

# Veer Savarkar and the Evolution of Hindutva: Ideological Foundations and Contemporary Implications

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**Abstract-** This research paper explores the evolution of Veer Savarkar's concept of Hindutva and its profound impact on Indian politics, both historically and in contemporary times. Hindutva, as articulated by Savarkar, represents a form of cultural nationalism that seeks to unify Hindus under a common heritage and identity, distinct from the religious practices of Hinduism. The study provides a detailed biography of Savarkar, highlighting his early life, political activism, and ideological shift towards Hindutva. It examines the core principles and ideological foundations of Hindutva, including cultural nationalism, historical continuity, and the exclusionary definition of Indian identity.

Historically, Hindutva offered an ideological counterpoint to the secular nationalism promoted by the Indian National Congress, contributing to the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha and inspiring revolutionary movements against British rule. In contemporary times, the influence of Hindutva is evident in the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), shaping policies and governance through the promotion of Hindu cultural values and legislative measures such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

The paper also analytically discusses the criticisms and controversies surrounding Hindutva, including its exclusionary nature, communal polarization, and challenges to India's secular framework. It addresses the ethical and moral implications of Hindutva, balancing the perspectives of cultural revitalization and political mobilization with the potential risks of exclusion and communal tension. By providing a comprehensive analysis of Hindutva's impact, this research aims to foster informed and constructive dialogues about the future of Indian democracy and the principles guiding its evolution.

**Keywords-** Hindutva, Veer Savarkar, cultural nationalism, Indian politics, Bharatiya Janata Party, secularism, communal polarization, Indian identity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Contextual Background

The early 20th century was a period of profound socio-political upheaval in India. The struggle for

independence from British colonial rule was intensifying, and various ideological currents were competing for influence over the national movement. Among these, the concept of Hindutva, as articulated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, emerged as a significant and contentious ideology. Savarkar, a freedom fighter turned ideologue, formulated Hindutva as a form of cultural nationalism that sought to define Indian identity primarily through Hindu cultural values and heritage (Sampath, 2019).

### Objective

This paper aims to explore the ideological foundations and contemporary implications of Hindutva, as conceptualized by Veer Savarkar. By examining Savarkar's writings and the historical context of his ideas, the paper seeks to elucidate the core principles of Hindutva and assess its impact on modern Indian society and politics.

### Significance of the Study

Understanding the evolution of Hindutva and its ideological foundations is crucial for comprehending the broader dynamics of Indian nationalism and contemporary political developments. As Hindutva continues to shape the policies and rhetoric of major political parties, particularly the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a critical examination of its origins and implications remains essential (Jaffrelot, 1996).

### Structure of the Paper

The paper is structured as follows: first, it provides a brief biography of Veer Savarkar, highlighting his early life, political activism, and ideological shift towards Hindutva. Next, it delves into the concept of Hindutva, outlining its core principles and ideological foundations. The paper then explores the impact of Hindutva on Indian politics, both historically and in contemporary times. Finally, it addresses the criticisms and controversies surrounding Hindutva, offering a

balanced perspective on its ethical and moral implications.

#### Literature Review

Existing literature on Veer Savarkar and Hindutva includes historical accounts, ideological analyses, and contemporary perspectives. Works like "Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past" by Vikram Sampath provide comprehensive biographies, while Christophe Jaffrelot's "The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India" examines the broader historical context (Sampath, 2019; Jaffrelot, 1996). Scholarly interpretations, such as Jyotirmaya Sharma's "Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism," offer critical insights into Savarkar's ideology and its philosophical underpinnings (Sharma, 2003). Recent studies, including those by A.G. Noorani, analyze the resurgence of Hindutva in modern Indian politics, particularly its association with the BJP (Noorani, 2002). Review of the latest literature from various perspectives are hereunder.

- **Historical Accounts and Biographies**  
New biographical works on Veer Savarkar have further illuminated his life and contributions. Vikram Sampath's two-volume biography, *Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past* (2019) and *Savarkar: A Contested Legacy* (2021), have been particularly influential. These works provide an in-depth examination of Savarkar's early life, revolutionary activities, and the evolution of his ideological stance towards Hindutva (Sampath, 2021).
- **Ideological Analyses**  
Several recent studies have provided nuanced analyses of Hindutva as an ideology. Audrey Truschke's *The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Indo-Muslim Rule* (2021) examines how historical narratives are constructed and contested within the framework of Hindutva. Truschke's work critiques the selective use of history by Hindutva proponents to support their ideological claims (Truschke, 2021).
- **Contemporary Perspectives**  
The resurgence of Hindutva in Indian politics has been a focal point of contemporary scholarship. In *Hindutva and Dalits: Perspectives for Understanding Communal Praxis* (2022), Anand Teltumbde explores the relationship between Hindutva and Dalit politics. Teltumbde's analysis highlights the complex dynamics

between caste and religious identity within the Hindutva movement (Teltumbde, 2022).

Christophe Jaffrelot's *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (2021) provides a critical examination of the political ascendancy of Hindutva under Narendra Modi's leadership. Jaffrelot argues that the BJP's policies and rhetoric have increasingly aligned with Savarkar's vision of a Hindu nation, transforming India's political landscape (Jaffrelot, 2021).

- **Policy and Legal Analyses**  
Recent policy and legal analyses have examined the implications of Hindutva on India's secular framework. *The Citizenship Amendment Act: Legal Implications and Political Context* (2020) by Arvind Rajagopal critiques the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) through the lens of Hindutva ideology. Rajagopal argues that the CAA represents a significant shift towards a more exclusionary and religiously defined national identity (Rajagopal, 2020).
- **Global Perspectives**  
The global dimensions of Hindutva have also been explored in recent literature. Thomas Blom Hansen's *The Law of Force: The Violent Heart of Indian Politics* (2022) examines the international influence of Hindutva, particularly among the Indian diaspora. Hansen's work highlights how Hindutva has been promoted and adapted outside India, influencing global perceptions of Indian politics (Hansen, 2022).
- **Social and Cultural Impacts**  
The social and cultural impacts of Hindutva have been the subject of recent ethnographic studies. *Everyday Nationalism: Women and the Hindu Right in India* (2021) by Kalyani Devaki Menon explores how Hindutva shapes gender dynamics and everyday life in India. Menon's study provides insights into the ways in which Hindutva's cultural nationalism intersects with issues of gender and social norms (Menon, 2021).

#### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach, analyzing primary sources, including Savarkar's own writings, and secondary sources, such as books, journal articles, and credible online resources. The analysis focuses on the historical development, ideological foundations, and contemporary implications of Hindutva.

## II. VEER SAVARKAR: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

- Early Life

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, commonly known as Veer Savarkar, was born on May 28, 1883, in the village of Bhagur, near Nashik in the Maharashtra region of India. He was born into a Brahmin family, which had a strong sense of pride in their heritage and a deep-seated nationalist sentiment (Sampath, 2019). His early education took place in Nashik, where he was exposed to revolutionary ideas and the works of prominent Indian leaders. Savarkar was greatly influenced by his elder brother, Ganesh, who was actively involved in the anti-British movement.

Savarkar's early exposure to nationalist ideas intensified during his college years in Pune, a city known for its intellectual fervor and nationalist activities. He enrolled at Fergusson College, where he became involved with the nationalist organization Abhinav Bharat Society, which he founded in 1904. This organization aimed to liberate India from British rule through armed revolution (Sampath, 2021).

- Political Activism

In 1906, Savarkar received a scholarship to study law in London, where he continued his political activism. He joined the India House, a hub for Indian students and nationalists, and quickly became a prominent figure in the Indian independence movement in Britain. It was during this time that he wrote "The First War of Indian Independence," a seminal work that portrayed the 1857 uprising as a unified struggle for independence rather than a series of isolated mutinies. This work was banned by the British government for its incendiary content (Sampath, 2019).

Due to his revolutionary actions, Savarkar was arrested in 1909 on suspicion of participating in an assassination plot against a British official. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and transported to the Cellular Jail in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. During his imprisonment from 1911 to 1921, Savarkar endured harsh conditions but continued to write and reflect on his ideas (Sampath, 2021).

- Ideological Shift Towards Hindutva

It was during his imprisonment that Savarkar's thoughts began to shift from revolutionary nationalism to a more defined ideological framework, which he termed "Hindutva." In his seminal work "Hindutva:

Who is a Hindu?" published in 1923, Savarkar outlined his idea of a Hindu nation. He defined Hindutva as not merely a religious identity but a cultural and nationalistic one, emphasizing the unity of all Hindus based on shared cultural heritage (Savarkar, 1923).

Savarkar's Hindutva was rooted in the belief that India was fundamentally a Hindu nation, shaped by Hindu culture, traditions, and values. He argued that a Hindu was someone who considered India as both their fatherland (Pitrbhumi) and holy land (Punyabhumi), thus excluding Muslims and Christians who he believed did not share this dual attachment (Savarkar, 1923).

After his release from prison in 1924, Savarkar became a prominent leader in the Hindu Mahasabha, an organization dedicated to protecting Hindu interests and promoting Hindutva. He continued to write extensively, promoting his ideas on cultural nationalism and advocating for the consolidation of Hindu society against perceived threats from other religious communities (Jaffreot, 1996).

- Legacy

Savarkar's legacy is complex and contentious. While he is celebrated by many for his role in the independence movement and his advocacy of Hindu unity, he is also criticized for his exclusionary views and his impact on communal relations in India. His ideology of Hindutva has had a lasting influence on Indian politics, particularly with the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other right-wing organizations that draw inspiration from his vision of a Hindu nation (Jaffreot, 2021).

## III. VEER SAVARKAR'S CONCEPT OF HINDUTVA

### Introduction to Hindutva

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's concept of Hindutva is a form of cultural nationalism that seeks to define Indian identity through Hindu cultural values and heritage. First articulated in his seminal work *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* published in 1923, Savarkar's ideology aimed to consolidate Hindus and foster a sense of unity based on shared cultural and historical bonds (Savarkar, 1923). This section delves into the core principles and ideological foundations of Hindutva as envisioned by Savarkar.

## Core Principles of Hindutva

### 1. Cultural Nationalism

Hindutva is primarily a cultural, rather than a religious, concept. Savarkar distinguished between Hinduism, the religion, and Hindutva, the cultural and national identity (Sampath, 2021). He argued that Hindu culture forms the bedrock of Indian civilization and that this cultural unity is essential for the nation's strength and integrity.

### 2. Defining 'Hindu': Pitrbhumi and Punyabhumi

A central tenet of Hindutva is the definition of who qualifies as a Hindu. According to Savarkar, a Hindu is someone who considers India both their fatherland (Pitrbhumi) and holy land (Punyabhumi) (Savarkar, 1923). This definition includes followers of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, as these religions originated in India and share cultural ties. However, it excludes Muslims and Christians, who regard holy sites outside India as central to their faith.

### 3. Historical Continuity and Pride

Savarkar emphasized the importance of historical continuity, tracing the roots of Hindu civilization back to ancient times. He believed in reviving and celebrating India's ancient heritage, which he viewed as having been undermined by centuries of foreign rule (Sampath, 2019). The goal of this historical awareness was to foster a sense of pride and cohesion among Hindus.

### 4. Social and Political Unity

Hindutva seeks to create a cohesive social and political entity by uniting various Hindu communities. Savarkar envisioned a strong, centralized nation-state where Hindu cultural values formed the basis of the socio-political order. He argued that the consolidation of Hindu society was essential to counter external threats and internal divisions (Jaffrelet, 1996).

### 5. Resistance to Foreign Influence

Hindutva emerged as a reaction to the perceived threats posed by Islamic and British domination. Savarkar viewed these influences as having diluted and fragmented Hindu culture and society. Hindutva was thus a call for the reclamation of cultural and political sovereignty from foreign rule (Noorani, 2002).

## Ideological Foundations of Hindutva

### 1. Civilizational Identity

Savarkar's Hindutva is rooted in the idea of civilizational identity, where the essence of being

Indian is inherently linked to Hindu culture. This identity transcends religious practice, encompassing language, arts, customs, and traditions that have evolved over millennia (Sampath, 2021).

### 2. European Nationalism

Savarkar was influenced by European nationalist movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly the emphasis on cultural and racial unity. He saw parallels between these movements and the need for a unified Hindu identity in India (Sarkar, 2002). His writings reflect a synthesis of these nationalist ideas with the Indian context.

### 3. Rationalism and Modernity

Despite his emphasis on tradition, Savarkar was a proponent of rationalism and modernity. He advocated for the eradication of social evils like caste discrimination and sought to modernize Hindu society while preserving its cultural essence (Jaffrelet, 1996).

### 4. Militant Nationalism

Hindutva also encompasses a militant aspect, advocating for the defense of Hindu interests through both cultural assertion and physical resistance if necessary. Savarkar's involvement in revolutionary activities against British rule exemplifies this militant dimension (Sampath, 2019).

## IV. IMPACT OF VEER SAVARKAR'S HINDUTVA ON INDIAN POLITICS

### Historical Impact

#### 1. Formation of the Hindu Mahasabha

The ideological foundations laid by Savarkar had a profound impact on the political landscape of India, leading to the formation and strengthening of the Hindu Mahasabha. As one of its leading figures, Savarkar's vision of Hindutva guided the organization's activities and policies. The Hindu Mahasabha emerged as a significant force advocating for Hindu unity and opposing both British colonial rule and the perceived appeasement of minorities by the Indian National Congress (Noorani, 2002).

#### 2. Influence on Revolutionary Movements

Savarkar's ideas on militant nationalism inspired numerous revolutionary groups and individuals involved in the freedom struggle. His emphasis on armed resistance against British rule found resonance among young nationalists who were disillusioned with the non-violent approach of the mainstream Congress leadership. Savarkar's writings and speeches

motivated freedom fighters to adopt more radical methods in their quest for independence (Sampath, 2019).

3. Ideological Counterpoint to Congress Secularism  
Hindutva provided an ideological counterpoint to the secular nationalism promoted by the Indian National Congress. While Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized a composite Indian identity transcending religious boundaries, Savarkar's Hindutva insisted on the primacy of Hindu culture and identity in the national fabric. This ideological divergence created a significant debate within the Indian independence movement regarding the future identity of the nation (Jaffrelot, 1996).

#### Contemporary Impact

##### 1. Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

In contemporary Indian politics, the most significant impact of Savarkar's Hindutva is seen in the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP, which has its roots in the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (founded in 1951), has adopted Hindutva as a core element of its political ideology. The party's ascent to power at both state and national levels can be attributed to its successful mobilization of Hindu identity and cultural nationalism, as envisioned by Savarkar (Jaffrelot, 2021).

##### 2. Policy Making and Governance

The influence of Hindutva on BJP-led governments is evident in various policy decisions and legislative measures. For instance, the abrogation of Article 370, which granted special autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir, was justified on grounds of national unity and integrity—a key tenet of Hindutva. Similarly, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019, which provides a pathway to citizenship for non-Muslim refugees from neighboring countries, aligns with the exclusionary aspects of Savarkar's definition of who belongs to the nation (Rajagopal, 2020).

##### 3. Cultural and Educational Policies

Hindutva has also shaped cultural and educational policies in contemporary India. The promotion of Sanskrit, the celebration of Hindu festivals, and the revision of school textbooks to emphasize Hindu contributions to Indian history reflect the ideology's impact on the cultural landscape. These measures aim to foster a sense of pride and continuity in Hindu heritage, as advocated by Savarkar (Menon, 2021).

##### 4. Social and Communal Dynamics

The propagation of Hindutva has had significant implications for social and communal dynamics in India. On one hand, it has fostered a sense of unity and identity among many Hindus. On the other hand, it has led to increased polarization and tension between religious communities. Incidents of communal violence, mob lynchings in the name of cow protection, and the marginalization of religious minorities are often attributed to the aggressive promotion of Hindutva ideology (Teltumbde, 2022).

##### 5. Criticism and Controversy

Hindutva remains a highly contentious and polarizing ideology in contemporary India. Critics argue that it undermines the secular and pluralistic foundations of the Indian republic, leading to the erosion of democratic values and the marginalization of minorities. Proponents, however, view it as a necessary assertion of cultural pride and national identity in the face of historical injustices and contemporary challenges (Sarkar, 2002).

The impact of Veer Savarkar's Hindutva on Indian politics is profound and multifaceted. Historically, it provided a counter-narrative to secular nationalism and inspired revolutionary fervor. In contemporary times, it has significantly shaped the policies and politics of the BJP, influencing cultural, social, and legislative landscapes. While Hindutva has succeeded in uniting many Hindus under a common cultural identity, it has also sparked significant debates and controversies regarding secularism, inclusivity, and the future of Indian democracy.

#### V. CRITICISMS AND CONTROVERSIES SURROUNDING HINDUTVA: AN ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

Hindutva, as conceptualized by Veer Savarkar, has been a subject of significant debate and controversy. While some view it as a necessary assertion of Hindu identity and cultural nationalism, others criticize it for promoting exclusionary practices and undermining India's secular ethos. This section provides a balanced perspective on the ethical and moral implications of Hindutva, highlighting both its criticisms and defenses.

##### Criticisms of Hindutva

###### 1. Exclusionary Nature

One of the primary criticisms of Hindutva is its exclusionary definition of Indian identity. By defining

a Hindu as someone who considers India both their fatherland (Pitrubhumi) and holy land (Punyabhumi), Hindutva excludes Muslims, Christians, and other religious minorities who do not share this dual attachment (Savarkar, 1923). Critics argue that this exclusionary stance undermines the secular and pluralistic foundations of the Indian republic (Noorani, 2002).

#### 2. Communal Polarization

Hindutva has been accused of fostering communal polarization and tension between religious communities. The aggressive promotion of Hindu identity often leads to the marginalization and demonization of minorities. Instances of communal violence, such as the 2002 Gujarat riots and more recent mob lynchings in the name of cow protection, are frequently cited as outcomes of the polarizing rhetoric associated with Hindutva (Jaffrelot, 2021).

#### 3. Undermining Secularism

Critics argue that Hindutva undermines India's secular framework, which is enshrined in its Constitution. By promoting a Hindu-centric view of the nation, Hindutva challenges the principle of equal treatment for all religions. This shift is evident in policies and legislative measures that appear to favor Hindu interests, such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019, which provides a pathway to citizenship for non-Muslim refugees from neighboring countries (Rajagopal, 2020).

#### 4. Impact on Social Justice

The impact of Hindutva on social justice, particularly concerning caste dynamics, is another area of concern. While Savarkar himself advocated for the eradication of caste discrimination, contemporary Hindutva movements have been criticized for failing to address the complexities of caste oppression adequately. Some Dalit activists argue that Hindutva co-opts Dalit identities without genuinely addressing their social and economic marginalization (Teltumbde, 2022).

#### 5. Intellectual and Cultural Domination

Hindutva has also been criticized for attempting to impose a monolithic Hindu identity, thereby suppressing the diverse and pluralistic traditions within Hinduism itself. The revision of school textbooks to emphasize Hindu contributions and the promotion of Sanskrit over regional languages are seen as efforts to create a homogenized cultural narrative that ignores India's rich diversity (Menon, 2021).

### Defenses of Hindutva

#### 1. Cultural Revitalization

Proponents of Hindutva argue that it is a necessary response to centuries of foreign domination and cultural erosion. They view Hindutva as a means of revitalizing Hindu culture and heritage, instilling pride and unity among Hindus. This cultural nationalism is seen as essential for the nation's cohesion and resilience (Sampath, 2021).

#### 2. Political Mobilization

Hindutva has been effective in mobilizing political support and creating a unified Hindu vote bank. This political consolidation is viewed as a counterbalance to what supporters perceive as the appeasement of minorities by other political parties. The BJP's electoral success and policy initiatives are often cited as evidence of Hindutva's positive impact on Indian politics (Jaffrelot, 2021).

#### 3. National Security

Supporters of Hindutva argue that the ideology addresses legitimate national security concerns by promoting vigilance against internal and external threats. They contend that a strong, culturally unified nation is better equipped to defend itself against terrorism, illegal immigration, and other security challenges (Jaffrelot, 2021).

#### 4. Social Reforms

While acknowledging the criticisms regarding caste, some proponents highlight the social reform efforts within the Hindutva movement. They point to initiatives aimed at promoting social harmony and economic development among marginalized communities as evidence of Hindutva's commitment to social justice (Sampath, 2021).

### Ethical and Moral Implications

#### 1. Inclusivity vs. Exclusivity

The ethical debate surrounding Hindutva often centers on its inclusivity. Critics argue that a truly inclusive national identity should encompass all citizens regardless of their religious or cultural background. The exclusionary aspects of Hindutva raise moral questions about the treatment of minorities and the ideals of equality and justice (Noorani, 2002).

#### 2. Secularism vs. Cultural Nationalism

The tension between secularism and cultural nationalism is another key ethical issue. While secularism advocates for the equal treatment of all religions, cultural nationalism emphasizes the primacy

of the majority culture. Balancing these two principles remains a significant challenge for a diverse and pluralistic society like India (Rajagopal, 2020).

### 3. Cultural Preservation vs. Pluralism

The effort to preserve and promote Hindu culture must be weighed against the need to respect and celebrate cultural pluralism. The ethical implications of imposing a singular cultural narrative on a diverse population raise important questions about cultural dominance and the rights of minority communities (Menon, 2021).

### 4. Violence and Non-Violence

The moral acceptability of using violence to defend or promote Hindutva is a contentious issue. While Savarkar's advocacy for militant nationalism has historical roots, the contemporary use of violence in the name of Hindutva is widely condemned. The ethical stance on this issue depends on one's views on the legitimacy of violence for political or cultural ends (Jaffrelot, 2021).

The criticisms and controversies surrounding Hindutva highlight the complex ethical and moral landscape it occupies. While it has succeeded in mobilizing Hindu identity and addressing certain cultural and national concerns, it also raises significant questions about inclusivity, secularism, and the treatment of minorities. A balanced perspective requires acknowledging both the legitimate aspirations and the potential risks associated with Hindutva, striving to find a path that respects India's diverse heritage while promoting unity and justice.

## CONCLUSION

The exploration of Veer Savarkar's Hindutva and its impact on Indian politics offers a nuanced understanding of the ideological currents that have shaped and continue to influence the nation's socio-political landscape. Savarkar's formulation of Hindutva as a cultural and national identity, distinct from the religious practices of Hinduism, laid the groundwork for a form of cultural nationalism that seeks to unify Hindus under a common heritage and identity. This ideology has played a critical role in historical and contemporary political movements, particularly through the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its affiliated organizations.

Historically, Hindutva provided an ideological counterpoint to the secular nationalism espoused by

the Indian National Congress, fostering a sense of pride and unity among Hindus while also contributing to revolutionary fervor against British colonial rule. In contemporary times, Hindutva's influence is evident in the policies and governance of the BJP, affecting cultural, social, and legislative landscapes. The promotion of Hindu cultural values, revision of educational content, and legislative measures such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) illustrate the tangible impact of Hindutva on the fabric of Indian society.

However, the propagation of Hindutva is not without controversy and criticism. The exclusionary definition of Indian identity, communal polarization, and challenges to secularism raise significant ethical and moral questions. The tension between cultural preservation and pluralism, the treatment of religious and caste minorities, and the use of violence in the name of cultural nationalism are critical issues that merit careful consideration.

This research article aims to provide a balanced perspective on Hindutva, acknowledging both its contributions to cultural revitalization and political mobilization, as well as its potential risks and ethical dilemmas. By understanding the multifaceted nature of Hindutva, scholars, policymakers, and citizens can engage in more informed and constructive dialogues about the future of Indian democracy and the principles that should guide its evolution.

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