimray 1994, 28; Balasuriva 2000, 75). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights included all the three generations of rights (UNESCO 1953; UN 1998). It was enshrined at the global level by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 3–21 of the Universal Declaration and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It derives primarily from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political theories associated with the English, American, and French revolutions. Major political theory consisted of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, which favoured limiting the government by placing restrictions on state action.
When democracy becomes devoted to the maintenance of the existing structures of power, the first causality is, naturally, freedom: for without freedom to imagine, to dare to conceive alternatives— including also alternative ways of answering human need [...]. To set ‘freedom to choose’ at the heart of our culture, and to deny the possibility of choosing any other way of being in the world is a denial of the ‘pluralism’ and ‘diversity’ to which the West asserts its devotion these are evidently mere ornaments decorations on the surface of an increasingly showy, image-conscious, appearance-manipulating culture. (Seabrook 1996)

Politics over lynching has reached alarming heights in India with slogans such as: “Leave India, if you don’t like cows”, “respect cows, love Hinduism”, “respect cows or leave Hinduism” and “lynching will continue till cow Slaughter and beef eating stops”. Human life has value and in no way has lesser value than a cow. Attacks are based on an ideology of polarization leading to hatred and antagonism. In such a climate, it is important for Christians to invoke faith which is rooted in the authority of scripture. There is no direct reference to or usage of Human Rights in the Bible. But the Christian Scripture brings out clearly human wrongs and substantiates explicitly why they are wrong.

7 Human Dignity. An Essential Component of Human Rights

The materials we find in the Bible need to be complimented by non-scriptural materials to address the contemporary issues concerning human rights. Humans represent the image of God and so it is implied that co-humans are treated with respect and dignity. Therefore, treating each other as co-humans is the core principle of God’s creation. The essence of human rights acquires greater value and fuller meaning precisely due to this. For instance:

The atonement has been powerful grounding of human dignity and consequently of human rights for several reasons. It is universal, containing a dignity which applies to all people. Human rights are claims any individual can place upon the community solely on the grounds of being human. The dignity of those for whom the Son of God died rests not on individual characteristics, which distinguish one person from another. No characteristic, which commends one person as being greater than another, provides status before God or a claim upon God’s mercy. Those crushed by human power are able to know that neither colour nor sex. (Mott 1985, 6)

Human dignity acquires a fuller status in and through incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. As human beings we have failed and also fallen short of representing God’s image. We are clothed with human dignity and a set of human rights. It is embedded in us as God’s gift from whom the rights flow. The God of righteousness is the provider of rights and expects us to respect the rights of humans because we are bestowed with human rights that are inalienable and inviolable. In this sense, everyone before the sight of God is equally endowed with human dignity and human worth.
Differences, exclusions, and segregations based on caste, colour, gender, and ethnicity are considered unbiblical and un-Christian. Further,

\[d\]rawing upon dignity through the creation has the advantage of being more widely accepted and understood beyond the Christian circle. Those who do not respond to Jesus as the dying and propitiatory Son of God may accept the conception of a creating God. This basis of human worth thus provides a broader value basis for human rights. The advantage of drawing upon the atonement is that it brings human dignity and human rights into the very heart of Christian faith and experience, dispelling the dichotomy of piety and social commitment. (Mott 1985, 7)

As human deprivations and violations of human rights are on the rise we need to commit towards the restoration of life. It begins with basic education, awareness, and commitment eventually leading to action. How are we to set right human wrongs, so that human dignity and human worth may be retrieved? Human rights undoubtedly are one of the vehicles or instruments that could address the human wrongs effectively and thereby the deprivations of millions of people would be set right. We live in miserable times and our identities are questioned, challenged, and contested. In such a scenario, “Human rights are an expression, channel, and control of the power which limits and ameliorates exploitation. Because exploitation arises out of the depth and pervasiveness of sin, voluntary efforts are insufficient. Exploitive power is never adequately controlled by reason and conscience alone.” (Mott 1985, 6) Concretely speaking, Human rights are the Magna Carta for a global future of human dignity. They are the foundation of a new world order. They are also a prerequisite for the transition to sustainable societies, where future generations can live in political and economic security. Partially due to this vigorous development some care must be taken towards conceptual clarity, in order to better promote human rights. Oppression literally means, pushing people down “below a certain existential threshold or not allowing them to come” to satisfy existential needs – which need not be material needs. The victims of oppression suffer deprivation. They live below their existential threshold, and existential needs are not satisfied. One of the most vicious arguments of oppressors of all sorts is to call oppression normal and present it as a law of nature (FIAN 1995, 14–15).

Rights of human beings are existential and real. But, in reality these rights hardly work and therefore rights have to be pursued all the time and by all means. The dominant and the powerful keep inventing new instruments, meanings, and mechanisms to justify their wrongs. As people of faith, we are called to set right the human wrongs that the dominant and the powerful inflict upon the weak and the vulnerable. Those in power and authority wield their power in socio-political and religious structures and systems that obstruct the rights that are due to every citizen irrespective of gender, caste, creed, and class. Therefore, realizing fuller and authentic humanity and restoring human rights that are due to them is of utmost importance. Those with power and authority continue to deny those on the bottom rungs their full and authentic humanity and negate their basic identity as persons. The very notion of human rights is precisely entrenched in humans and thus upholds
human rights against human wrongs. Christian Scripture adds value to human dignity. It endorses infinite worth because the concept of humanity is enmeshed in its letter and spirit. So, it is expected that victims are to be treated and respected as humans, persons, and people whose stature is far above and far higher than other creatures. It is in this context that the goal of human rights is to give people their dignity, help them regain lost personhood and reiterate peoplehood, so that they become as subjects of history and fulfil their own destiny. M. M. Thomas, the revered and renowned Indian Christian theologian, has delved into human rights in-depth and thus offers two typologies that consist of the rights of people or “people-hood” which in the Indian context refers to minorities and other weaker sections of Indian society (1977, 33).

Two concepts surface more powerfully in M. M. Thomas’ theology i.e., personhood and people-hood encompassing – individuals and community respectively. These two concepts have to be theologically nuanced because they clearly state that each and every individual before the sight of God is endowed with the highest order considered as the crown of God’s creation representing the image of God (imago dei). In that human dignity (self-esteem or self-respect) is indeed part and parcel of all humans. Hence, human dignity is intrinsic and inalienable and therefore no one has the right to take it away from anyone. Accordingly, even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Indian Constitution categorically insist that the core of these two concepts is humanity. ‘Humanity’ in this context becomes essential and central. In and around humanity human dignity hangs on, so tightly and deeply entrenched since each and every human being represents the image of God, and therefore, are above all creatures intrinsic and thus sacred.

Human rights and human dignity are value loaded and deeply entrenched and intertwined with each other and therefore inseparable concepts. Rights and dignity are within us and ingrained in us and so no one has given them to us because they are natural, indivisible, and indelible. Amidst a number of facets in the sphere of human rights, human dignity is undoubtedly the most important because it touches upon the very being of each and every human. M. M. Thomas develops personhood theologically and reasons that the dignity of every human being is personified in personhood that adds to other related aspects of rights. Therefore, whether singular personhood or plural “people-hood”, each is embedded in self-esteem / self-worth. Accordingly, minorities and the marginalized have been victims of rising majoritarianism and populism.

The very purpose of creating humans in God’s image pre-supposes the worth and dignity extended to all humans and certainly not only to a select few. When the very purposes of God are violated, and the basic rights of humans negated then we have to correct the wrongs by employing the instruments of human rights. It further endorses that God’s covenantal relationship with humans symbolizes God’s gracious mediating effort to redeem the fallen world and created order. M. M. Thomas (1996, 31) issues a clarion call for all people to participate in establishing human dignity and thus restoring equality of all and for all. God so loved the world and the hu-
manity and so sent His Son to the world in flesh and blood so that the fractured and alienated humanity by His birth, death and resurrection could be redeemed, renewed, and thus become a new community of persons (Thomas 1996, 31).

According to M. M. Thomas, Christ brought anew the lost and fractured humanity. He substantiates the New Humanity as “the restoration of the human person in Christ as God’s free creative agent in the divine act of new creation to restore the wholeness of the entire universe throughout history” (Rajaiah 2017, 141). Reiterating, “The new humanity revealed in Jesus Christ is the instrument of constant revolution in social history, exerting pressure aimed at creating universal brotherhood/sisterhood” (Rajaiah 2017, 141). Retrieving lost humanity or redeeming de-humanized humanity is possible in and through human rights that are inalienable and inviolable of all humans. Let us strive to reclaim the personhood and peoplehood at the individual (personal) and communitarian (community) levels that are premised in human dignity because their worth is infinite and incontrovertible.

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