

The constant attack on the secular fabric of the Indian society in the last two decades has been raising a fundamental issue about the concept of secularism - its alien-ness to India.

This little booklet is a modest attempt to trace the concept of secularism, and to touch upon related debates surrounding the issue. It also tries to look at the element of the rationality of the concept as being a tool for organizing society in times of crisis; especially, in the case of India, it focuses on the freedom movement and the rise of the concept of secularism.

It finally looks at the various attempts made by civil society organizations and institutions to restore the secular fabric of our society.

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Secularism and Secular Action

by
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Introduction

A year ago, on a Monday (3rd May 2006) morning an old Dargha in Vadodra was to be removed. This was a dargah that had withstood the pressures of time and weather for more than 200 years. The dargah finds first mention in 1912, in a municipal survey under the princely state of Baroda ruled by Siyajirao. The dargah was said to have been built in honour of Syed Rashiduddin Chishti and was a site where programmes were being held everyday, ironically fully funded by Hindus. Unfortunately its location in Gujarat was its biggest drawback.

Gujarat, today has become a shameful blot on India's struggle to maintain her pluralistic ethos. Minorities there have become a condemned lot living in fear of threats to life and property. As much as we would like to see strong protests from the public to preempt such meaningless demolitions, we will have to resign ourselves to the fact that for a long while now the demoralized citizens of the state have become too heart weary and feeble to raise their voices in order to protect either identity, ideology or property.

Fastforward to hill road Bandra where the Mumbai Municipal corporation's road widening project was threatening to bury the Tata agiary and parts of St. Peters Church compound and St. Andrews graveyard. Bandraiters unlike the Vadodaraites were at one raising a

systemic campaign to impress upon the authorities the historic significance and importance of these structures, and in the process managed to stall the so-called development oriented demolitions.

Can old structures really be obstructions to road widening projects? The concept of town planning as put in place way back in the 1950s in India said townships were to be planned integrating existing structures with the new plans. Then why was the dargha being looked upon as an encroachment, rather it should have been the other way round. The road that was being planned should have been called an encroachment on dargha property.

The dargha was demolished; everyone with a basic understanding of the human psyche would have anticipated riots as a response. One fails to understand why then the Municipal Corporation of Vadodara and the Police failed to anticipate this outcome. This definitely leads us to the uncomfortable zone that questions not just the credibility of these officials, but the system which is responsible for systematically creating such instability. In this act of ravagement, was the state perpetuating communalism? What happened to the state that was committed to building a Secular Nation?

It also brings us to questions like the ones that well-known Marxist, Sitaram Yechury raises in one of his speeches about the situation in Gujarat post-Godhra. He says, "The question here... is how to maintain communal harmony and how to strengthen the secular and democratic republic in the country... The complaint is that thousands of riot victims in Gujarat are still not getting justice. About POTA detainees, the POTA Review Committee says these arrests are not justified. The question is not whether economic development is taking place in Gujarat or not, the question is not whether this development can be expedited or not, the question is whether we would be able to preserve our secular democratic republic and recent events need to be examined in this context."

But the man and his party, seen to have been crusading for victims of Gujarat, find themselves in a cleft-stick on Singur. The proposed SEZ allotted to one of India's top-most Industrial houses is embroiled in a sea of controversy. Farmers are being displaced from their livelihood with very little compensation. We see Mr Yechury tongue-tied on the issue of Singur, where the same party that crusaded for Gujarat victims is creating havoc in the lives of innocent farmers of Singur. They also find themselves on sinking sand with the Nandigram episode. But these are not isolated instances which make me feel uncomfortable. Remember the riots in Mau and Bhiwandi, both industrial towns, the former in Uttar Pradesh and the latter in Maharashtra.

TILL October 15, 2005, Mau was a small textile town in eastern Uttar Pradesh where the Muslim and Hindu populations crossed frequently. Mixed neighbourhoods were the norm. The business interests of the two communities were linked. There are one lakh powerlooms in Mau district, owned by the Muslims who make up 70 per cent of the town's population, whereas Hindus who run cloth shops supply them with thread and yarn.

Then the events of a single day changed Mau forever. And ironically it was Mau's secular custom that became its undoing. Mau is not the only village that has seen a communal upsurge, but this has been a common occurrence. Communal riots have become common. Can we take time to understand why this has happened?

For years Mau followed this tradition: Hindus would knock the hand-drawn rath of their idol three times against the gate of the Shahi Katra mosque on the busy Kotwali-to-Chowk Road during Bharat Milap, while the Muslims would climb three steps of a neighboring Sanskrit pathshala during Moharram. Can we call this Secularism?

The world today seems dark and clouded, no hopes of peaceful coexistence. Though Mumbai, which has also seen many riots over the years, is peaceful at this moment, does that mean it won't flare up in situations similar to the above mentioned ones? My heart breaks when I see my city being ravaged by partisan politics and murderous ill-will. A gloom settles over me just mulling over the thought of another riot happening in Mumbai.

The world is of course not as bleak as we make it out to be. There are heart-warming stories of togetherness between diverse communities which need to be ferreted out and showcased as examples of the upholding of human values. One such story is about the people of Pende village which you will read in the chapter on secular action. I am absolutely sure that if we probe deeper into our day-to-day lives we will find similar examples in every nook and corner.

I also came across an article in Communalism Combat on their project Khoj and their work with children in an attempt to restore the secular fabric of India. It dawned on me then that there was hope round the corner, but my questioning mind did not stop there. How many of these attempts are being taken seriously? Are they enough? What is secularism? What are the different shades of Secularism?

I couldn't just look at secularism as defined by acts of syncretic inclusion. I needed to find a more broadbased answer to the many questions flitting through my mind. So I also explored western theory on the subject and came across some interesting definitions. Susan Jacoby a proud nonbeliever, a "progressive" activist and a Pulitzer Prize finalist is currently Program Director for the New York City branch of the Center for Inquiry. She defines "secularism" as "a concept of public good based on human reason and human rights rather than divine authority." Secularists therefore make up a much broader group than atheists or even freethinkers. It's hard to consider atheism (an active and often evangelical disbelief in God) separately

from secularism, liberalism, modernism, evolutionism, and all the other "isms" of the modern world. In the 'The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World' (Doubleday, 2004), Alistair McGrath, described as a professor of historical theology at Oxford writes:

"The idea that there is no God captured human minds and imaginations, offering intellectual liberation and spiritual inspiration to generations that saw themselves as imprisoned, mentally and often (it must be said) physically, by the religious past. It is impossible to understand the development of Western culture without coming to terms with this remarkable movement."

This made me realize that secularism is a process that needs to be nurtured and it takes a great many years to achieve the nonchalance achieved by the west on matters of religion.

The ideology of the Indian National Movement was born out of its concerted focus against the British colonial struggle. A struggle of that proportion needed mass participation from the Indians who were divided on the basis of caste, creed, religion, class etc. Out of political and practical compulsion for unifying the country for one common cause the ideology of secularism was adopted. Adoption of the ideology of secularism was interpreted in different ways by the intellectuals of that time. The rationalist adopted it as an ideology, which meant separation of religion and politics and a rationalist aptitude towards life that will enlighten people from the oppressive traditions in the society. This also meant that people would understand and fight for basic human rights. The second group, the spiritual kind believed that tolerance and respect to all religion should be the key for unifying people. A third group of people who were neither votaries of spirituality nor of rationalist attitude also believed that co-existence of different religions led to mutual understanding which could have been responsible for the so-called secular behaviour.

All three streams were in vogue in India even in the pre-independence time but their relative strengths changed over a longer period. Even though the rational secular traditions were weak from the beginning, its advocates, played a very positive role at the time of the freedom struggle.

The beginning of Secularism has been found in the spirit of reformation (16th Century). Martin Luther's advocacy of the individual's right to understand the word of God, independent of church and autonomy of secular power became one of the very important trends in secularism. The need for separation of State and Church was advocated by reformers which was further affirmed through the first Amendment of the American Constitution in 1776, and Jefferson's exposition of the same in terms of the "wall of separation" between the two.

The major influencing factor which inspired the secularist thinking of the period was the rapid growth of science, both in pure and theoretical form and its application in day-to-day life. The sciences of astronomy and physics made western man realise that there are surer ways of arriving at the knowledge of reality than a dogmatic reliance on religious authority.

Copernicus (16th Century), Galileo (17th Century) Newton (late 17th/early 18th Century) and Laplace (late 18th/early 19th Century) demolished biblical cosmology and world views. Darwin's theory of evolution (19th Century) demolished another dogma regarding the entire human race descending from a common ancestor- Adam.

Demolitions of various dogmas by various scientific theories, the acceptance of natural laws affirmed by sciences as explanatory principles of all natural phenomena and the prestige of scientific methods as a source and creation of truth during the four centuries following the Renaissance led to an intellectual culture in which religion and culture were seen as contradictory. Miracles were rejected as they were seen to have been dictated by the Christian anthology,

and clergy was forced to admit that they had neither force, authority, nor competence to pronounce judgement regarding secular knowledge. This independent and critical thinking of various philosophers paved way for affirmation of this worldly and humanistic ideology of secularism.

Bipin Chandra in a detailed study of Communalism, argues that "communalism was a false consciousness of the historical process of the last one hundred and fifty years, because objectively, no real conflict between the interests of Hindus and Muslims existed. The Britishers through their colonial rule pitted Hindus and Muslims against each other.

Communalism according to him was "one of the by products of the colonial character of Indian economy, of colonial underdevelopment, of the incapacity of colonialism to develop the Indian economy". The resulting economic stagnation and its impact on the lives of Indian people, especially middle classes, produced conditions which were conducive to division and antagonism within Indian society as also to its radical transformation. In this effort, I have attempted to answer some very sticky questions. What has gone wrong with our polity that our people are being incensed into reprehensible behaviours? What has happened to the syncretic culture that we were so proud of sharing? Why are riots happening so frequently? What is communalism? Why is it on the rise today? Are we taking measures to cope with it? Almost all the answers are sourced from various publications from the print and electronic media and are written by well-known scholars on the issue. Likewise I hope that you as a reader will also make an attempt to answer these questions for yourself. This book is a small attempt on my part to understand the meaning of secularism, its various interpretations, the debates in intellectual circles on this mystery word, and what are the attempts being taken to restore the lost secular fabric through Secular Actions.

Chapter 1

National Movement and The Concept of Secularism

The ideology of the Indian National Movement was born from its concerted focus against British colonialism. A struggle of that proportion needed mass participation from the Indians who were divided on the basis of caste, creed, religion, class etc. Out of political and practical compulsion - for unifying the country under one common cause - the ideology of secularism was adopted. Secularism was interpreted in different ways by the intellectuals of that time. The rationalist adopted it as an ideology, which meant separation of religion and politics and a rationalist attitude towards life as a means to free/liberate people from the oppressive traditions prevalent in the society. This also meant that people would understand and fight for basic human rights. The second group, the spiritual kind believed that tolerance and respect for all religions should be the key to unifying people. A third group of people who were neither votaries of spirituality nor of rationalist attitude also believed that co-existence of different religions led to mutual understanding which could have been responsible for the so-called secular behaviour.

All three streams were in vogue in India even in pre-independence India, but there was transformation in their relative strengths over time. Even though the rational secular traditions were weak, from the beginning its advocates played a very positive role in the freedom struggle.

The Roots Of Religious Tolerance in India - The Pluralism of Hinduism

The Hindu religion is unique in the sense that it is the only surviving major religion today that has retained a continuous link with its hazy origins in antiquity. Hinduism has no founder, no code of beliefs, it never had any religious organisation that wielded temporal power over its followers.

Its distinguishing characteristics are its diversity and multiplicity. The term Sanatana Dharma (also used to refer to this religion) reflects its character - Sanatana means continuing. The religions of the Mesopotemians, ancient Greeks and Romans were similar to Hinduism. But they were replaced by **Islam** and **Christianity**, both of which are monotheistic religions.

But, ironically, though Hindu philosophy is very liberal and tolerant, the social framework that is associated with the Hindu religion displays rigidity in its extreme. For instance, the hereditary caste system, or the ban on re-conversion into Hinduism of those who had got themselves converted or were forcibly converted to other religions.

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Secularism in India

Secularism actually means an attitude unconnected with any religion. But if asked its meaning *an Indian would invariably say that secularism means 'religious tolerance'*.

In ancient India it was the king's duty to promote dharma. Now the term dharma has a wide connotation involving law, duty, morality and religion. Thus dharma did not just connote administration; it also had ecclesiastical overtones. The king was expected to encourage piety and virtue and also aid religious institutions. Government was not based on a theocracy and considerable impartiality was practiced in the treatment accorded to various sects - irrespective of the sect to which a king belonged. However, the religious overtones of regal policy were very pronounced. The ancient Hindu State, like today's Indian State, was tolerant towards all religions, was equidistant from all religions and also generally gave equal promotion to all religions. But despite all this it could not be called secular as it was not a non-religious state and the promotion of dharma tied it down to ecclesiastical pursuits which cannot go into the making of a secular state as per the dictionary meaning of the term.

In promoting dharma, the state in ancient India built temples, granted them large endowments, and exercised strict supervision over their affairs. As the Hindu kings were tolerant towards all creeds and frequently aided them all, the foundations of religious tolerance (one of the bases of secularism) could be said to be indigenous to India.

The first generation leaders of the Indian National Congress made sincere efforts to highlight the growing problems of the Indian masses under British rule. However, their non-confrontationist attitude towards British authority allowed others to brand them as moderates. Moreover the mass support base of Indian Nationalism under their leadership remained very narrow. Around this time, the impatient and activity oriented leaders like Balgangadhar Tilak started

utilizing Hindu religious festivals and processions for preaching nationalist politics. As ideological justification for use of religion for political ends was already given revival, thinkers like Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra and Dayanand Saraswati joined this stream and were against communal politics. A large number of people who got attracted to the Nationalist movement thereafter happened to be Hindus. It was because of this that the early National struggle acquired a Hindu orientation. Therefore a suspicion was created in the minds of the largest Muslim minority, and they joined the National Movement only a few decades later when situations changed under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru. This was the time in India when we saw the rational secularists compromising and supporting Gandhi's religiously oriented nationalism.

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NEHRU'S CONCEPT OF SECULARISM

Nehru defined secularism as a way of life outside the religious arena, but not antagonistic to people's religious beliefs. Nehru's secularism translated in political terms was one which honored all faiths equally and gave them equal opportunities; its equivalent in Hindi would be dharma nirpekshata.

By intellectual preference Nehru was against institutional religion, ritual and mysticism and did not consider himself a religious person. He was not, however, uninterested in spiritual matters. He was an agnostic who subscribed to a rationalist worldview. Nehru's study of world history and his encounters with Indian masses in the 1920s and 30s made him feel negative about the role of religion in human affairs, and he looked forward to a secularized society. (Excerpts from Crisis of Indian Secularism by T N Madan, Towards Secular India, Vol 3, No 1, Jan- March 1997)

Nehru's concept of secularism in our Constitution:

Nehru was a great believer in the constituent assembly of India which, according to him, should solve many of its long standing problems, particularly of nation building and development. In his own words: "The first task of this assembly is to free India through a new constitution, to feed the starving people, to clothe the naked masses and to give every Indian fullest opportunity to develop himself according to his capacity."

Nehru was never tired of emphasizing that the fortune of every group, whether majority or minority, whether religious or otherwise, was organically linked with the future of India. This assumption was the crux of his philosophy of nation building and the backbone of his views on secularism. Nehru once said, "The one thing that should be obvious to all of us is that there is no group in India, no party, no religious community, which can prosper if India does not prosper... But if it is well with India, if India lives as a vital free country, then it is well with all of us to... whatever community or religion we might belong."

Nehru also talked of a close relationship between individuals and social freedom. This idea is again relevant in the context of

secularism, particularly with reference to the role of the majority in relation to minority rights, which he always emphasized. Therefore to Nehru it was a must for India to be a secular state.

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GANDHI'S CONCEPT OF SECULARISM

Nehru defined secularism as a state policy of Gandhi, on the other hand defined secularism in the context of social and personal attitudes. Gandhi's interpretation of secularism stemmed from his being a highly religious person and a strong believer in moral aspects of religion. He believed that a truly religious person would respect all religion since the essence of religion, according to him, is brotherhood and peace. Therefore Gandhi defined secularism as respect for all religion - sarva dharma samabhav.

Gandhi on religion and the secular state: "Religion and state will be separate. I swear by my religion, I will die for it. But religion is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it. The state will look after your secular welfare, health, communication, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody's personal concern."

The notion of the unity of God was at the heart of Gandhi's attitude towards interreligious relationship, which led him to acknowledge communal harmony as a cornerstone of his political philosophy and programme. He rightly realised that without Hindu - Muslim unity, Indian civilisation could not survive Gandhi's concept of religion and practice of Hinduism were diametrically opposed to that advocated by the Hindu communalist headed by the Rashtriya Swyamsevak

Sangh. It is true Gandhi asserted that religion could not be separated from politics. In the last 50 years, the Indian intelligentsia has continued to raise the slogan: "Separate religion from politics". The sad part of this story is that it has failed to tell the ordinary people and the middle-classes how it could be done. What is desirable may not necessarily be achievable. Perhaps this demand for separation of religion from politics is being confused with the demand for the separation of church from the state, as has happened in the process of secularisation in the West where the state and the church entered into a prolonged struggle for power over everyday life. Gandhi dared to aim at the impossible - Hindu-Muslim amity. Gandhi was aware of the gulf between Hindus and Muslims in India and wanted to bridge it. By 1905 in an article he asked, "Is it not a fact that between Mohammedans and Hindus there is a great need for ... tolerance?"

Gandhi on Hinduism: "I can no more describe my feelings for Hinduism than for my wife. She moves me as no other woman can. Not that she has no faults. I dare say that she has many more than I see myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond is there. Even so I feel about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations. Nothing elates me as much as the music of the Gita or the Ramayana of Tulsidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. I know the vice that is going on today in all the great Hindu shrines but I love them in spite of their unspeakable failings. I am a reformer through and through. But my zeal never takes me to a rejection of any of the essential things in Hinduism." -MK Gandhi, Young India, 6-10-1921 (Gandhi versus Hindutva, Bindu Puri, Tehelka Magazine, 18/09/2004) [C.Eldoc1/Q31/18sep04teh1.pdf]

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AMBEDKAR AND SECULARISM

Ambedkar said, "No institution, which is maintained wholly out of state funds, shall be used for the purpose of religious instruction irrespective of the question whether the religious instruction is given by the state or by any other body." He further explained the corruption of the concept of secularism in India: "This country has seen the conflict between ecclesiastical law and secular law long before Europeans sought to challenge the authority of the Pope. Kautilya's Arthshastra lays down the foundation of secular law. In India unfortunately ecclesiastical law triumphed over secular law. In my opinion this was the one of the greatest disasters in the country." (Excerpts from Legacy of Dr. B R Ambedkar stands irreconcilably opposed to Hindutva, B.Sivaraman, cpiml.org, 25/09/2003, <http://www.countercurrents.org>) [C.Eldoc1/L54/Legacy_of_Ambedkar.html]

Why is there a popular misconception about the meaning of 'secularism' the which is enshrined in our constitution. To answer this question we would have to probe deeper into Indian polity and the dialectics of Hinduism, the religion of the majority.

Indian Secularism is not a result of the historic struggle in the west, but a principle of state policy for a heterogeneous society. Secularism must surely have been adopted because of the emerging political

urgencies and the new western universalistic rationalist and humanistic view brought by English education. At one level secularism must have drawn substance from reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule, Vivekananda and many more. On the other hand as academicians like Neera Chandhoke put it, adoption of secularism was a must during the time of independence since it seemed as the only probable option to regulate inter-group behaviors. (The 25 years period between 1920s and 1940s had witnessed momentous and decisive political events, which culminated in the partition of India in 1947). The base of the national movement widened in the 1920s. Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a national leader as he proceeded to finely hone techniques of resistance he had developed in South Africa to build up mass struggle. For the first time in the world, previously marginalized groups were politically mobilized and Indian society was united as never before. But the deep social divisions were never erased. The hold of religion on the popular psyche was always there. Religion was politicized and made the propellant of a political movement which finally led to partition. The post-partition period saw large-scale massacres, abductions and communal frenzy. The ideology of secularism was adopted not as it was conceived in the west in opposition to religion, but as suited for Indian society - in opposition to communalism.

The revivalist and the rationalist both advocated for social reforms. The format initiated reforms broadly within the religious framework; the latter attempted social reforms to weaken the hold of religion on man and society. One appealed for action based on faith and the other based on reason. The Indian National Movement was therefore influenced by both rationalist secularism as well as Indian secularism. Since 1980 the Sangh Parivar started popularizing its own brand of secularism, compatible with their goal of Hindu Rashtra. We can see in the next chapter, 'Rise of Communalism' how communalism took seed in India.

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Chapter 2

Rise of Communal Forces

Academicians and activists have produced a variety of definitions of communalism. Various facets brought out through these definitions are “it is an ideology”, “false consciousness” (Bipin Chandra), “consciousness” (Pannikar), “a struggle for scarce resources” (Bipin Chandra), “competition for jobs” (Bipin Chandra), an instrument of ruling class politics.

Bipin Chandra, in a detailed study of Communalism, argues that “communalism was a false consciousness of the historical process of the last one hundred and fifty years, because objectively, no real conflict between the interests of Hindus and Muslims existed. Britishers through their colonial rule pitted Hindus and Muslims against each other.”

K N Panikkar argues, "Communalism is a state of consciousness...." which primarily draws upon certain assumptions of distinct cultural identity for members professing the same religion, where the emphasis is on a distinct homogeneous cultural identity of any religious group.

Distortion Of History

The rise of communal problems has been accompanied by distortion of medieval history. According to the rising communal forces, the

invasion by Muslim Kings brought slavery to Hindus and converted them to Islam on the strength of the sword. Another historical distortion has been division into various phases: the ancient golden period of prosperity, the medieval dark period, a period of exploitation by the Muslim rulers, and the British Period of colonial exploitation. James Mill, the British historian, was the first to do a periodisation of this kind based on the religious identities who ruled in that particular period. It was for the British policy of divide and rule that periodisations of this kind were made. When all the historical periods are examined in all honesty and religious prejudices, we shall find it full of conflicts and clashes of interest. The Britishers had their own political axe to grind when they gave this concept of periodisation. They based their period not on religious identity but on their nationality.

Distortion of history leading to formation of powerful communal ideology for communal solidarity was propagated through two interconnected ideas. First the notion of Hinduism as a homogenous religion and second the notion of Hindu religion going back to earliest times.

The attempts by communal forces to trace the roots of present day Hinduism and Hindu community to the ancient past are based on the assumption that Indian culture is Hindu culture and Indian nationalism is Hindu nationalism. In fact the communal forces got many steps farther than just distorting Indian history, rather they attempted in falsification and denial of a significant dimension of our historical tradition.

At another level communalists also distorted or misinterpreted social tension and class conflict between the exploiter and exploited belonging to different religions as communal conflicts. These conflicts were very much there but not of religious nature. Some of the classic examples of this type of conflict between exploiter and

exploited being branded as communal conflict can be seen in between the exploiting landlords, merchants and moneylenders and exploited poor peasants and laborers. The struggle between tenant and landlord in East Bengal and Malabar and the peasant debtor and moneylender in Punjab would be portrayed as communal strife between Muslim and Hindus. Similarly, the landlord moneylender oppression of Muslims by Hindus, and the attack by the rural poor on the rural rich as an attack by Muslims on Hindus.

But the rise of communalism must be understood in the context of its roots within British colonial society where the masses had no say in political matters, as there was no universal franchise.

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Muslim League, RSS and BJP

In the early 19th Century, the Indian National Congress put forth two main demands:

1. Give more scope to Indian Capitalists in industrial enterprise and also provide some impetus;
2. A demand for participation in the government and in administrative services at different levels. When the Britishers noticed growing momentum behind a common Hindu-Muslim platform, they deliberately adopted the policy of "divide and rule". This in turn, gave rise to communal politics in India. The result of which was the formation of the Muslim League and RSS. The Britishers showed some preference for the Muslims and in other matters they favoured Hindus or even the Indian National Congress. By doing this, they were very successful in creating a situation of conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

The Muslim League

The seeds for the formation of the Muslim League were sown when Britishers first gave patronage to Aligarh Muslim University. With this, their mission of instituting Beck, a British pedagogue to serve editorial control of the Institutes Gazette for further maligning Hindus and Muslim was fulfilled. Beck consciously started feeding the gazette with anti-Bengali Hindu information and tried to unite Muslims under one banner. At the same time, Sir Syed Ahmad argued against the Nationalist demand for representation in legislative council not through democratic elections but pleaded for a system based on nominations. (It is very important to remember that Sir Syed Ahmad belonged to the rich Muslim Zamindars; they had no understanding and sensitivity towards the sufferings of poor peasants.) This struggle led Britishers to accept the demand of "Vernacular Press Act" which talks about expansion of Urdu language and Urdu press. The next step was taken during the 1906 Shimla meet where an entirely Muslim delegation with demands limited to seeking greater share in governing bodies at all levels in the

name of protecting Muslim intent met the Viceroy Minto. This meeting encouraged Prince Agha Khan and his compatriot Muslim communalists to form Muslim League on 30th December 1906. First resolutions regarding the objectives of the Muslim League were: 1. To promote among the Mussalman of India feeling of loyalty towards the British government 2. To protect and advance the political rights and interests of Muslim. 3. To prevent amongst Muslims in India a feeling of hostility towards other communities without prejudice to the others objects aforementioned.

Growth of Nationalism in a particular direction was seen as a consequence of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-40. The Congress emerged as a dominant political force in the election of 1937. Various political parties of landlords and other vested interests suffered a drastic decline. The suffering peasants and jobless youth were increasingly turning towards the National Movement which was getting radicalized in its economic and political program and policies. The zamindars and landlords interest by and large switched over to communal policies for their class defense. This was true for both the Hindu and the Muslim communalist. The Hindu communalists organised themselves around the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslims around the Muslim League.

The Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha's loyalties were well established during World War I when they both agreed to collaborate with the colonial authorities. All the while they had tried to stay away from mass politics, but the poor performance in the 1937 election made them realize the necessity of mass politics. In the 1930s, a successful right-wing model of mass politics was made available to them in the form of fascist movements which they decided to follow.

Communalism has a logic of its own and, if not checked at the initial stages, the trap closes on its own. Something similar happened to Jinnah. The role of Jinnah cannot be overlooked in the entire debate

on communalism. Jinnah was a great proponent of Hindu -Muslim unity in his early life. Sarajoni Naidu gave him the title of "Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity". He joined Congress on his return to India after becoming a barrister in 1906. His first step toward communalism was taken without any desire of his own and perhaps against his wishes when he entered the Central Legislative Council from Bombay as a Muslim Member under the system of separate electorate. This was furthered by him joining the Muslim League in 1913. He still remained with the Congress and opposed separate electorate. But with passing time he was finding himself in the role of being the spokesperson of the entire Muslim community. His dual role reached its pinnacle and got him trapped during the Lukhnow Congress League Pact of which Tilak and Jinnah were joint authors. He got Congress to accept separate electorate and the system of communal reservation. In 1919-20 when congress decided to take a turn towards mass politics, Jinnah disagreed and did not find it easy working along with Gandhi. Due to opposition faced by the top leaders in Congress, Jinnah left the Congress and tried reviving the Muslim League around the demands for safeguarding the interests and rights of Muslims. Now Jinnah's social base comprised of communal-minded persons. During the discussion on the Nehru report and its presentation later, Congress did not oppose the reservation of seats in proportion to population in the centre too, which was less than one fourth of the central seats. Jinnah was enraged by this and from then on opposed the joint electorate. Step by step he surrendered to the more reactionary communalists led by Agha Khan and M. Shafi.

The Muslim League led by Jinnah was very happy on receiving the communal award in 1937 with all their demands being accepted, after which they only made one demand of protection and proliferation of Urdu language and script and adoption of measures for the

amelioration of the general condition of Muslims. Poor election results showed that Jinnah's assumption had been proved wrong and he had no alternative to towing the communal line of Islam for mobilising masses. Later in his life he tried to take a liberal communal stand but the damage had already been done.

Hindu Mahasabha, RSS and BJP

During this entire period, Hindu communal forces did not lag behind. The two main liberal communalist leaders took an untimely retirement from active politics. Hindu communalism survived the crisis of the loss of early leadership. Golwalkar advanced towards an extremist fascist phase. Hindu Mahasabha made a sharp turn in the fascist direction. The RSS had been from the very beginning formed on fascist lines; it then started branching beyond Maharashtra.

V D Savarkar warned Hindus of the dangers of being dominated by Muslims. Both the Muslim communalist and the Hindu communalist towed similar ideologies: for the former, Islam was in danger as a minority religion; for the latter, the Hindus were in danger since special preferences were given to Muslims in the name of protection.

The growth of Hindu communal forces can be traced to the early 1920s with the leadership of Congress slipping away from Brahmins and dissatisfaction with Gandhi's conciliatory methods in the backdrop of the Brahmins' slipping hegemony over the lower castes. The ideas of organization representing the aspirations of the high castes took roots and this is what gave birth to the RSS in 1925. The tools used to generate communal hatred were based on a distorted version of history. After its formation the RSS concentrated on a so called cultural work of spreading the Hindutva doctrine by molecular permeation keeping aloof from the anti-British struggle. It went to the extent of ridiculing the Quit India movement and instead supported British war efforts.

After independence the RSS helped to form the first Bharatiya Jan Sangh and other unions and networks which would support the proliferation of communal groups like the Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Though the RSS and its allies were very much present, they were not noticed as a powerful force in Indian politics. The first time they were noticed was when one of their trained cadre, Nathuram Godse, killed Gandhi, and then during the "anti-communist" noise they made during India-China war in 1962. It got noticed in a big way and became a part of mainstream political process during the JP movement in the 1970s. The JP launched a mass struggle and permitted the committed RSS to be a part of it. Following the emergency, the Janta Party came to power, and Jan Sangh was one of the important constituents of it. The Jan Sangh was being pressurized by the JP and others to break their relationship from the RSS. Unwilling to do, so they broke up with the Janta Party government to form the Bharatiya Janta Party. (Anatomy of the BJP's Rise to Power: Social Regional and Political Expansion, Oliver Heath, Economic and Political Weekly, 21/08/1999) [C.Eldoc1/Sc1/21aug99epw2.pdf]

From then on, they became a powerful political party with active support from their communal allies. More scope for communal proliferation came their way when Indira Gandhi (after loosing her popular appeal), subtly tried to win over religious nationalist upper castes by communalizing Kashmir and Punjab. Then blunders as in the case of Shah Bano and opening up the of Babri Masjid gave a lot of scope to Hindu Communal forces to once again cry about appeasement of Muslims and favoritism and therefore the need to mobilize Hindus under one banner.

From then on we have seen how the BJP and its allies have constantly been making attacks on the secular fabric of the country. (Hinduism and Politics, Gail Omvedt, Economic and Political Weekly , 7/04/1990) [C.Eldoc1/Sc1/04apr90epw1.pdf]

BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal and Communal Mobilisation

We have time and again witnessed mobilisation of masses by the VHP, the Bajrang Dal and the BJP on communal lines. A similar incident was witnessed on 12th of September 2004. Thousands of VHP activists gathered to demolish the tomb of Afzal Khan situated in Pratapgadh. The VHP had whipped up this controversy for its own political gains. The controversy started when a small grant was allocated for beautification of the tomb. Mobilisation of people was based on the distorted fact that the Hazrat Mohammad Afzal Khan Memorial Trust had illegally occupied nearly 20,000 sq feet of forest land by constructing the main shrine, the conference hall and 23 rooms. They also mobilised people on the emotional grounds that beautification of Afzal Khan's tomb was nothing but glorification of Afzal Khan who attempted to assassinate Shivaji on the foothills of Pratapgadh for when he had come to hold peace talks with him. (Satara Remains Tense, but Afzal Tomb Safe, The Times of India, 13/09/2004 [C.Eldoc1/L53b/13sep04toi1.pdf], Sena keeps away from Afzal Agitation, Nandkumar Dhavalikar & Dilip Chaware, The Times of India, 12/09/2004 [C.Eldoc1/L53b/12sep04toi1.pdf]). Not many knew that Shivaji himself, who had slain Khan in an encounter, built this tomb. This encounter was planned as a negotiation meeting to which both Shivaji and Khan were to come without arms. Violating this, Shivaji carried the iron claws. Interestingly, it was Shivaji's spy Rustam-e-Jaman who advised him to carry this secret weapon. In the scuffle which followed their meeting, Shivaji killed Afzal Khan. Following Shivaji's attack on Khan, Khan's private secretary, Krishnaji Bhaskar Kulkarni, attacked Shivaji with his sword. Shivaji survived the attack. (Erasing the Past for Present Political Agenda, Ram Puniyani, South Asia Citizens Web, 11/10/2004 [C.Eldoc/0411/Erasing_the_Past.html])

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Communalism and Women

The Hindu right's approach to women and women's equality is found in religious overtones. The Hindu right defines women through the images of Hindu Goddesses and consorts, as mothers and daughters - dutiful and sacrificing. Though the BJP, the RSS and their allies state that men and women should be treated equally and adopt a formal approach towards equality, they differ conceptually over the framework of the women's liberation movement. They say that a readjustment in the status of women should be done according to present socio-economic conditions. According to them, women in India had a pride of place within the household and society. This position should be restored, reestablished and reaffirmed. In other words, the position of "equality" which communal forces support are traditional roles related to family. But very interestingly their sense of equality for women does not extend to Muslim women. They are considered to be oppressed and the subservient "other". But unlike Hindu women, they are not to be respected as mothers, nor are they subjects having rights. Saving Muslim women from their oppression becomes justification for not respecting the practices and beliefs of the Muslim community, and indeed, the basis for subordinating their community to Hindu rule. In short, Muslim women are what Hindu women are not. Muslim women have been looked at as objects that

can be used, abused and mutilated for bringing disgrace to their community. This is very evident from the number of atrocities reported during the recent Gujarat riots.

Another interesting phenomenon is the participation of Hindu women in communal violence. The rise of this phenomenon has to be analysed in the light of the image which the communal forces have been projecting - Hindu women as victims of Muslim aggression.

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Communalism and Dalits

One of the main reasons for the formation of the RSS was the weakening of the upper caste brahmins hold over the dalits. We have seen in the past that Hindutva has always been paying lip service to eradication of untouchability and the caste system. But whenever dalits have launched their movements for access to the public drinking wells and temples, the Hindu Mahasabha have not been a part of it. On one hand, communal forces have wanted to ensure the continuation of their upper caste/class hegemony and, on the other hand then have been appealing to dalits through slogans and programmes to attract electoral support.

The Hindu right used distorted version of history to communalise dalits as was done with women. The impact was that for minor gains, a majority of dalits left movements for dignified life and actively participated in communal violence.

The high castes need the Dalits to beat the drum at marriages and funerals, to dispose of the dead and to perform other "impure" functions. So their conversion is a threat to those whose riches and power depend on their poverty.

Communalism and Education

Formal equality produces and intensifies inequality within society. To ensure equality, we may have to protect the weaker sections or the minorities through special measures. Learning should be crafted to develop, understand, shape our understanding of the events of our past. This understanding of past influences our ability to grapple with the present and therefore with the future. Hate language and hate politics should not be a part of history teaching in a democratic country like India. But we see that over the years our history and social studies textbooks emphasise a prejudicial understanding and

rendering of history that is certainly not born out of historical facts. In the past crucial exclusion and inclusion has been practised both at school and college level text books.

RSS and Vidya Bharati schools have blatantly used NCERT books for dissemination of communal ideas. Many sections have been rewritten in a way that benefits the communal forces.

Communalism and the Left

Communalism, consequent conflicts and hostility have been part of the Indian social and political fabric for over a century. To investigate the reasons for this constant source of tension in our society, we have to go back in time and explore certain aspects of the class rule in independent India. "The Indian bourgeoisie (middle class citizens) and its leadership, due to the compulsions of its narrow social base, had to align with the landlord sections in order to maintain class rule in independent India. Such an alliance meant the inability of the ruling classes, on the one hand, to break decisively from the economic stranglehold of imperialism and, on the other, eliminate the vestiges of feudalism and its grip over Indian people and its economy. This latter aspect found expression in the continued narrowness of the domestic market despite the recent burgeoning of the middle class. Historically, nowhere had capitalism developed, without decisively eliminating feudal relations of production. Such a compromise with imperialism on the one hand, and landlordism on the other, in independent India could not lay the complete basis for the flourishing of the capitalist path of development as required by the Indian bourgeoisie. All efforts at super-imposing capitalism on feudal structures did not and could not yield the desired result of eliminating the vestiges of feudalism. The consequent narrowness of the domestic market, as reflected in the low levels of purchasing power in

the hands of crores of people, as a result of the inability of the ruling classes to effect a thorough agrarian revolution through radical land reforms, forced the bourgeoisie to look for external markets in pursuit of its capitalist path of development. This in itself paved the way for greater dependence of the Indian economy on imperialist capital and technology in order to enable the Indian capitalist class to compete in the external markets. Thus, the compromise with landlordism in the sphere of economy had led to a situation where the Indian bourgeoisie was attempting to overcome the contradiction arising out of such a compromise by, on the one hand, perilously increasing the country's dependence on imperialism and, on the other, transferring the burdens of the resultant crisis on to the shoulders of the common people.

While this has been one manifestation of this contradiction, there is another and equally important one. The inability to eliminate the vestiges of feudalism meant, at the level of the super-structure, the existence and perpetuation of the social consciousness associated with feudalism. The impact of communalism and casteism continued to dominate the social order. The efforts at super-imposing capitalism only created a situation where the backwardness of consciousness associated with feudalism was combined with the degenerative competitive aspect of capitalist consciousness.

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The process of class formation as a consequence of capitalist development was, thus, taking place within the parameters of the existing caste divided society. It was taking place not by overhauling the pre-capitalist social relations but in compromise with it. It is precisely this aspect that explains the complexity of issues that effect and dominate Indian society today. The advancing class struggle has, therefore, to encompass the already existing and surviving caste oppression. This lies precisely in the overlapping commonality between the exploited classes and oppressed castes in contemporary India.

Thus, at the level of the superstructure, feudal decadence was combined with capitalist degeneration to produce a situation where growing criminalisation of the society coexists and grows in the company of caste and communal feelings, which are exploited by the ruling classes for their political-electoral purposes.” This was Sitaram Yechury's explanation for the communal malady affecting India.

The discontent amongst the Indian people, as a result of the crisis of the system over the years, is growing. Discontent is affecting also the expanded and vocal middle class, drawn more from the former exploiting classes rather than from the upward mobility of the exploited classes. The domination of the consciousness of the exploiting classes combined with discontent provides fertile soil for the growth of communal ideology. Exploiting this discontent and perpetuating backward consciousness, the communal forces are able today to divert this discontent into communal channels in pursuit of their political objective. In the pursuit of this objective, the communal forces have adopted a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, they seek to generate a sort of a monolithic unity amongst the vast diversity within the community of Indians embracing Hindu religion, and, on the other, they generate hate against enemies outside of the Hindu faith, i.e. the Muslims and the Christians. The entire

propaganda mechanism based on fascist techniques unleashed by them is to achieve this dual strategy.

The ideological foundations for a Hindu Rashtra were laid in the 1920s by V. D. Savarkar. It was later adopted and an organisational structure provided for this by the RSS after its foundation in 1925 and particularly in the period of the late thirties when the British inspired communal divide was exploited to the full.

This objective was articulated by none other than the former long serving RSS supremo M. S. Golwalkar way back in 1939 in a book entitled, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*. His articulation of the RSS agenda continues to be the inspiration for the saffron brigade today. After making an unsubstantiated sweeping declaration that the Hindus alone constitute the national race in India, he says: "There are only two courses open to the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or to live at its mercy so long as the national race may allow them to do so and to quit the country at the sweet will of the national race...From this standpoint, sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment -- not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation; let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races, who have chosen to live in our country."

And how should 'old nations' deal? "To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic Races -- the Jews. Germany has also shown

how well nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by."

It is the same Golwalkar who, while making many compromises seeking the removal of the ban on the RSS following Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, had assured the then Home Minister Sardar Patel that the RSS would confine itself as a "cultural organisation". In search of a political outfit, Golwalkar had sent some pracharaks to assist Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (who fell out with Nehru and resigned from the union cabinet) to found a political party in 1951. Amongst those sent were former Prime Minister Mr. A. B. Vajpayee and the former Home Minister Mr L. K. Advani to found the Jana Sangh, the earlier incarnate of the present BJP. Further, in a later work, *A Bunch of Thoughts*, Golwalkar described in a separate chapter the three internal enemies that were preventing the destruction of the secular democratic character of India and the RSS march towards a fascistic "Hindu Rashtra". These three, according to the RSS, are the Muslims, the Christians and the Communists. We are, therefore, to borrow the words of Paul Robeson, in the same boat, brother!

Our subsequent experience underlines that fact that both the Hindu communalist offensive and the Muslim or (for that matter, all other religion-based) fundamentalist response today constitute a frontal assault on the very independence and sovereignty based on a secular democratic polity that defines modern India. These forces, in fact, feed each other. Their similarity in attacking the modern concepts of secularism, democracy and nationalism are indeed glaring. While castigating these concepts as alien to their respective religious cultures, they have no compunction in borrowing the modern 20th century concept of fascism. They base themselves on a distorted definition of nationality, central to which is religion. Rejecting the historical experience till date of how religion has never been and can

never be a cementing factor for any national formation, (e.g., Pakistan and Bangladesh) they openly advocate the predominance of religion, both in politics as well as in the ordering of the society. Thus, they reject, both the historical experience of the nation states and negate the scientific basis of nationality.

Communalism and its fundamentalist ideology is not the championing, far less the protection of religiousness. It is the utilisation of the religious divide between the people consciously engineered and perpetuated for a political purpose. It is an ideology based on a religious conflict for a specific political purpose. The British had used this for perpetuating their colonial rule and in the process elevated it to such an extent that they could succeed in partitioning our country and leave behind a scourge that continues to claim countless lives. Communalism, hence, is far removed from religion. It generates and perpetuates hatred amongst religious communities as the basis for its existence and growth.

Religion is the opium in the sense that it is as potent as opium is in creating an illusory world. For a human being who is oppressed, religion provides the escape for relief; it provides a "heart in a heartless world, a spirit in a spiritless situation." For this precise reason, it is the opium that the people require, to lull themselves into inaction so long as they continue to remain in conditions which appear outside of both their comprehension and control.

Communalism in pre-independence India was generated and utilised by the British as a constant instrument of state power in their notorious divide and rule policy for maintaining the colonial order. It is in fact following the 1857 first war of independence when Hindu-Muslim unity was at its highest that the British consciously engineered a policy of communal politics. The consequent separation of electorates on the basis of Hindu-Muslim divide, the partition of

Bengal and the patronage given to the Muslim League etc. were part of the political agenda for continuing colonial rule.

In post-independence India, the ruling classes continued to use the deep communal. Instead of consciously working for the eradication of the communal poison, that continued to be perpetuated following partition, the communal divide was often utilised through vacillation and compromise for narrow political benefits.

The unity and integrity of a country of such vast diversity -- not only religious but linguistic, traditions, customs etc -- can only be maintained by strengthening the bonds of commonality. Any attempt at imposing uniformity upon this diversity will shatter the unity and integrity of India. This is precisely what the communal fascist forces seek.

The spread of communal poison and the sharp polarisation taking place creates dangers for the dismemberment of the country, lays foundations for virtual civil war conditions, and also consciously and effectively disrupts the unity of the very toiling sections on whose unity rests the advance towards people's democracy. The rise of communalism today, therefore, represents simultaneously the weakening of the unity of the basic classes on whose strength the struggle against the present class rule can be mounted. The struggle against the communal forces today is, at the same time, the struggle for maintaining the unity of these classes and to that extent, is an integral part of the struggle to defend and advance India.

Chapter 3

Secularism as Defined in the West

History:

The beginning of secularism has been found in the spirit of reformation (16th Century). Martin Luther's advocacy of the individual's right to understand the word of God, independent of church and autonomy of secular power became very important trends in secularism. The need for separation of State and Church was advocated by reformers which was further affirmed through the first Amendment of the American Constitution in 1791, and the Jefferson's exposition of the same in terms of the "wall of separation" between the two.

The major influencing factor which inspired the secularist thinking of the period was the rapid growth of science, both in pure and theoretical form and its application in day-to-day life. The sciences of astronomy and physics made western man realise that there are surer ways of arriving at the knowledge of reality than a dogmatic reliance on religious authority.

Copernicus (16th Century), Galileo (17th Century) Newton (Late 17th Century early 18th century) and Laplace (late 18th century early 19th century) demolished the biblical cosmology and world views. Darwin's theory of evolution (19th Century) demolished another dogma regarding the entire human race descending from common ancestor- Adam.

Demolitions of various dogmas by various scientific theories, the acceptance of natural laws affirmed by sciences as explanatory principles of all natural phenomena and the prestige of scientific methods as a source and creation of truth during the 4 centuries following Renaissance led to an intellectual culture in which religion and culture were seen contradictory. Miracles were rejected which were so far being dictated by the Christian anthology, and clergy was forced to admit that they had nether force nor authority, nor competence to pronounce judgement regarding secular knowledge. This independent and critical thinking of various philosophers paved way for affirmation of this worldly and humanistic ideology of secularism.

Andrew Coates defines secularism as "the freedom of the public sphere from religious dogma". Unfortunately these are not issues which inspire much passion among most citizens. And even here there are certain contradictions. Coates apparently wants to ban religion, not just from the apparatus of the state, but from "the public sphere". Now the fact is that a great many people hold religious beliefs, and inevitably their political conduct will be influenced by their beliefs. Those of us who are atheists may deplore this, and those of us who are Marxists may offer a sociological explanation. But we can hardly prevent it happening. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were both motivated by religious belief; would Coates have excluded them from the "public sphere"?

In 1905 Lenin was keen to develop a relationship with Father Gapon, though he was criticised by many Bolsheviks for being too sympathetic to this clergyman who turned out to be a police agent. But as Krupskaya pointed out, "Gapon was a living part of the revolution that was sweeping Russia". (N.S. Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin*, London, 1970, p.104.) Earlier, in 1903, the Bolsheviks had launched a newspaper called *Rassvet* (Dawn) aimed specifically at

members of religious sects, of whom there were over ten million in Russia. After the Russian Revolution Trotsky argued for a sensitive and non-sectarian approach to Muslims, and in particular rejected any attempt to put Muslim nationalism on the same level as Russian nationalism:

"And this uniform conception must consist in a non-uniform attitude to Great Russian and to Muslim nationalism: in relation to the former, ruthless struggle, stern rebuff, especially in those cases when it is displayed in the administrative and governmental sphere, in relation to the latter patient, attentive, painstaking educational work." (A. Richardson [ed], In Defence of the Russian Revolution, London, 1995, p.181.)

Two centuries ago, "democracy" was deprecated by monarchists and republicans alike as "mob rule". Today, democracy is hailed as "representative democracy", an oxymoron that refers to little more than a republican oligarchy of the chosen few who ostensibly speak for the powerless many.

"Communism", for its part, once referred to a cooperative society that would be based morally on mutual respect and on an economy in which each contributed to the social labor fund according to his or her ability and received the means of life according to his or her needs. Today, "communism" is associated with the Stalinist gulag and wholly rejected as totalitarian. Its cousin, "socialism" which once denoted a politically free society based on various forms of collectivism and equitable material returns for labor is currently interchangeable with a somewhat humanistic bourgeois liberalism.

Frederick II (the Great) of Prussia (1740-86) was sympathetic to the American Revolution and wrote a new code of Prussian law to distribute justice among the different classes more equitably. He was a patron of the arts and sciences, including the writings of Voltaire who

had said that governments which do not protect people's basic rights should be overthrown. The writings of Thomas Paine had influenced both the French and American revolutions.

Ideas that were to be the forerunners of Humanism flourished. Ideas that would lead to Secular Humanism in particular included Spinoza's pantheism. The others were a related, often overlapping, group of ideas espoused by the Encyclopedists, Materialists, Philosophes, Sceptics and Democrats. But first we will start with Pantheism.

Baruch Spinoza(1632-1677), a Dutch philosopher, popularized pantheism, the belief that the universe is identical with God, described by Spinoza as the uncaused "substance" of all things. Pantheism is as old as 3000 BCE Egypt, and includes the love and awe of nature such as that expressed by Spinoza, who denied revelation and the supernatural. He stressed the idea of "immortality" but it was not lived through an afterlife, but rather by attaining a high quality of thought and action in this life that would become part of the unchanging, eternal past. It was a symbolic "living on" through the legacy one leaves to the world and to history.

Communalism is defined as "a theory or system of government in which virtually autonomous [sic!] local communities are loosely in a federation." No English dictionary is very sophisticated politically. This use of the terms "government" and "autonomous" does not commit us to an acceptance of the state and parochialism, let alone individualism. Further, federation is often synonymous with confederation, the term I regard as more consistent with the libertarian tradition. What is remarkable about this (as yet) unsullied term is its extraordinary proximity to libertarian municipalism, the political dimension of social ecology that I have advanced at length elsewhere.

In Communalism, libertarians have an available word that they can enrich as much by experience as by theory. Most significantly, the

word can express not only what we are against, but also what we are for, namely the democratic dimension of libertarian thought and a libertarian form of society. It is a word that is meant for a practice that can tear down the ghetto walls that are increasingly imprisoning anarchism in cultural exotica and psychological introversion. It stands in explicit opposition to the suffocating individualism that sits so comfortably side-by-side with bourgeois self-centeredness and a moral relativism that renders any social action irrelevant, indeed, institutionally meaningless.

Anarchism is on the retreat today. If we fail to elaborate the democratic dimension of anarchism, we will miss the opportunity not only to form a vital movement, but to prepare people for a revolutionary social praxis in the future. Alas, we are witnessing the appalling desiccation of a great tradition, such that neo-Situationists, nihilists, primitivists, antirationalists, anticivilizationists and avowed "chaotics" are closeting themselves in their egos, reducing anything resembling public political activity to juvenile antics.

None of which is to deny the importance of a libertarian culture, one that is aesthetic, playful and broadly imaginative. The anarchists of the last century and part of the present one justifiably took pride in the fact that many innovative artists, particularly painters and novelists, aligned themselves with anarchic views of reality and morality. But behavior that verges on a mystification of criminality, asociality, intellectual incoherence, anti-intellectualism and disorder for its own sake is simply lumpen. It feeds on the dregs of capitalism itself. However much such behavior invokes the "rights" of the ego as it dissolves the political into the personal or inflates the personal into a transcendental category, it is a *priori* in the sense that it has no origins outside the mind to even potentially support it. As Bakunin and Kropotkin argued repeatedly, individuality has never existed apart from society and the individual's own evolution has been coextensive with social evolution. To speak of "The Individual" apart from its

social roots and social involvements is as meaningless as to speak of a society that contains no people or institutions.

The fact that a Communalist politics entails participation in municipal elections based, to be sure, on an unyielding program that demands the formation of popular assemblies and their confederation does not mean that entry into existing village, town and city councils involves participation in state organs, any more than establishing an anarchosindicalist union in a privately owned factory involves participation in capitalist forms of production. One need only turn to the French Revolution of 1789-94 to see how seemingly state institutions, like the municipal "districts" established under the monarchy in 1789 to expedite elections to the Estates General, were transformed four years later into largely revolutionary bodies, or "sections," that nearly gave rise to the "Commune of communes." Their movement for a sectional democracy was defeated during the insurrection of June 2, 1793 not at the hands of the monarchy, but by the treachery of the Jacobins.

Capitalism will not generously provide us the popular democratic institutions we need. Its control over society today is ubiquitous, not only in what little remains of the public sphere but in the minds of many self-styled radicals. A revolutionary people must either assert their control over institutions that are basic to their public lives, which Bakunin correctly perceived to be their municipal councils, or else they will have no choice but to withdraw into their private lives, as is already happening on an epidemic scale today. It would be ironic indeed if an individualist anarchism and its various mutations, from the academic and transcendently moral to the chaotic and the lumpen, in the course of rejecting democracy even for "a minority of one," were to further raise the walls of dogma that are steadily growing around the libertarian ideal, and if, knowingly or not, anarchism were to turn into another narcissistic cult that snugly fits into an alienated, commodified, introverted and egocentric society.

Rise of Secularism in the West

Secularism is defined related to this world which is non-transcendental and non-metaphysical. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines secularism 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 on in a future state;” (2) “the view that national education should be purely secular.” The Chambers Dictionary defines secularism as “belief that the state morals, education etc should be independent of religion...”

Secular, Secularisation and Secularism

Etymologically, the word secular originates from the Latin word *saeculum* which implied “great span of time” or the “spirit of the age”. Subsequently, *secularism* or *secular* acquired a different meaning, that of belonging to “This world”. (Thus, there was a conceptualisation of two worlds, the secular and the religious or the temporal and the spiritual.) Around 1648, after the Peace of Westphalia, 'secular' was used to refer to the transfer of ecclesiastical lands of civic control. By the nineteenth century (1851), in the context of strong powerful hold of enlightenment values, G. L. Holyoake used the term 'secularism' to define ideology and socio-political movement started by himself, Charles Bradlaugh and others. Holyoake described secularism as “way of thinking” and as being concerned with “issues that can be tested in this life”; secularism is “hitherto determined by reference to the transcending principles of religion, now to be determined by reason, and firmly anchored to good of man in this life. Secularism was subsequently projected as a rationalist movement, agnostic or indifferent to religion.

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Chapter 4

Commentaries on Secularism and Communalism

The concept of secularism is a much debated one. The debate is not new: Indian political leaders first used the word in the nineteenth century. Basically various debates on secularism can be broadly classified into three categories and the rest differ marginally around these broad categories.

There are basically two major reasons why these debates have come into existence. The term secularism was first used in the west and hence the concept is a western concept. The second debate happens to exist mainly because of how it is interpreted with reference to its relationship with religion.

Out of the three categories of interpretations of secularism, the believers of the first category are those who are either atheist or agnostic. They believe that secularism is a rationalist approach to life. The greatest proponent of this belief system in India was Jawaharlal Nehru. At a peripheral level, this would also include people who believed that secularism is an organizing principle of the society (as Neera Chandokhe mentions in *Religious and Political Communities in India, Beyond Secularism*, Oxford University Press, 1999). The second category is of highly religious people and their interpretation of secularism in the Indian context is that of “sarva dharma samabhav”. The greatest proponent of this belief system was Mahatma Gandhi.

The third are those who believe that secularism is a western concept and is alien to Indian society. Their belief systems are based on the fact that Secularism came into existence as an ideology when tolerance and traditions were depleted in the west, but in South Asia such depletion of tolerance and traditions never occurred, therefore there is no need to adopt secularism.

Ashis Nandy in 'A billion Gandhis' says

“The ideas of tolerance in ordinary people and everyday life are tinged with popular religious beliefs, however superstitious, irrational and primitive they may seem to be as progressive, secular Indians. Modern India, till today, has not produced a single hero of secularism except for that fading star, Jawaharlal Nehru. If Ashoka, Akbar, Kabir and Gandhi, whose names the secularists routinely mouth, could do without the concept of secularism, so can the people of South Asia. They do not need leaders, vanguards, preachy academics or journalists vending fancy theories to educate them in the niceties of tolerance and respect for other faiths. The time has come for us to decipher the language and culture of those humble Indians who live by their inferior beliefs and have made our society livable.

In a democracy, people will bring their values into politics, whether we like it or not. Instead of imposing on them an idea that makes no sense to the non-English-speaking majority -- even the term dharmarapekshata is a translatese that literally means amorality -- why can't we learn from and build upon indigenous concepts that have worked in real life over the centuries? If secularism only means the traditional tolerance of South Asia, why do we need an imported idea to talk about that local tolerance? And why import an idea from countries that have such shoddy records of religious, racial, cultural and ethnic tolerance? Why not, for instance, borrow the concept of convivencia from Medieval Islamic Spain, arguably the only truly plural polity Europe has produced in the last one thousand years?

However, I also know that it is pointless to raise these questions. Some things are just not possible in the dominant, colonial culture of India's knowledge industry and among our official dissenters. Otherwise, at least the Indian Left would have picked up a thing or two from the aggressively non-secular, liberation-theology-based ideology of the Sandinistas. Instead of obsequiously aping, in the name of secularism, the Leninist crudities of a cut-throat regime that killed 6.2 crore of its own citizens during its so-called revolutionary rule to become the exemplar of India's brain-dead, pre-war, colonial Left.

I am a child of modern India and a non-believer myself. It has taken me many years to turn a traitor to my class -- the urban, western-educated, modern Indians -- and to learn to respect the people who have sustained Indian democracy using their tacit theories and principles of communal amity. That has not turned me into a believer but forced me to rediscover, study and reaffirm these theories and principles in my work during the last 20 years. In this effort, I have been guided by Gandhi's maxim that those who think that religion has nothing to do with politics understand neither religion nor politics. I leave it to the next generation of South Asians living in South Asia to judge if it has been all a waste of time."

(A billion Gandhis, Ashis Nandy, Outlook, 21/06/2004)
[C.Eldoc1/L54/21jun04out1.pdf]

The Nehruvian concept of secularism based on complete separation of church from the state still has takers in academia. But most politicians know it has fallen apart. India has proved to be too religious a country for such separation of work from religion. Politicians have over the years been forced to compromise, whether it is in the form of a Marxist becoming a member of a temple board or a secular party appealing to the religious heads of minority communities. As the compromises multiplied, the definition of secularism has tended to change in practice if not in theory. Rather than being defined in terms of the separation of religion from

politics, it is being defined in terms of that which is opposing communalism. (Changing debate on secularism, Narendra Pani, Economic Times, 26/03/2004) [C.Eldoc1/L54/26mar04et1.pdf]

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Changing Debate On Secularism

Anil Nauriya in his article on Equal Respect For All Religions, says:

"Some writings from the secular side of the debate in the last 15 years or more were dismissive of the concept of equal respect. It was rubbished variously as the "Ram-Rahim approach" and as "Hindu ecumenicalism". The reference to the "Ram-Rahim approach" was used to suggest in the pre - independence context that those adopting it had taken no interest in providing constitutional safeguards to the minorities or that their approach did not provide for a religiously neutral or secular state. Both these propositions are contrary to the record. Similarly, the dismissal of the equal respect concept as "Hindu ecumenicalism" was fallacious. It seemed to imply, albeit unintentionally, that religions apart from Hinduism did not have the intellectual and emotional resources to support a multi-religious society based on mutual respect. How then do we relate to the equal respect concept?"

First, it is useful to specify whether what is being discussed is the individual, society or the state. The norms to be expected at the three levels are a set of complementary ideas which cumulatively support one another. But these do not need to be identical ideas. So if the state is religiously neutral it is not necessary for its sustenance that all individuals should be, say, atheists. They could be religious. Individually they may, and many probably will, give priority to their own faith. What is required of them here is no more than a sense of humanism or respect for difference. Similarly, at the level of society at large it is not necessary, even if it may in one view be desirable, that the religious element be eliminated. It is enough that groups and individuals, or the vast majority of them, are prepared in their social intercourse to meet on a par, without claiming in civic space priority over one another on account of their religion. Equal respect for all religions is primarily a concept of the social domain, though the state may seek to internalise it consistent with other applicable obligations. At the level of the state, additional norms apply. Yet the religious neutrality of the state and equal respect for all religions are not inconsistent ideas. It is only by its religious neutrality that the state expresses its equal respect for all communities. The state must make this claim good in its attitude to governance, with the protection of the lives and property of, and provision of opportunities of growth and development to, all sections. Obviously protection would in the first instance be for the ones threatened. In focusing on them the state only enforces the equality principle. It does not amount to bestowing a special favour.

When the then Prime Minister Mr A. B. Vajpayee reacted to the violence against Christians in Gujarat by merely asking for a debate on conversions, it was not evidence of equal respect for all religions on the part of the state or his party. Yet another aspect of the equal respect concept is sometimes overlooked. When the concept was

promoted in the pre-independence period it did not mean that all practices and ideas propounded in the name of the various religions were entitled to respect. When Gandbi undertook his anti-untouchability tour in 1933-34 a significant section of Hindus opposed him wherever he went. It was claimed that untouchability was part of the Hindu religion and that Gandbi had no business to interfere with this belief.”

(Equal Respect for all Religions, Anil Nauriya, Hindu, 08/05/2004) [C.Eldoc1/L54/L54_B1011.pdf]

In India, Jawaharlal Nehru and his followers subscribed to the later Marxist redefinition of the concept by which even in public function cultural symbolism such as lighting a lamp to inaugurate a conference or breaking a coconut to launch a project was regarded as against secularism. This orthodoxy induced a reaction in the Indian masses for whom religion was a way of life. Nehru had also failed to define what historical roots ought to be a part of the modern India, and what was to be rejected. Instead in the name of 'scientific temper', he rejected most of our past as 'obscurantism', although in his later years (especially after the 1962 debacle) he came under the influence of at least one mystic. His orthodox secularism sought to alienate Indians from their hoary past. (Redefining Secularism, Subramanian Swamy, The Hindu, 18/03/2004) [C.Eldoc/L54_/18mar04h1.html]

Rethinking Secularism

Secularism was meant to create a peaceful environment free of inter-religious violence for the country to proceed on the path of economic development. The Constitution simultaneously liberated the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes from centuries old bondage and thus made them all participants in the process of economic development. For the first

time in Indian history, political status and economic development generated the momentum for upward mobility of the Shudras and the Achuts and the Adivasis and gave rise to the phenomenon of Sanskritisation. Sanskritisation was thus the societal by-product of economic development, call it green revolution, if you like. The secular order never stood in the path of upward mobility. There was no contradiction between the secular state and the goals of economic development and social justice for all, including the various depressed and deprived sections of the Hindu community. (A Counterpoint to Dr. Swamy, Syed Shahabuddin, *The Hindu*, 26/03/2004) [C.Eldoc/L54_/26mar04h2.html]

India's secularism has also been buttressed by its people's fascination with non-violence and aversion to violence in the course of their inquiry into the nature of life, as manifested till date in its vegetarianism. It started with Buddhism and Jainism and, though it was also extolled by the Upanishads, was seldom followed because of the myriad of other competing values of tolerance of alien faiths, accommodation of dissent and a democratic temper. (Saga Of Indian Secularism And The New Crisis, Shree Shankar Sharan, *Mainstream*, 27 Dec 2003) [C.Eldoc1/L54_/27dec03mainstream1.pdf]

For one thing, Indian secularism has followed a tortuous course all through the post-independence period. It is not surprising in a backward country like India with its immense poverty, insurmountable levels of unemployment and widespread illiteracy. The BJP, which came to power using its Hindutva card, is not likely to give it up in near future. With every election it intensifies its Hindutva agenda. (Whither Secularism? Asghar Ali Engineer, *Frontier*, 14 Sep 2003) [C.Eldoc1/L54_/14sep03fro1.pdf]

Asghar Ali Engineer in one of his essays for the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism in 2004 says:

“Religion became a source of identity for political mobilisation and hence became a source of conflict. The power elites of Hindus and Muslims began to assert religious identities of their followers so that they may bargain for power on the basis of their respective numerical strength. Many groups among Hindus and Muslims had no clear religious identities being halfway between Hindus and Muslims. Hence purificatory movements like Shuddhi and Tablighi movements were launched to establish 'proper identities'.

The electoral system introduced by the colonial powers proved more divisive. Political leaders began to generate religious identities to bargain for share in power. The South Asians stressed caste and regional identities before such as Bengali, Rajput, Pathan and so on. But the electoral politics in colonial India changed all this and Indians began to assert their religious identities such as Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Sikh.

Thus it will be seen that communal politics was borne not on account of religion per se but by use of religion for political ends. Both Hindu and Muslim political elites invoked religious sentiments to further their own political interests. As the Hindus were in majority the Hindu communal leaders began to exploit majoritarian sentiments for creating Hindu Rashtra and a section of the Muslim leaders began to invoke minoritism and that led to the two-nation theory.

In the modern globalised world one cannot have mono-religious societies and one has to live with multi-religious and multi-lingual nations. Thus religion as a basis of nationhood will never create a peaceful society. It would lead to confrontation between different religious communities real people's problems will always be sidelined. It should also be noted that majoritarianism is the very negation of the democratic spirit.

However, the communal and majoritarian forces call enactment of such provisions in the constitutions as 'appeasement' of minorities and try to incite religious feelings of the majority community. The BJP in India is

wedded to the concept of Hindu Rashtra and through its chauvinistic propaganda creates basis for removing these articles from the Constitution. And makes minorities feel quite insecure. It is as a result of such aggressive majoritarian politics that Gujarat like situations arise. Gujarat carnage is a great shame for a liberal democracy like that of India.

Common nationhood in a multi-religious society is not possible if Hindu Rashtra or Islamic or Khalistani states are made the basis of politics. In a democracy, religion should never become the basis of politics. If religion becomes the basis of politics it would lead to worst of both the worlds. Religion will become more and more sectarian than spiritual and democracy will tend to be a vehicle of majoritarian rule. The common people will be the ultimate losers in this game of political power.

In the given political circumstances the future of secularism does not seem to be bright. However, one should not take short-term view based only on given context. Human beings have always struggled to transcend their given situation. A purely contextual view tends to be realistic but also restricted one. A vision, on the other hand, may not always be realistic but has a much broader sweep. And it is this broader sweep which shapes new realities enabling people to shape their future.

Common nationhood in a multi-religious society is not possible if Hindu Rashtra or Islamic or Khalistani states are made the basis of politics. In a democracy, religion should never become the basis of politics. If religion becomes the basis of politics it would lead to worst of both the worlds. Religion will become more and more sectarian than spiritual and democracy will tend to be vehicle of majoritarian rule. The common people will be the ultimate losers in this game of political power.”

(Religion, Identity and Democracy, Asghar Ali Engineer, CSSS, <http://www.countercurrents.org>, 8/11/2004) [C.Eldoc/Q11/comm-engineer.html]

In his article 'Religion, Politics And The Modern State' in Countercurrents.org, 31st August 2004, Mr Ram Punyani talks about why secularism was defeated post independence:

“There are many arguments on this line, regarding Secularism as a western concept, it being against religion, it being appeasement of minorities, it being an artificial graft in the body politic of India the country, which is the land of spirituality etc.

It is not only the Advani parivar, which will argue on these lines. This parivar is in the company of Talibans, the Zia Ul Haques and others from around the national borders who also conduct their politics in the name of religion. On the face of it the two trends may sound antagonistic while there is a deeper conceptual unity in both the streams. This stream is joined by an unexpected quarter of Post Modernists, the likes of Ashish Nandy to whom Secularism is a Western graft unsuitable and unnecessary here as diverse communities here have been living together peacefully in the same geographical area.

Somewhere in the middle of this argument Gandhi is quoted as if he was against secularism, also Nehru is quoted as being against religions and imposing this 'alien' concept in Indian context.

The Advani-Nandy duo suffers from multiple confusions. To begin with secularism is not a mere Western concept. It is true it began in the west. But it began not to sort out the quarrels between religions but it came up with the introduction of Industrialization, with the emergence of two modern classes, Industrialists and workers. Till that time it was the King-Landlord who had the divine sanction to rule on the direct approval of the almighty. While King was the Son of God, landlord his representative, the clergy the most visible part and the custodian of religion, was the legitimizer of this ideology.

Secularism essentially was an outcome of secularization process in which the divine power of the king-landlord and the social hold of clergy was done away with.

While secularization is presented as an external process, the deeper inner logic of this was to do away the hierarchy of caste and gender. In Indian context due to colonial rule and the Landlord-British alliance, the process of secularization could not be completed. The hold of Landlord-Priest and the accompanying values of caste and gender hierarchy persisted though in less intense form. At this point of time secularization process was represented by Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Bhimrao Babasabheb Ambedkar and Periyar Ramasamy Naicker social level and by the likes of Gandbi, Nebru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad at political level. While many a difference can be seen if one sees their ideologies in a superficial way, the deeper unity of their thoughts was apparent as these luminaries spearheaded the social process of opposing the inferior treatment to Shudras and women at the social level and relegating the clergy-landlords to the political level...

The relationship between State-Politics and religion could not have been defined better than what Nebru has to say on the issue, "What it means is that it is a state which honors all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities; that as a state, it does not allow itself to be attached to one faith or religion, which then becomes the state religion... In a country like India, no real nationalism can be built up except on the basis of secularity... narrow religious nationalisms are a relic of the past age and no longer relevant today."

Amartya Sen in the Wall Street Journal (via 3QuarksDaily) makes a compelling argument.

"For me the two key themes are:

- a) Democracy isn't Western*
- b) The West doesn't own democracy*

These overlap nicely to create a coherent critique of the false west/ non-west dichotomy. That democracy isn't just a western concept is an important argument for those who aren't western".

Sen provides examples of leaders such as Mandela and Gandhi who combined modern notions of democracy with active traditions. While these may not have contained things such as voting, Sen argues that they were similar to modern democratic system in many ways. Take this example:

"...the Great Mughal emperor Akbar (who was born a Muslim and died a Muslim) had just finished, in Agra, his large project of legally codifying minority rights, including religious freedom for all, along with championing regular discussions between followers of Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and other beliefs (including atheism)."

This is where the second point comes in. As Sen points out, seeing Iranian dissidents as 'ambassadors for Western values', is both incorrect and counter-productive. As another example, why should an Afghan convert to Christianity be executed for apostasy? As Muslims we should not consider it either a humane or rational thing to do. The West can contribute to this discourse by making their voices of protestation heard, however it should be done in the spirit of reflection rather than triumphalist conversion.

(Taken from "Is Democracy only a Western Concept?")

By Shariq, 02/04/2006,

<http://www.pickledpolitics.com/archives/401>)

Sudipta Kaviraj, a scholar from Jawaharlal Nehru University, confesses, "among those who consider themselves secular individuals there is an intensifying sense of crisis." Radhey Mohan, another academic, says "I am firmly of the view that secularism never faced greater danger than at present."

What are the criticisms of secularism which lead to the perception of a predicament? At first glance, the challenge appears minuscule, since all political parties, even the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), accept secularism in some form. As government official P.K. Nijhawan remarks, "the contending sides swear by secularism."

However, secularism as it has come to be practiced by the Congress Party and the Indian government (hereafter referred to simply as secularism) comes under scrutiny for four general reasons: the unequal treatment of different religious groups, the implied hostility to religion, the poor translation of secularism from the West to India and the inability of secularism to create a national identity for India. That both sides attempt to appropriate the term secularism can lead to tremendous confusion; even the U.S. government had some problems in its effort to catalogue the journalistic debate about secularism in the wake of the violence in Ayodhya.

In the opinion of the Hindu nationalist, the Congress commitment to secularism does not bring about the tolerance, the Sarva Dharma Samabhav, to be expected of Hindu rulers. Rather, Congress appeases the communal demands of minority religious groups while masquerading as a force for equal treatment.

A few academics see democratic secularism encouraging communalism. D.D. Joshi of the Indira Gandhi National Open University argues that "the religious minorities are nurtured and encouraged to maintain their separate identity as political pressure groups and then used as 'vote banks' to obtain legitimacy through the elections." K. Raghavendra Rao explains that "an increase in the quantum of secularism leads to an increase in the quantum of communalism" in large part because the individualism bred by secularism means that people will "not hesitate to use community interest and identity opportunistically to promote their self-interest."

Tapan Raychaudhari, professor of Indian history at Oxford University, also argues that imported western ideas make it difficult for India's leaders to challenge Western dominance in a useful fashion. Raychaudhari contends "*the deep impact of Western, rationalist values on [Nehru's] perception and personality, however, modifies his role as a challenger.*" Nehru was handicapped by an inability to empathize with Indian tradition. This handicap was not limited to Nehru, but "*was, and is still, shared by our modernizing intelligentsia, who refuse to acknowledge the centrality of religious values in the lives of our masses.*"

Even after reading numerous debates on the origin of secularism my belief still holds strong that in India the need of the hour is to clearly define the relationship between State-Politics and religion. This cannot be better defined than what Nehruji has to say:

"What it means is that it is a state which honors all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities; that as a state, it does not allow itself to be attached to one faith or religion, which then becomes the state religion...In a country like India, no real nationalism can be built up except on the basis of secularity...narrow religious nationalisms are a relic of the past age and no longer relevant today." And all our efforts should be towards the secularization of society.

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Chapter 5

Secular Action

Secular action has to be perceived as a movement of human freedom and as a process of democratic transformation. In other words secularism is a wider struggle against caste, class, gender and ethnic oppression. Pluralism is one of the basic elements in the construction of secular identity. It cannot be a mere rhetoric; it has to be embodied in active political struggle so that the transformation potential of the identities as well as the voices of the oppressed will get foreground. And this should be the guiding principle of Secular Action.

The twentieth century had been proclaimed to be the Humanist Century. Many of the then-dominant philosophical schools-naturalism, phenomenology, existentialism, logical positivism, and analytic philosophy-were in a broad sense committed to the humanist outlook. The same was true of humanistic psychology and the social sciences in general. And secular humanism holds great promise for the future of humankind. (Death Of Indian Pluralism, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20/07/ 2002) [C.Eldoc1/Sc1/20jul02epw1.pdf]

Though secularism was adopted as a national ideology, no efforts were made to deepen the ideological base of secularism. Shaken by the frequency of communal violence and communalisation of social and cultural spheres of human life, especially after the demolition of

Babri Masjid, the meaning of secularism has to be redefined on the interventionist lines to challenge caste and gender oppression and reconstitute collective and individual identities.

Neither the state nor political parties have been willing or capable of forceful intervention in the present crisis, which to a large extent is their own creation. Only if political parties come under massive pressure from justice movements is there some hope.

The Problem of Communalism: A Democratic Rights Perspective

The proper antidote to majoritarian politics is the cultivation of a love of individual freedom that rejects the thought that any community, majority or minority, can define the identities and circumscribe the possibilities of any of the individuals that compose it. (The Problem of Communalism: A Democratic Rights Perspective, Manoranjan Mohanty, Lokayan Bulletin, 04/05/1987), [C.Eldoc1/secularism/The_Prob_Comm_n_Perspect.pdf]

Freedom and Secularism

Secular forces have to find out concretely and analyze the genuine source of these fears and anxieties and put forth a struggle for the real ways of removing them- redressing the social situation, protecting the minorities, and simultaneously bringing out the falsity of communal premise and promise. Secular forces must oppose segregation and ghettoization that is being forced upon Muslims and other minorities.

One of the basic principles of Secular Action should be directing all energies towards preservation and promotion of democracy which protects certain basic human fundamental rights like the right to life, freedom of expression, freedom of association, gender rights, child rights and minority rights. But we clearly see that this is still a far fetched dream in a country where we see Muslims, Christians and

others discriminated against based on their religious identities. Attempts have been made to impose a uniform identity on people aimed at eliminating diversity and denial of freedom of autonomy. Women's bodies are used as objects to dishonor communities. Rights of children are violated at every corner. Strengthening of democracy should be the driving force towards combating communalism and building a secularised society. The movement for democratic rights must become a way of life in order for us to prevent communal hatred. All such movements, whether the women's liberation movement, workers rights movement, right to have a dignified life, etc, need to be linked and built up as mass movements for the ideology of secularism to become a way of life.

Secularism does not mean the absence of religion, but it means absence of discrimination on the basis of religion.

Is 'secularism' as we have now come to define it possible in modern India?. (Freedom and Secularism, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, The Hindu, 28/02/2003) [C.Eldoc1/L54_/28feb03h1.pdf]

Ram Puniyani asks the question differently: "Is 'Riot Free India' A possibility?". He explains,

"After the tabling of Nanavati Commission report (August 2005), we have once more seen the face of our polity in the mirror, the defects and flaws in implementation of democratic ethos are there for us to give a serious thought once more. The first thing, which emerges, is about the sequence and the major victims of the communal violence. Starting from Jabalpur riot (1961), Hindu-Muslim riots have gone on and on, the last one being the horrific anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, in the aftermath of burning of Sabarmati express at Godhra. These riots have been projected as Hindu Muslim riots but the statistics tell a different tale. In the data released by the ministry of Home affairs that prior to the Babri demolition, the percentage of Muslim victims in these riots had been 80%. (In the total population Muslims are 12.6%).

Post Babri demolition the ratio might have become more adverse to Muslims.”

(Is 'Riot Free India' A Possibility? Ram Puniyani,
Countercurrents.org,15/09/2005)
[C.Eldoc1/Sc1/riot_free_India.html]

The second most targeted minority is in the report mentioned is the Sikh community. In the single and intense anti-Sikh pogrom (1984), around 3000 Sikhs were butchered in a most merciless fashion. The third is the Christian community, particularly nuns and priests, working in remote areas. In this violence, the most horrific case was the burning alive of Pastor Graham Stuart Staines along with his two children, Philip and Timothy. Apart from this glaring act, many nuns and priests have been raped and killed.

Many inquiry commissions have been instituted off and on. Not all of them have been satisfactory for various reasons. But surely some of them have been outstanding in their approach from judicial and human rights angle. Justice Jagmohan, Madon and Shrikrishna are few examples of that. In most of the anti-Muslim riots, the investigation commissions have shown RSS links. Some organizations were floated by RSS swayamsevak for the specific purpose of the riots, apart from the deeper role of the RSS's ongoing program of 'Hate minorities propaganda', which keeps going on ceaselessly through its vast and frighteningly organized network of trained, indoctrinated swayamsevak.

The PUCL report on the anti-Sikh pogrom was a work of outstanding quality. Various reports on this riot put the blame on the second rung of Congress leadership, while the top leadership occupying the throne was apparently too grieved to discharge its constitutional duty at that time.

The anti-Christian violence has been investigated only once at an official level: the Wadhva Commission after the murder of Pastor

Staines. This commission, while not totally satisfactory in some aspects, did point the finger at Dara Singh, who was initially given the death sentence, which later was reduced to life imprisonment. This commission report pointed out that the allegation that Pastor Staines was 'converting' was totally baseless. It is not the place to debate whether or not preaching one's religion is a crime or a perfectly valid legal and social activity. Apart from this, many human rights groups have come out with significant reports on this issue, and practically all of them conclude that the propaganda of conversion activity is a manufactured myth and that one can see the hand of RSS affiliates, Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal in all such acts of violence. The writer of these lines also happened to be part of some of these committees, and needless to say, it is amazing how cleverly RSS has laid and continues to lay mines to trap missionaries working in remote areas.

The second most disturbing general observation is that while on one hand it is the innocents who are killed in the communal violence, the perpetrators and planners of the riots generally go unpunished; many times their social and political prestige also goes up. The Shiv Sena, a close cousin of the BJP, was the leading force in the Mumbai riots. Its supreme leader, Balasaheb Thackeray, was elevated as Hindu Hriday Samrat (Emperor of Hindu Hearts) after leading the Mumbai riots. Narendra Modi was given the same prefix, after he "successfully" presided over the Gujarat carnage. Dara Singh was also anointed, Hindu Dharm Rakshak (Protector of Hindu Faith) and seems to be the lone exception who is in jail for his crime. What connects these different events of anti-minority violence? Is there a method in the madness? One cannot fully generalize from these acts of violence, but some observations do stare us in the face. The first one is the strengthening of the communal forces in the area where the riots take place. Starting from the 1960s add-on factors have also been aiding in the communal violence, like settling business rivalries, land grabbing

by the builder lobby. The major aftermath of communal violence has been the electoral strengthening of those who have led the riots: the Congress in 1984, the Shiv Sena in 1992-93 and the BJP in post - 2002 elections. Some do say that the BJP lost the 2004 elections at national level due to Gujarat, but one wishes this conjecture were right. In Gujarat, the BJP did emerge as a more powerful force.

The biggest common factor underlying the communal violence is the intense demonization of that particular community prior to the riots. This acute demonization rides on the ongoing chronic demonization, which is part of the program of communal outfits. In the case of anti-Sikh riots, it was a temporary phenomenon, where every Sikh was made to look like Bhindranwale, a terrorist. In the case of Muslims, it is an ongoing process, which began before the partition tragedy and keeps building itself by the day. In the case of Christians, the propaganda was intensified in the mid-nineties, and violence followed in due course. The major players in the anti minority violence have been the RSS along with its progeny and the Congress. While the RSS and its progeny has well-oiled machinery for spreading hate on a sustained basis, for Congress it was a one go affair in the anti Sikh pogrom.

For the secular principle to take seed, we as a people must make the ground ready for a humanist moral revolution that could offer great promise for the future of humankind; for it allows humans to achieve the good life here and now, without the illusion of salvation or immortality. We must wish to test moral values by evidence and reason, and should be willing to modify our ethical values in light of the consequences. Our approach must be planetary- we must hold that every person on the planet has equal dignity and value. Our moral commitment is to be concerned with the rights of every person in the global community and to preserve our shared habitat. Humanistic ethics defends the autonomy of the individual, the right of privacy,

human freedom, and social justice. It is concerned with the welfare of humanity as a whole.

In conclusion, I think that secular humanism has lost ground in the last three decades to religious forces, not only in America, but also in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide are secular; they do not look to the ancient faiths for guidance and believe that anyone can be moral without belief in any religion.

As Vikram Kumar puts it in 'Secularism versus Tolerance':

"The failure of the modern State and civil society to contain and combat communalism has inspired the critics of secularism to suggest that there exists an inherent incompatibility between Indian tradition and secular ideology. As a therapeutic measure, they suggest its substitution by the pseudo-doctrine of religious tolerance. The anti-secularists have erroneously jumped to the fallacious conclusion that the cause of the malaise lies in the process of modernisation of the Indian tradition.

The pertinent question is why a tradition having an uncanny ability to change and simultaneously retain its continuity for over 5000 years should manifest the symptoms of maladjustment vis-a-vis the agencies of modernisation. This can be explained by the discriminatory policies, followed by the imperialist, which did not allow the uniform dissemination of the benefits of modernisation among the people divided along caste, community, religion and class lines.

The votaries of homogenisation, by stifling the multiple expressions of our rich culture end up balkanising the nation. The process of secularisation does not take us away from our tradition. Discerning scholars have pointed out that in our pre-colonial past there were many ideas and institutions conducive to secularism. It is ahistorical to talk about State religion in the pre-colonial context, especially when political power was relatively open throughout history. It is easy to cull out references of religious tolerance from textual

sources. There was an overlap of beliefs and practices in two adjoining groups but social distinctions were strictly demarcated. There was strict enforcement of social boundaries and when they were transgressed or viewed as competitive, the tolerance disappeared taking the form of religious conflict.

Inherent in the concept of religious tolerance is the idea of promoting every religion.

In promoting religion, we also promote a host of irrational beliefs and practices, which are counter-productive to the health of a civil society. The doctrine of religious tolerance is thus intrinsically impregnated with the seeds of conflict, which may sprout in future. Secularism is indispensable for our pluralistic society and cannot be replaced by any alternative ideology suggested by its critics, except at the cost of unraveling the tapestry of our culture, woven over more than five millennia. It follows then, that only a rational world-view and firm faith in democracy and secularism can strengthen the process of nation building.)"

(Secularism versus Tolerance, Vikram Kumar, The Pioneer, New Delhi, 30/11/ 1999) [C.Eldoc1/L54_/L54_B1018.pdf]

Today, when the country is confronting its history of riots, we should also think of ways to come up with a more effective piece of legislation to deal with communal violence.

Colin Gonsalves a senior advocate with the Supreme Court writes in 'The contours of a Communal Violence Law':

"The fatal flaw in the Draft Bill is that it cannot be invoked even when communal crimes take place unless the state or the central government decides to declare an area as communally disturbed. Therefore, if a state has the support of the Centre, it can engage in the most heinous communal crimes and get away with it. The Act can only be invoked in the most extreme circumstances where there is criminal violence resulting in death or destruction of property and there is danger to the unity of India. There are myriad kinds of serious communal crimes which may not result in death, such as rape, and which are not considered to result in danger to the

unity of the country. All these crimes fall outside the ambit of this Draft. Even if such circumstances do exist, it only prescribes that the government 'may' act. On the face of it, the duty to act is not mandatory.

Chapter III has the most controversial provisions importing the provisions of the Armed Forces Special Protection Act in order to allow the army to intervene at will, even kill. Section 10 which grants immunity to the police and the army is particularly insensitive. Various Commissions of Inquiry have found the police and civil authorities either passive or partisan. Section 22 introduces the POTA provisions relating to bail and remand, doubling the maximum days of remand and making grant of bail impossible. These were some of the offensive provisions that led to the repeal of POTA.

Communal crimes are nowhere defined. Apart from the obvious crimes; gender violence including the insertion of objects in the genitals, social and economic boycotts, forcible evictions, restraint on access to public spaces, residential segregation, deprivation of access to food and medicines, enforced disappearances, interference with the right to education, using religious weapons and ceremonies to intimidate, interference with police work, advocating the destruction of a religious structure, need to be specifically set out in the statute. A chapter is necessary to punish the police and members of the security forces for their involvement in communal crimes particularly when FIRs are not registered or registered improperly, when security is not provided to minorities under attack, when destruction of property is not prevented and when inadequate forces are deployed. Where the officers stand firm - and there were many such fine examples of bravery even in Gujarat - the rioters are quickly scattered. No communal riot can take place without the support of the police and the security forces. They must be severely punished for not doing their duty.

A chapter on preventive action to be taken by the authorities along the lines of the SC/ST Atrocities Act is also needed. Apart from section 21 which deals with the externment of persons there is nothing else. Immediately on receiving information the officials should visit the area, establish a police outpost, begin patrolling with special police forces and form vigilance committees. The abject failure of the

criminal justice system because of the undermining role of the police and the public prosecutor, who often side with the accused, needs special legislative attention.

There is no provision in the present Draft Bill relating to the duties of authorities after the riots take place. A section is necessary requiring the authorities to provide immediate relief, protection from further acts of violence, to prepare a list of victims and their losses, to provide for legal aid and for allowances and facilities during legal proceedings. Likewise, provisions are required to enable the arrest and detention of people engaging in hate speeches and enabling the court to shift the investigation to the CBI in cases of involvement of the local police in the communal crime. Section 27 of the Bill deals with compensation to be paid to the victims but restricts the compensation to the amount of fine payable under the Code which is a few thousand rupees. In Chapter XIII of the Communal Crimes Bill submitted by Anbad, an anti-communal group, the suggested sections made it mandatory for government to set up relief camps, pay subsistence allowance, pay substantial compensation and provide reasonable rehabilitation including alternative sites and housing and reconstruct the destroyed places of worship at government's expense. All these victim's rights are missing from the government Bill.

There is, of course, a wishy-washy Section 31 in the Draft Bill requiring the government to plan and coordinate relief and rehabilitation measures but this section falls short of clearly enunciating a victim's rights enforceable in a court. Once again had government cared to look at the Atrocities Act, it would have noticed the provisions relating to the collective fine where the community harboring the aggressors could be substantially fined and the money used for the payment of compensation. A special section on communal crimes against women and children is solely needed covering sexual violence, penetrative assault, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancies, enforced sterilisation and other forms of sexual violence. The rules of evidence need to be modified so that the victim is not further victimised during the trial.”

(The Contours of a Communal Violence Law: An evaluation of the Communal Violence(Suppression) Bill, Colin Gonsalves, The Indian Express, 12/08/ 2005) [C.Eldoc1/L53a/12aug05ie1.pdf]

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There are heart-warming stories of togetherness between diverse communities which need to be ferreted out and showcased as examples of the upholding of human values. One such story is the following: Early one morning, Dr. Pendekar got a pleasant surprise-a letter from his village. He opens the letter to find that, Irfan's wife has delivered a baby boy.

The memories are yet fresh; Dr. Pendekar can still very clearly see himself as a boy of ten waking to the rhythmic beats of *sandal* early in the morning in Pende, his village in Northern Goa.

Razzak's family is the only Muslim family in the entire village. Every morning Razzak beats his sandal as a wake up call for the sleeping Gods in all three temples of Pende. This Muslim family has a special place in this predominantly Hindu village. His sandal beats are not just for every day ritual but this Muslim man is specially invited to play on every Hindu festival. He not only plays the dolki as an every day ritual but is also called at every Hindu festival before the *staphana* (installation) and then for the final procession before the immersion. This is a tradition that has been followed in Pende from ages. It is said that if Razzak or anyone from his family does not play the drums, the festival is incomplete and would draw God's wrath in one form or the other.

During one of his yearly visits Dr. Pendekar found the village immersed in a gloomy atmosphere. On asking some shopkeepers he had known since a kid, he was told that Razzak had expired a few years back and his son Irfan is not willing to get married. All were worried what would happen during the festivals, The entire village was trying to convince Irfan to get married.

The villagers took it up as their responsibility to get Irfan married. After a lot of convincing, he agreed to marry Ameena from Lucknow. 70 Hindu villagers covered a large distance to attend his marriage. On their return, there was a big feast organized to celebrate and bless the newly married couple. After a few years, a similar feast was organized to celebrate the birth of young Iqbal, Ameena and Irfan's son.

This Muslim family has a special place in the village. They are a part of the important fabric of the village like anyone else. The fact that Irfan is a Muslim in a Hindu village has not become a point in his disfavour. Here is a prime example of Muslim identity which does not interfere with the syncretic culture we have in India. I am absolutely sure that if we probe deeper into our day-to-day lives, we will find similar examples in every nook and corner.

"Secularism is a process that needs to be nurtured, and it takes a great many years to achieve the nonchalance achieved by the west on matters of religion."

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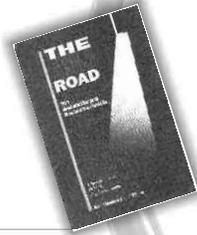
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