

# STATE SECULARISM AND RELIGION

WESTERN AND INDIAN EXPERIENCE

*EDITED BY*

**ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER**

**UDAY MEHTA**

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AND RELIGION -  
Western and Indian  
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*This book is dedicated to the memory of  
Dr. A.R. Desai who originally conceived  
this project but died before he could complete  
it and who struggled all his life  
for promoting secularism.*

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# PREFACE

The Centre for Study of Society and Secularism had undertaken a project on secularism in Western and Indian context and to examine its relevance. Scholars and activists participated in this project. Their views have been expressed in their contributions which are presented here in this book. There is ongoing debate in India on the relevance of secularism, its context and meaning. Number of articles have been written and numerous books have been published. Still this controversy goes on and different people express different views. This controversy will never be irrelevant in Indian social and political context. It will remain ever alive. We feel this book explores some new dimensions, as far as religion and secularism are concerned. This work will certainly help not only clarify issues but would also be of some help to the activists who have to work with the people and often have to face difficult questions about religion and religious sensitivities of the people. They are often embarrassed. The essays in the book address these questions. Hopefully, it will also generate fresh debate both among academics as well as activists.

Asghar Ali Engineer,  
*Bombay, 25.8.97*  
Uday Mehta.

# INTRODUCTION

Secularism has come under heavy attack from different quarters in Indian society during the last two or three decades. The Constituent Assembly which came into existence after Indian independence, after long deliberations formulated the constitution in a way which had all the basic ingredients of a secular state. In the initial decade after the Independence, India was admired for adopting secularism as the basic credo, though sometimes giving way to the pressure and compromising under religious influences.

This is a far cry from present attacks on secularism. The major offensive against the secularism as a policy, principle and a concept comes not only from *Sangh Parivar* but also from some social scientists who have taken up cudgels against it in the recent past.

Historically, as social phenomena, modernity and secularisation have emerged together in the Western world. From 17th century, discoveries of science began challenging the deeply held beliefs and faith which were integral part of broad canvas of religion. This was first observed in Europe, where medieval period was characterised by the supremacy of church over all theological, juridical, economic and administrative spheres of life and society. European secularisation process took root during the period of Renaissance and French Enlightenment. The vast mass of peasantry crushed under feudal exploitation could see the liberatory potential of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity—the call given by the rising French bourgeoisie to break the hold of feudal lords and church nexus on the civil society. Here of the newly emerging industries required the peasants to be released from the social grip of feudal lordsom on one hand, and the concomittant religious grip of the church on the other. It is in this backdrop that one can begin to understand development of social norms around modern rationality and ideas. It was in other words, beginning of the 'Age of

Reason' in contrast to 'Age of Faith'.

Similar to the French experience, the Industrial Revolution in England projected the ideal of democratic form of government and rights of individuals as citizens which also had far reaching impact on the Western World.

The secularisation of civil society and polity thus was the culmination of numerous factors such as the new scientific discoveries and technological advancements which revolutionised the mode of production both in agriculture and industry unleashing novel socio-religious processes, broadly characterised, as Renaissance and Reformation. Navigation and new markets, emergence of new class of bourgeoisie and consequent contractual relationship, gave rise to free labour and capital accumulation. As a matter of fact the three essential components of secularisation can broadly be summed up as (a) Capitalist modernization, (b) Enlightenment values, humanism and rationalism and (c) emancipatory aspirations of peasantry. Nevertheless, these processes occurred at an uneven pace in different countries of Europe.

Modernity and secularisation should not be viewed as mere ideological constituents of the philosophers and ideologues. Primarily, these twin processes are the outcome of the struggles of the emerging bourgeoisie and the expression of the struggles of peasants under the clutches of feudal lords.

These processes strike social roots in those sectors of society which emerge, *Pari Passu* with development of science and technology which form the infrastructure of the newer production processes.

Although socio-economic and other factors which accelerated secularisation process in Europe had some common origin, the particular historical contexts in which it took shape were strikingly different in most of the nations in Europe. Even in the same country, it underwent significant modifications. Levels of

secularisation of civil society were also dissimilar in different countries of Europe. Religious influence also vary from nation to nation in the West, depending on host of factors, including the state policy, composition of ethnic groups in society, socio-economic context and forms of social stratification. Martin Berger and other critics also held that there was no master trend which all countries in Europe followed uniformly and that there was nothing irreversible about the secularisation process. Over a long period, there was shrinkage in social space occupied by religions, especially in terms of its institutional hold. Even the role and significance of religion as a social institution underwent tremendous change in many Western nations.

Similarly, the application of secularism as an ideology also varies from country to country in the Western world. In the UK for instance, Anglican Christianity is the state religion and a monarch is supposed to be head of the church as well as the state, but the British society is highly secularised. The British state, despite being associated with a Christian denomination, enacts laws on secular considerations and is hardly motivated by Anglican Christian dogmas. The Indian state, on the other hand, is secular and is not associated with any religious denominations, but Indian society is highly religious and the state, despite its professed secularity and neutrality towards religion, acts often under the influence of one or other religion.

In Mexico, state is so strict with the church, that it does not permit the clergy to take part in politics. No clergy man in Mexico can contest elections or associate with political parties. In the U.S.A. its constitution has adopted the doctrine of wall of separation between the church and the state and yet the US dollar mentions the name of God.

In Germany, the state collects taxes on behalf of the different denominational churches and passes on the taxed amount to respective churches. Some of the

states in Germany still make it compulsory for children to study religion in schools. In Norway, it is the state which maintains religious places and assigns funds to churches and mosques for their maintenance.

Trajectory of modernity/secularisation in India has been extremely complex and painful. The British policies put into motion a number of contradictory processes. The development of modernity was not just against the religious clergy and feudal remnants but had to confront the British rulers also. The process of breaking of the hegemony of the priest and Zamindars was painfully slow and remained incomplete for decades leaving the remnants in different pockets which persist till today. The process was initiated by Mahatma Jotirao Phule who founded Satyashodhak Samaj in Maharashtra, with its alliance of middle and low castes, shudra and ati-shudra.

In Tamil Nadu, Periyar E.V.Rama Swamy Naickar began self respect movement (1926) which centered around the struggle for secularisation of the hitherto inarticulate sections of Tamil society. Periyar denounced Brahminism and proclaimed atheism. Another major attempt which had a deeper impact on secularisation of Indian society was the one initiated by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar for restoring self dignity and honour of depressed castes in India. Similarly worker's movement, especially since 1920s broke the long slumber of passivity in social relations.

The secularisation/industrialisation process was slow in its trajectory because of colonial powers who permitted/initiated only as much modernization as was needed for their 'plunder' project. The secular, democratic movement, led by Congress, was also predominantly representing the emerging bourgeoisie which was not very strong and only partly represented the aspirations of the broad layers of society. It sought to take along the anti-caste and workers movements but with much reservation and compromises. It is for

this reason that anti-caste movements never came under the Congress hold, preferring to keep their separate identity.

The weak secularisation movement, represented by the Indian National Congress, was projecting the socio-economic needs of the nascent industrialists, a section of professionals and the modern businessmen. The opposition to their social aspirations came from the entrenched social powers, assuming a communal manifestation. The newer developments were a threat to the established social hierarchy of landlords, moneylenders and the priests. Realising the dangers to their social and political interests, these sectors of society hit back and threw up the political formations like the Muslim League (formed mainly by zamindars and later supported by middle class and businessmen) and Hindu Mahasabha, RSS (Hindu Zamindars, Rajas, Brahmins and Banias). The complex development of this political triangle, British colonial aspirations, freedom struggle led by Gandhi and Nehru and the communal forces, represented by Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha and RSS, led to partition of the country and also retarded the growth of secularisation process to a great extent.

With those Muslims demanding partition going to Pakistan and Hindu communal elements being a small force, the Indian constitution could be framed so as to represent the aspirations and political agendas of the industrialists, workers and Dalits. Constituent Assembly adopted a secular constitution which also represented, partly at least, aspirations of the weaker sections. Nehru was an overarching figure and in bringing in the secular principles at the level of state policy, he had the support of modern industrialists and radical intelligentsia in this endeavour. During this period, the main opponent to modernity/secularisation, the RSS, remained a marginal force, and secularism as a state policy continued to have respectability and admiration from different social

scientists. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that there was a contradiction of sort between the secular constitution and semi-secularised society. However, by and large the critique of the state initially was restricted to its ineffective implementation of secular policies and not the other way round. This was the period when rapid industrialisation, under the state patronage, i.e. the public sector was on, and workers, movement was the major force occupying the social space.

It is only since 1980s with the rapidly changing social scenario that secularism has come under attack. The predominant opposition to secularisation, it seems, has come mainly from the rising middle castes and petty industrialists, traders and middle-class as the decade of 80s is marked by a rapid increase in the ranks of these section of society, thrown up by ushering in of green revolution on one hand, and, expansion of middle class and petty traders, on the other.

The policy adopted by the Congress under late Mrs.Indira Gandhi and subsequently her son late Rajiv Gandhi at the helm of national affairs, aimed at appeasing the Hindu majority in order to make up for its shrinking social among of Dalits, Muslims and OBCs also contributed significantly to aggressively rising communal propaganda launched by Sangh Parivar.

Last four decades of lopsided industrialisation process have also thrown up a newer sector of the middle class, product of screw driver technology, the nervous neo-professionals, who being scared of the assertion of exploited subaltern sections of society feel that these sections under the state patronage of reservation may try to get some share of limited resources depriving it of its control over the same.

Joining the bandwagon of communalists i.e., the different components of Sangh Parivar, this modern version of old Brahmin-Bania combine is hitting out at the secular roots of modernising Indian society. Its

language is the modernised version of traditionality, a more subtle and clever presentation of hierarchical social structures. It talks of 'merit' to snub the Dalits, it talks of "traditions" to keep women in their traditional, hierarchical subordination. The current onslaught of Hindutva is not just an attack on minorities, not just an assertive upper caste/class hegemonic politics, it is the resurfacing of the 'pre-modern' vested interests with collaboration from a section of industrialists, in a new garb of pretentious and false modernity, but actually hostile to modernity as the forces unleashed by modernity are perceived to be anti-thetical to its interests.

The present compilation consists of eight essays. The merit of this compilation is in its attempt to portray a backdrop of the peculiar features of the Reformation, Secularisation, and Modernisation process and religious change in Europe, along with the exhaustive appraisal of the recent debate on the "Crisis of Indian Secularism" and the current success of the Hindutva forces, headed by the Sangh Parivar in striking deeper roots in Indian society.

Asghar Ali Engineer in his essay "Secularism in India:- Theory and Practice" argues that the Western notion of secularism could become popular only among a small section of Indians in urban areas. The word 'secular' in the Indian context can be used only in a pluralist setting and not in the Western sense, that indicated indifference to religion. The protestant movement broke the monopoly of the church and enabled the ruling princes to assert their secular authority. European society unlike India, was for all practical purposes a mono-religious society. It essentially signified a political authority, totally independent of the church. While in the West it was 'religious' which was opposite of 'secular', in India it was 'communal' that was its opposite. Engineer further makes distinction between the Nehruvian concept and

the Gandhij's perception of secularism. Gandhiji stood for equal respect for all religions, and himself was deeply religious person. Nehru's intellectual approach was different, he was a rationalist and humanist and was critical of at least organised religion in India as it always seemed to stand for blind belief, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation and preservation of vested interests.

The Nehruvian concept of secularism, as Engineer suggests, has, of late, come under severe attack from the Sangh Parivar. Sangh Parivar claims to have proposed a concept of positive secularism. But the concept has not been precisely defined by the ideologues of Sangh Parivar, except emphasizing that Nehruvian secularism results in pampering the minorities. The Sangh Parivar tries to define positive secularism as 'Justice for all and discrimination against none'. However, as Engineer argues, in a complex Indian situation, this seems to be a highly naive and oversimplified approach. If such an approach to secularism is accepted, all reservations based on caste or tribe will also have to be abolished, as these reservations also appear to be discriminatory. The Sangh Parivar, in order to win the majority's votes, has made *majorityism* its main plank. This propaganda, although conducted for over a long period, has gained greater acceptability now. Engineer explains the breakdown of the old consensus prevailing among the educated elite about the Nehruvian model of secularism on account of the increasing democratic consciousness of their rights among the minorities on the one hand, and the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes on the other, which has increased threats to the age old powers and privileges enjoyed by the upper caste Hindus.

The author, in conclusion, observes that uneven benefits of modernization and industrialization on one hand, and marginalization of religious tradition, on the other, have led to strong reaction giving legitimation

to reassertion of religious and ethnic identities, putting more and more pressure on the secular state. Prof.D.Smith had visualised that the forces accelerating westernization, modernization, industrialization and urbanization and the break-up of the joint families, higher literacy and educational attainments all would strengthen the secular state and secularism of civil society. But the recent developments have actually weakened and shaken up secular credentials of the secular state and led to increasing communalization of the civil society.

P.R.Ram in his paper "Hindutva Onslaught on Secularism" points out that the Hindutva offensive, which began with the communalization of society in the eighties has got strengthened by sidetracking the basic social agenda of exploited and subaltern sections of society. Along with their high pitched political campaigns aimed to intimidate minorities and other exploited/subaltern sections of society, there has been a strong attack on the secular ethos of society. Keeping in mind the overall change in social values under the impact of modernity and also the electoral compulsions, the author argues, Hindutva on-slaught has adopted its language to suit the changing times, while retaining the core meaning and agenda of its political programme i.e. representing the aspirations of a section of society which stands to benefit from the pre-modern social relations. It will not talk of 'caste abolition' as Ram suggests, but social harmony between different groups, it will not talk of 'workers rights', but of 'occupational families' and workers cultivating 'harmonious relations' with employers, it will not talk of 'gender equality' but of the role of women as mothers and their 'respectable' status in ancient past. These velvet gloves, though highly deceptive, pass off as respectable in the society. It becomes as the 'mass consciousness' has been distorted by it because of its decades long process of 'premodern' value system religious ideology.

Pre-modern value system stands for straight jacketing the roles of exploited and subalterns in a way, so as to become subservient to the interests of elite, and upper castes, despite their claims for not believing in the caste system.

Thus, in a nutshell, Ram remarks, Hindutva is the other of secularisation process. It is the 'other' of change for modern (i.e. equality) relationships. It stands for pre-modern values in the modernist language. In a society with slow paced development, it is the 'permanent opposition' to the process of change towards liberty, equality and fraternity, the flag bearers of secularisation process. It is on the one hand, akin to the middle class based fascist movements which operate more in the political arena and abolish liberal space, straightjacket the roles of exploited sections through terror and invocation of the glorious past, on the other it has similarities with 'fundamentalist' onslaughts in various third world countries, in the form of using the emotive appeal of religion to achieve the similar goals. What is the core commonality between the two is the 'same mass base'. In the former (fascism) the society is already partly secularised so the 'petty bourgeoisie' resorts to terror and invokes the past, while in the latter (Fundamentalism) since the societies are semi secularised, religious emotionalism is able to achieve similar purpose as sought to be achieved by throwing people into gas chamber. It can be substituted by 'mere' anti-Muslim programmes, as the emotional appeals of religion mark up the rest.

Uday Mehta in his work on "Secularism, Religion and State-Western Experience" makes elaborate appraisal of the Western Model. In recent debate on the "Crisis of Indian Secularism", some of the critics assume that the West provides a model of secularism rooted in some identical socio-economic and religious processes, ignoring peculiar historical context of the secularisation process in leading European countries

like Germany, France and England, paving the way for distinct models of development. Mehta's contribution indicates that Reformation took different directions depending on the peculiar socio-economic and historical context in which it operated in these countries. Not only that but the response of different social strata such as nobility, monarchy, various plebeian groups, peasantry, artisans and others also strikingly differed in these nations. There could be no comparison for instance, with the militant, heroic peasant struggles led by Munzer with similar movements in England or France. The radical programme of social transformation unleashed by the French Revolution had no parallel either in England or Germany.

Similarly, decline of religion either before or since Reformation was not an irreversible process. Along with the decline of the feudal church, monasteries and state sponsored religious structures, one finds, emergence of parallel religious movements in the form of rise of numerous radical religious sects as in the case of England, feminization of religion as in case of France and radical prolonged peasant war under the religious disguise in Germany. Similarly the connotation of the term secular is not identical in any of the these countries. Certainly it does not necessarily imply non-religious or anti-religious phenomenon, unless by religion reference is restricted to the state sponsored, established religious institutional structures, such as the Catholic church and monastery in medieval period, and the state church and religious institutions even in post-Reformation period.

His study also brings out that during Reformation, post-Reformation and even modern period, with the decline of the state patronised religious structures and the spread of secularisation process in civil society, culminating in secular polity, vast bulk of oppressed and weaker strata in Western society, inclusive of women, found it convenient and legitimate to articulate

their aspirations as well as their protest against social and economic exploitation and to gain social approval through varied religious and social movements. In this respect even in India, right from the vedic and post-vedic period and even after the advent of the British oppressed strata registered their dissent or protest and thereby created alternative forms of devotion either by fresh interpretation of dominant religious traditions or by paving way for more democratic egalitarian religious traditions through their social and religious movements.

Rohini in her paper "Struggle against Communalism, Defining a Positive Alternative" stresses the need for greater clarity of the terms such as democracy, secularism, communalism, religion, community and identity which are freely used by political leaders, trade unionists, feminists, Dalits and others without spelling out their implications. She further suggests that in the Indian context, secular state can't remain completely separate from religion, but it should intervene in religious practices where it becomes necessary in order to protect fundamental human and democratic rights. In any case, the state must not selectively intervene only to appease either Muslim Fundamentalists or majoritarian Hindu Nationalists as it has often happened in this country. She concludes her article with the remark that creation of a movement with a positive alternative to communalism also implies a radical critique of most of the existing progressive movements. Their paralysis, when confronted with the communal violence of December 1992, and January, 1993, underlines their sectional character, opposed as they are to one form of oppression and authoritarianism but not to others; thus the trade union movement stands seriously compromised as being seriously contaminated with communal elements, the feminist movement has raised slogans amenable to communal interpretation, and even Dalits have not been immune to the false promises of Hindu Rashtra. On the other

hand, the anti-communal secular movement as it suffers from the same kind of narrowness can never become a mass movement, while it remains indifferent to class, caste and gender oppression. She suggests that the alternative is not that each individual has to participate in every struggle, but rather that the movement must be one which transcends particular interests.

Asghar Ali Engineer in his other paper on "Religion and Secularism" as the title suggests focuses on the relationship between religion and secularism in the context of the Western experience and the Indian situation. Engineer suggests that the medieval revolt against the Roman Papacy, as articulated in the movement for Reformation was not so much against the church as against its greed, its lust and its will to dominate and not against the religion as such. Secondly, the European society, until the Reformation was a mono-religious society comprising Catholic Christianity. In sharp contrast to European experience, India was pluralistic both religiously as well as culturally even before the Christian era. Further, as the author suggests, neither Hinduism, nor Islam, the two major religious traditions of India since 1000.A.D. had a concept of a church. Similarly, unlike Europe, this country has no record of struggle against the religious authority and until late nineteenth century there was no concept of secularism in political sense at all. Right from the beginning the Indian secularism drew its strength from its pluralism, as is evident from the assurance given by the Indian National Congress to all religious communities for just and fair representation, right from its inception.

Gandhi, unlike Pandit Nehru, Engineer argues, sought to develop creative fusion between religion and secularism from Hindu tradition as Maulana Azad and Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani upheld the concept of secular and composite nationalism, despite their deep religious convictions. Indian constitution, the

author argues, while articulating this aspiration represents the creative blend between state secularism and religiosity of civil society. In conclusion, Engineer suggests that religion, if properly understood and interpreted, cannot be antagonistic to healthy secularism. In fact creative inter-action between the two, will make life much more meaningful.

Uday Mehta in his write up on "Social Scientists and Secularism - Critique of the Critics" argues that a recent debate on "The Crisis of Indian Secularism" as initiated by some prominent social scientists like T.N.Madan, Ashis Nandy and M.N. Srinivas on the one hand and the Sangh Parivar on the other, reminds us of the change experienced by the Indian polity, economy and society in the last two decades in comparison with the socio-economic and political scenario that prevailed till almost the mid-sixties, when the state was condemned for its weak secular character. The author is of the view that the current discourse on secularism has become so elitist and sterile that one wonders what useful purpose it could serve for the vast majority of oppressed and exploited strata of this country. For Hindu nationalists, the labelling of charge against the Congress and left-liberal model of secularism, as pseudo-secular has become a convenient device and also an effective strategy for popularising and making their communal appeal acceptable to majority of Indian electorates. Left liberal advocacy of secularism with their elitist thrust and upper caste bias has hardly proved effective in meeting the challenge posed by Hindu-nationalists or the Muslim-Fundamentalists. Arguments advanced by critics like Nandy, Madan and Srinivas, knowingly or unknowingly strengthen the case of Hindu communal elements in this country. Unfortunately, hardly any serious attempt barring the radical critic like Anandhi's (Contending Identities—Dalits and Secular Politics in Madras Slums, 1995) has been made to show the

relevance of secularism and secular ideals for vast majority of toiling people in this country, who are left with no option but to wage bitter struggle for survival in the face of globalisation and liberalisation policy, adopted by the Indian government in recent years. Secularism vindicates their basic democratic rights for equality, Justice and freedom from exploitative and oppressive conditions of existence. Advocacy of secularism, therefore, also implies advocacy of the cause of working people irrespective of their caste, class, gender and creed, in their struggle for liberation from all forms of exploitation and oppression.

Irfan Engineer in his paper "Religion, State and Secularism" argues that without understanding the role of religion, a proper understanding of secularism in India is unimaginable. He explains the present global appeal of religion to decadent values like consumerism, five star culture, drug industry, speculative activities, increasing insecurity, alienation, individualism, and dehumanisation of people the world over. He also suggests that religion by itself may not be reactionary or progressive, as that would depend on the section which is employing it as an instrument to further its interests. Unlike the West, religion in India was never confronted by science and renaissance. Science in this country, was never siezed of the problems that trouble the toiling masses. Religion, being deep rooted in this country, he suggests, has been utilized by both, the ruling classes as the well as forces that want to change the *status-quo*.

Ram in his paper "Towards Secular Democracy" suggests that understanding of secularism and secularisation is the prerequisite for evolving the future strategies in social and political arena. The electoral politics has taken a turn for the worse from 80s and the rise of BJP as the frightening political force has woken-up the political parties to the threat of saffron brigade occupying the corridors of power. The

response to this threat, to a large extent, also depends on understanding the character of Sangh Parivar. The social scientists have put forward two major viewpoints. One section opines that Sangh Parivar is fascistic while the other posits that it is more akin to a fundamentalist movement. P.R. Ram, takes off from here to weave together the contributions of different left liberal ideologues in an attempt to understand the strategies which can be employed in building a secular democratic platform. Ram, while reemphasising the need to look at the role of movements led by Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar in secularisation process, tries to bring forth lack of emphasis of left scholars in delineating the secularisation process in India. Dalit struggles have not been given due importance by the Indian left, barring few exceptions, and that probably explains the stunted secularisation process here and the "Success" of Hindu Right in denigrating the concept of secularisation.

It is clear, as the author suggests that Sangh Parivar's political project involves a frontal attack on liberal ethos of society, it is an attempt to straitjacket the roles of exploited, oppressed and subaltern sections of society. These struggling sections of society have been putting forward their political programmes which hint at the threat of stifling of their rights due to this offensive of Sangh Parivar, but an explicit programme to take on the might of Hindu Rightism is not posited. While separately, all these sections, workers, women, dalits and minorities realise the naked suppression of their social, economic and human rights, with Hindutva brigade occupying the seats of power, none of these movements has been able to throw up the platforms which can articulate the aspirations of these sections. These issues are in the process of churning and more needs to be thought about them. But, as the author suggests, it is sure that all those concerned with social movements of exploited sections of society have to put

their heads together to evolve a strategy to counter the ascendancy of Sangh Parivar.

Finally, with regard to the present compilation, we would like to stress that all contributors by and large hold the view that the historical context of secular polity and secularisation process in India sharply differ from the secularisation process and advent of modernity in Europe. Secondly, secularisation process and secularism as an ideology have neither been unilinear, nor uniform in major countries of Europe. Similarly, historically also it has not been irreversible process. Thirdly, while recognising the elitist framework and upper caste bias of the Nehruvian model of secularism, one should not overlook the fact that the constitutional projection of Indian secularism has been an outcome of the deliberations of those who were in the forefront of the freedom struggle, and the consensus arrived at historical Karachi Convention of the Indian National Congress in 1931, keeping in view the peculiar socio-economic and cultural context of Indian situation. Fourthly, in India as well as in the Western world, one must take note of the role of religion as the instrument of the dominant strata to perpetuate and consolidate their ideological hold over people and the social movements - evolving their own religious traditions and idioms in order to articulate their grievances and to register their protest against inhuman conditions of existence. Lastly, secularism, if its to be meaningful in Indian context, has to be viewed as a human liberation project, protecting and promoting the struggles of the oppressed for defending their basic democratic economic rights, so vital for their dignified human existence.

We feel such interpretation of secularism and secularisation process will make it more creative and meaningful project.

*Asghar Ali Engineer - Uday Mehta*

# I

## RELIGION AND SECULARISM

*Asghar Ali Engineer*

The relationship between religion and secularism is highly controversial and vehemently debated. There are totally opposite points of view. Those who are inclined towards the atheistic view point, maintain that there is no positive relationship between the two and that the two are antagonistic. But those who uphold the religious point of view, either reject the concept of secularism as hostile to religion or feel that secularism means *sarva dharma sambhava* (i.e. an equal respect for all religions). All these formulations are challenged by one group or the other and the controversy goes on. Obviously, it is very difficult to evolve any definition or approach acceptable to all. In social sciences, controversies are a norm rather than an exception.

It is also important to note that no concept can be valid if it is not related to the social context. An abstract definition, however elaborate and eloquent, is meaningless without relating it to some context. Secularism also cannot be defined without relating it to the socio-political context. One should not go by the dictionary meaning of the term. Philology by itself cannot help much. What is true in the western context, may not be necessarily valid in Indian context and vice versa. Thus, one has to bear the concrete circumstances in mind.

Secularism is generally defined as what is this

worldly and non-transcendental and non-metaphysical. As far as the dictionary meaning is concerned the Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines it as (1) "the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state" and (2) "the view that national education should be purely secular". The Chamber's dictionary defines secularism as "the belief that the state morals, education, etc. should be independent of religion.." It is fine. But as pointed out above, dictionary meanings do not, if torn out of the real life context, help much. When one is dealing with a particular state and society complex problems may arise. The crucial question would be what should be the relationship between the state and religion? Should the state be dictated or dominated by religion or should religion be subservient to the state? Some would also maintain that the state should have nothing to do with religion. It should stay completely neutral. Until the Renaissance period the state was subservient to the church. It was only after a long struggle that the state could free itself from the domination of papal authority. It was really a long and bitter struggle. It became possible for the state to free itself from the domination of the church due to the emergence of a bourgeois class in Europe. The bourgeois class felt stifled under the domination of the church. It required a free society for its expansion.

Of course, the European bourgeoisie found a spokesman *par excellence* in Martin Luther. Luther fought against the domination of the church and the bourgeoisie class and attempted to revive Greek culture and philosophy which was based on humanitarian principles. The revolt against the church was not a revolt against religion, it was a revolt against corruption, greed and domination. William Durand, Bishop of Mende, submitted to the Council of Vienne (1311) a

treatise containing these words:

"The whole Church might be reformed if the Church of Rome would begin by removing evil examples from herself...by which men are scandalized, and the whole people, as it were, infected...For in all lands....the Church of Rome is in ill repute, and all cry..... that within her bosom all men, from the greatest even unto the least, have their hearts upon covetousness... That the whole Christian folk take from the clergy pernicious examples of gluttony is clear and notorious, since the clergy feast more luxuriously...than princes and kings." (See Will Durant *The Reformation*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1957, Pp-7). The high Spanish prelate Alvaro Pelayo said, "Wolves are in control of the Church and feed on the blood" of the Christian folk. Edward III of England, himself adept in taxation, reminded Clement VI that "the successor of the Apostles was commissioned to lead the Lord's sheep to pastures, not to fleece them." In Germany papal collectors were hunted down, imprisoned, mutilated, strangled. In 1372 the clergy of Cologne, Bonn, Xanten, and Mainz bound themselves by oath not to pay the tithe levied by Gregory XI. (*Ibid*)

Thus, it will be seen that the revolt against the Church was a revolt against its greed, its lust and its will to dominate. If the Church had followed the Christian ethics of love, simplicity, and renunciation of worldly desires, such a revolt would not have taken place. Also the expanding bourgeoisie needed liberal attitudes and laws and did not want to be restricted by theological considerations. For them this worldly considerations were far more important than the other worldly ones. Thus, secularism as an ideology, became more and more important for the emerging merchant class. This class was more interested in matters of profit and loss in this world than rewards and punishments in the other. It wanted to dominate the state so that it could make laws in its own interest.

Secular ideology of the merchant class was thus pitted against the religious ideology of the Church.

It is also important to note that the European society until then was a mono-religious society. And until the Church split, there was only one brand of Christianity i.e. Catholicism (except in certain parts of Eastern Europe where the Orthodox Church dominated). It was only after the Reformation that the Protestant Christians came into existence. Thus, the European experience, unlike the Indian one, was quite different. India was pluralistic both religiously as well as culturally even before the Christian era. Both Christianity and Islam came to India as soon as they came into existence further enriching its pluralistic experience. Also, neither Hinduism, nor Islam - the two major religious traditions of India since 1000 A.D. (Christianity remained confined to relatively small number of people for various reasons not to be gone into here) had a concept of a church. Though Hinduism has a concept of priesthood, Islam does not have even that. Thus, in both the religious traditions it was not possible for any religious establishment to dominate the lives of all as in the Catholic Church. Hence, no revolt was possible encouraging secular ideology as it happened in Europe.

The experiential context of India was very different. Europe had to wage a struggle against an established Church. From the 15th century onwards it began experiencing a Renaissance and went through the process of secularization. There was no such struggle in India against any religious authority and also until the late nineteenth century there was no concept of secularism in the political sense at all. It should also be noted that generally secularism and democracy go hand in hand though there can always be exceptions. India, until the advent of the British rule, had not experienced political democracy. There was no system of elections at all. It was feudal monarchy and monarchs ruled according to

the religious scriptures of the respective religious or caste communities. There was no concept of secular laws. The concept of secular laws emerged in the Indian society only with the advent of British rule.

However, the Indian society was very different from the European society in its socio-religious structure and could not, therefore, imitate the western model of secularism. It had to evolve its own model of secularism from its own experiential context. Since there was no struggle against any established religious authority, there was no question of any resentment against religion. Also, as pointed out above, India was rich in pluralistic traditions, and mainly relied on them for developing its concept of secularism. For example, when the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885, it had to assure all religious communities that it (i.e. the Indian National Congress) was not a Hindu organization and that all the religious communities will be given just and fair representation. Right at the beginning, the INC leaders made the three presidents of the INC from the minority communities (W.C.Bonerjee, a Christian, Badruddin Tyebji, a Muslim and Dadabhai Naoroji, a Parsi).

Thus, right from the beginning, Indian secularism drew its strength from pluralism. Secularism in the Indian tradition, was not the opposite of religion but was related to communalism, while Europe, being mono-religious, secularism was not the opposite of communalism as there was no struggle for domination between various religious communities. This is the crucial difference between the western and Indian concepts of secularism. In Europe there was a struggle between the Christians and the Church, while in India the struggle was between one religious community and the other. In India the saner leaders of both the communities emphasised justice in power-sharing without questioning the religious authority of either community at any stage.

In fact the leaders of minority communities feared domination by the majority community and interference in their religious affairs and the leaders of the majority community sought to assuage the feelings of minority communities by assuring them that they would be free to follow their own religions. Such leaders were called secular while those of the majority community who resented unrestricted religious freedom for minorities were called communal. Thus, in Indian secularism an anti-religious attitude did not play a part. When the concept of secularism came to be accepted in Indian politics, beginning with later part of 19th century, Indian society was deeply religious and people jealously guarded their religious rites as well as religious identities. Even the modern reform movements, both in the Hindu and Muslim societies were launched within the frame-work of respective religions. Raja Rammohan Roy and Sir Syed both argued in favour of social reforms from their respective scriptures. Other social reformers as well followed the same strategy.

The seminal political leaders who were precursors of the freedom movement like Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Azad, Maulana Muhammad Ali and others were all believers themselves and adopted the religious idiom to mobilize the Indian masses for the freedom struggle. The only exceptions were Nehru and Jinnah who believed in employing the purely secular idiom (though Jinnah switched over to the communal idiom in the later phase of his political career). Tilak and Gandhi wrote a commentary on the Gita and dealt with its philosophy of action to inspire the Hindus to act against the foreign rulers and asked them not to be resigned to their fate. These commentaries on the Gita were widely read and discussed and left their impact on the people's mind.

Tilak also organised religious festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi and Shiv Jayanti for this purpose. Gandhiji

used the concept of Ram Rajya to draw the Hindu masses on the one hand, and the Khilafat movement to draw the Muslim masses, on the other. Gandhiji's concept of satyagraha, also drawn from Indian tradition, had an electrifying effect on the Indian masses. His insistence on non-violence also had religious bearings. The concept of non-violence, needless to say, is also drawn from Indian religious tradition. Gandhi was a deeply religious person and drew inspiration for his political actions from his religious beliefs.

Gandhiji even used to say that he was proud of being Sanatani Hindu. He even thought that religion was as necessary for politics, as a nose for breathing. Yet Gandhiji was considered to be secular. He never approved of communal politics. In fact he laid down his life for the sake of Muslims. He held a sincere belief that the essence of all religions is one and his prayer meetings were never complete without a recital from the holy scriptures of all faiths. For Gandhiji, the basis of Hindu-Muslim unity was also religion. The political unity, in his view, should also be based on ones religious duty to unite with other human beings. He writes in the Harijan of July 6, 1947 that "...by trying to befriend Muslims I have only proved myself a true Hindu and have rightly served the Hindus and Hinduism. The essence of true religious teachings is that one should serve and befriend all." To strengthen his point then he goes on to quote a couplet~from Iqbal's famous poem *Naya Shivala* "*Mazhab nahin sikhata aapas mein bayr rakhna*" meaning, religion does not teach us to bear ill-will towards one another. It is easy enough to be friendly with one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business."

However, despite his religiosity, Gandhi can never be accused of being communal. India of his dreams was a secular India. He writes in Harijan of August

31, 1947, "...Some Hindus are now beginning to feel that they have the upper hand, and some Musalmans are afraid that they will have to play the underdog in the Union today. This will be shameful indeed. If a minority in India, which is a minority on the score of its religious professions, is made to feel small on this account, I can only say that this India is not the India of my dreams. In India for whose fashioning I have worked all my life, every man enjoys equality of status, whatever his religion is. The State is bound to be wholly secular. I go so far as to say that no denominational, educational institution in it should enjoy State patronage."

No one will dispute that Gandhiji was as secular as any one in India despite his deep religiosity. He never compromised his religious beliefs and yet he was, I dare say, a spotlessly secular person. His secular credentials were beyond any doubt. He further observes in the same issue of Harijan, "All subjects will thus be equal in the eye of the law. But every single individual will be free to pursue his own religion without let or hindrance, so long as it does not transgress the common law. The question of protection of minorities is not good enough for me; it rests upon the recognition of religious grouping between citizens of the same State. What I wish India to do is to assure liberty of religious profession to every single individual. Then only India can be great, for it was perhaps the one nation in the ancient world which had recognized cultural democracy, whereby it is held that the roads to God are many, but goal is one and the same. In fact roads are as many, as there are individuals in the world."

Again he said in his speech on October 15, 1947 which was published in Harijan, October 26, 1947, "We must not produce a State in which respectable life is impossible and still claim that we do not want the Muslims to go. If, inspite of really equal treatment,

they (the Muslims) choose to go to Pakistan (this speech was made immediately after partition), it is their look-out. There should be nothing in our behaviour to scare away the Muslims. We should be correct in our conduct. Then we can serve India and save Hinduism. We cannot do so by killing the Muslims or driving them away or suppressing them in any way...."

From the above speech of Gandhiji also it can be seen that from him the true worth of Hinduism is in giving all - Hindus and non-Hindus an equal status. Then only one can truly serve the cause of Hinduism. The real worth of one's religion is tolerance and respect for the other. Gandhiji took up the Khilafat movement to convince Muslims that as a Hindu he cares for their religious sentiments and that as a true patriot, he ought to care for religious concerns of others, he must feel emotional pain of other fellow Indians. One can call it the highest and noblest degree of religiosity. At this highest degree, religiosity and secularism fuse into one another. Tolerance and respect for the other is the essence of true faith and in Indian conditions, secularism also signifies tolerance of the other rather than hostility to religion.

Gandhiji also had interesting views on religion and nationalism. Thus, he writes in Harijan of December 7, 1947, "A friend asked me the other day whether I share the opinion, often expressed, that as between nationalism and religion, the former was superior to the latter. I said that the two were dissimilar and that there could be no comparison between dissimilars. Each was equal to the other in its own place. No man who values his religion as also his nationalism can barter away the one for the other. Both are equally dear to him. He renders unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's. And if Caesar, forgetting his limits, oversteps them, a man of God does not transfer his loyalty to another Caesar, but knows how to deal with the usurpation. A rehearsal

of this difficulty gave rise to Satyagraha.”

This is a very balanced and commendable approach. It is, one may say, even superior to the western concept. In western secularism, the nation is at centre stage. The nation is above everything else, even above God, i.e. moral considerations. It was this kind of approach that led to two world wars in the twentieth century resulting in the slaughter of millions of human beings. It is also to be remembered here that for Gandhiji, religion was no mere bundle of rituals. Above all, religion signified for him a deep moral commitment. He lived and died for this commitment. For him secularism was not the uncontrolled passion for this worldly matters. Since his secularism was born of his deep religiosity, it signified, above all, this moral commitment. Thus, he established a creative relationship between religion and secularism.

If Gandhiji was developing this creative fusion between religion and secularism from Hindu tradition, Maulana Azad and Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani did it from within Islamic tradition. Both Maulana Azad and Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani were, like Gandhiji, deeply religious persons. Again, like Gandhiji, both upheld the concept of secular and composite nationalism and vehemently opposed the creation of Pakistan. While supporting the concept of composite nationalism, both derived their inspiration from the Qur'an, on one hand, and the Prophet's Sunna, on the other. Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani wrote a book *Muttahidah Qaumiyyat aur Islam* (Composite Nationalism and Islam) and showed, by quoting chapters and verses from the Qur'an, that it is in no way against the Islamic tradition to support the concept of composite nationalism. The Maulana opposed the concept of Pakistan on the basis of his religious convictions. He also saw nothing wrong in supporting the concept of a secular state as long as that state fully guaranteed

freedom of religion, both at the individual and corporate levels. He did not think it was necessary to establish a theocratic state in order to fulfill one's religious commitment.

Like Gandhiji, Maulana Husain Ahmad also had to face the fury of Muslim fanatics. But the Maulana had deeper religious convictions and stood by his commitment to composite and secular nationalism and never wavered even once. He was attacked several times by those who stood for the Pakistan demand. He faced these attacks and yet tried to convince the Muslims, that they should stand by united India as Islam will have much greater scope in a united country instead of being threatened.

Maulana Azad was another eminent Muslim theologian who propounded the concept of *rububiyah* and *wahdat-e-Din* (i.e. universal sustenance and unity of religion). The Maulana argued that Allah is *Rabbul Alamin* (Sustainer of the whole universe) and not *Rabbul Muslimin* (sustainer of Muslims). Thus' one should not have a closed mind towards others who do not follow Islam. Similarly the Maulana argued in favour of *wahdat-e-din* i.e. oneness of all religions. Both these doctrines were quite revolutionary in their implications. They demolished the walls of hatred and conflict between different faiths. It is also important to note that the Maulana was writing all this during the twenties when the Hindu-Muslim tensions were escalating after Mahatma Gandhi suspended the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad too, like Gandhiji, had deep religious convictions and yet he was meticulously secular in his political commitment. He was also greatly opposed to the partitioning of the country on religious lines. He opposed communal politics with great vehemence.

Jawaharlal Nehru of course had no religious convictions and his secularism was that of an agnostic. He was greatly drawn towards the western concept of

secularism which is indifferent to, or even hostile in some cases, to religion. He was greatly attracted towards modernity, science and technology. Nehru says about religion, "Instead of encouraging curiosity and thought, they (i.e. religions) have preached a philosophy of submission to nature, to established churches, to the prevailing social order, and everything that is." (The Discovery of India, Bombay, 1960, p.524). He also observes about religion, "The belief in a super-natural agency which ordains everything has led to a certain irresponsibility on the social plain, and emotion and sentimentality have taken the place of reasoned thought and inquiry. Religion, though it has undoubtedly brought comfort to innumerable human beings and established society by its values, has checked the tendency to change and progress inherent in human society." (*Ibid.*) Nehru also thinks that religion "is narrow and intolerant of other opinions and ideas; it is self-centred and egoistic and it often allows itself to be exploited by the self-seekers and opportunists" (An Autobiography, Madras, 1962, p-377).

Strictly speaking Nehru's views about religion are based on what certain sections of people make of religion. The meaning of religion varies from one person to another. All religious people are not dogmatic, narrow-minded, ignorant, superstitious and intolerant. Dogmatism and narrow-mindedness or fanaticism are psychological rather than religious categories. In that way even an atheist or agnostic can be dogmatic or intolerant and even fanatic. Religion *per se* is neither intolerant nor tends to promote ignorance and superstition or opposes change. It is religious priests who have vested interest in maintaining the status quo and keeping people ignorant and superstitious so that they will remain under their influence. Conservatism and orthodoxy are also mental and psychological attitudes. Like in religion, there are people displaying

conservatism and orthodoxy even in political and social beliefs.

In fact truly religious persons like Gandhi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and several others were neither intolerant, dogmatic or fanatical nor did they oppose change. Both Gandhiji and Maulana Azad explored religious resources from their respective faith traditions to promote tolerance and respect for other faiths and openness to new ideas. Even in Europe, the struggle during the period of Reformation was against domination by the Church, rather than against Christianity. Martin Luther himself was a firm believer in Christianity. He fought against the political domination of the Roman Catholic Church and also propounded the doctrine that no intercessor was needed between God and human person. Belief in religion does not mean accepting all the inherited theological dogmas and beliefs. Believing and critical thinking are not necessarily contradictory to each other, as often thought. Something can be held with strong conviction only after it is critically examined. A true religious mind, ought to be a critical mind. The intellect is the most reliable ally of faith. Anything believed without critical inquiry is imitation, not faith and one must distinguish between the two. Most of us are imitators of socio-religious traditions, rather than believers in true religious spirit.

It is also thought that religion opposes social and scientific change while secularism promotes change. In fact the process of secularisation is the process of change. Again, it is not religion which resists change; it is human psychological resistance which is sought to be legitimised by invoking certain religious dogmas. What a true religious believer does or should opposes is purposeless or value-free change. Change is not desirable by itself. Any change should be in conformity with fundamental values. A secular change could be value-free or value neutral change. It may or may not

promote human welfare. Some vested interests may push certain changes if they suit them. A truly religious person would not oppose change but would like to critically examine its consequences for humanity. For example, the modern consumer based economy is more interested in promoting consumerism which is totally insensitive to ecological consequences. These technological changes promote the over-consumption of earth's resources and ecological balance. To conserve these resources and maintain ecological balance is highly necessary for the survival of humanity on earth. Modern industries and automobiles are also highly polluting and destructive to health. A truly religious person would not, therefore, endorse these changes blindly. He/she would critically examine the positive and negative consequences and then endorse or oppose any change. For example, a religious person maintains that the entire universe is creation of God including ecological balance and the destruction of God's creation is a sinful act. Similarly, a religious person would also vehemently oppose the destruction of the sustainable resources of earth for the consumption lust of a small percentage of humanity, ignoring claims of future generations. Now ecologists are opposing the construction of big dams as the same results in submersion of huge forest areas and fertile lands, leading to ecologically negative consequences on the one hand, and human misery on the other.

Many modern medicines are pushed by powerful multi-nationals despite their harmful side-effects. Thus, economic vested interests welcome new discoveries and technologies just because they bring them windfall profits, though they may be grossly harmful in their consequences. Many discoveries and technological changes become highly controversial for their consequences even among those who uphold secular ethics. Cloning is the latest example of such controversies even among secularists. Many doctors

are opposing its use for humans. A religious person also can oppose it on ethical grounds. Every change should be critically examined for its real or possible consequences for humanity.

The application of secularism (as an ideology) also varies from country to country in the western world. In the U.K. Anglican Christianity is the state religion and a monarch is supposedly head of the Church as well as the State, but the British society is highly secularized. The British State, despite being associated with a Christian denomination, enacts laws on secular considerations and is hardly motivated by Anglican Christian dogmas. The Indian State, on the other hand, is secular and is not associated with any religious denomination, but Indian society is highly religious and the State, despite its professed secularity and neutrality towards religion, its acts often come under the influence of one or the other religion. Some of its enactments are also influenced by religious considerations.

In Mexico, the State is so strict with the Church that it does not permit the clergy to take part in politics. No clergyman in Mexico can contest elections or associate with political parties. The State in Mexico jealously guards its secular principles in the strictest possible sense. In the US the Constitution has adopted the doctrine of "wall of separation between the Church and the State" and yet the US dollar mentions the name of God. God is invoked by the US senate also. But there ends the relationship between the State and the Church in the USA. The Church cannot influence the State affairs in any other respect. Legislation is not affected by religious considerations by and large though controversies like pro-life and pro-choice in matters of abortion goes on. Some schools in the USA, particularly in the more conservative South, still insist on teaching the flat-earth theory.

In Germany, the State collects taxes on behalf of

the different denominational churches and passes on the tax collected to the respective churches. Some of the states in Germany still make it compulsory for children to study religion in schools. France, on the other hand, did not permit a Muslim girl to wear *chador* (head-covering) on grounds that France is secular, but it does not object to the Catholic nuns wearing Christian dress in schools. In Norway and some other countries of Europe it is the State which maintains religious places and assigns funds to churches and mosques etc. for their maintenance. In Germany too, such funds are given to religious places.

Thus, it will be seen that in the western countries also there is no uniform concept of secularism and the relationship between the State and the Church varies from country to country. Much depends on the history of the relationship of state and church in that country. One should not adopt any secular dogma but adopt it to the specific conditions of one's country. Indian secularism also has its own specificity. Though the State is secular in the sense, that it is not associated with any religion, the Indian Constitution permits all its citizens to profess, practice and preach one's religion both, individually as well as collectively. It also allows all religious communities to practice their respective religion-based personal laws though the directive principles of the Constitution direct the State to enact a common civil code.

Thus, it will be seen that the Indian Constitution is a creative blend between state secularism and religiosity of the civil society. It is a creative and balanced relationship between secularism and religion. The Indian Constitution treats all citizens equal, irrespective of caste, creed, race, sex or religion. Article 14 guarantees equality before law. It says, "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India." Article 15 says, 1) "The State shall not

discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. And 2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing, roads and places of public resort maintained, wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public."

Thus, the article does away with caste discriminations and Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of employment. Articles 25 to 30 guarantee freedom of religion, of culture and language. Article 30 also guarantees to minorities the right to establish their own educational institutions. These Articles from 25 to 30 are extremely significant as far as minority rights are concerned, the minorities could be religious or linguistic.

Thus, it will be seen that the spirit of Indian secularism is not denial of any religion or religious practice but religio-cultural pluralism. It is certainly better than atheistic secularism as the latter does not admit the right of citizens to believe. Such a variety of secularism can thrive only in authoritarian set-ups, not in democratic ones. Democratic secularism, as the Indian secularism is, allows every citizen right to or not to believe. Thus, democratic secularism is complementary and not antagonistic to the right to believe. The Constitution upholds the Indian spirit of pluralism. While the Western society historically has been mono-religious and mono-cultural, Indian society has always been pluralistic. In India several religious traditions have co-existed for centuries. The traditional Indian society too treated all religious-traditions with equal respect and Indian secularism has inherited this rich tradition.

Indian pluralism is best summed up in two maxims

i.e. *ekam sad vipra bahuda vadanti* (i.e. That which exists is One; sages call it by various names) and *sarva dharma sambhava* (All religions should be equally respected. Vivekananda put it very tersely in Chicago in 1895 when he said, "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we (also) accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth." (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.I, Calcutta, 1972, p-3)

Vivekananda also said, "[We] not only tolerate, but we Hindus accept every religion, praying in the mosque of the Muhammadans, worshiping the fire of the Zoroastrians, and kneeling before the Cross of Christians. Knowing that all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of them marking a stage of progress" [*Ibid*, p-3331-32]. The Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad contains the essence of universal religion when it proclaims "From Delusion lead me to Truth. From Darkness lead me to Light. From Death lead me to Immortality." I.3.28)

Islam too emphasises the pluralist nature of human society and inculcates in its believers, a respect for other faiths which are mentioned in the holy Qur'an which encourages pluralism when it says, "For every one of you, we appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you (pluralism, variety of religions, laws and ways). So vie one with another in virtuous deeds" (5:48). The Qur'anic proclamation is a very significant one. It poses pluralism as a challenge to entire humanity to live in peace with the 'other' and requires it to vie

one with the other in virtuous deeds. The essential message of the Qur'an is thus *istibaq fi'l kjayrat* i.e. vie with each other in good deeds. The Qur'an clearly discourages believers to enter into theological polemics and instead encourages people to Excel each other in good deeds.

The Qur'an also proclaims that *la ikrah fi' al- din* i.e. there is no compulsion in religion. Allah only sends guidance, it is up to people to accept or reject it. Those who reject will deprive themselves of the divine wisdom and those who believe will emerge from darkness of ignorance into the light of guidance. The Qur'an also teaches that "And abuse not those who worship other than Allah, lest, exceeding the limits, they abuse Allah through ignorance. Thus, to every people have We made their deeds fair-seeming..." (6:109).

Thus, it will be seen that it is a very important doctrine of the Qur'an—a doctrine which accepts every person's right to believe what he wishes to believe in keeping with his conscience. To every people, the Qur'an says, "Allah makes their deeds fair-seeming. So others have no right to attack them". The Qur'an also says that there cannot be compulsion in the matter of religion. Thus, the Qur'an makes it obligatory for all Muslims to respect other faiths and other's right to believe and do what they like. Allah alone will decide who is right and who is wrong. The Qur'an also maintains that Allah has sent His prophets to all nations to teach in their language. All these prophets brought the truth from Allah and, therefore, none can be false. This too clearly leads to pluralism.

The Sufis were open to all faiths. They showed great respect for Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in India. Elsewhere too, they showed respect for other faiths like Judaism and Christianity. Muhiyuddin Ibn Arabi known as Shaikh al-Akbar i.e. the Chief of the Tribe of Sufis founded the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*

(i.e. Unity of Being) which had radical consequences as far as unity of all human beings was concerned. He, much before, Vivekananda, said, my heart is a centre of love and hence a mosque, a temple, a synagogue and a church.

Thus, we see that both Hinduism and Islam, the two great religious traditions of India, emphasise pluralism as a way of life. The other faith traditions like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, are no less pluralistic in nature. The *anekantwad* (i.e. truth has many manifestations or that one reality can be described in many ways) is the central doctrine of Jainism. Sikhism too, is a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam and non-exclusivistic by nature. Guru Nanak held both Islam and Hinduism in great esteem.

Thus, it will be seen that the Indian tradition is very rich in religious pluralism and the essence of Indian secularism is pluralism and respect for all faiths. While the western secularism accepts the supremacy of reason over faith, Indian secularism brings about synthesis of reason and faith. Neither reason, nor faith can be absolute. While an uncontrolled absolute reason can become absolute disaster, an absolute exclusivistic faith can degenerate into blind imitation leading to stagnation.

Religion, if properly understood and interpreted, cannot be antagonistic to healthy secularism. In fact creative interaction between the two, will make life much more meaningful.

## II

# Secularism, Secularization and Modernity: A Sociological Perspective of the Western Model.

*Uday Mehta*

This article attempts to & make somewhat elaborate appraisal of the Western model of secularism. We thought of undertaking this exercise for three important reasons, one, in recent debate on the "crisis of secularism" in this country, some of the critics, like Madan and Ashis Nandy base their critique, assuming that the West provides" a model of secularism" rooted in some identical socio-culture and religious processes ignoring the peculiar historical, socio-economic and political characteristics of the secularization process even in leading European nations, such as, Germany, France and England, paving way for distinct models of development.

Secondly, most of these critics in recent debate have argued by focussing on secularism as a state sponsored ideology, side-tracking completely its relevance as a major social phenomenon, emerging at a particular historical juncture, as an outcome of various cultural, political and religious and economic forces in Europe. Restricting the focus of the debate on secularism as a state ideology or using it as an instrument of rationality, or as a value-structure leading to perverse, irreligious and inhuman process of development, distorts our understanding of the

implications of the secularization as a social process with its distinct characteristics and mode of development in different nations of Europe.

Thirdly, the recent debate on secularism in this country also overlooks the dual role of religion in society right from its inception. In classical Marxist perspective also, distinction is usually made between religion on the one hand as a complex organisation owing its existence and influence to the state patronage and in turn, becoming instrumental in strengthening and consolidating the prevailing class and power structure, and on the other hand religion, as located in popular, religious and social movements of the oppressed strata of the society articulating their grievances and registering their protest against unjust, inhuman, exploitative practices of the dominant classes and striving to 'restore' just, egalitarian social order. Religion, as Marx and Engels noted, was probably the only effective and easily accessible institutional mechanism, that majority of oppressed masses could use in traditional societies for articulating their grievances. Even in modern societies, such movements continue to play revitalizing role as reflected (those struggles inspired by the liberation theology) in Latin America and social and religious movements of the oppressed strata even in this country, right from the early period of Indian history. Numerous sects, and cults right from the Mauryan and even earlier period, such as *Lokayat*, *Ajivikas*, Buddhist, *Nath* and *Siddha* cults, various Tantric sects, medieval Bhakti and Sufi movement culminating in religio-reform movement by Mahatma Phule and other social reformers in nineteenth century, articulated the aspirations of the oppressed strata in this country. Recent debate hardly recognises this dual role of religion in this as well as in Western world. As a matter of fact, Madan and others hardly even take note of such parallel trend in Indian religious traditions. Hence, this debate often

becomes too abstract and academic for large sections of this country.

Finally, as stated earlier, we have done a little elaborate appraisal of Reformation, the French and Industrial Revolutions, in spite of the fact that sufficient literature is available on these major historical phenomena. Nevertheless, our purpose in reexamining the implications of these significant epoch making events, is to focus on different implications of these events for major European nations, like Germany, France and England and to indicate their relevance for the proper appraisal of the recent debate on secularism, which has, by and large, overlooked their significance.

The study is broadly divided into five sections. The first section deals with the Protestant Reformation in Europe and specifically with the Reformation in Germany. We have done detailed appraisal of the Reformation in Germany, keeping in view the peculiar features of the German economy, its feudal structure and polity. In spite of its backward economy and weak political structure, the Reformation made the first initial dent in Germany. Secondly, revolutionary, insurrectionary movement found the most powerful and militant expression in Germany, despite or because of its backward economy and weak polity. Marx and Engel's appraisal of the German situation and peasant wars, even today, sound so refreshing and revealing. Engels particularly, has given considerable weightage to radical role of the religion, especially the early Christianity in inspiring revolutionary movement in Europe. As noted earlier, till the advent of capitalism, religion probably provided the only effective and easily accessible mechanism to ventilate the aspirations, as well as the protest of the oppressed strata. Even after the advent of the capitalism, its significance as a "weapon of weak" should not be minimized. Keeping this consideration in view, we have dealt with the

Reformation in Germany more exhaustively.

Second section provides brief appraisal of the Reformation in England and also deals with the impact of Industrial Revolution in UK.

Third Section deals with the French Revolution and Reformation in France. We have gone into causes and consequences of the French Revolution and their impact on secularization process, religious institutions and practices. This survey of the French Revolution, we thought, is relevant in the context of understanding distinct features of the secularization process, secular state and religious institutions and practices in Europe.

The fourth section focusses on the recent studies on popular religious revival movements in Europe and specifically in France. The emergence of new studies of religion in Europe in last over a decade has significantly altered our understanding of rise and decline in religious influence in the West, since the French and the Industrial Revolutions.

In this context particularly, recent studies on "feminization of religion" in terms of changes in devotional practices in Catholic Europe especially in France, that led to increasing involvement of women in religious practices are quite revealing and these studies also bring out how religious institutions have become instrumental in empowerment of women and religion being used as an effective "weapon of weak" by women in large numbers in France during the nineteenth century.

The last section deals with the emergence of numerous radical, militant religious sects in England since the advent of the Industrial Revolution. It also deals with their decline and cooption with the established religious or social institutional structure over a period of time in UK.

Etymologically, the word secular originates from the Latin *seculum* which implied "great span of time"

or the 'spirit of the age'. Subsequently, it acquired different meaning, that of belonging to 'This World'. Thus, two worlds are conceptualized i.e. the secular and the religious or the temporal and the spiritual. In the Christian discourse, the spiritual order is regarded as decisive in terms of ultimate truth. The term secularization was the subsequent outcome. It was coined in 1648 after the Peace of Westphalia which originally referred to the transfer of ecclesiastical lands to civic control. By the nineteenth century, in the context of strong powerful hold of enlightenment values, G.L. Holyoake used the term secularism to define an ideology, where in social and industrial morality "hitherto determined by reference to the transcending principles of religion, were now to be determined by reason, and firmly anchored to the good of man in this life.<sup>1</sup> Secularism was subsequently projected as a rationalist movement, agnostic or indifferent to religion .

Secularization, as argued by Liana Gorgi, is a loaded concept, both theoretically and emotionally, and has been used in diverse ways and is rightly referred as a multidimensional concept<sup>2</sup>. Some critics as David Martin and others have also strongly disapproved of the projection of secularization, as involving a more or less unified syndrome of characteristics, subject to an irreversible master-trend<sup>3</sup>.

It is true, that the secularization process has not proceeded in a uniform, linear way in industrially advanced nations of Europe. The United States of America has altogether distinct religious traditions, because of its peculiar historical situation. At the same time, it would be too naive to ignore the major focus of the socio-economic changes that took place in Western nations, beginning with Reformation, culminating in the French and the Industrial Revolutions. Although, historical context in terms of social structure, nature of polity, technological or

industrial development and socio-cultural traditions were strikingly different in major countries of Europe such as France, England and Germany, one could notice the major contours of changes that took place in these nations, since Reformation. We shall briefly examine the peculiar historical context during medieval period in major European countries, such as, Germany, France and England in order to properly comprehend the nature of transformation that took place in these nations, since Reformation.

## Section-1 Reformation

Protestant Reformation, as widely acclaimed, was one of the most important movements which inaugurated what is called the 'modern West' just as the idea of popular participation in the government was established with the French Revolution and large-scale mechanical production with the Industrial Revolution. Individualism in the religious sphere similarly, began to assert itself from 1517, with Martin Luther's revolt<sup>4</sup> Hence, the Reformation provides useful clue to understand the modern West. The Reformation had a remote, as well as a proximate social background. The remote background consisted of the general economic change affecting Europe, such as the Crusades, the Black Death, the new trade routes, the medieval frontiers and the internal contradictions of the feudal structure.<sup>5</sup>

Medieval period witnessed the consolidation of the nation-states in many parts of Europe. partly, at least, as a response to the growing economic demands of these regions. The emergent new political structure undermined the age-old relations between the church and the state. The new nations with despotic monarchs started challenging the overlordship of Rome. These

changes were actually shaped by the peculiar political and economic conditions of each region. Thus, the kings of France could obtain the cooperation of all the three 'Estates' in their resistance against the Roman papacy. The kings of England, on the other hand, had several rounds of talks and had to negotiate with the Popes although some of them defied the Popes - others obtained the cooperation of the church to contain the barons, culminating in Henry VIII openly breaking with Rome. But Germany was politically and economically much weaker than either France or England and had to submit themselves to the Pope on several occasions. Typical was the case of Henry IV, who in 1077, had to wait three days in the winter with a rope around his neck as a penitent before he was admitted to the presence of the Pope in his Castle at Canossa. But this economic and political weakness of Germany itself, as argued out by Robert Varickayil, became the immediate prop for the success of the Reformation. In a nutshell, an excessive drain of money from an economically weak nation, prepared the necessary ground for a successful protest movement. This drain included the papal taxes, the veneration of relic and the sale of indulgences.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the feudal possessions of the church too differed from nation to nation. Thus, the catholic church owned a half of Germany, while only a fifth of France (estimated at value three quarters of the wealth of France) and only one third of the Italian peninsula. Such possessions were still smaller in other nations though they included vast estates of immense wealth. Obviously, the ecclesiastical possessions as well as exactions, were resented by every nation concerned, mainly because it strangulated the emerging merchant capitalism. The monarchs of these nations too, depended on the merchants. Hence, one could see that an attack on financial drainage became the rallying point of religious Reformation in feudal Europe.

Further, the Reformation broke out in Germany because that region had suffered the worst form of papal exactions. This probably was also the main reason why Luther could initially succeed in Germany, whereas, his forerunners had limited impact in other countries.

The Lutheran revolt was actually preceded by a number of attempts at the purification of the church. The Catholic Church itself had made repeated attempts at Reformation from within. But the Popes, the college of Cardinals and the bureaucracy of the church could not agree upon a common formula, as the economic interests of each party or group could not coincide with the interests of other groups. Reformation with external pressure had thus become unavoidable. Reformation in a sense was actually the outcome of joint endeavours by kings, priests, intellectuals and mass of ordinary people.

Louis of Bavaria (1314 to 1347) was probably the first king to challenge the authority of the Church. He advocated, that marriage was a purely civil affair and granted divorce on his own authority. He patronized the first well known intellectual, William among the reformers who declared with the help of king, that the Pope had no infallibility as he claimed to have. Two more, Wycliff and Huss joined him. Wycliff (1370-1384) was a priest teaching theology at the University of Oxford. He taught, among other things, that there was no need for such intermediaries as the Pope and the bishop to stand between God and the faithful. Wycliff received protection from John of Gaunt, the king of England. John was badly in need of money to defend his country against France, especially when the Pope was a French man. Wycliff taking advantage of the situation, published a pamphlet advocating the retention of the Church dues and the severance of the English Church from Rome. Actually, Wycliff preached almost every precept Luther and Calvin stood for later. But as suggested, the social base in England was not

ripe for a complete break with the Roman Church. A revolt of the lower classes demanded a strengthening of the *status quo* in England. The state, subsequently discouraged Wycliff from pursuing his radical teachings but he got protection from the government, so as to die in peace.

### Martin Luther in Germany

At this juncture, Martin Luther popularly known as the leader of the Reformation, appeared on the scene in Germany. One of the main reasons why Luther could succeed in Germany was a tremendous change in the socio-economic situation in Europe, which was favorable to new ideas by his time. Europe was no more a closed continent, which it was for centuries. The Europeans had already penetrated into African continent on the one hand and crossed the Atlantic on the other. The sixteenth century, the century of Luther, witnessed the maturing of the mercantile capitalism. Nationalism too was stronger in the sixteenth century than earlier Portugal, Spain, France, the Netherlands, England and even Russia had gained a new awareness from the medieval lethargy. As Holborn notes, "Everywhere the secular authorities tried to counter the papal policy and they found support even among the devout." Germany, of course, was far behind France and England in national solidarity. But even here, the princes had started establishing universities, a function that was strictly reserved for the Church till then.

A few distinct characteristics, marked Germany off her neighbours such as, France and England. Germany was declining because the continental economy, in terms of mining and commerce, was losing ground to the maritime economy, controlled by Spain, the Netherlands and others. Secondly, the Church was giving less concessions to Germany because she had a weaker central government compared to France or

England. Thirdly, the weakness of the central government meant, that the local princes were more powerful. There was actually, no one Germany that was bargaining with the Pope, but a number of regions under various leaders. When it came to Reformation too, it was easier for Luther to bring this or that prince to his side, than to convert the king or the whole of Germany.<sup>8</sup>

### Printing Press—Far-reaching Impact

The theses of Luther were originally written in Latin, but were translated in Germany for circulation among the masses. Perhaps, for the first time, the press was used for propaganda. The power of the press was just emerging into the open. The presence of the press was one of the marked differences between the world of Luther and that of earlier reformers. This became evident from the fact, that between 1457 and 1517 over 400 editions of the Bible were published. The opponents of Luther too had the same facility and they too printed and circulated their counter theses. Luthers theses appeared on 31st October 1517. Tetzds 106 counter theses appeared in December 1517. When the counter theses reached the university students, they were burned. Thus, what was intended as a modest debate, soon assumed a violent form.

Each offensive against Luther led to stronger reaction from him. Within a short time, he advocated the placement of an ecumenical council above the Pope and practically rejected the arbitrary mode of auction of religious relic by the Roman Church. Luther also focussed on economic issues. Thus, in his very first thesis he declared, if the Pope knew the poverty of the German people, he would prefer St.Peter's in ashes so that it should be built out of the blood and hide of his sheep. To this, all Germans would agree.... Rome is the greatest thief and robber that has ever appeared on earth, or ever will. Poor Germans that

we are...we were born to be masters, and we have been compelled to bow beneath the yoke of our tyrants.. It is time that the glorious Teutonic people should cease to be the puppet of the Roman pontiff<sup>9</sup>. Thus, as observed by Robert, the Reformation from the beginning was a fight for political as well as economic freedom. Religion in this sense was only secondary. The exploitation was in the name of religion. Hence, the revolt too had to use the same mask.<sup>10</sup>

### Engels on Medieval Church

Referring to the medieval religious conflicts, F.Engels also writes :

Even the so-called religious wars of the sixteenth century involved primarily positive material class interests: These were class wars, too. just as the later internal collisions in England and France were. Although the class struggles of that day were carried on under religious shibboleths, and though the interests, requirements, and demands of the various classes were concealed behind a religious screen, this changed nothing in the matter and is easily explained by the condition of the time.

Further, the middle ages had developed altogether from the raw. They wiped the old civilization, the old philosophy, politics and jurisprudence off the state to begin anew in everything. The only thing they kept from the old shattered world, was Christianity and a number of half-ruined towns, divested of all their civilization. As a consequence just as in every primitive stage of development, the clergy had a monopoly on intellectual education, and education itself became essentially theological. In the hands of the clergy, politics and jurisprudence, much like all other sciences, remained mere branches of theology, and were treated according to the principles prevailing in the latter. Church dogmas were at the same time political axioms, and Bible quotations had the force of law in any court.

Even as a special estate of jurists was taking shape, jurisprudence long remained under the tutelage of theology. And this supremacy of theology in entire realm of intellectual activity, was at the same time, an inevitable consequence of the place held by the Church, as the most general synthesis and sanction of the existing feudal domination,<sup>11</sup> Under the circumstances, all the general attacks against feudalism" assumed the form of attacks against the Church, and it is not surprising that all social, political and even revolutionary doctrines found manifestations mainly in theological heresies. Revolutionary opposition to feudalism lasted throughout the Middle Ages. It took the shape of mysticism, open heresy, or armed insurrection, all depending on conditions of the time. Sixteenth century reforms heavily leaned on mysticism. Munzer, who led peasant revolts against the feudal oppression, himself derived deep inspiration from it. The town heresy which was actually the official heresy of the Middle Ages was directed against the clergy whose wealth and political importance it affected. As bourgeoisie demanded, at a later stage, 'cheap governments', the medieval burghers mainly demanded cheap Church'. Reactionary in form, like any heresy that sees only degeneration in the further development of church and dogma, the burgher heresy demanded the revival of the simple, early, Christian Church constitution and abolition of monks, prelates, and the Roman court. In short, everything in the Church that was expensive.

### The Plebian Heresy

The heresy that articulated the peasant and plebeian aspirations, and almost invariably accompanied an insurrection, was of a totally different nature. Though it shared all the demands of burgher heresy with regard to the clergy, the Papacy, and revival of the early Christian Church constitution, it also went much

further. It demanded the restoration of early Christian equality among members of the community and the recognition of this equality as a prescript for the burgher world as well. From 'equality of the children of God' it inferred civil equality, and partly even equality of property. Equality of nobleman and peasant, of patrician, privileged burgher and plebian, abolition of the corvee, ground-rents, taxes, privileges and at least the most crying differences in property, these were the demands advanced with more or less determination, as natural implications of the early Christian doctrine<sup>12</sup>.

Engles classifies the various responses to the growing social and political crisis of the Middle Ages in terms of emergence of the three camps. The first of these, he calls the conservative Catholic camp that embraced all the elements interested in maintaining the existing conditions, i.e, the Imperial authorities, the ecclesiastical and a section of the lay Princes, the richer nobility, the prelates and the city patricians. The second camp of burgher like-moderate Lutheran reforms, attracted all the propertied elements of the opposition, the bulk of the lesser nobility and even a portion of the lay princes who hoped to enrich themselves through confiscation of Church estates and wanted to seize the opportunity of gaining greater independence from the empire. Peasants and plebians who constituted the third radical camp were united in a revolutionary party whose demands were most clearly articulated by Munzer.<sup>13</sup>

Luther by translating the Bible in German had placed a powerful weapon into the hands of the plebian movement. Through the Bible, he showed the contrast between the feudalised Christianity of his time and the unassuming Christianity of the first century; and between the decaying feudal society and a picture of a society that hardly knew anything about the complex and artificial feudal hierarchy. The

peasants, revolts during the medieval period were largely inspired by the aspirations drawn from such versions of old, the original spirit of Christianity. There were peasant revolts in France in the thirteenth century, in England in the fourteenth century and in Bohemia in the fifteenth century. But none of these could succeed. The same fate awaited the revolt of the German peasants in the fifteenth century. By April 1525, no less than 800,000 peasants were under arms in Germany. They looked up to Luther for support. Luther, by this time, had become a symbol of the new social order. Luther initially supported the revolt and challenged the princes. But he soon realized that Germany was not ready for such a radical change, not at least for another few hundred years. Princes and knights joined hands together to defeat the peasants, rebellion. Luther quickly changed his stance and openly advocated crushing and killing of rebels and told the princes that thereby they would please the God.

Revolutionary leadership to rising peasant rebellion was provided by Thomas Munzer who treated the Church dogmas and rites with the greatest contempt. He drew inspiration from medieval mystics and particularly the Chiliastic works of Joachim. Munzer's philosophical, theological doctrine attacked all the main points, not only of Catholicism, but of Christianity generally. Under the cloak of Christian forms, he preached a kind of pantheism. He repudiated the Bible, both, as the only and the infallible revelation. The real and living revelations, he argued, was reason, a revelation which has always existed among all peoples at all times. To hold up the Bible against reason, he maintained, was to kill the spirit by the letter, for the Holy Spirit of which the Bible speaks is not something that exists outside, the Holy Spirit is our reason. Faith is nothing else but reason come to life in man, and pagans could therefore also have faith. Through this faith, through reason come to life, man became Godlike and blessed. Heaven is, therefore, not

a thing of another world, and is to be sought in this life and it is the task of believers to establish this Heaven, The Kingdom of God, is here on earth. Just as there is no Heaven in the beyond, there is also no Hell and no domination. Similarly, there is no devil but men's evil lusts and greed. Christ was a man as we are, a prophet and a teacher, and His Eucharist is a mere commemoration meal wherein bread and wine are consumed without any mystic garnishing. Munzer preached these doctrines mostly cloaked in the same Christian phraseology, under which the new philosophy had to hide for some time.

Munzer's political doctrine also followed his revolutionary religious conceptions very closely, and just as his theology overstepped the current conceptions of his age, so his political doctrine went far beyond the prevailing social and political conditions. Just as Munzer's religious philosophy approached atheism, so his political programme approached communism. This programming was much less a compilation of the demands of the plebians of his time and was more an anticipatory vision of the conditions for the emancipation of the proletarian elements that had just emerged among the plebians. This programme called for the immediate establishment of the Kingdom of God, of the prophesied millennium, by restoring the Church to its original condition by the Kingdom of God. Munzer understood a society in which there would be no class differences or private property and no state authority independent of or foreign to the members of society. It aimed at establishing a union to implement this programme, not only throughout Germany, but throughout Christendom. Princes and lords were to be invited to join, and if they refuse, the union was to take up arms and overthrow or kill them at the first opportunity.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Munzer's Utopia could not have succeeded in his time. He lost the battle and the growing peasant revolt was crushed and about 30,000 peasants were murdered in cold blood.

This created a situation where the Reformation was left only with two options, either to carry the princes or perish. Luther openly preached that the subjects of the princes had no right to insurrection even if their lords were evil and unjust. In one word, the Bible and the rules of Christian morality were placed at the service of the temporal authority. Thus, the union between the Church and the empire was broken. The new Church decided to serve minor lords and local interest. International Church became national, an important step toward a bourgeois Church. It is not that Luther consciously visualized such outcome. He actually desired a better Church. But the unanticipated consequence of this wish was a territorial Church. Later, the nation became a union between the king, the parliament and the burgher. The Reformed Church as argued by Robert, was in the Frontline to bless that union. Thus, Luther laid the foundation unknowingly for the triple alliance between religion, nation state and the bourgeois<sup>15</sup>.

In Norway, it was the king who needed money badly, found easiest source through acquisition and sale of the Church property. Hence, he imposed the Reformation on Norway and Iceland in 1537 and secularized the properties of the clergy.

The reform in Switzerland was welcomed by Zwingli, a military chaplain who came to power in 1529. He was against the Papal authority, image worship and the veneration of the saints and also mercenary work abroad.

## Section-II

### Protestant Reformation in England

The sixteenth century saw the integration of English towns into a single national unit. London was unique in terms of its economic and political importance and

contributed as much to a parliamentary subsidy as all other towns put together. Moreover, in the sixteenth century, the 800 or so market towns in England and Wales came under the control of oligarchies of their richer burghers, as the latter grew in strength and ambition. They had emerged as a class by this time to rule in their own right, against the feudal ruling class.

The significant expansion of London, and its growing power as a unifying force was quite visible in the post-Reformation era. It furnished a market for food which could be supplied only by improved means of cultivation. This paved way for enclosure and the investment of capital in farming for the market, gradually over the whole kingdom. The standards and morality of the market-place were increasingly drawn from London. "Individualism", city doctrine soon became respectable, as London merchants brought more and more of the country into a single market.

Throughout the Middle Ages, as noted, there had been a tug-of-war over control of royal administration. Government was located in the King's households. As business became more complex, formal departments began to be differentiated.

The Church had been a source of power, patronage and wealth to rulers of major powers like France and Spain for a long period. These governments, which broke with Rome in the early sixteenth century were on the fringes of Catholic civilization, secondary powers whose rulers had not been strong enough to effectively bargain with the papacy, like England, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and Scotland. Before the Reformation, English kings had to join hands with the Pope in order to control their bigger clergy who also were privileged land owners and franchise-holders. Since Reformation, they were reduced to royal servants, and played a much less independent role in political life. In 1540, Henry VIII proclaimed himself King of

Ireland, to do away with any consideration of Ireland as a papal patrimony. The King became, in theory, as well as in practice head of Church and state, leading to the concept of national sovereignty.

The English Reformation was actually enacted by statute. The authority of the King over the Church became the authority of the King in parliament. Tax-payers benefited by diversion to the king of huge revenue which earlier had gone to Rome. Similarly, from the sale of monastery lands, state as well as the gentry made enormous gain. The Reformation not only subordinated the national Church to the King but it also subjugated ordinary parishes to squires. Gentlemen succeeded monasteries not only as land owners but also as recipients of tithes. After the Reformation nearly 4000 of the 9000 English parishes were appropriated, that is, tithes were paid to a lay rector and only a small stipend got reserved for the vicar or curate, whom the local squire often appointed. This opened actually, a vast source of wealth and also patronage.

The Reformation thus nationalized the Church, and thereby prohibited any appeal outside England. It reduced the franchises and privileges of the Church. Post-Reformation bishops, were reduced to the status of royal civil servants. The Church could exercise coercive power since Reformation only in alliance with and dependence on the Crown. Long run consequences, which followed from the break with Rome were momentous. Sir Lewis Namier went to the extent of even suggesting that 'Religion is a sixteenth century word for nationalism' The early Protestant reformers were staunch supporters of the English monarchy. This is evident from the statement of the Protestant martyr William Tyndale, that the King is, in this world, without law, and may at his lust do right and wrong, and shall give account, but to God only. As a matter of fact reformers preferred a tyrant to a weak

king, as in contest against the Roman Pope authority, powerful monarch was far more useful than a timid emperor. But this situation created a deep dilemma in Protestant attitudes, which simultaneously sought to elevate both, the monarch and the conscience of the individual.

Printing press enabled the protestantism to spread dissemination of vernacular translations of the Bible, some in pocket edition, made possible study of Scriptures to people at large. In the sixteenth century increase in middle class wealth was reflected in more domestic comforts and more privacy, the economic achievements made possible more widespread study and discussion of the Bible. As celibacy was not regarded as compulsory for intellectuals, and printing made books easily accessible to the middle class, the home could become a cultural and discussion centre. Closed parish churches and family worship were both characteristic of protestantism.

The Protestants stress on Bible-reading, vernacular preaching and congregational participation in worship encouraged higher educational standards, in clergy and laity alike. The whole trend of educational advance during the century before the Reformation had been towards a more secular, lay-controlled education in the vernacular. Gentlemen's sons, who previously had the exclusive privilege of learning in monasteries, now sat side by side with plebeians in village and grammar schools, and flocked in to the universities. However, over a period, the gentry managed to monopolize the better schools, Oxford and Cambridge Colleges, to the great detriment of the lower stratum in English society.

Protestant theology in all possible ways, appealed to the individualism of the middle class. The abolition of mediating saints and a mediating priesthood placed individual consciences face to face with God. It also popularized the idea of the individual spiritual balance sheet, the profit and loss book keeping of diaries. The

assumption is that of an atomic society of individuals fighting for their own salvation and no longer a community working for their salvation. The phrase 'The individual' as suggested, in its modern sense emerges in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. This also gets reflected in the emphasis on puritan; and dramatists on the right to choose one's matrimonial partner, which proved so liberating for women, in more realistic portraiture and sculpture, resulting from post-Reformation secular patronage of the arts.

The Reformation stimulated not only individualism but also gave impetus to a scientific world view. Protestants had imbibed long standing lollard tradition of skepticism about the miracle of the mass. Tyndale denounced the Pope as a magician. There was a sharp decline in appeal for magical power of shrines and saints. But the attempt was made to transfer such power to monarchy. This also could not be sustained for a long period, with the advancement of industrial and scientific age. But as suggested, it finally disappeared only after the establishment of parliamentary sovereignty. Another byproduct of the Reformation was a hatred towards cruelty. The great puritan preacher William Perkins for instance, even condemned cock-fighting on humanitarian grounds. Nevertheless, in spite of this humanism, English law remained harsh and brutal, especially to the lower classes<sup>16</sup>.

### Section-III French Scenario

Development in France proceeded on a different line than England. Main reasons for this distinct pattern of the French development, was the sharp contrast in socio-economic conditions and the

technological breakthrough in these two important nations of Europe, in medieval and post-medieval-periods.

As aptly suggested by Hobsbawm, if the economy of the nineteenth-century world was formed mainly under the influence of the British Industrial Revolution, its politics and ideology were formed mainly by the French. French actually provided the vocabulary and the issues of liberal and radical-democratic politics for almost the entire world. France provided the codes of law, the model of scientific and technical organization and the metric system of measurement<sup>17</sup>.

The French Revolution, although was not an isolated phenomenon, had far reaching consequences throughout Europe. The French Revolution was a major social revolution and was far more radical than any other comparable development in Europe. It is no accident that the American Revolutionaries, and the British 'Jacobins' who migrated to France because of their political sympathies, found themselves moderates in France. For instance, Tom Paine, was an extremist in Britain and America, but in Paris he was among the most moderate of the Girondins. The American Revolution, compared to the French, remained a crucial event, but left a few major traces elsewhere. The French Revolution was a landmark for all countries. It inspired as far as social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy in India, who insisted in 1830 on traveling in a French ship to demonstrate his enthusiasm for its principles of equality, liberty, fraternity and social justice. Throughout the eighteenth century 'France was the major economic rival to Britain in Europe. Her foreign trade which multiplied fourfold between 1720 and 1780, caused anxiety in Britain; her colonial system was in certain respects far more dynamic than the British. Yet France was not a power like Britain which was technically far more advanced and whose foreign policy was substantially determined by the interest of

capitalist expansion. France in a sense, was the most powerful and in many ways was the most typical of the old aristocratic absolute monarchies of Europe. In other words, as suggested, the conflict between the official framework and the vested interests of the old regime and the rising social forces was more acute in France than elsewhere<sup>18</sup>.

### The New Forces

The new forces were quite clear in terms of changes they desired. For example, Turgot, the physiocrat economist, advocated for an efficient exploitation of the land, for free enterprise and trade, for a standardized, efficient administration of a single homogeneous national territory, and the abolition of all restrictions and social inequalities which stood in the way of the development of national resources and rational, equitable administration and taxation. Yet his attempt, not surprisingly, to apply such a programme as the first minister of Louis XVI in 1774-6 failed miserably. Reforms of this nature, Hobsbawm argues, in modest dose, were not incompatible with absolute monarchies. They were widely propagated during this period among the so called 'enlightened despotism.' Such reforms were inapplicable, and therefore restricted to mere theoretical formulation, as also they failed in the face of the resistance of the local aristocracies and other vested interests. In France they failed more rapidly than elsewhere, as the resistance of the vested interests was more effective. But the results of this failure proved to be far more catastrophic for the monarchy; and the forces of bourgeois transformation were far too strong to relapse into inactivity.<sup>19</sup>

However, in order to understand, why the revolution broke out when it did, as the same author suggests, it is most useful to consider the so-called 'feudal reaction' which actually provided the spark to explode the power-barrel of France. The French nobility

consisted of around 4,00,000 persons in a total population of twenty-three million in France. They enjoyed considerable privileges, including exemption from several taxes, (although clergy enjoyed still more concessions), and the right to receive feudal dues. But politically their situation was not so comfortable. Absolute monarchy, while entirely aristocratic and even feudal in its ethos, had deprived the nobles of political independence and responsibility and cut down their estates. Economically, the noble's worries were by no means negligible. Nobles, being fighters by birth and traditions, were even formally debarred from taking up trade or profession, hence depended exclusively on the income of their estates. This too was possible if they happened to belong to the favoured minority of court nobles or through wealthy marriage, or court pensions, and gifts. They found increasingly difficult to manage their rising expenses. Throughout the eighteenth century therefore, it is not surprising to find that in France as in many other countries, they encroached steadily upon the official posts, which the absolute monarchy had preferred to fill with technically competent and politically harmless middle class men. By the 1780s, large chunk of the army commission assignments, all bishop posts and even the keystone of royal administration were captured by nobles. As a result the nobility not merely exasperated the feelings of the middle class by their successful competition for official posts, they also undermined the state itself by frequent attempts to take over provincial and central administration. Similarly, they did everything possible to extract maximum money by squeezing the peasantry. Hence, the nobility exasperated not only the middle class but also the peasantry.

The position of this vast strata, constituting nearly 80 percent of the French population, was also far from satisfactory. They were, in general free and also often landowners. Noble estates covered only one-fifth of

the land, clerical estates probably another 6 percent, with some regional variations, In fact, great majority were landless or with insufficient holdings, and technically backward. Land hunger was getting intensified with rising population. Feudal dues, tithes and taxes took a large and rising proportion of the peasants income. Only the minority of peasants who had a constant surplus for sale benefited from the rising prices; the rest in one way or other suffered from them, especially in the times of bad harvest. The twenty years preceding the revolution, undoubtedly, the situation of the peasants grew worse for these reasons.

The financial troubles of the monarchy precipitated the matters to a head. The administrative and fiscal structure of the Empire was grossly absolute, and attempts to remedy it by the reforms did not succeed, France's involvement in the American War of Independence was economically a big setback. Victory over England was gained at the cost of financial bankruptcy, various attempts were made to tide over the financial crisis, but nothing short of a fundamental reform, which could mobilize the taxable capacity of the country that could cope with a situation in which expenditure outran revenue by at least 20 percent. The government's crisis provided good opportunity to the aristocracy and the parliaments to exercise enough pressure on the monarchy. They refused to pay without extension of their privileges. The first breach in the front of absolutism was an attempt to call assembly of nobles in 1787 to consider government's demands. The second was the desperate decision to call the States General—the old feudal assembly that had become defunct since 1614. The revolution thus began, as Hobsbawm aptly suggests, as an aristocratic attempt to recapture the state . However, the aristocracy totally underestimated the strength of the 'Third Estate'- the entity that demanded to represent all who were neither

nobles nor clergy, but in fact was dominated by the middle-class.<sup>20</sup>

The French Revolution, surprisingly, was not made or led by organized party or movement as we now understand these terms. Nevertheless, a basic consensus of general ideas among a fairly coherent section of people provided the revolutionary movement, an effective unity. This section consisted of the 'bourgeoisie' who articulated ideas of classical liberalism.

### Bourgeois Declaration of 1789

The demands of the bourgeoisie of 1789 were specifically laid down in the famous Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens. This document proved to be a manifesto against the hierarchical society of nobles and privileged, but still it did not stand for democratic or egalitarian society. "Men are born and live free and equal under the laws" stated its first article; but it also provided for the existence of social distinctions. Private property was accepted as a natural right, sacred, inalienable and inviolable. A constitutional monarchy based on a propertied oligarchy expressing itself through a representative assembly still appeared more congenial to most bourgeois liberals; though there were a few who did not hesitate to advocate the democratic republic. But on the whole the classical liberal bourgeois of 1789, was not a democrat but a believer in constitutionalism, a secular state with civil liberties and guarantees for private enterprise, and stood for the government by tax-payers and property-owners.

However, formally such a regime was supposed to express not simply his class interests, but also the general will of 'the people; which was identified as the French nation'.

Since the peasants and toiling poor were illiterate, politically modest and the process of election indirect,

around 610 men got elected to represent the Third Estate, most of whom were lawyers and about 100 were capitalists and businessmen. The middle class, although representing overwhelming mass of people, had fought bitterly and effectively to win representation as large as that of combined strength of both nobility and clergy. The Third Estate succeeded, in spite of united resistance of the King and the privileged orders, as it represented not merely the views of an educated and militant minority, but far more powerful forces; the labouring poor of the cities and also the revolutionary peasantry. The later 1780s had been, for various reasons, a period of great difficulties for practically all branches of the French economy. A bad harvest in 1788-89 and very difficult winter made this crisis more acute. Bad harvest hurt the peasantry, as it meant that large producers could sell at a very high price their produce. The majority of them, because of their very small holding had to eat up their seed-corn, and buy food at exorbitant prices. It also hurt the urban poor, with bread prices shooting very high. The impoverishment of the countryside reduced the market for manufacturers and hence also produced an industrial depression. The country's poor, under the circumstances were desperate and took to riot and banditry. The urban poor were all the more restless as work ceased at the very moment when the cost of living soared. The outcome was an epidemic of peasant unrest, combined with provincial town risings that spread rapidly across vast stretches of the country. By July, 1789 the social structure of the French rural feudalism and the state machine of royal France was totally shattered. By the end of August 1789, the Revolution had also acquired its formal manifesto, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. The King resisted with his usual stupidity, and sections of the middle class revolutionaries, frightened by the social implications of the mass upheaval, felt that the time

for conservatism had come to an end.

### "Sansculottes"

In short, the main contours of French and even all subsequent bourgeois revolutions had become now clearly visible. Time and again, one could see moderate middle class reformers mobilizing the masses against die-hard resistance or counter-revolution, masses pushing beyond the moderates to their own social revolutions, and the moderates in turn splitting into a conservative camp. In most subsequent bourgeois revolutions the moderate liberals, as suggested, shifted to conservative camp, at a very early stage. In the nineteenth century we increasingly find, especially in Germany, that "they become unwilling to begin revolution at all, for apprehension of its incalculable consequences and preferred to compromise with King and aristocracy. The peculiarity of the French Revolution is that one section of the liberal middle class called the Jacobins was prepared to remain revolutionary even beyond the brink of anti-bourgeois revolution: Since the French Revolution, the new Jacobins became a symbol for radical revolution everywhere. After 1794, it became clear to moderates that the Jacobin regime had driven the Revolution too far for bourgeois comfort and prospects. Jacobins could afford radicalism also because, in their time no class existed that could provide a coherent social alternative. Such a class could arise only in the course of the Industrial Revolution, with the emergence of the 'proletariat'. In the French Revolution the working class or to be more precise, toiling strata consisted only of the aggregate of hired, but mostly non-industrial wage-earners, which had not played any independent role. The only alternative to bourgeois radicalism were the "Sansculottes", a shapeless, mostly urban movement of the labouring poor, small craftsmen, shopkeepers, artisans, tiny entrepreneurs and such other categories.

The "Sansculottes" were organized, especially in the 'sections' of Paris and the local political clubs, and provided the main striking force of the Revolution, the actual demonstrators, rioters, constructors of barricades. They also formulated a policy which reflected their contradictory ideals, combining respect for (small) private property, with hostility to the rich, government guaranteed work, wages and social security for the poor man, an extreme, egalitarian and libertarian democracy. As Hobsbawm argues, the "sansculottes" in fact, were one branch of that universal and important political trend which sought to express the interest of the great mass of 'little men' who existed between the poles of the 'bourgeois' and the 'proletarian', often nearer the latter than the former because they were, after all, mostly poor. One can observe such trend in the United States (as Jeffersonianism and Jacksonian democracy or populism) in Britain ( as 'radicalism'), in Italy (as Mezzanines and Garibaldians). Mostly, it tended to settle down, in post-revolutionary period, as a left wing of middle-class liberalism.

Sansculottism could provide no real alternative in France. Its ideal, a golden past of villagers and small craftsmen or a golden future of small farmers and artisans undisturbed by bankers and millionaires, was unrealizable. History moved ahead against them.

Between 1789 and 1791 the victorious moderate bourgeois, operating through the Constituent Assembly, introduced the gigantic rationalization and reform in France. Most of the lasting institutional achievements of the Revolution date from this period, the metric system and the emancipation of the Jews, as well as its other striking international results. Economically, the perspectives of the Constituent Assembly were entirely liberal: for the peasantry, it adopted the policy of the enclosure of common lands and the promotion of rural entrepreneurs, for the working class, the banning of trade unions, for the small crafts, the

abolition of guilds and corporations. It actually provided hardly any concrete measure, for the common people, except, from 1790, by means of the secularization and sale of Church lands as also of those of the emigrant nobility, which had the triple advantage of weakening clericalism, strengthening the provincial and peasant entrepreneur, and giving sizeable section of peasants, a measurable return for their revolutionary activity.

The post-revolutionary generations witnessed attempts to create a bourgeois non-Christian morality that could be a substitute to that of the Christian. This could be seen in a Rousseauist cult of the supreme being (Roberpierre for instance in 1794) and several such pseudo-religions constructed on rationalist non-Christian foundation, but still retaining the ritual apparatus as Comte's "Religion of Humanity".

### Victory of Secular Forces

The bourgeois actually remained divided in its ideology between a minority of increasingly frank free-thinkers and a majority of the pious Protestant, Jewish and Catholic. As Hobsbawm argues, although in purely quantitative terms, religion remained immensely strong, and grew stronger, yet it was no longer dominant, had become recessive and has remained so to this day<sup>21</sup>. This was strikingly demonstrated by the decisive victory of secular over religious ideology. With the American and the French Revolution as suggested, major political and social transformations secularized. The issues of the Dutch and English Revolutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been discussed and fought out still in the traditional language of Christianity, orthodox, schismatic or heretical. In the ideologies of the American and French Revolutions, for the first time in European history, Christianity became irrelevant. The language, the symbolism, the costume of 1789 were purely non-Christian, if we leave aside, a few

popular-archaic efforts to create cults of saints and martyrs, analogous to the old ones, out of dead Sansculotte heroes. This secularism, at the same time also demonstrated the remarkable political hegemony of the liberal middle class that imposed its particular ideological form on the much vaster social movement of the masses. Bourgeois dominance imbued the French revolution with the agnostic or secular-moral ideology of the eighteenth century enlightenment. The French revolutionary idioms also in turn inspired all subsequent social revolutionary movements to imbibe secularist ethos in them. The same author further notes that with a few exceptions, among intellectuals like the Saint-Simonians and a few (Christian- Communist sectarians like the tailor Wrestling (1808-1871), the ideology of the new working class and socialist movements of the nineteenth century was secularist from the inception. The pre-dominant ideology of modern labour is based on eighteenth century rationalism.<sup>22</sup>

### Secularization and the Masses

It should be noted that this secularization trend in the industrial working class was in sharp contrast to the masses who remained predominantly religious. This should not sound very surprising, because the natural revolutionary idiom of the masses brought up in a traditional Christian society is one of rebellion, as articulated through social heresy, millennialism and the like, as the Bible leaves enough room for such interpretations.

Nevertheless, as Hobshawm writes, by modern standards the working classes and urban masses who grew up in the period of the Industrial Revolution, were no doubt rather strongly influenced by religion; by the standards of the first half of the nineteenth century there was no precedent for their remoteness from, ignorance of, and indifference to organized

religion. The British religious census of 1851 clearly indicated this. However, one of the main reasons for this indifference was the utter failure of the traditional established churches to cope with agglomerations, the new industrial settlements and with new social classes like the proletariat, which were foreign to their routines and experience. By 1815, there were Church places available for only 34 per cent of the inhabitants of Sheffield, only 31.2 percent of those in Liverpool and Manchester, and only 29 percent in Birmingham. The problems of being a parish in an agricultural village could not really help much to cure souls in an industrial town or urban slum. The established churches hence, neglected these new communities and classes, thus leaving them particularly in Catholic and Lutheran countries almost entirely to the secular faith of the new labour movements. The Protestant sects were more successful, especially in countries like Britain, where such sectarianism was a well-established phenomenon. But they were more influential particularly in traditional small town village communities, as among the farm labourers, miners and fishermen. Among the industrial workers, the sect's influence was quite marginal. Hence, according to Hobsbawm and several other Marxist scholars, the general trend of the period from 1789 to 1848 was one of distinct secularization. Science came increasingly in clash with the scriptures, as it ventured into evolutionary fields. Historical scholarship which applied to the Bible especially from the 1830s questioned the validity of the document as a single inspired text of the Lord. David Strauss's controversial life of Jesus (1835) eliminated the supernatural element from Jesus's biography. By 1841, as suggested, educated Europe was almost ripe for the shock of Charles Darwin. This trend was further reinforced by the direct official attack on the property and legal privileges of the established Churches and their clergy, coupled with

the increasing tendency for government or other secular agencies to take over functions like education and social welfare, hitherto left largely to organized religious institutions, especially in Roman Catholic countries. Between 1789 and 1848 monasteries from Naples to Nicaragua were dissolved and their property auctioned.<sup>23</sup>

## Section IV

### Recent Studies on Popular Religious Revival

The farreaching significance of the French Revolution in promoting the secularization process in France and other countries of Europe has been sufficiently highlighted by various scholars. These studies knowingly or unknowingly convey impression that secularization has proceeded as an irreversible process in France, England and other European nations. Although the decline of religion, in the sense that increasing reversal in the role and influence of the organized State in Church, clergy and monasteries was witnessed in most of the European countries. and some of the vital functions like education, social welfare and legal functions were taken over by the secular agencies, interference of the organized State sponsored religious institutions in private affairs of individuals such as choice of a marriage partner, divorce and occupation was minimized. Citizen's rights of equality, liberty and social justice and the states obligation of maintaining and promoting them were incorporated in the constitution. Nevertheless, if one gathers the impression that this resulted in the perpetual decline of religious influence in general, over a period of time even in most advanced industrial nations it would be a misleading interpretation. As suggested by Caroline Ford, although the two centuries following the French Revolution have seen periods of great

popular religious revival, the tale most often told by historians has been one of the ineluctable "secularization of the European mind"<sup>24</sup> The emergence of new studies on religion in Europe in the past over a decade, have significantly altered our understanding of the rise and decline in religious influence in the west, since the French and the Industrial Revolution. These studies include, Thomas Ksciman's, "Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France", Edward Berenson's, "Popular Religion and Left Wing Politics in France, 1830-1852, Judith Devlin's "The Superstitious Mind", French Peasants and the Supernatural, Suzanne Desan's, "Reclaiming the Sacred: "Lay Religion" and Popular Politics in France. These studies highlight the persistence of popular religious enthusiasm, the relationship between popular religion and politics, and the larger, social and cultural meanings of spiritual belief.<sup>25</sup>

### Gender as a Category of Historical Analysis

Recent literature on religion and popular culture in Modern Europe as suggested, has also shaped by development in the gender history and with a focus to make gender a genuine category of historical analysis. Natalie Zemon Davis's pioneering contribution on women in Reformation and Caroline Walker Bynum's remarkable appraisal of the religious significance of food among medieval women, serve as models for understanding modern European history. A historical survey of formal religious practices, autobiographies, and records of female associational organisation, sufficiently demonstrate that religion occupied a central place in the lives of European women. Cholvy and Hilaire's the first comprehensive history of post-Revolutionary France consists of two volumes which span from 1800 to 1930, which depart substantially from earlier Dansette's classic account, as their central focus is on the religion of the people, rather than that

of political and religious elites. Cholvy and Hilaire's work focuses on the history of religious France from the perspective of both, Paris and the provinces and not restricting their account only in terms of the political conflicts between the Catholic Church and the French state. The regional perspective brings out the evidence of both persistence and disappearance of religious practices. But they do not provide any causal explanations for such phenomena. Ralph Gibson's *Social History of French Catholicism*, as suggested, bridges this gap by exploring the relationship between the old regime and nineteenth century religious beliefs and practices.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Lannon provides a comprehensive history of Spanish Catholicism. One of the most significant insights these works provide is, as brought by Lannon's, that to be religious could and did mean quite different things according to place, local culture, education and class.<sup>27</sup> Caroline Ford adds one more, but very important dimension to this. According to her, religions also meant different things according to gender. All of them argue against reduction of cultural or religious beliefs to economic or social determinants. The nineteenth century was punctuated by a series of religious revivals in France as well as by a process of rechristianization among certain social classes, especially the bourgeois. All the four of them share in common, a view that there was marked continuity in the religious geography of France and Spain over time, even though there were sharp regional disparities. In France, statistics of religious practice do not show any immutable boundary between practicing and non-practicing France. The well known St. Malo/Geneva line that identified a literate, enlightened and industrial France in the north from an illiterate, rural, underdeveloped France to the south, did not create two geographically distinct areas in terms of religious behavior. However, certain parts of the French west and the Central portions of the

southwest have demonstrated their continued allegiance to the Catholic faith in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>28</sup>

### Religious Practices—Cultural and Political Clues

As socio-economic and educational status do not help in predicting religious behavior, historians have begun to turn to cultural and political clues to resolve the riddles of religious practices. In some cases, it seems that the relationship between the clergy and the laity was of central importance in determining the strength of religious devotion. In others, the collective memory of a single historical event or series of events, such as the French Revolution in the Vendee and conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in the Rhone Valley in the sixteenth century, appear to have made religious affiliation a vital element in the identity of a community. In France, as well as in Spain the growing religious indifference of the working classes is attributed to the growth of anti-clericalism. But the intensity of anti-clericalism has to be seen in the context of the peculiar traditions, historical events and other allied factors in a given country or even a region. Lannon suggests that the intensity of Spanish anti-clericalism had a great deal to do with the formal relationship between the Catholic Church and the state, particularly the Franco's regime. In Spain, the Spanish Church as Lannon argues was intimately tied to the cultural identity of the nation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the Church supported one authoritarian regime after another during this period, and as it was intimately associated with the propertied classes, it bred an unparelled resistance and contempt among the Left in all areas, except the Basque region. In France, in contrast, one of the legacies of the French Revolution and of twentieth century republicanism was that the Catholic Church failed to become a national Church and Catholicism

never became a constituent element of French national identity. Besides this, the secularization of educational and welfare institutions as well as the separation of Church and State in 1905 put the Church on the defensive during much of Third, Fourth and Fifth Republic.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to Cholvy, Hilaire and Gibson, Ravitch's *History of the French Catholic Church from Henry IV, to the bicentennial of the Revolution*, adopts a more holistic approach. According to Caroline Ford, Ravitch's theological view prevents him from seeing the more variegated, complicated, and ambiguous religious world that Cholvy, Hilaire and Gibson reveal. Ravitch holds that the Church in France is in "considerable disarray"<sup>30</sup> He explains this disarray, as a consequence of the Church's alleged support of ultra conservative positions, particularly fascism. His argument that the Catholic leadership embraced the Vichy regime and fascism appears to be of a doubtful proposition, in view of the fact, that the leadership of the first mass-based Christian Democratic Party in France, the *Parti Democrate Populaire*, emphatically rejected such a regime. The creation of populist religious and social organizations in the 1920s and 1950s that challenged the right wing *Action Franchise*, is conveniently overlooked by Ravitch. Ravitch also can't give any adequate explanation for the continued vitality of popular devotions as it does not fit into his linear view of the progressive alienation of more and more Catholics from the Catholic religion. He downplays the role of the people in shaping developments within the Church. The 'religion of the people' finds only a cursory reference and here also he equates 'popular religion' with "superstitions" which shuts out fascinating area of historical enquiry.

Cholvy, Hilaire, Lannon and Gibson on the basis of their study, argue, in contrast to that of Ravitch, for the healthy survival of the Church. While it lost

some adherents, it also won others. By exploring the complicated and changing relationship between clergy and laity and the persistence of religious belief, they suggest that the process of rechristianization is as important a subject of historical study, as that of secularization in the modern period. While the notion of dechristianization has received a fair amount of attention, that of rechristianization and the persistence of religious enthusiasm, whether within or outside an institutionalized Church, needs as Caroline suggests, further enquiry.<sup>31</sup>

### **Persistence of Supernatural Belief: Pilgrimage Shrines**

The history of post-revolutionary Europe is rife with evidence, that points to the persistence of supernatural beliefs. It is not possible for us to examine numerous studies that vindicate such inferences. However, we shall refer to some major such findings that deserve serious consideration. Nolan and Nolan have provided historians with quite significant information about the evolution of the Christian pilgrimage, during a long historical span from 1099 to 1980. The active pilgrimage shrines in Europe were established, as they suggest, in five major periods, the Early Christian (to 1099), the High Medieval (1100-1399), Renaissance (1400-1529) Catholic Reformation (1530-1779), and Modern Periods (1780-1980). Although these divisions are somewhat arbitrary, but the authors have been able to assess changes in the pilgrimage phenomenon over many centuries. They have found, for instance, that some of the significant differences between modern visions and those of the pre-1780 period correlate with changes in patterns of age and gender among the visionaries. Only 22 percent of the visionary experiences that resulted in the establishment of pilgrimage shrines in the past 200 years were those of men. Women and young children have become the principal visionaries of the modern period. Nolan and

Nolan suggest that increasing creditability is given to female testimony and the 'feminizations' of the Roman Catholic Church in the modern period. But still, the larger meaning of such a change appears a mystery to them.<sup>32</sup>

According to Nolan and Nolan, the European pilgrimage has been predominantly Marian in orientation. Since the Renaissance, sixty-five percent of all holy places are devoted to the Virgin Mary, and the largest number of shrines are located in Italy, France and Spain, followed by West Germany, Austria and Portugal. Saint shrines are more numerous in Ireland and in the Protestant regions of northern Europe.

Hilaire, Cholvy, and Gibson provide exhaustive accounts of the expansion, particularly during the 1830s; the cults of saints and the growing importance of the Virgin Mary as a subject of veneration during the course of the nineteenth century. Festivals in honor of the Virgin Mary-Purification, Annunciation, Visitation, Assumption, and the Immaculate Conception, were celebrated with renewed enthusiasm. Confreries and congregations devoted to the Virgin Mary proliferated from the 1840s onward, and so also the celebration of the month of May as the "*mois de Marie*" since 1830. The Catholic publicist Louise Veuillot proclaimed that the epoch following the century of Voltaire will be able to call itself the century of Mary.<sup>33</sup>

In a period during which the Catholic Church, as suggested, increasingly worried about empty benches, the clergy encouraged this popular Mariolatry. The nineteenth century, surprisingly, saw a growing trend on the part of the Church to institutionalize popular forms of piety in order to control them. These new forms of piety might have been deemed, as argued by Caroline 'superstition' by a prerevolutionary clergy, but the nineteenth century Church chose in many cases to embrace, rather than suppress them for pastoral

purposes. It is interesting to note that the clergy's task and the spread of new religious practices were helped, rather than hindered by economic modernizations and the Industrial Revolution. Lithography and the printing press considerably facilitated dissemination of the new devotional practices, The railway lines laid from the 1840s to the 1860s, helped an increasing number of pilgrims to reach remote shrines. Finally, the mass production of the idols allowed the humblest household to acquire images of the saints and the Virgin Mary.

Cholvy suggests that the exaltation of Mary was a part of larger cult of feminity that characterized the nineteenth century. According to Cholvy and Hilaire, the nineteenth century witnessed a 'Veritable sacralization of women' and this was reflected not only in Catholic devotions of the period, but also in the writings of Jules Michelet and in the followers of Saint-Simon and August Comte.<sup>34</sup> "One also notices the growing social role that women occupied in Churches through social work and particularly in education. They argue that despite the civil code, in spite of the relative degradation that the working class woman experienced, in spite of the growing number of 'kept women' among the bourgeoisie, it can be hardly refuted that the family acquired a growing importance, which got translated into the greater influence of the mother. Historians of religion on either sides of the Atlantic have indicated the growing 'feminization of piety' throughout post-revolutionary Europe.<sup>35</sup> Ellen Badone for instance, claimed, that in contemporary Brittany religion is perceived to be primarily women's responsibility.<sup>36</sup>

### Feminization of Religion

The 'feminization of religion' has been defined in terms of changes in devotional practices in Catholic Europe. Two of the indications, most frequently cited by historians of Catholic Europe as evidence of this

phenomenon, are the unprecedented growth in the number of women entering religious orders and congregations and the marked dimorphism observable in statistics concerning formal religious practice. Women increasingly performed Catholic rites, more faithfully and regularly, than men during the nineteenth century. These facts have been distinctly documented by Yves-Marie Hilaire in his work *"Materiaux pour l'histoire religieuse"* and by Claude Langlois and Caitrona clear in their studies on female religious congregations in France and Ireland.<sup>37</sup>

Between the end of French Revolution and the early 1880s, 200,000 women in France joined religious congregations. Whereas, women represented only one third of the members of the Church, as a whole on the eve of the French Revolution. By 1880 women constituted almost three fifths of the personnel of the Church. Catholic Spain also shows similar patterns.<sup>38</sup>

In Odile Arnold's *Le corps et l'ame* - her exploration of the cultural and social world of female religious communities in retreat in the nineteenth century brings out the profound impact of the contemplative orders on their roles, both as women and as women in the Church. In a broader sense, Arnold indicates how religion shaped the understanding of gender differences and thereby provided a broad framework of the cultural construction of gender identities.<sup>39</sup>

Arnold's book is based on a wide range of primary sources that include autobiographies, biographies, the rules and constitutions of orders, memories, courtsey books and educational manuals. It is supplemented by an appendix documenting innumerable rules concerning postures, gaze and gesture that were expected to be followed by the nun in their routine life. Nuns were cautioned, as in the seventeenth century, never to gaze at their own flesh with the exception of their own hands. The refectory was regarded as a place of penitence. The rules and manuals meant for the nun

were replete with references to mortification. But in course of time, the mortification began to be articulated less in terms of the body than in terms of spiritual obedience. As Arnold points out, "It is interesting to note that the asceticism in the control of gesture and emotion, which was in turn, an inherent part of the religious education of young girls, contrasts sharply with the exuberant, expressive feminization of religious devotion that the nineteenth century ostensibly inaugurated:" It is no wonder, under the circumstances, contrary to the view that the nun was often placed in a convent against her will one finds that the vocation was freely chosen by her, at times even against the will of parents and peers.<sup>40</sup>

This reference to Arnold's study on the convent and female religious piety, although exhaustive, provides useful insight in understanding the vital role played by women in moulding religious institutions in nineteenth century France.

Yvonne Turin in her study explores the subjective motivations of congreganists and the consequences of such a choice for women themselves. Using the private archives of two congregations, those of the Soeurs de la Doctrine Chretienne de Nancy and of Saint, Joseph du Bon Pasteur de Clermond-Ferrand—she scrutinized the transformation and growth of both lay female associations and religious communities from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. She found that many of these associations, consisting of unmarried or widowed women, were in essence work cooperatives whose ostensible religious purpose ensured their social acceptance. She poses the question whether, the formation of these communities represent protective pacts for single women, or were they a means for women to assert their independence? They probably represented both. Many of these female associations became self-supporting and existed alongside communities with more explicit religious purposes by

providing educational and social services to the laity. Despite the crisis of the revolutionary decade, as suggested, which sent the clergy into hiding or to the guillotine, female religious associations quickly reconstituted themselves under the "benevolent" eye of the Napoleonic regime.<sup>41</sup>

Religious life, as argued provided opportunities and avenues of social mobility, which were otherwise not available elsewhere. In a practical way, apart from spiritual considerations, they created networks of female sociability, and security, as well as professional opportunities in the domains of education and medicine unavailable elsewhere. As Olwen Hutton so effectively brings out, women's role in reconstructing the Church in France during the nineteenth century, can in part, be linked to what religion offered in spiritual and practical terms in the context of the post-revolutionary settlement. Revolutionary legislation since 1792, and thereafter, the Napoleonic Civil Code excluded women from the public world of politics and relegated them to narrowly circumscribed social and economic orders. Religion and the vocation it offered, provided French women a means of transcending those roles and the isolation that they created. Irrespective of the authoritarian and retrogressive role of the organized Church and the clergy, it is not difficult to argue, that for French women religion was also a "weapon of the weak".<sup>42</sup>

Turin's book subtitled 'Feminism in Religion' has come as a challenge to the view that the 'feminization of religion' was a reflection first and foremost of clerical domination. Turin actually seeks to restore the human agency to the religious women and argues that religion or the religious vocation was a source of empowerment. This is illustrated in the vivid cameos of a number of authoritarian superiors and independent missionaries, like case of a sister Bonnard, who protested against the attempt to lower the numbers of the

clerical staff and to reduce the remuneration of the nuns who staffed the hospital in 1832. Whereas Claude Langlois referred to the congregation as a model that mobilized elite women in the Church. Turin argues, for an inverse process, it was a self-created elite of women, not necessarily drawn from the social elite of French society, who found in the Church a way of acting and taking hold of themselves. Entry into a religious congregation represented a kind of feminism '*avant la lettre*'. However, it should be noted that Turin makes a distinction between the unself-conscious feminism of her womens religious organisations and a more strident 'egoistical, contemporary Feminism.

Turin's work acquires a distinct significance because it also challenges the rather questionable attempts to link women's religious proclivity to the biological differences between the sexes, which allegedly put them in closer proximity to birth and death. It is most certainly true that women have often assumed the role of bearers of tradition within the family and were the guarantors of family unity, but such extreme views that link gender difference to biology cannot explain, why female religiosity assumed the particular forms, and why it disappeared at certain other historical moments.

## Section-V

### Radical Sects in England

As in case of France, in England also the religion sponsored and patronized by the state and religious sects which masses imbibed or adopted were strikingly distinct. In England, for the last over 300 years, the attempt had been made, to bring the entire population, within one comprehensive religious political institution, the Anglican Church. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 made the terms 'citizen' and 'Anglican' synonymous.

This actually was attempted when all religious bodies, Anglican included were in fact minorities within a predominantly non-Church English society. The largest single component in the religiously plurastic society, as is the case with several other western countries, is the unaffiliated, non-ecclestial majority.<sup>43</sup>

As against the fictional state of affairs legalised in the Act of Uniformity, the real religious situation in the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries was the fact that large numbers of the ordinary people adhered to an interconnected system of supernatural beliefs and practices which could be called popular paganism. The term paganism, as suggested, is widely appropriate for a situation in which at least 80 percent of the population lived in the country side, and experienced the human sufferings of a rural, pre-industrial society.

Under the Act of Uniformity, it was illegal even in 1662 to be absent from Anglican worship. Non-attendance could entail the future of two thirds of a man's estate. Those who could most likely suffer such loss of property were the Catholic landed gentry. These penalties, however, were not usually enforced after 1660. The main intention in imposing such penalties was to exclude non-Anglicans from positions of influence in the state. This was in order to neutralise what was felt to be the continuing political danger to the state, posed by the presence of Puritans and Papists and also to establish strong government with the aid of a politically reliable Church. Its significance has to be seen also in the context of the possibility of religious beliefs and organizations to be used to justify revolt. Penalties of non-conformist religious belief and affiliation were therefore proportionate to the political danger they represented. Thus, the idea was allowed to gain currency that in England, all those who are not actively non-conformist were *de Jure* recognized as adherents of the Church of England

irrespective of their fulfilling their ritual obligations.

The practical consequence of the Act of Uniformity had been to reinforce the division between Anglican and non-conformists. The hostile attitude of Puritans towards the Church of England during the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, was a powerful factor for the Anglican hostility towards Puritans since 1660. Puritans subsequently emerged under the name of Protestant dissenters and came to form a subordinate element in the cultural life of England.<sup>44</sup>

### Divisions among Non-conformists

Non-cognizance of religious pluralism under the Act of 1662, led to the polarization of the distinctively ecclesiastic bodies between conformist and non-conformist. The non-conformist, was extended to all, whether they were Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu Pentecostal or any other. But non-conformists could broadly be divided into two main types; 1) Protestant dissenters and later, the secular dissenters; and 2) Catholics, Jews and various Asian minorities. The former type can be viewed as contra-cultures; where as the second are basically sub-cultures. Between the two categories, there was hardly any affinity or cooperation, except that in certain respects the sub-cultures were at times beneficiaries of the achievement of the contra-cultures in resisting the monopoly claims of the Church of England<sup>45</sup>.

Since 1660, Anglicanism was identified as the upper-class religion, while Protestant non-conformists consisted largely of men and women 'who used to rather pride themselves on their independence'. They were largely found in towns than in the countryside. Some were artisans, others were merchants. Their social solidarity was also essentially a response to the concerted attempts of the Anglican State Church to destroy them altogether. The culture that developed among them was appropriately described as a contra-

culture. It emerged in contradistinction from and the hostility to the upper-class Anglican culture of the gentlemen of England and their faithful, rustic dependents. Barred from universities and schools, as T. Ling argues, Non-conformists organized their own academies, from which eventually came the ministers of the Non-conformist congregations, supported financially by the contributions of the local congregation. Such congregations were mostly concentrated in towns and cities, as it was easier to gather a number of members sufficiently large to support a minister economically. These two cultures developed and persisted, side by side, as 'church' and 'chapel', almost to the end of the Victorian period and also continued to correspond with divisions in party politics, sociaethics, and economic roles<sup>46</sup>

The Catholic non-conformists also were subject to civil discrimination, till the enactment of the 'Catholic Emancipation Act' in 1829. Nevertheless, the social position of the Catholics who were largely landowners, gave them some immunity from the contempt which the Anglican upper classes showered on Protestant dissenters. But still they remained politically suspect and religiously obnoxious to majority of the Anglicans. The Catholic community, often an extension of the aristocratic or land owning Catholic families, supported the priest and provided the chapel for the celebration of Catholic sacraments. Rather than developing as a contra-culture, as Tavor Ling suggests, Catholicism contributed within the English environment until the early nineteenth century as a distinct sub-culture.

The English Revolution of the 17th century as noted earlier, dissolved the monasteries and deprived them most of their land which was almost one-fifth of the English land, crown and Church land. This land went directly to members of the gentry, merchants and wealthy. They used the money thus earned from the acquisition of landed property to finance a

commercial policy that won the shipping trade of Europe from the Dutch, and removed several restrictions on trade and industry. It actually gave the English bourgeoisie a tremendous head start over the bourgeoisie of the other European countries. Like the French Revolution, as argued by Paul N. Siegal, it gained a good deal of its impetus from the pressure of the plebian masses. This pressure exerted through numerous sects estimated to be around 29 in London and as many as 199 in England. This estimate may not be entirely reliable. But it shows the extent of influence exercised by numerous religious sects, radical in nature and quite popular among the masses.

Calvinism had proclaimed that worldly success was a sign of membership in the elect arbitrarily chosen by God. The sects denied that the poor were damned, and asserted that salvation came through an intense religious experience, which was more likely to come to those not corrupted by wealth. Calvinism had substituted the authority of the Bible for the authority of the Catholic Church enabling the educated to monopolize religion. The sects argued that it was not through burning the midnight oil that one can attain a knowledge of divinity, but through the innerlight, the spiritual spark that could be the possession of every human being.

Although the sects spoke in terms of mystical revelations of god, they sought to reform the educational system, to make learning accessible to all and there is discernible in some of their writing the beginning of scientific materialism. For the Digger leader Winstanley the "inner light" came to be pretty close to the light of reason through which man could percieve the workings of nature. Similarly, Richard Overton's pamphlet 'Man's Morality' affirmed that man is 'a compound wholly mortal contrary to the common distinction of soul and body and that of heaven and hell which are a mere fiction'. Thus, while

using theological phraseology, they remained committed basically to materialist interpretation in philosophy. In this sense, both Winstanley and Overton were like the 16th century German Anabaptist Munzer.<sup>47</sup>

Contemporary works dealing with 17th and 18th centuries sects with faith in the "Inner faith" have shown "the barbarous outrages committed by the sectarians" by preaching that 'god hath now opened their eyes and discovered unto them their Christian liberty; and therefore it is now fit that the nobility and gentry should serve their servants or at least work for their own maintenance; The reversal of the roles of the servants being served, reminds one of Jesus's words about the first becoming last and the last becoming first at the millennium, which was confidently expected by the various sects."I tell you" Winstanley argued, "the scripture is to be really and materially fulfilled"— You jeer at the name of Leveller (one of the well known sects). I tell you, Jesus Christ is the head Leveller'. The idea of bringing the mighty down from their seats and raising those of low degree was articulated in a frequently used phrase of the 'the world turned upside down'. Today, we have, as suggested by Siegal, the word 'revolution'<sup>48</sup>.

As also observed by Christopher Hill in "The World Turned Upside Down" the revolutionary decades produced a fantastic outburst of energy, both physical and intellectual..... for a short time, ordinary people were more free from the authority of Church and social superiors than they had ever been before'<sup>49</sup>.

The radical sects of the 17th century, whose members overwhelmingly came from the poorer artisans, journey men and apprentices, disintegrated with the advance of capitalism or were absorbed by the Quakers. The Quakers whose name projected their trembling with excitement during their religious meetings, and their name was a term of opprobrium labelled on them by their opponents, originated in the 17th century with the

other radical sects. They refused to take their hats off before a leader. George Fox, a Quaker who was a cobbler, the son of a weaver and who became the richest man of the kingdom, warned the rich in the vein of the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus that misery would come upon them. Fox later took to non-violence as it happened to the German Anabaptists, after the failure of their uprising.

With the Restoration, Fox concluded that the Kingdom of God was not of the world. The Quakers gave up the expectations of their early million and their early enthusiasts who had appeared in public in the nude to demonstrate their adherence to the plain truth became responsible. Quakerism later became the religion of those artisans and petty tradesmen who, under the conditions of expanding capitalism became well to do businessmen. Quakers acquired fame for their sobriety, industry, orderliness, and (in the tradition of their earlier civil disobedience) their dislike for legal proceedings. Quakerism, basically remained a religion of the middle class. Those Quaker families who became well-to do usually gave up their religion in the course of time<sup>50</sup>.

## Methodism

The Quakers set the pattern for the Methodists of the 18th century. Methodism focussed on man's corruption, but advocated that by relying on divine power one can change one's nature. It found its original support among artisans and a portion of the new industrial working class. The aristocratic and commercial oligarchy showed contempt towards them because of the mass hysteria that prevailed at its revival meetings and also due to the social composition of its membership. Their doctrines, said the Duchess of Buckingham, is most repulsive. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl the earth. However, quite a few

of the capitalists realized the advantage that could accrue to them, through Methodist virtues. The Industrial Revolution by destroying rural domestic industry and along with it the lingering patriarchal relationship, had congregated large masses of dispossessed peasants and artisans in the cities. Like the Black Muslims of a later time who took lumpen proletarians and instilled them with self respect, ridding them of their dependance on drugs, the Methodists liberated their converts, often disoriented by their new lives in the cities, from their addiction to drink, turning them into dependable workers. In the Methodist preaching-houses, as observed by a contemporary, the worker finds stimulus..... not less powerful than what he formerly sought at the alehouse but, that has no morning headache. Methodists conducted their lives by rule and method and worked zealously with a sober exaltation, unmarred by hangeovers<sup>51</sup>.

This naturally was to the liking of employers, who often recruited Methodists to impose the rule and method of the factory on their workers. However, many Methodists, despite the Toryism of its founder John Wesley, on account of its earlier mass base among the workers were influenced by the 18th century radicalism and agitated for greater democracy within their movement. In the next century Engels referring to the Salvation Army, which was founded by the Methodist preacher William Booth, precisely because Methodism had no hold on unskilled workers or on the lumpen proletariat.

"The English bourgeois.. accepted the dangerous aid of the Salvation Army, which... appeals to the poor as the elect..... and thus fosters an element of early Christian class antagonism, which one day, may become troublesome to the well-to-do people who now find the ready money<sup>52</sup>.

The authoritarian structures of the Methodists as well as the Salvation Army, facilitated the suppression

of the protest movement they led against the rich. The Methodists lost their militancy, just as the Salvation Army lost its earlier radicalism and was reduced to a charitable organization for tax deductible donations. As was true of Quakerism, Methodism also became the religion of the middle class.

Wesley's teachings stressed the gain of all one can, and the saving of all one can, 'but' likewise give all one can, so that one will grow in grace. But as the Methodist grew in wealth they conveniently forgot about the principle of giving back to the community, everything beyond one's necessities. The richest Methodists came to dominate chapels. The habits of austerity and frugality were a good deal lost. Methodism, like Quakerism, also became respectable.

The religious situation in England, particularly in terms of affiliation to the various ecclesiastical bodies, Anglican and non-Anglican had significantly changed by the middle of the nineteenth century. The major transformation that occurred was the large extent of secularization of the working people. Briefly, what had happened was the erosion of popular paganism under the gradually growing influence of scientific ideas and, more particularly, technological invention, the mechanization of workshops, and the increase in the number of industrial towns and cities. Magical and astrological beliefs and practices certainly did not disappear completely, but many aspects of their appeal lost ground as it became possible for human misfortune to be alleviated in other than magical ways. The spread of secularism along with the growth of Methodism, affected the relative strength of the religious establishment, vis-a-vis the total population.

The growth of secularism among the large majority of the working class, since the period of Industrial Revolution had also the marks of a contraculture. It has an affinity with the Protestant dissenting contra-culture, as it was also based on rejection of Anglican conformity.

The extent of erosion of Anglicanism could be seen in the facts provided by the Census of 1851, which shocked the Anglican hierarchy. In 1840, it had been estimated that the percentage of non-Church goers among the urban working class differed from place to place, ranging between 75 and 90 per cent. In 1821, the total number of seats in Anglican churches in Sheffield was around 4000, of which hardly 300 were rent free, that is available for the working class<sup>53</sup>.

It would be pertinent to note that although in the major centres of urban industrial society and culture, non-Anglicans are minorities within a pre-dominantly secularised majority. Secularized majority here is defined in terms of those who are virtually without any religious affiliations. Hence, in modern England, as T. Ling argues, Anglicanism is the 'major' religious community, only in the sense, that it possesses major power, especially political and social. This inheritance of political power has been carefully guarded and, when it was possible to do so, has been used in order to check any growth in the rights or status of other bodies. As late as 1847, for instance, a parliamentary Bill for the removal of civil and religious disabilities affecting Jewish citizens met with strong opposition from the Anglican lobby. It was opposed in the House of Lords on the grounds that its effect would be to 'de-christianize the legislature and imperil the country's religion' and was rejected by 163 votes to 125<sup>54</sup>.

It has been argued that the Church of England has now declined in power, as it is no longer in a position to affect the rights of or the freedom of the other religious minorities in this country. Although in terms of number of worshippers it has lost the advantage which once earlier it might have had over other religious bodies, however, socially, it is still a formidable force. Its dominance in industrial society of modern England is explained in terms of other factors, such as one, the monopolist claim which was

implied in the Act of Uniformity, and the continuance of this claim by the Church of England during the succeeding centuries, and the fact that the Church is established by law. The Anglican clergy are also more numerous than other clergy. This along with the special position of bishops in political life, gives them a major presence. Another reason as Ling suggests, is that the Judgement that the Church of England is the major religious body in this country is made by commentators, who themselves come predominantly from the middle class, and in whose milieu it still retains 'major' status. Such commentators are usually representatives of an influential professional class whose adherence to Anglicanism is more of a cultural and social kind, and which does not necessarily imply the Church attendance. So far as the national life as a whole is concerned, the predominant element is what may be called secular. But as the same author argues, a better word would be 'profane' in its original sense of 'outside the temple' or not belonging to a sacred community. That seems to be the most common characteristic of this now a 'predominant class—the 'unchurched'. This does not imply that they have no interest in religion. 'Young people in this 'unchurched' class will often be found to be those who have consciously rejected some conventional, institutional form of religion, but who have a strong interest in religious issues and in finding a satisfactory religious view of life. Not a few are attracted by an Eastern religion, usually in its more mystical forms as Yoga, Zen, Sufism and such other religious traditions. For every one of the fairly small number of English members of local Buddhist and some other Asian faith, there are many more who have taken a serious interest in the ideas, and the way of life represented by these non-Western faiths. The contribution which such religious concerns make to the emerging 'alternate culture' — what Ling calls, contra-culture among

young people, deserve serious consideration<sup>5</sup>.

Our perusal of secularism and secularization and religion in three important nations viz, Germany, France and England, reveals that these processes have not proceeded in uniform, indentical ways in any of these nations. Reformations also assumed different directions depending on the peculiar socio-economic and historical context in which they operated in these countries. Besides, that the response of different social strata such as nobility, monarchy, various plebian groups, peasantry, artisans and others also have strikingly differed in these nations. There could be no comparison for instance, with the militant, heroic peasant struggles led by Munzer with similar movements in England or France. The radical programme of social transformation unleashed by the French Revolution, has no parellel either in England or Germany.

Similarly, decline of religion, either before or since the Reformation, has not been an irreversible process. One also finds that with the decline of the feudal Church, monasteries, and state patronized religious structures, parellel emergence of religious movements in the form of rise of numerous radical sects as in the case of England, feminization of religion as in the case of France, and radical, heroic, prolonged peasant war under the religious guise in Germany. Similarly, the connotations of the term, secular, is also not identical. Certainly, it does not imply non-religious or anti-religious phenomenon, unless by religion, reference is restricted to the state sponsored, established monolithic religious institutional structures, such as the Catholic Church and monastery in medieval period and the State Church and religious institutions, even in post-Reformation period.

Our perusal also indicates that during the Reformation, post-Reformation and even modern periods, with the decline of the state sponsored religious



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# III

## HINDUTVA ONSLAUGHT ON SECULARISM

*P.R.Ram*

Last two decades have seen a concerted attempt by the forces of Hindu right to denigrate secularism as a concept and state policy. The Hindutva offensive, which began with the communalisation of society in post 80 decade has got strengthened by sidetracking the basic social agenda of problems of exploited and subaltern sections of society. Along with their high pitched political campaigns aimed to intimidate minorities and other exploited/subaltern sections of society, there has been a strong attack on the secular ethos of society, on secularism as a concept and on secularism as a state policy. Though this phenomenon, attacking of secular concept by Hindu right has become very visible recently, it is not new. Right since its beginning as a political formation, Hindu Maha Sabha and RSS, secularism has been attacked in various garbs and guises.

1. *Hindutva on Secularism*: The very foundation of Hindutva has been laid on the concept of Hindu Rashtra, a type of religious nationalism which is antithetical to ideas of secularism. M.S. Golwalkar [1] wrote <sup>in</sup>.... the very notion of 'secularism' as it originated in the west has no relevance to our country ..... the word 'secular' is nowhere to be found in our Constitution. .... As such foisting of that word on our Constitution could, in a way, be termed an interpolation

and a superimposition upon the Constitution.' He goes on to write (1) there is a confusion of equating secularism with nationalism. The two can never be the same and also (1) 'But unfortunately, secularism has in practice, meant anti-Hinduism for people at the helm of affairs'.

The first election manifesto of Jan Sangh (previous political *avatar* of Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP) stated [2] 'Any talk of composite culture is, therefore unrealistic, illogical and dangerous, for it tends to encourage fissiparous tendencies ... the so called secular composite nationalism is neither nationalism nor secularism, but only a compromise with the communalism of those who demand a price, even for their lip loyalty to the country'.

Koenraad Elst [3] presents the ideas of Hindutva in a most forthright and aggressive manner 'Pride in being Indian means for 99%, pride in Hinduism (unless you are a secularist distorter and consider the Islamic invaders' avowed objective of destroying Hindu culture also as 'culture' and as 'Indian'). So, this legitimate pride has to be nourished with broad and indepth knowledge of Hindu culture. The two enemies of this effort are the secularist morbidity that glorified the destroyers of Hindu culture, denies the unity and integrity of Hindu culture and discourages its study altogether; and the mental laziness of some cranks, who get exuberant over wholly mistaken ideas about the Hindu past, without caring to critically and thoroughly study it.'

Over a period of time, various ideologues of Hindu right have evolved a multipronged strategy to condemn and downgrade secularism. They openly and aggressively propogate the agenda of Hindu Rashtra on one hand and simultaneously assert, that they do not want a theocratic state. In nutshell, their multispeak

has prompted them to propound various strategies and assertions which sounding contradictory, fit very well into their propoganda based on 'multispeak'.

Taking advantage of the fact that state and the ruling party could not implement secular policies and had compromised at most crucial times they called the ruling Congress as 'pseudo secular party'. Presenting the 'principle of affirmative action' of the state in a distorted light, they projected that a 'Hindu society is riddled with a non-Hindu state'. Matching with their 'Nationalist' projections of themselves, SP branded the concept of secularism as a Western concept, unsuitable for a 'religious society', the Indian society. They have subtly manoeuvred the 'equal respect for all religious' as the Indian meaning of secularism, mocking at 'aloofness from religions as the Nehruvian imposition on Indian society'. Not content with the above multispeak and to justify the concept of 'Hindu Rashtra', Hinduism (Brahminism) based religious nationalism, they are leaving no stone unturned to prove that Hinduism itself is secular. This concoction betrays the manoeuvrable capability of SP. Secularism a state policy, is being applied to the so called inherent catholicity and tolerance of Hindu religion. While propounding this doctrine, SP is at its 'cleverest' best because neither is Hinduism tolerant, as betrayed by its attitude to shudras and women, its glorification of *shrutis* and *smrutis* which are deeply intolerant to *shramanic* traditions which were mainly followed by the low castes, nor the category of 'secular' can be applied to it.

2. *Hindutva Onslaught*: To understand their attitude towards secularism, it is necessary to understand the concept of Hindutva, as it has developed over a period of time. Hindutva is a political movement of upper castes/middle classes based on the principles of

## Brahminical Hinduism.

(a) *Hinduism*: The word 'Hindu' has many connotations. Initially, it was used for those living on the region East of river Sindhu. This word was initially used by Arabs who pronounce 'S' as 'H'. This was essentially a geographical term to begin with. Later, with the development of many religions in South Asia, the term Hindu started being used for followers of different religious sects, which can be grouped under Brahminism and Shramanism. Shramanism in turn was a conglomerate, a broad term for multiple non-Brahminical religious traditions like: Tantra, Bhakti, Shakta etc. Shramans were those who were often in opposition to Brahminism and their belief structure was away from the Vedas and Dharmashastras. Their teachings transcended castes and communities. In contrast to Brahminism which categorised religious practice by caste, Shramanic religions opposed this, in order to universalise their religious teachings. Bhakti tradition emphasised selfless action projected as the need to act in accordance with ones' moral duties. This shift of emphasis, away from Brahminical rites and sacrificial rituals provided the root, in later time, for a number of cults like, Shaiva, Vaishnava and many others. It also provided the rough outline to much that is viewed as traditional 'Hinduism'. Lot of variations occurred in this tradition. Much later, Kabir and Nanak brought in Sufi ideas in their teachings. Shakta sect and Tantric rituals also gained wide popularity. These are now played down as being anathema to the current version of Hinduism, i.e. Brahminical Hinduism. Thus over a period of time, the term 'Hindu' stood for followers of multiple religious traditions of South Asia.

Later, during 6-10 century period starting from Satavahan dynasty, Maghad-Mauryan Empire;

Brahminism ascended socially on the higher ladders and began to subjugate other streams. As per Gail Omvedt, "The Hindu religion as it is described today is said to have its roots in the Vedas, .... In any case, whatever we call the religion of these nomadic clans, it was not the religion that is today known as Hinduism. Thus, (Hinduism in its current version) began to be formulated only in the period of Magadha-Mauryan state, in the period ranging from the Upanishads and the formation of Vedantic thought to the consolidation of social order represented by Manusmriti. Buddhism and Jainism are (as well as materialist Charvak tradition) were equally old .... Hinduism, as we know it, was in other words, only one of the many consolidations within a diverse sub-continental cultural tradition, and attained, social and political hegemony only during the sixth century A.D. often after violent confrontations with Buddhism and Jainism [4]. Romila Thapar states, "The new Hinduism which is being currently propogated by Sanghs, Parishads and Samajas, is an attempt to restructure the indigenous religions as a monolithic uniform religion, rather paralleling some of the features of semitic religions. This seems to be a fundamental departure from the essentials of what may be called indigenous 'Hindu' religions. Its form is not only in many ways alien to entire earlier culture of India, but equally disturbing is the uniformity which it seeks to impose on the variety of 'Hindu' religions" [5]. Further, she adds,

"Hindu' missionary organisations, taking their cue from Christian missionaries are active among the adivasis, untouchables and economically backward communities, converting them to 'Hinduism' as defined by upper caste movements of the last two centuries. That this 'conversion' does little or nothing to change their status as adivasis, untouchables and so on, and that they continue to be looked down upon by upper

caste 'Hindus', is of course of little consequence."

The Hinduism, which more or less has won the social space also draws mainly from Brahminical texts, and Dharmashastras. The attempt of this exercise is to present a modern reformed religion. The net result is a repackaged Brahminism. The Hindu communities settled abroad, look for a parallel to Christianity, as their religion. This is to overcome the sense of inferiority and cultural insecurity which they experience in their life. Thapar goes on to say "Syndicated Hinduism claims to be re-establishing the Hinduism of pre-modern times; in fact it is only establishing itself, and in the process, distorting the historical and cultural dimensions of indigenous religions and divesting them of the nuances and variety which was a major source of their enrichment."

As per Gail Omvedt, this Brahmanic Hinduism adopted and identified with the authority of the Vedas and Brahmins. Material base of this system was the caste structure of the society. Its cooptive power was qualified to the extent that dissidents had to accept their place in the caste hierarchy. The masses of people did not have the identity of 'Hindu'. Multiple local gods and traditions existed side by side forming the base of popular culture. Later, only during colonial period, this identity of Hindu was constructed for all the inhabitants of this land, except those who were followers of Islam or Christianity. This construction was thrown up by English scholarship and by Indian elites. Gail posits that "In the nineteenth century, people like Lokmanya Tilak adopted the "Aryan theory of Race", claimed a white racial stock for upper caste Indians and accepted Vedas as their core literature. Tilak was also the first to try and unite a large section of the masses around brahmanical leadership with celebration of Ganesh festival — also, by the end

of 19th century, Hindu conservatives were mounting a full scale attack on their upper caste reformist rivals with the charges that latter were "anti-national."

(b) *Hindutva Onslaught*: 'Hindutva' as a term came in usage mainly from second decade of Twentieth century. There is some vague mention of this term in late Nineteenth century as well, but it did not have wide usage. Though the articulation of this term began in 20th century, its base was laid by two social processes (a) the rise of Hindu communalism, Hindu communal nationalism in reaction to development of secular nationalism (represented by Indian National Congress) (b) Congruence of religious nationalism and (Brahminical) Hinduism.

Formation of Indian National Congress(INC) was culmination of the process of crystallisation of secular nationalist aspirations of the rising industrialists, newer professional businessmen and sections of bureaucracy. Congress demanded facilities for these sections of society, irrespective of their religion. In response to this secular Nationalism began two communal reactions, that of Muslim communalism through the articulations of Sir Sayyed Ahmed and Hindu communalism. A section of Hindu zamindars, moneylenders and middle class professionals began to arouse anti-Muslim sentiments. They picked the colonial view of history (Hindu period, Mughal period and British period) and started talking about 'tyrannical Muslim rule in medieval period, and the liberating role of the British in 'saving' Hindus from 'Muslim oppression.' They criticised Congress for talking of the interests of 'Indians' in general, in contrast to the interests of Hindus. They started giving communal twist to the language question and cow slaughter. All over India anti-cow slaughter propaganda was undertaken in the early 1890s, directing the campaign against the Muslims.

As per Bipin Chandra, 'The Punjab Hindu Sabha was founded in 1909. Its leaders .... were to lay down foundations of Hindu communal ideology and politics. They directed their anger primarily against INC for trying to unite Indians into a single nation and for 'sacrificing Hindu interests' to appease Muslims .... Lal Chand described the Congress as the self inflicted misfortune of Hindus' [6]. Lal Chand went on to advise, 'Hindus should try to neutralize the third party, the government in their fight against Muslims. A Hindu .... (should) make it a part and parcel of his organism, of his life and conduct, that he is a Hindu first and Indian after' [7]. Lala Hardayal's 'Hindu Sanghatna' reinforced these attempts as it went on to propogate that future of Hindu race depended on Hindu organisation, Hindu rule, *shuddhi* (purification) i.e. reconversion and reconquest of Afghanistan and frontiers.

The Punjab Hindu Sabha had support mainly from Brahmin-Bania, Hindu landlord-moneylenders. The Hindu communalisms first major crystallisation occurred with the formation of All India Hindu Mahasabha, whose first session was held in April 1915. Savarkar's contribution 'Who was a Hindu (1923) and formation of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (1925) are the major landmarks in the evolution of Hindutva as an organised politics. Savarkar's anti British revolutionary career lasted till his escape from Andaman jail. His later life is marked by absence of anti British struggles and a subtle ridicule of Independence struggle led by Gandhi. Savarkar emerged as a major ideologue of Hindutva in early 20s, and his book 'Who is a Hindu' laid the ideological foundations of Hindutva movement. This theme book of Hindutva onslaught states that Hindu is a person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha (spread from Indus to seas) as his Pitrubhumi (Fatherland) and Punyabhumi (Holyland)

i.e. the cradleland of his religion. By implication, all those who follow a religion, which did not originate here cannot identify this land as their holyland and thus their social position is inferior to those whose religions originated here only. As per Savarkar, Hindutva involves reverence for a 'common culture' and 'common civilization', and thus Hindu festivals like Divali, Rakhi and Hindu places of pilgrimage are essential from a national and racial point of view. He asserts to project Ram as the symbol of national identity as all of us (Hindus) love Ram as the most illustrious representative monarch of our race.

RSS was founded in Nagpur, in central India, in the part of India, which was comparatively least affected by the Mughal Rule. "It was a region which saw the powerful anti-Brahmin movements of the backward castes. With the leadership of Congress slipping away from Chittapavan Brahmins, with the dissatisfaction with Gandhi's conciliatory methods and in the backdrop of slipping hegemony of Brahmins over the lower castes, the idea of an organisation representing the aspirations of these high castes took roots, and this gave birth to RSS (in 1925), an explicitly Hindu organisation, working for achievement of Hindu Rashtra. Thus, the synthesis of religious construct Hinduism, and Nationalism got crystallised through this organisation, which in due course, was to take the central place in political battles of upper castes, displacing the Hindu Mahasabha" [8]. The influence of emerging Italian Fascism and German Nazism was clearly discernible at the level of ideas of nationalism, race and culture. This became manifest in the main assertion of this political offensive and in the theoretical outpourings of its ideologues.

This exclusively male body was modelled on the lines of dictatorial model of '*Ek Chalak Anuvartita*'

(Follow the leader) and the same pre-modern hierarchical principles were put in most of the future activities and philosophies emerging from this organisation. It concentrated its energies on what it called 'Hindu Sanghatan' organising Hindus, and in this direction started the so called 'cultural work' which involved training young boys in physical exercises, akin to traditional 'Akharas' (gymnasiums) and indoctrinating them in the ideology of Hindu Rashtra. The sum and substance of their ideology and core doctrine dished out in the intellectual sessions is, "Hindus and Hindus alone, constitute the Indian nation, since they are the original inhabitants and sole creators of its society and culture. Hinduism is uniquely catholic and tolerant, and hence superior to any other faith, but its tolerance has often been mistaken for weakness. The Hindu nation has been repeatedly conquered by aliens, particularly Muslims and then the Christian British, and must acquire strength through RSS Sanghatan to counter all present and future threats. The subsequent entry and takeover by foreigners created the illusion that India was a land of many different and equal cultures. ....'Pseudo secular' nationalists like Nehru, who preferred bondage an to an alien system of thought, perpetuated it by integrating this notion within pseudo secular constitution .... only a 'truly secular' Hindu Rashtra will afford protection to non-Hindus. The threats remain, because the present state is ruled by traitors to the Hindu nation, pseudosecularists who appeased Muslims in their pursuit of politics of vote banks [9].

The underlying premis of RSS was that only Hindus would free Hindustan, only Hindu strength can save the country, so Hindu youth had to be organized on the basis of personal character and absolute love of the motherland. RSS had initial following from amongst Brahmins and Banias. It drew big support from the

landlords, Rajas of the independent *riyasats* (princely states) and also from a section of Hindu industrialists. Its emphasis on indoctrination was very heavy and mythified history, projecting Muslim Kings as temple breakers and spreading Islam with the strength of sword, glorification of the past of Hindu kings was the sum and substance of its indoctrination. The name Rashtriya (National) was a deliberate prefix to the organisation to assert the identity of Hindu with national. Unlike the underground revolutionaries, RSS emphasised on the physical training, which can only be of use in street violence and not against the British rulers. In their preachings Gandhian struggles and methods were projected to be useless, to be appeasers of Muslims and as the ones' having a misplaced emphasis on the anti British struggles. As per Hindutva votaries, Hindu organisation and dealing with minorities had to precede the anti British struggles.

It advised its cadres to remain aloof from major anti British struggles and encouraged them to join military and bureaucracy. It turned down the request for the entry of women into RSS, instead advising them to form RS (*Rashtra Sevikas*) as women could not be 'self driven' like men (*Swayamsevak*; volunteer self driven, *Sevika*: servant: taking orders from the other i.e.males). And also because as 'ideal mothers' how could they devote time to the activities of the RSS type?

This was the time when workers were organising into unions under the leadership, initially of Narayan Meghaji Lokhande and then of the Communist party. Ambedkar was leading the dalit movement by demanding access to public wells, temple entry and condemnation of Manu Smriti. Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai were opposing the male domination and patriarchal system. During these decades of

preindependence periods, the struggles of exploited and subalterns was taking definite shape. RSS had nothing to do with any of the struggles, on the contrary most of the struggles of subalterns were directed against the support base of RSS itself. Brahmins, at social level were supporting RSS and devising ways to 'control' and oppose the struggles of dalits, when Ambedkar was burning Manu Smriti, Guru Golwalkar was writing eulogies for Manu and his laws, when Pandita Ramabai and Tarabai Shinde were standing up to oppose patriarchy and male domination. RSS was advising the women to remain within the confines of family, in order to play their roles as 'ideal mothers', which according to Hindutva is the primary identity of women.

The second supreme dictator of RSS, Guruji M.S. Golwalkar elaborated the politics of RSS in two major books. 'We or Our Nationhood Defined' and 'Bunch of Thoughts'. Guruji is very critical of anti-British nationalism and territorial nationalism. As per him, this type of nationalism deprives us of the inspiring content of our real nationhood and making the freedom struggle as virtually being anti British struggle. He propounds that equating anti British struggles with patriotism and nationalism had adverse effects upon entire course of independence struggle.

After independence, accompanied by tragedy of partition, the ire of Hindutva votaries against Gandhi intensified as he was dubbed to the person whose appeasement of Muslims emboldened them in getting Pakistan, dividing the Hindu Nation. One of the ex-pracharak of RSS, Nathuram Godse, enraged by Gandhi's principled stand on division of treasury, killed Gandhi. Godse was a member of RSS, though he denied it during his trial to protect the RSS from wrath of the law [10]. RSS was banned in the wake

of Gandhi murder, and Guruji was put behind the bars despite RSS's disowning of Godse. From prison, Guruji wrote to the government offering cooperation of RSS to contain the 'menace' of rising communism in the country.

From this time on, RSS went on to form various organisations to operate in different fields of society: Jana Sangh: political, ABVP-student body-operating on the principle, that educational institutes are like families and students and teachers/managements should relate to each other as per the norms of family hierarchy. Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh, a 'mild' 'soft' alternative to trade unions, rejecting the principle of class struggle and international solidarity of labour; again advising the workers to treat the industries as the occupational families (subtly advising the acceptance of pre-modern hierarchical relationship of patriarchal control) and advising workers to cultivate harmonious relations with the owners of enterprises. Rashtrasevika Samiti, later on was supplemented by BJP's Mahila morcha which glorifies the place of women in ancient society (Manu Smriti conveniently forgotten at this juncture or precisely to reinforce the modernised version of the same). It founded Adivasi Kalyan Ashram to cultivate Brahminical norms amongst adivasis. Interestingly, it had no organisation amongst the dalits and poor peasants.

Politically, RSS had to lie low till quiet sometime, as the disrepute brought in by Gandhi murder was not easy to wash off. It began again in mid fifties with campaigns of cow slaughter ban and 'Indianisation of Muslims'. But these campaigns failed to have broader impact on society. It succeeded in restoring some of its respectability in the wake of India China war, as its 'Nationalist breast beating' did impress all and sundry. But the real event which washed off the sin

of Gandhi murder was its being allowed to participate in the Jayaprakash Narayan led popular movement. Following which, its political arm Jan Sangh became part of Janata Party, which came to power in the post emergency elections.

Meanwhile, VHP was gaining strength by using the vehicle of religious emotionalism, and was able to make inroads to the different sections of middle classes, especially Non-Resident Indians and the petty industrialists. In post 80 scenario, there occurred a heavy communalisation of Indian polity due to the social changes, byproduct of green revolution and petty industrialisation and by the political opportunism indulged in by Congress led by Indira Gandhi and then by Rajiv Gandhi. Shah Bano Judgement and opening the locks of Babri Masjid was the politics of ruling Congress i.e. appeasing fundamentalists of both the communities. Victory of Janata Dal at the hustings brought in the government of V.P. Singh which brought in Mandal Recommendations.

And this was 'The' point which transformed the Indian politics. The reaction to Mandal Commission was a widespread backlash of the upper castes, especially in Hindi belt. BJP cleverly encashed upon it by giving an emotive touch to the political events. Sangh Parivar by a masterstroke, projected Hindutva, Mandir issue as the core of social problems. It was not possible for BJP to directly oppose Mandal Commission, also it had to express the aspirations of its social constituency, those opposed to social justice, those for status quo, those for privileges of upper castes. Advani's Rath Yatra campaign came at a time, by which the industrialisation process had thrown up a new layer of petty industrialists, also in north the construction of Hindu identity was strongest amongst this new layer, Brahmin/Bania/ Rich peasant and which got

added on to its earlier social base i.e. upwardly mobile middle classes (an unavoidable mix of caste/class categories).

The movement, Hindutva, which existed only as an ideology so far, got the real flesh and blood with the consolidation of anti-Mandal sentiments. The social sector which was supporter of Religious nationalism, which was living in the category 'us' in contrast to the category of the 'other' the Muslims, swung into a social action to aggressively guard its privileges and status. The cultural onslaught of VHP (Ramshilapujan and the like) came in to supplement the political campaign of BJP and the heady mix of religious emotive symbol and political agenda of protecting the interests of the upper castes, watered the so far dormant, poisonous seeds of Sangh Parivar movement, culminating in the demolition of Babri Masjid and accompanying nationwide anti-Muslim pogroms, reaching their crescendo in the Shiv Sena-controlled anti-Muslim riots in Bombay and the ghastly rape of Muslim women in Surat.

The political force, which had a semi-national existence till mid 80's, and was mainly surviving on the ideological fodder of 'ban cow slaughter', 'Indianise Muslims', 'abolish Article 370' and the like as an ineffective social distraction, found its moorings and strength in late 80's to create a 'social monster' which, after an 'acute' beginning of early nineties has crystallised itself as a social political and ideological force asserting its political agenda at every opportune moment in the society.

3. *Social Roots of Hindutva Movement*: The early simmerings of Hindutva can be seen in the opposition to the secular Congress movement of 19th century. The reaction to secular politics was spearheaded by the Jamindar (landlord), moneylenders, Brahmins and

Banias. This support base constantly stood by the Hindutva politics all through. Later, some industrialists did successfully ride on two boats of supporting secular Gandhian movement and also supporting Hindutva movement. But mostly, the modern industrialists stood by the secular movement led by Gandhi. The Rajas (Hindu kings of Princely States) by and large stood by the politics of RSS.

The march of industrialisation process changed the social composition and brought in newer layers into society. The BJP and its predecessor, the Jan Sangh began with small electoral support. It was the urban middle classes, sections of twice-born castes, and the Banias. Let us have a brief look at the changes in social composition which have occurred during last 50 years of the republic. The proportion of urban population has gone up by 20-25 percent. They also constitute the ones having derived maximum benefit of modern education and the facilities thrown up by the industrialization process. They have a sort of dominant presence in the society. The cultural, social and political aspirations of this sector is the ground, on which has risen the edifice of Sangh Parivar.

To understand the social base of the Sangh Parivar, we will like to go into the regrouping of social groups in Gujarat. Nandy et. al. have described this process in detail. Along with urbanisation, there has been a parallel process in which the rich peasants of Gujarat have achieved an enhanced social status. These Patidars, (cash crop farmers) caste has been upgraded by a process of religious manoeuvring. The polarisation of middle class (Brahmin, Bania) and Patidar occurred around 1980, around the issue of reservations for the lower castes. In 1980, Gujarat witnessed an extreme form of caste violence directed against the lower castes. These antireservation agitations played a key

role in consolidating the base of upper castes and upwardly mobile middle classes. Sangh Parivar directly or indirectly stood by to support these upper caste onslaught.

By using clever strategies. Sangh Parivar was also able to give an upwardly mobile channel to a section of Dalits, aspiring a better place within Hindu society. In Gujarat, one can clearly see the social functionality of creating the 'other'. Here earlier, the ultimate object of hate was the Dalit, by a clever manoeuvre, the Muslim is substituted for that, the Dalit is unleashed upon the "other", an atmosphere of terror is created, which helps to maintain a 'status quo' of Social hierarchy. The core of this social base was given a cohesion by various yatras and campaigns by VHP.

Basu, Datta, Sarkar, Sarkar and Sen in their enlightening work 'Khaki Shorts' Saffron Flags', have tried to trace the roots of Sangh Parivar movement. They correlate it with the rise of new religiosity around worship 'Jai Mata Di', 'Jai Santoshi Ma', and around functions like 'Jagrata' and pilgrimages like 'Vaishno Devi'. All these which emerged in northern states in late 60's and early 70's got co-opted and colored by the VHP campaigns. Basu et al identify a significant social base of Sangh Parivar in new urban middle class, spreading in small towns as well, which has come up due to the rapid growth of relatively small enterprises and the accompanying trade boom. "These small scale units flourish without the concomitant growth of organized working class, since individual work-places are far too small to consolidate the labour force and enable effective unionization." This type of industrial development, based on screw driver technology has mushroomed all through in 70's and 80's. This newer middle class, tends to be fragmented into smaller, more individual units. "They

are marked by intense internal competition and steady pressure of new opportunity structures, ever expanding horizons for upward mobility and a compulsive consumerism that keeps transcending its own limits. The very pressure of growth is disturbingly destabilizing, the brave new world of global opportunities creates anomie and existential uncertainties." The Green Revolution in parts of UP has increased rural purchasing power feeding into the boom in urban enterprises, consumerism and trade.

It is not incidental that Hindutva movement got its flesh and blood in the wake of Mandal Commissions implementations. The social base of Hindutva sees Mandal as the assertion of exploited and subaltern sections of society, and it is in response to this that aggressive politics of Hindutva got a head start in the early 90s.

4. *Secularisation Process:* As a social phenomenon, modernity and secularisation go hand in hand. They begin with rise of industrial society. From 17th Century discoveries of science were challenging the deeply held beliefs and faith which were integral part of broad canvas of religion. This phenomenon was first observed in Europe, where medieval period was characterised by supremacy of Church over all aspects of life.

European secularisation movement took root during the period of Renaissance and French enlightenment. The vast mass of peasantry crushed under feudal exploitation, could see the liberatory potential of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity', the call given by the rising French bourgeoisie to break the hold of Feudal-Church nexus on the society. The struggle against feudal absolutism also involved struggle against the hold of Church/Religion on the society. Here, on the

one hand, the requirements of the newly emerging industries required the peasants to be released from the social grip of feudal lord and the concomitant religious grip of the Church. It is in this backdrop that one can begin to understand the meaning of social norms developing around modern rationality, ideas from science i.e. beginning of the 'age of reason' in contrast to 'age of faith'.

Thus, modernity and secularisation do not emerge from ideological constructs of the philosophers and ideologues. Primarily, these twin processes are the outcome of the struggles of the emerging bourgeoisie (industrialists and their paraphernalia) and the expression of the struggles of peasants under the clutches of feudal lords. These processes get social roots in these sectors of society who emerge, *pari passu* with development of science and technology which form the infrastructure of the newer production processes.

Modernity/secularisation occur at a particular juncture in history when the newer production processes are trying to integrate the achievements of science and technology into its gambit. The newer requirements require a labour force which, till that time, is not 'free floating' as it is gripped by the traditional hierarchies, is at the service of feudal lords and its legitimiser, the clergy. The prevalent system is a mix of prescientific social wisdom, along with birth and gender related hierarchies which are sustained by the preachings of clergy, pandits and mullahs. The secularisation movement is heralded by two parallel, but opposite groups, whose interests are common at this point of time. The rising industrialist needs more social powers, and a labour force which can be hired at contractual terms. The victims of prevalent hierarchies look forward to the work in industries as a 'relative' liberation from

the prevalent oppressive hierarchies. And along with it goes the struggle for social consent, ideas in social space where the scientific reason battles it out with the pre-scientific social ideas. Thus, the complex of modernity/secularisation cannot be located in any one single arena, it is a comprehensive arrival of newer social relationships (Industrialist-labour: on contractual terms), newer rationality (around science and reason) on one hand arrayed against the feudal-church nexus (based on birth-based hierarchies) and prescientific social ideas.

5. *Secularisation Process in India:* Trajectory of modernity/secularisation process in India has been extremely complex and a painful process. The European powers were out to colonise rest of the world to increase their industrial development, for the primitive accumulation of their industries and also for creating markets for their industrial products. India came mainly under the sway of British, who colonised most of the country and keeping their needs in mind, initiated a ruthless plunder of India's wealth and raw materials. They increased the taxation on land, forced the shift to cash crops resulting in number of severe famines in the country. Simultaneously, to ensure the intense plunder, they laid down the railways, telegraphs as the efficient means of communication. To supplement their needs for trained/educated manpower, they also introduced the English education in the country. To support their efforts many Indians came up as their 'assistants', but shortly learned the ropes and started laying down the foundations of modern industries of their own, and started graduating into 'modern' business professionals. At this time, the 'modern' ideas also found their way through the newer education system and through a class of intelligensia which started going to England for their education.

This process required again the release of peasants from their 'ties', to the lands and subjugations to the feudal lords and the Brahmins. Simultaneously, we see the twin movements which contributed to the secularisation process. The first of these was a series of regional movements against the social hierarchy, caste system and gender oppression, aimed to gain self respect, aimed to break the social stranglehold of Brahmins and the caste system. The second of these was the independence movement, aimed to get rid from the clutches of colonial masters.

The process of breaking of the hegemony of the priest and Jamindar was painfully slow and remained incomplete for decades to come, leaving its remnants in different pockets even till today. The process was initiated by Mahatma Jotirao Phule, who founded *Satyashodhak Samaj* in Maharashtra, with its alliance of middle and low castes, shudra and anti-shudra, it stood the Aryan theory of race on its head. He used popular peasant myths and symbols from 19th century theism to contest the prevailing brahminic religious hegemony. This "gained widespread following throughout India in 1920s, where it was used especially by untouchable groups throughout India as an assertion of equality and a rejection of Hindu identity".

In Tamilnadu, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker began 'Self Respect Movement' (1926) which developed into a political party, Dravida Kazhagam (1944), which "centered around the struggle for secularisation of the hitherto inarticulate levels of Tamil society". Periyar denounced Brahminism and proclaimed atheism.

Another major attempt, which had deepest impact was the one initiated by Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar who attempted at organising a broad based caste-class front of dalits and non Brahmins, but could not quite succeed. But he was able to arouse the self

respect in large section of dalits though workers under the influence of communist parties, which had a different perception of struggle of the oppressed, remained aloof from Babasahebs movement. He initially struggled to gain a place for the dalits within the fold of Hinduism, but failure of all his attempts forced him to convert to Buddhism with all his followers.

Workers, movements began with Narayan Meghaji Lokhande and later on communist parties picked up the thread. Workers, movement had deep ramifications in the social dynamics, and it broke the long slumber of passivity in social relations. It sent the villages into turmoil and new value systems began making their offensive into the Jamindar-poor peasant relationship. Thus, the existing social relationships came under attack from multiple quarters (a) the anticaste movements of Periyar and Ambedkar (b) workers movement (c) independent struggle, anti British movement led by Gandhi and Nehru.

The secularisation/industrialisation process was slow in its trajectory because of colonial powers who will permit/initiate only as much modern infrastructure as needed for their 'plunder' project. The secular democratic movement led by Congress was also predominantly representing the emerging bourgeoisie, which was not very strong, and partly the aspirations of the broad layers of society. It did want to take along the anti caste and workers, movements, but with lot of limitations and compromises. It is for this reason that anti-caste anti-upper class movements never totally subjugated to the Congress, preferring to keep their separate identity as they were clear that their interests are secondary as far as the priorities of the freedom movement are concerned. The land-reforms, land to the tiller, may sound a purely economic demand but it is the social core of secularisation process, as it is

this measure which frees the tiller from the clutches of the landlord. One of the reasons, as to why Nehru rejected the offer of coalition government with the Muslim League was his realisation that Muslim League, like its counterpart Hindu Maha Sabha, was dominated by the landlords and they will prevent the measures for land reforms in the states, wherever the coalition governments will be formed.

The movement for secularisation of society had enemies within the society itself. The weak secularisation movement, represented by Indian National Congress, as pointed out earlier was voicing, projecting the socio-economic needs of the rising, nascent industrialists, a section of professionals, and the modern businessman, who came up in the wake of newer business requirements. The opposition to their social aspirations came from the entrenched social powers, assuming a communal manifestation. The newer developments were breaking the back of established social hierarchy of landlords and the priests. Realising the dangers to their social and political interests, these sectors of society hit back and threw up the political formations like Muslim League (Muslim landlords and Nawabs) and Hindu Mahasabha, RSS (Hindu Jamindars, Rajas of Riyasats; small states within Indian territory: paying tribute to British masters but not controlled by them directly), Brahmins and Banias (traditional tradesmen). The complex development of this political triangle: British colonial aspirations, freedom struggles led by Gandhi and Nehru, and the communal forces: Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha, RSS, led to the partition of the country, and also retarded the growth of secularisation process to a great extent.

6. *Discussions:* In Western countries, in France and England in particular, secularisation process occurred

in a quick pace against the authority of Feudal Nobility and the Church. The social process occurred over a period of few decades only resulting in newer, contractual social relations, a sort of rigid structural hierarchy of feudal times, being replaced by equality and functional hierarchy accompanied by liberalism.

In Indian and most other colonial countries the dynamics of this social change was very different. In India, the secularised England colonised the country and had a 'social tieup' with the feudal lords and nobility. The interest of colonial masters was to drain the wealth of the country and also to create a market for their industrial goods. In the process they introduced railways, telegraphs and modern education. On one hand they intensified the exploitation of peasantry (routed through landlords) on the other they unleashed the processes resulting in the beginnings of industrialisation in this country as a byproduct.

By middle and late 19th century, three distinct social forces emerged (1) colonial power in liaison with landlords (2) rising industrialists and newer professionals (3) the shudras in transition to becoming workers. The things may not have been as clear cut; with lot of fuzzy areas, but broadly, these were the social powers face to face with each others, based on their socio economic interests. Here different streams, tendencies and leaderships came up, representing broadly these different sectors.

To begin with, the rising industrialists and professionals started coming together under different associations demanding more facilities for industries and better opportunities for Indian professional classes. This stream was the stream which wanted to intensify the social change and in this direction chose the vehicle of 'secular nationalism'. This stream, in due

course, recognised the need to oppose the hold of landlord clergy on the peasantry. The political expression of this came up in the form of Indian National Congress.

In opposition to this was the stream giving expression to the interests of landlords, who were in direct collusion with the Britishers. This stream was bifurcated on them religious lines, full of mutual hatred for each other, standing for '*status quo*', this was the beginning of religious nationalism: Muslim and Hindu, in the form of nascent predecessors of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha/RSS. Both were opposed to the Congress politics.

The third stream had a very amorphous beginning and got articulated in opposition the—landlords/Brahmin, and partly supporting secular nationalist stream while preserving its own identity. The first vague beginning of this started with the movement spearheaded by Mahatma Phule. As per Omvedt caste was to him slavery, as vicious and brutal as the enslavement of the Africans in the United States, but based in India not only on open subordination but also on deception and religious illusion. The deception was the essence of what high castes called "Hinduism". "....Phule is today taken as a founding figure in Maharashtra not simply by the anticaste but also by the farmers, women's and rural based environmental movements.... Phule's argument that knowledge, education and science were weapons of advance for the exploited masses, was in contrast to all elitist theories that sought to link western science and eastern morals and argue that Indians could maintain their (brahminical) traditions while adopting science and technology from the west for material development" [11]. Later, Ambedkar picked up the threads of this movement and took it further by

leading agitations which brought together the Shudras in their bid to escape from the clutches of upper castes - landlords. The major agitations which Babasaheb led were, Chavdar Talab: attempt to have access to public drinking water, Kalaram Temple: attempt to enter Hindu temples and Manu Smriti dahan: Burning of Manu Smriti, a book which codifies the hierarchical social structures aimed to subjugate shudras and women. This third stream had another ally, in the form of workers, movements, which initially was started by Narayan Meghaji Lokhande and further carried on by Communist party.

The stream led by Congress, broadly stood for modern values of science, introduction of technology and breaking of the feudal dominated social hierarchies. Supporting this, but without merging in it was the movements of Shudras and workers, who saw a commonality of some of the goals with the goals of freedom struggle, but also realised that this freedom struggle movement, the movement led by Congress cannot go far in fulfilling all their social aspirations. This stream thus supported Congress so far as anti-British struggles were concerned (with minor deviations here and there) but did not merge themselves totally in the Congress movement. Both these streams stood for land reforms, abolition of landlordism and abolition of the vice like grip of Brahminical ethos. In this latter struggle, Congress though committed overtly, was willing to accomodate within itself, even those elements who were not totally committed to these goals in full, and Congress agenda in this direction was half hearted. This was completely realised by the leaders of Shudras and Workers, Ambedkar and Communist Party, who preferred to build up these movements around own agendas.

Again both these streams were open to modern

values of reason, science and for their adoption of science was not just an instrumental ploy. These streams did endeavours to bring in secularisation in the society, though this was a very very slow process. Their efforts did mean loosening the grip of pre modern relationships, opposition to rigid structural hierarchies, an attempt to bring in functional fluid hierarchies, based on equality and contract.

Hindutva movement was in total opposition to this secularisation process. It based itself on the brahminical hinduism, glories of Hindu Kings and the hierarchical social order inherent in the same. It's emphasis was not a social change which was a comprehensive process involving (a) breaking free of the peasantry from the clutches of landlords (b) dumping the religion sanctioned position of Brahmin Jamindar, and (c) struggle against British powers.

As we have seen, British rule here was in collaboration with the landlords, and by implication with the Brahminism and landlordism. So there stood two opposite forces on one hand; the ones' for '*status quo*', the colonial masters and feudal lords (represented by Hindu Mahasabha/RSS and Muslim League) and on the other rising industrialists, neo-professionals (represented through Congress, Shudras (represented by Phule, Periyar, Ambekars (represented through Lokhande/ Communist Party). Despite temporary vacillations of Communist Party under the dictates of the interests of world socialism i.e. interests of Russian socialist state, broadly stood for anti British struggles.

The British-Landlords combine stood opposed to secularisation, while the Congress-Dalit/worker combine stood for secularisation. Role of Hindutva onslaught has to be understood in this 'social location'. It is in this context that one has to see RSS's role

during freedom struggle. It kept totally aloof from anti-British struggles, in turn ridiculing Gandhian movements and calling for building Hindu Sanghathan. It is in this context that one has to see their aloofness from anticaste struggles led by Ambedkar and it is precisely in this context that one has to see their 'lending RSS volunteers' to break the strike in one of the textile mills owned by Birla.

Today, phenomenon related to Hindutva are not as simple and straightforward. Keeping in mind the overall change in social values under the impact of modernity, and also keeping in mind the electoral compulsions, Hindutva onslaught has adopted its language to suit the changing times, while retaining the 'core' meaning and agenda of its political programme i.e. representing the aspirations of a section of society which stands to benefit from the pre-modern social relations. It will not talk of 'caste abolition' but 'social harmony between different groups', it will not talk of 'workers'rights' but of 'occupational families' and workers cultivating harmonious relationships with employers, it will not talk of 'gender equality', but of the role of women as mothers and their respectable (!) status in ancient past. These velvet gloves easily get passed off in the social psyche as the 'mass consciousness' has been doctored by it, because of its decades long process of percolation of 'pre-modern' value system coated in the syrup of religion based emotionalism. Its honey-coated ideology stands for straight-jacketing the roles of exploited and subalterns in a way so as to become subservient to the interests of elites and upper castes, their claims for not 'believing' in the caste system notwithstanding.

Due to the impact of industrialisation, a new layer of petty industrialists and rich farmers has come into being. This layer of society by its very situation feels

extremely insecure, and prefers to have the option of 'structural hierarchy,' where roles of exploited sections of society can be straight-jacketed and via the sanctions mediated through religiosity, these middle classes can 'breathe' with better comfort and rule the roost. This sector again preferring to have 'pre-modern, structural hierarchy' based relations in India is similar to the mass base of German fascism. It is this layer which, threatened by the assertions (aiming to overthrow the hierarchical constraints) of lower castes/class, in the wake of Mandal Commission recommendations, is hitting back through the politics of Hindutva, to 'restrain', to enforce the *status-quo* through the 'ideal *status quoist* onslaught', the Hindutva.

Thus, in a nutshell, Hindutva is the 'other' of secularisation process. It is the other of change for modern (i.e. equality) relationships. It stands for premodern value systems in the 'modernist' language. In a society with slow paced development, it is the 'permanent opposition' to the process of change towards liberty, equality, fraternity: the flagbearers of secularisation process. It is on one hand akin to the middle class based fascist movements, which operate more in the political arena and abolish the liberal space, straightjacket the roles of exploited sections through terror and invocation to the glorious past, on other it has similarities with 'fundamentalist' onslaughts of various third world countries, in the form of using the emotive appeal of religions to achieve the similar goals. What is the core commonality between the two is the 'same mass base'. In former, the society is already partly secularised, so the 'petty bourgeoisie' resorts to terror and invokes the past, while in latter, since the societies are semisecularised religious emotionalism based dictats are able to achieve similar purpose, and need to resort to slightly lesser degrees of terror, as the emotional appeals of religion make up for the rest.

Being very clear of its social/political goals and aspirations, Hindutva onslaught makes a judicious use of religion and 'fascist' tactics depending on the contingencies of the situation. Hatred for minority community, neighbouring country playing the role of 'invented hate objects' around which 'mass hysteria' can be created to subjugate the voices of reason, progress, liberalism and secularisation. Thus, this 'opposite', 'the other' of secularisation process, the 'Hindutva onslaught' operates at many a plane to oppose, denigrate and even 'use' the concept of secularism. It is precisely for this reason that it is doctoring the mass consciousness to propagate that (a) secularism is a western concept unsuited for India (b) secularism is antireligion so how a religious country like India can adapt it (c) secularism in Indian context has been used to appease Muslims, so the secular state means 'anti-Hindu state' (d) secularism has resulted in pampering of Muslims, who are fundamentalists, so secularism is another mask for fundamentalism (e) earlier it was Gandhi whose policies resulted in emboldening muslims resulting in Pakistan formation, that people like Nehru preferred bondage to Western system of thought because of which secularism has found a place in Indian constitution, both the processes need to be undone (f) Hinduism itself is secular, so only a Hindu Rashtra can be truly secular country (g) the ruling Congress has appeased Muslims at the cost of Hindus, so it is 'pseudo secular', while SP believes in 'positive secularism' (i.e. does away with the very concept of 'affirmative action' an accompaniment of liberal democracy). This claim of SP is the 'cleverest one' as it highlights only the pampering of Muslims fundamentalist leadership (not Muslims as a whole) completely overlooking the pampering of Hindu fundamentalists by the government, and on the other hand makes a 'clever' use of the credibility of secularism as a concept for electoral purposes.

7. *Conclusions:* Secularisation is a comprehensive process involving introduction of industries and other accompanying modern paraphernalia. It means overcoming of feudal, premodern, structural hierarchy based relationships. With the beginning of secularisation process begin the counter reaction of those social layers which stand to loose in their social power. This in Indian context has been the underpinnings of Hindutva onslaught. It began as a response to the Indian National Congress's movement, which had elements of secularisation inherent in it. This reaction to secularisation got expressed in Muslim League, Hindu Maha Sabha and RSS. Hindutva is the political signature of the latter two.

Hindutva had to undertake the exercise of presenting the 'pre-modern' value systems, 'obscurantist ideologies' and 'caste' and 'gender' hierarchies in the language of modernity for the secular compulsions. Today, the form last two decades the traditional class base of Hindutva has been joined by a layer of society which mushroomed due to modernisation process itself, section of middle classes (petty industrialists, middle level professionals etc.), and has the silent support even of section of the industrialists who presume the abolitions of liberal space and strengthening of 'structural hierarchical' relationships may benefit them as well.

This movement is neither just political, nor just religious movement, it is a comprehensive conglomerate trying to straight-jacket all the social mores and relationships as per its premodern agenda. The beneficiaries of this antiseccularisation agenda are the forces entrenched in the seats of social powers. The victims of this onslaught are the deprived, struggling, exploited and oppressed sections of society, whose goal is to struggle for their rights to minimise the levels of their material suffering. As secularisation

process gives them a liberal space to struggle for their rights, secularisation, secularism is an inherent part of their agenda. As the other social force wanting to have 'secularisation' the industrialists and its associates, are willing to strike a 'comfortable compromise' with these pre-modern powers, probably the major onus of struggle for secularisation will lie on the shoulders of exploited and oppressed sections of society.

The onslaught on secularisation is masquerading as 'religious revival', 'nationalism' and a conglomerate of 'emotionally charged' slogans. The battle for containing and secularisation process by Hindutva has shrewdly been orchestrated through 'Yatras', and Kar Sevas and Demolitions. This onslaught needs to be given a fitting reply by the exploited of the society, as its them alone who can show Hindutva onslaught its place in the history—the dustbin.

# IV

## RELIGION, STATE And SECULARISM

*IRFAN ENGINEER*

Secularism has come under a cloud from a section of academicians. The aspirations of the middle class, especially of the majority community, to be more assertive has influenced the shift in the centre of gravity of the Indian polity and the social analysts towards the right. The Hindutva offensive during the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Mosque controversy and the consequent demolition of the Babri Mosque by Hindu communal fanatics is the indication of the trend. It is now being argued that the State is too secular and is seeking to impose this western concept on the traditional masses. It is being said that secularism will not work, as the Indian people are deeply religious. On the other hand, there is also a trend, albeit a weak one, which vehemently argues that secularism is nothing, if not a movement, to reduce the influence of religion in the society and that religion is pre-modern, backward, unscientific, thinking, and the root of many problems in the society. We feel that the role of religion and science on the one hand and the relation between State and religion on the other, has not been properly examined and a lot of misconceptions are still prevalent. Some consider religion as something static, ideal and divine, which has existed uniformly all through in human societies. While others consider it as if all religions have always played a negative role and are obstacles which come in the way of progress of science

and human society. We feel that it is necessary to examine how and why religion evolved in history and what human needs it has satisfied. This paper is an attempt to contribute towards the clarification of some aspects regarding the role of religion in society and examine its implications for secularism in the Indian context. We also argue on this paper that in India, since there was no confrontation between Church and science or Church and the common masses, secularism was never accepted as an anti-religious ideology by the majority of Indian people. The ruling classes used the term 'secular' in the context of the State being non-communal, i.e. the State will not interfere in the internal affairs of the community. This often leads to consolidation and perpetuation of community identities. Rigid identities serve the interests of the elites within the communities and may become burdensome on the toiling sections of the community. We call this hegemonic secularism. Finally, we argue that there is a need for democratic secularism in our country which means that the State should, while granting cultural autonomy to the community, uphold the democratic rights of the citizens and should not allow the communities to represent the citizens as far as secular problems of the citizens are concerned.

### Role of Religion

Some Western scholars considered that development and modernization would lead to the decline in the influence of religion. Emile Durkheim (1915), maintained that although the inroads of science into human affairs (that is secularization) had proceeded far and deep by the end of the early 20th century, yet it was forbidden entry in the world of religious and moral life. Durkheim thought that even this final barrier would be overcome and science would establish herself as a mistress in this reserved region also. Durkheim later acknowledged that religion seems

destined to transform itself rather than to disappear. The bourgeois class became so confident of itself in the 'Age of Reason' and its triumph over nature by technology and industrialization, that the protagonist of this age, not looking far beyond its time and continent, declared that religion will no more be necessary. It was the arrogance of their triumph which bespoke of their power over the society.

Harvey Cox in his work "The Secular City", for example, said in 1966 that industrialization and urbanization, distance human beings from nature. They find themselves in a situation where they are no longer at the mercy of natural or rather 'supernatural' forces and are more or less masters of their destiny. The secular person is pragmatic and has a matter-of-fact approach to life. Such an individual is not much concerned about the mystery of life or the questions of life after death. His chief or only interest is life in this world which he wants to live as best as he can. He utilizes science and technology to achieve his chosen ends.

Science, it was hoped, would not only provide humankind with new technologies and gadgets, but also completely unravel all the mysteries of nature. Religion, they forecasted, would not be required to provide mythological explanations for natural phenomena and its influence will therefore decline, and probably vanish. It was assumed that all the material needs of humans would be taken care of in the industrial society. Whether science and capitalism accomplished the task allotted to them by these scholars, and who did they benefit by their accomplishments, are questions which we do not wish to go into in detail here. However, science and technology, can at the most be burdened with meeting material needs and the knowledge of nature and natural laws.

Contrary to these assumptions, the role of religion was not confined to providing explanations for natural

phenomena. Nor did it always have antagonistic relations with science throughout history. Therefore, even when science provided with better and more convincing explanations than religious mythologies for natural phenomena, religion was not made redundant. Science and religion played even complementary roles, for example, during the transition from tribal societies to class societies, where a limited scientific knowledge and understanding of the nature and natural forces had developed and which helped produce some surplus. The custodian of religion and knowledge of natural forces were the same individuals. While science provided protection from nature, religion provided protection or at least consolation from social forces, viz. oppression and exploitation by the dominant class. Religion continued to perform this role in the society.

### Other Roles of Religion

Scientific discoveries and scientific explanations of simple natural phenomena do not reach a significant section of the population. An extensive network to disseminate information about discoveries of science, and simple scientific explanations of natural phenomena to all the people throughout the world has not been developed. Religion and religious mythologies seem to be the only source through which a significant section of the world's population arrives at some understanding, about natural phenomena even today in this 'modernized' world. Religion is one of the oldest institutions of human society and has a well established institutional network. Human and other resources have been at its disposal. We will not linger on this point any longer, as our purpose here is to examine other roles of religion.

The role of religion has often varied, from being an instrument in the hands for enforcing abject subjugation of the toiling masses, to that of inspiring

the revolt against tyranny or racial oppression. Debiprasad Chattopadhyay describes the historical necessity of religion as follows:

The career of the human beings began with a struggle against nature: men have progressively acquired the knowledge and capacity to control the forces of nature and extract from nature wealth for the satisfaction of human needs. This eventually led them to the threshold of civilization, when emerged a new problem, namely the need for the regulations necessary in order to adjust the relations of men to one another and especially the distribution of the available wealth. At this stage, a section of the community itself could serve the function as custodians of the wealth in relation to another section, and when this section soon converted itself into the owners thereof, the product of the labour of others could be appropriated by it for its own satisfaction. It thus no longer remained the simple struggles of man against nature; to this was added another form of struggle, namely that of man against man. .... The impoverished masses who in the earlier phase of civilization were simply slaves and who, in its advanced phase, became the propertyless working class were henceforth confronted with a dual uncertainty and a dual misery; those coming from still uncontrolled nature and those coming from the exploitative machinery of the ruling class. Science and technology were left with the task of progressively delimiting the former, while religion to blunt the sense of the latter. ... This made life for the masses too painful or too full of sufferings and uncertainties to be born without some form of palliative remedy. This was supplied by religion—the belief in God who alone could assure justice, if not right now at least sometime later, if not in this world at least in the after-world. [Debiprasad Chattopadhyay (1987)]

If, for the toiling masses, religion has acted as a palliative, it was at the same time an instrument to

channelise surplus in the hands of the dominant class and to accumulate surplus.

The social surplus produced in the villages had to be channelised to the incipient city centres and stored there, so that the means of subsistence for the whole-time specialists could be supplied from this accumulated surplus. The smoothest and easiest way of bringing this about was to resort to some ideological device, and, under the given historical conditions, the most suitable ideological device was religious beliefs and practices. Thus, the full-time craftsmen, uprooted from the older tribal collectives which provided them with the protection they required for its inner cohesion, needed a new ideological device: awe-inspiring organized religion. To acquire the surplus produced by the peasantry, it was enough to put forward well-worked out myths and superstitions; thus, for example, once the peasants are made to believe that without offering a part of their products to the goddesses or gods - i.e. concretely to their earthly representatives, the priests or priestly clans working for the god or god-king - they remain exposed to grave perils like draughts, plagues and disasters in many other forms, the peasants would willingly and eagerly part with whatever they could afford from their own products. In this way, the working class, being ignorant of the true causes of its subjection, is reconciled to its lot. This is the genesis of religion. [Stan Lourdusamy (1990)]

### **Role of Religion for the Toiling Masses**

For the oppressed and toiling masses, a well knit and forceful social existence can go a long way in overcoming the frustration emanating from dominance over them. The toilers seek to overcome their individual frustration which exist in a strong collective society. Their powerlessness has to be compensated by some explanation which consoles them. A promise of a

bright future, even though distant, or even after death is called for. Religion for toilers generally steps in to cement the strong bonds desired. It provides values and meaning to their lives. It is their hope. Religion acts, not only as a substitute to science in explaining the universe and its laws, it also has to act as a popular philosophy for even the most ordinary person to be able to appreciate. The more powerless need stronger, collective existence to give meaning and purpose to their existence. The collective social existence through which the individual seeks to compensate his or her powerlessness is to have common social values, culture, and a world view.

Whenever there is a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty in life, the oppressed and the marginalised have an easy recourse to turn to their past and their religion for solace. A glorious and unblemished past, capable of giving solace is 'discovered'. The glorious past that is discovered begins to appeal. Insecurity and uncertainty of the present, does not permit one to give up anything of the past, including religion. Religion appears to be something fixed that has never changed. The 'glorious' past has to be a certainty in order to provide solace in the present uncertain times. It therefore appears to be capable of only one undisputed version and one interpretation.

Science cannot be burdened to provide a world view and meanings to people's lives, their diverse needs and circumstances. It cannot be expected to give people, cultural and social values. It cannot be expected to guide the people as to how they have to conduct themselves in the society and interact with others in the society. This burden has been historically carried by religion. Though religion is not to be the only source of social values, world view and meaning of life, but nevertheless, it has been the main source. Religion, unlike science has a social sanction to enforce the social moralities, values and culture on one and

all. Religion gives a degree of certainty to life and values. It gives the much needed faith to its followers. Therefore, science may discover great things and benefit mankind immensely, religion at least in the present circumstances does fulfill a meaningful need of the people. It will continue to do so till a vast majority of people experience insecurity and instability in their life, feel powerless and are oppressed. It therefore cannot be said merely to be a false consciousness.

### Origins of Religion and Tribal Communities

The origin of belief in the existence of some supernatural power which controls nature and life had been out of fear, especially of an unpredictable nature. The simple religion, followed by the adivasis, do not have any elaborate rituals or books which require any authority or priest to perform the rituals or interpret the religion. Their religion, in a nutshell, is a social spirit as well as love and respect for nature. In fact it can hardly be called religion. It is faith in a supernatural force with some sacred notions. Their rituals are expressions of gratitude to nature for being bountiful towards them and looking after them. Some rituals are to propitiate the angry spirits capable of destruction. Though there are both *devis* (male deities) as well as *devi* (female deities), *devis* predominate. There are deities for crops, forests, hills, animals, etc. i.e. deities protect and govern all natural resources on which they are dependent for their livelihood. Their deities are capable of being bountiful as well as destructive, when furious. They can be offered alcohol, or sacrifice of a fowl or animal and are pleased with dance. Hence, on festive occasions, first the deities are offered alcohol or sacrifice of an animal or fowl and then the entire village or family shares it together. Adivasis derive tremendous inspiration from the supernatural forces in their struggle for a livelihood-both - with the nature as well as against oppressors.

Amongst them, there is no concept of prayers. They do not seek any special or personal favours for themselves or for fulfillment of any individual wish. As pointed out earlier, they express their gratitude to deities for being bountiful and pray to them to look after their village and collectives. Those individuals, who want to pray for personal favours, like a job etc. have to pray to non-tribal gods.

### Nature of Religion in Class Divided Societies

Religion which evolved, when the human society could produce a surplus, and a class of people lived off that surplus without involving themselves in the day to day production was markedly different. The religion evolved by the dominant class, had to confront and gradually suppress the tribal religion. The tribal religion, which was a collective product of the entire community strongly encouraged collective participation, at festivities and enforced the collective will and aspirations. It catered more to emotions and feelings and did not have any elaborately worked out ideology nor any explanations for natural phenomenon. In the society divided on class lines, the new religion was more a product of thought processes of the dominant class which monopolized surplus without participating in production. While the labouring classes produced material goods, so to say, the dominant classes produced religion, ideology and other instruments of appropriating the surplus. Divine force in such religions is more specifically defined with not only magical powers, but also supernatural powers and the power to punish. The punishment is general, unlike in the tribal belief system where punishment is to the entire collective. The individuals who do not carry out their religious obligations ( religious duties) are in any case delineated from the ruling class. Religion with an outlook of the oppressor class has to have an elaborate mythology and ideology, which reflects the values

desirable to that class. The toiling masses are more alienated from such a religion as compared to the tribal religion which helped communal solidarity. Religion of the oppressor justifies appropriation of surplus and also calls upon the labouring class to work harder to achieve their salvation. The supposed salvation would bring to the toilers all the luxuries they aspire for and which the dominant classes enjoy in this world. Marx referred to religion as a sigh of the oppressed in this sense. Such a religion is religion of *status-quo*.

*Status-quoist* religion which is an instrument in the hands of the dominant class of the society to justify their dominance over the toiling majority, oppose vehemently any change in the system. Using its philosophy, it tries to ease the tension between the dominant and the subjugated; between the exploiter and the exploited. It sweetens the bitter pill of exploitation or what Marx called, proves to be the opium of the masses.

The small group of religious elite who take charge of the institutionalized religion give it an autonomy. This autonomy is made to impose itself, not only on the society in which it finds itself, but also on the other types of society it may come in contact with. During this process, however, the beliefs, the myths, and the rites may or may not correspond to the experiences and needs of the people in the practicality of their daily lives. If it corresponds to their experiences and needs, it is well and good for the religious system; if it does not, a tension gradually builds up at the base, that eventually pressurizes the religious elite in charge of the religious system to change and adapt it to suit the felt needs. Once this is done, the religious actors non-consciously institutionalize the adapted system all anew and give it an autonomy once again; and this process goes on until such time when the religious actors would have to make yet another

adaptation. [Stan Lourdasamy (1984), pp 211-212].

Religion thus continuously evolves. Conflict between the dominant and subjugated; oppressor and oppressed leaves its own stamp on the evolution of religion in a society. To the extent the subjugated and oppressed class is able to resist the dominance of their oppressor and their ideological hegemony and are able to pose a serious challenge to the oppressive religious doctrines, the oppressed can insulate their beliefs which later continue to symbolize defiance. To blunt such defiance, those symbols, values and beliefs are co-opted by the dominant class. The philosophy of Charvakas, Buddhism, Siddha, Natha, Tantra ran parallel religious traditions to the Brahminical religion, more popular amongst the oppressed, right upto the Bhakti movement. Lord Jagannath was worshipped by the adivasis of Orissa but now has been co-opted by the dominant class and caste. Krishna, Vishnu Shiva, Ganesha are but a few examples of the goods co-opted by the Brahminical religion as a compromise. Many of the little traditions of various oppressed castes and communities has continued to date.

The ruling classes and hegemonical, elites more or less, have the means to influence and determine the social forces. Unlike the toilers, they are not generally in desperate search of morals, values and meanings of life. They aspire to be able to command the existing society rather than to search for values and meanings. Religion is, whenever possible, used to gain the command over the society and manipulate the social values to suit them and to gain absolute hegemony over the society or consolidate their hegemony.

Unlike the religion of tribal communities, where class differences are not yet sharp, religion which is a product of the dominant class is usually institutionalized. The hierarchy prevalent in the society gets reflected in religion and therefore there is institutionalization of religion. More rigid the hierarchy

necessary to appropriate surplus from the subjugated classes, the more institutionalized is the form taken by the religion in their hands. Institutionalization of religion is also an attempt to arrest its evolution by the dominant classes with the might that the church can command. No deviation from the official version is tolerated and heresy is punished. The church assumes the right to mediate between the believer and god. The church and the State reinforce each others powers. The doctrines of the church can be evolved only by the clergy or by the State. The common man is kept out of religious affairs as well as the affairs of the State. He has to merely follow in worship as told to.

The dominant class as part of this effort to maintain control and power over the society will cut across and limit activity of religious institutions; viz., the objectively conflictive structure of social dominance, will condition which religious activity is impossible, which religious activity is possible but undesirable, which religious activity is tolerable, which religious activity is acceptable, which religious activity is suitable and which religious activity is primary and urgent. The dominant class will try to (1) annihilate and subjugate, all religious elements (belief, rite, behavioural norms, groups and leaders) that may pose a danger to it's dominance (2) create and restructure all elements accordingly. The reading of the foundational proclamation of any religion and its interpretation and the ethical, liturgical, doctrinal organizational definitions, are done in the framework of a specific society. [Stan Lourdusamy (1990)]

However, the crisis within the system deepens and the forces of change emerge from the womb of the old society. The emerging forces challenge all the values and culture of the dominant classes. Religion and religious institutions of the earlier dominant classes are also challenged. New philosophy, ideology, values, culture and social relations emerging from the struggle

with the old dominating class may take the form of an alternative religion. Christianity as well as Islam are examples of such religions and one can find values of equality in both the religions. However, once the old exploitative order was overthrown, they also became the religion of new establishments and new exploiters, viz. the feudal classes.

Christianity's institutionalization was ensured with the conversion of King Constantine I, and subsequent establishment of the Roman Church. Similarly, as the Umayyad Dynasty under Muaviyah and Yazid consolidated their rule and power, the original purpose of Islam was lost and the religion was used as an instrument to consolidate their power. An army of interpreters of the religion, who could interpret religion as the rulers wanted to legitimize all the deeds of the rulers, came into existence with efforts of the new establishments. Thus, the non-existent priestly class came into existence under Islam.

In the hands of the new classes, these religions were institutionalized. The institutions of these religions sided with and supported the feudal classes. Christianity then had to face new challenges from the rising capitalist class. Church and the feudal classes were dealt heavy blows by the rising capitalist class in Western Europe and its legitimacy was considerably reduced in that part of the world. Nevertheless, religion did have new utilities for the merchants and the imperial bourgeoisie who required and were in constant search of new colonies. Missionaries accompanied the merchants and imperialists to 'civilize' the 'barbarians' of Asia, Africa and Latin America and lent legitimacy to the colonization process. The toiling masses of the colonized world as well as the working class fighting for their liberation, resurrected the original spirit of Christianity that had then sided with the exploited of its time and liberation theology emerged out of these efforts. It may be clear from the above, that religion

by itself, may not be reactionary or progressive. That would depend on the section which is employing it as an instrument to further its interests.

### Religion in the New World Order

Notwithstanding predictions of western scholars, religion thus continues to have its sway in the present global arena, not only in the Third World, but it is also getting stronger in the advanced countries of the First World. Robert Wuthnow's (1989) richly documented work which underscores that a simple-minded, linear notion of secularization is wholly inadequate to capture the restructuring of American religion in our times in all its complexity and vibrancy<sup>1</sup>. The New World Order, dictated by global capitalism, has led to concentration of global wealth in the hands of a few from the First World, amidst a sea of poverty and deprivation of millions of people of their basic human needs. The reactionary ruling classes of the resource rich Third World countries are fully backed by global capitalism to repress their people and brutally crush any challenge to their world order. Of course the reactionary ruling classes of the Third World countries get some crumbs and opportunities to amass wealth out of the labour of their people and the natural resources of their territory. The unbelievable affluence, due to concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, has led to a decadent consumerist culture and values, which is evident from the disproportionate growth of service industries, five star culture, womanizing, drug industry, gambling, casinos, etc. It has led to alienation, individualism, racism and above all dehumanization. High suicide rates are, but a manifestation of this phenomena. However, even drugs, and consumerism have failed to provide any solace to

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1. Quoted by T.N. Madan in "Modern Myths, Locked Minds, Secularism and Fundamentalism in India."

the alienated mortals. They started turning towards religion, but of Osho Rajneesh and ISKCON variety or towards movements led by Catholic Churches against abortion. Thus, we see religious revivalism in the First World. The oppressed and the exploited are also turning more and more to religion. In America, the African Americans recently took out a massive rally in Washington to fight racial discrimination. The rally was called 'Million Men March' and was led by Mohammed Farrah. Farrah has been appealing to the African Americans to give up the religion of their oppressors - white men i.e. Christianity, and take inspiration from Islam.

The brains of the Third World countries that migrate to the First World in search of greener pastures - after receiving the education from the resources of their country - cannot easily adjust themselves in the First World culture and find themselves to be the targets of racism. Unable to give up the greener pastures nevertheless, they too turn towards religious revivalism and finance revivalist movements of their home country. On the other hand, the masses in the Third World come increasingly under the influence of fundamentalist movements within their countries as a means to protest against the alliance of the ruling and comprador capitalist classes of their country and the global capitalism. The alliance causes mind boggling inequalities with misery and want of basic human needs on the one hand, and affluence and luxurious lives of the elites on the other. The affluent classes indulge in conspicuous consumption, take to the western way of life and become consumers of western culture. The opposition to such affluence takes fundamentalist form. Religious fundamentalism promises to purge out the western culture and the liberal values along with it. Fundamentalist movements in Egypt and Algeria, are a good examples of such fundamentalist movements.

## Religion in the Colonized Countries—Science and Technology

The contention of the western scholars, that after development of science, religion will have no role proved wrong. Religion has survived, as it satisfies some felt need in the society. Their contention was wrong in another sense as well. Science, by itself, did not mean progress. Science is knowledge-based which can be used for progress. Capitalism, however, monopolised its control over science and prevented it from being used for the progress of human society. Science and technology in the colonized countries could not play the role it played in Europe i.e. challenge the mythologies and beliefs held by the religious institutions under feudalism, especially those explaining natural laws. There was no confrontation between science and religion in any field in the colonized states as in medieval Europe. The Church in medieval Europe had taken a human centric view of the universe, i.e. humans are highest creation of god and the universe was created for the human beings. It was a way to justify the authority of the Church and the prevailing social hierarchy. God has created the universe for mankind and has also authorised them, as its representatives to command the hierarchial society. Therefore their rule was by logic, not just on human society, but extended to the entire universe. Scientific discoveries which could have challenged this human centric view of the universe were sought to be suppressed by the Church with the help of its authority and power. The emerging bourgeoisie saw the use of science and led the battle against the Church and feudal order. Science, with the backing of the rising bourgeoisie not only won the battle, but also revolutionized people's lives and could serve them in their day to day life. The ruling classes in the west - the bourgeoisie no more required the

crutches of organized religion to maintain its dominance and hegemony over the rest of society. This was called separation of religion from politics, and therefore, secularization of the society.

Science did not have to confront the oppressor class's hegemony the way it had to do in the west. It therefore did not have the opportunity to confront religion and its human centric world view, sponsored by the oppressor class. The Indian Renaissance, if we may call the *bhakti* so, was not in the light of any major scientific discovery or rational explanations of natural phenomenon. The *Bhakti* movement was more a movement for a anti-authoritarian religion with a message for love and humanity. The philosophical outlook also did not challenge the human centric world view.

The skills and techniques of production of the artisan class could have led to scientific revolution. Science and scientific experiments that were emerging on the Indian soil were suppressed by the British colonialists. The whole knowledge base of the community was systematically destroyed and a deluge of imperialist goods and services were dumped on the Indian soil. Religion in India was therefore, never confronted by science and the Renaissance. Also, science has never employed the services of the toiling masses, and it never had to grapple with their problems. For example, in spite of the fact that the knowledge of medicine has advanced so much, as to even transplant human organs, and there are inventions of costly biotechnological gadgets in the rural areas. Dysentery is the killer disease causing higher number of deaths than any other disease. Marginalised sections of the rural areas do not have access to even simple medicines to cure diseases. How are the people to reconcile with such a phenomenon, if they have no opportunity to understand the cause of the epidemic? Religion which explains that bad spirits are responsible, is the only

source to which they can turn for consolation. The ill equipped Primary Health Centres may be inaccessible, but the Bhagat and his limited experience of treating diseases is available any time it is needed. Scientific knowledge may be advanced enough to produce nuclear bombs, super computers, new sophisticated models of luxury cars, fashion designs, etc. However, science has not been employed to improvise the bullock carts of the rural people, or to improvise the houses of the toilers, or provide better stoves that operate on the fuel, easily available in the vicinity for the women, or to solve the drinking water problems of all villages, or to light a lamp in all houses, to construct school buildings in the rural areas, etc. Except for the occurrence of green revolution in small pockets and the growth of a few cash crops, science has not been used to improve agricultural production in the drought prone regions and irrigate the farms of the poor farmers. People have to fall on their traditional knowledge and skills to solve their humble existential problems, and if they cannot be solved with traditional skills and knowledge, they learn to live with it. Religion forms part of this tradition. Thus, tradition as well as religion have become deep rooted amongst the people, as they have appeared to stand by them and provide a meaning to their life. Science is not employed to reduce the drudgery of toiling men and women. Like religion, science is also a weapon in the hands of the elites.

Even after Independence, the model of development employed by the post-Colonial government was not very much different. Giant modernized industries were encouraged in few pockets, at the cost of the rest of the country in the name of Planning. All the electricity and water that the industries required were made available by constructing big dams and hydel power projects. Several millions of rural people, especially ST and SC, were displaced without rehabilitation.

Our export-oriented industrial growth is dependent

on the Western technology. Import of modern technology to compete in the international markets, rather than for the needs of the people, causes more and more workers to be retrenched, even though, millions are already unemployed or underemployed. The Western technological solutions to multiply the profits of the *compradore bourgeoisie* has led to many big projects like power, mining, firing ranges, and even tourism (sic) results in eviction and displacement of millions, thus increasing their problems rather than solving them. In the name of science and modernization, Western technology was imposed on us from above. The inauguration of these modern (read Western) technology-supported projects take place after duly consulting the 'Panchang', or '*Shubh Ghadi*' with '*Shubh Labh*' signs and coconut breaking and all that. Science and technology, in the hands of the capitalist class has, thus made the lives of people miserable.

Since science and scientific knowledge did not emerge from the Indian soil (and is beyond the control of the oppressed masses), science and scientific temper has not been instrumental in changing their traditions. In fact, in the hands of the dominant capitalist class, the encounter of the toiling masses with science and technology was and continues to be very hostile. It has displaced the marginalised sections of rural people without giving them any alternative livelihood, and modernization of industries has reduced the work force and rendered workers unemployed. Readymade technology is available for all the problems - but with a heavy social and economic price.

Since readymade technology was available, there is no incentive for the inquisitive and intelligent students in the country to reinvent it all over again and in any case, the patent regime prohibits it. The promising scientists in any case are bought over by the prosperous countries or in one of the few elite institutes in India, like the TIFR, PRL, IITs and IISc etc. The research in

these elite institutes is conducted for the benefit of industries. India has not boasted of any major invention. An army of rural scientists or even science enthusiasts and entrepreneurs are simply missing from our country, who through various studies and experiments could challenge traditions. A strong caste system did not allow such an army of scientists to emerge. Continuation of traditions has in reality meant a hold of feudal, orthodox/fundamentalist, institutionalized, hierarchical, and oppressive religion and values which seeks to bind the toiling masses into neo-feudal relations, and construct primordial solidarities which ultimately are employed in the service of the elites to subjugate the weaker and oppressed sections. It also means subjugation of women. This is not to say that all traditions are regressive or backward. There are good traditions, especially the traditions prevalent amongst the oppressed classes/castes. But they will never be able to become the dominant force in the society, not because they are not widely prevalent, but because unless the power structure is challenged, it will never have the strength to be able to raise its voice and challenge the reactionary, oppressive and anti-people traditions.

In the above discussion, we saw that there was no confrontation between religious institutions and science, as the subcontinent was colonized even before a powerful mercantile/capitalist class could emerge on its soil. Therefore, the question of secularization and secularism also did not come up in the subcontinent, as it happened in the west. In fact, the concept of secularism itself came with the Colonial rule. The term 'secular' was used for the first time by the Indian National Congress when it was condemned as a Hindu communal party by Sir Sayed. In defense, the Congress claimed to be secular. It did not mean by the term 'secular' that religion should not be used in public life, nor was it against any religion. It simply meant that it did not represent any one community alone. In fact,

Congress freely used religion and religious symbols to mobilize the masses in the Freedom Struggle. Despite the Constitution, in India the principle of secularism has been modified and it has been conditionally accepted by the ruling elites that the State in India will be non-communal. Nothing more, nothing less. The reason for such a distorted 'adaptation' of the principle of secularism, lies in the Colonial rule. The Colonial State, through its policies and acts consolidated and reinforced caste and communal identities. The Indian National Congress, being the party of elites drawn from various communities, was basically interested in self rule, and to inherit the colonial state. Politically, it would not pay to approach all the people of the country as individual citizens. It was much easier and simpler to draw communities as a whole into the Freedom Struggle. All the resources of the communities so drawn, would then be available. Let us first examine how the Colonial State strengthened community identities.

### The Colonial State and Communalism

The policies of the British Communal State resulted in a dual process. On the one hand, introduction of railways, opening of industries and urbanization in some pockets, were weakening the caste structures. Some avenues for education and employment were also opened up for the Depressed Castes, e.g. military service. This helped in generating a new awareness and agitation amongst the Depressed Castes. The Self Respect Movement in the South, and Phule-Ambedkarite movement in Maharashtra are well known examples of the result of this awareness. Besides, the working class came into existence.

However, the dominant process was the strengthening of caste and communal bonds among people. The British Government encouraged and

welcomed delegations, as well as representations on the basis of caste and community. Not surprisingly, the opposition to British policies by different elites also asserted itself in terms of their adverse impact on caste/community interests that elites came to represent. While it divided elites along caste/communal lines, it also strengthened the caste/community basis of ties and laid the foundation for inter-community rivalries. For example, the Muslim elites represented the secular grievances of the elites as those of the entire community. Receiving such representations on the basis of caste and community, the Colonial rulers were well aware, would compel the elites to rally the caste/community behind them and to construct political identities on the basis of caste and communities. This would ultimately deepen the social divisions, by emphasizing their social differences.

The Colonial State exploited the traditions to consolidate its rule. Gyanendra Pandey (1990) in his seminal work, describes how the Colonial bureaucracy was bent on recording traditions in the private and public life of the communities. This often reshaped caste and communal identities which were otherwise in flux and sufficiently fluid to adjust according to the needs and times. New self-images and identities were built up to get 'traditions' recorded and the new communal identities had to be rigid. The records were also contested at times giving birth to communal tension.

Elites within all communities had various secular demands. The most important demands were usually related to a share in political and economic power. Hence, the demand for separate electorates, reservations, personal laws and a share in employment. The State had to deal with these demands time and again right from colonial days. The Colonial State actively encouraged the Muslim community to demand various concessions from the state to seek the support of the

elites of the community for separate electorates, reservations in the Central Legislature etc. It even passed the Shariat Act in 1935, for the first time, codifying the Muslim Personal Law and bringing the Muslim population under unified legislation. Similarly, the Colonial State was more than eager to grant the depressed castes, separate electorates, which question was finally solved by a pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar. We must remember that these policies of the Colonial State were notwithstanding the fact that after the 1857 rebellion, the Queen's Proclamation had promised that the state would not interfere with the religious matters of the subjects.

Ironically, the elites who were responding to the policy of Colonial States and negotiating 'community rights', invoking religion, religious festivals, traditions and history of the 'golden age' of the 'communities' were Western educated. However, a section of elites did not confine to invoking religion, religious festivals, 'traditions' and the 'golden age'. They took the project even further, in order to politically exploit the communal feelings generated in the process. Militant or extreme communalism took up the issues of ban on cow slaughter and Hindi with Devnagri script. The intention of taking such issues was to target the 'other' community as enemies and to rally all the castes into one identity of the 'Hindu community', under the hegemony of the upper caste elites. In the early 20th century, communal politics did not confine itself to the rights of the communities, but was further developed by the respective community leaders which started claiming the status of nationhood on communal lines, first by Savarkar and then by Mohd.Iqbal and finally by Jinnah. The seeds of such an analysis were of course laid earlier by Sir Sayed Ahmed, who claimed that the Hindu and Muslim communities in India were like two eyes of a beautiful bride [which can never meet, but are essential for its beauty].

Religion was also utilized by the forces of liberation and change. The first widespread anti-British sepoy mutiny was sparked off on account of discontent on religious grounds in 1857. Almost all tribal revolts against the British rule, before and after 1857, expressed themselves in religious idioms. Even before the 1857 rebellion, the Wahabi movement in North India and the Farzi movement in Bengal were essentially anti-British movements, though expressed in religious idioms of 'purging' the Colonial influences from the Islamic traditions. If we travel even further back into history, prior to the British domination of the sub-continent, social discontent was expressed in religious idioms. The Bhakti and Sufi movements are examples of social discontent being expressed in religious forms. There were hardly any other forms or options in which social discontent could have expressed itself.

Even the nationalist party - the Indian National Congress - utilized religious symbols to mobilize the masses for their movement. The Congress initially lacked a popular base. Even their demands did not reflect the basic problems of the toiling masses. The extremists within the Congress, in order to mobilize the people addressed them in religious idioms to appeal to the communities. Tilak utilized the *Ganeshotsavs* and *Shiv Jayanti* for this purpose. Later Gandhiji continued to employ religious idioms to mobilize the masses of other religions eg. his support of the Khilafat Movement and the Gurudwara Reform Movement of the Akali Dal.

With the consolidation of caste and community identities during the Colonial rule, and use of religious and other traditional symbols to mobilize the communities by the major parties in the Freedom Struggle, is it surprising that secularism for the ruling classes in India has always meant a non-communal state rather than non-religious state? Manoranjan Mohanty (1993) calls this form of secularism as

hegemonic secularism.

### Hegemonic Secularism

Though the Indian Constitution is broadly secular, in practice, there was little departure from the Colonial policy. Strictly speaking, the ruling elites do not rule in the name of religion or for a particular religion. However, politics of the ruling elites has always found<sup>2</sup> it convenient to negotiate with various communities, rather than individuals. Religion has firm presence within the communities as we saw above, and it becomes a reference point for the communities to define themselves. The Indian State, therefore continues to interact and deal with communities and in the process, constantly legitimizes and reinforces the communities through its acts. The name of the game is sarva dharma samabhav. In the process of giving legitimacy to the community and its elites, the state is also guided by the religious interpretations of the elites of the community concerned. It therefore appears as if freedom of faith is not granted to the individuals but to the communities, and their religious organisations are controlled by the elites, rather than leaving the matters pertaining to religion to individual citizens. The State thus ends up encouraging organized religious activities and the fundamentalist sections of all religions. All other interpretations of religion are ignored. We therefore witness the continuity of orthodox and backward looking religious tendencies pre-dominating. For example, the personal laws made applicable to the citizens are not based on feminist readings of religions. Such interpretations are rejected under the pressure, from male chauvinistic, orthodox readings of the religious organizations.

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2. When I say communities, I also mean to include castes unless context suggests otherwise.

While dealing with communities, the State and the political parties have usually dealt with the dominant elites of the community, notwithstanding, that they constitute only a minority within the community. In doing so, the State or the party is exercising the softer and convenient option. Various political parties patronize the elites of one or the other community or a combination of such communities, as their social base for political power. The political work of these parties is rendered relatively easier in as much as they do not have to work hard on formulating economic policies, which appeal to the toiling majority, in order to retain or consolidate their base amongst them. Addressing some emotional issues around which a community can be rallied, like defense of personal laws, self-respect, reservations, etc. suffice. This is not to say that these issues are not real issues of the backward castes, but these are not the only issues, in fact, not even the basic issues.

Global capitalism in fact wants to keep economic policies out of politics. Economics, we are told again and again, has to be left to the markets and capitalists. Political parties which seek to stake their claim to power by consolidating their social base amongst one or more communities, are not much concerned about global powers and their economic hold. Economic participation of the labouring classes continues to be on caste and communal lines in quite a few sectors, especially, in the agricultural and the unorganized sector. For example, the Vadaris in Maharashtra break stones, banzharas and vanzharis harvest cane for the sugar industries in western Maharashtra. One can give a number of such examples of caste-wise participation in various occupations. Caste and communal identities suit capitalist production, which can exploit the cheap labour of toiling masses, divided on this basis. Capital exploits labour, drawn from various castes and communities in the unorganized sectors.

State and *status-quo* politics do not identify the democratic interests of the weaker sections within the community, whose interests are suppressed by the elites. In the *status-quo* politics of the ruling classes, the contrary would not only be risky in changing the apparently stable power equations, but also mean creating space for a secular and democratic polity, wherein, the dominant sections of the community would no more be in an advantageous position and continue their domination easily. They would no more form the basis of politics. In other words, the weaker sections could utilize the democratic space, and pose a likely threat to the present structure and power equations. This would ultimately lay the basis for reforming religion and traditions to serve the interests of the toiling masses.

The ruling classes in India are not likely to give up dealing with and reinforcing communities so easily. Therefore, whenever the need arises, it has used religion without hesitation. There is hardly any major Parliamentary political party, including the Congress, which has not used religious symbols and idioms for purely electoral purposes and utilized or patronized some communal elements or other at sometime for its narrow political gains. Major political parties in the country represent the interests of the ruling classes and therefore never try to address themselves to the genuine problems of the common people. Whatever growth the economy has registered over years, has been at the expense and impoverishment of the toiling masses, viz. the landless labourers, small and middle class peasants, workers and the struggling middle classes. The rich wealth and resources of the country and its cheap labour power, were at the service of the imperialists and their allies - the ruling classes of the country got some benefits and crumbs. With the worsening conditions of the poor, their disillusionment with political parties has been growing. As a result,

these parties come up with deceptive slogans and issues to divert the attention of the people from their miserable existence. The major Parliamentary parties, basically represent the interests of the ruling classes and depend on them for their support. They, therefore, have a very limited spectrum to decide their political and economic programmes. To differentiate amongst themselves and create their exclusive vote banks, they have to resort to issues related to various levels of identity - linguistic, regional, religious and so on. These issues enable parties to regain their hold over the people and divide them into rival camps. In order to create their vote banks while in power, they placate the fundamentalists by agreeing to their demands. While out of power, they themselves take up the demands normally raised by the fundamentalists.

Congress is an old hand at this game. In order to create Muslim vote banks, it always appeased the fundamentalists of the community and agreed to all their religious demands while ignoring the basic issues of Muslims, that would enable their political participation and their economic and cultural development. On the contrary, the Muslim masses were discriminated against in the political and economic fields. They were even victimized during the riots by the police as well as the majority community members whose passions were roused by rumours and false propaganda.

The fundamentalist section, nevertheless, demonstrates to the Muslim masses the power and influence with the ruling party and the government. They demonstrate their popularity with the community to the ruling party and bargain for a share in power. By agreeing to the demands of the fundamentalist section of the community, the Congress enabled them to impose their leadership over the community, to the detriment of the democratic and reformist trend. Thus

Muslims remained educationally and socially far behind the rest. The Shah Bano and ban on 'Satanic Verses' are the recent examples of how the fundamentalist sections were appeased. Not only the Congress, but even the Janata bandwagon had amongst them, leaders who would woo the fundamentalist sections of Muslims to create their vote banks, and the RSS-BJP lobby in the 1977 Janata Party, never raised any objections to such practices. Later, during the Janata Dal period in 1989, V.P. Singh's visit to the Jama Masjid to meet Imam Bukhari, and to persuade him to issue an edict to the Muslims to vote for the Janata Dal is also a well known fact. It did not disturb the BJP enough not to support the Janata Dal Government.

The democratic voice within the Muslim community to oppose the fundamentalists, remained weak. For example, Reformists within the Bohra community are struggling for their human and democratic rights curbed by the authoritarian and fundamentalist High Priest - the Sayedna. The Reformist movement is also demanding non-interference in the secular affairs of the members of the community, viz. like the choice of the party for their votes and the choice of newspapers for reading; enforcement of purdah on women and Islamic beard and cap for Bohra men. All those who refuse to abide by the directions of the Sayedna are persecuted by declaration of a social boycott against them and prevented from entering community mosques, and they are denied burials in Muslim cemeteries after death. The Reformists are demanding that a bill be brought by the Parliament banning the practice of social boycott, on the lines of the banning of untouchability.

All the governments of the States, as well as the Centre have refused to do so, on the ground that it would amount to interference in the internal matters of the community. Social boycott of any citizen who refuses to follow the directions of the Sayedna, cannot

be an internal matter of the community<sup>3</sup>. The State has to be concerned as the democratic rights of the citizen are at stake. Instead, an ex-President of the country Giani Zail Singh, inaugurated a mausoleum in Mumbai of the community in spite of the fact that a reformist delegation met him and appraised him of the atrocities of the Sayedna. The Bohra Pontiff has been accorded the status of a state guest by many of the states and the state air craft is sent to receive him. In spite of the fact, that reformists have the sympathy of overwhelming members of the community, they are not able to convert this into a support for their movement as the Syedna appears to have the firm backing of the State and ruling parties. The reformist voice, thus gets suppressed.

When the Reformists approached BJP ruled states to bring legislation banning the practice of social boycott and the control of the Sayedna's finances, even the BJP Governments (which claims to be vehement opponents of Muslim fundamentalism) refused. Fundamentalists of other communities like Christians and the Sikhs have been likewise encouraged by meeting the religious demands raised by their leaders, while ignoring and discriminating against the community as a whole, politically and economically.

Wooing the minority, fundamentalists get for political parties, minority votebanks and a political hold over them. This may not be sufficient to capture power and perpetuate the hegemony of the ruling classes. Caste formulae are therefore worked out on the KHAM and AJGAR lines. Then casteist demands

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3. National Commission appointed by Jai Prakash Narayan and Tewatia Commission appointed by the Indian People's Human Rights Tribunal Reports point out the violation of democratic rights of the members of the community by the Bohra Pontiff and recommended to the government to enact a law banning social boycott. Copies of these reports are available in Mumbai.

are agreed to, provided these do not disturb the *status-quo* or cause a disturbance in the distribution of economic resources and political power of the ruling class, the big bourgeoisie and landed kulaks. The toiling masses of the castes are essentially left high and dry. It may accommodate a few of the elite of the castes in the bureaucracy and State machinery. Tickets are thus distributed to create caste votebanks. Here again, by agreeing to the issues of the elites of castes - which may not yield tangible benefits to the toilers within the caste, the ruling party and the State enable these elites to maintain their hegemony and stranglehold over the entire caste by demonstration of their influence with the ruling party and the Government. The elites also demonstrate to the the ruling party, their influence amongst their caste fellows, and therefore, their vote gathering capacity.

Not all fundamentalists remain under control all the time. Sections of fundamentalists within a community/caste, in some situations, tend to compete for their hold on the community and in their zeal to outdo other sections of fundamentalists are forced to demand more and more political share, than is possible for the ruling classes and their parties to concede. The ruling parties turn even this to their advantage. If the likes of Bhindranwales have gone out of control and exceeded their brief, the situation can be turned to their advantage by appealing to majority communalism and fundamentalism. Now instead of castewise vote banks, attempts can be made to convert the majority community as a whole into a vote bank by talking about the danger of fundamentalism of the other communities. Since the early 80s, fundamentalism of the majority community was wooed by giving in to their demands. Sending an army to the Golden Temple in Amritsar, 1984 anti- Sikh pogroms, first opening the locks of the of the Ramjanmabhoomi Temple and then allowing the Babri mosque to be demolished are a few

examples. In riots, the police and vandals of the fundamentalists from the majority community were allowed to go unpunished for their inhuman crimes on the minorities. On the contrary, the minorities were, arrested for rioting and a large number of them harassed in the name of investigating the bomb blast case. The fundamentalists of the majority community were not even touched, for openly giving rabid speeches against the helpless—the minorities.

Given the global set up, in which a few from the First World control the global resources and maintain their hegemony over the rest, especially the Third World and strangle the growth and development of the Third World; given that technology of the North has suppressed the growth of science and the knowledge base of the people and the deep rootedness of religion; given the limited spectrum of choice available to the major Parliamentary parties for their economic and political programmes to be able to represent issues pertaining to identity - including religion, in order to distinguish themselves and consolidate their vote banks and maintain their hold over the masses; what kind of secularism are we to expect?

It is completely puzzling, when it is argued, that the State is trying to 'impose' secularism on the Indian people, and that the western educated elite is putting pressure on the State to do so. In fact, the State is turning more and more communal. One finds mandirs inside every police station and the Doordarshan serialising the major Hindu mythologies and now those of other religions also. DD covers every festival prominently. Every State Transport bus has the pictures of God or *shlokas* pasted on it. Every PM and CM visits religious places and publicizes the fact in order to derive electoral advantage. We have mandirs within most of the factories. The big industrialists with their ill-gotten money, stinking of the blood of the workers, donate to all kinds of places of worship. Birla Mandirs

are too well known. The first thing that the smugglers and the black marketeers think of, is investing their booty in the places of worship. The elite are not only religious but communal. The State's complicity in taking action against policemen responsible for shooting innocent people from the minority community in riot after riot, discrimination against minorities in all fields, communal text books at school and college levels as pointed out by the study of NCERT etc. are just a few examples of communal nature of the State machinery today. A report in the Times of India [dated 27th and 29th July 1994 ] by Praful Bidwai, points out that even the IAS trainees and top bureaucrats nurture communal attitudes. Globalization is fast creating a complex amongst the middle class from the majority community, as it consumes and prefers global products. There is nothing left to take pride in, except one's religion and culture. The middle class from the majority are becoming more and more communal and intolerant towards the minorities. The State, under the influence of the middle class is also pushed to take more and more communal stances.

### Democratic Secularism

There is hardly any real dispute within democratic circles that Indian State should be secular. However, some academicians point out that the Indian context is different, and therefore western secularism will not work in our country. In the West, the term secular, was a result of struggle between the rising bourgeoisie and the feudal Church. As the Church sided with the feudal elements against the rising bourgeoisie, it got isolated and people's faith in religion and religious institutions was shaken. The concept of secularism and anti-religion will not find roots in India, at least, in the present. In the foregoing discussion, we have seen how important has been the role of religion in the lives

of the masses. Any anti-religious propaganda will never be digested by them. It may push the people into the camp of vested interests who misuse religion for the promotion of the ruling class ideology and consolidation of their politics.

Congress always claimed to represent the cause of Indian Nationalism, as against the communal nationalism of the Muslim League and Hindu or cultural nationalism of Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS. Indian nationalism was propounded to be secular *per se* though it predominantly drew upon the culture and values of the upper caste of the north, with which the southerners, the minorities, the SC, the ST, OBCs and the women had very little to identify'. 'Indian nationalism' did not have any common culture or language. The only thing common was its opposition to direct dominance of the British imperialists. After 1947, Indian nationalism could be defined only as a sort of anti-thesis to the 'Pakistani or Muslim nationalism'. The Indian (read Hindu upper caste) nationalist might dread to think what would happen if the map of Pakistan was rubbed off the face of the globe? How would it survive and what would keep it undivided?

The ruling class secularism of the Indian national variety has always meant that fundamentalism, of not just one community be encouraged (*viz* the fundamentalism of the majority community as demanded by the BJP) but all communities be equally encouraged - if not at the same time, as and when they are needed. We have witnessed the result of such a policy. It resulted not only in the rise of fundamentalist movements, but in the armed separatist movements in the North-East, Punjab and Kashmir. The ruling class parties are left with very limited options. They cannot do without religion to consolidate their hold over the masses and therefore need the fundamentalists. However, it becomes difficult to manage and balance

all fundamentalists and they could be playing with fire, resulting in separatist movements.

With the IMF and World Bank loans and the New Economic Policy and the liberalization process, the 'secularism' of the ruling classes will be a useful weapon in their hands, in as much as it would mean encouraging fundamentalism, within all communities. The accelerated pace of transfer of resources from the toiling masses to the ruling classes, especially the big bourgeoisie, and global capitalism, is bound to worsen the crisis and existential problems of the people. Encouraging fundamentalists of all religions to divert the attention of the people and divide the toiling masses, will be one of the weapons, besides repression, in the hands of the ruling classes.

The meaningful interpretation and application of the term 'secularism' is certainly not an easy task. It is not a question of defining it on paper and deriving satisfaction out of it. The struggle for defining secularism is also struggle for establishing a secular State and secularizing civil society too. It is therefore difficult to visualize any blueprint of Indian secularism. Nevertheless, it might be possible to set out some broad parameters. First and foremost aspect of Indian secularism should mean non-religiousness, rather than anti-religiousness of State and polity. Which would mean that people would reject any politics which attempts to encourage or discourage any religion or interferes in any religious practices. Religion and religious institutions should be discouraged from supporting any political parties or campaigns by the people, following that religion themselves. Everybody should not only respect others, right to follow any religion, but also right not to follow any religion. State would be empowered to regulate the secular activities of religious trusts and charitable institutions. If any identity is suppressed or even discriminated against in any manner, by State or in civil society, secularism

is bound to be the first victim. Secularism doesn't mean merely separation of State and religion, but that State would not interfere with any identity or community and would allow all identities to grow and develop without coming in conflict with each other. Religion, at the same time, would not be given free hand to interfere with the democratic and fundamental rights of the citizens.

It is equally important for the State and ruling elites not to legitimize, and in fact, discourage the construction of political identities defined on the basis of communities and castes, even while allowing cultural autonomy to the communities. This essentially means, that while on the one hand, the State will not interfere in the religious and cultural affairs of the communities/collectives, if they do not violate any human rights or democratic rights of the communities, it will not negotiate any political demands with the elites, claiming to represent any specific religious or other community. The State should not allow any organized religion to curb the democratic rights of its followers, especially the women and weaker sections of the group. In formulating any laws or regulations, the State should not accept or reject any religious interpretation. Religious interpretations should be left to the individual followers.

Pointing out to some broad parameters, is not the end, but the beginning of the struggle for definition, and the striving for a secular State and polity. It is by no means an easy task. The definition of secularism will emerge only in the struggle to achieve it. However, it can hardly be expected to be achieved within the present framework. If true and democratic secularism has to succeed, the present hegemonistic 'secularism', which has come to mean equal respect for fundamentalists of all religions, has to be rejected and defeated. That may not be possible without defeating the class that is behind such secularism, and whose

purpose it serves. Thus, struggle for establishing democratic secularism is also, and has to be a struggle for social change and struggle to overthrow the hegemony of the present ruling classes. Since the ruling classes derive their legitimacy and backing from the global capitalism, the struggle for secular change will also be opposed by the global powers that be. The struggle for secularism has to be in that respect, part and parcel of global struggle against the hegemony of global capitalism.

Cultural pluralism and encouraging democratic culture of every community - which would mean throwing the shackles of the elite of the community and developing cultures that represents the aspirations of weakest of the community, and with which the toiling masses of the community can identify - would go a long way in inculcating, not only democratic, but also secular values that teach tolerance. In other words, the culture of democratic struggle and the struggle for democratic culture can build secular consciousness amongst the toiling majority that would not permit non-secular, hegemonistic tendencies to operate.

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## V

# Crisis of Indian Secularism Critique of the Critics

*Uday Mehta*

Recent debate on the crisis of Indian Secularism as initiated by some prominent social scientists, like Prof T N Madan, Ashis Nandy and M N Srinivas on the one hand and Sangh Parivar on the other, reminds us of the change experienced by the Indian polity, economy and society in last two decades, in comparison with the socio-political and economic scenario that prevailed till almost mid-sixties. One could see the articulation of the earlier scenario in the major findings of the Seminar on 'Secularism in India' organized in 1966 at Bombay. Participants in the Seminar included eminent scholars and thinkers such as A B Shah, A V Sharma, P Sathe, Raghvendra Rao, S P Ayer, Moin Shakir, Mark Galenter, John T Flint, Donald E Smith, M N Roy, V K Sinha and others. The papers submitted in the Seminar were subsequently brought out in a volume, edited by V K Sinha entitled, "Secularism in India" in 1968.

We find it pertinent to refer to some of the major findings of the Seminar, as they pose sharp contrast to prevailing cynical postures of some of the eminent scholars in recent debate on secularism. Secularism in India, as brought out by V K Sinha in his introduction to the book, meant different things to different people. Political leaders as well as scholars used it differently, and in contradictory ways. For Dr Radhakrishnan, secularism did not mean irreligion or atheism, or even

stress on material comforts, but a stress on the universality of spiritual values which may be attained by a variety of ways. M R Masani equated secularism with atheism. Ved Prakash Luthera, interpreting secularism strictly refuted the contention that India was a secular state and maintained that it was, 'a Jurisdictionalist State'. Prof Smith gave a wider meaning to secularism and argued in favour of India as a secular state, with several anomalies, which should eventually disappear.

Main reason for the variety of meanings attributed to secularism in India as Sinha argued, could be located in the different attitudes adopted towards India, and in particular to Hindu culture. Those who apprehended a general decline of the old institutions and customs sanctified by religion, perceived secularism as a threat. Those who leaned on ancient traditions and elements of Indian culture and wanted them to come to terms with forces of modernization and sought to incorporate secularism within the traditional framework. This has been the major attempt of Dr Radhakrishnan. However, those who considered that Indian traditions were an impediment to the modernization of this country gave different meaning to secularism. M N Roy held that India was not a secular state as the preconditions necessary for it were absent. A theocratic society imbued with religious superstitions, could hardly be the base of a secular state. He was of the view that a secular state must accord to its citizens, not the freedom to choose among various religious doctrines but give freedom to human spirit from the tyranny of religions. A B Shah believed, the real problem of secularism in India was changing the attitude of the Indian people towards religion in public life.

The seminar made distinction between two types of secular states viz. 1) non-interventionary and 2) non-discriminatory. The first type, modelled on the

American pattern of setting up a wall of separation between the Church and the State, was perceived as yet inapplicable to this country, as religion still plays an all pervasive role in social life. As per the broad consensus arrived at the Seminar, it was felt that if India were to succeed in democratizing and modernizing its society, the state would inevitably have to remove those social practices which are inimical to such a goal, even if these have religious sanctions. A strictly non-interventionary state would be ineffective in a society which is still largely non-secular in character. Nevertheless, it was stressed that this intervention must necessarily be non-discriminatory. But it was also brought out that sometimes, non-discrimination was not clearly distinguished from active support to religion. Attention was drawn to renovation of temples, churches and mosques in certain parts of India on grounds other than archeological or historical considerations. It was felt that regular broadcasting of bhajans and kirtans and occasionally, of religious hymns of different denominations by the All-India Radio, should not be permitted by the state, which claims to be secular in character.

With regard to law and secularism, there was a consensus that the Indian Constitution does provide a framework within which, remarkable democratic and secular changes can be brought about. To illustrate this, it was pointed out, that within the provisions of the Constitution, the state has brought about a silent revolution in the social life of Hindus by throwing open their temples to all castes. It has also brought in changes in their personal law as relating to marriage and inheritance and legislated the abolition of untouchability.

The courts in India, it was stated in the Seminar, have by and large played a creative and vital role in the growth of secularism in India, except in certain decisions like, Hanif Qureshi vs State of Bihar, which

upheld prohibition of cow slaughter in Bihar were unfortunate and were at the expense of the rights of the non-Hindu minorities.

Another pertinent issue raised in the seminar was about the continuance of stiff social stratification of Indian society into castes, a painful and unhappy legacy from the past. A wide gap separates the principle of social equality as enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the stubborn, hard reality of social inequality in the Indian society.

There was a near unanimity in the Seminar on Nehru's contribution to modern India and about his creative role in the strengthening of secular forces in India. Syed Ayub, in his paper on Nehru's contribution argued, that though Nehru opposed communal or organized manifestations of religion, he was a man of deep religious emotions who would have rather been out of place with the 19th century movement called secularism.<sup>1</sup>

Optimism, consensus and clarity that could be noticed in deliberations of this Seminar held almost three decades ago, are in glaring contrast to growing cynicism, ambivalence and reservation about secularism due to the offensive launched by the Sangha Parivar in recent years. One also has to keep in view the socio-economic and political context in which deliberations took place in mid-sixties and the recent depressing socio-economic scenario with its increasing political instability, in order to understand the present debate on the "crisis of secularism" in India.

The relative success of the first two Five Year Plans, stabilization of democratic form of polity, consolidation of the capitalist system of production, through comparatively rapid growth of public and corporate sector, expansion of employment opportunities and favourable global economic situation, generated an aura of optimism and this was also instrumental in creating confidence and general optimism towards

the state policy, its secular objectives and an application of modern technology in industries. Till the mid-sixties, most of the scholars, and political thinkers critique was based on the failure or limitations of the secular state in checking or in compromising with revivalist elements and use of the state apparatus for religious propaganda.

In this context, Prof Upendra Baxi's observations with regard to the recent controversy about the relevance of secular state and secularism in India, deserve serious consideration. Prof Baxi remarks, "The events of eighties have engulfed all hegemonic apparatuses of state and society rendering 'secularism' into a problematic category. Political parties, Parliament and Judiciary, have all been in major ways, exposed to legitimation crisis symbolized by events, such as, Shah Bano, Roop Kanwar and Ram Janmbhoomi-Babri Masjid issues, which have generated, both a rich theoretical discourse (See Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, 1990, Zakia Pathak and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, 1989 and the literature cited there) and a whole mass of killed, maimed and disarticulated Indian citizens. The Indian state has emerged as an arena for the struggle to redefine 'Secularism', a struggle which puts to severe test, not just the hegemonic apparatuses, but also the repressive apparatuses as well. The relatively new Hindu political formations - the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajarang Dal have emerged as ideologues and pedagogues of a 'new secularism', which, by combating the politics of appeasement of the minorities, strive to enhance the identity of Hinduism and Hindus. Whether or not their militancy will generate counter-militancy among the non-Hindus, remains an open question. But it is clear that all centrist political parties have to cope with their prowess of propaganda and mass mobilization and at least one major political party - the BJP - has contrived to attract credibility for three core propositions: that Hindus (in

India) are treated badly by a state professing 'secularism', that true 'secularism' consists in affording stronger protection, or at any rate affirmation of Hindu Indian; and that only such protection or affirmation will, in turn, ensure respect for the autonomy of other religions. Further, the culmination of this process at the hands of politicians, stands marked by the distinction between 'secularism' and "Pseudo - secularism". In the more supple hands of eminent thinkers like Ashis Nandy and T N Madan, 'secularism' appears as incoherent, unrealizable notion.<sup>2</sup>

## Section - I

Ashis Nandy holds, that secularism in India is not only irrelevant, but has proved harmful to Indian society. He blames secularism and modernity for the new religious violence witnessed by this country in recent years.. He characterises secularism as a child of modernity and colonialism product of western science and rationality and today it functions as the ideology of the modern state, which Nandy thinks as a source of most contemporary problems. He argues that it is the secular state and its elite, with its instrumental rationality and amoral and manipulative technocratic managerial ethos, that has been responsible for the greatest atrocities of this century from the Third Reich to the Gulag to Hiroshima to the anti-sikh riots, in Delhi. Thus, Nanday's rejection of secularism, as Joseph Tharamanglam sums up, is rooted in a two-fold critique, a critique of modern culture and society that approvingly and respectfully draws on the Gandhi of Hind Swaraj, and a critique of the secular state. With a sense of moral outrage, Nandy advocates that the Indian secular state has much to learn about morality from Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, while Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism have nothing to learn from the

secular state in this respect. As an alternative to secularism, Nandy stands for the recovery of India's traditional religious tolerance. The greatest representative of such tolerance was Gandhi, but it is also still widely practiced by the masses of non-modern, peripheralised believers, in contrast to the modern secular rationalists and the semi-modern zealots.<sup>3</sup>

Nandy further argues that for secularists, religion is an ideology and feel uncomfortable with religion-as-faith, which has its own principles of tolerance and intolerance. Further, he also thinks that the imported idea of secularism has become increasingly incompatible with the fluid definitions of the self, shared by several South Asian cultures. Such more fluid definition of the self, he feels, is more compatible with religion-as-faith and "depends more upon a distinctive set of the non-self and anti-selves". Nandy argues that the anti-selves are counter points without which the self just cannot be defined in the major cultures of South Asia. It is the self in conjunction with anti-selves and its distinctive concept of the non-self, which together define such a complex concept in South Asian culture<sup>4</sup>

Akeel Bilgrami, while focussing on Nandy's work aptly brings out that such contemporary critiques of Nehru begins by drawing a fundamental distinction between religions as faiths and ways of life and on the one hand and as constructed ideologies on the other. This is intended as a contrast between a more accommodating, non-monolithic and pluralist religious folk traditions of Hinduism and Islam and the Brahmanical BJP and the fundamentalist Muslim League versions of Islam, which amount to constructed religious ideologies, that are intolerant of heterodoxy within themselves as well as of each other. Nandy's target obviously is modernity itself. With its modern conception of nationhood and its statecraft, which is the source of such ideological constructions that distort

those more innocent aspects of religion, "as ways of life".

Likewise, Hindu nationalism, Nandy argues is nothing but an offshoot of Nehruvian state-imposed secularism which leaves people no choice, but turn to the only religious politics. Thus, secular tyranny breeds Hindu nationalist resistance, with its own form of tyranny.

As Bilgrami suggests, nationalism is far more omnibus and vague formulation to analyse, than Nandy or the Hindu nationalists allow. There are a variety of ingredients that go into a particular nationalism at different stages and sometimes even at the same stage. One can't lump together Palestinian nationalism with Zionist or for that matter German nationalism. It can have instinctive tie to social democracy, liberal democracy, autocracy or fascism. In this country also nationalism during its anti-Imperialist struggle phase to post-independence stage with, its major thrust on capitalist consolidation exhibit different characteristics.

One of the frustrating features, as Bilgrami suggests, that go into making 'nationalism' is that some of its most narrowing and tyrannical aspects are a product of it being neurotically inclusivist. Compared to its exclusivity, what is most salient about it is that, it produces a tin ear for the demands of regional autonomy because of its inclusivism (as in the case of Pakistan, for example in the name of Islam). In most cases of such exclusivism) there is an underlying exclusivity having to do with the fact of a set of dominant economic institutions at the centre find it necessary to exclude regional masses, even when they, in principle include them superficially into the ideal of the nation, in Pakistan's case, via, its appeal to Islamist ideology. That is to say, the inclusivist, unifying nationalist image is an ideological perpetration in order for an underlying exclusivist agenda for a dominant, centrist, Panjabi-ruling elite to maintain their hold over the

bureaucracy and the military and thereby eventually of the invertible resources of the economy and the various elements which concentrate it in their hands. In Pakistan, these elements had more to do with systems of land-ownership that yielded agricultural surpluses which was siphoned into the metropolises to keep the economy attractive for comprador capital. In recent years, surplus generated by a thriving sub-economy of gun and drugrunning, has added a new dimension to comprador character of Pakistani economy.

Such interpretation of the inclusivity in nationalism, harbouring a deeper and underlying exclusivity in the agenda of ruling elites shifts the focus, as Bilgrami points, out from nationalism to capitalism. Nandy's historiography has no place for such basic elements that play crucial role in shaping nation state and nationalism.

Similarly, monolithic, majoritarian, Brahminic version of Hinduism as popularised by the Sangh Parivar is just not offshoot of, or reaction to state-imposed secularism or modernity, as its construction "process goes long way into the recesses of Indian history and has helped to perpetuate the most remarkably resilient inegalitarian social formation in the world. As Bilgrami suggests, it is the product of sustained effort over centuries on the part of the upper castes to sustain their hold over the Hindu psyche.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, Nandy remains quite ambivalent when he idealizes indigenous religious tradition, its tolerance and its extensive acceptance among masses. Indian society, historically, right from early period, has not only witnessed multiple religious and social traditions, but also clash of traditions at different levels at various historical junctures right from the vedic till the advent of the British rule in this country. Nandy's justification and blanket support to Hinduism, betrays his bias and indifference to subaltern traditions in this country. Similarly, when his advocacy of 'Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam and contention that secularism

could learn from them and they have nothing to imbibe from secularism, also exhibits his intellectual arrogance, devoid of any worthwhile substance. Hinduism, as it is now widely understood, is a predominantly upper caste, Brahminic version, popularised in medieval period, especially after the advent of the Muslim rule in this country. This was projected as an ideological construction in the context of the vulnerability of the orthodox Brahminic traditions, in the face of growing popularity of the Bhakti movement and egalitarian values of Islam, as projected by sufi saints. Likewise, when he refers to Buddhism, one is not clear, which Buddhist traditions, he has in mind, because Buddhism, as enunciated in Buddha's own preaching, underwent sea change within two hundred years after his death. Buddhism split into three major schools namely, Mahayan, Therevadi and Hinayan traditions, and each was in sharp conflict with the other. Mahayan traditions, which became more dominant since the first AD, is certainly a more idealistic, distorted version of the original Buddhist position. Thus, the projection of Buddhism by Nandy, creates more confusion and it is difficult to believe that Nandy is not aware of such major landmarks in Buddhist traditions. One could argue on the same line, probably with regard to Sikhism as well as Islam. Thus Nandy's offensive against secularism exposes more vulnerability of his own position and confusion it creates in our mind. Use of jargons, however attractive they may appear, cannot become substantive justification of one's position. Nandy also argues that the imported idea of secularism has become increasingly incompatible with the fluid definition of the self in many South Asian cultures. Such a self, he thinks, can be conceptually viewed as a configuration of selves, invokes and reflects the configurative principles of religion-as-faith. Such a fluid definition of the self also depends more upon a distinctive set of the non-self

and anti-selves. Nandy does not elaborate, what exactly he has in mind, by fluidity of the concept of self which depends more on non-self and anti-self. But it appears, his notion of self comes close to what Sudhir Kakar vividly elucidates, while examining the concept of self in Western psychoanalysis and Indian healing traditions. Referring to indigenous healing traditions in India, he points out that apart from Vaidis and Hakims, there are palmists, horoscope specialists, herbalists, diviners, sorcerers and a variety of shamans whose therapeutic efforts combine classical Indian astrology, medicine, alchemy and magic, with beliefs and practices from the folk and popular traditions. Apart from them, we have the ubiquitous sadhus, swamis, maharajas, babas, matas and bhagwans, who trace their lineage, in some fashion or other, to the mystical-spiritual traditions of Indian antiquity and claim to specialize in 'soul health,' the restoration of moral and spiritual being.

Unlike Western psychotherapy, where introspection has significant bearing on the concept of 'true self,' as the same author argues, the meditative procedures of Indian psycho-philosophical schools of 'self-realization' are of a different nature and follow radically different goals. The Indian injunction, 'know thyself,' is related to a self other than the one referred to by Socrates. It is a self, uncontaminated by time and space and thus, without the life-historical dimension which is the focus of psychoanalysis and of Western romantic literature. This inherent belief in supra-historical self is shared by almost all traditional, as well as modern religious cults in India.

Similarly, the concept of body and the understanding of its processes are not the same in Indian and Western healing traditions. The self—the Hindu 'subtle body' is not primarily a psychological category in India. According to Hindu mythology, the disturbance in the order of self for instance, have their genesis, not in early family situations, but are explained in terms of

the notion of 'karma'. 'When we talk of shamans and other healers of folk traditions, correcting disturbance in the individual's social order, then we must remember as Kakar suggests' that for many Indians the polis consists not only of living members of the family and the community but also of ancestral spirit—the *pitris*—and other spirits who populate the Indian cosmos.<sup>6</sup>

We have made elaborate reference to the conceptual framework of Indian healing traditions vis-a-vis basic postulates of the western schools of psychoanalysis, especially with reference to their notion of self. Partly, we did this exercise to understand the implications of Nandy's contention of Indian notion of self, in contrast to self, as defined in western secular model. In western secular world 'atomistic' notion of self, presumes individual as a basic unit of society and individual citizen's dignity, equality, freedom and liberty are the cherished ideals, enshrined as the basic principles of the state constitution. Obviously, the fulfillment of these ideals also assumes democratic form of polity.

So far as this country is concerned, although Indian Constitution is based on democratic form of government and enunciates rights of individuals, as citizens of the country and ideals cherished in Indian Constitution are in no way basically different from the ideals of equality, liberty and freedom of citizen as enshrined in most of the western secular states. Still in practice, one certainly finds, that the notion of self, its freedom and emancipation, resolution of its existential dilemmas are very much influenced and conditioned by multiple religious traditions of this country, as articulated in extensive influence of indigenous healing traditions, as cited earlier here. This dichotomy between the ideals and principles of the secular state as enshrined in Indian Constitution and practices of overwhelming mass of people in tribal, rural and even in urban areas, need proper explanation. Part of the explanation obviously comes from the fact that secularism, even

in advanced western societies has not resulted into decline in religious beliefs and practices of people at large. As brought out by various enquiries in Europe and USA that the decline in the influence and hold of the organised ecumenical religious structures, does not necessarily imply decline in religious faith, or religiosity. Even Marx and Engels could not be accused of holding such opinion, that in advanced capitalist or industrialized societies, the religion would automatically disappear. They also were quite explicit in their writing on religion, that the hold of religion over the minds of people would persist, till men gain control over social forces and advance of science and technology, basically signify control over nature and not society.

In a country like India, where overwhelming majority of population, suffer, from all types of insecurities, where even minimum medical care, amenities are not available as is the case with most of the tribal and rural areas, poverty and unemployment are so rampant, where the sense of isolation and alienation is so acute especially in urban areas, where cultural and moral scenario is so demoralizing, where future looks so bleak, in such frustrating situation, if large majority of people, from all social strata take recourse to variety of shamans, mystics, babas, Mahatmas, Maharshis, and swamis, secularism should not be made scapegoat for such eventualities. The root cause lies elsewhere. There is a wide gap between the secularism of polity (which also suffers from various handicaps, contradictions) and the civil society, which exhibits tremendous hold of religious influence. All over the world, the religious influence on civil society still persists. There are cases even where hold of religion might have also increased. Not only that, there are some western countries, like Germany, where the state financial assistance to church has been the main source of the church activities not only in these

countries but also in several countries of the third world. Germany is not an isolated case. There are other countries in Europe also which follow this convention. Thus, secularism in west and certainly in Third World nation like India has not proved anti-religious in practice. Historically, the battle of secular forces was largely confined to orthodox practices of the organised and established church priesthood, who stood in the way of industrial, economic and scientific, advancement, who while aligning with reactionary feudal forces, sought to obstruct the onward march of humanity towards, equality, freedom, liberty and social justice as enunciated by the French and American Revolutions. The struggle was against the religion and religious institutions, which were supported and strengthened by the ruling classes of the medieval period where priesthood, monasteries not only owned huge landed estates, but dominated over the theological, juridical, and administrative apparatus of the medieval society. There was hardly any interaction or open confrontation between them and popular folk religious practices of people at large. As it is widely acknowledged that religious leaders like Munzer in Germany, inspired heroic, militant peasant struggles against the feudal oppression. Similarly, mystics like William Blake, interpreted religion in a manner which was strikingly different from the state-sponsored religious doctrines. Thus, when the reference to clash between secularism and religion is made, one should not overlook the restricted scope of conflict, as between official state religion and religious structures and onward march of progressive historical forces which they obstructed.

Unfortunately, Nandy and others who are very critical of secularism as such, and specifically of its Indian version, totally overlook these basic distinctions of religious practices, state religion and religious practices of toiling strata of the western as well as

Indian society.

In this context, some of the healing traditions which are deeply rooted in indigenous folk religious beliefs, practices and the healers representing such traditions, often combine use of local herbal medicine with deeper insight in the psyche of patients, prove effective in curing physical and mental ailments. There is no question of glorifying such traditions, but outright rejection of such approaches when nothing better is easily available to local population, would also be equally unwarranted in a given situation. There is nothing in this sense irrational about local practices. Confusion arises, when we define secular in a mechanical, abstract fusion, ignoring the real world of people.

Nandy's contention about the tolerance of the indigenous religious traditions is, if not misleading, is certainly confusing, as he does not spell out what religious traditions he has in mind. His contention that Brahminic version of the Hindu nationalists is a response and outcome of the state-imposed ideology of secularism also does not hold water, as the Brahminic version of Hinduism is not a modern, recent interpretation as its roots could be traced in medieval history with the advent of the Mughal rule and popularity of the Bhakti and sufi movements in this country. Egalitarian bases of Islam and liberal, humanist, pro-poor and depressed castes and women oriented thrust of the Bhakti movement proved a challenge to the Brahminic, ritualised, Sanskrit dominated religious doctrines of the medieval period. As a matter of fact, Hinduism, as it is popularised at present, is largely the outcome of the version that came to dominate the medieval and later Hindu society till the nineteenth century. It is really unfortunate that Nandy, in his reference to Hinduism, keeps complete silence about such vital historical facts. Likewise, this country has not only witnessed multiple religious and

cultural traditions, but throughout the ancient and medieval history has also experienced contestation between upper and lower caste traditions, of course with the upper castes and especially the Brahminic version gaining dominance, especially since middle ages. But neither Nandy nor Madan show any interest in such historical probing. In their treatment, Hinduism turns out to be such homogenous, egalitarian, universal religious theology that prevailed over this country since ages and continue to appeal to all sections of Indian society, irrespective of caste and class matrix. This is quite a strange and absurd view of understanding, either Indian social history or its religious institutions and practices.

## Section - II

Now we will briefly sum up Prof Madan's critique of secularism in India and subsequently, give our comments to this critique.

Prof. Madan traces the root causes of the present "Crisis of Secularism in India" to three basic assumptions. 1) Secularism is anti-religious or non-religious ideology with universal applicability. Though secularism is not an Indian ideology, there is 'an Indian ideology of secularism". 2) It is assumed that secularism will be welcomed by all right-thinking persons, as it shows the way to the making of rational plans for social reconstruction and state action, placing ultimate faith in the adequacy of human agency. 3) With appropriate corrective measures, ideological secularism can still be made to succeed in India.

Madan, like Ashis Nandy, comes very close to Gandhian perspective. According to Madan, Gandhi has been unjustly called a secularist. A Gandhian critique of secularism in terms of ultimate values and individual responsibility is, Madan thinks, similar to

Max Weber's concern with the problem of value. Both, Gandhi and Weber hold that a secularized world is inherently unstable, because it elevates to the realm of ultimate values the only value it knows and these are instrumental values.

Nehru's position on religion, religious conflict and the significance of the processes of secularization was what Madan calls rationalist and modern. However, Madan also admits that it was Nehru who, in 1931, persuaded the All India Congress Committee at its Karachi session to insert in the resolution on fundamental rights, 'Freedom of conscience and, profession and practice of any religion'. Further, all citizens of free India would be equal before the law, irrespective of religious differences and the state would observe neutrality with regard to all religions. As Nehru's biographer S Gopal tells us, this was the first breakdown, in concrete terms, of the concept of secularism in the Indian context and formed the basis of many articles in the Constitution, many years later.

Madan also quite strongly argues, that one of the major reasons for the rise of religious fundamentalism all over the world today, is the excess of ideological secularism and its emergence as dogma, or a religion, just as Karl Marx, Max Weber and some other social theorists had anticipated. The temple and the mosque lovers of India today are, Madan states, first and foremost, power hungry politicians. According to their interpretation, religion no longer is concerned with values, but only with instrumentalism; that is, religion as a means for the achievement of certain political goals.

To begin with, Madan's contention about the secularism as an ideology, appears to us misleading, as it does not properly convey the process of evolution of the notion of secular state in India. In the West, by and large, with some variations, secularization represented a socio-economic and political process which sought to eliminate the church-feudal hold

over the society and polity. The French revolution was the classic case, with proclaimed ideals of Equality, Fraternity, Liberty and Social Justice which inaugurated a new era in the history of mankind and had a far reaching significance for humanity. Similarly, Industrial Revolution in England with its ideal of democratic form of government, and rights of individual as citizen, proved a turning point of European history. Secularization of civil society and polity was actually the culmination of numerous factors, such as, new scientific discoveries and technological advancements, which revolutionized the mode of production, both in agriculture and industry, unleashing of novel socio-religious processes, renaissance and reformation, navigation and new markets, emergence and rise of new class of bourgeois and the consequent contractual relationship brought in free labour and capital accumulation, amongst others. As pointed out by A Vanaik, historically, secularization (and the ideology of secularism which intertwines with this process) emerges in Europe in the context of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the rise of the Enlightenment and of partial de-Christianization. The general understanding on the issue of secularization has ever since been marked to some extent or the other by this historical background. Differences over the weights to be attached to these three components (a) capitalist modernizations (b) Enlightenment values of humanism, rationalism, materialism; and (c) Christianity, continue to influence the ways in which one perceives the nature and potential of secularization today.

As brought out by Upendra Baxi, the meaning in which this term 'Secular' is being used is rarely made unequivocally clear. Larry Shiner as early as in 1967, made distinction between five types of 'Secularization' on the basis of available literature. According to this classifications; 'Secularism' or 'Secularization' may signify :

1. Decline of religion, ('The previously accepted symbols, doctrines and institutions lose their prestige and influence'. The culmination of the process being creation of a 'religionless society'.)

2. Conformity with 'this world', (turning away from the supernatural).

3. Disengagement of society from religion, (where society, and state, strive to constitute themselves as an 'autonomous reality' or separation of religion and politics- in short, differentiation).

4. Transposition of religious beliefs and institutions, ("Knowledge, patterns of behavior and institutional arrangement once understood as grounded in divine power, are transformed into phenomena of purely human creation and responsibility").

5. Desacralization, of the World, (culminating in the banishment of 'sacred' or 'mysterious', culminating in perfectly rationally manipulatable society.).

As Prof Baxi aptly remarks, 'While Madan seems to identity 'secularism' with the decline of religious model, Nandy seems to identity it with desacralization. Both, however, converge on state centered category of 'differentiation' to critique the ideology of 'secularism'. Both ignore transposition, both present account of 'secularism' which are devoid of empirical data which makes any rational assessment virtually impossible. Further, even at the level of theoretical redescription neither Madan nor Nandy fully appreciate the point, made by Talcott Parsons, that secularization as a process of differentiation may itself be a product of differentiation of "community of faith and social community, embedded in a religious tradition". Clearly, some religions may permit (and even encourage) secularization much more than others....In other words, great deal more than the mere usage of the word 'secularism' is needed before a summons to history of future (whether in terms of development of 'inter-religious' understanding as Madan proposes or recourse

to pre-modern in theology of popular faiths concerning tolerance as Nandy advocates) can mark a significant point of discursive departure.

Even with regard to Europe and USA, secularization as decline thesis has generated rich meaningful debate, which is worth pursuing in order to understand the relevance of secularism in India. It is widely acknowledged that the transition from pre-modernity to modernity is marked by decline of religious institution's influence. There is overt shrinkage in the social space occupied by religious influence. Nevertheless, it is argued by those who are against this contention that secularism does not necessarily imply decline of religion, that modern societies remain as permeated by religion, as those before them by redefining secularization to mean something other than decline. Secularization is understood as a form of 'religious change'. The very process of institutionalization (reaching its apogee in Christianity and embodied by the Church, especially the Catholic papacy) becomes in a sense pre-condition for the separation of Church and State and the emergence of the 'secular state'. Those who reject secularism as decline thesis, accept this probably as a positive development. But their contention does not mean that there has been overall decline of religious influence and power in civil society. The change has been in the form of reallocation of religious functions, which could also imply, even secularization of religious practices. Hence, Protestantism - Calvinism was, to start with, the generalization of elite ascetism (of monks) to the laity. The Catholic "confessions" is replaced by the privileged confessional relationship between lawyer and client, doctor and patient.

However, this kind of argument actually hides one very important fact. Pre-modern relationships and religious systems have always been imbued with principles of strong hierarchy and dependency. In so

far as modernity, as Achin Vanaik states, also brings in a new conception of equality as it has a potential to undermine and destroy older relational patterns eg. the confessional format. Even most ardent critic of secularism - as decline thesis, like Berger and Martin, do admit that 'Secularization can be defined as a shrinkage in the role of religion, both in social life and in individual consciousness..... Secularization is a progressive loss of plausibility to religious views of reality. The real focus of Berger's as well as Martin's critique lies elsewhere, than in denying the fact of some degree of religious decline in modernity relative to the past. The attack is actually directed against, presumably, modernist concepts of rationality. The argument advanced is how can pre-modern or even 'primitive' thought or even religious thought be considered irrational compared to modernist thought? Is it not the arrogance of the rationalists which leads them to dismiss the relevance of the irrational, or more appropriately called 'beyond rationality' inclusive of systems like religions? The question of secularization thus, is clearly linked to the debate about rationality and cultural relativism.

Basic presumption to the 'secularizations as decline' thesis is the view that religious systems of thought are less rational, than say, scientific ones, and that modern societies are in some sense more rational than pre-modern ones due to the impact of the scientific-industrial revolution. How far such contention is valid? Vanaik argues that it all depends on how we understand rationality. We have come a long way from the strong foundationalism of the Enlightenment view of Reason. We have learnt to be more modest. We talk not just of rationality with a small 'r' but of rationalities in the plural. "Primitive" thought is not so much irrational as another kind of rationality comprehensible in its context. But can we say that different rationalities and cultures are beyond comparison and judgement.

Rationalities do not simply coexist, they compete and clash. In so far as they are incommensurable and obey different rules, they cannot be compared, but so far as they place claim to the same space, they can. Magic, religion and science are different kinds of rationalities and are not comparable. But in so far as the former makes epistemological claims eg. explaining why rain falls, it can be compared and judged inferior to scientific explanation.

To be rational, as suggested, is to explain. To be more rational is to explain better. To explain is to do by 'disengaged perspective' i.e. in a theoretical way, modern societies are more theoretical than those in the past and to that extent are 'more rational'. This is not merely an abstract virtue, as to understand or explain 'better' is inseparable from having a better handle to 'shape' or 'master the World'.

The contrast then is not, as suggested, between irrationality and rationality but between different and competing rationalities; a competition which forces choice and judgment according to standards. There is less rational and the more rational and there is both the fact and the possibility of growing rationality. Irrationality is generally culture specific. It is 'inconsistency' which can only be gauged within a framework of accepted standards, a contextual irrationality. But there is also 'logical inconsistency' based on universal standards e.g. laws of identity, contradiction, negation, just as there are some minimum human capacities. Cutting across different rationalities is also common minimum rationality, which allows for cultural translations across cultures, change in consensually agreed directions, and 'weak' notions of universal or common objectivity and progress. Better understanding and explanation i.e. progress in rationality is generally discipline-specific, secularization has taken place in the transition to modernity.

Major focus of eminent critiques of Berger and

Martin, as Vanaik suggests is not directed at refuting the fact of 'secularization as decline', which Martin concedes, has taken place in large parts of Europe. What Martin, Berger and a host of others are really against, is the idea of secularization being a 'master-trend', a moreorless continuing, if not irreversible process.

Instead of a uni-directional process of progressive secularization, more complicated combinations of de-secularization of the secular in society are clearly possible. This could pertain to different spaces, such as state and civil society, where the strength of religious influence in the latter is strong enough to threaten the secularity of the state. As in the early phase of the Kemalist revolution in Turkey, Iran under Shah Pahlavi's, 'White Revolution' or Poland under Communist rule, the secularization, (of state) de-secularization (of civil society) could be two moments of the same process. Elsewhere, as in India, the secular and the non-secular simply exist in separate spaces in a relationship of tension. The weak secularity of the Indian state is related to the pressure imposed on it by the much less secular character of Indian civil society in comparison to the civil societies of other democracies. This hitherto diffused pressure is now being politically organized and channeled with such force as to threaten to undo decisively the secularity of the Indian state and government.

Similarly, secularization, de-secularization can also apply to different sectors or groupings in society in uneven manner. In UK for instance, there is a clearly uneven spread of religious influence among different ethnic groups with such influence growing among 'British Hindu and British Muslims', but declining among British Christians".

American mainstream civil society is often cited as less secular than British mainstream civil society. But this observation does not really convey the prevailing

situation in USA. The secularization of consciousness and religious 'pluralization of society' go together as facts of a common process. American religions emerge out of the privatization of religious pluralism, which, in a sense is reflection of the 'individualism' of modern life. In fact, here marketization of religion to meet private, therapeutic needs has reached unprecedented levels. Thus, American situation does not necessarily imply refutation of decline thesis as, secularization does signify that religion becomes more private, optional and also problematic.

The above brief appraisal of secularism in some Western countries provides us some insight with regard to secularization as a social process, its origin, evolution and distinct features in these nations. Even in Western world, secularization has not been uniform, identical process over a period of time. Even in the same country, it has undergone significant modification. Levels of secularization of civic society are also dissimilar. Religious influence also vary from country to country, depending on host of factors, including the state policy, types of ethnic groups in society, socio-economic context, forms of social stratification. Madan's argument gives one the impression that secularism in Western world had been a uniform process and its shortcomings, as identified in a very crude way by him such as, instrumental use of values, rationality reaching dead end everywhere and particularly in the so called advanced nations. As we could see from above observations, that even the most ardent critics like Berger and Martin have not reviewed secularism with such perspective. Their basic contention is that there is no master trend which all countries have followed. So far as secularization process is concerned there is nothing irreversible about the process. Secularization could pave way for desecularization also, but over a long period they concede that there is shrinkage in social space occupied by religions,

especially institutional hold of religion. Apart from this even the role and significance of religion as a social institution has undergone tremendous change in many Western nations. This is especially true of the USA where religions cater to multiple needs of its divergent ethnic population. Religious pluralism that one finds in America is distinctly a modern phenomenon. Religious denominations have to sell themselves, and satisfy the changing and specific aspirations and needs of different social, ethnic groups, if they are to survive and consolidate their hold over them. Moreover, politicians make use of religion for their sectional or personal ends which also is a common occurrence in several Western countries. Political parties, as in Germany, also use religious card for political purpose. But all these variations and spread of religious influence should be seen in the context of modernity. The role and influence of religions must be seen in the context of needs they serve, or void they fill up which could be understood in terms of historic and the socio-economic and political set up in which they operate. Hence, the relevance of religion in modern society is qualitatively quite different from its role and hold in traditional societies. Besides this, the instrumental use of rationality also has to be seen in the context of the dominant classes and their objectives. For instance, in a capitalist system where profit maximization is the central objective of the state apparatus, cut throat competitive matrix, use of manual or intellectual labour as a commodity, dominance of market relations, and universalization of alienation process, operate as an inexorable phenomena, would create a void, generate problems in the absence of a viable solution in sight, lead to religion coming to the rescue of individuals, or social and cultural groups in modern society.

Apart from this, the blind critique of rationality shorn of concrete socio-economic context could also

lead to other type of dead-end, as the whole debate on end-of-ideology has done. As we could see from the important issues raised by Vanaik that rationality and irrationality are not only culture-specific but have to be viewed historically and in a given context. When phenomenon appears irrational, it may have logical justification in a particular socio-economic and cultural context in which it takes shape. Rational also becomes meaningful to the extent it helps to explain any phenomena satisfactorily. Ultimate test is in terms of valid explanation. There are areas, where we are still groping, and rational probings are not giving proper, effective clues. There is a realization that obsession for mastering nature should eventually pave the way for living in tune with nature and this should be accepted in all humility. But the kind of dogmatic rejection of rationality and its use as instrumental value as advocated by Madan, shorn of socio-economic context, appears totally unconvincing. We don't know, but it would be more appropriate, if our academics, highly placed as they are, instead of using jargons, abstract formulations should help in generating meaningful, fruitful debate which ultimately could help in resolving issues raised by secularism debate in recent years.

Madan's brief exposure of Gandhian perspective, though confined to Gandhi's views on religion and politics, provides only limited insight to Gandhi's role and contribution to Indian polity, society and religion. Gandhi was a highly religious man and his perception of religion, especially Hindu religion was far more modern than traditional. He was more of political and social reformer, and sought to recast Hindu religion in tune with ideals of equality, freedom and social justice. His crusade against untouchability, caste rigidity, his advocacy for women's participation in freedom struggle, simplicity and austerity would place him closer to, as Nalini Pandit has suggested to Protestant reformer. Thus, he used traditional religious

idioms but the context was strikingly different. Hence, the projection of Gandhi as upholder of ancient Hindu religious ideals, values and traditions and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as a modern, radical utopian idealist, sounds quite hollow.

Nehru, as Madan also admits, was not an atheist and Gandhi also could not be compared with traditional devotee, (as he never visited any temple) and was not in favour of temple worship. Nehru though modern, consulted astrologer for making horoscope for Indira's children (quoted by M N Srinivas). Of course, he insisted that a person preparing such horoscope, should be genuinely learned scholar (preferably Brahmin). We referred to earlier debate of mid-sixties on secularism in India, where one of well known participants rated him as a highly religious man, who would not be in tune with nineteenth century materialism or secularist version, as prevalent in Europe.

One should not overlook the fact that Gandhi, apart from his religious convictions, was a shrewd politician, with sufficient pragmatic wisdom to shape nation's destiny. It was Gandhi, who nominated Pandit Nehru, as his heir and not Sardar Patel, who otherwise was probably ideologically closer to him, and was not only senior in age, but had a profound grip over the party and organization. He probably would have been more acceptable to many Congress stalwarts. Gandhi could not have ignored such hard reality. But still, he opted for Nehru, as he thought, Nehru would be the proper architect of modern India. One should also not overlook the fact, that though Gandhi popularized the cause of charkha and village crafts, upheld the ideal of self-sufficient village economy, was also very close to India's leading industrial magnates like G D Birla and Sarabhai and Kasturbhai in Gujarat. He was the principal architect of Congress trade union approach and policy. One can't be sure whether Gandhi's non-violence was a political strategy or cherished principle

of life. He used non-violence in freedom struggle against the British rule, but did not oppose the state violence. This was evident from his support to British war efforts or use of state violence against rebels of Naval Mutiny in 1946. His objection was, by and large, restricted to people taking recourse to violence against the state apparatus. One should not forget the fact that Gandhi has also been accused of indulging in communal politics, as demonstrated by his support to Khilafat movement in 1921 and his attitude to Mopilla revolts in Kerala, where he displayed Pro- Hindu bias. There are such other instances, which certainly damage Gandhi's image and values he upheld. As it is evident from Madan's own references, where Gandhi speaks in favour of secular state, and advocates, religion should form an integral part of individual's private domain and certainly was against giving any kind of financial or other form of state support to religion or religious institutions.

As we noted earlier, during Pandit Nehru's lifetime and especially during first and half decade of independence, when socio-economic conditions were favorable and India was recognized as an outstanding leader of the non-aligned movement, his secular ideals were not only accepted, but admired by practically all eminent Indian intellectuals and political thinkers. It is only since 1980s, with rapidly changing economic scenario, political instability, with growing legitimization crisis of the ruling party and the state, the apprehension and resentment about the secular ideals and commitment of the state have become quite vociferous. Hence, it is our contention that any attempt to assess the success or the failure of secularism in India, shorn of the context of prevailing socio-economic situation, vested interests of the dominant strata and the stability of their rule, restructuring of the Indian society as a result of earlier policies and programmes adopted by the government in urban and rural areas, would be

fruitless exercise. Synchronization of what Upendra Baxi calls practices of knowledge and practices of power can't be viewed as accidental phenomena. As is well known, Vishwa Hindu Parishad gained currency, due to the free hand given to it by late Mrs Indira Gandhi after Meenakshipuram conversion incident in Tamil Nadu. When the Congress realized the shrinkage in its vote bank, in terms of erosion of its base among the Muslims and lower and backwards castes in Indian society, it switched over to the communal propaganda. The most blatant example was of Mrs Indira Gandhi's indulgence in pro-Hindu, anti-Muslim stance in Jammu, during the general elections in 1980. Thus, without the connivance of the Indian National Congress, communal hatred would not have reached the intensity which it could subsequently reach with Sangh Parivar taking its full advantage.

Madan also finds contradictions in the constitutional provisions as articulated in Fundamental Rights in Articles 25 to 30, which provide for freedom to preach, practice and propagate one's own religion, protection of religious institutions of minorities, minorities religious institution's right to impart religious instruction and also the state's obligation to promote such institutions through financial assistance. About the Directive Principles advocating enactment of the Uniform Civil Code for all religious communities in India under Articles 43, 44 his contention is that on the one hand, the constitutional provisions strengthen minorities rights to preach, and practice their religious code, which imply personal laws, or Church Conventions in case of Muslims and Christians respectively, and on the other hand it advocates the Uniform Civil Code for all religious and cultural communities. Unfortunately, the trouble with Madan as it appears to us is that he would not permit us to adopt the Western model of secularism (as per his understanding of this model) and on the other would

not grant us the liberty to evolve the Indian pattern of secularism, keeping in view the peculiar conditions in terms of the uneven levels of economic, educational, social and cultural development of different religious communities. Madan is right when he accuses the state and ruling parties of placating the fundamentalists of minorities and majority both over a long period of time, which has certainly further vitiated the atmosphere. Electoral politics certainly has played havoc in this respect. Even liberal view of the secular state in a democratic set up, would permit religious minorities a freedom to practice and preach their religion. In Western countries like Germany and Norway, state giving financial assistance to Churches is an accepted principle of the Constitution. Hence, such provisions in Indian Constitution do not necessarily imply providing impetus to communal forces. Secondly, so far as the Uniform Civil Code is concerned, its mere enactment would not really drastically alter the situation in so far as gender justice is concerned. But on the other hand, imposition of such code may result in disturbing communal harmony and the Sangh Parivar on the one hand and fundamentalists among religious minorities on the other would fully exploit the situation to their advantage. Hence, one point programme of the enactment of the Uniform Civil Code may prove disastrous for communal amity in this country.

Majoritarianism and Minoritarianism, as they have grown and consolidated due to the policies adopted by the political parties like BJP and the Congress, have given rise to pathetic situation in this country. 'But unfortunately, Madan finds it convenient to refer to only a single legislation passed at the instance of the Rajiv Gandhi Government, after Shah Bano case verdict by the Supreme Court. Muslim women (Protection of Rights) Bill Act in 1996, which permits Muslim males and women to abide by provisions of the Muslim

Personal Laws where the obligations of the husband for wife's maintenance after divorce is restricted to only three months since marriage dissolution and Meher given to Muslim women at the time of marriage should take care of her maintenance after talaq. Apart from this, Madan does not find it necessary to refer to the series of provisions and enactments made by the Indian Government and the ruling parties to appease the majority, such as withdrawing state control over the Ramjanmabhumi land, Rao Government's active connivance in demolition of Babri Masjid etc.

Mandan's communal bias comes to the fore while presenting Kashmir as the cause of crisis of Indian secularism. In selective presentation of the past events, Madan conveniently forgets that at the time of independence the princely states were given the choice to merge with India or Pakistan, while the Muslim Ruler (Nizam) of Hyderabad contemplated to remain aloof from India, the march of Indian army into Hyderabad sealed the vacillation, integrating Hyderabad into India. Similarly, Hindu Raja (Hari Singh) of Muslim dominated Kashmir's vacillation faced the Pakistani invasion and before he could sign the instrument of accession with India via the provision of Article 370, more than half of Kashmir was occupied by Pakistani army. It was at the insistence of Sheikh Muhammed Abdullah that Maharaja Hari Singh agreed to accede to India. Many of the provisions similar to those of Article 370 are applicable in different parts of India also, more so in states of North-East. The problem of Kashmir is not the problem of 'secularism' *per se* but the the problem of 'nationality', the problem of ethnicity, the one similar to equally prevalent problem in North East states, but since the majority of Kashmiris are Muslims, Indian state, more so from 1980s communalised a basically 'ethnic' problem, and picking up the cue, the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP got an extra bonus for its communal political

agenda and used this to the hilt by fuelling the Hindu communal sentiments by using the communal projection of Kashmir issue. Problems created due to the ethnicity based militancy, be it in Kashmir, Punjab or North Eastern states, have their own specific features, but all said and done, they are essentially the problems related to ethnicity and 'nationality' and ruling elites for the sake of their convenience communalise it if it suits their political goals.

In concluding part of his essay as pointed out earlier, Madan shows a concern for the future of Indian secularism and suggests some steps for resolving growing crisis of secularism in India. Madan argues that secularism is not essentially anti-religious, and Indias' major religious indigenous traditions, Hindu or Islamic, do not recognize the sacred- secular dichotomy as Christianity does. He approvingly refers to L Dumont's suggestion, that the alternative model of secularism need not imply mutual exclusion and not unilateral surrender to the Western concept. India could pave way for 'synthesis' that could be of universal significance. Such notion of secularism would be based on inter-religious understanding. This type of alternate model of secularism would be possible here because, according to Madan, the Indian religious traditions are open to modification, either under internal pressure or external influence, exhibiting the flexibility of attitude. Hence, reinterpretation of these traditions is possible and has been done successfully as Gandhi did.

One major problem with Madan's conceptual framework so far as Indian religious traditions are concerned, is that, it is so much permeated with the upper caste bias that he does not even care to acknowledge, the existence of parallel religious traditions which prevail among the vast majority of lower castes and tribes in India. Indian religious traditions, for him, primarily refer to Vedic, Upanishadic, classical scriptures and the concept of

'Dharma' based on such authorities. By Dharma, he means, concept of multiple connotations of dharma, as Hindus perceive it, which he says, includes cosmological, ethical, social, legal principles that provide the basis for the notion of ordered universe. In the social context, Dharma refers to the rules of social intercourse laid down for every category of persons in terms of social status (Varna), state of life (ashrama), and inborn qualities (guna). In other words, for every person there is an appropriate mode of conduct, (swadharma) defined by his or her caste, gender, age, and temperament. Such context-sensitive prescriptions, are however, subject to the dictates of general morality (swadharma) which are binding on everybody..... All activity is goal-oriented and dharma as the first goal (purushartha) is the basis for the rational pursuit of economic and political goals..... the sources of dharma, according to traditions, are four; The original knowledge (shruti), remembered teaching (smriti), the conduct of good people (sadachar) and moral reason or conscience (atma trushti). Jain, Buddhist and Sikh notions of dharma, though different in detail, Madan feels, are fundamentally similar.

It seems strange to us, why Madan, while referring to the Indian traditions, counts only those upper caste or Brahminic traditions which became dominant over a period of time and ignore other parallel religious traditions which existed and nourished for considerable time right from Indus Valley and vedic period such as Tantra, Lokayats, Ajivikas Siddha, Natha, Sankhya, Kapalikas, medieval sant and Sufi sects which were totally opposed to Brahminic traditions and were quite popular among the masses.

Similarly, one fails to understand why he wants to bunch together Jainism, Buddhism and such other major religious traditions, with the Brahminic version of Vedic, and Upanishadic scriptures. One will not like to admit, but the entire thesis of Madan signifying

deepening crisis of secularism in India, betrays upper caste bias and thereby undermines his efforts to raise some vital issues that weaken secularist project in this country.

## Section - III

M.N. Srinivas's critique of Indian secularism was published in article in the Times of India in 1993. Srinivas finds secularism as inadequate framework to resolve the grave cultural and spiritual crisis facing the country and that philosophy cannot be secular humanism. This new philosophy has to be rooted in god, as creator and protector. Likewise, India cannot afford the mindless consumerism that is being promoted by the media. The only realistic option, sustainable development, too needs a proper *Weltanschauung*. According to Srinivas, such a call is for a spiritual renewal and a renewal of faith in god as saviour. Srinivas also expresses deep anguish for corruption, materialism and consumerism which apparently, he believes to be a product of secularism. Underlying his critique, as suggested, there appears to be a nostalgic longing for a moral social order that is organic, harmonious and holistic in contrast to the individualistic, amoral, secular order. Srinivas however does not explain why the *Weltanschauung*, needed to resolve the crisis of India cannot be secular humanism, He simply assumes that only religion could provide the basis for morality and spirituality. Such assumptions could easily be contested, as it is widely known that inquisitions, crusades, witch burning, genocide, widow-burning and untouchability and variety of social and economic oppression was practiced with religious sanctions.<sup>13</sup>

However, Srinivas's recent views on secularism strikingly differ from what he thought about the same

in mid-sixties. As pointed out by Andre Beteille, Srinivas in his Tagore Lectures delivered over thirty years ago gave a finally balanced account of secularisation as a complex and many sided process. Nowhere one is given impression to believe that secularism is solely or even mainly the work of minuscule minority of intellectuals.

Srinivas sought to highlight two things in his lecture, firstly, the wide reach of secularization process and secondly, to point out the great resistance of religious beliefs and practices in the face of that process. Srinivas's definition of secularization here implies that what was previously regarded as religious, is now ceasing to be such, and also it refers to a process of differentiation which results in the various aspects of society, economic, political, legal and moral, becoming increasingly discrete in relation to each other. In other words, as Beteille suggests, secularisation leads to changes in (a) the beliefs and practices of individuals and (b) the nature of institutions and their mutual relations. In this definition, at least, secularisation does not lead to elimination of religion, but to a state of affairs in which some ideas, some practices, and some institutions cease to be regulated by religion.

Srinivas here also drew attention to the fact that secularisation is a universal tendency and contrasts it with sanskritization, affecting only Hindus. The range and depth of secularisation vary from one country to another and within the same country, from one segment of the population to another and this probably, he thought, would always be.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, one could notice seachange in views of Srinivas over last three decades. As we noted in the beginning, till mid-sixties, intellectuals, and academic community by and large overwhelmingly favoured and extended their support to the principles of secularism and secular state in India. Critique assumed

the form of the state's ambivalence in face of religious pressures and thus, concern for India as a 'weak' secular state. Srinivas probably did not subscribe fully to such critique of secular state, but still was not opposed to secularisation process taking place in this country. He had reservations about the view that held that religion is fast losing relevance in modern Indian society and was keen to point out complexity of secularisation process in this country.

There is every reason to believe that this striking change in Srinivas's view on secularism and his present critique of secularism and modernity is influenced by the growing dominance of the Hindu nationalist and revivalist politics and ideology of communal forces like BJP and increasing communalisation of politics and the Congress succumbing to its pressure. Secondly since the debacle of USSR, China and East European countries and bankruptcy of capitalism at a global level to resolve any of the basic problems faced by overwhelming mass of people not in the third world, but also in erstwhile second and first world nations and the growing sense of insecurity, alienation and loss of meaning and values as getting articulated in crisis of identity in difficult cultural, ethnic and racial groups in different parts of the world, certainly are responsible for the present nihilist attitude towards modernity and longing for religious solace among Indian intellectuals like Srinivas, Nandy and Madan.

Nevertheless, despite the reservation, these scholars display towards secularism and the contempt they show for modernity, as Joseph Tharamangalam argues, none of these critics would be in favour of a theocratic state that would bring the state, bureaucratic and legal systems under the domain of religion. Until the state withers away, all of them are very likely to be in favour of the three main principles laid down in the constitution, viz. Freedom of religion, Equality of citizenship, and separation of state and religion.

Secondly, it is quite unlikely to think that they are uncomfortable with the secular institutions of Indian society, such as universities, hospitals, laboratories, where most members of intellectuals themselves function. Srinivas himself, as Joseph Tharamangalam suggests, was an exemplary model of a teacher, and practitioner of a sociology that is very model of a rational, scientific, critical and 'secular' intellectual project and played the leading role in building the eminently 'secular' department of Sociology in Delhi University, which has attracted some of the best faculty and students in the country, regardless of caste, religion, theological persuasion, region or gender during the past over four decades.

In our concluding remarks, we would like to refer to very significant observation made by Anandi in her appraisal of the recent critics of secularism and modernity. She argues, the key problem of this discursive formation (Nandy and Madan) stems from its inability to distinguish between different sources and forms of modernity. It defines modernity exclusively as a practice from above, especially (by the state), while there are indeed forms of modernity which are contestatory practices from below. For instance, most of the anti-caste movements deploy arguments within the discourse of modernity. Further, the post-modern critics locate the roots of modernity totally in the post-enlightenment west, that too is open to question. Modernity can have its own roots and forms.

If the anti-modernist discourse of secularism idealises the indigenous religious traditions as a means to counter communalism, the left-liberal discourse on secularism, endorses modernity uncritically. The left-liberal discourse also hardly attach any importance to analysing the problems involved in secularisation process in Indian civil society Anandi quite aptly argues that while a secular state may be necessary

condition for democracy, but in itself it is not a sufficient condition for the larger project of human liberation. For example, a secular state might still discriminate Dalit and Women, irrespective of their religious affiliation. An atomistic view of secularism, which treats secularism as being independent of various liberative struggles, will fail to address such questions which are central to the politics of the subaltern groups.

Thus, the alternative formulation of secularism has, to perceive it as a movement for human freedom and as a process for democratic transformation. In other words, secularism has to be viewed as a part of the wider struggle against socio-political domination, a struggle against class, caste, gender and ethnic oppression<sup>15</sup>.

The recent debate on secularism has become so elitist and abstract that one wonders what useful purpose it could serve for the overwhelming majority of oppressed and exploited strata of this country. For Hindu communalists, the labelling of the Congress and left-liberal brand of secularism as pseudo-secular has become a convenient device and effective strategy for popularising and making their communal appeal acceptable to majority of Indian electorates. Left-liberal advocacy of secularism with their elitist thrust and upper caste bias has hardly proved effective in meeting the challenge posed by Hindu-nationalist or the Muslmm-fundamentalist. Arguments advanced by critics like Nandy, Madan and Srinivas, knowingly or unknowingly strengthen the case of Hindu communal elements in this country. Unfortunately, hardly any serious attempt is made to show the relevance of secularism and secular ideals for vast majority of working people in this country, who are left with no option but to wage struggle for survival in the face of accentuation of globalization and liberalization policy adopted by the Indian government in recent years.

Secularism vindicates their basic democratic rights for equality, justice and freedom from exploitative and oppressive conditions of existence. Advocacy of secularism thus also implies advocacy of the cause of toiling people in their struggle for liberation from all forms of exploitation and oppression.

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# VI

## SECULARISM IN INDIA - Theory and Practice

*Asghar Ali Engineer*

The concept of secularism is a much debated concept. The debate is not new; it has been there with us ever since the word was used by Indian political leaders in the nineteenth century. Recently, the BJP has added further confusion by calling Nehruvian secularism 'pseudo-secularism' and its own as 'positive secularism'. Many people feel that secularism implies indifference to religion, whereas some others assert that it has to be understood in the Indian context and seen in this context, it should mean equal respect for all religions. In fact the issue would remain highly debatable as unanimity or even near unanimity on it is difficult to achieve. Whatever consensus that existed among the educated urban elite, has also broken down with recent re-assertion of Hindu identity by the Sangh Parivar. It should also be emphasised here that the western secular notion had never struck roots in rural India. However, respect and tolerance for religions other than one's own had always been an integral part of the rural scene.

### II

As pointed out above, we came across the concept of secularism in the nineteenth century, under the influence of the British rulers. It had never been the part of the Indian scene before the British dispensation. The king in ancient India was supposed to be a protector of dharma. It was his duty to uphold dharma and the Hindu moral order. The Muslim rulers did not impose shari'ah on non-Muslim subjects, despite

pressure from some bigoted ulamas, but they too did apply the rules of Hindu dharma on their Hindu subjects. The Muslims were, of course, governed by Islamic shari'ah. The Mughals, with a few exceptions like that of Aurangzeb, were more open and liberal, but could not ignore religion. Akbar and Jehangir were personally highly liberal but they too faced pressures from the orthodox ulamas. Jehangir had to imprison Mujaddid alf-e-thani, but he could not keep him for long in jail and had to compromise with him.

Also, unlike Europe, India did not undergo Renaissance movement. It was only in the late nineteenth century, when the mutiny failed and the British consolidated their rule that the Indians opened their minds to the western influences. But the western ideas became popular only among a small section of Indians in urban areas. The British rule was essentially secular as they began to impose secular laws replacing many of the religious laws. It was a new experience for the Indians so far. They had always followed religious laws and traditions. There did not exist any concept of secular law until then. Any deviation from religious laws and traditions was strongly condemned. It even attracted punishments like social boycott and excommunication. In the case of Hindus, caste rules were followed very rigidly.

The word 'secular' in the political sense was used after the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. In fact the Congress was looked upon as a Hindu body by most of the non-Hindus, particularly, the Muslims. The Muslims who constituted about 25% of the Indian population then, were not only the largest, but also the most important minority. No political formation could have had much impact without their participation. Sir Syed, the advocate of modern education among Indian Muslims, remained aloof from the Congress and dubbed it as a 'Hindu organisation'. The Indian National Congress leaders were, however,

keen to enlist the Muslim support and hence they tried to convince them that the INC was not a Hindu, but a secular organisation. Badruddin Tyabji, who later became its first Muslim President, also tried to persuade Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, that the Congress was a secular organisation, and not a Hindu one.

Thus, it would be seen that the word 'secular' in Indian political terminology came to be used in a pluralist setting and not in a western sense which indicates indifference to religion. As we know in the West the concept of secularism emerged as a result of a struggle between the Church and the political rulers. The Church was dominating the political scene and denied independence to the ruling monarchies in various parts of Europe. The Church imposed its own laws and claimed its authority as divine. The Protestant movement broke the monopoly of the Church and enabled the ruling princes to assert their secular authority. Thus, as a result of this struggle, the concept of secular polity emerged in Europe. It should also be noted that the European society was, for all practical purposes, a mono-religious society. Thus, secularism had a very different connotation in the western context. It essentially signified a political authority, totally independent of the Church.

However, in India there was no rule of ecclesiastical authorities nor a struggle against religious authority for assertion of independent political power like there was in the West. There was no centralised religious institution among the Muslims too. The concept of secularism in India emerged, as pointed out above, in the context of religious pluralism and not religious authoritarianism like in the West. Secularism was emphasised by the Indian National Congress, to allay the apprehension of religious minorities, particularly the Muslims, that Congress was not a Hindu political formation. It was the religious community, rather than religious authority, which mattered in the Indian

context. In the West it was religious which was opposite of secular; in India it was communal that opposed secular.

It will be seen that it is a vital difference. Secularism in Indian context, had a very different connotation right from the very beginning. It related more to community and its secular interests rather than religion and its authority. It was because of this that despite adopting a secular polity, people tended to be deeply religious not merely in the individual, but also in the collective or corporate sense. The collective manifestation of religion has as much a central place today as ever before. And this despite the secularisation process of our society for close to a century now. But this is a different story.

Throughout our Independence struggle, we were faced with a secular/communal dichotomy. But none of our political leaders thought of challenging any religious authority, Hindu or Muslim. On the contrary, these leaders held out repeated assurances that both Hindus and Muslims would be free to profess and practice their respective religions both in the individual and collective sense. Besides, the political leadership used existing religious institutions to draw the Hindu and Muslim masses into political processes. Thus, Tilak used the Shivaji and Ganesh festivals to create a political consciousness among the Hindu masses. Gandhiji too, used the concept of Ram Rajya on the one hand, to draw the Hindu masses, and the Khilafat movement on the other, to draw the Muslim masses into the movement. Religion and religious institutions had to be used repeatedly, to inspire people towards political action. Thus, Indian secularism never collided either with religion or religious authority. On the contrary, it drew upon it and its institutions, to reinforce political processes. Though this has had its own consequences on modern day Indian polity, it could not be avoided.

The two principal religious communities, specially their western educated elites, often clashed with each other for their secular political interests. The INC emphasised its secular character and meant thereby, that it would not only ensure freedom of religion to all, but also a fair share in power to the Muslims and others. However, a large section of the modern/educated Muslim elite was far from convinced. It always doubted the Congress's credentials. The Muslim League thus came to be formed in 1906 to safeguard the 'Muslim political interests. Since the league represented only the interests of Muslims, it came to be characterised as communal as opposed to the INC which represented the interests of all sections of Indian society and hence was described as secular. It was this struggle with communalism which etched out the character of our secularism.

For quite sometime, the Congress had to accept separate electorates as the Muslim elite felt their interests would not be guarded through the institution of joint electorates. The separate electorates could be abolished only after independence. It must also be emphasised here that it was the secular educated Muslim elite which insisted on a separate political party and separate electorates. The religious elite represented by the jami'at-al-Ulama-e-Hind, neither approved of separate political party nor of separate electorates. They lent their whole-hearted support to the secular Congress. It appears problematic if we go by the western sense of secular and secularism. The INC retained the Muslim theologians' political support throughout the freedom struggle - they also opposed the partitioning of India on a so-called 'religious basis' - on the assurance that their religious freedom and religious laws would not be touched.

### III

The connotation of secularism in Independent India

also should be understood in our historical background, specially that of the Freedom Struggle. It is in its contrast with communalism that the chief characteristics of our secularism can be determined. The character of the Indian state has also to be understood in the same background. It would be highly problematic to take secularism and the secular state in western sense as far as India is concerned. Seen in western perspective, Indian state and society can hardly be described as 'secular' in character. But there is a school of thought represented by M.N.Roy and others who emphasise the western connotation of secularism. According to Roy, it is the total cultural atmosphere of a country which makes it secular, not a mere declarations by an individual or a group. He says, "Secularism is not a political institution; it is a cultural atmosphere, which cannot be created by the proclamation of individuals, however, highly placed and intensely sincere. A state is called secular when it is not organically associated with a particular religion, which relation persisted through centuries even after political power was wrested from the priestcraft. The severance of that relation was a mere formality in the Christian countries, where cultural progress had sharpened the conflict between the Church and state." (M.N. Roy, *The Secular State*, Independent India, Bombay, August 1, 1948).

It is for this reason that M.N. Roy was highly critical of the character of the Indian State. For him it was far from being secular, as it was associated with the Hindu religion. Roy says, "In a secular state, a medieval monstrosity like the Kumbh Mela would be forbidden. But the Government cannot take such a step, which should be done for the sake of public health, if not for other reasons; given a free election, it would be turned out of office. Prudence may counsel moderation; but short of the drastic measure of prohibiting such mass monstrosities, the Government could have done things to discourage them." (M.N. Roy, *Ibid*).

In the Indian context, it is an extreme view, but nevertheless, it has been held by many rationalists and humanists. What M.N. Roy wrote in 1948, is true even today and such occasions have greatly increased. At least persons like Jawaharlal Nehru and Radhakrishnan did not visit temples and other religious places. But now prime ministers and presidents do so in full glare of media publicity. Shri Rajiv Gandhi visited Deoraha Baba during his election campaign of 1989, who blessed him by putting his foot on his head. The photograph was widely published by the print media. Many more instances could be cited.

Here it will be in order to refer to what is called the Nehruvian concept of secularism. Nehru undoubtedly was the architect of this concept as far as India is concerned. Mahatma Gandhi also stood for secularism in his own way. But his concept of secularism was radically different from that of Nehru. Gandhi undoubtedly and unswervingly stood for equal respect for all religions - *sarva dharma samabhava*. Thus, prayers from all religious scriptures were recited at his prayer meetings. Needless to say, the Mahatma was a deeply religious person and for him - in his own words - "religion was as necessary to politics as more was to breathing". To many this is anything but secularism. They may even dub it as a medieval religious approach. Nehru himself wondered at what the Mahatma said, but then he reasoned that Gandhiji, by the word religion perhaps meant morality and ethics. Which indeed he did. Gandhiji never thought of associating Hinduism in its formal dogmatic sense with the Indian state. For that matter, he would have opposed associating any religion in the formal and dogmatic sense with any state, Indian or otherwise. For him religion was more of an ethical and religious code than a formal dogma.

Nehru's intellectual approach was different. He did not entertain any religious belief. He was horrified by

religious dogmas. He was rationalist and humanist. He writes in his autobiography: "The spectacle of what is called religion, or at any rate organised religion, in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror, and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it. Almost always it seems to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation, and preservation of vested interest."

Thus, we see that Nehru was both religious and an agnostic and his concept of secularism was deeply influenced by this view. He was abhorred by ritualistic practices. In other words he was closer to the western view rather than the Indian view of secularism. This was the basic difference between the Nehruvian concept and Gandhian concept of secularism. If Nehru had his way, he would have banished religion from the Indian political scene and would have kept the state strictly neutral to religion. But he was aware of the Indian reality and hence tempered his view. When he was questioned by Indian students in England about his views on secularism, he said that in England the state had a religion (Anglican Christianity) but society was quite secular in as much as the English people were indifferent to religion in public life and hence religion did not wield much influence in public affairs. But in India the state had no religion as a force to be reckoned with. The Indian state thus could not remain indifferent to religion and hence in the Indian situation, secularism would mean equal protection to all religions, as far as the state was concerned.

Nehru had been very close to some important minority leaders like Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and others who had vehemently opposed the creation of Pakistan and had resolutely fought Muslim communalism. Also, being deeply humanist, he felt for the woes and grievances of the Muslim leaders, about the existence of the

freedom to profess and practice religion, unhampered. This made Nehru sympathetic to the minority grievances. He was, therefore, not in favour of enacting a Common Civil Code at the time of framing the Constitution as advocated by Dr. Ambedkar. It would have meant betraying the promise given to the leaders of Jami'at al-'Ulama-e-Hind. As for the controversy about Muslim personal law and other personal laws, we will throw more light on them, a little later.

The Nehruvian concept of secularism has, of late, come under severe attack from the Sangh Parivar. As opposed to that they have posed the concept of positive secularism. The concept of positive secularism has not been precisely defined by the ideologies of the Sangh Parivar, but they keep on emphasising that Nehruvian secularism is rejected by the Sangh Parivar as it tends to favour the Muslims. It is too sympathetic to them. The Sangh Parivar tries to define positive secularism as "justice for all and discrimination against none." However, in a complex Indian situation, this seems to be a highly naive and oversimplified approach.

If such an approach to secularism is accepted, all reservations based on caste or tribe will also have to be abolished as these reservations also appear to be discriminatory. Though it might be considered impolitic to say so openly, the Sangh Parivar does express its displeasure at continuing the caste-based reservations. It, in particular, is opposed to the implementation of the Mandl Commission Report and has dubbed it as a 'conspiracy to perpetuate caste stratification' in the Hindu society. Though the "Muslims have not been given reservations, the Sangh Parivar does think that the Muslims are a 'pampered minority' and thus the Nehruvian or the Congress secularism is a 'pseudo-secularism'.

Any perceptive student of Indian society would know that the Indian society is far too complex and unevenly developed to admit any uniform policy

towards all its constituents. As it is necessary to continue reservations as long as caste discriminations remain, it would also be necessary to pursue certain policies towards the minorities which are comparatively more backward socially, educationally and economically, though these policies may appear to favour them. Thus, some kind of positive discrimination becomes necessary in favour of relatively backward sections of the society. In fact, in such a complex situation, lack of such positive discrimination might result in injustice to them. Thus, it will be seen that the slogan "Justice for all and discrimination against none" is highly misleading, as pointed out above.

Similarly, the categories like 'pseudo-secularism', 'positive secularism' etc. are also misleading. These are politically motivated terms, not an honest attempt to evolve a better alternative to the prevailing notion of secularism. Here, we have also to take into account the ideological differences between the state and civil society. The ideological space, as far as the Indian state is concerned is too narrow and constricted. The civil society, as pointed out by M.N.Roy as well as Nehru, is under the deep influence of religion, whereas the state has adopted, either because of the influence of the West or the prevailing pluralist situation, a secular ideology. The present malaise has arisen out of this dichotomy between the state and the civil society. M.N.Roy is right when he says that one cannot establish a truly secular state by mere declaration. The cultural and social ethos should also support it. It is under such socio-political constraints, that the state begins to deviate from its secular norms. Thus, while one has to approve of the notional aspect of state's secularism, one should also understand its functional deviations.

#### IV

### MAJORITYISM And MINORITYISM

This discussion takes us to the recently publicised

concept of 'majorityism' and 'minorityism'. The advocates of 'positive secularism' argue that all those who follow Nehruvian or 'pseudo secularism' are indulging in 'minorityism' by unduly favouring the minority. According to them India has a large Hindu majority and hence it is the Hindu cultural religious ethos which should prevail and that can be fulfilled by establishing Hindu Rashtra. M.S. Golwalkar, the chief ideologue of the RSS even described the Muslims and the Christians as 'guests' who should not overstay and tax their hosts' hospitality in his work titled. We, Our Nationhood 'Defined.' In other words the Muslims should go to Pakistan or any other Muslim country and the Christians to some 'Christian country of their choice. They are no more needed in India. Or, if at all they wish to stay in India, they must remain totally subordinate to the Hindu majority. In other words, they should enjoy no political rights.

According to the RSS ideologue, whom the entire Sangh Parivar reverentially follows, wants to establish a majoritarian state wherein minorities will play no role, and if any political party allows minorities their political rights, it will be guilty of minoritism and pseudo secularism. The Sangh Parivar, in order to win majority votes, has made majorityism its main plank. It is also true that this propaganda has found more and more acceptability in recent years. And as a result of this, the old consensus prevailing the urban educated elite about the Nehruvian model of secularism is being questioned. One must try to understand the reasons for the breakdown of this consensus. The increasing democratic consciousness of their rights among the minorities on one hand, and the S.Cs and S.Ts on the other, has increased threats to the age-old powers and privileges enjoyed by the upper caste Hindus. The privileged castes and classes practice democracy - or secular democracy - for that matter as long as their powers and privileges are not challenged. The

democratic consciousness among the minorities, according to these upper caste and classes, has overstepped its limits and has assumed the proportions of 'minorityism' and hence must be fought.

The best way to fight this 'menace' emanating from the democratically conscious minorities is to create a strong Hindu (majoritarian) ethos and demolish the political model which favours the weaker sections of society. Since it is difficult to establish a case for the Hindu Rashtra logically and rationally, it is best to raise religious controversy like the Ramjanambhoomi Babri Masjid issue. Under pressure from a privileged and strong section of society, the state also made serious compromises with the established model of secularism. The Congress Government not only subtly allowed the door of the Babri Masjid to be opened for the Hindus to worship the deities, but it also took the initiative in laying the *shilanyas* (foundation stone) for the Ram Temple.

Here, mention should also be made of the Shah Bano controversy which arose, as a result of the Supreme Court judgement granting maintenance to a Muslim divorcee under the Criminal Procedure Code, section 125. The Muslim leadership construed it as 'interference in Muslim personal law and launched an aggressive movement pressurising the Central Government to annul the Supreme Court judgement through a suitable enactment which, under pressure from Muslim leadership, the Government did. All these opportunistic acts further seriously compromised the secular character of the Indian state. It must be said that the secular character of Indian state is coming under more and more pressure with the rising assertion of religious identities of various communities, especially the majority community. The Ramjanambhoomi controversy has made it very clear. Before the Mosque was demolished on 6th December, which was a grossly unconstitutional act, the Chief Minister of U.P had

filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court assuring it that he would protect Babri Masjid. The Central Government watched helplessly and took no constitutional measures to stop the demolition. It clearly showed that the Central Government neither cared for the constitutional provisions nor for its secular character. Both were seriously compromised. Not only that, the Government of India, after dismissing the BJP Government in U.P., allowed a temporary temple structure to be built there and worship to be carried out.

## V

Here, an important question arises; what is the Constitutional concept of secularism. Though our Constitution is secular, originally the word secularism did not occur in it. It was during the Emergency in the mid-seventies that the words "secular and socialist" were added. But the word secularism or secular was not defined. We read in H.M Seervai's Constitutional Law of India (Vol. 1, Chapter IV, para 4.4), "Realising that the words 'secular' and 'socialist' required to be defined, the 45th Amendment Bill (which became the 44th amendment) proposed an amendment of Article 366 by inserting definitions of the words 'secular' and 'socialist'. However this amendment was not accepted by the Council of States. Consequently, the words 'secular' and 'socialist' remain undefined." But a footnote to this gives the proposed amendment thus: "Article 366 of the Constitution shall be renumbered as clause (2) of that Article and before clause (2) as so numbered, the following clause shall be inserted, namely, (1) in the Preamble to the Constitution the expression 'secular' means a Republic in which there is equal respect for all religions."

Thus, we see the word secular or secularism remains underlined in the Indian Constitution. But the definition proposed was close to the Indian reality. In a pluralist society like India where all the major religions are

represented, in addition to many local cults, sects and sub-sects, equal respect for all religions, by the state, and also equal protection to them, as envisaged by Jawaharlal Nehru, is necessary. In India, one cannot have either an atheistic state (as the Soviet Union was) or a state indifferent to religion. In western countries too, there is no uniform concept of secularism. In the United States 'there is a wall of separation between the state and religion' which is strictly adhered to. Still the state invokes the name of God on various occasions and even prints it on its dollar bills.

In Mexico which is part of South America, secularism has its own specificity which is not found elsewhere. There, the wall of separation between state and the Church is so complete that the priests are not even allowed to vote, let alone contest the election. The Church has to maintain a complete distance from political processes. In south Ireland, on the other hand, the Church exercises a great deal of pressure on the state, including pressures on the process of law making. Abortion is still illegal there, it being against the doctrine of the Church. In France again we find a separation between politics and religion. This separation is jealously guarded there and is also reflected in its educational system. The Church has no control over education in France.

Thus, we see that each country has its own specificity as far as the concept of secularism is concerned. This specificity depends on its historical evolution as well as on contemporary social conditions. In India too, these factors will have to be taken into account. The Indian Constitution does try to separate religion from politics. In fact it is its ideal, yet the development in the civil society impose their own constraints, as pointed out above.

One might argue that India is changing fast. It is modernising and industrialising and has better chances of secularisation. In fact Prof. Donald Smith argues:

"The forces of westernization and modernization at work in India are all on the side of the secular State. Industrialization, urbanization, and the break-up of the joint family system, greatly increased literacy, and opportunities of higher education which all tend to promote the general secularization of both public and private life. The indifference to religion which characterises the contemporary western outlook has already made a powerful impact on certain sections of Indian society, and the process is a continuing one. Whether good or bad in terms of the individual, this process tends to strengthen the secular State." (India as a Secular State, Princeton University Press, 1963, p-495).

Prof. Smith wrote this in 1963. Nehru also thought so. But the subsequent developments did not turn out to be so optimistic. Development did not assume a linear course but a convoluted one. We saw that the Indian State, rather than becoming more secular, has tended to be less so. Uneven benefits of modernization and industrialization on one hand, and marginalization of religious traditions, on the other, led to strong reaction lending legitimation to the reassertion of religious and ethnic identities putting more and more pressure on the secular state. An assertion of religious and ethnic identities is there to stay with us for a longer period than we think.

Also, right from the beginning the, Indian Constitution has had certain features which are problematic for a secular State. The Constitution provides for the maintenance of certain Hindu temples (for example the one in the former state of Travancore Cochin) from the consolidated fund of India. Can a secular state maintain any religious place, shrine or temple? Also, in its Directive Principles, it makes provision for banning cow slaughter. Such a ban can be justified for the milch cattle and those animals who are young and useful, but can an absolute ban be

imposed on cow slaughter by a secular state? Also, retention of personal laws poses a question, can a secular State permit retention of different laws for different religious groups in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption etc.? The question of personal laws has assumed serious proportion in recent times.

Another important question is, can a secular state assume an interventionist role and bring about social reforms? should a secular state assume non-interventionist role? If the state, as in America, prefers to play a strictly non-interventionist role in matters religious, can it abolish personal laws followed by different communities and enact a common civil code as being demanded by some secularists (this demand is also made by communalism but only to tease minorities, not with a genuine intention to improve the status of women)? Before we take up this seminal question in the Indian context, it is important to define what is religious and when the state should or should not intervene. For application of Article 25(1) the definition of 'religion' becomes crucial. The United States Supreme Court feels that a violation of religious freedom occurs when a state regulation is seriously regarded as such. American courts have even shown an inclination to accept as 'religion' whatever is claimed to be religion.

Dr. Ambedkar, on the other hand, feels that 'We ought to strive... to limit the definition of religion...to...beliefs and such rituals as may be connected with ceremonies which are essentially religious.' (See Constituent Assembly Debates Vol.7, p.781). These are two radically different positions in defining 'religion'. Ambedkar's position, confining religion to some essential beliefs and rituals, though quite progressive, is ideological, not empirical, and may not be acceptable to many. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had also said that in Din (essence of religion)

what is abiding is *ibadat and itiqadat* (rituals pertaining to worship and beliefs) and rest (i.e. the shari'ah rules) can change, a position very close to that of Ambedkar. However, the Maulana's position was never accepted by Muslims in general. Both among Hindus and Muslims, their personal laws are also integral part of a way of life. Among the Hindus, the caste system has also a similar position. Abolition of untouchability is also considered interference in Hindu religion.

Thus, the question of enactment of a Common Civil Code is not easy one in the Indian situation today. Religion is considered all encompassing on one hand, and, personal laws, especially for minorities, are part of their identity, on the other. The Muslims insist that any attempt to change their personal law would amount to interference with the freedom of religion guaranteed in the Constitution according to Article 25. Moreover, the Congress had given assurance to the leaders of Jami'at al-Ulama-e-Hind who opposed creation of Pakistan and supported the concept for composite nationalism, that they will be free to practice their religion (which includes rules of sha-ri'ah). In view of all this, the crucial question is, can the Indian State assume interventionist role to abolish certain practices which though abhorrent to modernists, are considered by the orthodox, as essential part of religion? The answer is not as simple as it appears to be.

The controversy would remain. Moreover, ethnic and religious identities have assumed much greater role in recent times and fundamentalist movements are on the rise. It is much more difficult today for the state to assume an interventionist role. Though the modern secular outlook demands that justice be done to women (all personal laws are, invariably, unfair to them), the conservatives take shelter under the constitutional provision for freedom of religion, and oppose any intervention on the part of the state. Women are being gradually conscientised but still they are too weak and

subordinated to counteract conservative and fundamentalist forces. On the continuum, sacred and secular and non-interventionist and interventionist roles, the state will have to occupy perhaps a middle position. The state should not appear to be grossly violative of what is considered sacred or be crassly interventionist. This can be done, as far as Common Civil Code is concerned, by making it voluntary so that a first step is taken; also it should take steps, through persuasive means, to mitigate injustice to women in different personal laws. Voluntary agencies and non-governmental organisations can be encouraged to launch a campaign for this change.

# VII

## The Struggle against Communalism : Defining a Positive Alternative

*Rohini Hensman*

Creating a movement which puts forward a positive alternative to communalism also implied a radical critique of most of the existing progressive movements. On the other hand, the anti-communal, secular movement can never become a mass movement while it remains indifferent to class, caste and gender oppression.

The menace of communalism can be tackled at many different levels: organising physical resistance to its storm-troops, combating its propaganda at an ideological level, exposing state collusion with communal forces and so on and so forth. All these are essential. What is attempted here is the limited task of (1) identifying popular practices and conceptions which condition large masses of people to be receptive to the appeal of communal organisations, and (2) defining an alternative which is capable of showing up the communal 'Utopia' for the hell on earth that it really is.

A major problem in discussing communalism and trying to define an alternative to it is that virtually all the terms we use, such as democracy, secularism, religion, identity and community are so nebulous that it is often not at all clear what exactly is being advocated. While it is true that an alternative has to be created in practice, it would surely help if we have a better idea of what we are talking about and trying

to achieve, since a purely negative movement can never have the same powerful appeal as a positive movement with a clear and attractive goal.

## Democracy

For some people, the meaning of 'democracy' is very simple: it means majority rule by means of representatives who are elected once every four to six years and are then more or less free to do as they wish. According to this conception, if the government elected by the majority then proceeds to discriminate against, persecute or even exterminate various minorities, this behaviour is not in conflict with the norms of democratic government because they do, after all, represent the majority of the electorate. Thus this kind of democracy can go along with a fairly authoritarian and repressive state, the violation of fundamental human rights, and the denial of basic civil liberties. It is also quite compatible with communalism, casteism and racism. While the holding of elections may distinguish this type of state from a more thoroughly authoritarian one, it is no guarantee of either liberty or equality. If this is what most people understand us to be advocating when we put forward 'democracy' as an alternative to communalism, they might well say, 'What's so great about it? We've had it ever since independence, and look at our condition today!' Alternatively, they might feel that a rabidly communal government is perfectly democratic provided it comes to power through an election.

Very different is the conception which identifies democracy with the protection of certain basic human and democratic rights: the right to life, freedom from torture and arbitrary detention, freedom of association and expression, the right to unionise and go on strike, etc. In order to qualify as a democracy, a state must be able to guarantee these rights to all, irrespective of individual differences: it has to be democracy for

every-one, or it is not democracy at all. Clearly, this is still far from being an ideal state of affairs. There is no guarantee, for example, that everyone will receive basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, health care and education; democracy of this sort does not rule out dire poverty and deprivation. What it does not do, however, is provide conditions in which people can organise and take collective action to obtain these necessities for themselves; it provides conditions where people have some minimal control over their own lives which enables them to live with dignity. And on the other side, it limits the power which some people have over the lives of others, the power to deny to others the rights and liberties which they claim for themselves.

This kind of democracy, which includes women's, children's workers' and minority rights, trade union rights as well as the right to choose your own marriage partner, hardly exists on a mass scale in India today, except as a dream; it is incompatible with communalism, casteism or racism, the whole rationale of which is to endow people of one group with rights and privileges denied to others. If democracy is to be a positive value counterposed to communalism, we have to make it clear it is this kind of democracy we are arguing for and not the other. And this meaning of 'democracy' is inseparable from secularism.

It is a common misconception that 'secularism' implies the total absence of religion; this implication is present, for example, in the Hindi term for secularism, and leads to statements such as. 'In a country like India, where the majority of people are religious, secularism is undemocratic'. However, secularism does not necessarily mean the absence of religion as such, but rather the absence of discrimination on the basis of religion.

A minimal definition of a secular state is that it should not discriminate between people on the basis of religion. Within this broad definition, there are (at

least!) three possible variants; (1) it can remain completely separate from religion; (2) it can intervene in religious practices only where it becomes necessary in order to protect fundamental human and democratic rights; (3) it can intervene impartially in all religious and social reforms.

A secular state in the first sense would not be very practicable, nor would it be desirable; it would mean, for example, that the state would not be able to intervene to prevent practices such as human sacrifice, so long as it is claimed that these are undertaken for religious reasons. A democratic state implies freedom of religious belief, but religious practices should be restricted to those which do not violate the human rights and civil liberties of any individual; in this sense, religious rights are subsidiary to fundamental, human and democratic rights.

India corresponds most closely to the third model, at least, in theory. However, its intervention in the affairs of minority religions can hardly be said to have brought about reform. The most wellknown case is perhaps that of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, which takes away from Muslim women the right to receive maintenance from an ex-husband for more than three months. The Bill was demanded by the most vocal section of the Muslim community, but was bitterly opposed by others, who felt that it deprived Muslim women of right accorded to them by the Quran and was obnoxious to Islamic principle; its enshrinement in law not only made religious reform more difficult, but represented a set-back in the achievement of more egalitarian gender relations between Muslim women and men. Similarly, Christian women campaigning for the reform of Christian family law to allow for divorce in cases of a husband's persistent neglect, cruelty, adultery or desertion, felt that the state's recognition of only the Church hierarchy as representatives of the community

was an obstacle to their own campaign for reform. In the case of Hinduism, affirmative action in the interest of scheduled castes and tribes have been aimed at purging Hinduism of the evil of untouchability; but the denial of these benefits to Dalits who have a non-Hindu religious affiliation has resulted in discrimination against them on the basis of religion alone, and has penalised those who chose this method of affirming their dignity.

As these examples show, the 'interventionist' interpretation of secularism, by requiring the state to intervene on matters of religious doctrine, compromises the secular character of the state; it can come to play a role similar to that of a theocracy, which violates the religious freedom even of those whose religion it claims to represent by imposing on all believers the interpretation of only one section. Moreover, it would clearly not be tolerated if non-Hindu judges were to make pronouncements on Hinduism; this means that only Hindu judges could officiate in such cases, which once more compromises the secular character of the state.

Both the first and third senses of the 'secular state' indicate that while a secular state may be a necessary condition for democracy (because it rules out persecution of religious minorities and dissidents), it is by no means a sufficient condition. A secular state could, for example, discriminate against all women, regardless of their religious affiliation or it could violate the human and democratic right of all critics without discriminating between them on the basis of religion. In other words, while a communal state is necessarily undemocratic, it does not follow that a secular state is necessarily democratic. From this point view, the second definition of a secular state is the most satisfactory, to the extent that it implies a commitment to the protection of human rights and civil liberties. When arguing for secularism, we have to make it clear that it is this

essentially ethical, humanist notion of secularism that we mean: a meaning which links it to the positive meaning of democracy identified earlier. If we simply argue for 'secularism' and a 'secular state' without specifying what kind of secularism and secular state we favour, we could easily be mistaken to be advocates of models which are unappealing, if not outright repellent.

Just as a secular state is one which does not discriminate between people on the basis of religion, a truly secular person too would not discriminate between people on the basis of religion or caste. You can be religious and secular at the same time provided you do not choose your associates, friends and family connections according to religion and caste. If a white person says, 'I have nothing against blacks, but I wouldn't want my son or daughter to marry one,' we would certainly think of that person as a racist. Similarly, someone who claims to have nothing against Muslims (or Christians, or dalits, or whatever) but cannot tolerate the idea of a son or daughter marrying one, is essentially communal. Perhaps not into the same vicious way as those who spread anti-Muslim propaganda or participate in pogroms; and yet, sharing something in common with them: the feeling that 'they' are in some fundamental way different from 'us'.

But, someone may ask, is not it part of the definition of religion itself that followers of one religion should themselves set apart from everyone else? The answer is that it all depends on what you mean by 'religion'.

## Religion

Here again, divergent meanings intertwine, creating confusion which can be manipulated in devastating ways. To some people, religion means spirituality: a recognition of the importance of the spiritual dimension inherent in every human being which makes human

life of infinite value and implies that human needs—and therefore rights—are not simply physical, material ones. Recognition of the common, universal spirit shared by all implies recognition of the right which all human beings have not only to life and the means of life but also to freedom and dignity, autonomy and control over one's own life; it means desiring for all human beings the respect and consideration which one desires for oneself. This meaning can reinforce and amplify the ethical humanist interpretation of secularism and democracy by making one feel a sense of personal violation when anyone is oppressed, persecuted or killed: although the language may be different, the meaning is same.

But religion is not just about spirituality, indeed for many people—both those who practise religion and those who do not—this dimension is completely absent. For them, religion is a hierarchical, authoritarian, male-dominated institution, which divides rather than unites those who practise it by inculcating a sense of difference from and superiority to anyone outside a particular religious community. Religion in this sense is the breeding ground of communalism: the ease to be indifferent to the suffering of those outside the community, and the hierarchical, authoritarian structure and ideology makes it easy for those at the top to manipulate large masses of people to commit unspeakable atrocities in name.

In India, communalists have counterposed indigenous spirituality to Western materialism in order to justify their retrograde politics and the argument has sold because it has superficial plausibility. But communalism is about power: nothing could be less spiritual or more materialistic. The resurgence of religious communalism today; at the time of rapid social change and capitalist expansion, plays more than one role. Apart from the leadership, who see it as a convenient means of capturing state power, wide

strata of the population suffer a deep sense of insecurity as 'all that is solid melts into air', and they are only too willing to cling to the illusory material security promised by returning to a mythical past. For others, communalism offers a means of getting ahead in an increasingly competitive environment, offering them everything from employment to school places for their children to physical elimination of their business rivals. Finally, for the lumpen cadre of organisations like the Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena, the sense of power derived from the ability to kill, rape, loot and burn with impunity must be quite irresistible.

These are all sordid materialistic reasons for turning to 'religion', and paradoxically it is we who appeal to the more ethical, spiritual principle of seeking one's own well-being in solidarity with others, in establishing mutually caring relationship with others rather than competitive and destructive ones. Thus, religious communalism, far from being evidence of deep spirituality, is shameful proof of the complete and utter spiritual impoverishment of those who practise it, and their determination to destroy the spiritual element in our culture. Religious communalism is incompatible with genuine spirituality; confusion due to the use of the same word—religion—for both should not be allowed to obscure the fact that they are poles apart.

On the other hand, the same confusion had led some secularists to reject spirituality in their attempt to combat what they see as the purely retrograde phenomenon of religion, and this has contributed to the growth of authoritarian and repressive secularism at the expense of the ethical and humanist variety. Denial of the spiritual dimension of human beings can be used as a justification for using them as mere instruments in the acquisition of power, to be eliminated without any qualms if and when they become an obstacle. In their obsession with political power, secular

authoritarianism and religious communalism have much in common, and a notion of human rights is alien to both.

## Identity

The question of identity can be posed in two ways: (1) who am I (i.e. personal identity), and (2) with whom do I identify? (i.e. collective identity).

(1) A person's identity is shaped by everything which that person experiences and does from birth onwards (perhaps even before birth, but we cannot be sure about that). Experiences are of course affected by factors over which we have no control: our sex/gender, class, religious, ethnic and/or caste community into which we are born, our nationality, mother-tongue, and so forth. All these elements influence our identity, and to reduce anyone's identity to just one of them—say, religion—is a gross oversimplification. This does not mean that we have 'multiple identities' (unless we happen to suffer from a peculiar type of personality disorder!), but, rather, that anyone's personal or individual identity is extremely complex, shaped as it is by a multiplicity of influences yet irreducible to any of them. Indeed, in addition to the influences already mentioned, there are a plethora of others: our relationships with those who care for us as children and with our family, teachers, colleagues and friends, as well as the things we do (or don't do), the decisions we make (or allow others to make for us), such as our work, the partner we live with, the way we spend our leisure, etc. The list is potentially endless, and when all these influences are taken into account, it becomes clear why each person's identity is unique and different from everyone else's, even an identical twin's. We can say that we create our own identities, but out of material which is not entirely of our own choosing.

Given the uniqueness of each person's identity, any generalisation made about any category of people

is bound to be either a tautology (e.g. all women are women, all Muslims are Muslims, etc.) or untrue. Moreover, the attempt to impose a uniform identity on people is an inherently totalitarian exercise, aimed at the elimination of real diversity and denial of the freedom to act autonomously and thereby create one's own unique identity. Such an attempt is most likely to succeed if begun when the victims are in their early childhood. Where the attempt is successful, the vacuum left by the under development of an individual identity can quite easily be filled by a communal one.

In our society, unfortunately, there is very little respect for individual freedom, most young people, for example, are pushed into occupations (including, for many women, the 'career' of being a full-time housewife and mother) which hardly takes into account their talents and abilities, and into marriages in which the primary considerations do not include their preferences or their chances of emotional fulfillment; from a very early age, there is pressure to submit to community norms regardless of whether these are beneficial or harmful. In such conditions, the growth of individual identity can only be severely stunted—hence the heavy dependence on communal identities, completing the vicious circle of forced communal identities leading to stunted personal identities, leading in turn to reinforced communal identities.

(2) On what basis do we identify with people, especially people we don't know?

Obviously, it is on the basis of something we have in common with her or him; but that 'something' is what is in question here. If we identify with a co-religionist regardless of what that person is doing and cannot identify with people of other religions in the same way, then that is a communal identification. It creates the basis for communal violence by enabling us to identify with perpetrators of atrocities in our own religious community while preventing us from

identifying with victims of violence who follow another religion. We cannot approve of this kind of identification if we are opposed to communalism, but what is the alternative?

For many people, the alternative is a national identity based on shared citizenship. Such an identity would, it is argued, cut across religious, ethnic and linguistic differences and unite people on the basis of a common nation.

In India, while minority communalism can easily be denounced as being 'anti-national', majority communalism—which in fact is far more destructive—can always pose as nationalism. But even if it were possible to build up a genuinely non-communal national identity, would it be desirable? A national identity suffers from similar drawbacks to a communal one. It excludes people who are seen as aliens on one's own soil, and is therefore compatible with the persecution of refugees, migrant workers, and other foreign nationals (especially, in India, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis). Moreover, anyone beyond the national borders could be seen as fair game for exploitation, oppression and even extermination. A strong sense of national identity, even if it is not linked to religion or ethnicity, is quite compatible with national aggression, imperialism and genocide: and even people who do not participate actively in such behaviour may passively consent to it because of indifference to injustice perpetrated against 'foreigners' and 'aliens'.

In fact, the drawbacks associated with communalism can be traced to all forms of identification unless our primary identification is based on our shared humanity. This means that in any situation of oppression, we identify with those whose humanity is being violated in one way or another.

We might identify with a male worker against an oppressive employer, but with his wife against him if he abuses her at home: with a woman from a minority

community against communalists or racists who are persecuting her, but with her child or servant against her if she ill-treats the child or servant; with our fellow-citizens against a foreign aggressor if our country is being invaded or colonised, but with the foreigner against our own nation-state if it is pursuing a policy of persecution or aggression against foreign nationals. This kind of identity is neither simple nor straightforward, because it involves identifying with different people at different times, and thinking about each situation; whereas with a communal or national identity, you can simply and unthinkingly identify with same people all the time, no matter what they happen to be doing. But identifying with people first and foremost on the basis of our shared humanity is the only way to be truly consistent, and to avoid the danger of identifying on some occasions with people who in one way or another are oppressing others.

However, most of us need to feel, we belong to a collective which is smaller and more specific than the whole of humanity; we need some identity which is intermediate between our individual selves and the human race, and this is why people have always created communities of various types.

### Community

We can say that a community is a collective based on a shared culture and traditions; but this is true only if we accept that community, culture and tradition are all constantly being redefined and recreated. It is strange that it should be so widely accepted that 'community' and 'culture' are entities which are somehow given to us, as though there is some fundamental difference between us and our ancestors: they had the privilege of actually creating communities and cultures, whereas we are only given the option of accepting or rejecting them! In fact, even values and practices which existed in the past can become a part

of present-day culture and tradition only if they are reaffirmed in the present, and every generation has to do this anew. There is always a process of choice and selection when this takes place: some values and practices are ignored, while others are highlighted, reinterpreted and combined with completely new ones to produce a culture and tradition which is essentially modern, whatever its claims may be. The Hindutva of today, for example, certainly doesn't date back to Vedic times; it is a late twentieth century phenomenon propagating a modern form of ruthless authoritarianism using modern technological means such as videotapes and the Internet. It is a community based on multiple hierarchies: the domination and oppression of children by parents, women by men, lower castes by upper castes, workers by employers. Apart from a small elite who have genuine power over their own lives as well as the lives of others, most members of this system aren't losers in terms of control, and participation in the system of domination and subordination is degrading for everyone. To a greater or lesser extent, the same kinds of relationships prevail in other 'traditional' communities.

If in spite of these disadvantages, most people still choose to be part of one or the other of these 'traditional' communities - the majority, of course, being under pressure to identify with Hindutva - it is only because they have grown up in these communities, become dependent on them, and see them as the only alternative to Western individualism, with its selfishness on one side and loneliness on the other. In other words, faced with the choice between a patriarchal authoritarian community and no community at all, they choose the former.

But why should these be the only alternatives? In many parts of India, as in many other parts of the world, friends, neighbours, workmates and even family members include people from diverse linguistic and

ethnic groups and faiths, including atheists and agnostics. Where this is the case, it is not only possible but quite natural for a new type of community to develop; one which cuts across ethnic, linguistic, religious and caste divisions, in which relationships are egalitarian and caring rather than authoritarian and membership is by choice rather than being automatically decided by birth.

In fact, such communities have begun to develop in many places, with bonds of solidarity, friendship and love, crossing traditional community barriers, and a crucial element of the communal agenda is to halt and reverse this process. Conversely, the struggle against communalism cannot succeed unless we are able to create a multi-ethnic, anti-authoritarian, secular, caring community and culture which will attract millions of people who today are suffering from bondage to oppressive traditions, yet feel they cannot survive without a community of some sort.

## Conclusion

So there is democracy and democracy, secularism and secularism, religion and religion, identity and identity, community and community. If we want to be effective in our struggle against communalism, we have to make it very clear what we mean when we use any of these terms. This is not matter of being pedantic about definitions, but of being clear about what we are trying to achieve in practice. We already suffer a serious disadvantage vis-a-vis the far right, since they appeal to sentiments which are fostered on a mass scale by the deeply authoritarian character of present society, whereas mass proliferation of the secular, democratic humanism to which we appeal would require nothing less than a cultural revolution: a movement to eradicate patriarchal family and community relationships, encourage students to be critical and think for themselves rather than

unquestioningly accepting their teachers' authority, build trade unions which are free of crippling dependence on 'leaders', introduce industrial democracy whereby workers have information and consultation rights in the running of their enterprises, create genuine local democracy whereby residents have some control over the administration of the places where they live, etc. All the more reason, therefore, why our vision needs to be clear, and our articulation of it, unambiguous.

Creating a movement which puts forward a positive alternative to communalism also implies a radical critique of most of the existing progressive movements. Their paralysis, when confronted with the communal violence of December, 1992 and January, 1993 underlines their sectional character, opposed as they are, to one form of oppression and authoritarianism but not to other; thus, the trade union movement stands compromised as being seriously contaminated with communal elements, the feminist movement has raised slogans amenable to a communal interpretation, and even dalits have not proved immune to the false promises of Hindu Rashtra. On the other hand, the anti-communal secular movement suffers from the same kind of narrowness; it can never become a mass movement while it remains indifferent to class, caste and gender oppression, and in some cases even allows its members to engage in such practices. Unless this particularism is transcended, 'Why should we support your struggle if you care nothing about ours?' The alternative is not that each individual has to participate in every struggle, but rather that the movement must be one which transcends particular interests.

Secondly, internal relationships within this movement too have to be radically different from what we find in most movements today. If these relationships are hierarchical, authoritarian or sectarian, the attractive power of the movement will be greatly diminished; the

ability to debate differences creatively while working together on the basis of shared principles is crucial. In a sense, the movement itself has to prefigure the kind of society we are advocating; unless we are capable of functioning in a truly democratic manner, our arguments for democracy will hardly be credible, and unless we can establish and maintain mutually caring relationships, we cannot attract people desperately seeking the security of belonging to a community. To this extent, means and ends are inseparable.

It is possible that in the short term something which falls short of a movement of this type can push back the advancing communal forces; but the threat of their resurgence will continue to hang over us until we rise above narrow sectional interests and create a radical democratic, ethical, humanist, secular movement which is opposed to all forms of oppression and authoritarianism.

# VIII

## Towards Secular Society

*P.R. Ram*

The rise of sangh parivar, communalisation of society and increase in the suppression of Rights exploited sections of society during last two decades have been accompanied by the opposition to liberal ethos, attack on the concept of secularism and subjugation of the interests of oppressed sections of society. The social forces strengthening this onslaught have vitiated the 'Social Space' in the direction of constructed anti-minority, anti-dalit and anti-women myths, and projected their own interests under the umbrella of 'Hindu Rashtra'. Their politics at social and political level manifests through the 'Hindutva Onslaught' which basing itself on Brahmonical Hinduism, appropriates for itself a Nationalism of the religious brand.

### **Secularism Under Attack-Hindutva:Characterisation :-**

Hindutva shares many a features with fundamentalism like, targeting against liberal ethos of society, imposition of retrograde social values selectively culled out from the past, built around holy book, holy diety and clergy, harping on traditional orthodox religious beliefs, projecting women primarily as mothers, projecting a golden past of religious rule, demanding a homogeneous culture, creating hysteria against internal enemy and is built on emotive appeal of religion. Some of these features like projection of golden past , creation of internal and external enemy,

women primarily as mothers are also manifest in the fascist movements as well. There are certain other commonalities with fascism, like its getting strengthened in the face of assertion of exploited sections, precedence of national interests over the interests of the people, expansionism and being oppressive to workers, women and minorities. Social scientists are divided on the characterisation of this phenomenon, some calling it fundamentalist (Vanaik, 1994), while some others calling it clerical fascism, or fascism or Neo Fascism (Ram, 1996). Whatever be the outcome of debate on the issue, Hindutva aims to suppress and suspend the rights of oppressed. It is a social agenda of shaken threatened middle class in the service of big bourgeoisie. It is a mass movement; it is the political agenda of petty industrialists, sections of middle classes and rich peasantry blessed by capital (Ram, 1996).

*Hindutva's Projections* : Hindutva projects itself as a religious nationalism, aiming at building a Hindu Rashtra, and attacks secularisation process and secularism at multiple levels. As per them secularism is anti-religion, unsuited for Indian conditions as it originated in the Christian West, and that it has been smuggled into Indian Constitution taking advantage of the dreadful emergency. They also go on to assert that secularism is insensitive to the religiosity of people by making religion as a private matter and that it delinks people from the community resulting in the loss of their identity. Taking a severe dig at Islam they are propogating that since fundamentalism is prevalent in Iran etc., the muslim dominated country, and 'India's Secularism' is pampering muslims so 'secularism is a new mask of fundamentalism'. The Sangh Parivar (SP) can not swallow the fact that democratic states implement affirmative action for the disadvantaged sections of society, so it comes up with another concoction that 'secular state pretends to be neutral but is partial to minorities'. And their breast beating

reaches its peak with the cry that because of secularism a 'Hindu society' is saddled with anti Hindu state. And finally SP shamelessly propogates that a party committed to 'Hindu Rashtra' (BJP) is the party of 'positive secularism', and not content with this it goes on to elevate religion (Hinduism) itself as a 'secular religion'. Many of these 'constructs' and 'concoctions' have rapidly been percolated through SP's vaste network in media, schools and various levels of bureaucracy and thus these propoganda material are the dominant accompaniment of the onslaught of Hindutva.

*Anti Secularists* : The attack on secular concepts has been joined by scattered scholars, who though not a part of Hindutva bandwagon have joined the 'damn secularism' chorus. The term 'anti-secularists' is roughly used for some sociologists who neither support communal politics of Hindutva nor the secularists who are opposing the fundamentalist forces. They have some support amongst few academicians and some activist Non Government Organisations (NGOs). "They propose an 'authentic' indigenism which seeks to oppose communalism and the various forms of perversion of religion through endorsement and utilization of the resources in the India's religious traditions...they do endorse the view that if a notion of secular state in India is to be meaningful, then it must break away from enlightenment inspired notion of impartial religious abstinence to a more authentically indigeneous notion of active organisation of religious toleration" (Vanaik, 97, 153), further Vanaik adds, this group of anti-secularists, "is still united more by what it is against than what it is for. But in this discourse ranging over six general themes, there are common points of reference. These six general themes are : the issue of modernity; understanding of culture; civilisation; religion; Hinduism, in regard to Indian society's past and present; secularism and secularisation; particularism and universalism; individualism and

communitarianism; neo-Gandhism' (Vanaik, 97, 153).

The main exponent of these overlapping themes are Ashish Nandy, T.N. Madan, M.N. Shrinivas and Bhikhu Parekh. Nandy proclaims himself to be 'antiseccularist' and says that secularism and modernity are the source of violence in Indian Society. For Nandy secularism is 'A gift of christianity' and "a child of modernity and colonialism, a product of western science and rationality and today functions as the ideology of modren state. ...which is the source of most contemporary problems." (Theramangalam, 1995). To overcome the problem Nandy advices that Indian secular state should learn about morality from Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. While for Madan, "in the prevailing circumstances secularism in South Asia as a generally shared credo of life is impossible, as a basis for state action impracticable, and as a blueprint in foreseeable future impotent". (Madan, 1987: 748). As per him South Asian religions are incompatible with the ideology of secularism. As per Madan "One of the major reasons for the rise of religious fundamentalism all over the world today is the excess of ideological secularism all over the world and its emagence as a dogma or a religion" (Mehta, 1997: 86). M.N. Srinivas feels that India needs a new philosophy to solve the present grave cultural and spiritual crisis and "that philosophy cannot be secular humanism. It has to be firmly rooted in God as creator and protector" (Srinivas, 1993).

Though none of these 'anti-secularists' overtly identify with the Sangh Parivar's political project of Hindu Rashtra, there is a vague resemblance and overlap in the arguments which they proffer. Most of the anti-secularists gloss over the change in society brought in due to introduction of industrialisation. They cannot connect up the changes brought in the role of religion, changes in culture, human relationships, due to the change in the production techniques, which

in a sense shakes up the totality of social milieu and hierarchical relationships. While SP wants to impose premodern, structural hierarchies on society, the sociologists are unable to see the totality of social change. The process of secularisation which is the kernel of modernisation process is conspicuously absent in their discourses and there by its no surprise that many a conclusions which they reach and prescriptions they suggest have a great similarity to those put forward by the SP

*Liberal - Left Response* : The demolition of Babri Masjid came as a thunderbolt waking up many a left-liberal activists and ideologues. Secularisation process in India has not been the subject of intense study amongst this group of scholars. Unfortunately here the two main social groups contributing to secularisation process, the dalits (Ambedkarite and allied), and worker-peasant (Communist party, followed by Communist parties) had been spearheading their movements, unconnected to the movements of the other. Left scholarship contributed heavily to different facets of land reforms, workers, issues etc. Dalit literature presented the cry of the community in a intense and moving way. But the attempt to present the canvass was not as sizeable as needed in this vast and complex society.

Some of the scholars, activists sensed the communalisation of society, ascendance of Hindu right from early eighties and few studies and contributions started coming out from late eighties. But Babri Masjid demolition and the vehemence of Sangh Parivar and its stranglehold on society shook up a sizeable section of left intellectuals, resulting in substantial contributions to understanding the process of Secularisation and the concept of secularism. Also it forced the leaders of communist parties to revise their political strategies as a fire fighting measure to ward off the coming into power of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), the political wing of SP.

The confusion of the role of religion in human life had been a subject of many a debates. The offensive of Hindu right has been proclaiming that religion cannot be separated from public life and more so our 'Dharma' (religious duty) the core of our social life from political life. Most of the progressive commentators have by and large posited the necessity of separation between politics and religion. The major misunderstanding is caused due to conflating different facets of religion. Secularisation and modernity are accompanied by the rise of nation status and decline in the clout of clergy in particular. With this transition religion comes to occupy a different place in industrialised, modern, secularised societies, while in the societies where these processes are going on at snails pace the grip of 'clergy' on society remains strong and in due course the 'clergy' and the declining social classes come up with different political movemnets which aim to halt the process of 'secularisation' in the face of 'industrialisation' process. This schizophrenic situation, where industrialisation and technology are welcomed and their accompaniments, i.e., relations of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,' and 'Scientific temper' are ignored and positively curbed, is the 'gift' of offensives like those led by Ayatollah Khoemini and the RSS.

Rajeev Bhargava argues this on the grounds of democracy: "democracy requires that there be no concentration of power in any one institution or in any one group. If people with authority in religious affairs begin to exercise power in political matters, then this inevitably undermines democratic values. For the sake of democracy, therefore, religious and political institutions must be separated. Separation is required to curb political absolutism"(Bhargava, 1994), and further goes on to add, "Religion and politics form distinct spheres with their own respective areas of jurisdiction. Each is valuable in its own right. Religion

and politics respect each other as well as their own limits. The world of worship and congregation, of prayer and conscience, must not be intruded upon by politicians and bureaucrats. Likewise deeply religious people, in particular leaders of religious communities must not tread on the toes of politicians". (Bhargava, 1994: 1786).

Some of the scholars have tended to take the problem in the arena of the introduction of the concept of secularism in Indian Constitution due to the efforts of Jawaharlal Nehru (Bilgrami, 1995), summing up the arguments of Nehru's critics Bilgrami point out "the Hindu Brigade and ideologues on similar wave length assert that, Nehruvian Secularism...is an alien imposition upon a people who have never wished to separate religion from politics in their everyday life and thinking, and therefore, leaves the people no choice but to turn to the only religious politics allowed by modernity's stranglehold i.e., Hindu nationalism. Thus secular tyranny breeds Hindu nationalist resistance, which threatens with the promise of its own form of tyranny". (Bilgrami, 1994: 6). Bilgrami while refuting the charges of people like Nandy states that, "Secularism thus never got the chance to emerge out of the creative dialogue between these different communities. It was *sui generis*. This archimedean existence gave secularism procedural priority but in doing so it gave no abiding substantive authority. As a result it could be nothing more than a holding process, already under strain in the time of its charismatic architect and increasingly ineffective after his death". (Bilgrami, 1994: 20). This type of exposition betrays the chinks in the armour of left secularists, their lack of emphasis on the secularisation process, their approach which cannot relate the secularism's place in the Constitution to the struggles of dalits and workers and also of the secular aspirations of the rising industrialists and their paraphernalia.

Similarly SP has been gradually working at a deeper level to change the meaning of secularism from the Dharma Nirpekshita (aloofness from religions) to Sarva Dharma Sambhav (equal respect for all religions). While the former is the Hindi translation given in the Constitution and so far accepted, the latter is being projected as the 'real' meaning of secularism in Indian context. Cossmen and Kapur summarise the SP's stand on this very well (Cossman and Kapur, 1993, W-37), "Hindu fundamentalists explicitly argue in favour of Sarva Dharma Samabhava and positive secularism. There is a perverse logic to this RSS argument, based on its ability to define the terms of the debate. Secularism is defined as toleration of all religions; Hinduism is defined as the only religion with a true tolerance for all other religions, thus according to these terms, only a country based on Hinduism can be truly secular. Within this vision secularism collapses into its antithesis—a theocratic state".

Dealing with the issue of separation of religion and politics is not easy. Rajeev Bhargava (EPW, 1994 : 1786) tries to grapple with this vexed issue by dividing the concept of secularism into political secularism and ethical secularism, and based on this comes up with four versions of secularism *per se*: "(a) ethical secularism that excludes all religions from the affairs of the state; (b) ethical secularism that requires that state keep a principled distance from all religions; (c) political secularism that excludes all ultimate ideals including religions from the affairs of the state ; and finally (d) political secularism that demands that the state be principally distanced from all religious and non religious ultimate ideals", and concludes (Bhargava, 1996 : 72), "Political secularism has little or no conception of community. It is non-communitarian. From this, it does not follow that there are no secular communitarians and that to live together well, we must prepare a gingerly mix of political secularism

and non-secular communitarianism. The pluralist version of ethical secularism which is both secular and communitarian is worth exploring and enriching. It is superior to political secularism though the level and quality of motivation that it requires is not always easy to obtain. Ethical secularism is better but difficult, political secularism somewhat less attractive but well within our reach. Both insist upon the separation of religion and politics without undermining either. Both should be invoked to justify a secular state. But, in the short run and in some contexts, political secularism may not only be good fallback strategy but the only way to prevent a community from falling apart". In all this analysis the role of clergy is missing and that probably makes it look a bit more complicated. Secularism has no problems with religious practices and beliefs going on, on their own, but clergy dictated social and political norms cannot have a place in secular state policies.

K.N. Panikkar takes the debate on cultural and political level (Panikkar, 1997: 50), "that India consciously opted for secular polity, despite occasional spasms of sectarian violence, communal politics and partition, is no historical accident, no conjuring trick of Westernized intelligentsia. It is rooted in the historical experience and cultural dynamics of Indian Society". One can add that this historical experience and cultural dynamics is in the context of a series of anti-caste struggles led by Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar. The struggles which challenged the existing hierarchy of caste system, the struggles which stood to change the *status quo* of society, paving the way for the breaking of the pre-modern patriarchal relationships. These struggles met their supplement in the struggles of workers whose endeavours brought into being a new 'Contractual' 'wage labor' relationships. On the other side the modern intelligentsia and section of modern industrialists and intellectuals articulated the secular

aspirations of the emerging Indian Nation State, ensuring the incorporation of secular ethos in Indian Constitution.

*Secularisation* : As such secularism is the flag of a deeper secularisation process. Not much literature has come out on this deeper process of our society. As such there is no universal model of secularisation process. Indian secularisation process is peculiar in the sense of its being an extremely slow one, also giving rise to the reaction to itself in the form of rise of communal politics, both Hindu and Muslim.

K.N.Panikkar (Panikkar, 1997 : 16) makes a brilliant attempt to locate the reflection of this process in the rationalist and humanist ideas which were struggling to make their advent on the social scene. Panikkar lays a big stress on the ideas of Raja Ram Mohan Roy in whose writings, "religion was looked upon as a mechanism to preserve the existing property relations and to regulate social intercourse...social explanation of religion inevitably led Ram Mohan to question and reject dogmas of faith and miracles which were not integral to the original character of religion, they saw them as part of an accretionary process brought into play by religious leaders purely for their selfish interests and which they realised by misleading their unsuspecting followers. Supernaturalism and monopoly of scriptural knowledge were the effective instruments used to achieve this end. The religious systems, beliefs and practices, therefore assumed the character of deception. All religious systems, Ram Mohan Roy argued, were systems of human deception".

Panikkar's analysis of weakness of Indian secularisation process, as reflected in the ideological battles of 19th century is very apt, (Panikkar, 1996 : 19), "Our experience of the nineteenth century is sufficient proof that neither respect for all religions nor the idea of the unity of Godhead in themselves could create secularism. Instead they circumscribed

social consciousness within religious parameters, thereby keeping the possibility open for particularistic and antagonistic tendencies to re-emerge at appropriate moments. This is precisely the weakness of the Indian notion of secularism. It keeps religion in play and in turn enhances religiosity, it preserves and projects religious identities and thus increases the social distance between different religious communities". Panikkar's solution to this impasse, "The only way out of this impasse appears to be a frontal confrontation with religion: an all out critique of religion, with a view to its eventual negation..." (Panikkar, 1987 : 20), though essentially true can be easily misinterpreted as like most of the other progressive intellectuals he too glosses over the different subsets of religion. The focus has to be to oppose and fight against the stranglehold of clergy represented by Church, Mullahs or Pandits, and not to oppose religion as such.

Though there are some theoretical elaborations of the secularisation process (Heredia and Mathais, 1995) a lot needs to be done to unravel the dynamics of secularisation process in our society. Apart from Panikkar the other contribution on similar lines is that of Achin Vanaik. Vanaik delves in depth on the process of secularisation albeit slightly abstractly and again in the framework of 'Marxist Perspective'. Though this work is full of good insights, again the contribution of movements of dalits in the process of secularisation is conspicuous by its absence. Vanaik point out that, "the term 'secularisation' emerged after the peace of Westphalia in 1648 and originally referred to the transfer of ecclestical lands to civic control. By the nineteenth century and in still powerful flush of Enlightenment values, G.L. Holyoake of Britain coined the term 'secularism' to define an ideology and movement, wherein social morality, hitherto determined by the transcending principles of religion, were now to be determined by reason, and anchored to the good

man or woman in this life." (Vanaik, 1996 : 65).

Vanaik further states "Capitalist industrialisation, the rise of science and of enlightenment, the emergence and consolidation of civil society, in short modernity, posed the question of religion anew. How did religion, specifically Christianity, relate to modernity's emergence? Broadly speaking to this day three notions of secularisation have vied, singly or in combination, for controlling emphasis. There is the concept of secularisation as decline of religious institutions, beliefs, practices and consciousness losing social significance. There is the concept of relative separation. Here there is a shrinkage in the social space occupied or influenced by religion, also an implied reallocation of religious functions in polity, society and culture. The third notion is intimately connected to the growing importance of rational thought and activity. This dynamic implies newer claimants to intellectual and moral authority other than traditional religious systems". This is an excellent summary of the dynamics of the process occurring in the West. Vanaik supplements in the similar vein, "the emergence of secular State in Western democracies was more a practical consequence of a specific historical experience than an institutionalisation of an abstract secular ideal". And finally Vanaik describes a fourth notion of secularisation, "This Indian contribution is product of its specific history. In the context where the values associated with liberal democracy and nationalism were imported, secularism was conceived as the unifying principle mediating between different communities in order to forge a common struggle for national liberation....Like Western democratic counterpart the Indian secular state would be religiously impartial. But this impartiality would be ensured not by abstinence from religious affairs but by its 'fair' involvement on India's multireligious terrain...such a notion meant that Indian State did not represent that

sharp contrast from broad Western model", this proposition is open to debate as more enlightening work needs to be put in before Indian secularisation process can be properly grappled. We will shortly look at the contributions of S. Anandhi and G. Omvedt who partly try to present a deeper view of the Indian secularisation process.

The core process of Indian secularisation process differed from the Western model because here the bigger impetus for the process came from the exploited and oppressed of society. The slower pace of industrialisation in the colonial society threw up a section of industrialists whose social and political will to overthrow the colonialism-Landlord-Priests nexus was not as sharp as in the Western countries. The turmoil created by industrialisation's impact on the subalterns, shudras, women and other exploited sections, who were tied by the priestly dictates and landlord exploitation was immense and got reflected in the movements represented and led by Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar. Gail Omvedt (Omvedt, 1995 : 23) states, "Phule's argument that knowledge, education and science were weapons of advance for the exploited masses, was in contrast to all elitist theories that sought to link Western science and Eastern morale and argues that Indians could maintain their (Brahmonical) traditions, while adopting science and technology from the West for material development. For Phule, rather, *vidya* or knowlege was in direct contrast with the brahmanic, ritualistic *shastra* and was a weapon for equality and human freedom as well as the economic advance". Omvedt demonstrates the role of various radical dalit thinkers of the 1920s like Bansode (Nagpur), Bhagyareddy Varma (Hyderabad) and Mangoo Ram (Punjab). Omvedt is not blind to the deficiencies of the movements of the oppressed, despite their contribution in shaking up the existing hierarchical relationships. "Thus two opposing ideologies prevailed

among the toiling masses, one arguing from the standpoint of being original inhabitants or non-Aryans, and the other basing itself on the theory of class struggle. With the failure, in particular, of more all-encompassing Marxist theory to incorporate the problems of caste in India, the broad movement of the oppressed was split into class movement and a caste movement. There was no synthesis, no development of an integrated ideology and, as a result, those lower castes/classes who did get drawn into the national struggle or left-led working class movement, gave up the sharpness of their anti-caste fight" (Omvedt, 1995: 42).

Ambedkar emerged as the most significant dalit leader. His mammoth contributions included anti-caste struggles in the form of agitations like Chavdar Talab (for access of dalits to public drinking water), Kalaram Mandir (right to enter Hindu Temples), Manusmriti Dahan (Burning Manusmriti, the book codifying Hindu Dharma : rules, and consolidating the slavery of shudras and women and conversion to Buddhism and his laying the foundation of organisations/movements represented in Bahishkrit Hitakarinisabha, Indian Labor Party, Scheduled Caste Federation and the Republican Party of India. He supplemented this by his fundamental contributions in the form of Annihilation of Caste, Riddles of Rama and Krishna, and Buddha and His Dhamma. To cap this all he presided over the drafting of Indian Constitution which aimed to base itself on Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, the principles defining the 'core' of teachings of Ambedkar. As per Omvedt, "The way to liberation, then involved economic and ideological struggle and Ambedkar never gave up the former. But his stress was on ideological, cultural struggle, and though he could not succeed in fully integrating it with an economic alternative, he gave it a sharpness that would remain challenging before socialists to deal with the 'monster that would always

cross their path', the issue of caste and its religious justification". (Omvedt, page 55).

Periyar's contribution in contrast took a regional Tamil touch though essentially attacking the Brahmanical (upper caste domination). Periyar spearheaded a movement whose, "focus was similar to that of Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj, opposing Brahman Priesthood, calling for abolition of caste and supporting the liberation of women. He attacked all religions more than Phule did, taking an atheistic stance that contrasted with the modified stance of the non-Brahman elite" (Omvedt, pg : 56).

Anadhi S. (Anadhi, 1995) has thrown significant light on the process of secularisation while studying the Dalits and secular politics in Madras slum. As per her (Pg 9), "While the rest of the country has witnessed worst forms of Hindu communal mobilisation and violence against the Muslims, Tamil Nadu has remained an exception with remarkable communal harmony ; and this has been attributed to the Dravidian movement. We may note here that while the self respect movement phase of Dravidian Movement problematised Hinduism by means of Sudra/Adi Dravida identity and gender inequality, its later incarnations subsumed religious and other identities under a pan dalit identity".

Pariyar founded the self respect movement and "his politics was by and large framed by a search for free and equal citizenship for different subordinate social groups such as shudras, the Adi Dravids and Women'. (Anadhi, S., Pg 22) and further he argued that "Hinduism not only gave its adherents a religious identity, but also invested them with a range of other identities which, for him, were demeaning, disempowering and oppressive. The most obvious of these subordinated identities were that of Adi-Dravids and the Shudras, which in practice forced the bulk of Hindus to a situation of wretchedness". (Anandhi, Pg 23).

The Hindutva offensive cannot be properly placed in its socio-political and historical perspective without understanding the post-Mandal assertion of the dalits and other exploited sections of society. Hindutva's political baby, the BJP's success in rampaging the electoral battlefield, though highly disturbing in itself, cannot be negated without upholding and supporting the struggles of these groups who bear the brunt of Hindutva's onslaught at a deeper level.

*Political Responses* : The rise of petty industrialist, rich peasants and other middle layers of society along with a geometric increase in communalisation of society has brought to fore the electoral strength of the BJP. The party which began with a slogan of 'Gandhian Socialism', which was a mere attractive packaging material to be thrown away as soon as the contents are unpacked. The decade of 80s saw Congress taking advantage of this communalised common sense, but soon the 'communal dividends' were taken over by its 'rightful claimant' the BJP, which emboldened by its initial success in using 'religious emotive' appeals for political purposes, went all out to use the 'chariot of religion' in an attempt to trample the liberal democratic ethos under the wheels of its frightful armada of religion.

The implementation of Mandal by V.P. Singh Govt. put the rising tide of BJP in a fix. On one hand seeing the contingencies of electoral politics it had to pay 'Lip support' to Mandal commission, on the other it had also to please its own support base of 'rising middle classes'. By a 'shrewd and clever' manoeuvre it 'made best of both the worlds' by deflecting the issues related to social justice and rights of oppressed into religious issues and Ramjanmbhoomi issue came in as an apt battering ram to propel its communal political agenda. The progressive, secular and potential secular political formations kept watching the rise of communal political power and the demolition of Babri Masjid

with a mixed sense of disbelief, awe and terror. The rubbles of Babri masjid and rivers of blood flowing from the communal carnage unleashed by the campaigners of Sangh Parivar finally woke up the secular and potential secular formations into a sort of soul searching.

On one hand one is witnessing the apparently unstoppable march of BJP, duly supported by other wings of SP which are deftly using the 'communalisation of social space' to win over average middle class voter and by applying the 'social engineering' precisely to electorally win over those social groups whose social and political rights BJP wants to crush, i.e., dalits, women, workers and minorities. After the Babri demolition the SP has come to a 'fairly stable' phase and is pursuing its communal agenda with definite goals. The response of other electoral outfits from Congress to the Communists had been a 'knee jerk', one, of coming together to halt the march of BJP to power. The 1996 elections were an enough eye opener and a warning of the state of things to come. The coalition of parties, united front, supported from outside by the Congress and CPM was the outcome of this attempt to keep the BJP off from power. While coming towards this gravitation different parties were forced by what they had witnessed in the preceding years, as they could perceive that the communal forces "will always try to wade through rivers of blood of minorities to get to power, but a carnage that involves the 'Hindu Nation' itself is more than what they can muster ; that will be the surest way to destroy themselves" (Ahmed, 1996 : 1342). The expectation from this coalition was that it will not pose a threat to minorities, try to walk on the secular path, try to be representative of regional pluralism and try to take the political course away from Brahmin-Bania nexus.

At the moment there is no 'electoral vision' for

keeping the communal BJP at bay. Things are just drifting and the unpreparedness of non-BJP parties are feeding into BJP's strength. Though BJP's major problems at the moment are equally from inside as from outside. The breakaway of Shankar Singh Waghela in Gujarat and many a dissident satraps of the states are an indicator of the party's inner contradictions overturning its appellation. Though BJP is projecting itself as the 'party with a difference', it betrays its weaknesses many of which are similar to the ones shown by other parties, "the reality proving not to be different from the practice of other parties, in relation to power and patronage. There is hardly any state unit of the party which is not riven with factionalism and infighting. What happened in Gujarat holds a mirror to the future" (Panikkar, 1996 : vii). Though this may be true when the BJP is not in absolute power, with grabbing of a 'absolute power' one imagines the real controller of BJP, the R.S.S. will be ruling the roost and crushing the dissident elements with 'Lathi blows'. So though one can register the inner contradictions within BJP, one has to be a bit cautious in reading too much into them once the BJP is in total command, when all the wings of SP will come forward to ruthlessly execute the Hindutva agenda.

The coming together of Non-BJP parties cannot be seen as the total answer to the threat of SP. Vanaik, (Vanaik, 1996 : 333) makes a pertinent point, "Electoral politics bases itself on existing levels of consciousness and prejudices. A left wing politics which wants to retain its distinctiveness and operates in a context where centrist populism is already strong cannot hope to expand (beyond a point) by shifting its politics forwards to take the electoral risks of more frequently and determinedly going 'against the grain' of popular consciousness in order to change such 'normal' consciousness".

The need for initiating the extra electoral campaigns

to take on the threat of communal politics is very clear from this.

### Platform for Secular Democracy

The problem posed by the ascendance of Hindu Right is multipronged. On one hand it is a socio-political agenda of the middle layers of society out to undo their social insecurity by asserting the pre-modern patriarchal values which cater to their ambitions, on the other they manifest in the form of an onslaught which utilises multiple forms of programmes to appeal to broad sections of society. This peculiar problem of post-colonial societies is manifesting the features of 'clerical fascism', i.e., having the features both from fascist and fundamentalist offensives. Unlike the fascism of Europe, this onslaught grows slowly, infects the social ethos in a chronic fashion and strangles the liberal ethos of society in due course of time. It has some added features like restoring the pre-modern patriarchal values at a deeper level, i.e., at the level of culture. "That Hindu communalism is bidding for political power is too obvious to be stated. Its perspective of power, however, is not confined to electoral success. Electoral success is envisaged as the end-product of social acceptance of its cultural and ideological hegemony" (Panikker, : 1997 : 91). Hindu communalism has experimented with various religious cultural symbols and finally has succeeded in getting some of its symbols popularly accepted and also sinking them in the emotive psyche of the society.

The response to the communalisation of society has come up in the form of coming up of various groups with secular programmes aimed at the level of a dissemination of secular ideas aimed at combating communal ideology. Ekta Samiti is a good example of this which since 1987 has been engaged in meaningful

symbolic activities. Also Non-Govt. organisations like Centre for study of society and secularism and INSAF (Indian National Social Action Forum) have been engaged in publication work and have been organising multiple seminars regularly to deepen the anti-communal ideas at a deeper level. Also another significant activity has been the publication of Communalism Combat (popular level) and Indian Journal of Secularism (scholarly, aimed at intellectuals). There have been many other projects like KHOJ, interacting with school children to remove their communal biases, and initiatives like Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum targetted to remove the mutual misconceptions and hatred amongst the sections of two countries.

Where does one go from here ? Is this response adequate enough to fight a cultural, social, political force which is knocking at the door of power and, once in power its semi-concealed poisonous fangs will be capable enough to strangle-hold the democracy and liberalism for a long time to come.

More needs to be done to be able to take on the might of this monster of 'Religious Nationalism'. The measures described earlier are a very good beginning, but surely they are just the beginning. A long term political-cultural-social programme of agitational movement is to be thought of to be able to overcome the dark clouds of communal politics.

How can this agitational movemnet be built up ? Which social groups will feel the need to make this as their short term and long term goal ? If more than one, why should these groups come together ? This struggle of taking on the 'clerical fascism', is also going to be the struggle to secularise the Indian Society. "Any struggle for secularising Indian life has two objectives : the struggle to defend and deepen the secular character of Indian state today under seige ; the struggle to secularise civil society. The first struggle

requires aggressive propoganda on the need to sustain a basic seperation of religious influence from governance to preserve and deepen democracy. It requires aggressive extra parliamentary mobilisation against specific campaigns launched by Hindu communalists and if need be, extra-legal defence against the perpetrators of communal violence and bullying" (Vanaik : 1996 : 335).

The main victims of SP onslaught are the minorities (Muslims in particular), dalits, women and workers. But from distance these don't appear to be that obvious as SP is 'clever' enough to conceal its hard punch under the velvet gloves. It is clever enough to try to coop them, win over a section of them by different mechanisms.

At superficial level there does not seem to be anything common between these diverse groups. So how can they come together to form a 'Secular democratic' platform which gives them enough space to struggle for their rights ? Rohini P.H. (Mimiographed: 1996) perceives the question in its depth, "The saffron parties have exploited this complexity with a great deal of skill and sophistication. For millions of people with insecure jobs in the unorganised sector, or no employment at all, the promise of self employment through ownership of an autorickshaw or a paan stall could be enough reason to be committed supporters of Hindu communal party. For dalits the lure of political power or elevation of status could lead to compromises. For women subordination in a male dominated movement could be accompanied by the possibility of engaging in activities which widen their scope of influence outside the family. All of these workers, dalit and women could gain ephemeral 'empowerment' from participations, actively or passively, in communal violence, and more stable satisfaction from feeling of superiority over a persecuted minority...minorities are themselves divided into

different religious groups who do not necessarily identify with one another...Internal stratification (amongst these groups) means that those who are in a privileged position within these communities are more anxious to cling to those privileges than to fight against the oppression of the communities as a whole". Rohini goes on to opine, "the only way to build a common platform which will accomodate these diverse groups is to work for a consensus which is opposed to oppression in all its multiple form".

It is undoubtedly true that these movements of minorities, dalits, informal sector workers and women are scattered and isolated from each other. These movement's combined assertion is the only force which can confront the communal attack on the society. Time is over try to explore the possibilities of drawing out the common issues accross these movements which can bring them together on the basis of issues. This process is a process of a 'Social experimentation', a process of learning through social struggles, a process of bringing out the common threat of communal politics which affects them in common irrespective of their social location. Thus secular movement has to grapple with forms of activity like community work, organising the informal sector, giving economic content to caste struggles and defining and developing the movements against gender injustice.

The social struggles cannot go on in a void. They are necessarily to be accompanied by dissaminations of secular values and cultural ethos. "What is immediately required is an all-out effort to expand the secular cultural space. This can be achieved only through a vigorous movement striving for secular ethos through cultural endeavour, contending with seeking to replace the fast advancing communal ethos. The movement should aim to organize, on a large scale, an institutional infrastructure of newspapers, audiovisual production centres, theatre groups, music

societies, local history associations, publishing houses, environmental groups, literacy activity and so on”(Panikkar, 1997 : 100).

*Conclusion* : The communal threat has awakened the progressive, liberal and left movement of the country to adopt newer strategies to take on this monster. Since the political movement did not anticipate the vicious intensity of communalisation of society and the consequent increase in the electoral strength of BJP and social impact of Sangh Parivar, in a way it has been caught napping. The 'first aid' measures of temporary coalitions can not confront the aggression of communal politics for long time. A series of steps leading to emergence of secular Democratic platform which draws out the common programme leading to egalitarian society respecting the democratic rights of oppressed sections of society and practising the secular ethos needs to be undertaken. The struggles and campaigns have to be aided by number of cultural initiatives in different arenas of life to de-weed the society from the influx of poisonous seed sowed by religious nationalism, in Indian context, the Hindu Nationalism. The venom of Hindu Rashtra agenda from popular psyche needs to be eliminated and the humane values of mutual respect for 'others' life and culture, secular ethos and liberal space has to be brought in by engaging in struggles at different levels of social and political life.

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