

The University of Hull

Religion, Politics and the Secular State in India

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by

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Contents

Chapter 1 p. 1

Introduction, Is India a Secular State?

Various ideas and concepts. A multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual state. Its historical development. Secularism a modern concept. Divergence of the views of elites and the masses.

Chapter 2 p. 36

The Secular State in India. Its Limitations and Weaknesses

Basically a Western concept. Popular among English educated intellectuals. Masses left untouched. Secularist, Marxist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian perceptions.

Chapter 3 p. 69

Secularism, State and Society

Definitions of a Secular State. The Development of the Secular State in the West. Views of Lindsay, D.E. Smith and Ashis Nandis. Factors favourable to it in Indian society. Factors against it. The State and Society. Different views on Secularism.

Chapter 4 p.105

The Secular State, Democracy and Minority Rights.

South Indian Perceptions.

Is Secularism an ideology or an attitude? Views of religious and community leaders on the effectiveness of the Secular State. 'Majoritism' and 'minorityism'. Different perceptions of leaders of the different communities in South India. Definitions, differences and divergences. Prospects and possibilities of accommodation.

Chapter 5

p.145

The Historical Perspective - The South Indian Dimension

The historical factors. The geographical factors. Is the unity of India based on a cultural identity?

Hinduism, its tolerant and intolerant aspects in South India. Intra-religions and inter-religious conflict. The Muslim factor. Traders and missionaries, not conquerors. The Christian immigrants and converts. Trading contacts with the East and West. More cosmopolitan in outlook. Religious syncretism.

Chapter 6

p.210

The Secular State and Society: Views of Secularists and Marxists

The Marxists' view. Anti religious and atheists. Dismissive of religion . Emphasis on economic factors. Secularists - a mixed group. Bureaucrats, politicians and intellectuals - idealists and opportunists. Causes of failure as an ideology.

Chapter 7

p.260

The Hindu perception of the Secular State

The Hindu view on State formation. The sacred and the Secular. The Brahmin and the Kshatriya, co-operation and co-ordination. The pre-nationalistic and nationalistic phases. The period after independence.

Chapter 8

p.305

The Secular State and Minorities. Muslims, Sikhs, & Christians

The Muslim concept of the State and 'umma'. Religious identity dominant. Insecure in a non-Muslim state? The Sikh identity - fear of absorption by the Hindu majority. Christians - belief in Secularism no serious problem. Willing to co-operate with Hindus.

Conclusion

Problems and prospects of the Secular state. The Indonesian and Malaysian experiments. Are the eastern models more suitable to India? No alternative to Secularism. A second assessment of Secularism is essential.

Summary of thesis submitted for Ph.D. degree

by

C.S. Ranganathan

on

Religion, Politics and the Secular State

in India

India has been declared to be a 'Secular State' since 1976, by an amendment to the Constitution, although its supporters claim that it has been one since 1950 when the Constitution was first adopted. From its inception the weaknesses of secularism as an operational category was apparent, but was ignored by politicians as well as by academics. 'Secularism' has since then not been defined in terms of the institutions of the state or the dominant values of the political system. It was given different interpretations by different groups. Even among the ranks of secularists there have been distinct divergences.

The Constitution recognizes not only ethnic but also religious minorities and has given them special rights to maintain educational institutions. Similarly caste based privileges were provided on the plea of 'backwardness'. Moreover, India continued to be a religious society although the state claimed to be secular. Some secularists would identify it with anti-religious policies.

The Hindu revivalists would identify the state with pro-minority and even anti-Hindu policies. In modern political idiom it was called 'minorityism' and 'pseudo

secularism'. The Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, on the other hand, felt that such special rights are essential to maintain their identities. The rise of religions based politics in the eighties has created a major problem for the secular state.

In the light of the above 'Secularism' needs to be redefined in clearer terms. Religious syncretism and political and cultural accommodation associated with South Indian tradition where some of this necessary re-definition has been achieved through the process of historical evolution needs be looked into. Similarly, the de-linking of religion from culture in Indonesia and the adoption of a national ideology which can provide some helpful insights for India is worth pursuing. Apparently, Malaysia has established a viable democratic state by adopting an inter-communal than an non-communal approach to its political problems. By taking a comparative look at the problem of secularism, in the light of the experiences of other nations, perhaps, the Indian secular state could face the future with more confidence.

Religion, Politics and the Secular State in
India

C.S. Ranganathan

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

RELIGION, POLITICS AND THE MODERN STATE

IN INDIA

It is a regrettable fact that until recently the importance of religion in politics in India has been overlooked by politicians and academics both in India and abroad. It was considered to be irrelevant and if anything a negative influence in the formation of the state and the development of modern political institutions in India. It has often been dismissed in India in negative terms such as communalism, a rather surprising attitude as the role of religion in the development of society has been recognized by such eminent Western Scholars as Arnold Toynbee who characterized Indian civilization as one displaying "a manifest tendency towards an outlook that is predominantly religious".¹

The Indian Constitution does not give religion any important role in state-formation and nation-building. Attempts have been made to minimise its effects and interpret its impact in terms of fundamental rights of individuals which could be solved by legal and constitutional means. As Jennings remarks,

"In the main it [the Indian Constitution], so as to speak, plays down Communalism, and it is a remarkable fact that Ceylon, which for historical reasons suffered less from Communalism than India did, has by its Constitution, given greater recognition to Communal problems."²

Of course it is a debatable point whether giving due recognition to a communal, albeit a religious problem by itself, would in due course make it disappear. Sri Lanka is an

unhappy example. However, it is more doubtful whether evading the issue was a better policy.

"The Constituent Assembly (of India) has decided to ignore Communalism. If this bold step succeeds history will record it as a decision of highest statesmanship; if it fails, history will call it another case of political blindness."³

Perhaps it could even be argued that by recognizing religious differences Sri Lanka has exacerbated the problem. It is clear that communal and religious feelings could neither be wished away, abolished by law, nor constrained by constitutional means alone. If racial, religious and linguistic antagonisms are not to tear the fabric of state, a high degree of tolerance, understanding and accommodation based on statesmanship is required.

The state and secularism

The objective of my research is to raise the following questions and formulate suitable answers for them. What makes religion significant and important in Indian politics? Secularism in the Indian context may be defined as the most important principle of state on which all policies are based, which envisages that while the state has not identified itself with any religion or religious group, it shows equal regard and respect to all religions. What effect has it had for the state? How has religion affected the changing social base of the State? The general elections, the innumerable local elections since Independence, and the entry of politics in every sphere of Indian life have given politics a new dimension. A large number of new entrants have no understanding or firm commitment to the ideology of secularism. These groups are rural based belonging to or supported by the newly risen prosperous, middle class farmers and educated in the local language. The urban based middle class no longer dominate the Indian political consciousness. The political consciousness of the new

class ie rural based, vernacular, educated and non-committed to and even contemptuous of secularism as a state ideology is influenced by primordial loyalties and Hinduism. This salient feature of mass participation has given Indian democracy its legitimacy, power and resilience, but has not buttressed secularism in politics. On the other hand this new phenomenon has given religion based politics a degree of resilience and respectability. As such, the conventional characterization of religion as merely a reactionary communal problem can no longer be sustained. It can neither be qualified as a divergence based on cultural and linguistic differences. It cannot be smothered by the high flowing eloquence of Western educated political liberals with their politics based on their concept of a secular state in which the state and religious institutions will operate within clearly demarcated areas. The Western concept of separation of Church and State, which is what secularism means, does not apply to India as there is no clear line of demarcation to divide the sacred from the secular.

In the first place, is India a secular state in the sense that the institutions of the state can be kept completely separate from organised religion? The modern Indian secular state came into existence more than four decades ago. Still its role in the religious field has raised controversies and confrontations. The reason may be there has never been a wall separating state and religion in India. As Madan puts it,

"We do not, of course, have a wall of separation in India, for there is no church to wall off, but only the notion of neutrality or equidistance between the State and the religious identity of the people".⁴

The secularism of the state pre-supposes the rigid separation of state and religion. In Nehru's view religion has no role in a modern state. He has often castigated Pakistan as a theocratic state. Ideally in a modern state the important religious groups should have fully developed organizations to look after themselves. Neither Hinduism nor Islam, the two most important religions in India, are so well organized. Ved Prakash

Luthera forcefully makes this point. He argues that because of organizational deficiencies of religion in India the state is often required to undertake a number of the controlling functions normally organized by religious functionaries. Luthera concludes that India is not and cannot be a secular state. Smith, however, asserts that his view depends on too narrow a view of the definition of a secular state, and secondly Hinduism is capable of great organizational development.⁵ Until such a development takes place the controversy will continue. In addition, the endemic religious riots based on even trivial causes, which routinely lead to tragic outbreaks of communal clashes, will call into question the assumption of the irrelevance of religion to a modern state.

Nehru and the modern state

The efficacy of the modern state was an article of faith with the westernized politicians like Nehru and Ambedkar. To them modernity did not necessarily mean breaking with tradition, but it meant the enlargement of human freedom, escape from the limitations imposed by religion and from social constraints. Nehru was at pains to point out that a secular state was in no sense an anti-religious or even an irreligious state, but a state which respected all religions and treated them all equally and impartially. Michael Brecher puts Nehru's philosophy in clear terms. Nehru's state was essentially a secular state based on socialism with a broad international outlook and a modern approach to social, political, economic, cultural and religious affairs. In short,

"The Nehruvian State was first and foremost democratic, but in an economically poor and culturally diverse country it could hardly be truly democratic without being socialist and secularist."⁶

The positive aspects of the secular state were emphasized and its relevance and desirability even in a multi-religious, multi-racial country like India was asserted.

".... the idea of secularism, a gift of Christianity, has been built into western social theorists' paradigms of modernization, and since these paradigms are believed to have universal applicability, the elements, which converged historically - that is in a unique manner - to constitute modern life in Europe in the Sixteenth and the following three centuries, have come to be presented as the requirements of modernization elsewhere, and this must be questioned. Paradoxically, the uniqueness of the history of modern Europe lies, we are asked to believe, in its generalizability."⁷

The post-war years saw the hastening of the de-colonisation process and the rise of new nation states. The aims of the westernized politicians in the new states were to maintain territorial integrity, establish a liberal democratic state, maximise the prospects of domestic peace by containing if not eliminating the primordial loyalties, religious and communal antagonisms and constructing a socialist oriented society. It was argued that only such a society could lead to social integration and rapid economic development, thus sustaining the freedom of the individual and the independence of the nation. These views found a ready response in the western social scientists whose paradigm was the modern democratic state. Moreover, these

"comparative social scientists brought with them a set of theoretical perspectives that interpreted communal behaviour through a particular optic, one which for summary purposes can be referred to as the modernization paradigm. That paradigm, which had its roots in nineteenth century social thought, was premised upon the expectation that as societies become more industrialized, so would they become more integrated. The guiding assumption was that the processes of differentiation would feed co-ordinated demands for higher levels of interdependence and that together, these forces would weaken and eventually undermine the primordial ties underwriting communal solidarity."⁸

This modernization theory was in vogue for more than two decades and achieved a considerable degree of acceptance in academic circles. Its appeal lay in the fact that it offered a comprehensive framework for interpreting intercommunal behaviour and relatively it was based on fewer assumptions. It also made the state the centre of all the activities.

"Such issues as integration, nation-building, social mobilization and even economic take off are taken to be central social, political and economic processes, but they are all, in the final analysis, interpreted through a state centred optic."⁹

In other words, the state with a secular foundation will take the major responsibility for rapid economic development, social integration and nation building, presumably within a democratic set up. The modernization theory also incorporates the traditional view on religion, according to which religion played an integrative role in traditional societies but not in modern societies. In the past the human race was more spiritually inclined and placed more reliance on supernatural elements and by implication less free than today. Hence modernity is fundamentally against religion and religion is incompatible with rationality.

Marxist Perception

Nehru and other Indians who considered themselves to be patriotic and modern, nationalists and rationalists subscribed to the above view. Nehru believed that religion and its political expression, namely communalism, will simply vanish at the touch of reality. He laid emphasis on the economic factor and expected the communal issue to recede into the background. The Marxists held a similar view. C.G. Shah is of the view, that the material interests of the exploited classes are identical. Hence a united movement based on class interest should be built up. In due course class consciousness will replace communal consciousness. This is the only effective way to combat and ultimately liquidate communalism.

The Marxists were equally dismissive of the idea of the challenge of the communalists to the secular state. To them, communalism is the result of the distortions in the economic base of our societies produced by the colonial mode of

production and the "Communal question was a petit bourgeois question par excellence."¹⁰

The Marxists' criticism has its validity and importance, but it is only partially correct, as Marxists could only view Asian Society through coloured glasses. For example Marx's view of India was a country of small, semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities which restricted the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, and where the peasant lived an undignified, stagnant and vegetative life. These little communities, Marx argued

"... brought about a brutalising worship of nature exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the Sovereign of nature fell down on his knees in adoration of 'Hanuman' (sic) the monkey and Sabbala the cow."¹¹

To Marx, England was only an unconscious tool of history when she dominated and ruled India. His view merely contributed to the racist world view of Western ethnocentrism that underlay colonialism. Moreover, Marx's view on the progress of history and development of society is rather rigid. In his view societies progress from pre-history to history and from primitive Communism to adult Communism. It is obvious where Marx would place Asian societies.

"The Communist Party of China tried to escape this Marxian double-bind by passing an official resolution in 1927 that China was not an Asiatic Society".¹²

The above assessment of Marx bears a close resemblance to the opinion expressed by the Marquis of Hastings in 1813, when he was Governor-General of India. He wrote,

"The Hindoo appears a being nearly limited to mere animal functions and even in them indifferent. Their proficiency and skill in the several lines of occupation to which they are restricted, are little more than the dexterity which any animal with similar conformation but with no higher intellect than a dog, an elephant, or a monkey, might be supposed to be capable of attaining. It is enough to see this

in order to have full conviction that such a people can at no period have been more advanced in civil policy."¹³

The similarity in views is not surprising. Both Marxism and Colonialism have sprung from the same root of Western civilization based on a jaundiced view of Asian societies. Marx's view of India was prejudiced as he considered India to be a deeply religious society where men the 'sovereign' of creation worshipped 'Sabbala' the cow and 'Hanuman' the monkey. Moreover, the critique of Marx of all religion was that they are indifferent to human suffering. Gandhi has countered this argument with his view that this attitude was a distortion of religion.

The Muslim View

From the very beginning the Indian National Congress stood for Indian nationalism based on a commitment to a united, 'secular' ie non-religious, independent India. In spite of occasional and even serious lapses it has contrived to live up to its principles. The Karachi Congress merely laid emphasis to this principle. After independence the Congress Party held power at the centre continuously only with a short interruption. Its policies, postures and principles could be said to lay the agenda for all other political parties, including the regional parties.

Obviously the Congress party was committed to the establishment of a secular state. A state based on religion was not only irrelevant but harmful to a national state. To the secularists in India, the partition of the country in 1947 was a setback to their ideals but not a defeat for their ideals. However, to the forty million Muslims who did not migrate to Pakistan it was a traumatic experience. As one Muslim leader bitterly complained,

"Despite all the heroic talk of Islamic culture and Muslim salvation, what actually happened was that as soon as Pakistan came into being, the so-called leaders of Indian Muslims heroically installed themselves into positions of power and affluence, deserting the rank and file of their poor co-religionists to fend for themselves in India."¹⁴

For the success of the secular state, it was essential for it to secure the support of a large part of the population especially the Muslims most of whom have been the supporters of the two nation theory of Jinnah. This support was forthcoming, but it had its limitations. Political expediency rather than conviction made the Muslims support the secular state in India as something more desirable than a 'Hindu state'. The Hindu Nation enthusiasts, on the other hand, suffered from the backlash of Hindu revulsion against the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. In the 1950's Nehru and his secularism were in the ascendant. The activities of the R.S.S. were curbed. After the death of Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the Jana Sangh was on the wane and was rapidly being marginalised as the party of the Hindu lower middle class in North India. In the Congress Party, Nehru had defeated the Hindu revivalist under P.D. Tandon. Nehru was supreme in the party, government and in public esteem. The secular forces seemed to be well established. Religion was irrelevant to politics and vice versa.

The Hindu Idioms and Secularism

Secularists like Nehru considered religion merely to be an irrelevant irritation in politics to be avoided, an obstruction to be overcome, in spite of Gandhi's strong views on the subject.

"I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."¹⁵

It is obvious that when religion is discussed in the context of politics, in India, it has to be the role played by Hinduism. Almost eighty-five per cent of the people are Hindus and more than eighty per cent of the people are living in the rural areas. Secularism is a Western concept and its main protagonists are the Western educated elites. The influence of Western liberalism is significant among the urban middle class, it has left the rural masses virtually untouched. Indian nationalism has two important bases; one was the English educated urban middle class. They were familiar with the idioms of modern political thought like secularism, socialism, liberalism and democracy. Nehru was their leader and spokesman. The other base was the masses in the rural areas. It was Gandhi who brought national consciousness to the masses and enabled the Congress Party to become a mass based nationalist party. To appeal to the masses, Gandhi used Hindu religious concepts and symbols. To the Hindu masses in the rural areas Gandhi was not a mere political leader but a self-sacrificing saint, cast in the familiar mould of a Hindu holy man. The reason why Gandhi chose religious symbols to project his ideas was obvious.

"As Gandhi has demonstrated, one of the few channels of communications which existed between the cities and the countryside in India is religion."¹⁶

There is no doubt that Western Concepts of nationalism, liberalism and secularism have influenced Indian nationalism, but their impact was limited as it was confined to the English educated in the towns. The majority lived in rural areas and their loyalties were to their religion and their own community. Moreover, Hinduism is not merely a religion but has influenced and even dominated society by means of its caste system. The presence of and even the rise in communal feelings indicate the weakness of nationalism and the strength of ancient loyalties.

The aims, aspirations and ambitions of the rural masses were divergent from, if not diametrically opposed, to that of the urban elite who assumed the leadership of

the national movement. The prospect of independence and the euphoria in the immediate post independence period successfully camouflaged these basic differences. The dominant position of Nehru, as the heir to the Mahatma, and as the primus inter pares among the leaders, won from him the mass support and enabled him to rigorously pursue the ideals of secularism and socialism. In him was personified the ambitions and aspirations of the urban elite and the expectations of the rural masses.

The circumstances under which the Indian constitution was adopted was significant. Two of the most important personalities who influenced the constitution were Nehru and Ambedkar. Nehru was a self-confessed agnostic to whom religion was anathema. He thought that the belief in a supernatural agency led to a certain irresponsibility on the social plane, and emotions and sentimentality had taken the place of reasoned thought and inquiry. To Gandhi, religion was the source of absolute values. Ambedkar's animosity to Hinduism was well known. He equated Hinduism with casteism and as such he considered it not as an institution to be accommodated but as an anachronism to be destroyed. Ambedkar extended his hostility to Gandhi and his ideas as well.

"Ambedkar considered Gandhi an enemy of the untouchables from the time of the Round Table Conference until Gandhi's death in 1948."¹⁷

Although lip service was paid to Gandhi as 'Father of the Nation', it was Nehru's agnosticism and not Gandhi's religiosity that found a place in the Indian Constitution. Here it may be relevant to quote India's elder statesman C. Rajgopalachari, who in a moment of introspection told Alan Campbell-Johnson,

"I am not distressed at the usual struggle for power - the jealousies and intrigues; the trouble with India is that she has a solution to these

problems through her religion and that she has now seemed temporarily to forget it."¹⁸

Gandhi always maintained that he was secular. But his secularism was different from the state secularism advocated and implemented by Nehru the modernist. Gandhi's idea was based on the religious philosophy called goodwill towards all religion. It was in consonance with the religiosity of the people and not a 'petit bourgeois question par excellence'. As Madan puts it, South Asia's major religions are totalizing in character, claiming all of the follower's life and so a vital part of society. To the Marxist and the modernist it may be false consciousness but to a 'peripheral or everyday Hindu or Muslim' it was part of his personality. At best, Nehru's secular state was narrow in concept and negative in its approach towards religion, based on religious neutrality. It not only denies the role of religion but trivializes religious difference, as well as notion of the unity of religion'. To Gandhi, religion was the source of moral values, without it politics will become debased and will not be able to serve public interests. He put his faith in individuals committed to moral values to refine and reform society. In the Gandhian secular state, religion and state would be separate, but religious and moral values would be available to restrict and restrain state policies. Moreover the state would restrict itself to secular welfare and would not intrude into the religious life of the people. Nehru's ideas were different. He believed that social changes could only come about through the establishment of suitable institutions. Of all modern institutions, he believed the state to be the best institution to effect the change. To be effective the state was to be secularist, socialist and democratic. Religion and moral values were to play no part in it. The motive and guiding principles were to be purely economic which was equated with reality, rationality and modernity.

The provision for Secularism in the Constitution

The Indian Constitution came into existence in 1950 and professed to establish a secular state (Article 15) but the word secular was conspicuous by its absence. Only in 1976 it was introduced into the preamble of the Constitution by the Forty-fourth Amendment. The Constitution has not provided any definition or elaboration of the meaning of the word 'secular'. In a limited sense it means a non-religious state as opposed to a theocratic state. But to the atheists and anti-religious lobby any association of the state with religion, however innocuous or even symbolic, was an infringement of the Secular status of the state. Here again the Hindus, Muslims and Christians had divergent and even contradictory views on what a secular state should and should not do. Articles 25 to 28 guarantee the profession and propagation of any religion. In the Constituent Assembly debate, some Hindu members objected to the idea that religious freedom includes propagation of religion and proselytization. However, as a concession to Christian sentiments, it was accepted. Article 19(2) which refers to the freedom of speech, imposes certain restrictions but surprisingly enough does not empower the state to make laws against scandalizing religion. There is no law against blasphemy. As Jennings says,

"Remarks derogatory to Buddha or the Prophet Muhammad, for instance, would be strongly resented without its being possible to hold that they offend against decency or morality or undermine the security of the State."¹⁹

Having provided for what may be termed as freedom of religion, the Constitution does not take any further notice.

Ideally in a secular state there should be no communities as such in the political sense. There should only be citizens with equal rights and responsibilities. The position of the Congress Party on this issue was unequivocal.

"The official answer of the Indian National Congress to the communal argument was that it was simply a problem of fundamental liberties. Communalism is, or ought to be, irrelevant to politics, it is a cultural differentiation which will solve itself if the individual is given his freedom. Hence the solution to the problem is to limit the powers of government, not to enshrine communalism in the law."²⁰

But in practice, in the name of freedom of religion, the Secular Constitution of India allowed the profession, practice and propagation of religion, but also the freedom/the right to establish educational institutions along communal lines. No doubt there was a basic conflict between India's concept of secularism and its simultaneous commitment to communities and to equal citizenship. Nehru's policy was not only contradictory, but in the long run weakened his secular ideas. The Rudolphs support this view. The constitution of India was based on equal citizenship and committed to economic and social justice. But in order to allay Muslim fears Nehru tempered his commitment to secularism, socialism and democracy by giving the Muslims religious autonomy.²¹ Ashgar Ali Engineer asserts that this concession was due to the fact that the Muslim Ulemas supported the Congress Party against Jinnah. This basic contradiction is a fact in Indian political life.

This recognition of communal separateness was at best unfortunate and at worst granted communal politics respectability in the form of minority rights. In the long run, the credibility of the secular state was questioned.

"Division by creeds and classes means the creation of political camps organized against each other, and teaches men to think as partisans and not as citizens."²²

The Communal Identity

The special rights and privileges granted to minority religious groups as minorities not only enhanced their communal identity but also affected the commitment of the majority community to secularism. The question raised here is that if the special concessions granted by, and protected by the alien British government did not satisfy the Muslims, what chance do the guarantees spelled out in the Indian Constitution have of eliminating the feelings of alienation in the Indian Muslims? It was only a few years ago that the Ramakrishna Mission successfully moved the Calcutta High Court to have it declared a non-Hindu and hence a minority institution. As the Mission was one of the pioneering institutions to initiate social reforms in the Hindu community, it is a sad reflection on the secularism prevailing in India. It seems to be that not only has secularism failed to convert 'communal organisations' to the ideology, but it has made even otherwise secular prone organizations communal oriented. It looks as if there is a premium in being classified as a minority community. If the intention was to make the Muslim community feel 'at home' by means of these concessions and eventually enable them to join the mainstream of political life in India, it failed to achieve its objective and even widened the gulf between itself and the majority Hindu community. Not only was the attempt to introduce a common civil code resisted, but Muslim separateness was asserted as in the Shah Bano Case. As early as 1953, when Nehru was dominant, the All India Muslim Convention held in Aligarh called upon the Government of India to fix a certain percentage of reserved posts for Muslims in the Governments Services. The Muslims charged that they were denied opportunities to develop their language and culture and expressed their fear that they would eventually be engulfed by the Hindu majority. Some of these grievances are no doubt based on facts but obviously others are the product of a frustrated minority which has failed to accept its own limitations and failures. A.R. Sherwani is of the view that few Muslims compete for the I.A.S. Examination. Muslim parents do not encourage their children to achieve

higher academic standards. Salman Khurshid says that internal weaknesses provides fertile ground for failures, and such failures are taken for granted.²³

What is true of Muslim minority is true of Sikh communal perception as well. Y.K. Malik proves with the aid of statistics how the Sikhs constituting less than two per cent of the population are over-represented in All India Services and in the armed forces and overwhelmingly so in the government service in the Punjab.²⁴ Yet Surjit Mansingh says,

"... the neglected grievances of the State of Punjab gained the (not necessarily favourable) attention of New Delhi only when represented as Sikh demands."²⁵

This in spite of the fact that the per capita income of Punjab is more than twice that of the Indian average. One of the grievances of the Sikh Community was the fear of being engulfed by the Hindu majority. Such fears cannot be abolished in a short space, only time and rising self-confidence can overcome such irrational fears. These grievances cannot be quantified, hence be proven to be irrefutable. Another grievance is the denial of Sikh identity, presumably by the Hindus. In reality, however, Sikhs have the same rights to practice and propagate their religion like any other community.

The unfortunate effect of claims for special treatment of minority communities has its negative effect on the Hindu community. The privileges granted to the minority and their agitation for a separate identity have 'communalised' even comparatively secular Hindu organisations. The Brahmo samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission which pioneered reforms within Hindu Society have moved the Courts to have them declared as non-Hindu organizations to obtain the benefits under Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution.²⁶

The political consequences of such an attitude in a secular state is likely to be negative. This possibility is clearly brought forth by Prabha Dixit. She says,

"In a democracy the grant of special rights and privileges to a minority on grounds of religious identity is bound to arouse religious susceptibilities of the majority also. Also such measures disturbs the confidence which the majority group possesses on account of its greater members. Once the confidence is shaken, it starts campaigning against the minority with religious and cultural slogans similar to those adopted by the minority for self-preservation. In the extreme, it tries to eliminate the minority from all positions of political power."²⁷

This division of the nation along communal lines euphemistically called majority and minority communities, would eventually undermine not only the secular basis of the state but also its democratic institutions. It is significant that minority communalism when it feels threatened, does not appeal to secular institutions within the nation but to some external authority for protection and finally put its faith in separatism. Before independence the Muslim leaders depended on the British authorities to protect their interest as a community and when independence became a distinct possibility, demanded separation. Similarly the Sikhs do not put their faith in secular institutions in India, but appeal to the United Nations and hope to achieve a separate state of Khalistan through indiscriminate violence. Minority communal groups have neither faith in democracy and secularism nor in their ability to protect their rights as citizens. Under these circumstances it is difficult to accept D.E. Smith's assertion that the existence of sizeable religious minorities will strengthen India's secularism and that minorities are the natural custodians of the secular state. As Bipan Chandra states,

"If the majority of representatives also behaved in a communal manner, the minorities would be either faced with the position of perpetual ineffective minority and perhaps permanent communal oppression, or forced to move towards territorial and political separatism."²⁸

In a democratic system it is essential for citizens to think behave and vote as individuals and not in terms of an exclusive religious identity. This is the basis of communal politics. A person may believe in a religion and owe loyalty to it, but strictly in his private capacity. His religious identity should not intrude into the public domain. The above was the view of Mr. K. Karunakaran, Kerala Chief Minister who told me that in his private life he was a religious Hindu, but in public life he was a staunch secularist. Otherwise a political confrontation based on a religious identity would undermine democratic political institutions.

"The logic of minority communalism is separatism, the logic of majority communalism is fascism."²⁹

As late as 1961, Nehru became painfully aware of the fact that the people still did not understand the meaning of the word 'secular'. He reiterated that it was not opposed to religion. A secular state was one which honours all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities. He was aware of the inadequacy of the secular state, but still maintained his trust in the secularization process. He said,

"Our Constitution lays down that we are a secular state, but it must be admitted that this is not wholly reflected in our mass living and thinking. In a country like England, the state is ... allied to one particular religion ... Nevertheless, the state and the people there function in a largely secular way. Society, therefore, in England, is more advanced in this respect than in India, even though our Constitution may be, in this matter, more advanced."³⁰

Nehru was too optimistic about the decline of the hold of religion on the mind of the people.

The Hindu Identity

The perceptions and the policies of committed secular leaders could also lead to the rise in communalism among the Hindu Community. Gandhi and Nehru had always taken the view that the Hindus, as the religious majority, should adopt an unconditional generous approach towards the safeguards demanded by the Muslim leaders. This approach could not be defaulted on the basis of principles. The Hindus, being in a great majority, could find expression through all political parties subscribing to ideologies from the extreme left to the extreme right, while the Muslims could only express their fears as a community through communal organizations such as the Muslim League. Hindu communalism could effectively camouflage itself as nationalist and non-communal. This was true in the pre-independence as well as the post-independence period. Many stalwarts in the Congress Party are camouflaged communalists who would be quite at home with Hindu Mahasabha or the Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. Unfortunately genuine nationalist perception will be lost on the average Hindu who operates at a lower level of political perception. Gopal expresses this view quite well,

"... in itself, despite the call to magnanimity, assumes a communal approach, however sub-consciously the argument is on the behalf that the majority community is a privileged one, and the minority community has reason to be communal ... the implication that there was something to choose between Hindu and Muslim communalism was dangerous in its possibilities."³¹

The assumptions of the Muslim and Sikh communalists on Hindu Communalism are equally wrong. The view that the Hindus lack a common identity and would never coalesce behind a philosophy of 'Hinduness' with a common objective is not only defective but dangerous. As Bipan Chandra says,

"When warned of the dangers that the reiteration of minority communal themes can pose in terms of the growth of Hindu fascism, apologists and exponents of Muslim and Sikh communalism have been putting forward the dangerous theory that Hindus can never be solidified around Hindu identity or Hindu communalism."³²

Unfortunately, this minorities' view seemed to have found some credence with a few Western academics. As the Rudolphs suggest,

"only a fraction of uncertain magnitude shared, until about 1980, a Hindu identity that had political saliency. More important, the Hindu majority was more fragmented and competitive along sect, class, caste and region of cleavage than were India's minority religious communities."³³

However satisfying may be the statistical analysis given above as a policy projection for the future, it is defective. As an explanation of the past, the opinion is correct but as a guide to the future it is irrelevant. The rising ride of Hindu revivalism is no longer relegated to the periphery of Indian politics but has occupied the centre stage. Dr. Karan Singh, Member of Parliament, former member of Congress and President of the newly-formed Hindu Virat Samaj, expressed himself thus:

"The day has gone when Hinduism was like some helpless whale being constantly bitten into by aggressive sharks. We must be prepared to look after all our interests, and it is not our responsibility to look after the interests of other religions."³⁴

Hence the rising popularity of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and the formation of the 'Hindu Munnani' (Hindu Front) in the 1980's are relevant factors to be taken into account.³⁵ South India, especially Tamil Nadu and Kerala, was not as seriously affected as North India by the communal problem, particularly in the two decades before independence. This relative communal harmony was maintained even in the two or three decades after independence. For example in 1948 M. Mohammed Ismail

the President of the Indian Union Muslim League chose Madras as the Convention centre, as cities in North India were not considered safe. Similarly the murder of an entire family of Muslims in Malabar by some Muslim Zealots in 1947 and the destruction of the famous Sabarimalai Temple in Travancore by some Christian extremists hardly caused a ripple in the placid pool of South Indian politics. Hitherto, Tamil Nadu has not taken much interest in establishing a Hindu identity. Organizations such as the R.S.S. and the Hindu Munnani are taking an aggressive attitude against the Muslim and Christian minorities in the State. The positive assessment of Bipan Chandra should be more acceptable than the optimism based on negative factors as presented by the Rudolphys. Chandra says,

"Moreover, it should be realized that even if the process of Hindu identity formation and communalism remains limited, given the size of Hindu population, even this limited communalism would pose a massive and political danger."³⁶

One factor which has so far been underestimated is the problem of casteism which has grown in importance after independence. The Indian Constitution under Article 15(1) and 29(2) prohibits, among other things, discrimination based on caste. Under a Constitutional amendment, a new sub-section (4) was added to allow the state to practice discrimination based on caste. As a concession to the secularists, the amendment refers to 'socially and educationally backward classes of citizens'. Honour was satisfied on both sides and caste based loyalties were reinforced in the name of class. In the process the secular constitution gave de facto recognition to caste-based politics and privileges, which we were assured were only temporary. But once such privileges were in place, their protagonists fiercely resisted their removal on the ground that the backward communities have not shown enough progress to warrant their removal. Even after four decades the caste-based privileges are still part of the secular constitution. Such special rights have a tendency to become permanent. Some Western writers like Marc Galanter, seem to find reasons to

justify such caste based discrimination. He prefers to call it compensatory discrimination rather than preferential treatment, justifiable on the grounds of historical reasons. However well intentioned, introduction of discrimination is a negative and self-defeating policy. It exacerbates existing feelings of alienation, enhances primordial loyalties and caste consciousness, increases the communalization of politics and divides citizens along caste and communal lines. Finally it undermines national consciousness and the basis of the secular state. It attracts cynicism not support for the national state. Indirectly it has contributed to regional consciousness and even racialism. E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker equated 'Brahminism' with North Indian Aryan domination, which has corrupted the superior, casteless Dravidian, by implication, Tamil civilization. The political propaganda of the so-called Dravidian political parties who divide the people of Tamil Nadu into Aryans and Dravidians with its racial undertones, are obviously anti-national. The agitation against the 'imposition' of Hindi and the hostility towards Sanskrit as 'Aryan languages' has a long history. The coming into existence of linguistic states has given fresh impetus to regional and linguistic chauvinism and provided fertile ground for regional parties which need not have the constraints and restraints of national secular parties. The result is that secular ideology is undermined.

Initial success of secularism

It will only be an truism to state that from the early days of independence the anti-secular and communal forces were active. Secularism was a symbol and it attracted symbolic loyalty. Its presence in India's neighbouring countries was a temporary phenomenon. Pakistan disowned it and Burma, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh discarded it within a few years of its acceptance. In India, it was not the problems of secularism that is surprising, but its survival for four decades. In the early years, Nehru's authenticity as a committed secularist and his benign rule gained for him the support of the English educated middle class, the intellectual, professionals and

others. The minorities supported him as the best bet for their complete security and prosperity. The sceptics and opponents either retreated or were routed. The political euphoria was followed by an economic euphoria after independence. The increase in opportunities for gainful employment and business ventures satisfied the needs of the rising middle class in the fifties and sixties.

"The coming of freedom and the three Five Year Plans did open up a wide range of opportunities to the middle classes because of the immense expansion of the administrative apparatus. Indianization and the expansion of the officer cadre of the armed forces, Indianization of the higher cadre of foreign firms, development of banking, trading and industrial companies, rapid growth of school and college education and phenomenal expansion in the training and recruitment of engineers, doctors and scientists. For nearly twenty years after 1947 the middle classes not only had a respite but were in a state of euphoria."³⁷

The Nehru era was noted for its social and political stability. The communal forces were relatively weak and social coherence was taken for granted. These advantages were only a temporary respite. By the mid-sixties the opportunities became less and unemployment became a serious problem. The newly risen rural middle class and the children of prosperous farmers began to compete for employment. Developments in agriculture and industry only benefited certain strata in certain regions. Those who were left out became discontented and they provided fertile ground for the spread of casteist and communal ideologies. The reservation of jobs became a more contentious issue. The politicization of even economic issues in the form of caste backwardness is as dangerous for secularism as the politicization of religion. The violent agitation of the Vanniyar community, who once claimed to be Kshatriyas, to be classified as 'backward' is a good example. The breakdown of caste, the joint family and the village community resulted in a loss of identity. Caste-based and communal-based politics appealed to them. Appeal for votes was based on narrow

sectional interests. Many began even to question the basis and the legitimacy of the secular state.

The formal commitment to secularism started declining in the 1970s. The confident prediction that religion and its political expression, namely communalism, will 'vanish at the touch of reality' was not borne out by facts. The very legitimacy of the secular state was being questioned. As Madan puts it, the Western idea of secularism was transferred not translated into an Indian political idiom. It was a foreign concept which was not translated and thus failed to be internalized, and hence outside the experience of the majority. Secularism was viewed as an orphan child adopted by Nehru and like-minded modernists which the majority tolerated but refused to accept as a legitimate Indian institution. The assumed superiority of the secularists based on scientific temperament and rationality was dismissed as moral arrogance based on false premises, which proved to be a political folly. To the majority of citizens, religion was of greater importance than the secular state, which was often equated with an irreligious, if not anti-religious state. The introduction of adult franchise and the massive participation of the population in the general elections politicized the people and their religious consciousness assumed a political role. Yet as Ashis Nandy puts it,

"In the early days of independence the national leaders set the agenda of what could be done in the name of religion and were restrictive in the choice of men for the highest level in government".³⁸

By the 1970s, the above rules no longer applied. The increase in the political consciousness of the electorate made it imperative that politics should enter every sphere of Indian life. It was no longer possible for the elite to restrict the entry into politics to those who were committed to secular politics. In other words the process of democratization itself restricted and diluted the support for the secular state. But this restriction and dilution should not be viewed as lesser commitment to democratic

institutions. In fact it provided popular support and cultural content to the democratic state which gave Indian democracy its power and resilience. Only the rules of the game have been changed. The power elite which supported secularism was bewildered at the new tide, and viewed with suspicion if not with hostility the new entrants. They maintained their ethnic links which included religious consciousness but not religious commitment. To quote Nandy again, "Instead of religious use of politics, they make political use of religion."³⁹

Decline of Secularism

The complacency and confidence of the modern secularists received another jolt in the 1970s. The validity of the modernizing theory was itself being questioned in the West.

"That is, the state is taken as a given or an end point, the state itself is regarded as a constant, not a variable. That perspective is a limiting one most obviously because it is ahistorical. It forgets, for example, that the early state system of even the oldest European politics was a fluid one and in forgetting that, the more recent dynamic state formations in Pakistan and Bangladesh are rendered anomalous if not undesirable."⁴⁰

The theory that modernization would lead to social integration was no longer considered valid even when applied to Western societies. The Basques in Spain, the Irish in Britain and the Quebecois in Canada were the obvious examples.

"That evidence had the effect of eroding confidence in the theoretical underpinnings of modernization at least insofar as modernization purported to explain variation in intercommunal conflict."⁴¹

Faced with the evidence which conflicted with their theory, the proponents of the modernist theory suggested that inter-communal tension was the result of social

mobilization and social mobilization in turn was the result of modernization. This partial explanation proved nothing. "As Horowitz acutely observes, the problem becomes one of over specification for when both the original and revised explanations of the modernisation intercommunal conflict relationship are taken together, they exhaust all logical possibilities. In effect, by explaining all outcomes they explain none".⁴² Nehru's optimistic assumption that the scientific temper and touch of reality would make communal appeal ineffective proved to be premature. Nehru's touch of reality proved to be an embarrassment and a mirage. A secular state cannot abolish the religiosity of the people by using its coercive power. At the most it can keep religion submerged. The revival of religiosity in Turkey and Eastern Europe is a good example. As at present those who take religion seriously seem to have decided that they have nothing to learn about ethnic tolerance from a secular state. We may have to return to the Gandhian idea of secularism, that the state should restrict itself to secular welfare and not interfere in the religious life of the people. By denying a role for religion, the secularists have alienated society from the state. However, this does not keep religion out of politics but makes it enter politics by a different route and in a different garb. Religion-based politics enters the field as minority rights or as majority fears, better known as Muslim and Sikh fundamentalism or Hindu revivalism.

Some writers argue that Nehru should have used his enormous popularity and power to bring communal tendencies under strict control. At heart Nehru was too much of a liberal democrat to use such authoritarian methods. He was also an optimist who believed in the superiority of secularism and the inevitable decline of religion and its influence on society. What he did not consider was that secularism enhanced the power of the state and made it an arbiter in the inter-communal conflicts and the protector of all communities. Nehru declined this role for his secular state as an arbiter and the final source of authority with its coercive power held in reserve. As Madan aptly puts it, secularism as an alien ideology and without

the full authority of state behind it, failed in its ultimate aim of transforming society into its own mould.

The failure of secularism to make much headway in India has alarmed the modernist minority. Its remedial measures were along predictable lines and equally ineffective. In T.N. Madans view it seems to be a paradox that while those in authority are warning against the rising religious revivalism and the need for stern measures to check them the so called Hindu society continues to splinter.⁴³ Here the secularists are preaching to a converted audience, leaving the others unconvinced and cynical. A minority, an alienated minority too, has never succeeded in imposing its ideas on an unwilling majority, however noble the ideas may appear to be. However, there are some signs of change even among the secularists and intellectuals. It has been recognised that secularists who deny the validity of religion in a religious society provoke hostility. As Ashis Nandy puts it,

"... there is now a peculiar double-bind in Indian politics: the ills of religion have found political expression but the strengths of it have not been available for checking corruption and violence in public life."⁴⁴

There is no doubt that the secularists will have to accept a lesser role for themselves in society. Secularism, like religion, has a role to play in society. Its claim to a superior role in society, not to say of its claim for sole legitimacy in the state, should be discounted.

"Secularism must be put in its place: which is not a question of rejecting it but of finding the proper means for its expression. In multi-religious societies, such as those of South Asia, it should be realized that secularism may not be restricted to rationalism, that it is compatible with faith, and that rationalism (as understood in the West) is not the sole motive force of a modern state. What the institutional implications of such a position are is an important question and needs to be worked out."⁴⁵

Secularism as an Indianized concept has been found to be unworkable. The modernists transferred the Western concept but failed to translate it to a proper Indian political idiom. To deny the legitimacy of religion in a deeply religion-conscious society is to alienate society from state and provoke a reaction which would question the legitimacy of secularism itself. To claim ideological and moral superiority for secularism is arrogance, based on ignorance of the true nature of state and society. Secularism has its place in society, so has religiosity. Mutual respect, understanding and ability to accommodate each other will go a long way to resolve the conflict based on mutual suspicion and hostility. In a state like India both secularism and religion must be taken seriously. Perhaps the morality inherent in religion could temper unprincipled politics and secularism could restrain religious bigotry. Neither secularism nor religion could be abolished without serious consequences to state and society. The unhappy examples could be found among India's neighbours.

Does the rise in religion-based politics in India point in the direction of a Hindu state in the near future? It is very unlikely. In spite of present disenchantment, India's commitment to secularism as a state ideology goes way back to the 1880s when the Indian National Congress was founded. India cannot reject it without repudiating the legacy of Gandhi and Nehru and perhaps the claims to be a modern state as well. It has become part of Indian tradition and even more, part of India's self-image. Hindu nation and Hinduness are attractive rhetoric, but without substance. Not many subscribe to it. The rise in the vote for the Bharatiya Janata Party may be considered to be a protest vote against ignoring Hindu susceptibilities, but nothing more than that. As has been pointed out by a number of observers, the majority of voters still voted for the secular parties. The Hindu nation is not a feasible proposition. Moreover, for more than four decades the Indian nation has been committed to secularism. It has found expression in the Constitution itself. As Jennings has pointed out quite humorously,

"Most Constitutions, like most men and women, grow more respectable as they grow older. They become part of our glorious heritage."⁴⁶

Democracy, Religion and the State

Practical reasons alone would suggest retention of secularism as a State ideology. The adoption of the religion of the majority community in a state has often led to divisive tendencies and often exacerbated existing racial, linguistic and even doctrinal differences. The national state subject to such centrifugal forces, is unable to concentrate on essential solid and economic policies. Bangladesh and Pakistan have adopted Islam as state ideology, Buddhism has been declared the state religion of Burma and Buddhism has been accorded the 'foremost place' in Sri Lanka. Such concessions to the primitive do both of these forms need to be used? primordial instinct of the majority communities have not solved any economic, social or political problems in these states. The first victim to such exclusiveness and intolerance has often been the democratic institution. If minority communalism leads to separatism, majority communalism leads to military dictatorship and fascism. In 1953, the anti-Ahmadiyya riots erupted in Pakistan. The orthodox Muslims wanted them to be declared as non-Muslims. In 1984 they achieved their aim. The Sunni Muslims in Pakistan confronted the Shia Muslims on a question of Muslim jurisprudence. Their demand was the enactment of a Shariat Bill.

"Put simply, these demands were directed towards the establishment of a Sunni State in which all non-Sunni groups, whether Muslim or otherwise, would be relegated to minority status."⁴⁷

The experience of Burma, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are not dissimilar. Religion has been introduced into politics not because of ideological conviction but because of political expediency. The failure of the elite to solve the economic and

social problems and meet the rising expectations of the middle class led to the acceptance of populist policies, with a view to pandering to the prejudices of the illiterate and semi-literate populace who constitute the vast majority of voters. Ancient historical memories are revived, forgotten heroes are deified and ancient glories revived. Euphoria is offered in the place of practical policies. Such cosmetic effect and lack of consistent policies lead to the alienation of the intelligent and the pragmatic section of the populace. Such policies bring the democratic institutions and the electoral process itself into disrepute. This provides fertile ground for anti-democratic forces to come to power using extra-parliamentary methods. The consequence is a military dictatorship as in Pakistan, Burma and Bangladesh, or a majority based racial and religious chauvinistic government as in Sri Lanka. India has so far escaped from either model, but the revival of religious extremism could lead to a military fascist dictatorship. The only remedy seems to be to allow religion a role in politics but at the same time to strengthen the secular and democratic elements within society. Apparently the aims may appear to be contradictory but a policy of conciliation and accommodation should not be beyond the capacity of human intelligence and ingenuity. The establishment of a theocratic state has not solved the political problems of Pakistan. I doubt whether the establishment of a 'Hindu State' will ever solve the political problems of India. A redefinition of the secular ideology in the light of the experience of the past is essential to make it acceptable to the majority among all communities. This matter will be pursued in the other chapters.

In the light of the above, I propose to examine the future role of secularism in India and its prospects in a deeply religious society. In the next chapter the present position of the secular state will be examined. As a Western concept it has not been properly understood or accepted by society in general. It looks as if instead of society being secularized, the state may be communalized. The rise in communal feelings and communal riots point in the direction. The political parties, even the

so-called secular parties, accommodate communalists during election times. The question arises whether there are really any committed secular parties in India? This is a fundamental weakness of the secular state in India. The different views of the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians will be examined, and to what extent the various communities are committed to the secular ideology will be analysed.

In chapter three the origins of the secular state will be examined. Its development in the West and whether it could be successfully developed in India will be examined. The two contradictory views, that India is not a secular state (Luthera) and India could be a successful secular state (D.E. Smith) will be examined in some detail. The factors favourable and against will be analysed, including the relative positions of state and society. In this connection, T.N. Madan's view that in India there is no wall separating church and state but only a notion of neutrality or equidistance, will be given due consideration.

The secular state will be examined from the basis of the South Indian background in chapter four. The views of community and political leaders will be analysed. The divergences viewed in South India and whether it could serve as a model will be examined. Chapter five will be devoted to the historical perspective, with a major emphasis on South Indian history to examine the secular and non-secular elements in society and its modern developments.

In chapter six, the views of Marxists and Secularists on the secular state will be discussed. All of them have a tendency to dismiss religion as an irrelevant factor in state based activities. To the Secularists, Secularism is an article of faith and to the economists, religion is an irrelevant irritant. The Marxists view religion-based politics as a fascist tendency. They accuse those who are so influenced as suffering from 'false consciousness'. The Marxists themselves suffer from 'false consciousness', as they could only view every problem from a Marxian point of view.

The views of the Hindu majority within and without the Congress party will be discussed in the next chapter. The Hindu influence in the Congress Party and their differences with the 'socialists and secularists will be examined. The general consensus within the party for accommodation with the Muslim, Sikhs, Christians and other minorities, will be discussed. The Hindu communal view as represented by the R.S.S. and the Hindu Maha Sabha for a 'Hindu state' based on 'Hinduness' and its influence on politics will be considered.

In chapter eight the perceptions of the Muslims, Sikhs and Christians will be examined. Their pro-secular and anti-secular tendencies will be looked into, and their different historical experiences will be analysed.

The Christians seem to be the only group to accept the separation of Church and State, and as a corollary the secular state. Except for their enthusiasm for proselytization, they seem to subscribe to the view that they could be good Christians and good Indians at the same time.

In the concluding chapter, references will be made to Malaysia and Indonesia and the prospects of the secular state in India will be discussed. The experiences of Pakistan, Burma, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka will be discussed. Abandonment of secularism has in no way solved their problems; it has only enhanced them. Secularism has its own resilience and flexibility, and attempts should be made to minimise, if not remove, its defects and deficiencies, not to reject it. There seems to be no alternative to it.

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Chapter 2

THE SECULAR STATE IN INDIA, ITS LIMITATIONS AND WEAKNESSES

The modernization theory which dominated political thinking in explaining inter-communal conflict for more than two decades was being seriously questioned in the 1970s. Its appeal lay in the fact that it had relatively very few assumptions and was centred on state based activities. The State was considered to be dealing with issues such as integration, nation building, social mobilization and economic development. It became clear the theory could not adequately explain inter-communal conflict even in highly industrialized Europe. This theory supported the modernists and secularists in India in their attempt to build a modern secular state. By 1970 it became clear to the secularists that not only Indians but also a substantial number of non-Indians have become receptive to non-secular concepts of religious and ethnic tolerance. Nehru died in 1964, but his policies continued to be in place until the 1970s. The Congress Party dominated Indian politics as the only national party with an All-India identity. In the 1970s the Party for the first time lost power at the centre and subsequently suffered loss of power in a number of states. The rising tide of communal politics, the popularity of regional based politics, the resurgence of primordial loyalties, the rise of Hindu revivalism and Muslim and Sikh fundamentalism with the consequent increase in communal riots, all pointed to the failure of the secular state in containing these divisive and anti-national tendencies.

In the present chapter, I propose to look into these problems and what contributed to the weakening of the secular state and the rise of these regional cultures. It is obvious that secularism was outside the experience of the vast majority of the Indian people, who continued to cherish their traditional religious identity. Secularism was an imposition from above which failed to permeate society as a whole.

The role of the supposed secular political parties in promoting communalism will be looked into. The failure of the state to promote religious values to check political morality is another defect. Finally, the Hindus, Muslims and Christians have different perceptions of secularism which will be discussed in this chapter. The failure of the state to use its authority to promote secularism and at the same time permitting sectional interests to promote their interests by establishing their own educational institution will also be looked into. All these factors helped to undermine the secular state.

It has often been stated that India is a modern secular state. The basic assumption was, to be modern a state must be secular and a modern state must be a secular state as well. These assumptions were considered to be axiomatic, to question them was considered by those who espoused the cause of secularism to be almost anti-national and such persons were taken to be communalists and reactionaries. The followers of such persons were thought to be lacking in modern sense, inferior in political perceptions and bound by the chain of tradition and an outmoded religious consciousness. The commitment to secularism was an article of faith of the intellectuals and they believed quite sincerely that without it there was no future for India. Even those who were sceptical of the above claim remained muted and only dared to express their reservations in private for fear of being branded as communalists and reactionaries. The modernists and secularists tolerated no dissent or disagreement. The matter was clear and nothing needed to be said about it.

It may be argued here that in the early days following independence, secularism as then understood appeared rational and reasonable. Communalism, that is, religion based politics resulted in the death of half a million people and creating ten million refugees. Religion could only be seen in a negative light. Gandhi's assassination created a political revulsion against religion based politics. In the process Gandhi's religiosity, and principled politics based on religion as well as religion based ethics

and morality were forgotten. Godse represented only the extremist form of Hinduism, but it was taken to be what religion based politics could be, and which should be avoided at all costs. It was more than hinted that to bring religion into the area of politics, especially Hinduism, was being disloyal if not hostile to the Gandhian ideal of the State. It was hoped if not expected, that in due course, because of Gandhi's death, religion as a factor in politics would become less and less important and disappear sooner rather than later. Gandhi was recruited and placed among the secularists by default. Religion as a factor in politics was defeated but not destroyed, the secularists could not keep it away from state and society.

Nehru and Ambedkar were the greatest protagonists of the secular state. Nehru stated that religion was all right when applied to ethics and morals, but was not good when mixed up with politics. Ambedkar was more sceptical,

"The religious conceptions in this country are so vast that they cover every aspect of life from birth to death. There is nothing which is not religious".¹

Because of Nehru's dominant position, there was reluctant acquiescence in the secular state, not enthusiastic support based on ideological commitment by the Hindu majority. State and society were in separate compartments. There existed an uneasy relationship between a secular state and a religious society. As time went on there was a divergence and not a congruence between a secular state supported by a secular intelligentsia and a society with a deep religious base. What was true of pre-independence India was also true of the immediate post-independence India. As W.H. Morris-Jones puts it,

"India's modern 'idiom rulers' are no longer protected from the influence of traditional India by the three bulwarks of British administrators outside the caste system, the national movement and a restricted franchise."²

The neutral British administration and the restricted franchise were no longer there, but Nehru's connection with the Independence movement and its spirit of common cause were there to serve the cause of secularism based on a national identity. Moreover,

"His all-India political image is so firmly planted amongst the Indian masses that it needs no support from a sophisticated official ideology".³

Secularism was not developed as a state ideology. However, Indian secularism was considered to be an accomplished fact. In the opinion of writers like Moin Shakir it was implied in the Constitution. Hence Carnell's view that Nehru's image was so firmly planted in the minds of the masses that an official ideology was not needed could be accepted. But these advantages were temporary. Permanent links have to be made if the secularism of the state were to be acceptable to society still based on religion and having strong links with primordial loyalties.

Although it was Gandhi's 'goodwill towards all religion' that was closer to the political consciousness of the people, it was Nehru's 'policy of religious neutrality' which found expression in India's secular constitution. As time went on it seems that instead of the state influencing the society to become more secular the society will bring its religiosity to influence state policies. As Madan points out, unlike Christianity, India's major religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam are totalizing in character and do not recognise the separation of church and state. Here the remarks made by Ainslie Embree are significant. Firstly, the relationship between politics and religion is too complex and convoluted, and cannot be dismissed as a remnant of the 'historic antagonisms rooted in the conquest of India by Islamic invaders', but something very much to do with the nature of contemporary political and social life. Secondly, there is the use of the vocabulary of religion that has corrupted political discourse in India. He concludes by saying that,

"When the democratic process appears to be unable to satisfy demands that claim to be rooted in religion, violence is the possible and rational solution".⁴

Embree blames Gandhi (who mixed religion with politics), for this state of affairs. However, Nehru's secular India kept religion at arms length and was unsuccessful in secularizing both state and society. The ideal solution would be for the politician and state to keep out of religion, but no politician would keep away from issues which would ensure him immediate advantage and as for the state, it has not kept itself entirely out of the way of religion.

Religion and Politics

The Constitution may not give due importance to religion but it has not prevented the state from intervening in matters concerning Hindu religion and society.

D.E. Smith comments,

"It is ironic that India, the only country of the three which has committed itself to the ideal of a secular state, has engaged in the most extensive governmental intervention in religious matters in the interest of reform."⁵

It has even interfered in Hindu Religious Endowment and Hindu Temple Administration. The Hindu Religious Endowment Commission of 1962 made recommendations with regard to various aspects of temple administration. The Hindu Code Bill drastically altered and codified Hindu personal law. Here is an obvious contradiction, a secular state involving itself in religious matters in the name of social reforms, thus weakening its status in the eyes of the majority community. The paradox is that while the state is free to intervene in religious matters, religion finds itself kept out of the realm of the state.

What made the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution overlook or ignore this paradox? Perhaps the environment of the period had an influence on the Constitution.

"In a discussion in which Sir Alladi Krishnaswamy Aiyer himself took part, it was suggested that the lecturer (Jennings) had not laid sufficient emphasis on the environment in which the Constitution had to be drafted".⁶

The problem was to give due emphasis to the emotionally charged atmosphere while the Constitution was under consideration. Jennings lay emphasis on the fact of the strong belief in the rule of law and the suspicion of all government authority. I would also suggest that the traumatic experience based on partition with its strong religious bias had created an anti-religious feeling. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic put religion based politics under a negative light. Religion and politics were considered to be an incompatible mix and also perhaps a dangerous mix. Under such conditions it is not surprising that the agnostic, secular group should dominate the proceedings. It is not suggested that the Constitution should be slanted towards a theocratic state or even lead to a Hindu dominant or Hindu dominated society. The failure was to give due consideration to the role of Hinduism in the new state within the democratic framework based on majority rule.

One important fact was that at the time of independence, Pakistan declared itself to be an Islamic State, while India considered itself to be a non-Muslim but not a Hindu State. There were 40 million Muslims in India, besides a considerable body of Sikhs, Christians and Parsis. How they were to react to the establishment of a purely Hindu State? What would be the position of national Muslims such as, Kidwai and Sheikh Abdullah? National Muslims like Azad believed that Muslims and Hindus could share citizenship in an independent India without compromising their religious beliefs. Moreover, if any emphasis was put on religion, ie. Hinduism, the moral

ground on which Kashmir's accession to India was accepted would become untenable. In a way the formation of Pakistan was a blow to the Congress Party and its claim to represent all Indians, irrespective of their religion, on the basis of secular politics. The accession of Kashmir and the establishment of a secular state, were the re-assertion of the Congress Party of its faith in secular politics and a complete rejection of the two-nation theory of Jinnah, based on his view that nationality is based on religion.

For all his rhetoric, Jinnah was no fanatic Muslim. More correctly he was a westernized modern secular Muslim.⁷ He used Islam as an instrument to undermine the Congress domination of politics. As Khalid bin Sayeed shrewdly observes,

"How can one sum up the role that Islam has played in nation building in Pakistan? There is considerable evidence to show that Jinnah, with his brilliance and forensic ability could not have achieved Pakistan had not the two cries 'Islam in danger' and 'Pakistan and Islamic state' been raised."⁸

To Jinnah, Islam may be an instrument to achieve political power, but to India's national leaders, Islam and by implication, any religion based politics, was a divisive, anti-national phenomenon. In such a situation the only rational policy seemed to be to establish a secular state.

Nehru always criticised politics based on religion as a communalism. In his denunciation, he was more harsh towards the Hindus than the Muslims,

"He said that both Hindu and Muslim communalists were able to gain a measure of support from the public in the name of religion. But Muslim communal leaders conducted themselves with a measure of dignity before the Government and the public not so the Hindu leaders".⁹

Could Nehru's contempt for Hindu communalists be due to the fact that they have been less successful than the Muslims, or because,

"...Nehru, representing as he does the Islamicized, western trained universal aristocracy of Uttar Pradesh, had to discover the local cultural integrity of India's diverse regional life."¹⁰

The Muslim attitude towards the British has seldom been dignified. Maulana Shaukat Ali wrote an article in the Empire Review in 1931,

"...Rejecting any possibility of Hindu-Muslim co-operation, he appealed for Muslim-British friendship, 'we both need each other. We would grasp that hand and Islam would stand with Britain, a good and honourable friend, a brave fighter and a staunch ally'".¹¹

Again, in 1939, Jinnah suggested to the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow that to maintain the "equipoise between Muslim and Hindu votes" the British should stay in India.¹² With the wisdom of hindsight, it would seem that Nehru was over-generous towards Muslim communalism. Perhaps he lacked the 'equipoise' of the British, so much admired by Jinnah.

The drawback in Indian politics is to equate religious influence in politics with 'communalism' and condemn it as anti-national, divisive and even dangerous. It is not denied that a preponderant influence of religion in politics could be all that, but to fail to recognize its influence on the masses, especially in a country like India, is to ignore reality. A more realistic view would be

"Indians, with reason, generally take pride in having been able to establish a secular, parliamentary democracy, but the major cultural milieu is necessarily provided by Hinduism, albeit a Hinduism influenced through historical contact with Islam and Christianity, and modified more recently by the Gandhian experience".¹³

In other words, a secular state need not be defined primarily in terms of church state separation.¹⁴ Ashis Nandy's definition of secularism as the absence of ethnocentrism, xenophobia and fanaticism seems to be much broader and hence more acceptable.¹⁵

As Smith would remind us, church state separation is only one of the three vital relationships between the individual, the state and religion.

Since the concept of the modern secular state originated in the West, let us look at the constitutions of two European nations to see whenever religion is compatible with a modern democratic state.

"Although the present constitution [of Italy] grants to all religions equality before the law, it also ratifies the Lateran Treaty which recognizes Catholicism as the sole religion of the State".¹⁶

"Ireland in its constitution recognizes the special position of the Catholic Church, yet has successfully combined the recognition with its grant of freedom and equality to other religions".¹⁷

The founding fathers of the Indian Constitution are no strangers to the Constitution of Ireland. The Directive Principles in it is indebted to the Constitution of Eire.

"The idea of Directive Principles of state policy was taken from Eire, which in turn took it from the Constitution of Republican Spain. These preceding examples are significant. They came from countries whose peoples are predominantly Roman Catholic, and the Roman Catholics are provided by their Church not only with a faith, but also with a philosophy".¹⁸

So it seems as if there are no insurmountable difficulties in providing for the due recognition for Hinduism in the Indian Constitution, as the religion of eighty-five per cent of the population, without seriously infringing on its secular characteristics.

The recognition of the Hindu religion by the Constitution would also put to rest the controversies with regard to the participation in religious ceremonies in public and the chanting of Vedic hymns on such occasions. The participation of Sardar Patel in re-building the Somnath Temple, and President Rajendra Prasad's role in the consecration ceremony came under critical reference by some Muslims and Christians.

One Christian writer even found it ironical that the President should call for religious tolerance on the occasion. The critics' arguments were that the participation by such high dignitaries of state in religious functions in public would undermine the secular state. Most probably the irony was in the mind of the writer than in the situation.

Different Perceptions of Secularism

At this stage, we have to discuss two important issues about the secular state in India. Firstly, how secular is the state of India? Secondly, the perceptions of the secular state by the three major religious communities in India, namely, the Hindus, Muslims and the Christians are different. If questioned, probably most of the leaders of the three communities would agree that India is a secular state and it is desirable, and even imperative, that India continues to be a secular state. The unhappy experience of neighbouring countries which have adopted a state religion and their inability to solve the diverse ethnic, political, social and economic problems reinforces the view that the abandonment of secular ideas does not confer any special status or benefits to such states. That India has survived as a secular state for more than four decades proves the existence of such a consensus and the general support given to the idea by the Hindus, the majority community. Only when we come to the realm of its practical application divergences in perception among the different communities start to emerge.

The basic philosophy of Hinduism is based on tolerance of other faiths; this fact reinforces the basis of the secular state. As Smith has pointed out, of the five factors favourable to the secular state, Hinduism has four factors in its favour, while Islam only scores one point. Gandhi and Radhakrishnan contributed much to this school of thought, which emphasized the conviction that all religions are equally valid and equally partial paths to truth. The authority for this belief is found in the ancient Hindu scriptures such as the Upanishads which declares,

"As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee".¹⁹

Further, the doctrine of the chosen deity, although originally applied to the Hindu deities, could equally apply to other religions as well. As Gandhi succinctly puts it

"...we can only pray, if we are Hindus, not that a Christian should become a Hindu, or if we are Mussalmans, not that a Hindu or a Christian become a Musslman, nor should we even secretly pray that anyone should be converted, but our inmost prayer should be that a Hindu be a better Hindu, a Muslim be a better Muslim and a Christian be a better Christian".²⁰

As all paths lead ultimately to the truth, there could be no false religion and superior truth; hence Hinduism rejects proselytization as anathema to all seekers of truth. It is the assumed superiority and the denigration of other faiths by the missionary that arouses the hostility in an average Hindu. As Bishop Newbigin puts it,

"...for most well educated Hindus, the attempt to persuade a man to change his faith is something that arouses the deepest hostility and disgust".²¹

Does this mean Hinduism closes its door to all religious contacts and frank discussion on spiritual matters with the followers of all other religions? Hardly so. As Professor P J Mehta says,

"By all means discuss your faith with us, share your views and your experiences with us, but ...India would like to suggest that the true missionary is one who... helps the other to live his own faith more perfectly and not to forsake to the missionary's faith."²²

Such an attitude is in keeping with the letter and spirit of a secular constitution. To an enlightened Hindu, the legitimate propagation of religion means the sharing of spiritual experiences with no desire for proselytization.

However, it cannot be denied that Hinduism contains certain elements which militate against the concept of a secular state. It is an ethnic religion, the faith of one particular people. As Hindu extremists such as the members of the R.S.S. often point out, the Hindus have only one homeland - India.

"As has been illustrated by Judaism in modern Israel, an ethnic religion may easily become closely identified with nationalism and a national culture. The promotion of national ideas by the state thus tends to become the promotion of religion. This poses a more subtle challenge to the secular state".²³

This negative factor is enhanced by the fact that Hindu extremists tend to equate Indian culture and nationalism with a purely Hindu nation and Hindu culture, and by encouraging the other communities to return to the Hindu fold.

Self-perception of Muslims

In a heterogeneous society like India, the success of a secular state depends on all communities accepting a common nationality, ie. submerging their communal identity and interests when national interests are involved. Moreover, when a community feels its interests are involved, it should find a solution within the national context and within the democratic framework. To equate the interests of one community with national interests, as the Hindu extremists do, or to expect other Muslim nations to put pressure on the nation to concede Muslim demands, both negate the principle of secularism. In the case of the latter, not only the community would be suspected of anti-national sentiments, but it would also be considered as having extra-territorial loyalties. The Muslim fundamentalists are suspected on both counts.

The Hindu-Muslim antagonism has an historical antecedent. The granting of equality in law to the Hindus in the 18th century by the British was deeply resented by the Muslims. The basic assumption of Islamic law was the distinction between the Muslim and the infidel. A common nationality with common rights and duties is unacceptable to a Muslim. As Azad observed,

"While the Hindus could revive their national identity on the basis of secular nationalism, this was not possible for the Muslims, who could define their collective identity only in terms of Islam".²⁴

This excessive obsession on the part of the Muslims based on religion and fear for their identity explains their negative approach to the idea of secularism. In the view of the Muslims, the world 'secular' itself is suspect. In the early years of the Constitution,

"the Urdu papers translated the word secular as 'ghayr mazhabi' and 'la dini'. 'Ghayr mazhabi' means something contrary to religious commandments, and 'la dini' is irreligious or atheistic".²⁵

The Muslim ethos does not permit the unreserved acceptance of a secular state. The state is either Dar-ul-Islam, an Islamic State, or Dar-ul-harb, the State of War. Some secular minded Muslims made a valiant attempt to relate the secular state to Islamic experience. The covenant between the Prophet and the Jews of Medina was cited as an example. Nationalist Muslims affirm that the secular Indian Constitution is a covenant between the non-Muslims and Muslims in India. Such an ingenuous explanation has not found favour with the general body of Muslims in India. To a true Muslim, what was relevant and acceptable was,

"to tolerate the above three communities (Jews, Christians and Sabians) as people of the Book (believers in the revealed scripture) but to disarm them and make their tributary - strictly speaking, the very existence of other communities was forbidden".²⁶

Nehru's agnosticism and the emphasis on a socialist pattern of society with the challenge of modernity have further alarmed the Muslim community, so that they sought security in isolating themselves from the mainstream of Indian life.²⁷

This mentality of separatism of the Muslims had two important negative results. Firstly, their attitude towards the secular state was based on suspicion and hostility, a hangover from the Muslim League, and Congress confrontation policy of the pre-partition period. Secondly, the leader of the Muslim community stressed their differences from the majority community. The strong reaction to the Wakf Act of 1954 is a typical example. Faruqi agrees that the amendment was an act of wisdom as the proper utilization of the income and the sanctity of the Muslim Law has been left untouched. It was mere suspicion against the majority community and

"the obstinacy of the Muslim and in regard to any steps that a Parliament with a non-Muslim majority might intend to take in legislating on Muslim affairs".²⁸

At this juncture it is relevant to ask, is the secular state acceptable to the Muslim minority and, if so, what is their concept of a secular state? Vajpeyi has an interesting point of view. After independence,

"In India secular nationalism was trying to stifle Communalism, while in Pakistan, State Communalism has successfully stamped out secularism. The Muslims in India expect the Hindus to be secular, while they will retain their personal laws and separate identity based on religion, but continue to enjoy full democratic rights. This basic contradiction affects the process of nation building based on nationalism and secularism".²⁹

This dichotomy in the Muslim political consciousness explains their attitude to the secular state.

The same obduracy prevailed when, in 1948, the Constituent Assembly was discussing the directive principles regarding a uniform civil code. The Muslim members demanded that Muslims be exempted from its provisions. Again, in 1954, the Muslim League agitated against the Special Marriage Act. In the political field, in 1948 the Muslim League members from Malabar demanded in the then Madras Legislative Assembly, that the Muslim majority areas in Malabar be joined together to form a 'Moplastan'. This aim was achieved much later, although in a limited way, by the creation of the Malappuram district in Kerala. The agitation for Urdu is another form of this attitude. Urdu is not the mother tongue of the Muslims in Kashmir, West Bengal, Kerala or Tamil Nadu. In other states it is spoken by a small majority living in widely scattered areas. It is obvious that unless the Muslims learn the regional language, they will not be able to earn a decent living. In addition, the obsession with Urdu will emphasise their separateness from the majority of the people. This will not be in the best interests of the Muslims themselves. In 1960, the Maharashtra Chief Minister, Y.B. Chavan, agreed to accept the importance of Urdu, but appealed to the Muslims to pay sufficient attention to Marathi, the regional language and the language of administration of the State and be partners in every activity of the State. Under the proposed Kazi Scheme, Marathi was to be the language of instruction in the primary and secondary schools, with Urdu as the second language. The Muslims rejected the scheme and demanded that Urdu be made the language of instruction for both primary and secondary education. This is a good example of the success of sectarian sentiments over not only political realism but plain common sense.

The same sectarian view is expressed by Maulana Syed Abdul Hasan Ali Nadri. To the Maulana even a single story from Hindu mythology in a Hindi Reader constitutes a cultural aggression against the Muslims, although the same book may include the Muslim festival of Id. Such views expressed in intemperate language are unlikely to create a favourable impression in the minds of the Hindus. To them the Muslims seemed to be demanding a veto in the choice of materials for text books.

Suspensions and antagonisms

The Muslim separate mentality owes its origin to the introduction of separate electorates in 1909 by the British under the Morely-Minto Reforms. It provided for separate Muslim electorates in most of the major provinces. In addition, the Muslims retained the right to vote in the general electorates. The British did not create the Hindu-Muslim communal problem, but did exploit it for their own purposes. Dr S. Radhakrishnan's view on the problem is worth quoting,

"Separate electorates intensified communal consciousness and created such an atmosphere of distrust and hostility as to arouse the demand for Pakistan".³⁰

However, Sir Percival Griffiths asserts,

"It is undoubtedly true that the real creators of the demand for Pakistan were the Congress High Command. If they had been prepared to abate their claims to be the sole spokesmen for India and tried to allay Muslim fears even slightly, Pakistan might never have come to birth".³¹

The Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1918 seems to be closer to the view of Radhakrishnan than that of Griffiths.

"Division by creeds and classes means the creation of political camps organized against each other, and teaches men to think as partisans and not as citizens... we regard any system of communal electorates, therefore, as a very serious hindrance to the development of the self-governing principle".³²

The Report envisaged a slower progress towards a common citizenship. This hope was never realized. It created a permanent cleavage between the Hindus and Muslims.

To some extent this attitude of separateness still dominates the thinking of a large number of Muslims in India.

The separateness felt by the Muslims in India was enhanced by the propagation of the two nation theory by Jinnah in the 1940s. The twin slogans, 'Islam in danger' and 'Pakistan an Islamic State' brought the frenzied mobs to the streets, as Ayesha Jalal puts it, "an unthinking mob, fired by blood lust, fear and greed". Wayne A. Wilcox's political assessment is very close to the truth,

"The direct action campaigns in Bengal and Punjab destroyed the coalitions of H.S. Suhrawardy and Khizr Hyat Khan. In their stead Mawlana Akram Khan and Kwaja Nazimuddin in Bengal and the Khan of Mamdot in Punjab were empowered with the writ of the national Muslim League. These campaigns between the Muslim elites were fought in the streets of Lahore and Calcutta between the Hindus and Muslims, thereby fostering the militant Muslim quality of the League appeal".³³

Secularism and co-operation between the Hindus and Muslims died a natural death. The Muslims in India and Pakistan have always nourished a ghetto complex, irrespective of the fact whether they were in a minority or a majority. In the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, the Hindu leader of the Pakistan National Congress asked for joint electorates and no special rights or privileges. He only asked, on behalf of the Hindus, opportunities for a broader participation in the national life. The Muslim League leaders rejected his appeal and insisted on separate electorates on the grounds that the Hindus really did not know how best to protect their own interests! The real reason is neither obscure nor far to seek. As Professor Keith Callard noted,

"Undoubtedly the orthodox religious tradition that Muslims and non-Muslims may live at peace within a single state but never can be merged into one community has a bearing on the majority attitude".³⁴

Under these circumstances it would be difficult for Muslims to accept secularism without reservation.

It has often been said, and justifiably so, that Nehru was more tolerant towards Muslim communalism than Hindu communalism. Perhaps he felt that Hindu communalists could camouflage their communalism and present their views as the demands of the people, the Muslims could only present their demands as of their community. The Congress Party itself, even at top leadership level, included a number of communal minded Hindus. Purashotamma Das Tandon who was elected president of the Congress, and who Nehru had to force out of office, was a good example. Hence Nehru had to be unequivocal in condemning Hindu communalism to cover his flanks.

Politics and Secularism

Two other factors are raised to justify Nehru's policy towards the Muslims. Firstly Kashmir's accession to India made it necessary for India to treat the Muslims 'fairly'. It has also been stated elsewhere that since India has a large Muslim minority, Kashmir's accession to India is justified. A good example of tautology! In my view India's policy towards Kashmir has never been consistent or morally strong. Once the division of India on a communal basis has been accepted, Pakistan's claim to Kashmir becomes logical. The best solution to the Kashmir problem, so far, has been offered by Chester Bowles who says,

"At that time (the early stage of the dispute) there was considerable indication that if the Azad-Kashmir area, then occupied by Pakistan troops, were given outright to Pakistan, and the Jammu and Ladakh areas, which are composed almost wholly of Hindus and Buddhists, given outright to India, it might have been possible to agree on a plebiscite confined to the valley of Kashmir itself".³⁵

Another reason advanced in favour of the above policy was to strengthen India's position as the leader of the Asian-Arab block. Smith quotes with approval King Saud's public tribute to Nehru as 'Rasul-al-Salam', the apostle of peace, much to the annoyance of Pakistan. No doubt such public tributes are extremely gratifying to politicians, but the fact remains that nations have only permanent interest not permanent friends.

"First the OIC [Organization of Islamic Conference] Secretary General's position. At the inaugural speech to a gathering of OIC countries in Jeddah to mark the 20th anniversary of the organization, Mr Hamid Al Gabid expressed 'full solidarity with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and our [speaking for OIC] support for the struggle waged by the Kashmir Muslim People for self-determination'".³⁶

It is obvious that it would be difficult for theocratic states to support a secular state, however, friendly they may be, when religious issues are involved.

What role have the religious minorities played in the development of the secular state in India? It is not denied that the Muslim minority has made important contributions to the development of Indian culture including religious reforms, e.g. the 'Bhakti Movement'. The contributions of Kabir and Dadu to the Bhakti movement in North India is significant. As far as the secular state is concerned there have been positive and negative factors. Akbar's contribution to the development of the state, built not on the community of religion but on citizenship, was a significant factor which created a national state as opposed to a theocratic state. Smith's argument that the pressure of the Muslim opinion inside and outside India made it unlikely that India would develop into a Hindu State was correct. But the rejection by the Muslims of the secular state and the creation of Pakistan have introduced a new situation. The insistence of the Muslims that they are a separate community is a negative factor. The view that,

"the Muslims and the Sikhs have little in their respective traditions which lends positive support to this concept of the state, they will strengthen Indian secularism chiefly by guarding the rights of their respective communities".³⁷

is at best a negative quality. Such a parochial attitude based on narrow self-interest is more likely to undermine the secular state. Hence the assertion that the minorities are the natural custodians of the secular state must be treated with strong reservations. A minority community which does not believe in secularism but merely supports it to preserve its narrow self-interests or due to sheer expediency, is likely to undermine the state from within. For the secular state to survive and progress, more positive contributions are required, not only from the majority community, but from the minority communities as well.

The position of certain national institutions should be examined in the light of the above proposition. The existence of the Benares Hindu University and the Aligarh Muslim University is a paradox. Such institutions promote sectarianism and not a national outlook. Fortunately there are no Christian or Buddhist Universities in the secular state of India. Bipan Chandra puts the case squarely thus,

"... the Aligarh College and the Aligarh University, which were from the 1870s to the 1940s the cradles of modern Muslim intelligentsia, included from the beginning a large component of religion. Religious content of the syllabi, religious conservatism and orthodoxy, were further strengthened in the first decade of the twentieth century as a result of conscious effort to come closer to the Ulama... the Hindu denominational colleges and the Benares Hindu University too, were hotbeds of obscurantism and communalism. Only most of the intellectuals among Hindus were not educated and trained there. Not so much that the Hindu middle classes as the modern intelligentsia was basically secular and democratic... the opposite was the case among Muslims".³⁸

The Aligarh Muslim University, by its very nature, seems to promote Muslim communalism. No doubt it has produced some Muslim national leaders, but its

orientation is towards communalism. One of the major demands of the Muslim community as listed by Theodore P. Wright, was "the maintenance of Aligarh Muslim University as a primarily Muslim Institution".

The Aligarh Muslim University Inquiry Committee in its report in 1961 stated,

"It should develop and emphasize the study of what we may describe as the contribution of the Muslim community to the complex matter of our national culture, and in fact to the world wide culture of humanity. That Islam has made very substantial and notable contributions to this heritage, both historically as well as currently in our age, is a patent truth which no-one with any pretensions to the study of the history of civilization will dare to deny. It is this living tradition, this dynamic force, which we should like to preserve and cherish in this University".³⁹

The committee went on to recommend the building of languages associated with Muslim culture, Arabic, Persian and Urdu, and a strong history department which would pay special attention to the contribution of Islam to Indian polity, philosophy and art. There is no doubt that Islam's contribution to Indian culture has been substantial. The tone and tenor of the report resemble a challenge rather than an objective academic assessment. The emphasis on languages associated with Muslim culture may heighten Islamic consciousness, if equal emphasis were not given to other aspects of Indian culture. Aligarh would be a national institution, not merely in name, but in fact also, if the non-Muslim basis of Indian civilization were also taught there.

Christianity and Secularism

Compared to Muslim ambivalence the Christian attitude seems to be more national. The only negative factor in Christian attitude is the claim for absolute right to proselytize. The zeal to win converts began with the arrival of Bishop Heber in the

early part of the 19th century. The following hymn of Bishop Heber is both amusing and instructive,

"From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strand
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand;
From many an ancient river,
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain".!40

In the Constituent Assembly itself, there was much controversy whether freedom of religion includes the right to propagate one's view and win converts. After much consideration the Assembly finally accepted the right to propagate one's religion. The controversy did not end there, as later some Hindu leaders denied that propagation included proselytization. Even among Christians there was a difference of opinion on the subject. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a Christian and a member of the Central Cabinet, said

"Conversion or the desire to impel other persons to change their faith has always savoured of an arrogance which must surely be against the doctrine of life for which Christ lived and died".41

However, Rajaiah D. Paul asserts,

"We dare not offer Christianity to the Indian people if we do not believe with all our soul and with all our strength that Christianity is not only nearer the truth than any other religion but is the Truth".42

The above theological view is at least based on sincere conviction. On the other hand, some Christian laymen like C.P. Mathew, made the issue frivolous by comparing religious conversion to political convictions.

The attitude of the Christians to the Indian national movement has been at best equivocal. A number of Christian leaders supported the national movement and even joined it, but others were opposed to it.

"The Syrian Christians welcomed British rule in India as rule by a Christian power and did not sympathise very much with the freedom struggle in the 1920s".⁴³

There were, however, some progressive nationalist leaders among the Christians. Dr S.K. Datta and Mr K.T. Paul represented the community at the London Round Table Conference in the 1930s and rejected the principle of separate electorates. Dr H.C. Mookerjee followed the same tradition by rejecting separate electorates in the Constituent Assembly in 1948.

The problem of conversion, however, continued to exercise the mind of the Christian community. The Hindu insistence that all religions are true and hence conversion is unnecessary is rejected by the Christians as intolerance based on rigidity. To them the freedom of religion includes proselytization and without it freedom of religion is a meaningless phrase. As observed by one writer,

"...the strange reaction of Christians (especially in missionary circles) to effect to uplift the Harijans within the Hindu fold and of course the subsequent safeguards provided for them in free India, detecting a strange disappointment 'for obvious reasons' that it would stop the flow of converts to Christian churches".⁴⁴

On the other hand, the contributions made by the Christian Missionaries to the establishment and management of educational, medical and social service institutions have been acknowledged from the highest authorities to the ordinary people. Another favourable factor was the establishment of autonomy of the Indian Churches and the transfer of all property in India to them. Moreover, most missionaries regard themselves, and are regarded as, fraternal workers in a sense which upholds the dignity

and equality of the Indian Church. Such an attitude has created a favourable impression in the minds of all people that Christians and Christian Churches are no longer regarded as 'foreign'. In 1953, Valerin, Cardinal Gracias, was felicitated by the Governor of Bombay on his elevation, who said that the whole country shared in the Catholic community's joy and pride. In 1955 at the St. Thomas Day celebration in New Delhi, President Rajendra Prasad took pride in the fact that the Apostle St. Thomas came to India to spread the gospel when Christianity was in its incipient state in Europe. Such shared experiences could not but have a favourable impression in the minds of all the people. It is also gratifying to many that the President of India could participate in such non-secular functions without breaching the security of the sacrosanct secular state.

The Congress Party and Hinduism as a factor in Indian politics

The inconsistent attitude of Nehru on religious matters has often created confusion in the minds of people with regard to the nature of the secular state.

"Nehru has not only tolerated but also participated in religious ceremonies of non-Hindus. In 1949 he received the sacred relics of Sariputta and Mogallana from the British Government".⁴⁵

Similarly, in 1956, the 2500th death anniversary of Buddha was celebrated on a grand scale under official auspices as a day of 'cultural significance'. It was an exercise in diplomacy and public relations to win the approval of the Buddhist nations, camouflaged as a cultural event. It exposed the inconsistency of the Nehru government in its pursuit of the ideals of a secular state.

"The government could afford to display a lively interest in a religion which was professed by such a tiny minority within India. It could not do anything comparable in the case of a Hindu religious event, regardless of its cultural significance, without fostering the suspicion that it was promoting the majority religion".⁴⁶

It is not only for its inconsistency but also for its attempt to downgrade the Hindu religion that the Nehru government should be faulted. In the pursuit of its version of secularism it was not even true to its antecedents. The Congress Party which was the party of the urban middle classes representing a microscopic minority, was made to a mass based political party in the 1920s, by Mahatma Gandhi. He always evoked past glories of the Hindus to present political realities.

"He said 'swaraj' means 'Ram Raj'. Gandhi re-christened India 'Bharat Mata', a name that evoked nostalgic memories, and associated with 'Gao Mata', the Mother Cow... Gradually a new picture began to build in our mind, of India coming out of 'Kalyug' (age of unrighteousness) into a new era of freedom and plenty, 'Ram Rajya'".⁴⁷

As a political strategist Gandhi found that it was essential to make the masses identify themselves with the political process before any serious attempt could be made to attain independence. He shrewdly guessed that the masses, predominantly Hindu, illiterate and rural, would readily respond to Hindu religious slogans and symbols.

"The whole of Gandhi's life is a fascinating study in the art of influencing the masses and judging the success he has achieved in his mysterious domain, he must be accounted as one of the greatest artists in leadership of all time. He has a genius for acting through symbols which all can understand. Fasting as a means of moral pressure and purification is part of the fabric of Hindu life".⁴⁸

I doubt whether anyone would accuse Gandhi of being a communalist for using Hindu religious symbols for political ends. The Congress party had, during the struggle for independence, found no difficulty in accepting its importance; as Gandhi has demonstrated, one of the few channels of communication which existed between cities and the countryside in India is religion. It is not denied that this policy has created some confusion in the minds of the minorities, especially the Muslims, but its importance remains. It is obvious that the Congress Party was able to dominate Indian

politics for more than a generation due to Gandhi's great influences. but it would be an exaggeration to suggest,

"The Indian National Congress obtained strong support from the Hindu villagers, but it was a quasi-religious movement dependent on the emotional appeal of Mahatma Gandhi".⁴⁹

Gandhi's influence on the national movement has been profound as well as positive. Perhaps he represented the best in Hindu culture, its catholicity and tolerance. As Jinnah, his life-long opponent, remarked,

"He was one of the greatest men produced by the Hindu community".

Since Hinduism with Gandhi as its exponent has made a positive contribution to Indian nationalism, it would have been wiser to have accepted its moral principles and accommodated its values within the structure of the secular state. Otherwise it may assume anti-national characteristics and be channelled into extra-parliamentary activities, and even along the path of anti-democratic movements. As even a critic like V.S. Naipaul admits,

"The key Hindu concept of Dharma, the right way, the sanctioned way which all men must follow, according to their natures is an elastic concept. At its noblest, it combines self-fulfilment and truth to the self with the idea of action as duty, action as its own spiritual reward, man as a holy vessel. And it ceases then to be mysterious; it touches the high ideas of other civilizations".⁵⁰

There is another factor, the importance of which should not be underestimated. This is the dominant position of the Hindu electorate in the Hindu belt in North India. The Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan syndrome operates effectively from the states of Haryana to Bihar. The slogans for a 'Hindu Rashtra', and 'Hindutva' find a ready response in the hearts and minds of the people. Perhaps it is also a form of reaction to the Muslim claim of Uttar Pradesh being the centre of Islamic culture and the Urdu language. The

Hindus in the northern states with some pride, consider themselves to be typical Indians. In addition the Indian Constitution itself seems to give them a dominant position.

"...a Constitution which vests control in the Hindus of the north, and provides no adequate protection for the minorities".⁵¹

Secularism and State Institutions

In view of the overwhelming number of Hindus among the population in India some consideration is given by the All India Radio. A large number of radio stations broadcast Hindu devotional songs. D.E. Smith's comment is significant,

"Some Secularists object to Hindu devotional songs being played on the All India Radio will compromise state secularism. Gregorian chants and Negro spirituals may be listened to by Western audiences for their musical form. On the other hand Hindu audience would be aroused by the religious theme".⁵²

If Smith is to be taken seriously, in a secular state devotional songs should neither be broadcast nor listened to with devotion. Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, secularism is in the ear of the listener. Such over-sensitivity or perhaps more correctly the lack of sensitivity on the part of the secularists will create in the minds of religious people, that the secular state is a godless state and secularism is an anti-religious ideology. Such criticisms are, to say the least, extremely unhelpful in securing the support of the majority community for the secular state.

Moreover, such an attitude creates in the mind of the community the suspicion that the secularists are manipulating society to impose their anti-religious ideas in the name of modernization,

"...the minorities face the prospect of being Westernized as in a western nation state. However, in the second case, the situation is

morally 'redeemed' by the fact that what is in store for the ethnic minorities in the long run is no different from what is in store for the ethnic majority in the long run. Both become objects of social engineering and both face cultural extinction".⁵³

The Sikh Perception

The secular state not only failed to contain the widening gulf between the Hindus and Muslims but was also unable to prevent the rise of Sikh communalism which has been dormant for some time. The close social and religious contact between the Hindus and Sikhs and the common hostility to Muslim communalism submerged their mutual suspicion. There was close affinity between the Hindus and Sikhs as both opposed the Mughals. Guru Gobind Singh said that his father had died to protect the frontal marks and the sacred threads of the Hindus. Among the Hindu pantheon was included Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth guru of the Sikhs. For a long time the Sikhs were considered to be the "Sword arm of the Hindus". The Indian Constitution states,

"the reference to Hindus shall be constructed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion..."

Nobody took notice of this factor until Sikh revivalists took this as a threat to their identity.

Sikh revivalism took a political form in the Punjabi Subha movement in the 1960s. The aim of the Sikh revivalists was a Sikh majority state in the guise of the Punjabi state. The slogan for the achievement of the political aim was "the panth in danger". Increasingly Sikh revivalism took the form of terrorism to gain political advantages camouflaged as the survival of, and the maintenance of, the separate identity of the Sikhs. According to Sikh tradition there is no separation between spiritual and temporal authority.

"For two years prior to the June assault by the Indian military on the Golden Temple, the Akal Takht served as headquarters for Bhindranwale as his major fortification. Religion and politics were intertwined."⁵⁴

India, a Weak Secular State?

The failure of the Indian government in dealing with the problems of religion in State and society are many. Inconsistencies and contradictions created confusion in the minds of the secularists and non-secularists. The secular state was imposed on a religion-based society. The hope that society will in due course follow the dictates of state has not been realized. On the other hand it looks as if the state may be influenced by non-secular and even by communal elements. A fresh look into the problem is needed. Perhaps a sincere attempt to accommodate religious principles within the framework of a secular democratic state would be a step in the right direction.

Why was the secular state established soon after independence? The Indian National Congress which represented the national movement was non-sectarian and non-communal from its very inception. In spite of setbacks and occasionally lapses it was true to its secular ideology. The failure was of leadership not of ideology. It was to the credit of its national leadership that in spite of the creation of Pakistan it stood firm in its secular ideology, when the pre-eminence of economics over communal loyalties and the permanent dominance of secular based national parties were being questioned seriously. However, it is to the credit of the Indian nation state that secularism and democracy have survived in India, while the neighbouring countries discarded them. But the resilience of the secular and democratic institutions in India cannot be taken for granted. Its roots are not as wide and deep as its protagonists would like us to be believed. The secular state has failed to make society more secular and less religious. Arguably secular institutions such as political parties have become susceptible to religious and caste based influences. If anything the past four decades

after independence have exposed its weaknesses and limitations. The increase in communal riots is a symptom of these weaknesses. Its survival in the past is no guarantee for its survival in the future.

In the next chapter, I propose to examine the origin and development of the secular ideology in the West and the contribution made by Christianity, especially Protestantism, to the development of the secular state and to what extent it could be successfully applied to Indian conditions.

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Chapter 3

SECULARISM, STATE AND SOCIETY

It has been generally accepted that India is a secular state. The expression 'Socialist' and 'Secular' were included in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution only in 1976, but no doubt the idea was present and it was generally accepted by the national leaders that India was to be a secular state. That is, a state which treats all religions with respect and on an equal basis. Professor Moin Shakir's view is that India followed the principle of secularism even before 1976. His conviction that the founding fathers of the Constitution believed in the ideal of secularism and had defeated the notion of theocracy or a communal state could be accepted without reservation. Although the founding fathers of the Constitution have avoided a definition, it was assumed that what proved to be elusive and defied definition to the leaders of the independence era would be accepted by all without question. In the age of Nehru it was almost a sacrilege to question the validity of secularism as a state ideology. It was an article of faith to the secularists who ranged from confirmed Marxists and atheists to right wing intellectuals. The economic policies of the state were questioned, strong reservation was even expressed with regard to the implementation of secular policies but secularism as such was elevated to the level of a state ideology beyond the realm of doubt and deviation. Nehru was the high priest of this ideology and to question his decision was to question the basis of the state and undermine its legitimacy. There was criticism, but it was muted; to do otherwise was to invite being branded as a communalist or worse.

There seems to be a dichotomy in the policy adopted by the secular leadership in India towards communal issues. While the communalism of the Hindus was rightly condemned, the communalism of the minority communities was not condemned and even surreptitiously rewarded on the plea of minority rights, cultural identity or

linguistic cohesion. In the process the meaning of the word 'secularism' itself was distorted and its implementation as state policy created apprehension if not cynicism in the mind of an average citizen.

The wrath of the secularists fell mainly on the Hindu 'communal' parties such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. They were held responsible for the assassination of Gandhi, and for subscribing to fascist ideology and thus wanting to establish a Hindu fascist state. The echo of this criticism has been transmitted to the present generation. Bipan Chandra says,

"the logic of majority communalism is fascism, the logic of minority communalism is separatism".¹

Minority communalism was treated with a certain degree of circumspection. The Muslim League members' demand for a 'Moplastan' in the then Madras Legislative Assembly received less severe handling. It came to fruition in 1969 as 'Malappuram District' as a reward to the Muslim League for its support for the United Front Ministry under the veteran Marxist E.M.S. Namboodiripad and was denounced by its opponents as

"the illegitimate child of the old Two Nation Theory".²

Similarly the agitation of the Sikhs for a Punjabi speaking state was crowned with success.

"Thus the formation of the Punjabi Suba - a Punjabi speaking state in form but a Sikh state in substance was largely the result of the mobilization by the Akali Dal. This was a great political victory for the refugees who were already experiencing tremendous economic prosperity".³

The European Origin of Secularism

Since the ideology of secularism originated in the west and has gained wide currency there it would be to our advantage to trace its historicity and present day application. The western nation states were the product of Western Civilization. The two principal strands of it were the Graeco-Roman Civilization and Christianity. The secular authority was represented by the Holy Roman Emperor while the sacerdotium was represented by the Pope. The demarcation of authority was by no means complete. The Pope himself was a territorial chief and the Emperor often tried to influence the papacy. As Lindsay puts it in the Middle Ages there was a long dispute between Church and State for supremacy. It was agreed that both have a sphere of influence, but their respective spheres of influence were subject to dispute. Christians were aware of their dual loyalties, to Caesar and to God. Their doubt was where the boundary of one ended and that of the other began.⁴ The demarcation line between the sacred and the secular was often blurred but its existence was accepted.

The doctrine of the Holy Roman Empire and the rise of the modern states of England and France led to the rejection of plurality and the assertion of sovereignty over morality. The modern state rejected the premise that the basis of state was morality and both Church and State shared a common moral authority because they led to Papal absolutism. By rejecting Papal absolutism along with morality led to the establishment of the Absolute Monarch in the modern state.⁵

This denial of papal authority was the beginning of the 'secularization' of the state. However, this autocracy was gradually undermined by the rising capitalism which demanded laissez faire, modern science based on rationality and the reformation based on individualism. The development reached full circle with the establishment of the modern democratic state. Lindsay suggests that,

"We shall understand better the defects of twentieth-century democracy and the power behind the totalitarian rejection of it, if we understand the facts which produced the secularization of the state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When we see that the modern democratic state restored in a new form the values which the absolutist state had repudiated, we may take heart and be confident that these values will be universally restored again".⁶

The Liberal Model

Having accepted the fact that the idea of a secular state is western in concept and origin we can move on to its details. There are two concepts of secularism of western origin. The first is the liberal democratic tradition of the west which is generally expressed as the separation of the church and state. The second is the Marxian Communist tradition which is based on active hostility to the idea of religion. For our purpose we shall accept the definition of the liberal democratic tradition. The secularism of the liberal democratic state allows an individual complete freedom of religion. A citizen may believe in and practise any religion of his choice subject to public order and morality. He may propagate his religion or change his religion at will. The Indian Constitution guarantees the right of propagation of religion, but a controversy exists whether propagation includes proselytization. The basis of a secular state is,

"simply that religion and the state function are two basically different areas of human activity, each with its own objectives and methods. It is not the function of the state to promote, regulate, direct, or otherwise interfere in religion. Similarly, political power is outside the scope of religious legitimate aims. The democratic state derives its authority from a secular source ("the consent of the governed")."⁷

Although considered to be ideal the complete separation of church and state was never achieved in the west. The United States is the best example of a modern secular state. In the words of Thomas Jefferson,

"I contemplate with sovereign reverence the Act of the American people which declared that their legislature should make no law 'respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof thus building a "wall of separation" between the church and the state".⁸

Nevertheless the wall of separation is not absolute. Protestant, Catholic and Jewish chaplains are appointed in the armed forces, tax exemptions are granted to churches and synagogues and the opening of state and national and state legislative sessions are preceded by prayer. In England the Anglican church is the established church, and church properties and endowments are protected by the state. But the United Kingdom is considered to be a secular state based on liberal democratic ideas by Nehru who ruefully looked at India where secularism is established as principle but not understood or accepted by the people who tend to equate the secular state with an irreligious state. In France the separation of church and state came into effect in 1905. All state subsidies to the church were withdrawn, and the public schools were completely secularized. A number of European countries followed suit.

The Indian Experience

However, it must be emphasized that by merely separating the church and state a secular state does not come into existence. As in the Soviet Union complete suppression of religious freedom may be the result. On the other hand an established church need not hinder religious tolerance. England is a good example of religious freedom and the democratic ideal. India's experience is unique. The separation of church and state was deliberate and the declaration of a secular state is closer to the

American experience. The choice was the intentional policy of the Indian National Congress since its inception. There was no Asian precedent other than the Turkish Republic established by Kemal Attaturk where secularism was imposed by a fiat of the dictator. Whatever the argument, India is an old society originating in antiquity with a deep religious base, while the state based on secularism is a modern innovation imposed from above by a coterie of westernized individuals who hoped to shape state and society in their own image. Many problems lay ahead which were neither envisaged nor thought about seriously.

It is obvious that secularism is the strict demarcation between the spheres of influence of religion and politics, however the clear cut distinction between the regnum and sacerdotium, is alien to the Indian ethos. But this is not to deny that elements of tolerance, understanding and mutual accommodation has always existed in Indian society. As Smith puts it,

"The secular state is, in origin, a Western and not an Asian conception. This is not to deny the obvious fact that certain elements of the secular state, as we have defined it, have a long tradition in Asia. Individual freedom of religion, for example, has strong roots in the Hindu and Buddhist countries. But other elements of conception have been totally lacking".⁹

In the Indian tradition the state has always been the patron and protector of religion.

"Even kings, whose role in life is closely bound with material activities and considerations, are asked to observe and enforce dharma; they are considered merely regents and executors of dharma. A king who follows the injunctions of dharma is called a royal sage".¹⁰

It was the king's duty to protect dharma, and dharma in Hindu philosophy has a religious basis. The same principle applies to Buddhist and later Muslim rulers. No distinction was made between one religion and another. The policy was based on

"Sarvadharmā Sadbhava", goodwill towards all religion rather than "Dharma Nirapekshata" or religious neutrality. In the Indian context an autonomous self-regulating church does not exist to be separated from the state. To quote Madan,

"We do not, of course, have a wall of separation in India, for there is no church to wall off, but only the notion of neutrality or equidistance between the state and the religious identity of the people."¹¹

In the Hindu concept of state, the secular and the religious were brought together. The religion gave legitimacy to the secular. This dyarchy or complementary was the basis of Hindu society. The name "purohita" given to the chaplain is significant. In the hierarchical relationship the sacred takes precedence over the secular. As Madan puts in succinctly,

"The discrete realms of interest and power (artha) are opposed to and yet encompassed by dharma".¹²

The King not only built temples and endowed them with wealth but used his authority as patron and benefactor of religious institutions to enhance his temporal power.

"He was the final arbiter in all matters concerning caste regulations, carrying out the sanctions prescribed by the ancient texts where violations occurred. A Brahman royal chaplain advised the king and performed the sacred ceremonies deemed essential for the success of his rule."¹³

The Buddhist Kings built and endowed pagodas and shrines and protected Buddhism. He protected the monastic order, suppressed hearsay and revived religious interest. He intervened in the affairs of the monastic order to enforce discipline and eradicate corruption. In return the Buddhist monks supported royal authority and gave it prestige and legitimacy.

"In Burma, royal patronage of Buddhism was the most important basis for the loyalty of the diverse ethnic groups to the king".¹⁴

Muslim rulers jealously promoted Islam by building mosques and gave extensive grants to individuals and institutions to promote the study of theology and Islamic law, suppress heresy and promote proselytization. The rulers often enforced the observation of Islamic tenets among their subjects. Muslim ulemas often served as his advisers and had great influence over spiritual as well as temporal policies of the state.

Religious Tolerance and Secularism

In the South Asian context religions have played a positive as well as a negative role. While the elements of tolerance and accommodation could reinforce the secular concept of the state, the history of state protection of religion could undermine secularism,

"This excursion into South Asia's major religious traditions was important for me to make the point that the search for secular elements in the cultural traditions in this region is a futile exercise, for it is not these but an ideology of secularism that is absent and is resisted".¹⁵

The modern Indian State came into existence in 1947 and in 1951 it was declared to be a secular democratic Republic. Significantly the term secular was not clarified or even defined. It was an assumption that it has nothing to do with religion and will keep its distance from all religions. The negative defensive policy of religious neutrality was institutionalized in the "secular state". But the paradox of an old religious society and a new irreligious state remained in an uneasy coalition.

"... it is often forgotten that while Indian Society has an uninterrupted history dating back 5,000 years, the Indian State is just over 40 years old."¹⁶

It was only in 1976 the word "Secular" was introduced into the Constitution by a Constitutional amendment. But its claims were no longer undisputed. Madan would consider it no more than an inadequately defined attitude. Those who are uncharitable would consider it no more than the affectation of the thin upper crust of the westernized middle class. Whatever it may be, it has become part of the political idiom of the Indian ruling class.

Perhaps a few definitions from the Indian point of view would not be out of place. Ashis Nandy offers two definitions.

"According to the first, religious tolerance could come only from the devaluation of religion in public life and from the freeing of politics from religion. The less politics is contaminated by religion, this argument goes, the more secular or tolerant a state you will have. The word "secular" here is the opposite of the word "sacred".

"According to the second meaning 'secularism' is not the opposite of the word 'Sacred' but that of 'ethnocentrism', 'xenophobia' and fanaticism. One could be a good secularist by being equally disrespectful towards all religions or by being equally respectful towards them. And true secularism, the second meaning insists, must opt for respect."¹⁷

It was this second meaning and its political dynamism which gave the Indian national movement its mass base and momentum. But the modern Indian State was based on the ideology which was closer to the first definition of secularism.

The Secularism of Gandhi and Nehru

There is a vital difference between the secularism of Gandhi and that of Nehru. As Susanne H. Rudolph puts it,

"Nehru's secularism was based on the premise that religious influence on society is negative and its influence will recede with scientific thinking and economic development. Gandhi's view was that all religions are true and they give meaning to the moral life."¹⁸

The secular state which came into existence was closer to Nehru's negative and defensive 'religious neutrality' than to Gandhi's 'good will towards all religions'. Meanwhile the basic contradiction of a highly religious society and a non-religious and in the view of some an anti-religious state existed in what we may call an uneasy co-existence. The doubts about the secular state were considered to be insignificant or irrelevant by the secularists who assumed the mantle of superiority and considered themselves to be patriots, modernists, nationalists and rationalists.

The Communal Perceptions

Indian Secularism has always been fragile. The exogenously inspired secular state alienated from the roots of Indian religions tradition was weak and its political legitimacy doubtful. In the early days of independence the dominant influence was that of Nehru. His commitment to secularism, socialism and democracy was total, but in their practical implementation he was equivocal, especially in the case of secularism. In his condemnation of Hindu communalism he was strong and direct. He never hesitated to describe the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh as fascist. But he never used such words to describe the equally communal Muslim League. Nehru's position seems to be that the Hindus as the majority community are in a privileged position and should be unconditionally generous to the Muslims. As S. Gopal mentions, it looks as if the Muslims have the right to be communal. Such an approach did not reduce communalism among the Muslims, in fact in 1948 the Muslim League

members in Madras demanded a 'Moplastan' in Malabar. Moreover, the Congress party's opportunistic alliance with the Muslim League in Kerala, with the Dravida Kazhakam in Madras and with the Shiromoni Akali Dal in the Punjab for electoral purposes diluted its commitment to secularism.

Article 44 in the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution states,

"The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India".

For all practical purpose it remains a dead letter. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 was opposed by the Muslim League on the grounds that it violated the Shariat, the personal law of the Muslims. Nehru's view that the Act will be the first step towards bringing about uniformity in social observances was belied in practice. Criticizing the orthodox opposition of the Hindu Code Bill Imtiaz Ahmad says

"He [Nehru] had to make important compromises with and concessions to orthodox opinion. For instance, Nehru hoped to pass the Hindu Code Bill in a single session of the Constituent Assembly. It took him nearly six years to pass the two important measures giving Hindu women equal rights with men in inheritance, succession and holding of property, establishing monogamy, and providing for divorce."¹⁹

By introducing the legislation in parts spread throughout the years Nehru outmanoeuvred and outflanked Hindu communal opposition.

"In the course of the long debate on the bills, the Congress ran out of steam and abandoned attempts to draw up a uniform civil code for the country".²⁰

Perhaps it would be more correct to say that Nehru did not have the political will to push through a bill opposed by Muslim orthodoxy. This policy was a set back for Nehru's advocacy for a secular state.

"Not only the Hindu Bigamous Marriage Act, but the whole system of Hindu and Muslim personal law is contrary to Article 15(1). It is only when there is a Uniform Civil Code that the court will be able to afford the luxury of a natural and straight forward interpretation of this fundamental constitutional principle of the secular state".²¹

What makes the secular state hesitate to tackle with vigour the problem of minority communalism and interfere effectively by introducing social legislation to reform affecting minority communities? It is a paradox which undermines the secular claims of the state when,

"The Indian State pursues a policy of dualism with regard to religion. In the case of the religion of Indian origin, particularly the majority religion (Hinduism), the State intervenes as reformer, whereas it pursues a policy of expedient retreatism in the case of minority religions".²²

This policy indicates the failure of the state to implement its secular policies. Obviously it is not 'wisdom that hinders' as Nehru puts it, but political expediency. The claim that the State does not have the moral authority to intervene as a moral reformer in the case of the Muslims is political sophistry intended to camouflage the lack of political will. The legitimacy of the modern state is based on the consent of the majority of its citizens. A modern state does not compartmentalize its citizens according to their race or religion.

"Therefore, the legal right and moral authority of the state to intervene as a reformer in the case of all religions needs to be squarely recognized."²³

Limitations in state policies

What hinders is not wisdom but the three political constraints. Firstly the presence of Muslim states as neighbours who will be highly critical of any attempt at reform viewing it as a suppression of minority rights. Secondly the need to maintain India as a tolerant state in the view of other states especially the Muslim states and thirdly electoral considerations and the perception of Muslims as a vote bank. In addition there is a danger of those attempting reforms being labelled as communalists. Mahatma Gandhi narrowly missed being called a communalist because he used Hindu religious idioms and symbols during his leadership of the national movement.

"It is not my intention to suggest that Gandhi was a communalist. In fact, his religious faith was different from that of the earlier extremists like Tilak, and, while his approach to politics was basically traditionalistic, he broadened the nationalism of the Congress to include the Muslims."²⁴

However, Sardar Patel fared less well at the hands of the Muslim leaders. His credentials as a secularist were questioned; Imtiaz Ahmad says,

"represented militant ... Hindu feelings of solidarity, rather than secular nationalism."²⁵

Similarly Sardar Patel's part in re-building the Somnath temple destroyed and desecrated by Muslim invaders in the 11th Century was taken as proof of his religiosity.

"For him, as for many others, this project symbolised the repudiation of over a thousand years of Muslim domination in India and the restoration of Hindu supremacy".²⁶

But the real Patel was a different man. In the Constituent Assembly debate he threw his great prestige behind the Christians who wanted to include propagation of religion

as part of religious freedom. Again he supported the Christian contention that if the parents were converted the children should be allowed to be brought up according to their parents' faith. The above examples indicate the conflicting perceptions of a secular state by the different communities and how their views could colour their views of the various personalities involved in nation building.

Proselytization and Secularism

The controversy regarding proselytization and the privileges to be granted to the converted continued to bedevil the relationship between the 'secular' state and 'communal' society. T.K. Oommen argues,

"Eighty to ninety per cent of Christians, Neo-Buddhists and the majority of Muslims in India are converts from the lowest caste category. They were traditionally poor and oppressed and continue to be so in spite of the fact that they have converted to other religions. Many communal mobilizations are essentially efforts to improve the material condition of the people who belong these categories. If a schedule caste person converts to Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, the state takes him/her away from the umbrella of protective discrimination. But it is inevitable that people will continue to protest and mobilize to get from the state the benefits they think are due to them; benefits which are denied to them through a definitional shift."²⁷

This is a good example of solecism based on sophistry. The special concessions to the scheduled castes and others were not based entirely on economic considerations. Caste disability was supposed to be an exclusive Hindu phenomenon. These privileges were extended to those professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion because the Constitution includes them under the category of Hindus not because of their Indian origin of these religions. One of the major arguments of the protagonists of proselytization was the oppression and discrimination practised by Hinduism forcing the deprived and dispossessed to find salvation in egalitarian religions such as

Islam and Christianity. If the same discrimination continues in the new faith, conversion is a futile exercise. To that extent Oommen admits that the foreign religions have become Indianized.

".... the scheduled caste converts continue to be the victims of untouchability, not only at the hands of caste Hindus but also of their co-religionists who trace their social origins to clean castes".²⁸

The mass conversion of Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu in 1976 seems to have exercised the mind and soul of some minority community leaders. The reaction seems to confirm their worst fears that neither the constitutional guarantee of protection for the propagation of religion nor the general tolerance of the Hindu population is effective enough to grant them their full rights on religion. Oommen writes,

"In contrast when a few hundred persons converted to Islam in Meenakshipuram or to Christianity in Nagercoil (both in Tamil Nadu) not only did the Arya Samaj and/or the Vishwa Hindu Parishad immediately intervene with the Shuddhi ceremony but the collective conscience of the nation seemed to be profusely bleeding too. It is clear then in Hinduism, that in the cognitive map and in the behavioural orientation of the Hindu majority, the big divide between religion of Indian and alien origin persists."²⁹

Facts are, however, not as simple as that. The aim of the Jamia-Islamia preaches the doctrine that a true Muslim society could exist only in an Islamic State and would like to achieve the aim in India by mass conversion. Such an attitude would be against the secularism and pluralism advocated by Oommen. Proselytization is a doubtful method of spreading spirituality. It is an arrogant assumption of the superiority of a particular faith.

"As Sir Hermann Bondi puts in, "How anyone can have the arrogance to think that their own belief is right and anybody who thinks differently is wrong passes my comprehension."³⁰

What is proselytization to one group is apostacy to the other. The Rama Simhan murder case in Malabar in 1947 and the Sabarimala Arson case in 1948 in Travancore point out the danger of religious fanaticism getting out of hand. In the first case Rama Simhan, along with his brother were converted to Hinduism by the Arya Samaj for which he was murdered by Muslim fanatics. The Sabarimala Temple was well known for its religious syncretism and absence of caste taboos. Some Christian fanatics feared that their attempts to save the souls of Harijans were being impeded by the Harijans becoming devotees of the deity Ayyappa. So the temple which was situated in the midst of a jungle which and was only open during a certain period of the year, was burnt down. As the discovery of the crime took some time, most of the evidence was already destroyed. There was investigation but no prosecution.

There does not seem to be much change in the 'communal' attitude of different sections of the Indian society. If any, communal and caste identities have been reinforced and re-interpreted in terms of political idioms and ideological contents. In pre-independence days the Muslims responded with religious frenzy Jinnah's call to arms and direct action.

Dormant Communalism

Such psychosis of the mob does not get changed. 'Hindu Raj' and 'Hindu Imperialism' are still part of Muslim psychology and vocabulary even if at present it emanates from Pakistan. Why did the Muslims overwhelmingly support Pakistan, but prefer to stay in India? It is not a paradox, but a shrewd move based on economic and political considerations. Imitaz Ahmad writes,

"Many of the Indian Muslims were in government or private jobs and leaving for Pakistan could involve loss of the advantages of seniority, provident fund and pension. The main source of income for the upper and middle class Muslim in North India had been jagirdari and

Zamindari; if these Muslims left for Pakistan they were liable to lose their title to the land. In this situation, the choice of a large number of Muslims was the basis of pragmatic considerations".³¹

It is worth reiterating to bring out the contrast between India and Pakistan that,

"... the Hindus and Sikhs wanted to stay on [in Pakistan] but it was the political situation which forced them to flee to India. In India on the other hand, the presence of a secular leadership, more significantly Nehru gave the Muslims assurance that their lives and personal property will be protected".³²

What was true of the Muslims, was equally true for the Sikhs.

"The gurudwara movement was an effort to purify Sikhs of Hindu accretion. As the movement gained strength came partition and the Muslim onslaught on Sikhs. Understandably they turned to Hindus and India for safety. But once the problems thrown up by partition were over the Sikhs wanted to be recognized as a specific religious community the core carriers of Sikh religious tradition are the Keshdari Jat Sikh peasantry, a substantial portion of whom had faced atrocities at the time of partition".³³

Political and religious opportunists seem to play a major role in Indian politics. The consolidation of the Sikhs in the Punjab and their position as a minority community seem to give the Sikhs extra political clout. The agitation of the Akali Dal for a Sikh Subha, a Punjabi speaking state, succeeded. Now the demand is for an independent Khalistan or Sikh State. A religious identity merged with a territorial identity gave rise to a demand for separatism. A classical case for a religious group to be recognized as a nationality. The religious ghost of Pakistan still haunts the amorphous secularism of India. Indian secularism is still in an amorphous state, it has not taken a concrete shape. It is more of a state policy than a state ideology and as such has an insecure foundation. Unless it is clearly defined and promoted as a state and ideology and a reference point to all political action, its future will be doubtful.

Now we turn to the Hindu section of Indian society and its communal orientation. It is an accepted fact that there have always been communal elements in the right wing of the Congress party. Sardar Patel was assumed to be sympathetic to this group. In the early days of independence Nehru himself was challenged by this group. Purushottama Das Tandon's was the last and most serious challenge to Nehru. With the defeat of Tandon the group became demoralised and dormant. The method used by the Hindu lobby may be described as camouflaged communalism. The attempt to press the ban on cow slaughter is a good example. They referred to the Directive Principles in the Constitution which states in Article 48 that,

"The State shall endeavour ... and shall in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds ... and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle."

Nehru adroitly evaded the religious implications and opposed it on procedural grounds and then on economic grounds. A typical example of camouflaged secularism resisting camouflaged communalism. Similarly his defence of the Hindu Code Bill was based on democratic and sociological grounds,

"One looks in vain for the argument that the state should assist Hinduism in coming to terms with changed circumstances because Hindu religion is institutionally unequipped to do so on its own; that the state, in reformulating the Hindu personal law was only discharging its traditional function of articulating 'Righteousness in terms of law and law in terms of Righteousness.'"³⁴

Nehru used his enormous prestige, not to mention his adroitness, in using parliament as his platform to launch his persuasive argument to outmanoeuvre Hindu communalism and contain it within the limits of a secular state. Some writers even argue that Nehru should have used not only his influence and prestige but also his coercive power as the prime minister to settle the communal issues once and for all. But Nehru was too good a democrat even to attempt that. It was not his fault that

lesser men succeeded him. His greatest achievement and greatest contribution to the cause of secularism was that,

"... he used his considerable political influence within the Congress and his national prestige to transform the issue of religion in general and Hinduism in particular into a non-issue in India's high politics".³⁵

His contribution could and would have been greater had he taken the same uncompromising attitude towards Muslim communalism. His failure was that he saw Muslim communal issues as minority problems to be treated with indulgence which he hoped would gradually disappear with rapid economic development and the rise in national consciousness.

Parties and Communal Politics

Nehru's optimistic assessment was proved to be wrong by subsequent events. Minority communalism superceded national consciousness. It maintained its separate religious and political identity. If anything it became clearly identifiable even in South India, where hitherto it had been marginalized. This was the idea behind the Muslim 'vote bank'. Two reports illustrate the above argument.

"Top Janata Dal leaders led by the Party President Mr. S.R. Bommai, today met the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, Syed Abdullah Bukhari, and conveyed him that the Janata Dal would abide by the three conditions laid down by him for political parties seeking support of the minority community in the coming elections ... The conditions put forth by the Imam are (a) representations to Muslims in Parliament and Assemblies in proportion to their population (b) Muslim candidates should enjoy support and be able to espouse the cause of the community and (c) Muslim candidates should be fielded from Muslim dominated areas".³⁶

The Imam subsequently appealed to the Muslims to vote for the Janata Dal. He said

"... that he and Mr. V.P. Singh had agreed on issues such as right to employment, implementation of the Mandal Commission report, electoral reforms, independence of judiciary, non-interference in Muslim personal law, representation of minorities especially the Muslims in all advisory boards relating to employment and all financial institutions, preservation of minority institutions and implementation of Gujral Committee recommendations".³⁷

In order to meet the criticism that he was making use of religion for a political purpose, the Imam assured that his appeal was not a 'fatwa', as 'fatwas' could only be issued by Muftis. Further he said that he was issuing the appeal not as a religious leader but as a mere servant of the people. The Imam urged people not to vote for the BJP and the Congress (I) but to vote for candidates who believed in secularism, to ensure the emergence of secularist, nationalist and democratic forces in the country.³⁸

In such an environment it would be excusable if an average citizen is confused and bewildered as to the true meaning of secularism. The rise of neo-secularists and pseudo-secularists from among the ranks of communalists putting forward communal demands camouflaged as secular demands has dealt a blow to secularism as such. In this connection a new phenomenon has risen. In the pre-independence and immediate post-independence periods Hindu communalism expressed itself through right wing politicians in the Congress. The leaders were Purushotam Das Tandon, Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava, Seth Govind Das and others. The attempt by Hindu communalists to articulate their demands through Hindu communalist parties such as the Jan Sangh and Rama Rajya Parishad were unsuccessful. The Muslim League was the vehicle of Muslim communalism in the pre-independence and post-independence period. In the post-Nehru period Hindu communalism established a more clear-cut identity with the establishment of the Bharatiya Janata Party. This party now pushes forward Hindu communal demands. At the same time Muslim communalists have their own pressure group and influence and wrest concessions from the 'normally' secular parties such as

the Congress and the Janata Dal. This form of pseudo-secularism has gained wide currency in recent times especially during the elections. This phenomenon has negative and disturbing implications in the long run.

Politicians, academics and journalists agree that there was a rise in communal consciousness in India in the 1980's as indicated by riots, demand for privileges based on religion and caste, and the rise in communal votes. At this point two questions need be asked. Is the rise of minority communalism especially Muslim communalism due to the rise of Hindu communalism or vice versa? Should the majority community ie the Hindus bear the major responsibility and make major concessions, rather than the minority communities, for the preservation of the secular state? Obviously there can be no clear cut answers and non-controversial views on such an important matter which strikes at the core of communal problems.

In the early days of independence Hindu extremism was on the retreat. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the extremism advocated by the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and the strong advocacy of Nehru for secularism, socialism and democracy created a favourable climate for politics based on non-religious issues, and which were largely subscribed to by the Hindu majority. It was perhaps the right moment for the Muslim minority to put the two nation theory behind them and join the mainstream of politics, espousing the cause of secular politics. But the Muslims took the opportunity to entrench themselves in pre-determined positions based on communal ideology and religious separatism. Muslim leaders who perceived Hindu obstructionism and reactionary sentiments in the opponents of the Hindu Code Bill could only find Hindu obtrusion in the demand for a common civil code or attempt to reform Muslim personal laws. Article 44 of the Directive Principles in the Indian Constitution states,

"The state shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India".

The Special Marriage Act of 1954 was supposed to be the first step in that direction. But Nehru's hope was not realized, because not even Nehru was willing to act according to his impulses. M. Mohammed Ismail, President of the Muslim League opposed the Special Marriage Act and demanded that the Muslims be exempted from its provisions as it was against the Shariat. Similarly any effort to amend the Central Wakf Act is resisted by the Muslims on the ground that a secular government has no right to intervene in religious matters. However, this opposition to secular intervention is not absolute. In the Shah Bano Case, Muslims agitated for the amendment of the Constitution to restore the status quo ante. So we find the strange spectacle of a secular state amending the Constitution in favour of orthodoxy of the Muslims and thereby depriving Muslim women even the limited protection available under the constitution. Such concessions to communalism seem to the Hindus that the minorities are a privileged group whose personal laws are above the Constitution itself. Similarly the All India Muslim Convention in 1953 called upon the Government to fix a certain percentage of reserved posts for Muslims in government services which indicates the separateness in Muslim ethos. So it is difficult to accept the assertion,

"Indeed, the actions and attitudes of the Hindus are of crucial importance at present, because Muslim attitudes are still reactions to the pattern of Hindu politics rather than independent initiatives. In the face of the spread of traditional Hindu culture and the consolidation of the traditionalist Hindu forces, the Muslims have reacted by re-creating their communal solidarity".³⁸

The acceptance of the Janata Dal of the conditions of the Imam of Juma Masjid that Muslim candidates be put up according to their population, that Muslim candidates should be fielded in Muslim majority areas and all Muslim representatives should be

able to espouse the cause of their community, is camouflaged communalism and the revival of communal constituencies in a new name.

The Nation and Secular Values

Who should be mainly responsible for espousing secular values in a secular state?

"In any multi-ethnic society the burden of promoting the secularisation of the political system rests largely, though not exclusively, with the dominant majority community, because it alone is in a position to take a comprehensive view of the social and political process and to create a favourable atmosphere for the promotion of secular values".³⁹

As a general proposition the above argument is acceptable. However, the minorities especially the Muslims have a responsibility to accept secular values and join the mainstream of national life. In the early days of independence the Muslims had an opportunity to do so, but preferred to consolidate their communal identity. It was a short sighted policy as they have the most to lose if secularism is devalued in the Indian political process. Perhaps, Muslim perception was based on two false premises; firstly secularism has been accepted and entrenched in India and it will not be possible to discard it with out grave consequences to the national polity and secondly the Hindus are an amorphous and splintered community who will never be able to act as a body to enforce their will. Both are dangerous fallacies.⁴⁰ The secular state can be undermined not in form but in practice. A gradual erosion could adversely affect the Muslims in the long run. As the Hindus constitute about 85% of the population even if a good proportion became communalized it would be very large and effective in terms of political power. The Hindi belt which has an in-built majority and easily persuaded in terms of Hindu consciousness could pose such a threat to secular ideals. Hence, I suggest that the minorities especially the Muslims

take a more direct role in promoting secular values and resist the temptation to play communal politics for temporary gains.

The present position seems to be that even after nearly half a century of independence the state and society in India seems to be estranged. A secular state but a religious society. A secular state based on values and ideas foreign in concept imposed on a society which is still largely traditional.

"In a society where the outlook of the people is dominated by communalism the state usually cannot function for a long time on secular lines because the prevailing social tendencies, sooner or later, find their expression in the policies of the state".⁴¹

No group or community can hope to gain advantages for itself by organizing itself on a communal basis and expect other groups not to organize themselves on the same basis. Politicians who encourage and take advantages of such an arrangement during election times cannot espouse secularism at other times.

"In India, the state has remained committed to secularism but the widely diffused communalism and the highly strung atmosphere of the country has made it impossible for the secular values and ideals to be realised. The champions of the ideology of Secularism were conscious that the constitutional declaration of India as a secular state was not likely to be particularly meaningful unless the basic orientations of society were radically altered."⁴²

Views on Indian Culture

In India not only there is wide divergence between the westernized secular state and a traditional religious society, but also a gulf separates the different components in society itself. More significant is the gulf separating different species of self-proclaimed secularists in their perception of Indian society and the relative position and status of the cultural contents of society as a whole. Imtiaz Ahmad states that

although the waves of immigrants and conquerors in India have substantially contributed to the development of a distinctive Indian culture, it has remained predominantly Hindu. Hence Indian civilization remained an amorphous entity as other cultural streams are only partially integrated into the national culture. The other culture are merely loosely hung canvasses against the background of Hinduism, which are likely to fall of at the slightest disturbance.⁴³

In this view the very existence of a composite culture common to all India and containing the contribution of all groups is questioned. At best it is a loosely hung tapestry or more rudely 'canvasses' which will come apart at the slightest tilt. A more negative attitude to Indian culture will be difficult to arrive at. The two nations theory may soon graduate to a multi-nation theory, T.K. Oommen another secularist has something more optimistic to state,

"Mark that Indian tradition is not conceived here in unilinear terms but as a product of the long evolution and synthesis of different cultural streams. As it operates today it would be extremely difficult to identify purely Hindu, Pre-Aryan, Islamic or western elements in it; they have coalesced into an organic whole over a long period of time through a process of accretion. Similarly the elements of modernity can be adopted from different contexts and gradually to the Indian milieu."⁴⁴

Oommen's view offers a broader and wider perception of what Indian culture should mean. To view the different strands of culture as disjointed contradictions is to do a disservice to the concept of cultural unity and indirectly to secularism itself. In the process the first casualty would be the prospect of eventual national unity and the immediate attempt at national integration. Savarkar would define 'Hindutva' in terms of Hindu identity with the soul of India to form a strong nationality, to use their latent power to achieve greatness and take pride in their great literature. Finally he asserts that India is the holy land of the Hindus. The BJP would define 'Hindutva' in terms of its cultural content. This is especially so as the current debate is kept focused on the

cultural content of religion and the concepts of 'Hindutva' and 'Hindu Rashtra' are mere assertions of an Indian cultural identity in which all communities in India can participate as equal partners. The BJP even denies there is a religious content in its advocacy of these concepts. As Arun Jaitley the BJP leader puts in,

"Hinduism in India really does not convoke merely a religion. It is a cultural ethos in this country ... Mr. Advani has repeatedly said that even though he has not used the word Hindu anywhere, he would prefer that the word Hindu, Bharatiya or Indian mean the same in the context of a cultural heritage of a country, not merely restricted to a particular mode of worship or religion".⁴⁵

Another bone of contention is whether the very idea of secularism is foreign, or whether it is part of the Indian cultural or more correctly Hindu cultural heritage? It is unprofitable to assert that the concept of secularism has always been present in and part of Indian culture. This western hybrid has been translated, but not transferred and internalised, to become part of the Indian milieu as Ashis Nandy puts it. T.N. Madan's argues that it is futile to search for secular elements in Indian cultural traditions.⁴⁶

Hinduism and Tolerance

There is no denying the fact that tolerance was an element in ancient Hindu society and it could be a valuable adjunct to the modern secular state. However, there is an attempt to downgrade this element of tolerance as motivated by self-interest and not by an altruistic principle of equality. Imtiaz Ahmad asserts that,

"Kings in ancient India were tolerant of other religions not because they believed in the equality of all religions but due to political expediency and commercial interests. The system of justice in ancient India was based on the principle of inequality".⁴⁷

There is no doubt that self interest did play a part in shaping the policies in ancient and medieval India. But to attribute self interest as the sole motive in religious tolerance is to disregard the truth. Susan Bayly has clearly shown that even in medieval period the Hindu rajas of Kerala have not only tolerated but also encouraged Muslim and Christian traders and have given endowments to their religious institutions and given them high positions in state and they enjoyed a high ritual status in the Hindu religious hierarchy.⁴⁸ Moreover, Muslim rulers in the south during the 18th century onwards have followed this Hindu tradition to protect and patronise all religious institutions. To deny these facts is to deny one of the basic tenets of Hindu tradition namely "Sarvadharmā Sādhava", goodwill towards all religions. Hence it is incorrect to state that,

"In essence, therefore, the ideal of secularism as embodied in the Indian Constitution is derived from European political traditions, and the acceptance after partition constitutes a radical break with India's past traditions".⁴⁹

To emphasise its 'foreignness is to deny legitimacy to secularism in the Indian context. Unless secularism is translated to Indian terminology and becomes part of the political idiom and accepted as part of the Indian ethos its future as the state ideology is extremely doubtful.

Traditional Values and Secularism

In this connection the possible solution offered by T.K. Oommen is worthy of consideration. He argues that both assimilationist communalism of the majority community and the secessionist communalism of the minority communities undermines the state. The solution offered is pluralism which is an essential part of Hinduism.

"Pluralism as a value implied tolerance of other styles of life while preserving one's own. Hinduism the dominant religion of India, was essentially tolerant and instead of abruptly converting, it gradually assimilated other faiths. In fact, conversion to Hinduism was almost impossible as the consistency of placing the converts in the hierarchical order could not be easily solved. Hindus believed in the existence of multiple paths leading to the same ultimate goal. Thus the faiths of Muslim conquerors, Christian colonial rulers, Parsi merchants and traders etc. not only survived but prospered for centuries in India".⁵⁰

Oommen further argues how the traditional and modern values could be synthesised to support pluralism. The following table would make the matter clearer.

*** Table 3.1**
Tradition Modern and Pluralism

<u>Traditional Values</u>	<u>Modern Values</u>	<u>Prerequisite for Realization</u>
I(a) Pluralism	(b) Secularism	Tolerance and respect for other's style of life.
II(a) Hierarchy	(b) Socialism	Status based allocation of roles and resources for II (b)
III(a) Holism	(b) Individualism	Renunciation of self-interest for III and assertion of self interest for III(b).

Source: T.K. Oommen - Stte and Society in India.

Oommen feels that a selective retention of traditional values and cautious acceptance of some modern values could provide the basis for the new state. From the above table he suggests that as pluralism and secularism are compatible they be accepted while holism and hierarchy among traditional values be discarded. Coming to the present position, Oommen states,

"In the final analysis, what we witness in India today is neither the continuation of all the traditional norms nor the complete institutionalisation of the newly introduced values, but an intermediate situation containing elements of both tradition and modernity. It seems to me that this complex empirical reality cannot be dismissed as a transitional observation but should be recognized as an evolving reality with distinct properties. It is important to remind ourselves that this perspective rejects the misplaced polarity often attributed to tradition and modernity."⁵¹

Religion and Separatism

By accepting compatible traditional values, secularism could be re-defined and be made more acceptable to those who cherish tradition. In addition it would give secularism an Indian content. It will also refute the allegation that it is an imported ideology. If we could say something with a degree of accuracy, it is that Nehru's idea of secularism has failed to take deep roots in India. The substance has been eroded leaving the shell behind. Even if the idea has been abandoned the word has gained a new degree of respectability and resilience. The most devastating word in the vocabulary of the BJP is 'pseudo-secularists', thereby indirectly asserting the claim that they are the real secularists. The Marxists retort that the 'Hindus preach pseudo-Hinduism'. To borrow a phrase from Jennings in a different context the word 'secularism' seems to have become less effective but more respectable with the passage of time. It has become part of the glorious heritage of India. The Imam has issued a 'fatwa' which is not a 'fatwa', and urged not as a religious leader but as a humble servant of the people, that Muslims and other minorities should vote for the Janata

Dal and the left parties to strengthen and support secularism and democracy. Now it is left to the Shankaracharyas to issue a similar appeal to the Hindus and other deprived people to support the BJP to strengthen and expand the democratic and secular forces. It is gratifying to note that everyone in India is becoming a secularist.

Some questions have to be asked and some facts recognized. Imtiaz Ahmad asks why can't the Muslims organize themselves as a religious group and establish a territorial identity as well? The answer is, if a religious identity is given a territorial base it is bound to question the very legitimacy of the state based on secularism and demand a separate state. Punjab and Kashmir are two classic examples. The analogy of the linguistic state is a fallacy, language transcends caste, community and religion while religion is a more exclusive phenomenon. Hence it is difficult to disagree with Oommen when he says,

"Therefore a systematic effort should be made to de-legitimize religion as the basis of forming administrative units."⁵²

The provision in the Constitution granting separate status for the minorities negates the principle of equality in a democratic state. It creates a minority/majority syndrome within the nation. The majority perceives the minorities as privileged groups. The Ramakrishna Mission's claim for minority status becomes an understandable absurdity. As all political parties including the BJP have a minority constituency none has so far asked for its abolition. As Girilal Jain suggests let the Muslims ask for full rights as citizens, not special rights as a minority.

A limitation of the democratic system is that the majority is dominant and has a higher status than the minorities. As Girilal Jain puts it more bluntly, India has been a Hindu Rashtra since 1947, but the Muslims are unable to accept this reality. They are chasing symbols like fighting for a structure which has ceased to be a mosque long ago. All political parties appeal to the Hindus to show restraint on the Adyodhya issue

but strangely enough no similar appeals have been made to the Muslims. A Gandhian technique used by lesser men seeking votes, and manipulating morality without the moral stature of the Mahatma. Bipan Chandra states correctly, that secularists are freely criticizing majority communalism but are inhibited when it comes to minority communalism.

So the problem become more complicated than the question of dealing with Hindu revivalism or Muslim fundamentalism. Unless political leaders are willing to base their policies on secular principles, secularism as an ideology will not survive. Manipulation of minority fears and majority prejudices for electoral gains offer no solution. To understand and respect religious scruples is not communalism, but to make use of them for political ends is unprincipled politics.

So far we have seen how secularism and India's history and social values have been interpreted by a number of writers depending on their perceptions of what Indian society was and what it could and should be. One significant fact in these interpretations is the views of Hindus and Muslims are often contradictory. The fact remains that secularism can be re-defined but it cannot be discarded. Any such attempt would invite the hostility of India's Muslim neighbours which is undesirable. In addition it would tarnish the image of India as a tolerant democratic state. Moreover, in a democracy no party can afford to ignore completely the effect of such a policy on all minority communities.

In the next chapter, I propose to give a South Indian dimension to what is a national problem. We shall examine to what extent the views of the leaders in the South coincide and differ from that of the North. It would enable us to look at the old problem in a different way.

Footnotes - Chapter 3

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Chapter 4

THE SECULAR STATE, DEMOCRACY AND MINORITY RIGHTS

SOUTH INDIAN PERCEPTIONS

The South Indian perception of religion and politics has been different from that of the North. Its commercial and religious contacts with the outside world have been longer and more sustained than in the North. This process has led to religious and political accommodation and even to a higher level of religious syncretism. It would be an advantage to keep this in mind when looking into the problems of the secular state.

It was obvious from the very beginning that the state and society in India were on a divergent course. A secular state i.e. a state which considered religion irrelevant to the political process, took every effort to marginalise its impact on society, imposed a secular Constitution on an apparently apathetic and indifferent people but still highly influenced by religious values in daily life. Perhaps, Nehru himself was aware of the limitations of the secular state and the scientific temper he espoused. He said,

"We talk about a secular state in India. It is perhaps not very easy even to find a good word in Hindi for 'secular'. Some people think it means something opposed to religion. It is not correct... It is a state which honours all faith equally and gives them equal opportunities".¹

Ashis Nandy puts it more forcefully,

"...in spite of the tremendous growth in the power of the state in India, sensitive political analysts as well as activists are in no doubt as to who or what will be abolished if the Indian nation-state today takes on the task of abolishing religious and ethnic identities. The

secularisation of the Indian state has gone far but there are limits to its capacity to secularize society".²

The Basic Contradiction, Secular State, Religions and Society

Those who called themselves secularists and modernists like Nehru, considered religion to be a medieval anachronism to be disowned and discarded, and felt it their duty to raise the level of consciousness of the masses to reject all religions as the basis of society by means of state craft, state authority and power.³ It was assumed at the touch of realism, as envisaged by the modern state i.e. economic development and mass participation in the political process; "false consciousness" based on religious identity would gradually disappear. The puzzle was, much to the consternation of the self-assured secularist, that matters did not take the course expected by them. Religious consciousness remained very much alive and grew in such a proportion as to create doubt about the efficacy of state machinery to establish a secular state on a sound basis. To quote Madan,

"Social analysts draw attention to the contradiction between the undoubted though slow spread of secularization in everyday life, on the one hand, and the unmistakable rise of fundamentalism, on the other".⁴

Presumably this basic conflict is due to the fact that,

"South Asia's major religious traditions - Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism - are totalizing in character, claiming all of a follower's life, so that religion is constitutive of society".⁵

Why were the secularists unable to marginalise and finally abolish religion from the realm of politics? Could it be as T.N. Madan puts it,

"...Indian Secularism has been an inadequately defined 'attitude'... of 'goodwill towards all religion', Sarvadharmā Sādhava, in a narrower

formation it has been a negative or defensive policy of religious neutrality, dharma nirapekshata, on the part of the State".⁶

The Constitutional Contradiction

The founding fathers of the Indian Constitution might have envisaged a secular state with secular values, but the Constitution itself recognized communal division within society which has subsequently become controversial. Presumably the Constitution proposed to establish a secular state without clearly stating it. Under freedom of religion it allowed citizens to practice, preach and propagate their religions. It also allowed citizens to establish educational institutions along communal lines.⁷ I submit that most of the problems connected with the conflict between the expansion of communal demands and the secular ideals of the state arose from this basic contradiction in the Constitution. As S.P. Sathe puts it,

"The Constitution of India, therefore assigns, two seemingly contradictory roles to the state of intervention non-intervention and it is such contradiction which has produced many dilemmas for Indian Secularism".⁸

If the Indian state had kept to its secular role of non-intervention in religious matters, it could at least have claimed legitimacy and consistency in its approach to the religious question. Instead it had intervened in Hindu social and religious institution in the name of social reform and administrative efficiency. The Hindu Code Bill was introduced in piecemeal fashion to meet and outmanoeuvre orthodox opposition. The Bill introduced in the legislature in 1949 finally reached the statute book in 1956.

The Hindu Succession Bill was passed in May, 1956. In the same year Parliament passed the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act and the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act.

How did Nehru adroitly manipulate parliament and outmanoeuvre the opposition?

Nehru was able to whittle down opposition to the Hindu Code Bill to work out a compromise during the successive stages of the Bill and divide the opposition by regrouping the Code Bill into four distinct bills.⁹

Hindu temples and other religious institutions became more and more under bureaucratic control. Endowments made to Hindu religious institutions were often used for non-religious purposes. Atheists and agnostics were considered qualified to administer Hindu religious institutions. In the case of minorities, especially the Muslims, the government has taken a conciliatory approach in supporting orthodoxy instead of the reformists.

The Muslim Womens (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986 was such a move. In S.P. Sathe's view Indian Secularism was a futuristic proposition. The successful transition to that state depended on meaningful intervention during the transitional period. Its serious mistake was that it intervened when it should not have done so and did not intervene when it should have done so.¹⁰

Erroneous perceptions of the South

It would seem to be that South India especially the present Tamil Nadu and Kerala have been less influenced by the events of the North. The distance and relative geographical isolation would have played their part. Historians such as K.A. Nilakanta Sastri have correctly surmised that the relative isolation of the South from the North and its close commercial contact with South East Asia, the Middle East and Europe since the beginning of the Christian era have influenced its history, prompting the South

to assume a more cosmopolitan view of the world. This matter will be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter.

Some historians have a general tendency to treat South India as an appendage and extension of North India. For example R.C. Majumdar while referring to the raids of Malik Kafur states,

"Thus the whole of Southern India had to acknowledge the sway of Delhi Sultan".¹¹

Again he states,

"The Empire [of Vijayanagar] had now extended over the whole of South India".¹²

Both statements would appear to be exaggerations of the truth. It is not suggested that events in North India had no relation to the South, but events should be put in their proper perspective; and South India should be treated as a separate, geographical and political entity. Is the concept of 'secularism' more widely accepted in the South than in the North? At least to some extent it would appear to be so. The Ram Janma Bhoomi issue seemed to have less impact on the South. The Bharatiya Janata Party and its supporters had little effect in the elections of 1991. The 'secular' parties and their allies have done well. However, from my observations I should like to state that communal feelings i.e. perceptions based on religious identity are on the rise, which could, if left unchecked, give rise to religion based politics in the South as well. The sentiments expressed and the genuine sense of grievance felt by the audience at the Vishwa Hindu Parishad Seminar held in Madras on 28 July, 1991 point in this direction.

In the South also, 'secularism' has as many definitions as there are adherents. They range from those who would relegate religion to private realms, to those who

would see it abolished altogether. The Dravida Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu still publicizes its view that, "those who believe in God are fools, and those who propagate God are rogues".

In the opinion of some, 'secularism' is an affectation of those who claim to be modernists and progressives. Among the 'secularists' are those who claim to be communists, atheists, agnostics, and rationalists, and who would heartily agree with Professor Embree's definition of secularism,

"Secularism did not imply any disparagement of religion or rejection of the importance of its value for society, but only that no religion would be given a special recognition by the state and that all religions would have equal status and equal honour".¹³

The purpose of my interview with various leaders in Tamil Nadu and Kerala was to assess their views on the various aspects of secularism in India and to find out whether their opinions on secularism in any way differ from the opinion of leaders in North India. It was also my intention to find out whether the sharp Hindu-Muslim divergence in North India has affected the South and if so, to what extent. Of all the persons I interviewed in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, none questioned the concept of the secular state. It was considered to be a desirable and attainable objective. If India is not yet a secular state the fault must lie with the political leaders who came after Nehru. It was not secularism that is defective but the self styled secularists who assumed power who had failed the nation. The concept of equality and equal treatment for all religious groups was accepted by all; but differences of opinion arose when the concept was translated into policies and implementation. The problem became acute when one attempts to define 'secularism' and fix a role for the state in its dealings with individuals and groups. At this stage the perceptions are as divergent as one could imagine and even contradictory. A strange phenomenon is that even blatant communal demands are clothed in respectable terms, paying lip service to 'secular

values' e.g. a Muslim University in the South, recognition of Arabic as a special language of the Muslims in Kerala.

When words such as 'secular state' and 'secular values' are used the reference point has been the Constitution. They have become part of the Indian political vocabulary in order to describe the state. Strictly speaking the Indian secular state was an Indian innovation. Unlike in the United States the wall separating the state and religion was conspicuous by its absence.

"It was because of such departures from the existing model of the secular state that the makers of the Constitution did not specifically use the term 'Secular' in the original Constitution. In fact amendments seeking to provide mention of God as well as secularism in the Preamble of the Constitution were rejected".¹⁴

But secularism was an article of faith of the westernised middle class who framed the Constitution.

The first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had no doubt that the Indian state would be a secular state, but just as he did not include the word "Socialism" in the Preamble he did not include the word "Secularism" also.¹⁵

But why was this basic contradiction allowed to remain in the Constitution for nearly three decades? Since it has created an insoluble problem which has subsequently devalued the concept of secularism itself, and subjected it to a number of divergent and even contradictory interpretations? S.P. Sathe has an ingenious explanation to offer. He considers the "Secular State" to be a future proposition rather than a current reality and as such the founding fathers of the Constitution intentionally failed to declare India a Secular State. With regard to "Secular Values", again the reference point was the Constitution and its relationship to individuals and groups. In the opinion of those who support "Secular Values", it meant that the state should not support or seem to

support any activity in the political, educational, cultural, social or literary fields which has some connection with or orientation towards any religion. I shall come back to this point when dealing with minority rights and perceptions.

Since the Indian Constitution has been in place for more than four decades, it would be desirable to have the views of citizens holding prominent positions in society on the present condition and the future of the secular state. Firstly, is India a truly secular state (as opposed to the pseudo secular state as described by its critics like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad)? Secondly, are special minority rights and privileges compatible with the egalitarian principles of a secular democratic State? And thirdly what should be the direction of the state in the future? The perceptions were as divergent as they could be and even contradictory in terms of what was envisaged to be the characteristics of a secular state.

It looks as if India has successfully evolved into a Secular State thanks to the moral authority of Gandhi and the firm commitment of Nehru. The main complaint of the Christian and Muslim leaders was that the successors to Nehru were playing communal politics to retain power. The Muslim leaders asserted that the rise of Muslim fundamentalism could be considered purely in terms of the revival of Hindu communalism. They dismiss the idea that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East could have contributed to the rise of similar movements in India. The Imam of the Juma Masjid, Trivandrum claimed that the rise of Hindu communalism was due to the last ditch desperate effort of the 'Savarna (caste) Hindus to reassert their domination of society.¹⁶ However, Mr N Ram as a secularist dismissed the whole argument as communal and the "chicken and egg theory" of no consequence. His argument was to combat communalism in all its forms and manifestations.¹⁷

Naturally the Hindu point of view of the same problem was somewhat different. The idea that India was after independence, or even in the near future could be, a real

secular state in the light of the policies followed so far by the political leaders from Nehru downwards was treated with complete derision. At best it was a 'pseudo secular' state and at worst a weak state appeasing the minorities especially the Muslims. As one leader puts it,

"India is a secular state because the majority of the people are Hindus".¹⁸

There will be no "secularism" or "secularists" in a Muslim majority state. The Hindu perception was that although euphemistically called "the majority community" it was a fragmented, ineffective majority which did not even have equal rights with others. Unless secular values are accepted by all and equal rights and privileges extended to all, secularism is a meaningless word used, for their convenience, by politicians and communalists to camouflage their communal leanings. By secular values were meant a common civil code, equal rights and privileges as well as responsibilities for all irrespective of religion, and the ability of the state to deal with citizens as individuals and not as members of a religious group. It was alleged that the minority communities especially the Muslims profess to support secularism to enjoy special status and privileges in perpetuity. In the words of Professor K.V. Raman "India is not a secular state but a state which has abdicated its responsibility to extend equal rights and privileges to all and grant equal protection to all its citizens."¹⁹

The leaders of the Viswa Hindu Parishad were more forthright in condemning the official policy of discriminating against the Hindus and taking the Hindus for granted.²⁰ The leaders of the VHP also allege that the so called Secular Constitution of India and the officials who administer government policies are guilty of discrimination against the Hindus in Constitution and Law.²¹ It was said that such a policy is neither prudent nor practical in the long run but merely exacerbates communal tension. If secularism is to survive in India, such discriminatory policies and tolerance of minority communalism should cease. Such policies based on the

provisions of the Constitution are neither secular nor democratic but communalism of the reverse type termed "minorityism", which will in due course undermine the very basis of the State. It was further alleged that the founding fathers of the Constitution were responsible for introducing the discriminatory clauses in the Constitution.

"...if the intention of the Constitution makers was to protect the minority communities against discrimination, provisions could be made that no law could be passed affecting the minorities alone or discriminating against them".²²

This allegation is supported by S.P. Sathe, who concludes that,

"Article 30(1) was intended to protect minorities against discrimination not to confer special privileges on them. Otherwise it will only perpetuate their separation, which was unfortunately the case".²³

The remedy suggested by the VHP is to amend the Constitution to make all equal before the law.

Obviously the minority communities especially the Muslims do not see the problems in such a light. They agree that the secular state in India has worked fairly well and the minority rights have been generally safeguarded. The Roman Catholic Archbishop, the Protestant Bishop and the Imam of the Walajah Mosque in Madras expressed fair satisfaction with regard to the working of the secular state.²⁴ However, the Imam of the Juma Masjid in Trivandrum had one reservation. He claimed that in the inauguration of the Kerala State Transport Corporation, Hindu ceremonies such as the lighting of oil lamps were introduced which are against the secular principles of the state.²⁵ Although perceptions are different the government's attitude towards the acceptance of religious ceremonies could often take contradictory, confusing and even bizarre forms. Even the Central Cabinet seems to give contradictory advice to the Head of State with regard to participation in religious functions.

"While, in 1963 Central Government advised President Radhakrishnan against participating in the Kumbabishekam (consecration ceremony) of Sri Meenakshi Temple at Madurai, it did not find anything wrong in President Zakir Hussain opening a mosque in Tanjore District in a subsequent year".²⁶

Minorities as a privileged group

While framing the Constitution the consensus was that certain groups like the minority communities, Harijans and certain castes within the Hindu community needed special protection and privileges to enable them to reach the level of the more advanced public life of the nation. The history of the main stream of the society was regarded to

these groups as a temporary measure. The most controversial matter was with regard to minority rights. Here there is some confusion about what constitutes minority rights and what may rightly be considered as special privileges. The Muslims and Christians seem to treat the words as synonymous. Some writers feel that the courts have interpreted them in such a way as to convert minority rights into minority privileges.

"It is felt that these rights as now interpreted by courts have converted minority rights into minority privileges".²⁷

However, this view merely begs the question that if the courts have misinterpreted the will of the legislature, then only a constitutional amendment will clarify the matter. What was lacking was the political will and political leadership to rectify an error. The conclusion should be obvious. The minorities especially the Muslims seem to be determined to consolidate the gains made so far and at every opportunity to extend and expand their gains to maintain their special status and privileges in perpetuity. Some of these privileges are in establishing new schools, exemptions from providing an initial capital outlay in the appointment, promotion and discipline of teachers, admission of students, levy of capitation fees, governments rights in taking over

mismanaged educational institutions, withdrawal of recognition etc. In 1980 the then judge of the Supreme Court, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer observed

"Article 30[of the Constitution] gave the minorities the fundamental right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice but the right to administer did not carry with it the right to mal-administer. We are yet to tackle in a serious way the definition of 'minority', 30 years after the adoption of the Constitution".²⁸

However in 1983, the then Education Minister of Tamil Nadu admitted,

"Government could take over only the private educational institutions run by the Hindus, but not those run by the so called minorities even if they are not properly managed. If the Government took any steps to remedy the situation, the minority institutions went to the court and got a stay order"²⁹

How these concessions have been converted into entrenched privileges will be obvious from a few examples in Tamil Nadu. Hindu organisations need prior approval to start a school, while minority organizations ie. Muslim, Christian and Sikh organizations need apply only for recognition after the opening of schools. Hindu organizations should create an endowment for schools, but minorities are exempted. For the appointment and promotion of teachers only Hindu organizations are required to follow the communal roster. The same principle applies to the admission of pupils to schools. While school committees are compulsory for schools run by the Hindus, the minorities are exempted. Code of Conduct and disciplinary rules for teachers apply only to Hindu run schools; teachers employed by minority institutions do not have security of tenure. Office bearers in schools are subject to control of the authorities only in the case of Hindu schools. For schools administered by Hindu organizations recognition can be withdrawn if conditions of recognition are violated, but for minority run schools there is no provision for withdrawal of recognition. Similarly the Government is empowered to take over the management of schools for a period of

three years, but again the minority run institutions are exempted. The details given in Appendix 1 will make the matter clearer.

In their claim for a special identity the minorities especially the Muslims refer to the Constitution and the special rights it confers on them. This special provision in the Constitution contradicts the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution. These 'Communal rights' have been given a special significance and salience by the Supreme Court in its interpretation of the Constitution. This aspect will be dealt with later. Jawed Habib puts it succinctly,

"In my opinion, the basic misery of the Indian people is that according to the Constitution there is equality for all Indians. But simultaneously the Constitution guarantees the rights of minorities. That is the basis of the contradiction. When minorities ask about the preservation of that Article, a section of the people in the name of the majority contradicts this. And they cry that this is minorityism, that is against nationalism. I belong to a Muslim minority, where will I ask about the identity of my religion. I will use the Constitution".³⁰

Perhaps the founding fathers of the Constitution did not envisage the possibility that the special position granted to the minority communities as a temporary measure would re-inforce their communal identity in perpetuity and lead to the clamour to retain them indefinitely and thus prevent them from ever wanting to, or ever be willing to enter the mainstream of national life, by claiming that losing their special rights they will lose their identity as a religious minority. If the above surmise is correct then it would seem that the original intentions of the Constitution framers have been defeated. So the Muslim identity is not a mere religious identity, but also a reinforced constitutional identity of a secular state based on special constitutional rights. Professor T.N. Madan puts it in its proper perspective,

"...I find certain contradictions in the Constitution. An examination of Articles 13 to 17, 19, 23, 25 to 30, 44 and 48 brings these out clearly. Thus, Articles 25 to 30, which are the most crucial in this

regard, guarantee 'freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion (25), freedom to manage religious affairs (26), freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion (27), and freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions (28). They protect the 'interests of minorities'(29), including their right... to establish and administer educational institutions(30). Article 44 directs that 'the state shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout... India. The way things have proceeded reveals the contradiction between Articles 25 to 30 and Article 44. The former have contributed enormously to the strengthening of inward looking communal feelings and attitudes and obstructed the spread of modern, secular, education among the minorities".³¹

So the common perception of all is that minority status is a special privilege granted by the Constitution in perpetuity. It is not surprising that the Ramakrishna Mission with a fine record of service wishes to be considered as a minority institution. Jaswant Singh's opinion is worthy of consideration.

"...I do believe that the Constitution should not have provided a separate minority status. At that stage [independence] it was necessary because the land had been vivisected. I think that this kind of separate status, the Ramakrishna Mission asking for minority status, is a kind of, not just absurdity, it's a kind of obscenity".³²

But once granted it is difficult to take away any rights or privileges. All political parties consider the minority vote as a vote bank. There are even some among the secularists who consider minority communalism as a half way house to secularism!³³ However, some would shift the responsibility to the supreme court for misinterpreting the Constitution and turning minority rights into minority privileges and even giving it precedence over the equality of all citizens guaranteed by the fundamental rights in the Constitution. Perhaps a look into the various decisions made by the courts with regard to minority rights could make the picture clearer.

Rights Converted to Privileges

Apparently there is a discrepancy between Articles which guarantee equality to all citizens and the Articles which provide for special rights for minorities. Articles 14, 15, 16, 17 and 29(2) guarantee equal rights to all citizens and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.

"The anti-discriminatory provisions are applicable to actions of the state and the word "state" as defined in Article 12 includes all government, semi-government, statutory bodies which act as instrumentalities or agencies of State".³⁴

However, this fundamental concept of a democratic state is undermined by the introduction of exception clauses. Article 30 gives the right to the minorities to establish educational institutions and administer them without any interference from the State. In practice the curbs have broadened and enlarged these rights to prevent the State from intervening even where there is abuse of power or mismanagement. In effect minority rights have been converted to minority privileges.

"While the Constitution afforded privileges [rights?] to specified categories of minorities, representing specific ideologies, judicial interpretations had enlarged them to cover wide spheres, so much so the term minority institutions has come to include institutions managed by minority communities".³⁵

This situation has often resulted in abuse of rights. Educational institutions may be run by minority communities catering for non-minority communities with profit motives e.g. collection of donations, capitation fees, high monthly fees etc. The Courts have further extended minority rights even to include foreigners if they profess a religion of any of the minority communities in India. In the case of Bishop Patro v State of Bihar,

"The Supreme Court held that Art. 30 does not expressly refer to citizenship as a qualification for the members of minorities and so foreigners belonging to minority communities had the protection of

Art. 30 i.e. the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice"³⁶

which a citizen belonging to a non-minority community does not have. Chief Justice Hidayatullah in the course of his judgement on the Kerala University Act explained why the principle of equality ensured under Articles 14 and 15 could not be applied in the case thus

"the claim of the majority community institutions to equality with minority communities in the matter of the establishment and administration of their institutions leads to the consideration whether the equality clause can at all give protection, when the Constitution itself classifies the minority communities into a separate entity for special protection which is denied to the majority community. This is not a case of giving some benefits to minority institutions which in reason must also go to the majority community institutions, but a special kind of protection for which the Constitution singles out the minority communities"³⁷.

This decision puts the minority communities and their educational institutions into a special category based on their religious identity. Again in the case of Saifuddin Saheb v State of Bombay in 1962 the Supreme Court held that the Sydna, the high priest of the Bohra Community had the right to decide what the members of the community should read and whom they should marry by upholding his right to excommunicate recalcitrant members of the community. It looks odd that the Supreme Court of a secular state should uphold the 'fatwa' of a religious leader in the name of minority rights.

It would appear to be that minority rights are not confined to preserving the minority's religious identity and protecting their legitimate interests in the educational, linguistic and cultural fields. In the suit of St. Xaviers College challenging the validity of the Gujarat University Act, the Supreme Court held that five sections of the Act violated the rights guaranteed by the Constitution to the religious and linguistic

minorities to establish and run educational institutions of their choice. This judgement showed clearly that minority institutions need not necessarily be only for conserving language, culture or script but could cover general and secular education as well. Justice H.R. Khanna in his majority judgement dealt with the philosophy behind the decision. He referred to the independence movement and the need to create a sense of equality and non-discrimination among the minorities. He postulated the rights of the minorities and majority community in these words,

"special rights for minorities are designed not to create inequality. The real effect was to bring about equality by insuring the preservation of minority institutions and by guaranteeing to the minorities in the matter of administration of their institutions... The majority in a system of adult franchise hardly needs any protection. It can look after itself and protect its interest. Any measure wanted by the majority can without much difficulty be brought on the statute book. It is the minorities who need protection and Article 30 besides some other Articles is intended to afford and guarantee that protection".³⁸

In 1969 the provisions of the Kerala University Act was challenged by the private colleges managed both by the minority and majority communities. The clauses referred to the powers of the Government to take over mismanaged institutions, and also with regard to the appointment of principals, the right given to teachers to appeal to the vice-chancellor against the decisions of the management, in the cases of removal, dismissal or reduction in rank of teachers by management, only with the prior approval of the vice-chancellor, and the privilege given to teachers to stand for election to the legislature. The Kerala High Court and the Supreme Court invalidated the restrictive clauses as far as it affected the minority managed colleges, but refused the appeal as far as the Colleges run by the Nair Service Society and the Sree Sankara College Kalady were concerned.

These restrictive and selective applications of the law has a detrimental effect on education.

Schools run by members of the minority communities cannot be taken over by the Government even for mismanagement. Consequently in minority institutions staff belonging to other communities can be discriminated for which there is no remedy. However, members of the minority community attached to Hindu institution are protected against discrimination by law. It is significant that the promotion of a Catholic junior member of the staff to the post of headmaster has been upheld by the court.³⁹

The Tamil Nadu Association of Managements of Hindu Educational Institutions, the General Secretary of the Association of University Teachers in Tamil Nadu have all made representations to the Government about the grievances of their members and discrimination suffered by them. It must not be assumed that only the Hindus suffer from such discrimination. Even a Muslim or a Christian employed in institutions run by Muslim or Christian organizations could suffer from discrimination and injustice for which there is no remedy, because of minority rights. In effect minority rights have come to mean rights exercised by individuals who belong to the minority communities and organizations run by such communities which could be detrimental to the rights of individuals and even to natural justice. The law seems to favour the status quo and block every attempt to change the rules in conformity with the need of the nation. Perhaps, due to such discrepancies and discriminations in law and in practice which made Elute Rio Soares a Christian leader write in his column in the Indian Express,

"Democracy, being essentially government by consent, cannot obviously be the rule of the brute majority, but neither can it be reconciled with, what may be called the tyrannies of the minorities. Nor is secularism, as it being often thought of in some circles, a matter of letting the minorities have their own way even at the cost

of the legitimate interests of the majority community and maybe also these of the country as a whole".⁴⁰

From the opposite point of view it was asserted that minority rights are essential for the maintenance of the separate identity of the minority communities, who otherwise would be overwhelmed by the numerical, economical and educational superiority of the Hindu Community. Again the reference point was the Constitution. The rights were considered essential for the protection and survival of the minority community by the founding fathers of the Constitution and should be maintained if not in perpetuity, at least for a long time. The Catholic Archbishop of Madras hastened to add that the majority of beneficiaries of the Christian run educational and medical institutions are non-Christians. He mentioned with satisfaction that many prominent non-Christian Indians were educated in Christian missionary institutions. Other Christian leaders expressed similar views.⁴¹

Minority Rights in Perpetuity?

The Muslim point of view was more forthright. They wanted the rights to be maintained for a long period until in their opinion the Muslims are equal to the other communities in all respects. As to the question of whether minority special rights could be gradually abolished, the reply was a forceful negative. To another question as to whether minority rights were to be a permanent feature of the Constitution, the reply was equivocal. If an "independent Commission" declared that the Muslim Community had achieved equality with the other communities then the rights may be abolished. A rider was added to the above statement. Equality should not be formulated in economic terms as Muslim backwardness is mainly educational and social.⁴² To a question of whether the same rights could be extended to various groups within the Hindu community the answers were varied. While some raised no objection, others felt it will make minority rights meaningless. The Chief Minister of Kerala Mr K. Karunkaran felt that the impact of minority rights is much exaggerated.

To him it is a question of protecting their faith. Secularism and protection of the minority is part of the Indian ethos. In spite of any difficulties of religion and language Indian democracy has survived due to its commitment to secularism and protection of minority rights. There is no special reservation of minority seats in the legislative assemblies or in Parliament. The civil and criminal laws in India are supreme. Only personal laws cater for minority interests. There should be no objection if Hindus organize themselves to protect their interests. Perhaps this might even check Hindu fundamentalism.⁴³ Mr S Ramaswamy presents a different view. In his view the Muslims are educationally backward out of choice not because of necessity. Unlike the Harijans, nobody prevented the Muslims from seeking 'education'. If they chose not to take advantage of existing educational opportunities then it is their fault. They have been a privileged minority since independence and even before that.⁴⁴

Interference in Hindu Institutions

One of the criteria of the secular state was its intention of not interfering in affairs which are strictly religious. It should keep its distance from all religions or if it chooses to interfere it should make its presence felt in matters concerning all religion. It should either be "goodwill towards all religion" or negative religious neutrality which is considered to be a defensive policy.⁴⁵ In practice it is neither. It leaves alone the religion of the minority communities or even interferes negatively on the side of traditionalists or the fundamentalists to maintain the status quo or even adopts regressive measures by amending the Constitution. The Shah Bano Case was a good example. The enactment of the Muslim Womens Act in the 1986 was a cynical attempt to exploit the Muslim vote bank. As Sathe puts it,

"unfortunately we have only two types of parties. Those who are openly and uninhibitedly communal and those which are

opportunistically communal, though pretending to be secular superficially".⁴⁶

Nothing has exercised the mind of the Hindu community so much as the interference of the state in the affairs of Hindu temples and maths. To them a self-professed secular state interfering and even dominating Hindu religious institutions is a revolting proposition. What makes it more intolerable was quite often the ministers in charge of such religious institutions are self-proclaimed atheists and belonged to political parties proclaiming atheism as their creed.⁴⁷ While secular institutions run by minority communities such as schools and colleges are exempted from government control due to their religious persuasions, Hindu religious institutions are taken over and secularised. In 1987 under the Andhra Pradesh Charitable and Hindu Religious Endowment Act, the Tirupati Temple became in effect a government department. Subsequently the Venkateswara University founded, and maintained from Temple funds, became a secular institution and the Hindu prayers recited before the starting of any function in the University were discontinued. In 1984 Hindu Temples in Tamil Nadu were asked to contribute 6.6 million rupees for the midday meal scheme for school children initiated by the Government. Another secularization programme for temples introduced by the Tamil Nadu Government was the use of temple premises for storing paddy. In October 1984, the State Government turned the premises of many temples into godowns to stock the paddy procured by the civil supplies corporation. The most famous temple to suffer from this indignity was the Rajagopalaswamy Temple in Mannargudi.⁴⁸

The selective and insular application of secularism could undermine the faith in secularism among the Hindu community even in a state like Kerala which is not prone to religiosity. This phenomenon has come into the political vocabulary as 'majority alienation'. In August, 1991 the newly formed Karunakaran Ministry was short of cash to pay its employees salary and bonuses for its employees for the Onam festival. It put pressure on the famous Guruvayur Temple in Kerala to advance eighty million rupees

to meet its commitment. In answer to a question, the Minister for Dewaswam in Kerala replied that the Government was merely asking for a loan which will be repaid in due course; so there is nothing to be agitated about.⁴⁹ But governments could be generous if they wanted to be. In 1973 the Communist Ministry of Mr Achuta Menon granted a sum of one million rupees for the rebuilding of mosques in Tellicherry. In addition it also made the services of government officers available to carry out the programme free of charge. Such manifestations of secularism on the part of the government has enraged the leaders of the Hindu community who felt that the release of Hindu religious institutions from government control is essential for the proper welfare and development of such institutions. To thrash out these problems the Vishwa Hindu Parishad organized a seminar in Madras on 28th July, 1991. The aim was to put pressure on the Tamil Nadu Government to establish "An Autonomous Board for the Administration of the Hindu Temples". At the meeting the various discrepancies in Government policies and the problems faced by Hindu religious institutions such as the temples and maths were discussed. The seminar strongly felt that unless an autonomous body was founded the bureaucratization of religious institutions would lead to the demise of such institutions. What angered the speakers at the meeting was that mosques and churches with their properties were left intact but only Hindu temples were affected. This "selective secularism" was denounced by the speakers who asked whether secularism was only meant for the Hindus? What was significant was that Hindu feelings and problems were no longer dormant, to be dealt with by Hindu secularists and atheists at their leisure.⁵⁰ However, it must not be thought that all views on government administration of Hindu temples were negative. One prominent Hindu religious leader of Tamil Nadu told me that the Government has done much to rectify the mismanagement of temples by bringing them under their control. He feared that if proper care is not taken when establishing an autonomous body for temples, mismanagement might recur.⁵¹

The need for a Common Civil Code seemed to have created an unnecessary controversy which has nothing to do with the merit of the case. Hindu communalists have seized the opportunity to attack Muslim opposition as a refusal to join the mainstream of Indian society and as proof of their adherence to outmoded practices and loyalty to Islamic fundamentalism. On the other hand Muslim communalists have accused even the most secular of its proponents to be Hindu chauvinists wearing the mask of liberalism.

"The cause of uniform Civil Code like the cause of Hindi, has been retarded by over-enthusiastic crusaders. In a democracy, no government is going to make a law which will damage its electoral chances. But steps towards a uniform Civil Code could be taken without jeopardising the electoral prospects. The political leadership must assume greater responsibility for educating the people".⁵²

A most noble sentiment, but unlikely to be adopted by any political party who could only see the Muslim population as a vote bank and Muslim leaders who seem to be only too anxious to maintain their Muslim credentials by supporting orthodoxy rather than essential social reforms. As one Muslim leader puts it

"Everybody talks about the uniform Civil Code. I think what should come first is the uniformity of opportunities. Then understanding and then a uniform Civil Code. We have to find out whether there is a real urge of people to change the status of Muslim Women or Muslim Society or just to antagonise or slot the Muslim identity".⁵³

Under these circumstances it would be unrealistic to expect Muslim leaders to support reforms.

"The Minority leadership has also unfortunately been over-apprehensive of reform of personal laws. They must not think that the identity of a group depends upon the survival of the outmoded laws".⁵⁴

The Directive Principle of the Constitution (Article 44) declares that the

"state shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India".

Although the provisions contained in the Directive Principles are not enforceable in a Court of law, for it to have any meaning it should be the guiding principle of the State and not a dead letter awaiting resurrection. But it looks as if it would never be enacted as a law of the state. Bipan Chandra's remarks are to the point

"...The Secular parties have tried to treat Muslims as a vote bank. They have tried to cater not to Muslims, but to Muslim communalism. Like in Punjab they catered to Hindu-Sikh communalism, in Kerala to Muslim-Christian communalism".⁵⁵

Secularization and the Civil Code

What about South Indian perceptions of this general problem? The Hindus point of view and those who consider themselves "Secularists" feel a Common Civil Code is essential to build up a common Indian identity i.e. equality before the law, the same law applicable to all irrespective of their religion or preferences. The argument is that Articles 14 and 15 guaranteeing equality before law and equal protection under the law, remains a pious hope and a future possibility in the absence of a Common Civil Code and the presence of special minority rights. The view of D.E. Smith seems to be closer to this view.

"Not only the Hindu Bigamous Marriages Act, but the whole system of Hindu and Muslim personal law is contrary to Article 15(1). It is only when there is a Uniform Civil Code that the Courts will be able to afford the luxury and a natural and straightforward interpretation of this fundamental Constitutional principle."⁵⁶

The views of Muslims on the issue of a Common Civil Code were varied but predictable. Behind the opposition was the strong suspicion of anything that is

presented as part of the secular process. The hostility to a secular court, a secular government and secular parliament was obvious. There was the deep apprehension that any measure to tamper with Muslim personal laws was meant to "secularize" their religion. The Imam of Juma Masjid, Trivandrum, expressed his views quite strongly; no human agency should tamper with the God given shariat laws. Islam provides for a perfect way of life, in which every aspect of human life is provided for. For any secular agency to try to amend or improve such laws is sacrilege. The amendment to the Constitution to accommodate the orthodox views and overturn the judgement of the Supreme Court in the Shah Bano Case is thus justifiable as it merely restored the 'status quo ante'.⁵⁷ However, Justice M.M. Ismail took a more sophisticated and juridical view. Judicial reviews are part of the process of the administration of the laws of the state. It was the observations made by Chief Justice Chandrachud and his reference to the Directive Principles of the Constitution that turned Muslim opinion against the decision. It is interesting to note that Professor Ainslie T. Embree agrees with Justice Ismail and calls Justice Chandrachud's remark "gratuitous".

"A bench of five Supreme Court judges ruled that under section 125 of the Criminal Code a husband was required to pay maintenance to a wife without means of support. Chief Justice Chandrachud did not, however, conclude his judgment with this interpretation of the code; he went on to say that this ruling of the supreme court was more in keeping with the Quran than the traditional interpretation by the Muslim Shariat. He then said that the time had come for a Common Legal Code for all Indians, irrespective of their religion".⁵⁸

It is not clear why Justice Ismail and Embree find Justice Chandrachud's reference to the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution and the need for a Common Civil Code ""gratuitous" and "offensive". Perhaps Dhirendra Vajpeyi's views explain the situation correctly.

"As a minority they [the Indian Muslims] would like to live in a secular, democratic system where they not only have freedom to practice religion without interference from the state, but also enjoy

their democratic rights (Indian model). As Muslims, however, they would like to have their own laws, care less for other religious groups by asserting their uniqueness (Pakistani model). In short they want to have their cake and eat it too".⁵⁹

In all these controversies the basic ideas of the Muslims remain unchanged. They expect the state and the Hindus who are invariably referred to as the majority community to behave in a secular way i.e. strictly in a non-intervention way as far as Muslim interests and personal laws are concerned. At the same time the Muslims would like to be assertive of their uniqueness as Muslims in a largely non-Muslim country. Their Muslim identity would always overshadow their "Indianness". This dual identity and dual loyalty affects the perceptions of the Indian Muslim of the 'ideology' of secularism and the secular state. This problem of the Muslim fear of losing their identity in a sea of Hindu beliefs and influences should be a matter of genuine concern for all. To the Muslims holding on to a minority, rights seem to be a protective measure out of this dilemma. But the problem of religious minority identity based on special status in the Constitution will remain a perpetual puzzle to the secular state.

The Ram Janma Bhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy appeared to have had only marginal effect in the South. The issue was not seen as vital or of immediate interest. As V K Madhavan Kutty, a writer from Kerala, writing in the Sunday Times, Bombay, of 30.12.1990, has stated that in the South, Rama is looked upon as an ideal human being and a democrat. No doubt he is recognized as an incarnation of Vishnu, but he lived on earth as a human being with noble qualities and has not become a religious symbol for political appropriation. Some Muslim leaders refused to be drawn into it.⁶⁰ However, the Imam of the Juma Masjid had definite views on it. To him Sri Rama was only a legendary figure of no historical value. Unless the Hindus could prove the historicity of the Ramayana or conclusive evidence of the presence of the Hindu Temple on the site of the mosque there is no case. In Professor K.V. Raman's view the

question was one of Muslim intention and perception. Are they prepared to accommodate Hindu sentiments and religious beliefs? If not, all talks of secularism and tolerance is a farce. In controversies, to avoid confrontation should the Hindus always give way? Perhaps this is a neo-Gandhian concept?⁶¹

Surprisingly enough the politics of the Muslim League and its traditional role as the spokesman of Muslims was never raised or even referred to by any Muslim leader. Perhaps they felt that it has been tainted with the guilt of partition and as an uncompromising Muslim communal organization. An oblique reference was made to it by the Imam of Juma Masjid, Trivandrum when he agreed that the present Hindu-Muslim conflict originated from pre-partition times and the subsequent Indo-Pakistani conflicts.

Muslims prefer status quo

In my interview with various Muslim leaders in South India, I gained the impression that the Muslims generally feel that on the balance the secular state is working in their favour, particularly in the case of the special rights with regard to the running of educational institutions and their personal laws where the Government is even willing to amend the Constitution to accommodate the orthodox. Politically they are able to gain their objectives through 'secular' parties such as the Janata Dal and the Congress.

At the same time the Muslim leaders express strong support for the secular state and the principle of "secularism" and any rise of Muslim fundamentalism is blamed on the rise of Hindu communalism.

The Muslims generally attribute their backwardness in the social and economic fields to the lack of opportunities in the past and only marginally to the influence of orthodox elements in their community.⁶² The other side of the coin is often ignored.

"Some of these grievances are genuine while others are the product of a frustrated minority which has failed to accept its own failure... Salman Khurshid presents yet another explanation 'when you fail in a secular society, it is not because the state discriminates consciously but because internal weaknesses become fertile recipient for unconscious failures to provide for a minority. You fail because you are taken for granted'.⁶³

In the South, especially in Tamil Nadu, Muslims have achieved a measure of success in trade, business and industry. Perhaps, the reason was that the Muslims in the South, except in the old Hyderabad State were not part of the ruling class or the land owning class and had to learn to fend for themselves. In the old Madras Presidency they were only a small minority. Only in the old Malabar district of the Presidency there was a substantial number of Muslims. In the old princely states of Travancore and Cochin their numbers were very small. But as Ralph Buultjens points out if anything the Hindu maharajas granted them special privileges with regard to educational and employment opportunities. As Miller points out, because they were such a small minority in the princely states they did not develop a "ghetto mentality" but learnt to compete on equal terms and made substantial progress. It is also significant that the Imam of Juma Masjid in Trivandrum should equate Muslim backwardness to social and educational reason and not economic causes. The conclusion is obvious, even if the best minds in the Muslim community enter business and industry, and become prosperous the special rights and privileges should stay because economic progress could not be equated with social and educational progress. The Muslim Community is unable and unwilling to accept that their social and educational and even economic progress could be retarded by their own outmoded social structure and adherence to old fashioned orthodoxy.

In the majority/minority controversy the existence of the Christian minority is often ignored. Very often when "minorities" or "minority problems" are mentioned the reference invariably is directed towards the Muslim community. Probably due to the preponderance of the Christians in the South whilst Hindu-Muslim conflict was a predominant North Indian phenomenon, the Christian influence has been marginalised as a source of social conflict. The Christians seem to be quite contented with their present position. As long as their right to maintain and even extend their religious and educational institution and propagate their faith are not interfered with, they would be happy to be left alone. They seem to be genuinely interested in maintaining a secular state and understand its implications quite well. They are proud of the fact that the majority of beneficiaries of their medical and educational institutions are non-Christians. The Catholic Archbishop of Madras was very proud of the fact that the then President of India was a former student of Loyola College, Madras.⁶⁴

The right to propagate, practise and proselytize, Islam and Christianity in India has been subject to much controversy and even heated debates in the Constituent Assembly, Parliament and state legislatures. In the Constituent Assembly members tried to make a distinction between practise and propagation of religion and proselytization. All religious leaders uniformly condemned conversion by coercion, fraud and material inducements as unbecoming of the citizens of a secular state. But Bishop Azariah made a distinction between proselytization and evangelization. To him proselytization is merely conversion of a non-Christian to the Christian faith by persuasion, but evangelization is spreading the truth, the word of Lord which is the duty of every Christian.⁶⁵ In expressing such opinion the Bishop was merely following the traditional view of the Church.

The Imam of the Juma Masjid Trivandrum maintained that Islam had no need to convert people by coercion or inducements. In fact Islam opposes induced or forcible

conversion. Line 256 in the second chapter of the Koran is explicit on this matter.⁶⁶ However, Mr Suki Sivam a Hindu religious preacher has a different view. He mentioned as a fact that in 1976 the entire Harijan population of the village of Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu were converted to Islam by promise of employment, education for their children and 'protection' against Caste Hindu 'oppression' and much of the promise was never honoured.⁶⁷ It may be assumed that there is a wide gap between precepts and practices in all religions.

Communal Accommodation, a South Indian Phenomenon?

In spite of all problems and difficulties a large number of people sounded an optimistic note about the survival of the secular state in India in its present form with minor changes if necessary. The Christians and the Muslims felt that no changes are necessary but admitted some changes in the future may be necessary in keeping with the changing situation. The Kerala Chief Minister Mr K. Karunakaran and his two ministerial colleagues Mr R. Ramachandran Nair and Mr P. Kunhali Kutty were convinced that the secular state is in good shape and will continue to progress along the chartered path. Mr Karunakaran pointed out that for more than four decades India alone in South Asia has progressed along the path of democracy and secular ideas. There should be no contradiction between a person's private religiosity and public secularism. He has been a staunch congressman and secularist for more than four decades; at the same time he is a great devotee of the Sri Krishna Temple in Guruvayur which he visits every month. Tolerance and understanding of other faiths are the basic principles of Hinduism. He quoted the Upanishads - truth is one, the wise men speak of it in a number of ways (Satyam Ekam Buddha Bahu Vida Vadanti) Minority rights in religious matters and running educational institution merely assures them of their place in society. It would check the rise of fundamentalism among them. There are no reservations for them in Parliament and State legislatures. The Hindus, or for that matter any group could organize themselves for their material and spiritual

advancement. He said Sankara's Advaita philosophy had helped him to accept all faiths and adopt a tolerant attitude.⁶⁸

A number of prominent members of the Hindu community agreed that their aim is a "genuine secular" state, by that they meant a state which offers its protection equally to all and abolish the different treatment to citizens by dividing the nation into minorities and majority communities. The state should not interfere in Hindu religious institutions such as temples and maths which should be run by autonomous bodies. Hindus should have the rights to run their own educational and other institutions on the same terms and conditions as the minority communities.⁶⁹

Leaders in Tamil Nadu and Kerala were proud of the fact that the communal problem i.e. politics based exclusively on religion and religious values is not an important issue in South India. Mr M. Natarajan of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagan, the present ruling party in Madras, claimed that the communal problem in all its aspects has been marginal in Tamil Nadu. For example in the recent elections four Brahmin candidates, one a very orthodox person, have been elected to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, a far cry from the time when even C. Rajagopalachari, the veteran Indian Statesman was not sure whether he could be elected to the then Madras legislature in 1951 and had to be nominated to the legislative council.⁷⁰ Mr Suki Sivam went further to claim that Ms Jayalalitha, the present Tamil Nadu Chief Minister was the only politician in India to resist the claims made by the Muslim communal parties for an electoral understanding and to win an overwhelming victory without their support, thus exploding the myth of the decisive Muslim vote bank, although providing for Muslim representation in her Cabinet. One surprising and even original view was expressed by Mr P.S.M. Abdul Kader of Madras. He said that even if the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in Delhi, the Muslims need not worry. Power always had a sobering effect. In power they will never adopt any anti-Muslim measures. He cited as an example their moderate stance

in the Ram Janma Bhoomi issue in Uttar Pradesh.⁷¹ The Imam of Juma Masjid informed me with some pride that next to the mosque is a Hindu Ganapati Temple and his relationship with the temple authorities was quite cordial. At a recent public meeting in Trivandrum he had informed the audience that others would learn a lesson in communal harmony in Trivandrum.

However, one disturbing trend cannot be overlooked. Some secularists have a tendency to ignore some facts and even to deny them. Mr N Ram, one of the editors of the Hindu group of newspapers denied that the list of the Muslim candidates of the Janata Dal had been vetted by the Imam of Juma Masjid in Delhi. Mr Anand Viswanathan, political correspondent of the 'India Today' contradicted this view, as it was a well known fact. Secularism is not served by denying the communal leaning of parties which profess secularism. A principled stand exposing the limitations of different political parties would enhance the value of secularism.

An interesting point of view was given to me in Madras by a prominent Muslim leader who claimed to be secular in his views. He said that Hindus in India are tolerant and generous to establish a secular state instead of a Hindu state which they could easily have established in 1947 and allowing the Muslims to live in peace and prosperity. He asked me not to quote him as it would cause misunderstanding with his co-religionists.⁷² This is in vivid contrast to the provocative statement made by a Muslim leader in North India. He said "Hindus profess secularism because they are cowards and are afraid of Muslim countries".⁷³ Recently he was elected to the Parliament on the ticket of the Janata Dal which professes secular ideals. He had also demanded an exclusive Muslim University in the South on the lines of the Aligarh Muslim University. Such expression of uninhibited communalism devalues secular values and ideals.

Is there a difference in perceptions of the leaders in the North and South of the problems of religion, politics and secular ideals? Perhaps the different historical experiences of the different regions have affected the process. In the South especially in Tamil Nadu and Kerala the Muslims came in as traders and missionaries and pre-date the Muslim invaders of the North. Similarly the Christians arrived in Kerala during the first century of the Christian era as traders and missionaries. They lived under the Hindu rulers as peaceful and loyal subjects who afforded them their protection to practice and propagate their religions. In fact they lived as and were considered as part of the larger Hindu community. There was no claim for a territorial identity or a religious "uniqueness". As D.E. Smith puts it

"Muslims lived peacefully in India for three hundred years before Islam came as a military force in the eleventh century A.D."⁷⁴

The secular ship of state is in dire straits, but it should be able to survive by shedding some unwanted cargo and abandoning some comfortable myths. In the South I did not find any insurmountable obstacles to the mutual understanding among the Hindus and the minority communities. The South Indian Muslims have no myths to resurrect as the ruling class of the whole of India who have been dispossessed by the westerner. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri in his History of South India first published in 1947, states,

"That today South Indian Society presents a striking contrast in many respects to society in North India, that South India is still adorned by a large number of great temples that enshrine the artistic achievements of successive generations of Hindu master-builders, and that the 'Hindu Muslim' problem was virtually unknown in the South furnish some measure of the success that attended the efforts of Vijayanagar and its rulers"⁷⁵

It is perhaps significant that at least some of the Muslim leaders in the North have come round to this view. Arun Chacko writes,

"In the final reckoning, the North Indian Muslim has a role model in his South Indian co-religionist, who has done much better without generating too much antagonism".

Jawed Habeeb enumerates the South Indian Muslim virtues:

"He coexists very peacefully with his Hindu neighbours, co-operates in constructive work for his community and finally has political wisdom. There are historical explanations for this. In the North, Islam came through Central and West Asian conquerors, in the South it came through more peaceful Arab traders who integrated easily with the locals".⁷⁶

It is possible that South Indian history and perceptions are not and need not be mere appendages of the North Indian construct, but have a distinct background of their own which might give us a clue and a fresh insight into the old problem of communal hostility. A look into South Indian history would be an advantage to those who seek an objective analysis of the various problems connected with religion, politics and secularism.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 4

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17. Interview with Mr.N. Ram, Editor Frontline, The Sport Star in Madras on 26.7.91.
18. The statement was credited to A.B. Vajpayee by Professor K.V. Raman, Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras, interview 21.7.91.
19. Interview with Professor K.V. Raman in Madras 21.7.91.

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24. Interviews with Archbishop Dr. Casimir Gnanadikam S.J. Dsc. D.D. on 22.7.91, Bishop M. Azariah 27.7.91, Imam of Walajah Mosque, Madras 26.7.91.
25. Interview on 12.8.91.
26. R.S. Narayanaswami - Discrimination Against Hindus in Constitution and Law op. cit., p. 26.
27. S.P. Sathe - New Quest op. cit. pp. 333-334.
28. R.S. Narayanaswami - Discrimination against Hindus in Constitution and Law op. cit., p. 19.
29. Ibid., p. 16.
30. India Today New Delhi, May 15, 1991, p. 62.
31. Prof. T.N. Madan, Caparo Annual Lecture 1991, Hull University.
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33. Prof. T.N. Madan - Caparo Annual Lecture, 1991 - Discussion on the Lecture on 25.10.91.
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36. Ibid., p. 8.
37. Ibid., p. 21.
38. Ibid., p. 9-10.
39. Ibid., p. 15.
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41. Interview with Catholic Archbishop Dr Casimir Gnanadikam, Protestant Bishop M. Azariah, both of Madras and Bishop Rt. Rev. Soosai Pakiam, Latin Catholic Church, Trivandrum.
42. Interviews with Imam Manlavi Hafiz Quari_Abu Usman Mohamed Haroun Mozahiri Sahranpuri, Walajah Mosque Mols, Iman Hafiz Juma Masjid, Trivandrum, P.K. Kunhali Kutty, Minister for Industries, Social Welfare and Wakf Board. Kerala, Trivandrum, July, August 1991.
43. Interview with_Mr K. Karunakaran, Chief Minister Kerala Trivandrum on 21.8.91.
44. Interview with Mr "Cho" Ramaswamy Editor, Tugluq Fortnightly - Madras, August, 1991.
45. T.N. Madan - "Secularism in its Place" - The Journal of Asian Studies - Vol. 46, No. 4, November, 1987 p. 750.
46. S.P Sathe - op. cit., p. 338.
47. I am referring to the Dravida Kazhagam and its progenies the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The second and third mentioned are political parties which pay obeisance to Mr E.V. Ramasamy Naicker the founder of the Dravida Kazhagam and proclaimed his reforming zeal by breaking Hindu idols. The Dravida Kazhagam was a reformist movement and not a political party, while the two political parties have shared power in Tamil Nadu since 1970s. Please see all India Dravida Munneta Kazhagam 1991 - Election Manifesto. The Walls of Tamil Nadu are still adorned by slogans of the Dravida Kazhagam such as "There is no god", "Those who believe in God are fools", "Those who propagate God are rogues", in both Tamil and English!
48. The Hindu, October 28, 1984.
49. Interview with Mr R. Ramachandra Nair, Minister for Health and Dewaswam, 13 August, 1991.

50. Vishwa Hindu Parishad Seminar on "Autonomy Board for Administration of Hindu Temples", on 28.7.91 at Madras.
51. Interview with Dr. S. Viswanatha Sivachariar former professor of Sanskrit, Madras University. At present, Chief Hereditary Priest, Kapliswarar Temple, Madras, 20.7.91.
52. S.P. Sathe op. cit., p. 332.
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56. D.E. Smith - India as a secular state, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1963, p. 116.
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61. Interview with Professor K.V. Raman July 1991.
62. Interview with the Imam of Juma Masjid, Trivandrum.
63. D. Vajpeyi - "Muslim Fundamentalism in India" - op. cit., p. 68.
64. Interview with Archbishop Casimir Gnanadikam and Bishop M. Azariah of Madras, July, 1991.
65. Ibid.
66. Interview with the Imam of Juma Masjid, Trivandrum - August 1991.
67. Interview with Mr Sukhi Sivam, Hindu Religious Preacher, Coimbatore, South India, August, 1991.

68. Interview with the Chief Minister K. Karunakaran in Trivandrum, August 1991.
69. Interview with Professor K.V. Raman, Mr R.S. Narayanaswami, Mr Suki Sivam, Mr 'Cho' Ramaswamy and others.
70. Interview with Mr M. Natarajan, Madras, July, 1991.
71. P.S.M. Syed Abdul Kader - Member, Seethakathi Trust Board, Madras - Interview August, 1991.
72. Interview in Madras with a 'prominent Muslim leader' in July 1991.
73. Syed Shahibuddin in Sunday Weekly 20.8.83.
74. D.E. Smith - India as a Secular State, p. 2.
75. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri - A History of South India, Oxford University Press, Madras, 1991.
76. Arun Chacko - India Today April 30, 1991, p. 38.
77. In my interviews in South India, I gained the view that only the Hindus are required to take 'Secularism' seriously. At the Vishwa Hindu Parishad meeting in Madras, July 1991 the slogan very often quoted was 'Is Secularism only for Hindus?'. Mr Sukhi Sivam has an original idea. He told me during my interview with him in August, 1991 that he has suggested to BJP leaders in the South that all members of State legislatures and M.P.s should take an oath that they will not under any circumstances propose, support or work to establish a theocratic state. Any member who refused should be disqualified from standing for election. The implication was Muslim support for 'secularism' was at best temporary and tactical without any long term commitment. This no doubt is a Hindu communal view based on generalization. Unfortunately this view received some credibility from some Muslim communal leaders. For example Syed Shahabuddin has said that 'India is a secular state, because the Hindus are cowards; and afraid of the Muslim States'. In this context what Dhirendra Vajpeyi says is significant. He says that the Muslims in India want to enjoy the full benefits of a secular state i.e. to have full religious freedom and democratic rights. At the same time they would like to have their own land and as a

religious group assert their 'uniqueness' as in Pakistan. This basic contradiction is difficult to overcome. Please see page 68, D. Vajpeyi & Y.K. Malik (ed), - Religious and Ethnic Minority Politics in South Asia, London, 1989.

Chapter 5

The South Indian Dimension in Historical Perspective

South India has its own history. It is not an appendage or a continuation of the history of Hindustan. It has and has been influenced by North Indian developments, but nevertheless its geographical divergences and historical diversities have influenced the shape of its society and its cultural ethos. In describing South Indian institutions I shall be concentrating mainly, though not exclusively, on the areas comprising the present states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. An understanding of its historical development would enable us to look at the problem of religion and politics from a different angle. Geography has played an important role in the development of state and society in India. India is a nation of continental dimensions. The Himalayan range of mountains separate it from the rest of Asia thus enabling a distinct society to develop. The unity of India has become part of the vocabulary of the people. As a geographical term it is often referred as 'Aasetu Himachala' ie from Rama's Bridge to the Himalayas. The term also used to indicate cultural and political unity. The Vishnu Purana clearly indicates the geographical and political boundaries of the country.

"The country that lies north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains is called Bharata; there dwell the descendants of Bharata."¹

The Himalayas seemed to have influenced poets from Kalidasa to Tagore. It had become part of the Indian ethos. In the 'Kumarasambhava', Kalidasa said,

"There in the North is the divine Himalayas which enter the oceans in the East and West like a measuring rod of the World"²

Tagore's reference to the Himalayas in the 'Gitanjali' is well known. Not only the ancients but even modern politicians and diplomats had to seek recourse in ancient literary texts to support their case. In repudiating Chou En-lai's assertion that the Sino-Indian boundary was an artifact of British Imperialism Nehru insisted that the boundary has historical and geographical validity. Nehru said,

".... that the boundaries of India had been settled centuries before the coming of the British by 'history, geography, custom and tradition".³

His foreign ministry was more forthcoming. The Historical Division of the Ministry of External Affairs quoted from the Vishnu Purana to emphasise the point that the country south of the Himalayas and North of the Ocean is Bharat and all those born in the regions are Bharatiyas or Indian. With extensive quotation from the Rig Veda, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the cultural and political unity from the Himalayas to the southern ocean was proved.⁴

It is obvious that, if geography can unite, it can also divide. As K.A. Nilakanta Sastri says the Vindhya mountains divide the northern plains from the Southern peninsula

"From the southern slopes of the satpuras the Tapti flows parallel to the Narmada to the west and the Mahanadi to the Bay of Bengal in the east. This double wall effectively divides the peninsular south from the plains of North India, but not in a manner that hinders seriously the intercommunication between the two regions."⁵

However, V.A. Smith ventures to divide India into three distinct geographical units:

"(1) the northern plains forming the basins of the Indus and the Ganges (2) the Deccan plateau lying to the south of the Narmada, and to the north of the Krishna and the Tungabhadra rivers; and (3) the far south, beyond these rivers, comprising the group of Tamil states. Ordinarily, each of those three geographical compartments has had a distinct, highly complex story of its own. The points of contact between the three histories are not very numerous".⁶

In short the flat plains of Hindustan with its rich alluvial soil and teeming with population which formed the basis of a number of empires contrasts vividly with the rugged peninsular south with smaller kingdoms, somewhat isolated from the rest of the country, with a more pronounced pre-Aryan cultural background and less resources.

Divergences in History

The dominance of the North has exercised the minds of historians especially those in the South. Professor Sundaram Pillai remarked,

"The scientific historian of India ought to begin his study with the basin of the Krishna, of the Kaveri, of the Vaigai, rather than with the Gangetic plain as has been now long, too long the fashion".⁷

However, desirable may be the objective of such an approach it is not a practicable proposition. Professor Pillai argues that India South of the Vindhyas was India proper, where the bulk of the people still continue distinctly to retain their pre-Aryan features, their pre-Aryan languages and their pre-Aryan social institutions. But he admits,

"Even here, the process of organization has gone indeed too far to leave it easy for the historian to distinguish the native warp from the foreign woof. But if there is anywhere any chance of such successful disentanglement, it is in the south; and further south we go the larger does the chance grow".⁸

V.A. Smith gives two reasons for the importance given to the North as compared to the south. Firstly, the open nature of the country (in the North) easily accessible to martial invaders from the north-west, has given frequent occasion for the formation of powerful kingdoms ruled by vigorous foreigners. The tropical peninsular, section of India isolated from the rest of the world by its position, and in contact with other countries only by sea-borne commerce, has pursued its own course, little noticed by

and caring little for foreigners. The historians of India are bound by the nature of things to direct their attention primarily to the north, and are able to give only a secondary place to the story of the Deccan plateau.⁹

Secondly

"The northern record is far less imperfect than that of the peninsula. Very little is known definitely concerning the southern kingdoms before AD 600, whereas the history of Hindostan may be carried back twelve centuries earlier. The extreme deficiency of really ancient records concerning the peninsula leaves an immense gap in the history of India which cannot be filled".¹⁰

Sastri protests that the situation is not as hopeless as Smith says but concedes,

"but it must be recognized clearly that the systematic study of the pre-history of South India has just begun, and that our main approach to the historical growth of South Indian culture must for the present still continue to be made from the North".¹¹

So, historically speaking, south Indian's contact with the North has not been prolonged or continuous in the ancient and medieval period of its development. The Dravidian elements have been salient in the development of its political and social institutions for instance the 'left hand' and 'right hand' castes and kingship not essentially based on Kshatriahood. Strictly speaking there are only two castes in the South, the Brahmins and the Sudras. The other two castes namely the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas are unknown.¹² Smith's observation is shrewd and to the point,

"We see there the strange spectacle of an exaggerated regard for caste coexisting with all sorts of weird notions and customs alien to Brahman tradition."¹³

However, Smith's statement that the history of the South developed little noticed by and caring little for foreigners, needs to be treated with reserve. An ethno-centric civilization did not evolve in the south within the broad framework of the Indian

civilization; on the other hand it could be claimed that foreign contacts and foreign trade dating from the pre-Christian era with the Roman Empire and Arabia helped to develop a cosmopolitan outlook where religion played no part. Hence Nilakanta Sastri's assessment seems to be more acceptable,

"Historians have generally tended to ignore the effect of trade on the outlook of the people of those comparatively remote times. There is no doubt, for instance, that the continuous meeting and intermingling of people of diverse social backgrounds tended to create a liberal and cosmopolitan as opposed to an insular, attitude to life."¹⁴

Religious and Cultural Influences

It is a fact that religion could both unite and divide a nation. In the case of India there is enough evidence to support both schools of thought. The secularists, that is, those who would like to keep the state and religion apart, would argue that religion has always played a divisive role in India and attribute to it the negative quality of separatism. Ainslie T. Embree would support this view. He argues,

"... a very plausible argument can be made, as it often has, that Hinduism as a social system works against political and social integration. The word unity in his [Smith's] phrase is misleading, as it is in the usage of those who have borrowed it".¹⁵

But Smith is persuasive in his argument,

"It is a strange fact that the Vedic Indo-Aryans, the earliest known swarms of immigrants, have stamped an indelible mark on the whole country from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. Modern Hinduism, however, much it may differ from the creed and social usages of the ancient Rishis, undoubtedly has its own roots in the institutions and literature of the Vedic Indo-Aryans. Plenty of other strangers have come in since, but none of them, not even the Muslims, have provided effects comparable in magnitude with those resulting from the Indo-Aryan settlements made three or four thousand years ago."¹⁶

It may be assumed the positive aspects of Hinduism more than compensate for its negative values like the rigidity in caste distinctions and orthodoxy. The Hindu religion has not confined itself to any particular area. The seven sacred rivers include the Indus in the North to Kaveri in the South. According to Hindu lore the seven sacred rivers are Ganges, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Indus and Kaveri. Similarly the seven holy cities includes cities in the North and the South.¹⁷

The cities are Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya, Kashi, Kanchi, Avanthika, Puri and Duaravati.¹⁸

Similarly there are twelve holy places dedicated to Shiva spread throughout India. In addition there are fifty two places dedicated to Devi the Divine Mother.¹⁹

The existent of rivers, cities, mountains and temples throughout India considered holy by Hindus give them a national identity through religion. Perhaps it was this feeling of unity which made V.D. Savarkar claim in 1924 that not only was India the holy land of the Hindus, but it binds Hindus firmly to the soul of 'Sindhustan'. He calls this sense of unity 'Hindutva' or 'Hinduness'.

The unity of India in the religious sense is aptly described by V.A. Smith thus

"The most essentially fundamental Indian Unity rests upon the fact that the diverse peoples of India have developed a peculiar type of culture or civilization utterly different from any other type in the world. That civilization may be summed up in the term of Hinduism Few deny the authority of Vedas and the other ancient scriptures. Sanskrit everywhere is the sacred language. The great gods Vishnu and Siva are recognized and more or less worshipped in all parts of India. The pious pilgrim, when going the round of the holy places, is equally at home among the snows of Badrinath or the burning sands of Rama's bridge. The seven sacred cities include places in the far south as well as in Hindostan. Similarly, the cult of rivers is common to all Hindus, and all alike share in the affection felt for the tales of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana"²⁰

The spread of Hinduism, or Aryanization of the South, as some would prefer to call it, was a long drawn out process and no doubt met with some opposition from those who upheld indigenous culture. However, the process was gradually accepted and an Aryan Culture incorporating many of the Dravidian features gradually took root.

"The Aryanization of the South was doubtless a slow process spread over several centuries. Beginning probably about 1000 B.C., it had reached its completion before the time of Katyayana, the grammarian of the fourth century B.C., who mentions the names of the Tamil countries of the extreme south".²¹

This peaceful acceptance of Aryanization was due to the incorporation of a number of Dravidian symbols and values into the Aryan fold. It is also possible that the vedic rituals introduced by the Brahmins were found acceptable to the various local rulers.

"As keepers of this [vedic] tradition they were venerated in the South and found their supporters in the kings of the peninsula who, like most royalty anywhere, sought the highest respectability available by conforming to tradition; in this case the tradition as interpreted by the brahmans, whether through the performance of vedic sacrifices or through liberal grants to those familiar with the vedas. No doubt the kings felt that to conform with the vedic pattern would bestow a higher status on them".²²

Perhaps the broader vision taken by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri would explain the situation better

".... the incoming Aryans had to learn the language of the people of the south in addition to cultivating their own sanskrit idiom, to accept local customs and incorporate them as part of the new composite social order they evolved, and to find more or less suitable places in their elastic pantheon for the many godlings and goddesses cherished by the pre-Aryan peoples. We shall never know the exact details of the process, but a study of early Tamil literature, the oldest evidence from the southern side to which we have access, produces the definite impression that the new influences were everywhere welcomed and embraced with alacrity and that the changes were affected peacefully and in an orderly manner".²³

Sastri mentions a few of the Dravidian customs which have survived. The prevalence of the Snake cult, the annual celebration of divine marriage in South Indian Siva temples and the tying of the 'tali' or the sacred thread or the brides neck in marriage ceremonies were obviously pre-Aryan Tamil customs taken over and perpetuated into later times. So we find a unity based on religion which was flexible enough to admit non-Aryan practices into the Aryan fold to effect a syncretism which has stood the test of time.

The next epoch in the religious development of the south came with the three great acharyas namely Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva. As Nilakanta Sastri observes that all the three major schools of Vedanta have their origins in South India. The first among them Sankara propagated Advaita or the philosophy of Monism. Romilla Thapar describes his achievements thus,

"Shankara travelled extensively in the sub-continent, displaying the brilliance of his mind in discussion and debate, and converting others to the cause of Vedanta and Advaita. His own enthusiasm in debating with the opponents of Vedanta spurred the philosophical centres into new speculative thinking, where earlier they had tended to stagnant".²⁴

Sankara not only travelled extensively but established four mathas (monasteries) in the four regions in India, at Badrinath in the Himalayas, Puri in Orissa, Dwaraka on the western coast, and Sringeri in the South to propagate monism which survives to this day. The next important acharya was Ramanuja. He founded the school of qualified monism or Vishitadvaita. His emphasis on pure devotion was a forerunner of the Bhakti movement which spread throughout India in the 15th Century. His major contribution was that he built a bridge between the devotional cult and theology. His ideas and teachings spread throughout India. The third of the trinity namely Madhva was a Vaishnava and made further attempts to bring closer the cult of devotion and Hindu theology. He espoused the dwaita or the philosophy of duality. According to Romilla Thapar his ideas show some familiarity with the Christian concept of divine

grace. But Raghavan and Dandekar have pointed out that both the Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions in South India emphasize the role of divine grace in attaining salvation.

The predecessors of the three great acharyas who spread devotion as the ideal for attaining salvation were the Shaiva and Vaishnava Saints. The bhakti movement spread throughout India. It originated in South India in the fifth century A.D. The Shaivite Saints were known as the Nayanars and the Vaishnava Saints as the Alvars. As in Maharashtra the saints came in from all walks of life and many from very humble origins like potters and agricultural labourers. A number of them were Brahmins and they played an important and even a dominant role in the movement and travelled extensively in the country to propagate the faith.

Romilla Thapar tries to give the bhakti movement a non-Brahmin if not an anti-Brahmin colouring. This is not so. It is an attempt to read history in the reverse. She says,

"Although there were some brahmans among the writers of hymns, the majority belonged to the lower castes, being artisans and cultivators ... The concept of a compassionate God was due to the influence of Buddhist ideas ... The feeling of human inadequacy and sin which became an important facet of the Tamil cult owes more to Buddhist ancestry than to Vedic ... Although never so recognised by the brahmans, the Tamil devotional cult was in part a resistance to the Aryanization of the region".²⁵

In fact the Brahmins played a significant role in the movement among the Vaishnavite Alvars, Vishnuchittar was a Brahmin and the foremost among them. In Tamil he is known as 'Peria Alwar' or the great saint. His daughter known as 'Andal' was the only female Vaishnava saint. Of her Thapar says,

"Perhaps the most revolutionary feature was that there were women saints as well, such as Andal whose hymns were much revered. Andal saw herself as the beloved of the god Vishnu and sang verses on her love for him which foreshadow the verses of Mirabai ..."²⁶

Among the Saivite Saints the four greats were Thirunavakkarasu, Nanasambandar, Sundaramurti and Manikka Vasagar. Of them Nansambandar and Sundaramurti murti were Brahmins. Nansambandar is held in so high esteem that according to Sastri,

"There are few saiva temples in the Tamil country today where worship is not offered to him".²⁷

Sundaramurti whose devotion to the Lord was that of an intimate friend was known as 'Tambiran Tozhar' friend of the Lord. The hostility of the followers of the bakti cult was not towards brahmins but towards Buddhism and Jainism and not towards the vedic religion. As Sastri correctly surmises,

"Worshippers of Siva and Vishnu felt the call to stem the rising tide of heresy. The growth, on the one hand, of an intense emotional bhakti to Siva or Vishnu and on the other of an outspoken hatred of Buddhists and Jains, are the chief characteristics of the new epoch."²⁸

Today the devotional hymns of the Shaivite and Vaishnavite saints find a honourable place in South Indian temples along with Vedic hymns. The resistance to 'Aryanization' in all its form is of political origin and recent vintage. Generally speaking the contribution of the South to the development of the Hindu religion has been significant. It has a positive influence in developing an all-India identity to the religion. While maintaining its regional significance it has also influenced the development of the Hindu religion in the north. Sastri sums up the situation thus,

"In the sphere of religion, as generally in all matters of spiritual culture, South India began by being heavily indebted to the North, but in the course of centuries it more than amply repaid the debt and made signal contributions to the theory and practice of religion and philosophical thought in its various aspects."²⁹

Literary Influences

Sanskrit literature played a unifying role in India. While the regional languages were patronised by the rulers of the respective regions, Sanskrit was patronised by all rulers of the southern regions. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata were translated into all regional languages. The poet laureates wrote many secular literary texts as well.³⁰

In fact Sanskrit served as a link language in the South. Some rulers were Sanskrit scholars and literary men of eminence. Sanskrit emerged as the language of culture. It contributed to the literary idioms of the Dravidian languages.³¹

Romilla Thapar concedes,

"A seventh-century inscription of Chalukya King of Badami mentions Kannada as the local Prakrit or natural language and Sanskrit as the language of culture, which neatly summarizes the relationship between the two languages."³²

The early Sanskrit literature was religion oriented as aryanization spread by the beginning of the Christian era and even earlier. The earliest commentator on the Vedas Apastamba is reputed to have lived in the Godavari Valley around the third century B.C. with the foundation of the Vijayanagar Empire a syndicate of scholars headed by Sayana wrote commentaries of the Vedas, Brahmanas and Aranyakas

"Among the Puranas, the Bhagavata was composed somewhere in South India about the beginning of the tenth century ... The Bhagavata combines a simple surging emotional bhakti to Krishna with the Advaita philosophy of Sankara in a manner that has been considered possible only in the the Tamil country in that period".³³

In the eight century A.D. a number of Sanskrit colleges flourished in the South. According to Romilla Thapar the Sanskrit University in Kanchi acquired fame equal to that of Nalanda in the North.

"Two outstanding works in Sanskrit set the standard for sanskrit literature in the South. These were Bharavi's Kiratarjuniya and Dandins 'Dasa Kumaracharita'.³⁴

His 'Kavyadarsha is a milestone in the history of literary criticism. It is significant that this literary criticism formed the basis of 'Dandiyalangaram' in Tamil. It must be noted that all regions in the South contributed to the development of Sanskrit literature

"In some ways Kerala occupied from the beginning a special position as regards Sanskrit learning and institutions for its promotion, and this became more apparent from the fifteenth century when the Zamorins of Calicut began to stand out as the most powerful rulers of Kerala ... Mana Vikrama, the Zamorin who ruled in the middle of the fifteenth century, was a distinguished scholar himself and a patron of letters."³⁵

Sanskrit also influenced the literary developments in the regional languages. The regional languages were not completely divorced from Sanskrit. The epics - the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the Puranas continue to influence the literature of the regional language. Even the literature of the Sangam Age the oldest body of literature in the Tamil language shows Sanskritic influence

"That literature was the result of the meeting and fusion of two originally separate cultures, the Tamil and the Aryan"³⁶

This is not to deny the originality or even the separate identity of the Tamil literature and indeed the whole of the literature of South India. It is no disrespect to the author or his great work to suggest that Tirukkural, the Tamil classic of Tiruvalluvar is modelled on ancient Sanskrit classics.

"Emphasized here, however, is the fact that this Tamil classic is unique and its uniqueness emerges clearly only on a close study of the text and its commentaries."³⁷

V.A. Smith sums up the situation succinctly. In the early Christian era Tamil was the common language in the Chera, Chola and Pandyan Kingdoms. The golden age of Tamil literature was in the first three centuries of the Christian era. The author of the 'Kural' taught the ethical doctrine of beauty and purity unequalled in any literary form in the North. The other two works of equal literary merit were the epics of the 'Anklet' and the 'Jewel belt'.³⁸

Notions of Political Unity

India might not have achieved political unity in the past but idea and aspiration was always there. In spite of regional identities a national consciousness prevailed throughout the known period of history. The ideal may be vague, but nevertheless it existed. To quote Smith,

"The political unity of all India, although never attained perfectly in fact, always was the ideal of the people throughout the centuries. The conceptions of the Universal Sovereign as the Chakravarti Raja runs through Sanskrit literature and is emphasised in scores of inscriptions. The story of the gathering of the nations in the battle of Kurukshetra, as told in the Mahabharata, implies the belief that all the Indian peoples including those of the extreme south were united by real bonds and concerned in interests common to all."³⁹

J.C. Cunningham records that the Sikhs really feared of British aggression of their state because the whole country was considered as one and the domination by one ruler was accepted by all. Hence Smith asserts,

"India therefore possess, and always has possessed for considerably more than two thousand years, ideal political unity, in spite of the fact that actual complete union under one sovereign, universally

acknowledged by all other princes and potentates, dates only from 1857."⁴⁰

If the status of the universal emperor or Chakravartin was a desirable ideal its assumption is usually marked by the performance of the Ashvamedha or horse sacrifice whereby the political unity of the realm and the suzerainty of the emperor are acknowledged by all other rulers. Later this developed as a status symbol.

"The sacrifices were conducted on a vast scale, involving many hundreds of priests and large herds of animals, not to mention the various objects used in the ceremony. For the population they were vast spectacles to be talked of for generations. No doubt they kept the more critical minds diverted, and depicted the King as an exceptional person in communicating with gods, even if only through the priests. The priests too were not ordinary mortals, since they were in effect the transmitters of divinity. Thus the throne and the priest hand worked hand in hand".^{40 41}

These religious sacrifices were symbols of the temporal authority of the king. It established his claim of primacy not only over his subjects but also over lesser kings. It established the king's legitimacy in the exercise of his temporal power and as an arbiter in religious and social disputes within his realm.⁴¹ The brahmin priests too gained temporal power as the advisers to the monarch. As custodians of the Vedas and persons responsible for Vedic sacrifices they grew in spiritual stature as transmitters of divinity. A successful combination of political power and religious knowledge. A delightful combination of religion and politics! In the south too, the religious and the political aspect of the Ashvamedha sacrifice was recognized. As Pallava king performed the sacrifice, they also took titles with a northern flavour as Maharajadhi raja (King of great kings) Dharma-maharajadhi raja (great king of kings ruling in accordance with the dharma). The Pallava king took the title of Mahamalla (great warrior) and the city built by him is known as Mamallapuram. The Chalukya king Somesvara I took the title of Ahavamalla or great warrior. The ambition of many kings in South India has been to lead a successful invasion to the north. A Chera King Nedunjeral Adan assumed the title of Imaya Varamban - 'He who had the Himalayan for his boundary' after a successful northern expedition. Similarly Rajendra Chola I

led a successful expedition to the Ganges Valley and brought the sacred water of the river to his capital. He took the title 'Gangaikondasolan', the Chola who had conquered the Ganges Valley and built a new city 'Gangaikonda Solapuram'. The concept of national unity based on a cultural and religious identity was present even in those ancient times.

Unity in Diversity

The concept of unity in diversity was prevalent in India for a very long time. V.A. Smith is an enthusiastic protagonist of this theory. Although there may be limitations to this theory it is basically a sound proposition. This view is accepted by secularists like Nehru and Humayun Kabir, and Hindu revivalists.

"It would be an instructive exercise to identify and quantify the usage of Smith's phrase, since nationalist writers like Nehru saw the principle of unity as a form of high minded secularism, where Smith was quite explicit as to its content. The peculiar type of civilization that India developed is summed up, he wrote, in the word Hinduism, for India primarily is a Hindu country. This formulation was, of course rejected with vigour by Nehru and other nationalist leaders, but it is one that both Muslim separatists leadership and right-wing Hindu political movements found accurate, even though they drew different conclusions".⁴²

While Smith's view is more general and thus is capable of more than one interpretation Embree wants it to be more specific and its scope restricted. It is difficult to disagree with Embree when he says,

"It is not Hinduism but one element of it, Brahmanical ideology that has been a unifier in Indian civilization and a powerful force in maintaining its integrity in the face of tremendous onslaughts of two other great civilizations, the Islamic and the European."⁴³

Embree's arguments is sound when he postulates two sets of realities, one a regional identity and the other a Brahmanical identity which has created an overarching Indian civilization. He prefers to call the religious and cultural symbols which have an all-

India identity 'Brahmanical' rather than Hindu 'because it has the advantage of indicating well-defined intellectual continuities and commonalities since at least the third century B.C.' This may be true. But the word 'Brahmanical' is often used in the pejorative sense in the South. It is meant to signify religious practices initiated, supported and maintained by the Aryan Brahmans to maintain their domination. The word Hindu may be less precise and as its critics maintain a nineteenth century western innovation, but it has the advantage, of neutrality. Its general applicability and 'foreignness' may be its positive qualities. Embree continues,

"Hinduism is here understood to be correctly applied to the whole complex of religious and social practices that developed in the sub-continent over a very long period of time and which have many regional and local manifestations, varying greatly in time and place ..."⁴⁴

Perhaps it is precisely for this reason the term would be more acceptable to many especially in South India. Moreover, it has the advantage of encompassing all the local beliefs and ideas peculiar to the regions which are often pre-Aryan and non-Aryan and divergent and often in conflict with the classical texts. In this sense the word 'Hinduism' seems to be closer to the concept of 'Unity in Diversity'.

This concept of 'Unity in Diversity' has a positive aspect. The intellectual and cultural vigour of one region has often contributed to the sustained development of Indian civilisation. The period circa 900 to 1300 A.D. has been marked by the intellectual, political and cultural ascendancy of the South. Romilla Thapar generously concedes,

"The political ascendancy of the Cholas, although resented by the powers of the western and Northern Deccan, served to force home the fact that the centre of power in the sub-continent was not confined to one region and could and did shift from area to area. During these centuries the initiative in progress was with the southern part of the sub-continent. Northern India had become timid and conservative and it was the peninsula which saw the birth of new ideas and experiments - whether in the evolution of local civic

responsibility or in the philosophy of Shankarachary and Ramanuja, or in the socio-religious experiment of the devotional cult led by Tamil and Maharashtrian artisans, or even at the more basic level of welcoming Arab traders on the one hand, and on the other hand, venturing out into south-east Asian and Chinese trade. Whilst the north remained static, the peninsula advanced".⁴⁵

Hindu Revivalism or Political Re-Alignment?

There is much controversy with regard to the developments in South India from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. Romilla Thapar would deny any conscious Hindu revival. She prefers to downgrade the achievements of the Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar thus,

"culturally and intellectually Vijayanagara marked a static period in South India It would be more valid to attribute the patronage of Hindu institutions under the King of Vijayanagara to the fact that this was the only substantial kingdom ruled by Hindu kings who were rich enough to endow Hindu institutions".⁴⁶

However, a wealth of information from local sources such as literature, inscriptions and reports of foreign travellers like Ferishta, Abdur Razak, Paes, Nicolo Conti and Nunez make it possible to take a more objective view. Smith's assessment is more reliable.

"The story of Hindu monarchy which set itself up as a barrier to check the onrush of the armies of Islam is one of singular interest, and might be narrated with a fullness of detail rarely possible in Indian history."⁴⁷

Historians from South India take the question of Hindu revival more seriously. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and T.V. Mahalingam assert the theocratic and military dominance in the foundations of the Vijayanagar Empire.

"Here, [in Vijayanagara] in the presence of God, Virupaksha, Harihara I celebrated his coronation in proper Hindu style on 18 April, 1336. He undertook the rule of the kingdom as the agent of the deity to whom all the land South of the Krishna river was

supposed to belong, and his successors kept up the practice he started of authenticating all the acts of state by the sign manual of Sri Virupaksha".⁴⁸

Sastri explains the foundation of the Vijayanagar as the culmination of the general revolt of the Hindu population of South India against Muslim rule. Thus,

"The movement for the liberation of the Deccan from the Muslims may be said to have begun immediately after the Sultan left for Northern India in 1329. The people have never willingly accepted Muslim rule. At this time, moreover, they and their leaders were under the influence of a strong revival of saivism and in no mood to submit passively to the profanation and destruction of their temples and to the corruption and overthrow of their long established usages".⁴⁹

Sastri further explains the dominance of the military elements in the states in these terms

"Vijayanagor became the focus of resurgent Hindu culture which offered a more successful resistance to Islam in this part of the country than any where else ... the polity had to be organized on a warlike footing, and there was no room for weak or incompetent monarchs on the throne; whenever the hereditary claimants were found wanting, they were displaced by the ablest among their lieutenants. The empire is best looked upon as a military confederacy of many chieftains co-operating under the leadership of the biggest among them".⁵⁰

Far from presiding over a senile static society the kings of Vijayangar played an important role in stemming the tide of Muslim domination over three centuries. As Sastri points out the end of the Vijayanagar empire also marks the beginning of the rise of Marathas under Shivaji. The South, especially the far south beyond the Tungabhadra and Krishna river was never dominated by the Muslims. The Muslims, of course, were present in the South as traders and missionaries. This state of affairs was largely due to the fact that,

"The emperors of Vijayangaar addressed themselves deliberately to the task of preserving the Hindu social and political order from being

destroyed by Islam, and in this task they were eminently successful in spite of repeated reverses in the field of battle."⁵¹

Even in the field of literature the Vijayanagar period was not static. As R.C. Majumdar points out,

"The Vijayanagar Empire has to its credit brilliant cultural and artistic achievements. The Emperors were patrons of all languages - Sanskrit, Telegu, Tamil and Kannada"⁵²

The period of Krishna Deva Raya was notable for the development of literature both in Sanskrit and Telegu. His greatest contribution to literature was the long poem 'Amuktamalyada' in Telegu considered one of the five great poems in Telegu literature. Eight great literary figures lived at the court of Krishnadeva Raya. The greatest among them was Allasani Peddana known as the grandfather of Telegu poetry. This period was not lacking in innovation either. The practice of rendering literal translation of Sanskrit works was given up and independent handling of puranic and other themes was resorted to. This greatly encouraged the rise of a new Telegu literary style. In Sanskrit also the elaborate commentaries of Hemadri on the Dharmasatras and Sayana on the vedas were great contributions of the period.

"Part of the glory that was Vijayanagar was the mark of Madhava, a brother of Sayana whose commentary on Parasarasmriti, the Parasara Madhaviya, is a most erudite work which includes an independent treatise on Vyavahara which was neglected in the text of Parasara."⁵³

In short the Vijayanagar period cannot be considered as a sterile or static period in the history of South India but as a period which contributed to the political, religious and literary revival in the South. The patronage extended by the Kings of Vijayanagar to literary men was to a great extent responsible for the stimulus it created for the revival of literary activities.

Foreign Influences in the South

The far south has been less influenced by the Aryan influence and Professor Sundaram Pillai's surmise that in the farther south we could find Dravidian culture, influences and institutions is beyond dispute. However even if there was less Aryan influence, foreign influence was still there. It came from the east and the west, particularly from the west, which prevented the development of an isolated etho-centric civilization. This was especially true of the Malabar coast. It was more isolated, even than the far South Tamil Kingdoms, from the rest of India. It was more or less free from southern empire builders like the Kings of Vijayanagar and the Muslim invaders from the north. Geographically speaking the western ghats served as a barrier for foreign invaders. But the sea served as a highway for trade and cultural influence.

"Historically, there has been a striking contrast between the relative political isolation of this coastal country from the rest of India and its generally active contact by sea with the nations of the outside world - the Roman Empire, Arabs, Chinese, Portuguese and the rest."⁵⁴

Another important fact is that the economic importance of trade with foreign countries had created a new dimension in the political outlook of the country.

"The structure of the southern kingdoms had also to take into account the more than marginal effects of sea powers and the economics of maritime activities, which produced a more complicated pattern than that of the north."⁵⁵

The Chola power reached its height under the reign of Raja Raja and his son Rajendra. Their maritime activities even extended to South-east Asia in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The issue was the profitable trade with south-east Asia and China with India. The success of the venture resulted in the Cholas acquiring a major share of the profits of the trade. In fact the political, commercial and cultural contact between South India and South-east Asia goes back to a much earlier period i.e. around the

beginning of the Christian era. The establishment of Indianized Kingdoms in mainland South-east Asia could be traced to that period. The importance of trade with foreign countries for the prosperity of the nation was recognized by a number of rulers in South India including the Zamorins of Calicut and the Kings of Vijayangar. As early as the Mauryan period it was recognized that many precious commodities are produced in the South. In Kautilya's Arthashastra it was stated that the South produces precious commodities such as conch shells, diamonds, pearls, beryls, sandalwood and cotton fabrics from Madura. The contacts between the North and South were not too close or too numerous, but they existed and influenced each other. Similarly the contact between ancient Rome, West Asia and Southeast Asia and South India existed for a long time, contributing to the prosperity of the region and the settling of foreigners. The Jews, Christians and later Muslims settled in various parts of South India contributing to the diversity of the population and a more accommodating and tolerant attitude.

The history of South Indian Kingdoms indicates that from the beginning of the Christian era foreign influence and foreign trade began to appear in state and society. The Muslims followed the Jews and Christians as traders and missionaries. All these religions co-existed with Hinduism, influencing and being influenced by it without the fear of being absorbed by it. A high degree of syncretism helped to make religious accommodation easier. The Muslims in South India became part of South Indian society.

The Muslims in South India

The contacts between Kerala and Arabia pre-dates Islam. The Arabs came as missionaries and traders. Just like the Jews and Christians earlier, the Arabs were welcomed. Arab traders started coming on a large scale from the eight century onwards. There were no political or religious motives, and hence no cause for conflict. Many of the traders married local women and settled in Kerala.

Consequently their descendants the Mappilas are loyal both to their Arabic and local identities.

"The Malabar coast at this time [from the eight century onwards] was acting host to another influx of traders from the west - the Arabs. Unlike the Romans, they settled permanently in the coastal regions of South India, where they were welcomed as traders and given land for their trading stations. They were free to practice their religion, as had been the Christian in earlier centuries. The present-day Mappillas or Malabar Muslims, being mainly traders were not concerned with large-scale conversions of Islam, and therefore adjustments with local society was easier."⁵⁶

What gives the Mappilas a degree of legitimacy and a sense of pride is the Cheraman Perumal tradition. According to this tradition the Perumal the last ruler of Kerala, divided his kingdom among the various rulers and became a convert to Islam and went to Mecca. It is similar to Christian beliefs that the Apostle St. Thomas came to Kerala performed a number of miracles, converted many and established the church. Perhaps we could give these legends the same importance we give to the Hindu tradition that Parasurama raised Kerala from the ocean bed and gifted it to the Brahmans. As. P.A. Syed Muhummad puts it,

"... the history of Kerala prior to the coming of the Portuguese is a mass of legends and dreams"⁵⁷

The same Cheraman Perumal, according to Shaivite tradition was a close friend of Sundaramurti Nayanar and both reached Kailas, the abode of Shiva together. He was also claimed by the Jains to be one of them. All we should say is that he must have been a devoutly religious man to be claimed by three major religious groups as their own. As Sastri observes,

".... though legend is not history, the historian can never afford altogether to neglect the memory of races which often takes these fascinating enigmatic shapes"⁵⁸

Perhaps it is significant that the Mappila Muslims should use as a reference point an authentic Kerala King rather than a Turco-Afghan adventurer to confer legitimacy to their presence in Kerala. The presence of the Arabs was no doubt for commercial purpose, and their close association with the Zamorin of Calicut was of mutual advantage. It made him one of the richest princes in the South and established him not only as a powerful ruler but also as a great patron of learning. The famous Manavikrama who ruled in the middle of the fifteenth century was a distinguished scholar and patron of learning and attracted scholars from inside and outside Kerala. The Mappilas equally benefited from the Zamorin's patronage. They reached the height of prosperity, so much so, that centuries later they looked upon their period under the rule of the Zamorin as the golden age of Mappilas in Kerala! The reason for this state of affairs is not far to seek,

"The two important factors of mutual economic interests and religious tolerance were interacting in a balanced and positive way. The number of Arabs in the trading parts, as well as the number who married and settled in these places, increased steadily over the centuries. The influx was never large enough to produce a sense of threat. Political and religious imperialism were either absent or next to absent"⁵⁹

It is doubtful whether the Muslim Arakkal family contributed or strengthened the position of the Mappilas in any way as claimed by Miller. It was the only Muslim ruling family and too small and insignificant to have any effect on the Mappilas. The real reason as to the respectable position achieved by the Mappilas before the arrival of the Portuguese may be due to other factors.

"The assimilation of Islam in South India was a smoother process than in the North, since the Arabs were traders and not contestants for political power, and consequently were not concerned with maintaining a separate identity."⁶⁰

Thus the Mappilas lived in apparent peace and prosperity for eight centuries within the scope of Hindu receptivity and neighbourliness, until the arrival of the Portuguese. It is obvious that the Mappilas have been residing in Kerala long before any other

Muslim groups in India and have been accepted by the Hindu population as one of the groups among themselves, and has cultivated an amicable relationship with them.

Early Muslim Settlers in Tamil Nadu

Muslim traders from Arabia settled in various parts of Tamil Nadu, perhaps a little later than those in Kerala. Islam came to South India through its wide ranging maritime trading networks. Arab traders and navigators settled along the Coromandal coast as early as the eighth or ninth century A.D.

".... even today the South's highest ranking Muslim lineages are those who can claim descent from the region's early Arab migrants"⁶¹

These 'high caste' Muslims tend to look down upon other Muslims, called 'labbais', as mere converts and hence of inferior lineage. While maintaining their separate social identity the Muslims readily accepted the social norms and religious hierarchy. They were proud to accept the title and honours conferred on them by the Hindu rulers

"For all their austerity, their commitment to elite scriptural learning and piety and their insistence on the purity of the towns' Islamic life style, the Tamil maraikkayar have long perceived themselves as being part of a much wider world of shared faith and practice"⁶²

As the Mappilas developed the Arabic - Malayalam script, the Tamil Muslims developed Arabic-Tamil that is Tamil written in the Arabic script to develop their religious literature. The 'Sirappuranam' an epic poem on the life of Prophet Mohammed was written by a Muslim scholar 'Umar Pulavar' at the behest of his patron Shaikh Abdul Quadir, better known by this title "Sitakkathi". It is significant that 'Sirappuranam' closely resembles the Tamil version of the Ramayana. The name 'Sirappuranam' itself is significant. It refers to the Hindu puranic ideals. Moreover, Umar Pulavar's style has influenced the whole range of religious literature composed by Tamil Muslims in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Muslims in Tamil Nadu find no incompatibility in the incorporation of local beliefs and tradition in the Islamic fold. Neither have the Hindus any problem in accepting Allah among the Hindu pantheon. He is worshipped as Allah Swami equal to Siva, Murukan and Aiyanar of the Hindu pantheon.

"At this level, at the level of living religion, with its cult shrines and everyday devotional practices, the notion of a pir (saint) who may become transcendent is something which has given great power and vitality to the tradition of South Indian Islam. Thus has also been the means of forging strong and lasting links with the world which is now thought of as being formally 'Hindu', the world of South India's theistic high gods and power divinities."⁶³

In Kerala too the Ayyappan - Vavar tradition is a good example of religious syncretism. In his historical manifestation Ayyappan is supposed to have subdued the pirate chief who became his trusted lieutenant. Vavar's shrine is maintained by the Muslims but Hindus regularly visit the shrine and Muslims also visit the Ayyappan temple associated with the tradition. These traditions indicate that a close link between what may be termed as high or scriptural Islam and 'low' or folk Islam has been established and the trading Muslim community in South India is the bearer of this tolerant tradition. So any perceived conflict between these two traditions based on the assumption that 'low' or folk Islam is a corruption of the other is incorrect.

"To many ethnographers of the period, only the Persianate ashraf of North India constituted 'real' or 'pure' Muslims: Those who belonged to the vernacular linguistic cultures of Bengal, Malabar Tamil Nad of were converts' origin. This then is a typical case of Indian Society being reshaped according to crude British misperception about the nature of communal status and identity".⁶⁴

The Portuguese Interlude in Kerala

The coming of the Portuguese was a traumatic experience to both the Hindus and Muslims in Kerala. The Mappilas suffered the most as the Portuguese were antagonistic towards all Muslims who they called Moors. The monopoly of trade

enjoyed by the Arab traders and Mappilas were broken. The Portuguese took over the monopoly. The Mappilas were reduced to petty coastal trading and became shop keepers and agricultural labourers. In the struggle against the Portuguese the Mappilas lost out. They felt all the more bitter because the Hindus refused to support them. The Syrian Christians supported the Portuguese as their co-religionists and became their most obvious allies. The Syrian Bishop Mar Jacob wrote to the Pope offering the loyalty of the Syrians to the Christian cause, by not selling any pepper to the Moors and the service of twenty five thousand warriors. In retaliation the Mappilas attacked and destroyed the Christian Churches and Jewish Synagogues in Kodungallur in 1524.

"The result of the Portuguese period for the Mappilas may be summarised as economic regression, estrangement from Hindus, bitterness against the Christians and a new militancy. Each of these was passed forward in some measure into modern times, shaping both Mappila history and present attitudes."⁶⁵

Much has been made of the fact that the Raja of Cochin and the Kolattiri Raja co-operated with the Portuguese against the Mappilas. Their enmity to the Zamorin and the need to preserve their economic interests and thrones were good enough reasons. The piratical activities of Kunjali Marikkar and his indiscriminate attacks on all coastal shipping including that of the Zamorin, forced even the Zamorin to seek an alliance with the Portuguese to put down the piracy. It is significant that even the Bijapur Sultan refused to help his co-religionists to start a jihad against the infidels.

Some Indian writers have made pointed references to the atrocities committed by the Portuguese against the Muslims and other Indians. History provides a number of examples of Indian rulers committing greater atrocities on their rivals and even on their own people. Millers' assessment is more than fair,

"Vasco da Gama was not a free man. In every sense the intrepid explore was a man of his times. He came from a part of the world where the Christian Muslim struggle had gone on for centuries. He was an unquestioning representative of the medieval conviction that force was a legitimate aid to the task of conquering and converting.

He was given provocation by the Muslim traders who were intent on preserving their monopoly".⁶⁶

The result was politically and economically disastrous for the Muslims. This period also marked the social decline of the Mappilas

"... The combination of Portuguese political control and religious aggressiveness severely impeded the advance of Islam in Kerala. The Portuguese coastal presence had blocked the Arab influx and subsequent inter-marriage and Hindu conversion to Islam. Further the Mappilas had lost the attractiveness of a dominant group and were clearly on the defensive"⁶⁷

The English writers Logan and Innes agree with the Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa that,

"If the King of Portugal had not discovered India, Malabar would already have been in the hands of the Moors".

Whatever the cause, the disruption and destruction of their lucrative trade and their social and economic decline created a sense of bitterness among the Muslims towards the Hindus and the rulers, so that they were in a mood to assert their new-found religious identity to reassert their domination.

The Mysore Interregnum and Rise of Muslim Identity

The second half of the eighteenth century was a period of religious strife, political disorder and social dislocation in Malabar, which threatened to spill over into the States of Travancore and Cochin. During this period Haider Ali, who had usurped the throne of Mysore, and his son Tipu Sultan played a major role in these developments. Neither Haider Ali nor Tipu Sultan could be considered to be religious fanatics. But they found in religion a good excuse, and in the Mappilas a willing tool to extend and expand their political domination. K.P. Padmanabha Menon in his History of Kerala states "Tipu's fanatic efforts to convert the people to Islamism were

warmly supported by the Moplah inhabitants of Malabar whom he used as his unscrupulous elements."

"The occupation of Malabar by the forces of Haider and Tipu was disastrous socially and economically. Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan injected two related streams of infection into the life blood of the Mappilas that had not been discernably present previously. One of these was regard for Hindus as the natural enemies of the Muslims. This feeling, characteristic elsewhere in India but not a mark of Kerala Islam, was now imported and became a strong element in Mappila psychology. The other was the acceptance of the use of force in religious matters. The climate created by the Portuguese had fanned to life this principle but Tipu turned it into a fire that is going out only in contemporary times."⁶⁸

The Arakkal Ali Raja welcomed Haider Ali and became the chief power in North Malabar and many Nair families were forcibly converted to Islam. According to C.H. Rao fifteen thousand Nairs were forcibly transported to uninhabited areas in Mysore and barely one thousand survived.

The conditions in Malabar became worse with Haider's son and successor Tipu Sultan. He increased religious persecution.

"the advent of the highly successful Muslim rulers gave the Mappilas a much needed psychological boost. The fact that they were for the first time living under Muslim rulers made it appear that matters had finally turned their way. This emotional impact was reflected in the support given by the Mappilas to Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, including enrolment in their forces"⁶⁹

The Arakkal Bibi indicated the support of her family to the Islamic cause by marriage to a son of Tipu Sultan. The net result was the further exacerbation of hostile feelings between the Mappilas and the Hindus. Thousands fled the country to Travancore, others took to the jungle to carry on a guerrilla war from there. With the defeat of Tipu, the British took over Malabar. The Mappilas had to pay a terrible price for their misdeeds. The Hindu rulers and landlords returned under British protection and wreaked vengeance on the Mappilas. It was a return to status quo ante with a

vengeance. The dispossessed hapless Mappilas took to rebellion which was suppressed by the British, thereby earning an unnecessary reputation for being "pucca brutes". They returned to religion and conservatism.

"Socially, they had developed a ghetto-like pattern of life from which they were saved only by their common language, residential patterns, and the necessity of commercial intercourse".⁷⁰

This pattern of life continued, with some variation, until India became independent.

Religious Syncretism in Tamil Nad

Haider Ali called Muhammad Ali, the Nawab of Carnatic, - 'the most treacherous of men', but his style of enhancing and extending his power was different from that of Haider. Although he was nothing more than a nominee of the British on the Carnatic throne he claimed suzerainty over states in the South, such as Tanjore and Travancore. But the way he went about state formation and incorporating Hindu religious and social institutions within his sovereignty is worthy of consideration as an example of religious toleration and syncretism.⁷¹ The expression of piety and protection of holy places were part of the nation building process in India. In this respect the Nawabs of Arcot went further,

"... that is why, despite their commitment to Islamic forms of state craft, the nawabs also revered and patronised the regions' great Hindu holy places .. unlike his Navaayat predecessors, Muhammad Ali Walajah appears in the chronicles of several South Indian temples as a ruler who fulfilled the standard to protect and endow Hindu holy places"⁷²

In exercising his function as a ruler in defending and protecting Hindu, Muslim and Christian places of worship the Nawabs were holding some of the best traditions in South India and enhancing their reputation as well. Here it must be remembered that the political power of the Nawabs was declining and they were gradually reduced to the level of agents of the British. The only way they could enhance their status and

even justify their claim to sovereignty was to establish themselves more firmly as protectors of all religious and holy places as the repository of sovereign power. Not only had Muhammed Ali been a benefactor of holy shrines such as Sri Rangam, but had even been accepted as an arbiter in the dispute for temple honours in that temple. The Nawab's benefactions to temples, churches etc have been summarized as follows,

"On 31st October, 1789 it was reported to Nawab Wallajah that some British soldiers entered a Hindu temple at Trichy Fort and removed the idols. The Nawab became furious and immediately ordered to the commander of the fort that the idols should be traced and restored to the temple at once. He further ordered, that none other than Hindus should be allowed to enter the temple."⁷³

Nawab Wallajah donated vast lands for the construction of mosques, temples and churches. Thereby he maintained perfect religious harmony and unity amongst the members of different religious communities. It is a known fact that Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Sri Rangam near Trichy was a gift of the Nawab, with a sizeable estate, which is called 'Nawab Thottam' nowadays. There are many other temples in South which stand on the lands given by the Nawab.

The Nawab also permitted the establishment of Christian churches in South India, and not only gave lands to Christian missions, but also was present in person on the occasion of the inauguration of the Dr. Shwartz school in Trichy. This is still being mentioned year after year in the Calendar of the Bishop Heber College of Trichy.

When describing the holy places of Hindus, Muslims or Christians two points are significant. Firstly these holy places are not exclusively identified with any religious group and do attract devotees from the followers of other religions. Secondly by establishing contact with and protecting these holy places, the ruler is asserting his sovereignty over and claiming the allegiance of all people irrespective of their religious affiliations. In this respect the dargah or tomb of a Sufi is equally

venerated by Muslims and Hindus. This fact is clearly brought about by the patronage of the Maratha rajas of Tanjore of the dargah in Nagore.

"One of the greatest of these holy places was the dargah of the legendary Sufi Master Shahul Hamid Naguri. This shrine was closely tied to the state making ambitions of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Maratha rajas of Tanjore. The shrines' official histories commemorate the Maratha ruler Pratab Singh (1739-63) as the builder of the sites five great minars (minarets): Under the patronage of these officially Hindu rulers, the Shrine became one of the most celebrated sacred sites in South India".⁷⁴

It seems to me that in protecting all places of worship and patronizing them the rulers in South India were following in the footsteps of their predecessors' going beyond mere tolerance based on self interest. It seems to be part of the tradition of the rulers' duty to provide equal protection to all subjects irrespective of religion. There has been a close connection between spiritual and temporal authority in South India. The sacred and the secular were considered not as separate sources of power but as a unified source of power. The deities of Tirupati and Sri Ranganam were treated as universal rulers and the temple ceremonies include all the marks of royalty. Similarly, rulers sought spiritual guidance from learned preceptors, for example, the Maratha Raja of Tanjore accepted a Swami from the Sri Sankaracharya math as his preceptor and persuaded him to reside in Tanjore; in another case the Raja of Pudukkottai accepted a Brahmin saint, Sadasiva Brahmandra Saraswati as his royal guru. Rulers would also assume authority and titles as protectors of holy places: the Raja of Ramnad's assumption of the title 'Setupati', protector of the holy shrine in Rameswaram is an illustration of this.

".... there could be no real separation between the sacred function of the Tamil Shrines and their role in the political and military process of nawabi-era state formation. When the Wallajah ruler performed acts of patronage at Sri Ranganam, he was acknowledging the shrine as place of power within one of the great religious networks which comprised his domain. And in associating himself with the holy places, in incorporating them into his realm and assuming authority

over them, the nawab was asserting his authority in a way which fused the concepts of secular and supernatural powers."⁷⁵

Elitism and Syncretism

What were the factors that made the South different from the North in the establishment of states based on a tolerant and accommodating policy towards all religions? In the first place Muslims arrived in the South long before they came to the North. In the South they came as peaceful Arab traders; in the North they were the Turco-Afghan conquerors. The Deccan sultanate was held in check for nearly three centuries by the Vijayanagar Empire. The Deccan Sultanate itself was split into five sultanates each in turn was absorbed by the Mughal Empire. Kerala and the Far South were never under Muslim domination.

"Thus while the Tamil country did not have any sustained experience of Muslim conquest before the eighteenth century, the region did contain substantial number of people who identified themselves as Muslims and who wished to associate themselves with traditions of Muslim military and political ascendancy"⁷⁶

This condition led to the rise of two group of elitists. The Maraikkayar with a claim of Arab descent and a tradition of trade, who combined the notion of high Islamic purity with a tradition of service and honour derived from non-Muslim Kings and warriors. The new arrivals or the Dakhni Muslims who claimed to be men of standing, due to their connection with the Mughal or Deccani Courts. The former were more numerous and more dominant. The Nawab of Carnatic belonged to the later category but they found it expedient to adopt the accommodating stance of the former for practical reasons as religious syncretism had long been established in the Tamil country.

South India was receptive to religious accommodation due to three main trends in Hinduism in the pre-colonial period,

(i) high Hinduism based on the scriptures and Sanskritic temple worship which may be termed 'Brahmanism, (ii) the Bhakti cult tradition based on egalitarianism and devotion to God; and (iii) the Hindu folk tradition which includes, the worship of local deities, beliefs in local traditions unknown to and even opposed to the vedic religion. As Susan Bayly remarks each has its own identity but there is no clear demarcation among the three, but each influenced the other two. The poligar chiefs in Tamil Nadu were keen to enhance their ritual status by adopting 'high' or ritual Hinduism indicating their passage from blood spilling warrior to divinely mandated kings.

"On the one hand, ritual was a pervasive political fact; on the other, politics was permeated by ritual forms"⁷⁷

Brahmin priests played an important role in this process.

"The Thirugokarnam Temple in Pudukkottai was another of these tutelary temples, and it too became a rallying point for dynastic claims. The chiefdoms Kallar Tondaiman rajas made lavish benefactions to the shrine throughout the eighteenth century, and its Brahman priests performed the rulers installation rites and the various other ceremonies which expressed the lines claims of kingship"⁷⁸

The Brahmins played an important and even dominant role, but

"Brahmans did not displace ideological ascendancy of royal honour; they added to it."⁷⁹

Unlike in the North, in the South there were no intermediate castes between the Brahmins and the Sudras, so the social position admitted a number of adjustments and re-allocation of caste identities.

"Caste identities were extremely malleable, and the role of the Brahman was that of a catalyst rather than a representative of a dominant hierarchy."⁸⁰

The Decline of the Mappilas after the Haider, Tipu period

The short lived euphoria of the success of the Haider - Tipu invasion soon disappeared with the destruction of Tipu Sultan in 1799. The Mappilas' collaboration with the invaders and participation in atrocities against the Hindus, alienated the latter and created a barrier of mutual suspicion and distrust which survived for a long time. The Hindu rulers and landlords with the aid of the British not only recovered their property but took revenge on the Mappilas. During the period 1821 to 1921 there were fifty-one outbreaks by the Mappilas. Miller calls these as part of an apocalyptic movement of the Mappilas aimed at the destruction of the Kafir. These rebellions have a religious agenda but they were primarily due to agrarian discontent.

"The problem of serfdom and poverty is the most frequently cited case of the outbreaks. It was a problem that Mappilas shared with Hindus who also were tenants or landless labourers."⁸¹

But the rebellions were confined to the Mappilas. As Sir M. Krishnan Nair stated in the then Madras Legislative Assembly in 1921,

"all the outbreaks that have occurred in Malabar ... are in some way connected with religion"⁸²

Collector Innes of Malabar makes a shrewd observation that agrarian discontent, poverty and fanaticism provided the main impetus. Mappilas he said, are miserably poor and hopelessly ignorant. Their minds are peculiarly susceptible to inflammatory preaching which draws alluring contrasts between their miserable earthly state and joys of paradise.⁸³ The Mappilas faced with insurmountable problems gradually slipped into religious fatalism, fanaticism with a strong anti-Hindu, anti-Western outlook and general economic misery. Miller sums up the situation thus,

"Mappilas rather adopted and maintained a steady, unyielding opposition to the western, and therefore, it was felt, Un-Islamic

influences. The attitude was buttressed by the encouragement of new teachers from Arabia such as the Jifri family, and was inspired by the examples of the Mappila martyrs. The task of the community was to be guarded and to resist with all its power the latest manifestation of oppression"⁸⁴.

Much has been written about the Mappila rebellion of 1921. It started peacefully and on a non-communal basis as part of Gandhi's 'Khilafat' movement, but ended as communal movement. There was much resentment on the part of the Hindus because of the failure to condemn Mappila violence, rather attempts were made to condone it.

"There was also great misgiving over the failure of Muslim leaders to condemn Mappila violence against the Hindus. Maulana Mahani, a noted Muslim nationalist was criticised by Gandhi in this regard, 'He had made up his mind that the Moplah's fought for their religion, and that fact (in his estimation) practically absolves the Moplah from blame.'"⁸⁵

More regrettable is the current trend to re-assess the Mappila rebellion from the point of view of 'secularism'. It was given the colour of a national uprising against British rule. The Mappilas were considered to be national heroes if not martyrs and suitably honoured. This dilution of historical facts is likely to devalue 'secularism' than enhance its reputation. While sympathetically assessing the rebellion Miller states,

"The contemporary attempt to 'save' the Mappila reputation by a bland overlooking or reinterpreting of these events is not a favour either to historical accuracy or to the need for Mappila self-understanding"⁸⁶

A better assessment of the Mappila rebellion would be that it was a product of agrarian discontent, social isolation and religious fanaticism fuelled by current events.

Mappilas' Role in the Nationalist Movement and After

A number of prominent Mappilas like Muhammad Abdur Rahman Sahib and E. Moidu Maulavi took part in the national movement. But gradually the majority drifted towards the Muslim League and the two nation theory. It may be ironical as Miller puts in that the Mappilas who lived in cultural harmony with the Hindus for the first eight centuries of their history should subscribe to the two-nation theory. But it must be remembered that the Mappilas were always subject to the religious pull. In 1947 the Muslim League Members in the Madras Assembly demanded that the Muslim majority area in Malabar be granted a separate status as 'Moplastan'. The argument was that the acceptance of linguistic states implies the acceptance of religion based states as well. Culture is part of language and the heart of culture is religion. The Muslim League was revamped as the Indian Union Muslim League.

"In December, 1947, Mohammed Ismail was chosen to head the Indian Union Muslim League, as it was now called, and he now fought to maintain the fiction that the remnant of the League was still the sole representative of Indian Muslims".⁸⁷

The formation of the Kerala State strengthened the political power of the Mappilas for two reasons. Firstly as they constituted nearly eighteen per cent of the population mostly concentrated in Malabar, they became an influential minority in Kerala instead of an insignificant minority in Madras. The shifting alliances and multi-party system in Kerala made their support crucial to both the Congress party and the communist parties. A Muslim League member of Madras put the problem in its perspective.

"Muhammad Raza Khan stated this view clearly when he said, 'It does not require any extra ordinary wisdom to realize that safeguards, cries for justice and fair play, and goodwill, have no meaning unless they are backed by power. Politics means power, and that is exactly what five crores of Muslims in India lack.'"⁸⁸

Both the Congress party and the two communist parties which swear by secularism found new virtues in the Muslim League. The Congress and communist parties declared that the Kerala Muslim League is 'different' and not 'communal'. It was left to the aged Muslim nationalist to retrieve the situation. He remarked drily,

"If the Muslim League is not a communal organization, there is no communal organization in the world."⁸⁹

K.M. Seethi states of the Muslim League was clear and concise in his assertion. He affirmed an organization of the majority would be bound to be communal, "But when a minority organisation is formed to serve its needs, it is clear that it is not communal; it is the duty of community organizations to enter policy'. In brief the League was at the same time asserting that it was communal and that it was non-communal."⁹⁰

A contradiction which the Congress and communist parties were glad to overlook. In 1968 the Marxist government in Kerala created a Muslim majority district called Malappuram on the ground of 'backwardness' and 'administrative convenience'.

It took the Muslims to realize that neither the formation of a Muslim majority district nor participation in government by members of the Muslim League would solve their basic problems of poverty and education. This gave rise to the Muslim Education Society under Professor P.K. Abdul Gafoor. It excluded active politicians from its working committee. It avoided both religion and politics. Its success displayed the Muslim League in a bad light, and its growing influence posed a threat to the pretensions of the League. Having failed to take it over, the League mounted a vicious campaign against it. The MES leaders were not secularised Muslims, but they were primarily interested in the secular world. The end result was that the community accepted the state programme of universal secular education at lower level.

"The acceptance was made by the qualified or dedicated approval of Mappila leaders, by the example of other communities, and by the

sheer necessity to conform in order to survive. While this did not imply a commitment to the principles underlying secular education for a large section of the community; it set in motion a process of modernisation that altered outlook and behaviour."⁹¹

Progress in Tamil Nad

The territory of the Nawab of Carnatic was finally taken over by the British in 1801. So ended the last Muslim dynasty in South India. But it had no specific significance. The South Indian Muslim tradition hardly depended on a Muslim dynasty or a Muslim aristocracy. In the Deccan the Muslim tradition of an Urdu speaking elite continued under the Nizams rule, but in the South the traditional trading elites the Maraikkayar continued their business as usual. About Kerala Miller says,

"The Mappilas are Malayalis and Kerala is their home".

It is equally true to say,

"The Muslims in Tamil Nad are Tamilians and Tamil is their mother tongue".

In this respect the Tamil Muslims have done even better than the Mappilas. They have made major contributions to the development of Tamil literature. There is at present a Chair of Islamic Tamil Literary Studies at Madurai Kamaraj University. As far as the Nawabs of Carnatic are concerned their military cult tradition and political expansion were curtailed by the British.

"Once it had ceased to be an expanding territorial domain with its own army and revenue machine, the regime would naturally focus on the sacred and ceremonial functions of Kingship and on ritual which exalted the status of the ruler and his kin".⁹²

The disappearance of Nawab rule did not much affect the tradition of the Tamil Muslim's social framework. Even to this day the highest ranking Muslims in Tamil Nadu claim descent from the early Arab traders.⁹³

The rich Muslim trading community patronised learning and made generous contributions to religious institutions

"... the Nayakas and their medieval predecessors provided a model of princely benefaction and largesse which was taken up by the Muslim trading clans and absorbed into this same ideal of pious munificence and patronage. This overlapping of the regions two great traditions of lordship explains why some of the region's most eminent Muslim trading families took pride in using honorifics and titles which identified them with the ideals of Islamic High Culture and simultaneously, with the traditions and symbols of an indigenous Hindu Kingship"⁹⁴

The Tamil Muslims have always considered themselves as being part of a wider Tamil culture which included Hindu customs, traditions and religious practices.

However, it would be idle to pretend that the communal problem does not exist in the South. External factors have influenced both political accommodation and divergences. The modern period, unfortunately, has contributed more to the latter than the former. But past experiences could serve as a guide to the future. In the present century, Muslim politics in South India has followed the same path as that of North India ie co-operation with the Congress up to the 1920's, followed by Jinnah's organisation of the moribund Muslim League. Although the Pakistan demand and assertion of Muslim separatism was largely irrelevant to South India, the Muslim League succeeded in capturing all the Muslim Seats in 1946. After independence the rump of the Muslim League called itself the 'Indian Union Muslim League' and M. Mohammed Ismail became its president. Unlike in Kerala, the Muslim League in Tamil Nadu was an ineffective body. In 1957 it rejected Kamaraj Nadar's offer of co-operation as inadequate and backed independent Muslim candidates, all of them were

defeated. In 1961 the Muslim League split and the dissidents formed the 'All India Muslim League'. The new party supported the Congress party. The dissidents did not fare well and Mohammed Ismail continued his effort to claim for the League the role of sole representative of the Muslims. The League tried to revive its fortunes by aligning itself with the Swatantra Party and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in 1959 with some success. In 1964 in alliance with the DMK, the League was able to elect fifty four members to the various municipal councils. The claim of the League to be the sole representative of Muslims did not go unchallenged. In 1956 the nationalist Muslims founded the South Indian Muslim Convention. The Convention unreservedly supported the Congress Party. C.A. Mohamed, one of its leaders, is a member of the Tamil Nadu Congress Party and Secretary to the influential Muslim Educational Association of South India. The success of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), in the 1970 has further marginalized the Muslim League. The Congress -ADMK alliance has proved to be a dominant factor in Tamil Nadu Politics. In Kerala the Muslim League could hope to play a significant role due to the equal strength of the two 'fronts' and the communal distribution of the population which makes it impossible for any one group to dominate politics. As one political leader of the ADMK said that combined ADMK - Congress strength has created an unbeatable combination⁹⁵ which was proved in the elections in 1991. Under these circumstances Muslims could only obtain concessions by appealing to the sense of fairness to the ruling party and as a 'deprived' minority.

The Early Settlements of Syrian Christians in Kerala

In Kerala the Christians outnumber the Muslims and hence they are a significant minority. They were better able to cope up with the stress and strains of modernity than the Muslims. They do not seem to fear Hindu domination or absorption by The Hindu Community. The Syrian Christian Community seems to be one of the most intelligent and innovative communities in India. Their experience and attitude should serve as an example to others. Kerala is a land of dreams and legends.

One such tradition based on legend is that the Apostle St. Thomas introduced Christianity in Kerala. The legend is so strong that the Christians in Kerala are referred to as St. Thomas Christians or Syrian Christians - a reference to the land of their ancestors.

St. Thomas is said to have arrived in Malabar about 52 AD and established churches along the coast. He is reputed to have travelled overland to Madras to preach the new religion and was killed in 68 AD. The survival of the Syrian church in South Kerala and the historical and commercial links between South India and the Mediterranean region add strength to this legend.⁹⁶

However, clear evidence exists that a ruler of Venad Ayyanadikal Tiruvadi was religiously tolerant and made the Tarisappalli grant to the Christians in the ninth century A.D.⁹⁷ One significant factor was that the Christians mostly settled in central and South Kerala while the Muslims were in North Kerala and the contact between these two groups were minimal. It is also to be noted that the Christian integrated well within the Hindu caste hierarchy and were accorded the status of high caste Nairs.

The Syrian Christians were linked religiously with the primates in West Asia especially the Jacobite Patriarchs of Antioch. The archdeacon in Kerala possessed a measure of spiritual power. His performance of liturgical rites served to transmit this power, and these acts confirmed the authority of the priesthood and maintained the spiritual integrity of the population within the churches of West Asia. The primate or patriarch was regarded as the source of this sanctifying power, and it was dispersed to other clerics through acts of consecration and ordination. Bishops and priests were bound and united by the chain of spiritual authority emanating from the primate. But it was necessary to renew this spiritual power by continuous contact with West Asian primates.

"For over 500 years, the Syrians have perceived these overseas church notables as links in a continuing chain of prelate-saints

stretching back to the group's original heroes and progenitors, and thus ultimately back to St Thomas himself."⁹⁸

As the contact with the western prelates could never be continuous and was at times uncertain the Syrians had to look to the Hindu rulers in Kerala to renew the authority of their archdeacons. By the sixteenth century this necessity became an accomplished fact. The most notable of the rulers was the Raja of Cochin who strengthened his secular powers by endorsing and granting recognition to the Syrian clerics. Thus the Christian groups legitimacy was derived from the power of the Hindu ruler as well as the group ties to the West Asian primates and saint bishops.

Socially the customs and traditions of the Syrian Christians were indistinguishable from that of high caste Hindus. Their presence and proximity were not considered polluting to caste Hindus. Some of them even held positions connected with the ceremonial honours in Hindu temples. Similarly caste Hindus were given certain precedence in Christian churches.

"For many, centuries, the Syrian Christians performed 'Shradas (oblations to the family dead which also remove the ritual pollution caused by death) just as Hindus did. Many of their birth, puberty and marriage rites were also indistinguishable from domestic rituals enacted by high-ranking Hindu Malayalis, and they shared the same terminology for many of these rites with the region's caste Hindus."⁹⁹

Another tradition the Syrian Christians shared with the Hindus was the tradition of warriors associated with the Nairs. There were many martial arts, centres run by Nair chiefs who were given the title 'Panikkars' by the rulers. There were some Christian Panikkars and they helped to establish a Christian warrior tradition. The Christian warriors served the various rulers with distinction and were honoured by them. This tradition was even continued up to the British period.

"The two regimes [of Travancore and Cochin] were able to recruit and incorporate Tamil Brahman ritualists, Konkani traders, Deccani and Pathan Muslim soldiers and even warrior clansmen from the

Tamil poligar country, and so there is nothing exceptional about their success in assimilating high-ranking Malayali Christian warriors as well. The powerful Syrian Catholic families of North and Central Travancore, were especially prominent in Marthanda Varman's new War State."¹⁰⁰

Moreover, the Kerala rulers were able to connect the prestigious martial arts with the modern military training established by European military officers. Eustance de Lannoy the Belgian mercenary who trained Marthanda Varma's army in modern warfare is the most notable example.

The Syrian Metrans (bishops) were treated on a par with local chiefs and they had their own Christian body guards.

"The great Syrian lineages of Kerala were accorded shares in many of the state rituals which were inaugurated by the eighteenth century rulers. In Cochin, leading St. Thomas Christian families were given royal land grants, and settled in fast growing commercial towns such as Trichur and Trippunittura, Syrian prelates participated in the Raja's installation ceremonies".¹⁰¹

The Portuguese Arrival and Split among Christians

At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese the position of the Syrian Christians was that of a community which had accepted the Hindu moral order. They were an integrated community, accepted as closely bound up with the Hindu religious and social life, without losing their Christian identity. The Portuguese were the first European power to arrive in India with considerable military strength. They had a commercial and religious purpose backed by military strength. Their position was backed by the Papal decree granting them the right to control all ecclesiastical appointments in their overseas territories. To them, the West Asian prelates were 'vile Nestorian heretics', to be suppressed as they challenged the authority of the Portuguese priests. Strictly speaking there was no separation between the Church and

State. The 'padroado real', royal patronage, granted by the Pope meant a state backed church system with its Asian head quarters in Goa.

"In lands as far apart as Japan, South India and the Kingdoms of Kongo the Portuguese strengthened their position as a privileged trading power by building up ties of religious affiliation and patronage with local rulers and their elite warrior groups".¹⁰²

To compete with the Syrian Christians the Portuguese supported the St. Thomas Cult and sponsored the San Thome Church in Madras as a new centre of pilgrimage connected with the Apostle. It was to a great extent the Portuguese patronage of Christianity overseas that enabled Portugal to be accepted as a great power in Europe. The patronage of religion as a state building exercise was in keeping with the tradition of South India as well.

"By supporting the St. Thomas shrines the 'padroado' was bringing new refinement to its role as pious royal benefactor. This was a role which was analogous to that of the regional Muslim and Hindu rulers. As has been seen, pre-colonial rulers forged bonds of alliance and affiliation with warrior clans and other strategically placed client groups by endowing holy places, especially shrines connected with the military saints and deities of their new client groups"¹⁰³

The new client group was the Latin Catholics who separated from the Syrian Christians. As time went on their number increased with missionary activities. However a great body of Syrian Christians continued to be loyal to their tradition and they were influenced more by their local rulers and Hindu religious culture than the Portuguese.

Portuguese influence in Tamil Nad

Christian worship and reverence to Christian saints were prevalent in Tamil Nadu even before the arrival of foreign missionaries. The early Christian missionary was perceived as an individual holy man and not as a part of a Christian hierarchy. The early missionary preached in terms of joining an alien community. So the high

caste Hindus looked down upon the converts as the followers of the unclean parangi (Portuguese) who ate beef. But the Portuguese ignored these distinctions. They converted the entire fishing community called 'paravas' to Catholicism. It was more of a tactical alliance than religious conversion as it strengthened the position of the caste head of the 'paravas'. The Chief was given a number of imposing titles and he was made a hereditary chief of his community. The succession to the post of hereditary chief continued until the second decade of the present century: Christianity helped the Paravas to maintain a close knit caste identity in South India. Some Jesuits were unhappy at the poor image of Christianity and Christians. To improve the image Robert de Nobili adopted the life style of a Brahmin renouncer. He said he was an aristocratic Kshatriya from Rome and a seeker of knowledge and enlightenment. He took the name of 'Tattuvabodakar' a teacher of reality. Others followed him and the result was a syncretism between Hindu ideas and Christian beliefs. To this day Hindu religious vocabulary is part of Christian vocabulary as well e.g. Veda for scriptures, Vedapustakam for the Bible, 'Mantra'. prasadam etc. In addition the patronage extended by the Tamil poligars did much to Indianize and thereby popularize Christianity in the South.

"It should be recognised then that it was the poligars and not just the European pioneers like de Nobili who helped to make Christianity part of an intelligible and truly indigenous pattern of faith and worship in South India. Through their acts of patronage, Christianity was transformed into something that was no longer alien and unassimilable - no longer just the faith of the 'parangi kulam'"¹⁰⁴

The British Period and its Influence

With the rise of British power the warrior tradition of the Christians and Nairs was devalued. Some of the Syrian Christians began to change their caste life style and the set of customs and observances which defined them in relation to other communities and caste groups. James Forbes in his oriental memoirs published in 1813 describes their new attitude thus,

"Many of the St. Thomas Christians now preserve the manners and mode of life of the Brahmins as to cleanliness and abstaining from animal food. Francis Buchanan also found signs of a shift to vegetarianism and 'clean' Brahmanical life style among the Syrians of Cochin, particularly among the Kattanars (priests) who appeared to be leading this move to Brahmanise the groups' customs"¹⁰⁵

John Munro who was British Resident and at times concurrently Dewan of Travancore and Cochin wanted to 'save' the Syrian Christians from 'popish' tradition. The Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society both clamoured for intervention in the affairs of the Syrian Church. The Missionaries claimed 'Syrian Christian' status for their low caste converts and protested against the collection made by state officials for Hindu temple festivals. As the festivals was connected with the temple honours system the Christians gladly paid their dues. But the Christian missionaries assumed that the Christians were being forced to pay for these 'heathenish' activities.

"As in their dealings with other supposedly oppressed groups, British officials displayed an immense capacity to create problems where none had previously existed. They did this by throwing the whole weight of the colonial state into redressing a set of grievances that had only emerged in response to their own misperceptions. The non-existent problem in this case was the supposed oppression of the Syrians by the States' Hindu Office holders."¹⁰⁶

The ultimate losers were the Syrian Christians themselves. They were denied their share of the temple honours normally offered to high caste Hindus and thereby ending a long held tradition. The demand for equality for the recent converts from the lower castes resulted in the Syrian Christians themselves being reduced to the category of a polluting caste.

"... most seriously of all, St. Thomas Christians were being shunned as virtually polluting by the regime's caste Hindus. Where once they had been privileged participants in Hindu ritual, Syrians were now attacked and denounced for approaching urban temple precincts."¹⁰⁷

The low caste converts were not upgraded but the Syrians were downgraded. It exacerbated social tension and even led to violence. Munro also wanted to reform the Syrians from their 'popish' practices, which he considered to be subversive, and thus save them from decline and decay. He urged them to separate them from the Romo-Syrians and recover their lost property. This led to disputes, exacerbated feelings, social tension and violence. It is extremely doubtful whether the measures encouraged by the Christian missionary societies and adopted by John Munro benefited the Christians in the long run. The misconception of the missionaries and their misrepresentation created a lot of harm where none existed before. Munro's attempt to provide state funds for the uplift of the Syrians and rescue them from their melancholy state was equally unsuccessful.

Attempt at Mass Conversion and its Aftermath

The foreign missionaries and their patron John Munro failed to understand the intricacies involved in fitting the Syrian Christians within the social and religious hierarchy of what was still an overwhelmingly Hindu state where the rights and privileges of all communities were protected by the Hindu Raja.

"Indeed, as in so many other aspects of South Indian life, there was no clear distinction between 'secular' administrative tasks and the organisation of corporate rituals. Both served to order and integrate the States' political networks, and both fall within the domain of Hindu office holders."¹⁰⁸

Whatever may have been the intention of the Christian missionaries, the result was not only the Syrians lost their high caste status, but they also splintered into warring factions seeking government patronage and trying to grab as much church property as possible for their particular faction. In order to prove their credentials various groups such as the Mar Thomites, Jacobites and the Syrian Catholics founded 'Evangelical Societies' and launched vigorous campaigns to convert the outcastes and build chapels and schools for them thereby proving to the civil authorities and the

courts that they were a dynamic and expanding organization and thus proving their greater entitlement to church properties and state patronage. It is also significant that the Jacobite metrans were expanding and extending their influence and power like the temporal rulers of South India in their 'empire building' activities. The influx of the outcastes into the Christian fold further alienated the Hindus who considered all Christians to be 'polluted', and thus reduced and even ended any sort of religious contact with the Christian.

John Munro exacerbated religious feelings and alienated the Hindus by reducing the allocations made to various temples for daily worship and festivals. These impositions were made in the name of reforms and reducing wastage and increasing efficiency.¹⁰⁹

The separation of the Dewaswom Department from the Land Revenue Department made it possible to employ Christians and others in government service. The Dewaswom Department continued to be administered by Hindu officers under a commissioner. This was the state of affairs until independence. After independence the erstwhile departments in Cochin and Travancore were reconstituted as the Cochin Dewaswom Board and Travancore Dewaswom Board under members nominated by elected ministers.

Post Independence Developments

In Kerala, the Hindus constitute nearly sixty per cent of the population, but they never vote as a group, unlike the Muslims and the Christians. The Ezhava population is 24%. The Nairs 16%, the Brahmins 6%, the Christian 20% and Muslims 18%. Shifting alliances and loyalties make it almost impossible for any government to have a stable majority. Communal politics in Kerala has matured into inter-communal politics. As a general rule it may be stated that the Ezhavas tend to support the Marxists and their allies, and the Nairs and Christians the Congress Party and its

allies. The two alliances are of equal strength and only a few seats and a few thousand of votes separate the two groups. But such a bifurcation of political loyalties has given Kerala governments a certain degree of stability and continuity. The Muslim League has shown that it is not averse to joining the Marxists to protect the 'legitimate interests of the Muslims'. Communalism has been tempered by self interest and the need to scale down expectations to achieve practical results. It has not led to religious isolation, but inter-religious co-operation to achieve secular aims. In Tamil Nadu the Christians do not function as a separate group but function through the Congress and the regional parties.

South India and Secularism

Historically and geographically India has three regional identities, the plain of Hindustan in the North, the Deccan and the South. It would be more correct to consider Deccan as a connecting link between the North and South, instead of the northern part of South India. Historically the Deccan has been socially, politically and culturally closer to the North than the South. The Bahmani Kingdom and later the Nizam State have been brought closer to the Persian-Mughal culture of the North. But the South roughly comprising of the three ancient Tamil Kingdoms have preserved their Hindu, Aryo-Dravidian cultural identity. This does not mean that they were culturally or otherwise isolated from the rest of India, but it has given the place a special regional identity within the framework of an all-India identity. The region has been influenced by and has in its turn influenced the North. Its contribution to the Sanskrit literature has been great. The contribution to religion and religious literature has been substantial. To quote Romila Thapar, the South has been on the ascendant from the 7th to the 12th century A.D. politically, culturally and religiously, even the political centre of gravity having shifted to the South. The Bhakti movement originated in the South; and due to the efforts of the Nayanars and Alvars spread throughout India. The Vedanta Schools gave Hinduism a depth and intellectual vigour.

"Virtually, all the important schools of Vedanta, viz Advaita, Visistadvaita, and Dvaita and Sivadvaita had their origin and vast evolutionary development in the South"¹¹⁰

Sankaras Advaita or Monism revived the philosophy contained in the upanishads and his establishment of the maths in different parts of the country reinforced the religious unity of the nation.

South India's contact by sea, to regions both in the east and the west gave a new dimension to the political, religious and cultural development in the region. Both Christianity and Islam established their roots in South India through trade and by peaceful means. Perhaps this explains the high level of syncretism, both religious and social that prevails in the South even to this day. Hindu Rajas were the benefactors and protectors of all religious institutions. This factor so influenced society that even Muslim rulers who came much later on to the scene continued this tradition. Extension and expansion of their authority and 'empire building' were undertaken by providing endowments for religious institutions, presiding over the distribution of temple honours and patronising men of letters. As their political power dwindled their religious and literary patronage increased. This syncretism was even extended to the political field. The Maharajas of Travancore from the 19th century, onwards proudly bore the title Munnay Sultan conferred on them by their nominal suzerain the Nawab of Carnatic.

The Hindu states in South India may be described as liberal theocratic states. It is part of the ruler's duty to give equal protection to all his subjects. The princely states in South India were not 'secular' states. It would even be futile to discover elements of 'secularism' in the broad based religious tolerance practised by these state. It would be equally untrue to say as Imtiaz Ahmad has claimed that political expediency and commercial interests dictated religious tolerance. There was not much commercial interest in granting special privileges to Christians and none in the case of Jews. To assume self-interest where none existed is no service to the nation.¹¹¹

Perhaps Ahmad was writing from purely a North Indian perspective. Religious syncretism and social acceptance were part of State formation in South India. The States of Travancore and Cochin were Hindu States, where Hinduism was given due prominence, but state policies were based on the fact that the population was multi-religious. The metran (bishop) of the Syrian Christians participated in the installation ceremony of the Maharaja of Cochin which was essentially a Hindu religious ceremony.

There seem to be a dichotomy in the attitude of Muslims towards the Hindus throughout their history. The traditional or conservative view would be that it is the will of God that Islam should flourish throughout the world by peaceful or forceful means, but by mercy of the Lord the people of Malabar have freely accepted it.¹¹² A more modern writer K.B.K. Muhammad takes a more generous attitude. He recalls that in the early days of history when the Mappilas worked with the Hindus on a friendly basis they were prosperous and successful. As the Koran indicates that God has sent prophets to people of every language, the Muslims should not blaspheme against the prophets of others or despise their religion.¹¹³

I record with pleasure that the same sentiments were expressed by Justice M.M. Ismail in Madras and the Imam of the Trivandrum Juma Masjid.¹¹⁴

In the South, the Muslims came as peaceful traders and missionaries, the sword of Islam was sheathed. Trade depends on co-operation and conciliation not on confrontation. In the North the Muslims talk in terms of seven hundred years of Muslims conquests and domination as their golden age. Their nostalgia was based on the privileges of a ruling class. In the South it is a different perception.

"One aspect of Mappila significance is the fact that the Mappilas were able to survive as a minority Islamic community under non-Muslim rule for more than eight centuries. They adopted a policy of

co-operation with their Hindu neighbours, carried on their business activities, prospered and increased. Far from considering this an un-Islamic situation Mappilas of today look back on this period as the golden age of Islam in Kerala."¹¹⁵

Language can both unite and divide. To a Tamil Muslim, Tamil is his mother tongue, to a Mappila Malayalam is his mother tongue. They speak the same language as their Hindu neighbours. Muslims scholars have made great contributions to the development of Tamil literature. What Ashis Nandy claims for North Indian music may be claimed for Tamil literature. It is both Hindu and Muslim, and early Tamil literature includes the works of Buddhists and Jains. Justice M.M. Ismail belongs to this fine tradition of scholars. He is a master of Tamil literature and has written and spoken extensively on the Tamil Kamba Ramayanam. He is,

"a reliable guide to that garden of endless delights called Tamil literature. He is a great devotee of the Kanchi Paramacharya Sri Chandrasekhara Saraswati"¹¹⁶

With regard to Mappilas in Malabar and to all Muslims in general, Miller makes a shrewd observation

"A second aspect of Mappila significance relates to the minority psychology of the community. The minority psychology adheres especially to a significant minority, exemplified by Mappilas in Kerala and Muslims in India. A strong minority tends towards and is able to effect a sheltered existence. It is small enough to lack security and large enough to be able to create a defensive shell. In those areas of Kerala where Mappilas were few that they were forced to relate in a more than open way with their environment, such as in sections of central Travancore and Cochin, the development was generally more progressive. In Malabar, despite the common living patterns, Mappila members carry on a ghetto like existence which fostered defensiveness, perpetuated weakness and retarded progress."¹¹⁷

But in a highly competitive society such as Kerala where other communities pursue excellence in education as a means to improve their status economically and socially, the Mappilas were forced to re-orient their thinking and follow the other communities

"The hesitation of Mappilas to allow their children to participate in secular education was overwhelmed in the end by their involvement in the progressive environment of Kerala"¹¹⁸

The Muslims in the princely states in South India were a microscopic minority and were less influenced by the obdurate Islamic maulavis in Malabar.

"In 1939 some Maulavis [in Malabar] issued a fatwa stating, 'It is wrong to teach women reading and writing'"¹¹⁹

So it is not surprising that the first Muslim graduate from Malabar emerged only in 1937. Compared to the Muslims in Malabar the Muslims in the state of Travancore and Cochin made greater progress. When I was a pre-University student in Ernakulam which was then the capital town of Cochin State in 1948 a young Muslim couple K.K. Abdul Rahman and P.K. Fatima Bee were practising as lawyers at the Cochin High Court in Ernakulam. Theodore P. Wright is quite correct in stating.

"The princely states in that region [South India] such as Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore and Cochin tended, if anything, to favour the Muslim minority in government appointments, the chief aim of communal organization, so the "states" Muslim League (as it was called in princely India) was weak or non-existent within them".¹²⁰

He gives seven reasons why politics especially religious based politics are radically different in the South. Islam came peacefully to the South, most South Indian Muslims speak the language of their Hindu neighbours, except during the brief periods of the Nawabs of Arcot and the Hyder Ali, or the Tipu Sultan period, Muslims have never politically dominated the South. They were mostly self reliant merchants, fishermen or peasants who looked after themselves and were not reliant on government jobs and privileges. Unlike in the North, most leaders remained in the South, and after Independence no serious communal riots took place in South India. The Brahmin - non-Brahmin controversy diverted attention from the Muslims and finally Muslim areas are not near to Pakistan as to elicit the fear of Hindus or hopes of secessionist Muslims.¹²¹

The Muslims in the South are distinct from the Muslims in the North especially those in Kerala. This is clearly shown even in their building of the mosque.

"The unique Mappila mosque architecture not only reflects the Mappila communities integration in Kerala culture, but also its isolation from Indian Islam. Instead of following the Mughal pattern Mappila mosque observes the indigenous Jain style of architecture"¹²²

Since the achievement of independence the Mappilas have moved a long way from their religious obduracy and economic stagnation.

"Mappila resistance to modern education was finally overcome in the 1950's when the community accepted the state programme of universal secular education at the lower level. The acceptance was made easier by the qualified or dedicated approval of Mappila leaders, by the example of other communities and by the sheer necessity to conform in order to survive. While this did not imply a commitment to the principles underlying secular education for a large section of the community, it set in motion a process of modernisation that altered outlook and behaviour"¹²³

Consequently the Mappilas are adopting a more accommodating attitude towards changes in their own community and a more tolerant attitude towards the traditions of other religious communities. Moreover, there is a subtle movement towards a secular Kerala culture by all communities. For example Onam has ceased to be a purely Hindu festival. The activities of the Muslim Education Society from the 1960's have established two simultaneous and parallel process, firstly Islam itself was becoming a secularizing force through education, secondly there is an urge to relate to leaders of other religious communities who are contending with the problem of secularization.¹²⁴

The historical experience of the South has been different from the North. There is no shibboleth of the Muslims being the ruling class which has become a deprived and dispossessed minority. As Wright observes the Muslims in the South

have always been a self-reliant community of traders, fishermen and peasant. Moreover, they have a long record of co-operation with their Hindu neighbours. This does not mean that the relationship has always been pleasant and positive, but there are positive elements which could be explored and explained. In the process 'secularism' itself may have to be re-defined and made more flexible to accommodate religious sentiments. When a Hindu leader says 'Hinduism is secularism', he is not necessarily being 'communal'. What he means is that the basic philosophy is 'Sarva dharma Sadbhava', goodwill towards all religious and 'Sarvadharmā Sama bhava' equal respect towards all religious. There is no conflict between such a definition of Hinduism and 'Secularism'.

In the light of the above it is necessary to look at secularism as a state ideology. It is more than an ill-defined attitude or the affectation of the western oriented, but less than a philosophy meaning a complete interpretation of all aspects of the relationship between the state and individual. Secularism as a state ideology in India and how it has developed since independence, and its strength and weakness will be discussed in the next chapter.

Footnotes - Chapter 5

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Chapter 6

The Secular State and Society: Views of Secularists and Marxists

There are vital differences between Secularists and Marxists in their perceptions of 'Secularism' as an ideology and the purpose and function of a secular state in the creation of a secular society. In fact the differences are qualitative as well as quantitative and significant. Marxists assert that their view is more rational and scientific than that of 'the modern bourgeois liberal' which has been 'tainted' by religiosity albeit marginally. This point has to be emphasized early as very often the views of these two different schools of thought have been taken to be similar if not identical. As one Marxist writer says of,

"...the modern bourgeois liberal who has a particularly strong commitment to promoting rational/scientific modes of thinking and behaviour. In short, his is what is often taken as the standard secularist viewpoint and one which Marxists for the most part endorse. In fact one of the problems for Marxists is that their view of secularism has rarely been adequately distinguished from that of the 'progressive' bourgeois liberal".¹

However, it must be understood that there is no serious quarrel among secularists of different hues on the nature and purpose of a secular state. The Marxists' anathema is reserved for political parties and organisation's which take religion seriously as a reference point to public morality. This point will be taken up when dealing with the Marxist concept of a secular state. On religion and religiosity the Marxists' view was and remains that

"...you cannot be a Muslim (or a Hindu or a Christian) and an abiding anti-imperialist. All religious ideologies are in the last analysis reactionary".²

Obviously the non-Marxists can't afford to take such an extremist view. Nehru the doyen among secularists defines secularism thus,

"We talk about a Secular State in India. It is not perhaps very easy even to find a good word in Hindi for 'secular'. Some people think that it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct. What it means is that it is a state which honours 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".³

The secularists are not opposed to religion but merely deny it a role in politics and state formation. It also means that the state must keep its distance from all religions.

Although those who propagate secularism include Marxists and non-Marxists there is a vital difference between the two groups in their approach to secularism as an ideology. While the non-Marxists who subscribe to liberal democratic ideals would accept the policy of goodwill towards all religions, the Marxists would like to work for the eventual abolition of all religious influences in the public and private spheres. This objective will have to be kept in view when discussing the role of secularism in Indian society.

Definitions of Secularism

The shorter Oxford Dictionary defines secularism as,

"The doctrine that morality should be based solely on the regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life to the exclusion of all consideration drawn from belief in God or in a future state".⁴

The secularists should have no difficulty in accepting the above definition and developing it into a political philosophy on which all state actions should be based. However, there is still a doubt whether secularism should be considered to be a

philosophy. Whatever its status may be in the Western world it is in the Indian context, less than a philosophy i.e. it is less than the complete

"study of existence, knowledge, truth and principles of moral conduct".

Perhaps religion may claim to have the above traits. As T.N. Madan puts it

"At best, Indian secularism has been an inadequately defined attitude".⁵

It is difficult to pinpoint what constitutes secularism and whether a state can be accepted as secular if it satisfies certain conditions. William Cantwell Smith offers a practical solution.

"No one can define secularism in advance of some very hard and original excogitation testing, or colloquy. This much at least can perhaps be said to constitute an operational definition: that a secular state is a form of state so contrived as to win and hold and deserve the loyalty and warm allegiance of any citizen of whatever religion or of none"⁶

Is Secularism a Reality?

While Cantwell Smith would consider that secularism in India to be an aspiration rather than a reality others like Badr-ud Din Tyabji and Surinder Suri would consider secularism in India to be a reality as far as the state and its institutions are considered but an aspiration as far as society is concerned. Behind these arguments is the acceptance that secularism is yet to establish firm roots in state and society. It is neither secure nor perfect. If current trends are of any significance even where it was supposed to be strong it has proved to be weak. Perhaps it is perceived as a Western ideology with no indigenous significance. Perhaps the thin veneer of secularism has

camouflaged the deep division in state and society and proved to be brittle in the long run.

For more than three decades the secularists held the high moral ground of politics. Nehru's espousal of secularism and socialism gave the two ideologies a special moral aura. The Nehruvian state was secular, socialist and non-aligned. Those who questioned these basic tenets were politically and intellectually marginalised. Nehru's secularism was closely allied to socialism. In his view, to offer any role for religion was erroneous if not disastrous. Even Mahatma Gandhi's view on secularism was discarded. By implication Nehru rejected Gandhi's view that all religions are true and that they give salience to moral principles in politics, and a really secular state could be built on a community of religious communities. Nonetheless Gandhi was proclaimed to be a protagonist of the Nehruvian secular state by Indian as well as Western intellectuals.

"Louis Fisher, Gandhi's American biographer, noted the strange paradox that Jinnah who had grown up as a secular nationalist in his younger days, and who apparently had little interest in religion, founded a state based on religion, while Gandhi, wholly religious, worked to establish a secular state".⁷

The Secularist-Marxist perception of a secular state is close to the Soviet model. It should be eventually, if not immediately, an anti-religious state. Religion should be immediately abolished from the public realm and eventually from the private sphere as well. The Marxists insist that in this respect they differ from the perception of the bourgeois liberal democratic tradition. As Rex Ambler has pointed out, Marx's critique of all religions was that religions are indifferent to peoples' suffering.

Self-perception of Secularists

In the early days of independence, secularism as the basis of state policy was taken for granted. It was decided that India was to be a modern democratic state. It was a noble principle with which there could be no quarrel.

"Being modern means... the enlargement of human freedom and the enhancement of the range of choices open to a people, in respect to things that matter, including their present and future lifestyles. This means being in charge of oneself. And this you will recognize, is one of the connotations of the process of secularization".⁸

The secularists considered themselves to be the vanguard of the movement to take the nation into this modern age as they considered the majority of citizens to be 'primordially oriented'. As Ashis Nandy puts it, the expectation was the gradual erosion of faith and culture because of the growth of science, rationality and modern education, and the consequent expansion of an homogenous, universal, contractual, impersonal public sphere, where only values like self-interest, real politik and national security rule. The secularists took it upon themselves to guide their less developed fellow citizens towards these desirable objectives. This was the new morality of the modern age as distinct from the morality based on religion.

"In other words, the vanguard sets the pace by being a collection of exemplary persons who live by their fellow humans without illusions, yet ethically, and by building their ethics not on myths or compassion but on scientific rationality, history and reasons of the state".⁹

Perhaps the above was what Nehru meant when he appealed for the promotion of a modern scientific temper. No doubt there was a tinge of moral arrogance in the above assumption but to some extent it was justified.

"It should be admitted straight away that, however limited its concept of human nature, however contemptuous its attitude towards ethnic peripheries, such secularism has served the Indian citizenry reasonably well for long periods of time. Especially so in the early years after Independence under the easy benign modernist, Jawaharlal Nehru".

"At the time, political mobilization, despite the existence of a powerful nationalist movement since the 1920's was still at a manageably low level. The Indian power elite was choosy about whom it admitted to the highest levels of the government, and the memory of what could be done in the name of religion in public life was fresh in the minds of the citizens".¹⁰

Nevertheless, to preach secularism to the majority as the law of human existence eroded the basis of secularism. But the secularists were not anti-religious in any sense of the word. At the most they were non-religious or considered themselves agnostic like Nehru. They believed quite sincerely in the neutrality of the state towards all religions. They believed that the state should not identify itself with any religious community. The notion was one of neutrality or equidistance between the state and the religious identity of the people. The idea was important and influenced the policies of the government in the early days of independence. Not only Nehru but all Indians who considered themselves to be patriotic and modern, nationalist and rationalist subscribed to it.

However, there were some serious limitations to the self-perception of the secularists and their attempt to mould India in their own image. They were not optimistic with regard to the influence of religion and its political expression namely communalism. Like the Marxists, Nehru believed in economic factors as the final arbiter. He believed that the communal factor in politics would disappear when faced with the reality of economic and social development. Nehru was closer to the Marxist point of view when he said,

"The real thing to my mind is the economic factor. If we lay stress on this and divert public attention to it we shall find automatically that religious differences recede into the background and common bond unites different groups. The economic bond is stronger than the national one".¹¹

Time proved how illusionary was this optimism as far as Indian society was concerned, Madan's view was that Nehru's concept of secularism was based on practical considerations. Nehru believed that the state was the principal engine of social change. He could not envisage the state to be other than democratic, but India was economically poor and culturally diverse and so in order to be democratic it had to be secular and socialist. Here Hegel's view that the Hindus were a people and did not constitute a state takes on an added significance. Writers like Bipan Chandra who take a Marxist point of view asserts that India is not a nation state but a state in formation. A similar view is expressed by Surindar Suri who considers that secularism can only evolve in an autonomous political community and has nothing to do with religion or religious tolerance.

"Secular-mindedness in politics may be defined as the determination (and the ability) to sustain an autonomous political community. This involves the recognition of self-run responsibility"¹²

Suri further argues that the acceptance of a political ideology which can overcome personal, linguistic, regional and religious egotism is essential. His view is that,

"India has not yet produced or accepted such a new political faith or way of life. Communalism in India reflects the lack of it. Secularism is not a political faith but the accompaniment or by-product of one".¹³

William Cantwell Smith gives a different point of view on secularism. There are many votaries of secularism but few agree on what it actually should mean. A wide range of views are held as to the nature and scope of secularism.

"Accordingly, each position tends to be blandly held without discussion or criticism or clarification and without any realisation of how isolated and perhaps ineffectual are in fact the advocates of that particular view. That one understands secularism, and that 'of course' others understand it similarly, appear to be widespread fallacies".¹⁴

Secularists seem to be a conglomerate of individuals and groups whose self-perceptions and perceptions of secularism appear to be widely divergent and dissimilar and even contradictory. So Cantwell Smith asks a provocative question.

"India may be secular, or it may be democratic but is there any real possibility of it being both?"¹⁵

No doubt Smith has a valid point, but however difficult it may be there seems to be no alternative to holding a diverse nation like India together other than by accepting a tolerant and accommodating ideology like secularism.

Limitations of the Secular State

In the Indian context secularism was at best an incomplete and alien ideology, yet sought to find acceptance among the majority of people. As Ashis Nandy correctly puts it, it is borrowed from Western history. In the words of T.N. Madan, the Western idea of a wall of separation between state and church is inapplicable as there is no church to wall off.

"...the search for secular elements in the cultural traditions of this religion is a futile exercise, for it is not these but an ideology of secularism that is absent and is resisted".¹⁶

Nehru himself was puzzled and pained until the end, by Muslim separatism. But it was Hindu communalism that attracted his ire. He could find some redeeming features in Muslim communalists but none in the Hindus.

The Hindu Code Bill introduced in 1948 finally reached the statute book in 1956. Nehru threw his enormous prestige and authority to have the Bill passed. However, he was unwilling to introduce a similar bill for Muslims, although the then Law Minister H.V. Pataskar claimed that the bill was a step toward a Common Civil Code. Similarly Nehru described the Special Marriage Act of 1954 as a first step towards bringing about uniformity in social observances. M. Mohamed Ismail, President of the Muslim League opposed the bill and urged the government to exempt Muslims from the operations of the Special Marriages Act. His argument was that the shariat or personal law is a vital part of their religion. Perhaps Nehru underestimated the strength of Muslim communalism or felt that with the foundation of Pakistan and the reduction of the Muslim population from 25% to 10% the problem could be managed. Time was to prove him wrong as the government of Rajiv Gandhi was forced to retreat in the Shah Bano Case due to strong Muslim opposition, and pass the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986 to nullify the effect of the Supreme Court judgment, by which even the limited rights available to Muslim Women under the Criminal Procedure Code were denied by the State. Perhaps Nehru's staunch opposition to Hindu Communalism was based on the belief that it constituted the main threat to secularism in India as Hindus were an overwhelming majority in India.

Initially Nehru's policy was a success as it marginalised Hindu communalism and created an environment for the establishment of secularism as the basis for government policy.

Congress Compromise with Communal Parties

In dealing with communal parties Nehru's policy was less than unequivocal. Political expediency and electoral arithmetic made him compromise his principles. In the 1950's the Congress Party under the leadership of Kamaraja Nadar worked in close

collaboration with the communal Dravida Kazhagam and maintained its hold on power.

The Government of Kamaraj Nadar while not rejecting the secular ideals of the Indian Constitution, promoted a regional identity based on 'Dravidian nationalism' to revitalize the Congress Party".¹⁷

However, Kamaraja Nadar took the precaution of saying that the Congress could not countenance a communal organization, but the tacit alliance was in place. Similarly in Kerala the Congress Party formed an alliance with the Praja Socialist Party and the Muslim League in 1959 to oust the Communist Party from power. Left wing and nationalist Muslims were perturbed by this development. "How could Congress resist Hindu communalism pressure" like those from the Jan Sangh and Hindu Maha Sabha in the North, they argued, if it succumbed to Muslims in the South?

"...Nehru and his lieutenants had rationalised at first that it was the Communists who had started the flirtation with the league, and that anyway the Kerala branch of the organization was democratic not separatist as the old league had been".¹⁸

In changing political circumstances expediency seems to take precedence over principles. However, the collaboration with communal forces by Nehru even when he was at the height of power could not but erode the basic assumptions of his secular policies.

Hindu Communalists Singled out for Criticism

To succeed, that is to gain general acceptance by society, secular ideology must not only be, but appear to be, unequivocal in its condemnation of all forms of communalism. Otherwise it will fail and in the view of some writers it will deserve to

fail. Much of the problems faced by secularism in India is due to the equivocal stand taken by its partisans. Secularists of various denominations have identified Hindu communalists for special criticism. This partisan attitude has not only undermined the credibility of their criticism but also raised doubts about secularism itself. N. Ram, editor of the Frontline states,

"Communalism can be derived from various sources and can appear in different communities but, today, most of us who consider ourselves secular and fair are prepared to state that today it is Hindu chauvinism which poses the greatest danger. This is a political reality and this is what we should come to grips with."¹⁹

Of course perceptions can be different, but this approach raises a number of questions and, poses a number of problems. Why does Hindu chauvinism pose the greatest danger today and not in the first four decades of independence? Could other forms of chauvinism based on religious or secular identities be considered less dangerous or even legitimate? Such selective condemnation and sophistry would not lead to any solution but merely exacerbate feelings and divide debates along communal lines. Moreover, such assumed arrogance on the part of certain secular intellectuals could only prejudice the case for secularism itself. Here it is only pertinent to remember that no leader of any secular party is free from communal consideration during the electoral process. As S.P. Sathe points out there are only two types of parties in India, openly communal or opportunistically communal. It may also be argued that by exonerating the minority communal parties from the practice of communalism an aura of respectability is conferred on them. So does alliance with non-secular parties during election times. By ignoring minority communalism, it can be argued that all forms of communalism become acceptable if not respectable. Moreover, it begs the question, "Is secularism only for Hindus?" To be successful, secularism should not make compromises with any form of communalism. Communalism in all its forms and manifestations should be attacked.

Minority Perceptions and Secularists' Perceptions of the State

There is no doubt that some leaders of the minority communities are firmly committed to the idea of secularism. They do not see any contradiction in pursuing minority rights and espousing the cause of secularism. This might well be the case if constitutional means are used to pursue their ends and it is accepted that the national identity takes precedence over their communal identities. Unfortunately this has not always been the case. The call of the All India Babri Masjid Conference to all Muslims not to participate in the observance of the Republic Day - (even if it be an 'official function') in 1987 is a good example. It is an attempt to isolate the Muslim from the mainstream of political participation and undermine their belief in their national identity. More regrettable is the attempt to identify the state with Hindu communal aspirations and assign it an adversarial if not hostile role.

"The call of an All India Babri Masjid Conference to boycott the Republic Day function has shocked and divided Muslims, alienated non-Muslims and created resentment all round. By rejecting the secular basis to redress grievances the Muslims have done a disservice to their cause. Such tactics encourage the R.S.S. to vilify the Muslims and attack secular values".²⁰

More significant is the fact that assertions of minority rights in an aggressive and even violent manner is not only condoned but actively encouraged by secularist forces. Not only the state and its coercive instruments such as the police, para-military and army are seen in a negative light and demonised, but unrestricted and unrestrained violence against them is viewed as justified and justifiable in the interest of 'justice' and protection of minority rights. The separatists and territorists are the new folk heroes and their sympathetic representation has given terrorism credibility as a liberation movement. This accrued respectability has enhanced their ability to draw within their fold even those who may be attracted by their idealism but repelled by their

unmitigated violence against their innocent victims. Whatever that may be, to tarnish not only the state and its organs as 'Hindu oriented' but also the entire Hindu population as a legitimate target makes the idea horrendous. The implications are at best assertions of one's identity through violence and at worst violent communalism working towards separation for a theocratic state. There is no secularism in it. It becomes more deplorable when those who are normally supportive of secularism quote with approval Marc Auge's words as relevant,

"the reactions of peoples who have suffered not merely ethnocide but also genocide is, when they are in a position to produce one, totally and absolutely justified".²¹

Such views are bound to discredit the idea of secularism itself.

Gandhi, Nehru and Social Change

Gandhi and Nehru were both considered to be secularists. Gandhi said he was secular, but his secularism was based on the idea that religions give meaning to moral life and so religion has a role in politics. Nehru's secularism, however, has nothing to do with religion, although he was careful to state that a secular state is not an anti-religious state, but one which treats all religion with equal respect. But the Gandhian version of secularism was quite different from the Nehruvian version. While Gandhi took religion seriously and relied on it to reform and help to develop an ethically refined individual in creating a better if not an ideal society. To him politics was an opportunity for service.

"Politics was for him 'Sevadharma', service of the people, and 'yugadharma', the mode of righteous action appropriate to our times. And righteous action had to pass the traditional Indian tests of conformity to tradition, to the conduct of exemplars, and above all, to personal judgements based on moral reason".²²

So when he emphasized that religion and state should be separated, he meant the state should have no entry into the realm of religion, which should remain a private domain. But the moral values of religion should be available to check violence and corruption in public life. Perhaps this was what he meant when he said in his autobiography that

"Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means".

If Gandhi put his faith in the moral individual to improve society, Nehru believed that the state should play a decisive role in improving the individual and society. He was rather sceptical of religion and its role as a moralising influence on society. As an agnostic his view on religion was entirely negative. A supreme being directing or influencing human affairs was an alien idea to him. It was primordial and against the scientific temper. But he was not anti-religious in the sense of Lenin or Kemal Attaturk. As a democrat he did not believe in thrusting his opinion on others. To him the state was to be the principal modern institution to effect social change. Paradoxically he did not use his enormous influence as the national leader, or his authority as the head of the government to forcibly introduce the necessary changes. He was perhaps too much of a democrat to use coercive measures, or perhaps too optimistic; as Madan suggests,

"...he was also too optimistic about the decline of the hold of religion on the minds of people. He did not seem to take into consideration the fact that the ideology of secularism enhances the power of the state by making it a protector of all religious communities and an arbiter in their conflicts. No wonder, then, that secularism as an alien cultural ideology, which lacks the strong support of the state, has failed to make the desired headway in India".²³

Perhaps we could concede Professor Moin Shakir's argument that the founding fathers believed in secularism. Equally valid is Professor T.N. Madan's view that perhaps it was thought to be too controversial and also unnecessary. In its progress has

'secularism' itself developed the characteristics of a religion, although it is presented as a state ideology? Is the state supposed to promote it as the prevailing and accepted ethos of modern India? It looks as if the state under Nehru has tried and failed. The 'scientific temper' which Nehru wished to propagate has failed to take off. In reply to a question by Andre Malraux, Nehru said that his greatest problems were,

"creating a just state by just means" and perhaps, too, creating a secular state in a religious society".²⁴

Does this also mean that Nehru did not understand his people as much as Gandhi did? However, it was clear that Nehru had not given up his attempts at secularization of society.

"The chasm between him and Gandhi was deep. For Gandhi secularism in the sense of religious pluralism entailed inter-religious understanding and mutual respect".²⁵

Nehru viewed all religious encroachments in the realm of state and society with scepticism if not with suspicion. At the most he was willing to concede equality to all religion and keep the state's equidistance from all religion i.e. dharma nirapekshata. It failed and in the view of some it deserves to fail.

"To the extent to which Indian Secularism, even though it stands for equal respect for all religious faiths (Sarvadharmā Samābhava) is a state ideology, enshrined in the Constitution in which it is linked to the materialist ideology of socialism - to the extent to which it has nothing to say about the individual except in terms of his or her rights, it is a hedonistic ideology and deserves to fail".²⁶

Nehru's Perceptions of Communalism

Nehru's perception of communalism was divergent and even contradictory. Even before independence his views on Muslim communalism were more sympathetic than towards Hindu communalism. In his autobiography Nehru said,

"Muslim communal leaders said and did many things harmful to political and economic freedom, but as a group and individually they conducted themselves before the government and the public with some dignity. That could hardly be said of Hindu communal leaders".²⁷

His attitude towards the Hindu Code Bill and a Common Civil Code reveals his personality. The Bill was introduced in Parliament in 1948. The Hindu Code Bill was divided into four distinct Bills and finally passed in 1956.²⁸ Nehru had outmanoeuvred Hindu communalists and placed a Hindu reformist legislation on the statute book. But he was reluctant to do the same with regard to the Muslims. He did not run out of steam, he ran out of ideas and lacked the political will to tackle Muslim communalism with the same vigour as he had tackled Hindu communalism.

"This in spite of the fact that the Constituent Assembly had rejected the contention that Muslim personal law was inseparable from Islam and, therefore, protected against legislative interference".²⁹

His successors made further retreat. The Muslim Women's Act 1986 followed closely at the heels of the Shah Bano Case even deprived the Muslim women of the limited rights enjoyed by them under the Criminal Procedure Code.

"It is noteworthy that, in furtherance, of the objectives of a secularised society and the establishment of a secular state, Nehru showed a much greater willingness to oppose what he considered reactionary elements among the Hindus than among other communities".³⁰

This attitude was seldom helpful in building a secular state. If the intention was to bring into line those among the Hindus who showed a tendency towards a communal approach so that the Muslims would not be encouraged to follow their line of reasoning, it was a failure. On the other hand it was taken as an implied consent for Muslims and others to behave in a communal way and that perhaps they have a right to behave in such a manner. Here Professor Bhikhu Parekh's observation is significant,

"Nehru's state acted as, and claimed all the rights of a Hindu State in its relation to the Hindus... because he and his colleagues were and thought of themselves as Hindus... they [thus] both dared take liberties with the Hindus and dared not take them with respect to the Muslims and even Sikhs".³¹

Of course Nehru could not blame himself and partial perceptions of secularism for his debacle. What could anybody do if a backward people preferred a narrow and intolerant outlook, a belief which gives rise to a self centred and egoistic culture, vulnerable to corruption at the hand of opportunists?

"A Nehruvian answer to the question why Indian secularism has run into difficulties would, then, be that the people of India are not yet ready for it. It required a level of general education that is yet beyond us and a liberal outlook that we lack".³²

The spiritual home of his secular state were the dams, the hydro-electric power stations and the factories. The multitude applauded his speech but not his vision. None entered his new temples, they preferred the old.

The Constitutional Issues and Secularism

If the instruments of the state based on its coercive power and authority, not on individuals with a moral concept based on religion, are to be the engines of social development and progress, they should be fashioned in such a way as to meet the

demands on them. Here the Indian Constitution should have been the ideal instrument to promote secularism. Unfortunately it proved to be a defective mechanism. Firstly the Constitution allows the state to interfere in the affairs of Hindu religious institutions in the name of efficiency and social justice. As Professor Moin Shakir observes,

"Thus secularism means that there is no state religion nor does any particular religion get any patronage from the state. But there is no strict separation of religion from public life. The Constitution permits state interference in the financial administration of temples, mathas, the admission of Harijans into temples, the modification of religious personal law etc. Such interference is not considered to be undesirable from the point of view of Secularism".³³

In fact the Constitution did not provide a wall to separate the secular state from religious institutions. On the other hand it provided for state intervention.

William Cantwell Smith would put it as no more than an aspiration (of a minority?) than a reality. While Badr-ud-Din Tyabji and Surindar Suri would consider the secular state to be a reality, but perhaps not a sufficiently strong aspiration (of a majority?) Their argument is based on the Constitution itself. To question its validity is an outrage against the intelligence and good faith of Indian political and social leadership of the past one hundred years.³⁴ However, S.P. Sathe would only postulate the possibility that India would become a secular state in the future. At present it is in a transitional state as the Constitution allows it to intervene meaningfully at this stage. The interventionist and traditional stage would end only when the proper boundaries dividing religion and secular social life are properly drawn. He would fault the state for the present confusion because it intervened when it ought not to have done so and did not intervene which it should have done so.

"The result is that we have at best a non-discriminatory, non-denominational state trying to equidistance itself from all religions but in that process allowing orthodoxies and superstitions of every

creed to masquerade as religion. The state is a helpless arbiter of competing claims of rival fundamentalist contentions (For example Ram Jannabhoomi-Babri Masjid Controversy)".³⁵

Sathe identifies three important elements that are essential for a secular state namely absence of discrimination, freedom of religion and state religion relationship. The non-discriminatory nature of the state is guaranteed in Articles 14, 15, 16, 17 and 29(2), Articles 25 to 30 guarantee freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion, and the freedom to manage religious affairs. The most important provisions are 'cultural and educational rights' under Articles 29 and 30, under which minorities are specifically granted the rights to establish and administer educational institutions. In practice it has come to mean that minority institutions mean any institutions established, maintained and administered by members of a minority community. The supreme Court has interpreted this provision to include even a non-citizen if he professes the same religion of a minority community.

"Speaking on minority institutions at a meeting organised by the Association of University Teachers in Madras on January 27 1980 Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, Supreme Court Judge, said, 'Article 30 gave minorities the fundamental right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice, but the right to administer did not carry with it the right to mal-administer. We are yet to tackle in a serious way the definition of 'minority', 30 years after the adoption of the constitution' he said".³⁶

Although Article 44 envisages the enactment of a Uniform Civil Code throughout India it remains a dead letter as it contradicts the special privileges granted to the minorities in Articles 25 to 30. If the intentions of the founding fathers of the Constitution had been to protect the minorities against discrimination they could have introduced a provision prohibiting the introduction of any measures discriminating against the minorities on the grounds of race, religion or language

The way things have proceeded reveals the contradiction between Articles 25 to 30 and Article 44. The former have contributed enormously to the strengthening of inward looking communal feelings and attitudes, obstructing the spread of modern, secular education among the minorities.

Even legislation with a social or economic bias has been frustrated by minority rights. By the Forty Fourth Amendment the right to property guaranteed by article 31 was abolished, but the rights remain as far as the educational institutions established and administered by the minority communities are concerned. The Supreme Court seems to have converted minority rights into minority privileges. How this interpretation encourages separatism is explained by Sathe thus,

"It is submitted that the purpose of article 30(1) was not to provide special privileges for the minorities to protect them against discrimination on account of their minority character. It should be so interpreted as to provide only equal treatment - not special treatment. To consider minorities as 'special' is to perpetuate their separatism and article 30(1) as now interpreted and clause 1A enacted by the Forty Fourth Amendment have unfortunately contributed to such separatism".³⁷

Article 25 of the Constitution deals with the freedom of religion of an individual and Article 26 deals with the freedom to manage religious affairs.³⁸ By some strange logic the freedom granted under Article 25 is subject to other fundamental rights, while the denominational freedom granted under Article 26 is not under any such restriction. The Supreme court has given such wide latitude in interpreting the rights of various religious denominations, that it violates other rights granted under fundamental rights. This article has been invoked by the head of the Bohra Community to ex-communicate a member. Sathe argues that the Supreme Court judges have been on the conservative side and have favoured the status quo. It looks as if the judges were reluctant to act as 'social reformers' and hence gave undue advantage to religious heads to decide what is essential to their religion and thus

restrict the power of the state, in their effort at secularisation and modernisation of the state.

Coming to the state and its policy towards religion the Indian Constitution does not envisage a strict separation between religion and state. The state has continued to support all religion following the policies of the traditions of the pre-British and British periods.

If it could not support any religion, it could support all religions. It has also taken upon itself the role of regulator and controller of all Hindu religious institutions. The Government of Tamil Nadu has extensive powers over the maintenance and management of all Hindu religious and charitable institutions and the Government of Kerala has extensive powers over the Hindu Institutions in Kerala.³⁹ The general feeling among Hindus in Kerala and Tamil Nadu was that such intervention by the governments have adversely affected Hindu institutions in both States.⁴⁰

The state's involvement in religion has seriously undermined the secular principles. Sathe argues that the state should not only maintain equidistance from all religions, but also distance itself from religion as such. The public religiosity of ministers is to be deplored, it should be relegated to the private realm of ministers and other leaders.

"Is this consistent with the fundamental duty enshrined in the Constitution 'to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform' Article 51A".⁴¹

To meet the supposed threat from fundamentalists and communalists, two provisions in the Representation of Peoples Act, 1951 have been introduced, under which any attempt to promote hatred of caste, religion or race would disqualify the candidate from membership of any legislature in India for a period not exceeding six years.

Under section 29A of the Representation of Peoples act as amended by the Amendment Act in 1988 every political party has to swear to subscribe to socialism, secularism and democracy. Sathe feels it is an exercise in futility.

"It is not the lack of the laws that has caused the erosion of secularism in India. The new Section 29A might become a mere ritual. Because can any party swear by secularism?"⁴²

Secularism and Legalism

The attempt to promote secularism by legislation is another futile attempt by the Secularists. The Religions Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1988 is an example. The definition of 'political activity' under the act is so imprecise and nebulous that it contravenes Article 21 of the Constitution which covers personal liberty.⁴³ Any misuse of religious institutions could be dealt with under the Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code or the Arms Act. The most probable reason for the enactment of a spate of secular laws is for the politicians to establish their secular identity and credibility and keep an eye on the potential vote bank of the minority communities. When legislation is followed by inaction it devalues secularism.

"It was the lack of political will rather than the lack of proper laws that was responsible for such inaction"⁴⁴

To give credit to Nehru at least he acted according to his beliefs. He publicly disapproved of official religiosity and the expression of religiosity by persons holding high public office. After him there seems to have been more platitudes and less commitment to secularism.

"Since the inclusion of the word 'secularism' in the Constitution by the Constitution (Forty-Second Amendment) Act in 1976, there has been a notable downward decline on commitment to secularism".⁴⁵

The Formation of the Indian State

The institutions of the state failed as 'engines' of social reform. Even Nehru conceded as much in his interview with Andre Malraux in 1958. The founding fathers of the Constitution deliberately opted for a secular state. They believed in it, no doubt, but whether they 'detested the notion of theocracy or of a communal state' as Moin Shakir would have us believe is debatable. It would be more to their credit if we concede that they chose a secular model for practical reasons, because in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious state no other choice would be rational. If we are to believe Bipan Chandra India, is not yet a nation state but a state in making.

"The new Indian state... sought a continuity of political forces generated by the Independence movement of structures and institutions built by the colonial regime. India's new rulers viewed the task of building a nation, the necessary concomitant of a modern state, as one of devising an overarching political arrangement for a people divided along the lines of religion, language and other ethnic attributes - lines which had become sharper during the colonial regime non-unitary state, democratic and secular in character called the Indian Union, it constituted several provincial states organized on the principle of quasi-federalism".⁴⁶

The makers of the Constitution rejected the notion of religion as the basis of the new nation and chose secularism. There was, it would seem, no strong opposition to this idea, it was accepted perhaps with no great enthusiasm or deep commitment by society in general but there was no great hostility. This could be explained in terms of the strength of the national movement prior to independence and the hold of Nehru on the people as a national leader and his espousal of secularism. It was generally accepted that,

"Secularism is not only a philosophical necessity - it is a practical need for keeping India united in spite of its religious and cultural diversity. Secularism and federalism are two essential aspects of Indian nationhood".⁴⁷

To Hindu revivalists such as V.D. Savarkar India is not only the mother land of Hindus, but also a holy land which binds them to the soil. It gives them a national cohesion which he calls 'Hindutva' which is equated with nationalism. To identify 'Hindutva' and the traditional tolerance of all religions associated with it as a version of 'secularism' most suitable for India would be the distortion of a humane and tolerant ideology. On the other hand to take a rigid stand that 'secularism' means what signifies in the West and the Western model should be rigidly enforced in India is to antagonise and repel its potential supporters. As N. Ram explains,

"We are told by many a Pandit that the Indian case is very different and we are told that the secularism of Western societies does not belong here."⁴⁸

This basically means that the idea that religion should not be mixed up with politics, the separation of church from state and state-funded education, is an alien viewpoint. To Ram the basic propositions involved in the idea are the same everywhere. Indian secularism must be expressed in the universal proposition that there shall be no mixing up of religion and politics, no mixing up of church and state, and that there shall be equality for all before the law.

Obviously there should be no objection to the idea of equality before law, but secularism is in no sense a 'universal proposition' as a part of a natural order. It has to be accepted and be made acceptable to the majority by argument, persuasion and if necessary by an appeal to their self interest. To do otherwise i.e. to impose it as something pre-ordained by the natural order of society or even as a most desirable objective is to question the principle of democratic rule. However virtuous and determined the secularists feel, they can only lead not determine and impose. Democracy means equality before law and equal rights to all. In a free society secularism has an equal place with other ideologies but no special rights or privileges.

It has to compete in the market place with other ideologies on an equal footing, no less and no more.

The failure of secularists to hold the high ground of morality and create a national consciousness in its favour is attributed to 'cultural failure' by some writers like Kaviraj; the two relevant factors are the claim of the secularists to truth and the strategy to convince those who are opposed to them, that they hold the truth. Perhaps the Marxists fall under the category of,

"...those aggressive rationalists who regard any type of thinking different from theirs to be obviously untrue, condemnable and deserving to be stamped out by the use of force. Naturally, they would regard all religious practices in this manner."⁴⁹

The Cultural Paradigm

The nationalists seem to have achieved better success in organizing the nation behind the nationalist cause than the secularists. Arguably it could be taken as a hypothesis that their greater success was due to their ability to speak the language of the masses through the development of the vernacular languages which they had mastered. The elites among the nationalists spoke to their counterparts from other parts of India in English but to the masses in the vernacular language. There was intense political communication between the elite and their largely quiescent following. It was the regional organizations that carried the nationalist movement forward with its mass following.

Thus the nationalists were able to carry on a discourse with the largely illiterate masses through the vernacular languages and thus affect even their religious thinking to some extent.

"Significantly, religion was first thinned down into a rationalist form of religious beliefs, as in case of the social reformers. Their world view is still deeply religious yet there is no paradox in considering them as precursors of secular discourse because they defended the admissibility of nationalist criteria in discussions of religious beliefs, the first necessary step in secularisation of discourse".⁵⁰

Once religious people were forced to consider criteria other than religious ones in discussions, they were forced to take a world view of religion and admit that the practise of religion is compatible with the adoption of secular values.

Selective use of Historical Materials

To make effective use of the prevalent anti-colonial sentiments nationalist historians were forced to use historical materials selectively and judiciously. It would be too harsh an assertion to consider this method as a falsification of history as it would imply a perversion of fact or fraudulent alteration. To the British charge that India was not a nation and has never been a nation, in which there was enough truth to hurt but not to overwhelm the nationalists, the nationalists asserted that India has always been a nation and has a right to independence. Historically speaking if a nation is defined as a people sharing a common language, custom and tradition and common interests,⁵¹ India could hardly be called a nation. In order to assert their creditability, nationalist historians emphasized the following points in their favour. Traditional Hindu society maintained its coherence and identity by turning its 'back towards the outside' which even the relatively powerful were unable to break. Other groups such as Muslims and Christians were given 'adjacence but not admission into the Hindu fold. However certain movements like the 'bhakti movement'; created religious syncretism 'an extremely difficult cultural feat'. This was an exception, but its existence was generalised as a natural order by nationalist historians to reinforce their case.

It is obvious that during the nationalist period i.e. approximately from the rise of the Indian national Congress to independence, English was the language of the elite, but a powerful coalition of anti-British forces was built up through the vernacular medium by the same elite who were bi-lingual. The support was garnered not by doctrinal political arguments but by propagating nationalist ideas through literature.

"Indians, became nationalists not in English, but in Hindi, Bengali, Tamil etc".⁵²

This coalition of interests spoke the language of Indian nationalism. To make the voice of nationalism more authentic the nationalists had to assert that India as a nation existed from immemorial times. The problem arises when this reconstruction of history is accepted as a historical fact and gives this process of historical development a larger period than it actually has and thereby weakens its base.

"First, because of its teleology it illegitimately assimilates into history of modern nationalist struggle earlier phases of history bearing a distinctly different character; and thus present to us an historical process that seems much larger than it actually was. Secondly, nationalist history tends to concede the constructedness of the thing called "the nation", under-emphasise the imaginary community and give it a falsely objective character".⁵³

Such a reconstruction of history has two adverse effects. Firstly it hinders our understanding of history and the situation as it exists at present and secondly the nation exists and has been in existence for a very long time that no effort need be made to strengthen it. The nationalist rhetoric has defeated its own purpose.

"In fact, against this nationalist rhetoric, it is important to remind ourselves that it is a constructed thing; its community existence depends on its continued collective imagining. The moment people stop imagining they are a community, it collapses, there is nothing to defend. There is a close connection between nationalism and

secularism. The Indian National Congress was a vehicle of Indian nationalism. To a great extent it maintained its secular stance and credentials. The Karachi Congress declared its neutrality towards all religion. This policy was reflected in the Indian Constitution in 1950".⁵⁴

Such a nationalistic view no doubt served its purpose of enhancing national consciousness, but unfortunately it has made it appear as if the national movement was without blemish. It is essential to understand the national movement with its limitations, including its communal orientation and lapses, in order not to take the nation or secularism for granted. Whatever its limitations the nationalist's rhetoric has certain validity in the eyes of those who joined the national movement. To them nationalism was symbolic of a nation already in existence struggling against foreign rule to establish its own state. In this reconstruction of history the nation preceded the state which is a reversal of the truth.

"Nationalist historiography, the academic arm of this ideology fostered such misunderstandings. By choosing selective phrases of history and truly remarkable but untypical individuals, they covered a false sense of something like modern secularism having been achieved in the pre-colonial past, disrupted only by the evil designs of the colonial administrators"⁵⁵

What were in the periphery of social organisations come to be projected as the central principles of such organizations, and, it was claimed that a composite culture based on Hindu and Muslim cultures was evolving until interrupted by the British interregnum.

Nationalist historians have 'falsified' the history of nationalism as well, of course, for a 'noble purpose'. It is a Nehruvian text which re-defines the scope and trend of nationalism from a Nehruvian secular point of view. Under the new definition, the bulk of Indian national consciousness, tendencies and orientations will have to be re-interpreted as communal, regional, chauvinistic or some other pejorative ways. Gandhi was exempted from this negative view. It purified the national

movement retrospectively. It simplifies the issue but at the same time distorts it. It denies the complexity of the national movement and blurs the background and the context. It ignores much of the power of nationalism which comes from the use of the forces, idioms and symbolism of religion especially Hinduism.

"It is an excellent ideological move for the secular state to give itself a wholly secular past in the form of a national movement entirely free of religious influence. As an historical construction it is hardly credible. Its political effects are again similar. By constructing an excessively optimistic past, it actually clouds a sense of the problem in the present".⁵⁶

This kind of deliberate re-definition could form the basis of future error of judgment. To the post-independence generation the nationalist movement is not even a memory but an historical antecedent where the national leaders play an allotted role. Thus the secularised and sanitised history of the national movement removed from its historical context appears to be insufficient to explain the movement and provides the background for misjudgments. Moreover, the generation of national leaders who took power failed to understand that the later generation may not take the nation for granted. The inaccurate history in their hands is a defective tool to understand the past or plan for the future.

Nehru himself must be faulted for marginalising the cultural content in social development. Perhaps it was the temper of the times to translate all large questions into economic ones. The pundits would even consider communalism as a by-product of the distortion of the economy by British colonial capitalism and also "a petit bourgeois question par excellence". It may be true that Nehru was only reflecting the prejudices of his time. The public culture i.e. the views., ideas, aspirations of the people and what the policy of the state should be with regard to these matters were expressed in economic terms and an economic solution was envisaged for all of them.

"The prevailing atmosphere of an almost superstitious economism led to a complete neglect of serious thinking about separate, distinct, irreducible cultural pre-conditions of the development process".⁵⁷

The most unfortunate development was the bureaucratization of the cultural problem of education and public culture. This bureaucratization removed policies regarding public culture from the public domain, and public debate to the realm of committees and official secrecy.

The Bureaucratization of Secularism

The bureaucracy was the product of an alien, rigid, hierarchical and elitist educational system. Since the education system remained largely unreformed the selection process provided for a continuity of the past. The environment has changed with political independence but not the bureaucrats. In fact they became more isolated than before as the 'earlier political necessity of cultural vernacularism was eroded'.

"...the new elite, during the seventies and later became less interested and informed about Indian culture. In thirty years it led to a fatal divide in our political and public discourse, in our educational and cultural fields - between an inferior but resentful vernacularism and a brashly confident, domineering English speaking elite, whose ambition had changed from being the vanguard of a multi-lingual Indian culture to being the underworld of the Anglo-American educational and cultural universe".⁵⁸

The language of the new bureaucracy was Nehruvian but it has been of no use in Indianizing their ideas or enabling them to consider themselves as part of the nation or of a cultural milieu of the new India. In fact there was an attempt to distance themselves from the primordial cultural herd to keep their elitist status and privileges intact.

"To this elite, including their left wing members, Sanskrit is the language of Hindu fundamentalists; Urdu, similarly, by their Muslim

counterparts. Thus pure English, or ornamented of course by upper middle class Indian solecisms, came to be accepted as the language of pure Indian secularism".⁵⁹

It may be argued that the failure of secularism is not the failure of an ideology, however defective it may be, but the failure to recognize the nature of communalism and the most effective method to combat it. It is not merely a combination but also a discourse, by which is meant

"the act of understanding by which it passes from premises to consequences".⁶⁰

It means the dialogue with communalism must be carried out on the basis of ideology and in the vernacular language with ideas and idioms familiar to the masses. This was the method used by the nationalists to recruit the masses to the movement. More than ideology the importance must be stressed by discussion and dissemination of literature on the subject intelligible to the masses whose medium of communication is still the vernacular. In a way the failure of secularism was the failure of the leaders and the bureaucrats to engage in this discourse.

The Various Aspects of Communalism

To equate religiosity with communalism is not merely folly but a gross error which could lead to the erosion of secular values, by identifying it with anti-religious sentiments and even atheism.

"Secularists with a sense of history should not display anachronistic arrogance and condemn earlier humane views of the world with failing to be secular. It is important to recognise that the sentiment that feeds revolted and deeply touched by human suffering is not a monopoly of the modern or post-Marx generation".⁶¹

It is the only recourse of those who are deeply moved by the undeserved suffering of the many. Religion can only be defaulted for not admitting any social remedy for material deprivation.

It is unnecessary and even harmful to provide the national movement with the myth of pure secularism. As Susanne Rudolph has pointed out the Gandhian model of the secular state would incorporate religious ideals to serve as guiding posts to political action. The moral principles of religion will influence the secular state. The Nehruvian state on the other hand could only view religion in a negative light. Religion should have nothing to do with the state and state with religion, although it will treat all religions equally. The Nehruvian model may be ideal but the Gandhian model is equally valid and its base is religiosity. Also there is a strong communal element in it. Such an attempt at intellectual honesty will assist to build up secularism on a more rational basis. There is no guarantee for the success of secularism however desirable it may be, but serious effort must be made. Denunciation of communalism and shrill abuse have achieved very little so far.

The effort to build up a national consciousness has been addressed in high English at the national level; perhaps it is easy to convince a converted audience. This could be better achieved through discourses in politics through the vernacular languages and through vernacular education. The education system condemned by nationalists as the basis of cultural control by the colonial government has been largely left untouched. The empty cultural space has been occupied by other forces ignored and left behind. In a democracy numbers count and anyone who would appeal to the sense of grievance of those who consider themselves as deprived under the system will gain a ready audience.

"And the most dangerous connection is when such discourses of religious and cultural self-identification gets inter-meshed with a sense of material deprivation".⁶²

For more than forty years the secularists not only held the high moral ground in politics, but also were entrenched in power, and controlled society, but still they lost ground. The reason is not far to seek. All political parties exploited communal fears and even created them where none existed to gain electoral advantages. Few were openly communal but most were opportunistically communal. This includes the Marxist parties as well. Their claim that their communal calculations are peripheral but those of the bourgeois political parties are central is merely quibbling with words.

Both religion and caste have been cut from their traditional moorings of ethics and social order. The huge caste organisations are opportunistic alliances bent upon wresting concessions from a morbidly statistically minded state. Even religion has been secularised in its modern form shorn of its ethical values it has become a vehicle of sectarian propagation and projection of power.

The 'Socialist State' in Indian has given communal organization further scope for action.

"The increase in the number of state owned and state sponsored organizations has given communal organization further scope to entrench themselves by influencing politicians during election times to extend state patronage to individuals and organizations favoured by them".⁶³

Attempt to Control Communalism

Kaviraj argues that communalism is not just a force or an articulation of interests but most significantly a discourse. Its base of support is narrow and its source cannot be easily identified and attacked. When attacked it retreats into discourse and speaks the language of normality and rationality.

"It can be disrupted, injured, attenuated, only from inside, only by those who can speak inside, or rather be heard inside the same discourse, who operate within the same discursive space, in terms of its own conditions of intelligibility".⁶⁴

The attempt of the state to deal with it effectively has so far failed because of its inability to understand the problem. Organisations can be banned, interests can be fragmented, cajoled or bribed into submission. The state instruments are effective in using such means but powerless to deal with a 'discourse'. Secularism has been hijacked by an imitative linguistic elite which claims to be the true inheritors of Nehruvian secularism and which has successfully distanced itself from vernacular educated masses, and thus is in no position to identify penetrate and destroy from within the communal feelings of the non-English educated masses. It seems to have degenerated into a slanging match between the privileged, elitist, alien oriented⁶⁵ secularists and an under-privileged, alienated, vernacular-educated majority. Such a contest is bound to result in the discomfiture and retreat of secularism.

To combat communalism successfully there must be a cultural component in social development, and the values of this culture must come from the vernacular educated population. They should be able to identify themselves with this culture and subscribe to its values. The bureaucrats instead of distancing themselves from this group must be able to work with this group and gain recognition as the elite of the masses. Once the elite begins the discourse in vernacular the ideas of secularism that it expands will become accessible to the masses. As Bankim Chandra Chatterji mentioned,

"You can translate a word by word, but behind the word is an idea, the thing which the word denotes, and this idea you cannot translate, if it does not exist among the people whose language you are translating".⁶⁶

Unless a serious attempt is made in this direction it is doubtful whether secularism will ever become an acceptable ideology on the basis of state policy.

"It is imperative, then, that people must themselves render their historical experience meaningful: others may not do this for them. Borrowed ideas, unless internalized, do not have the power to bestow on us the gift and grace of living"⁶⁷

But it must be remembered that there are limits to secularism in a religious society. It is brash to suggest that,

"To ask people to cease to be communal in the short run need not mean asking them to cease to be religious. But in the longer term it must".⁶⁸

In my view that is the greatest weakness of the Marxist's perception and a disservice to secularism that religion has been cast in a negative mould. Its recognition by state and society to be a temporary concession to the religiosity of society and to be withdrawn at the earliest opportunity to lead the state towards an irreligious utopia. What is worse is the implied threat that the coercive force of the state would be thrown against those who wish to practice, preach or propogate religion in any organized way. The experience in the former Soviet Union should serve as a warning to those who still believe in such policies. Secularism has its place, so has religion. Any attempt to abolish religion is bound to be counterproductive.

The Marxists' view on Secularism

It is a truism to say that all Marxists are secularists but not all secularists are Marxists. Along with other secularists Marxists share certain perspectives and perceptions of the secular state but also differ from them with regard to the place of religion in a secular state and the state's attitude towards religions. In, the final

analysis the Marxists would like to abolish religion from the state itself. The right to propagate religion is anathema to all Marxists. They would prefer to equate a secular state with an atheist state. They strongly object to equality of all religion bestowed by the state or even that the state must keep an equi-distance from all religion. Goodwill towards all religion is an unacceptable policy; at the most they are willing to tolerate it as a temporary expediency.

"In countries like India and the Islamic world at least (and one suspects in lots of other places too) revolutionaries must learn to mute their atheism, but never the secularism".⁶⁹

Arguably the aim of the Marxists is to undermine and finally abolish religion from the scope of public policy and if possible from the private domain as well.

"Religion must be attacked at its weakest point - its inability to adequately address itself to, let alone resolve, the secular (the basic economic, political and social) problems of human existence. This is also the best way to bring about the ultimate disappearance of religious faith".⁷⁰

Definitions and Divergences

If there are divergences even in the perception of a secular state, obviously there must be widely different views between the Marxist and non-Marxist secularists on the nature of the secular state. While the secularists are willing to accommodate religion within the state the Marxists would like to abolish it if not in the near future at least in due course when economic factors and scientific temper are supposed to overwhelm them. The Marxists would consider even the right to propagate any religion as a distortion of the secular state. It has been suggested that this is the ideology of the ruling class to undermine economic realities to perpetuate the hegemony of the ruling classes. Moin Shakir states,

"The ruling class and the state managers perceive the Indian people in terms of different communities, caste and communal interests. The entire political system operates within the framework of aggregation and articulation of communal grievances and communal demands. This perception is an inalienable part of the ruling class ideology in the country as it mystifies economic realities in the polity and hopes the perpetuation of the hegemony of the dominant classes. This is the major reason for the existence of communalism in this country. The meaning of secularism is now distorted and it has come to signify the propagation of all religions".⁷¹

If the very nature and function of the secular state is in dispute it is obvious that there would be some basic differences in defining a secular state. Donald Eugene Smith's definition of a secular state was that it should be neutral towards all religions and should not be dominated by a religion. He refuses to concede that the former Soviet Union was a secular state as it was actively hostile towards all religions. Surinder Suri disputes those contentions. He feels Smith's view is pro-Christian and pro-religious.

"A state may be hostile to religion as in Russia or it may appease the Church in Poland. The one will be as much a secular state as the other".⁷²

Moreover, Suri argues that religious tolerance has nothing to do with secularism. A secular state may be intolerant towards religious minorities while a theocratic state may be tolerant towards them. He cites as examples the intolerance in Britain towards the religion of certain Asian minorities and in the United States against the Catholic and Jewish minorities. The only flaw in this argument is that the prejudices may be attributed to the societies but not to the States or institutions of the State.

Suri states

"Secular-mindedness in politics may be defined as the determination (and the ability) to sustain an autonomous political community. This involves the recognition of self-responsibility".⁷³

To him tolerance of religion is only a secondary issue. What is more important to establish secularism is to overcome personal, linguistic, regional and religious 'egotisms' in order to build a flourishing community. For such a purpose he argues the building up of a state ideology which subsumes the egotisms to create something which is accepted as higher and more desirable. The prevalence of communalism in India is due to the lack of such a new political ideology. The result would be secularism, as,

"Secularism is not a political faith but the accompaniment or by-product of one"⁷⁴.

Suri feels that religion, under such circumstances will change but it will not disappear. In fact it may be strengthened, unlike the Marxists Suri does not believe that religion would become marginal or superfluous. In fact he believes that "political secularism and religion would flourish side by side in India in the decades to come".

The Marxists would certainly oppose such comfortable ideas that both secularism and religion would find a modus vivendi of accommodation and flourish side by side. They would consider such ideas as dangerous as they promote comfortable myths and create illusions to make dangerous current trends respectable. The danger to the secular state comes from a resurgent Hinduism which is trying to fashion itself like Islam or Christianity based on religious texts and in more organized institutional form such as temple building. This resurgence of Hinduism is as dangerous to secularism as Sikh, Muslim and Christian fundamentalism. The emergence of such a strong religion based identity is essential for the development of communalism.

Firstly the Marxists reject the non-Marxist secularists' definition of secularism as separation of church and state. It would be inadequate even if secularism is accepted as a state ideology and aggressively promoted by the state to limit religion

and prevent it from entering what is recognized as the state's domain. This policy will constrain the state from developing secularism. It would not be sufficient even if the state completely secularizes education in schools and colleges and put down communal disturbances with a heavy hand. The Marxists idea would be,

"...secularism should be defined in a broader, more encompassing sense as not simply a state of affairs e.g. separation of church and state, or merely as an ideology... but as a many sided (at both material and ideological levels) process involving the progressive decline of religious influence in the economic, political and social life of human beings and even over their private habits and motivations."⁷⁵

Only such a dynamic definition would enable us to understand the historical process involved and guard us against complacency. In the process of secularisation there should be no clear line of demarcation between the public and private domain. The Marxists also reject any connection between secularisation, modernisation or westernisation. Nor could these terms be encompassed by the general term of capitalism. Only in the economic sense has capitalism helped to secularise life by destroying non-market privileges and religious orders. So it is incorrect to argue that the rise of capitalism and modernisation has led to a universal progress towards secularism. It is equally fallacious to argue that the religious and communal violence of the present age is a reaction to this secularist trend.

"Pressures for secularisation do not just emerge in the wake of a capitalistic modernisation (whose time span is conveniently stretched backwards and whose impact is universalised and exaggerated without justification) irrespective of the cultural-religious-ideological character of different pre-capitalist formations".⁷⁶

Even in the West secularisation is neither general nor uniform. In Italy, Eire and Spain the Church and state are far from separate. The Protestant states seem to have made greater progress in the direction of secularisation. Here again it would be incorrect to

generalize. The nexus between the Dutch Reformed Church and the state in South Africa is a notable example.

Another important fact is that secularisation and de-secularisation can take place at different levels of society at the same time. In modern Turkey the dispossessed Ulema changed from a collaborator of the ruling class to leader of the dispossessed in the urban and rural areas. Even this limited secularization of Turkey was possible because Turkey was the only non-colonial state. In other Islamic states, religion was a component of national identity. In Iran the limited secularization by the Shah was followed by rapid de-secularisation after his fall. So the Marxists argue that secularisation of the state has to be a continuous and relentless process as reversion is always a possibility. The displacement of religious influence should not be associated with decline.

"Relative secularisation of the state may not only prove to be temporary, it may often serve only to displace religious power and influence elsewhere even within the state as well as to different levels in civil society. A top-down approach i.e. pre-occupation with the state and its level of secularization can thus help to disguise and prevent a real comprehension of what is going on in the particular social formation under scrutiny".⁷⁷

Here it is significant to note that the most secular nation is China. The reason could be that China has no strong religious tradition.

"Chinese secularism is rooted not so much in its exposure to the impact of semi-colonial capitalism or Maoist communism as in the historical absence of any strong religious tradition, as distinct from the ethical tradition of confucianism".⁷⁸

So Marxism with its anti-religious theme found ready acceptance with the intellectuals and non-intellectuals in China. The possible explanation is, it is not capitalist or non-capitalist modernisation that prepares the ground for secularisation but the absence of a

strong religious tradition that accelerates the growth of secularism. But Marxists themselves admit the rapid change in the mode of production can create conditions for the revival of religion and spiritualism in the absence of a 'genuine socialist democracy'. To introduce secularism in Islamic country would be more difficult, as Islam is a 'political religion'. In such cases the Marxists would prefer a proletarian dictatorship even before any attempt is made at secularization. The 'bourgeois liberal democracy' insists on the separation of religion and state because 'liberal democracy' must forever remain partial and incomplete. It emphasizes 'liberalism' rather than 'democracy' and thus has to maintain the distinction between state and civil society. The Marxists argue that in a crisis it will abandon its liberalism and become fascist or semi-fascist with or without religious sanction. Such a state is incapable of creating or defending a genuine secular state. The Marxist definition of secularism must prevail. In the process it must effect a breach with and not defend 'bourgeois' secularism.

"Marxist secularists are in the most fundamental and in the 'ultimate' sense of the word anti-religious. They do not merely wish it to be restricted to individual private life and practice but ultimately expect and hope that religious influence will disappear from every sphere of human existence".⁷⁹

No doubt the Marxists have taken their cue from the Soviet Union. As Leonard Schapiro has stated Marx would allow religiosity to disappear from the lives of people by improvement in social conditions, but Lenin wanted the party to struggle against religious obscurantism. Lenin and Stalin persecuted and tried to eliminate religion as 'counter revolutionary' activities, but as one Soviet writer admitted even as late as 1937, 45% of the people in the Soviet Union believed in religion. Hence even Marxists are aware of the practical difficulties involved in the process. They will provide for some 'private space' for a persons religious commitment. Only religion attempts to answer the questions on the purpose and problems of human existence and the reality or otherwise of the cosmos. Marxist ontology is at best undeveloped. At the same time the struggle to restrict and restrain the influence of the institutionalised

and non-institutionalised religion should go on. The Marxists believe that, in the final analysis, religion survives due to the helplessness, powerlessness and alienation of individuals who turn to irrational solutions due to desperation. When these areas are reduced the religious commitment is automatically reduced.

"It is here that the process of secularisation and socialist democracy are indissolubably linked".⁸⁰

To attack religious faith and spiritualism is to court disaster by attacking its strongest point and play into the hand of communalists. It must be attacked for its inability to tackle the economic, social and political problems of the individuals and ultimately bringing about the end of religious faith. It is not enough to secularise the nation-state, or adopt secularism as a state ideology. Even an expansion of knowledge is not enough as expansion of popular power is crucial to secularization, otherwise it will only promote elitism. Secularism will not percolate from top to bottom in due course as knowledge or information increases. It will merely expand the power of the elite. Meanwhile the elite would remain the custodians of secular values and dominate the state machinery.

Between the secular political parties, the most prominent of which is the Congress Party, and the Marxist parties the vital difference is in their attitude towards religion. The secularist parties would like to adopt the Western model of separating the state from religion, and the public domain should remain strictly secular i.e. free from religious influence. In this connection secularism has been given an Indian definition; equal respect to all religions or goodwill towards all religions. The Marxists reject this definition as a distortion of secularism as it has come to mean 'propagation of all religions'. The Marxist would like to expel religion from all domains-public and private, to establish genuine secularism. Strictly speaking the state has often failed to keep equidistance from all religions. Here it must be remembered that since independence the central government has always been under the control of

avowed secular parties, yet Hindu idioms, symbols and ideas are incorporated in official functions thereby giving credence to the charge that India is for all practical purpose a 'Hindu state'. On the other hand the interference and influence of the state over Hindu institutions such as the temples and 'maths' are resented by the Hindus. The special provisions in the Constitution for the establishment, maintenance and administration of educational, cultural and religious institutions for the minorities and their extension and expansion by the courts and government actions are classified as 'minoritytism' and a violation of the principles of secularism. This kind of peculiar situation has (led the secular government in a bind); it has interfered when it should not have and failed to interfere when it should have. This explains the failure of the secularists to promote secularism in a meaningful way, although for the past forty years and more the secularists have had the monopoly of power and direction of state power over education, culture and arrangement of social life.

The bureaucracy, especially the upper echelons of it, is equally responsible for the projection of a negative secular image. It is a product of an education system based on elitism built up by the British to buttress their colonial edifice. It could administer efficiently, but is inflexible and unable to respond rapidly to a changing environment. The education system which has been criticised by the nationalists was left largely intact and the post independence bureaucracy was a replica of the pre-independence one. It became a self-perpetuating oligarchy convinced of its values and importance. Its loyalty to its own version of secularism is not in doubt, but it remains isolated and its convictions and attempts to propagate them failed to elicit an adequate response. Its values were western oriented and it became part of the 'underworld of the Anglo-American educational and cultural universe'. It fashioned/moulded secularism in its own image and claimed a Nehruvian precedent for it. To be fair to the Civil Service it must be admitted that it mostly responds and reacts to political leadership. It seldom initiates but very often imitates. In the Nehruvian age it responded to his

leadership and accepted his cultural values and vision of secularism.⁸¹ In a way the failure of the bureaucracy is the failure of the political leadership.

The Marxists' view on secularism is more comprehensive than that of the others. It does not recognize the public and private realm as distinct and separate. It would reduce all human values to economic terms. They assert that religion does not address itself, much less offer solutions to the basic economic needs of men. Religion is to be attacked at its weakest point and not at the level of faith or spiritualism its strongest point.

As religious propagation, organized and unorganized will be curbed, and economic problems are solved by secular means the need and space for religion could be diminished until it disappears totally i.e. 'religious influence will disappear from every sphere of human existence!' The aim is to marginalise religion and prepare the ground for its exit. The flaw in this argument is that even if the material problems of men are solved by Marxist secular means the problems, and measuring, of human existence and its place in the cosmos will remain a puzzle and human beings will seek a religious solution for them. As Ashis Nandy puts it, the Church is ascendant in parts of the super-secular second world.⁸²

The greatest weakness in the approach of the secularists to religion is their attempt to marginalise and make it ineffective. To preach secularism as a normal form of human existence and refer to religious consciousness of the community in pejorative terms such as 'primitive' and 'primordial' is to court disaster in a multi-religious state like India. Even atheist political parties like the Dravida Kazhakam and Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam, have attacked Hindu religious practices, but left Islam and Christianity alone.

"... sensitive political analysts as well as activists are in no doubt as to who or what will be abolished if the Indian nation-state today takes on the task of abolishing religious and ethnic identities. The secularization of the Indian state has gone far but there are limits to its capacity to secularize the society".⁸³

The solution seems to be that religion must be taken seriously. T.N. Madan's argument stands to reason,

"That where religion persists as a powerful element in personal identity, secular policy cannot build on a rationalist avoidance of religious community but must take it into account"⁸⁴

This is not an argument against secularism or a call for its abolition. Perhaps it is the only ideology that can attract the loyalty of the populace from a wide spectrum. In its various forms and manifestations it has attracted quite a number of people. It has an intellectual attraction and transcends the ethnic, religious and linguistic identities of the people. However, it would be an advantage to look at the problem of secularism from the points of views of the various religious communities. As the Hindus constitute a majority of the population, the Hindu perception of the secular state will have a great significance in the future development of the secular state. We must turn our attention to it.

Footnotes - Chapter 6

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36. R.S. Narayanaswami - "Discrimination against Hindus in Constitution and Law"
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37. S.P. Sathe, op. cit. p. 334.
38. See P. Muthuswamy - The Constitution of India, Swamy Publishers - Madras,
p. 12.
39. Please see Justice R Sengottuvelan - Commentaries on the Tamil Nadu Hindu
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Inaction can be both positive and negative. A curious incident was brought to
my notice by Mr Sukhi Sivam of Coimbatore in July, 1991. A Superintendent
of Police ordered the organizers of a Hindu festival in a temple to switch off the
loudspeaker as it was against the law. When asked why he has taken no action
against a nearby mosque where the loudspeaker was equally loud, he hit the
questioner on the head with his baton. Strange are the ways of the secular state.
45. Ibid. p. 339.
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47. S.P. Sathe op. cit. p. 339.
48. N. Ram op. cit. p. 16.

49. S. Kaviraj "On the Discourse of Secularism", in B. Chakrabarty (ed.), Secularism and Indian Polity, Segment Book Distributors - New Delhi, 1990, p. 186.
50. Ibid. page 192.
51. Roger Scruton "A Dictionary of Political Thought", Pan Books, London.
52. S. Kaviraj - op. cit. p. 191.
53. Ibid. p. 191.
54. Ibid. p. 191.
55. Ibid. p. 194.
56. Ibid. p. 195.
57. Ibid. p. 196.
58. Ibid. p. 197.
59. Ibid. p. 197.
60. Roger Scruton op. cit.
61. S. Kaviraj - op. cit. p. 205.
62. Ibid. p. 200.
63. Ibid. p. 204.
64. Ibid. p. 202.
65. Secularism itself has been relegated to a foreign ideology by a good number of writers. See D.E. Smith, Ashis Nandy, T.N. Madan and N. Ram.
66. Quoted in T.N. Madan op. cit. p. 754.
67. Ibid. p. 754.
68. S. Kaviraj op. cit. p. 206.
69. S. Khan - "Towards a Marxist Understanding of Secularism". "Some Preliminary Speculations" - Economic and Political Weekly - Bombay.- Vol. 22, No. 10, March 7, 1989 p. 409.
70. Ibid. p. 409.
71. Moin Shakir op. cit., p. 167.
72. Surindar Suri op. cit. p. 39.

73. Ibid. p. 41.
74. Ibid. p. 41.
75. S. Khan - "Towards a Marxist Understanding of Secularism" p. 407.
76. Ibid. p. 407.
77. Ibid. p. 408.
78. Ibid. p. 408.
79. Ibid. p. 408.
80. Ibid. p. 408.
81. The late Mr G.G. Thomson, Director of the Political Study Centre in Singapore in one of his lectures mentioned that the Civil Service often absorb the ideas and values of their political masters. He quoted India as a good example. He said that the long rule by the Congress party under Nehru had made the top civil servants accept Congress ideas and values as their own.
82. Ashis Nandy - op. cit. page 248.
83. Ibid. p. 245.
84. T.N. Madan op. cit. p. 748.

Chapter 7

The Secular State: The Hindu Perception

Hindus constitute about 85% of the population of India. Their acceptance of the Secular State is crucial to its survival. In ancient India there was no clear cut division between the sacred and secular; neither was there any clear cut demarcation between the role of state and society. The Brahmins and the Kshatriyas represented the sacred and the secular respectively. The Brahmins gained precedence and legitimised the kings' authority but in turn had to depend on the king for protection and upholding the social order.

In modern times ie 18th and 19th centuries Indian nationalism originated in Bengal and spread to other parts of India. Hindu nationalism was equated with Indian nationalism. The idiom was obviously Hindu and implicitly anti - Muslim who were denounced as "foreigners". This idea found powerful expression in the novels of Bankim Chandra and R.C. Dutt. Even an ardent nationalist like Surendramath Banerjee took pride in the achievement of the Hindu nation. B.G. Tilak's nationalism was 'Hinduised' nationalism.

After independence the 'secular' state was an imposition from above. Its western orientation and irreligious undertones were viewed with suspicion if not hostility by the "non-westernised" section of the populace. Hindu "communalism" was contained during the Nehru era due to his political dominance and personal popularity. But the right wing of the Congress remained Hindu oriented. In the early eighties Indira Gandhi made use of the "Hindu wave" to regain and retain power. The rise of the BJP indicates that its propaganda theme that "Secularism" is both pseudo and 'minorityism' has been effective. On the positive side it may be argued that 'Hindu Consciousness' ie that one is a Hindu and has a common identity with those who

consider themselves as Hindus has been present among members of the Hindu Community. Hindus may be a divided community based on caste, language and even in the practice of religion they profess they belong to, but as T.N. Madan points out, while the Hindu community continues to splinter, religiosity among Hindus seem to be increasing. The political expression of the feeling that they are an ineffective majority is the BJP. Hence its propaganda that Indian secularism is 'pseudo', and that 'minorityism' means the appeasement of minorities in the form of 'special rights' and privileges, and thus poses a threat to the Hindu community fell on receptive ears. This ties up with the glory of 'Hindutva' published by V.D. Savarkar in 1924. Hindutva was translated as 'Hinduness'. In the usage of its protagonists, it binds Hindus to the soil and puts the latent power of cohesion to greatness'. Hindus have inherited a great body of literature - the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the works of Kalidasa and Bhasa. Finally India is the holyland of the Hindus. The Hindus are about the only people who are blessed with these ideal conditions that are at the same time an incentive to national solidarity, cohesion and greatness.

However, no religious group in India or elsewhere is divided into caste, sect, language, even in the very concept of God and the aims of life herein and hereafter like the Hindu community. It is difficult to define Hinduism or the Hindu community precisely. At the core of the religion is the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. This core of the religion is referred as 'Brahmanism'. In addition Hinduism includes the Puranas, and treatises and commentaries written on various aspects of the religion by the great Acharyas (teachers). Regional beliefs in nature gods which pre-date the arrival of Aryans have also formed part of Hinduism, which gives the religion a regional identity as well. As this amorphous mass constitutes Hinduism - none is rejected. Those who believe in any or all of these, identify themselves as Hindus and form part of the Hindu community. The differences among Hindus are so wide that some even doubt whether Hinduism is a religion and the Hindus a religious community. At the highest level it is

a monotheistic religion according to the 'Advaita' school of philosophy, but at the lower level it is polytheistic and even finds no difficulty in accommodating beliefs in local gods and spirits. The overwhelming number of Hindus believe in more than one god and find nothing incongruous in attributing divergent and even contradictory qualities to different gods and even to the same god. Perhaps it is this quality which is responsible for the definition of Hinduism as,

"the polytheistic religion of the Hindus, a development of Brahmanism".¹

To a religious minded Hindu, the words 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' are foreign in concept and origin. In his view his religion is 'Sanatana Dharma', the eternal way of life, which defies definition. More correctly it may be described as a way of life. In the view of one writer

"Sanatana Dharma stands for the eternal spiritual truths enunciated by the Vedic Seers, and not for the degenerated form of Hinduism with which we are familiar today."²

If it is difficult to define 'Hinduism' it is more difficult to define a 'Hindu'. Among its ranks are included confirmed atheists to men who believe in a multiple of gods. As it is not a proselytising religion, a person born of Hindu parents is automatically assumed to be a Hindu unless he changes his religion. So in practice a person who does not claim to be a Muslim, Christian or Sikh in India is considered to be a Hindu. Attempts have been made to give the above definition a cultural dimension. Swami Chinmayananda is reputed to have told the Protestant Bishop of Madras Rt. Rev. Azariah that all the people in India are either 'Hindus' or 'ex-Hindus.'³ M.S. Golwalker the ideologist of the Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh offers a definition which is a classic example of non-definition.

"We, the Hindus, have based our whole existence on God and therefore, it is probable that the Hindu Society developed in an all-comprehensive manner, with a bewildering variety of phases and forms, but with one thread of unification running inherently through the multitude of expressions and manifestations. All the Sects, the various Castes in the Hindu fold, can be defined, but the term 'Hindu' cannot be defined, because it comprises all".⁴

It would be more practical to define Hinduism as it would appear to a Hindu as rational and acceptable. To Brian Smith it would appear to be a process rather than an essence. In his view,

"Hinduism is the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimising reference to the authority of the Veda."⁵

Hinduised Society

India has always been a highly religious society since the dawn of history. The origins of modern Hindu religion have been traced to the Indus Valley civilization. As Gordon Childe remarks,

"Some of the rites thus disclosed unmistakably foreshadow practices distinctive of later Hinduism; the latter represents certain deities under the same forms as the Indus art ... Hindu rituals and deities have roots in the cults depicted in the pre-historical art."⁶

Hindu beliefs and practices which may be traced to pre-historic times and even to the Indus Valley Civilization circa 2500 BC show clear religious influence. As religion permeated all sections of society it becomes more difficult to separate the sacred from the secular.

"Hindu philosophy and the knowledge of God are inseparable ... it is evident that India is a land overflowing with religion and with the religious spirit. India produced too much of religion, and China too little. Not too little but too much is India's trouble".⁷

The Origins of the Hindu State

The Indus Valley Civilization was supposed to have been destroyed by the Aryan invaders around 1000 B.C. The Aryans spread over the whole of north India and even penetrated gradually to South India imposing their mark on every aspect of society. No doubt this process was slow; but it was meticulous and complete and created a new composite social order so it is almost impossible to separate or even identify the different strands that are accepted as part of Hindu civilization.

"The Vedic Indo-Aryans were the earliest immigrants and they have influenced every aspect of society from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. Modern Hinduism has its roots in the institutions and literature of the Vedic Indo-Aryans. No other immigrant group, not even the Muslims have made anything comparable to it."⁸

The ancient Hindu state was structurally and functionally geared to the exercise of power. The function of the chief was to uphold the society based on 'caste' or 'varna', to protect property and the patriarchal family system. It was a class based unequal society.

"In all disputes arising out of Varnas, family, property, etc, the state had to mediate through its agencies, and its voice was final. The decision of the state could be ultimately enforced through the use of coercive power or danda. Of course in such cases social sanction or consensus which represents the views of the dominant class accepted by the dominated class also prevail."⁹

The inter-tribe and intra-tribe warfare increased the power of the chiefs and undermined the egalitarian character of the Vedic Society. The chiefs with the aid of his kinsmen institutionalised power on the base of a class structure with the help of the priests. This in turn gave rise to the dominance of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas in

the social, religious and political hierarchy. However, there ensued a struggle between the Brahmins and Kshatriyas for supremacy which ended in a compromise.

"Eventually the struggle ended in the recognition of the ritualistic leadership of the Brahmins by the Kshatriyas and the recognition of the political leadership of the Kshatriyas by the Brahmins".¹⁰

In this contest the Brahmins emerged as the legitimisers and not as the wielders of power.

"The Brahmins played a pivotal role in strengthening the authority of the rajanays/Kshatriyas along with whom they enjoyed a position of domination and superiority over the Vaisyas and Sudras."¹¹

The rise in importance of the priestly class may also be attributed to the rise of the belief in the divinity of kings. The priests introduced special sacrifices to bestow divinity on the king. This enhanced the prestige and status of the priest who claimed even precedence over the king. Thus was established the hierarchical relationship between spiritual authority and temporal power.

"It would seem that originally the two functions were differentiated, but they were later deliberately brought together, for the regnum (Kshatra) could not subsist on its own without the sacerdotium (brahma) which provided its principle of legitimacy. Says the King to the priest: 'Turn thou unto me so that we may unite ... I assign to you the precedence; quickened by thee I shall perform deeds'".¹²

The name 'purohita' attributed to the priests points to his precedence. The superior position assigned to the priest indicates the domination of the sacred over the secular in the ancient Hindu State. R.S. Sharma gives a good example.

"In the later vedic power hierarchy the respective positions of the brahmana, raja, raja's brother and others are known from an explanation put on the ritual called the 'passing of the sword' in the 'raja suya' coronation ceremony. Since the brahmana passes it to the

raja, the latter is called weaker than the brahmana, but stronger than his enemies (who evidently do not include the brahmanas)"¹³

One important question has to be addressed here. Why did the two lower castes acquiesce in the re-structuring of society in which they were assigned a subordinate role and accept the dominant role assured by the Brahmin-Kshatriya combination? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that it was given a religious sanction as ordained by the divine will and presented as a natural order of the world.

"It is a great tribute to the sophistication and finesse of the Brahmins that the scaffolding they designed to uphold their class interests was made to appear as part of the natural order of things - a constraint ordained at the time of creation of the world. In fact the social universe of a Hindu is wholly permeated by his religion."¹⁴

Was the first position of the Brahmins in the caste hierarchy and in society due to 'usurpation' of the Kshatriyas position as claimed by Romila Thapar?

"The priests were not slow to realize the significance of such a division of society and the supreme authority which could be invested in the highest caste. They not only managed to usurp the first position by claiming that they alone could bestow divinity on the King (which was now essential to kingship) but they also gave religious sanction to caste divisions."¹⁵

The 'Purushasukta' in the Rig Veda gives religious sanction to the fourfold classification of the caste. The Virata Purusha's mouth was the Brahmin, his arms were the Kshatriyas, the thighs were the Vaishyas and the feet Sudras.¹⁶ The verse describes the birth of the moon from the mind of the Purusha, the sun from his eyes, air from his breath and Indra and Agni: from his face. The description may be taken as a metaphorical description of the cosmos than a literal description of society. It would be preferable to accept R.S.Sharma's theory that the Brahmin- Kshatriya duality arose out of a necessity based on a compromise of the sacred and the secular. Altekar's assessment seems to be more to the point.

The Vedic teacher and priest enjoyed a high ritual and social status, but the financial reward was very low. It was also believed that this profession was confined to the Brahmin Caste by divine will. The state enforced the rule but 99 per cent of the non-Brahmins accepted the situation.¹⁷ Very little has changed in modern times. The profession is little esteemed and less rewarded. However, it may be assumed that the role of religion in the formation of state in ancient India was very important.

In South India too religion played a significant role in the development of polity. Aryanization of the south received strong support with the rise of the Pallava dynasty in the 7th century. They claimed divine origin as descendants of the God Brahma. They assumed traditional Hindu titles of kingship and performed vedic sacrifices.

"The Pallava period in South India saw the cultivation of what had been a gradual process of assimilating Aryan institutions, greater assimilation of Aryan ideas being limited to the upper strata of society."¹⁸

Entire villages were given to learned Brahmins as grants known as brahmadeya and to temples known as devadana, no doubt as part of the state formation process. The Chola dynasty which came to power in the 10th century continued with the process of aryanization and religiosity. The kings took royal titles such as 'chakra vartigal' which bear a close resemblance to titles assumed by their northern counterparts. The cult of god king was encouraged by the worship of images of deceased rulers and building temples as monuments for dead rulers.

"The raja-gura [priest of the royal family] of the Cholas became a confident and confessor in addition to being the adviser in all matters temporal and sacred."¹⁹

Tolerance and Intolerance in Hinduism

It is almost an article of faith among Hindus to consider Hinduism as the most tolerant of all religions in the world. To quote a Christian dignitary,

"they like to wear it as a badge of honour".²⁰

The Rig Veda proclaims 'Ano bhadra ritavo yantu Visvatah' - May noble thoughts from all over the world come to us. The Upanishads say 'Satyam ekam, budha bahuvidah Vadanti' - The Truth is one, the wise call it by various names. As a religion, Hinduism has no single sacred book or prophet. Within its fold it encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices which may even appear to be contradictory. It is a conglomerate of ideas, beliefs, traditions and religious texts. As the religious literature is an amorphous mass it has no difficulty in admitting other beliefs, be it Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity or Islam. Perhaps it is this accommodating spirit and tolerance which is feared by the protagonists of revealed religions, who fear that in due course their separate identities will be compromised and they will end up as a sect of the Hindus. Their fears cannot be dismissed as far fetched or irrelevant, as in Southeast Asia the dividing line between Hinduism and Buddhism is invisible. As Romila Thapar mentions,

"In time the distinction between Hindu and Buddhist in Southeast Asian countries became hazy. The Thai Court at Bangkok employs, to this day, brahmans from India for all court ceremonies, and the brahmans are maintained in comfort in Bangkok; yet the state religion of Thailand is Buddhism."²¹

It may be argued that the acceptance of foreigners within its fold was due to the catholicity in the outlook of Hinduism as well as its confidence in its cultural superiority. As Altekar points out the Greeks, the Scythians, the Kushans and the

Huns were all absorbed into Hinduism, who entered India as conquerors, but were later accommodated and absorbed into it.

There are certain factors which enable Hinduism to accept the secular state ie a state which treats all religions equally or even ignores religion as a factor in state formation.

"Hinduism's concern with political institutions and the course of human history is thus at most a secondary concern. The ultimate philosophical and religious values of Hinduism do not require a Hindu state, or any particular kind of political structure for that matter."²²

Moreover, Hinduism is not a proselytizing religion, as basically the Hindu belief is that all religions are true as they are only various paths that lead to the ultimate reality. On this basis some writers have argued that Hinduism is not a religion at all but a way of life based on certain ethical and moral principles. No doubt this view is an exaggeration. It would be more correct to say that

"... Hinduism is not merely a religion but also a type of social organism."²³

Hinduism does have a core of religious texts which can be considered to be authoritative and provide guidance for Hindus. The Vedas, Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita fall into this category. In modern times it has also proved to be responsive to social changes. The caste system which was considered to be the core of Hindu religion has no longer a religious function but survives as a political phenomenon. The Hindu Code Bill was passed nearly four decades ago, and has been generally accepted by the community. It may be assumed that as far as Hindu religion is concerned the right of the secular state to legislate for social reforms and the introduction of secular values has been accepted.

However, there are certain factors which have contributed to and are likely to make it intolerant and aggressive towards other religions and cultures. As Jennings puts it

"... it has not only its roots but its being in Hindustan".

It is an ethnic religion which originated and prevails in India. As a non-proselytizing religion, it is etho-centric and exclusive. A man is born into Hinduism and does not become one. In the pre-Muslim period it used to admit foreigners into its fold; but since then it has become more rigid, more orthodox and perhaps, more intolerant towards deviations and 'mlecha' (impure) practices. The present emphasis on 'Hindutva' or Hinduness by Hindu communal parties indicates its negative aspect. To a believing Hindu the motherland is even greater than heaven.²⁴ To him India is a holy land, its mountains and rivers are not only holy, but divine.

"Those who thus died for their religion and country no doubt believed intensely that Bharatavarsha was so holy a land, that Svarga and Moksha (heaven and salvation) is possible only by a birth in it and therefore even gods desire to be reborn within its territory."²⁵

No doubt such intense devotion to one's country is laudable but it can lead to a state where non-Hindus are considered to be 'foreigners' and the adherents of a 'foreign religion'. Even in South India where religious syncretism has led to a more tolerant attitude, there have been occasions where other religions have been oppressed. Nana Sambandar, the Saivite saint is reputed to have defeated the Jains in a debate and converted the Pandya King to Saivism.

"The story goes that on this occasion 8,000 Jains were put to death by impalement, and a festival in Madura temple is supposed to commemorate the gruesome event to this day. This, however, is little more than an unpleasant legend and cannot be treated as

history. There is no reason to believe that, even in those days of intense religious strife, intolerance descended to such cruel barbarities."²⁶

Foreign Intrusion and Hindu Reaction

It is a debatable point whether the Muslims were foreigners who imposed their alien, ie non-Indic religion, and a non-Indian Civilization on an unwilling and hostile people or were merely another group of immigrants and conquerors who made India their home. Hinduism has absorbed the pre-Muslim immigrants and invaders and 'Hinduised' them, but the Muslims considered themselves as conquerors and aliens with a superior religion and civilization. This is not to deny the existence of a degree of syncretism between Hinduism and Islam. But as Sudipta Kaviraj has pointed out it is falsification of history to assert that Islam and Hinduism were progressing towards the development of a composite culture until the process was arrested by colonial rule.

Nationalist historians

"... neglected a study of the structure of the social order in pre-colonial India, and presented what must have been exceptional experiments at its margins as the central principles of social organizations."²⁷

Perhaps such facts are emphasized because they were few and far between and correct and desirable from the nationalist point of view. It would be more correct to assume that

"... a study of these [Sufi] records gives us the history of the Muslims in its Indian setting, the influence which the Hindu religion and civilization exerted on the inner transmutation of Islam, the hopes and fears of Muslims in the midst of a dynamic though subservient majority and the alien infiltration of Hindu Customs, manners, and ways of thought into Muslim Society."²⁸

The net result was Hinduism was neither able to absorb or expel Islam from the sub-continent and

"... it was probably truer to say that they developed an adjacency which was a peculiar mixture of acceptance and rejection, at least of insulation from the other."²⁹

Consequently Hinduism tended to develop into an ethno-centric, rigid and orthodox religion during the period as it felt its very existence was being threatened by an alien religion allied with a superior military force.

Hindu Reaction to British Rule

British rule in Bengal was welcomed by the Hindus and resented by the Muslims. Having failed to absorb or expel the Islamic ideology, Hinduism welcomed British rule as an alien but friendly new power. In the early stages of Company rule the British even took over the responsibility and traditional role of Hindu rulers as the protector of Hindu religion and arbiter of Hindu customs and traditions. This role was given up by the British due to pressure from Christian missionaries who objected to government support of 'pagan' and 'heathenish' practices; but the favourable impression remained.

"Most Hindus were persuaded that British rule had given them political stability, security of life and property, the rule of law however truncated, a relatively impartial administration of justice and religious freedom which meant much to the Brahmins, a secular government which, though partial to missionaries, did not officially impose Christianity on the Hindus, a moderately free press, civil liberties and security from foreign aggression."³⁰

From the very outset Hindu leaders seemed to have accepted as basically correct the British view of Hindu State and religion as inferior, degenerate and lacking in

western virtues such as martial valour, intellectual integrity and moral commitment. This may be the reason why,

"Hindu leaders almost to a man, located and discussed it [British rule] in the wider context of their social regeneration."³¹

This attitude more or less reflected the feeling of crisis and impending disaster for the community as a whole. As Professor Parekh remarks,

"Since Hindu morality was based on 'Varnadharma' and closely bound up with the caste system, Hindu society faced not just a socio-economic but a deep moral and religious crisis as well. It had either to be re-constituted on new principles or it must face extinction."³²

Faced with such a dilemma Hindu leaders attempted to define who are 'Hindus' and what constitutes 'Hinduism'. For the first time Hindus began to identity themselves as a homogenous community.

Four Schools of Thought

Professor Parekh identifies four groups which emerged to identify the problems of Hindu Society and suggests remedies for the regeneration of Hindu Society. The four groups may be defined as traditionalists, modernists, critical modernists and critical traditionalists. The traditionalists found nothing, or very little wrong with society. They dismissed British rule as of no consequence. The modernists took the opposite view. They felt that Hindu Society has degenerated beyond hope. It must be restructured along modern European lines. They believed a strong, interventionist, secular and democratic state essential to recreate society. They saw society in a negative light and state as a corrective agency to put right the wrongs in society. In their view Indian Society was doomed unless the state transformed society in its own image. The critical modernists while agreeing that society needs regeneration were in

favour of a syncretic approach. They advocated a synthesis of western and Indian civilizations, accepting the best from both sides. But both groups agreed that a liberal secular state pursuing collective agreed goals leading to national immunity, prosperity, industrialization and liberal democracy would be an ideal solution. These goals legitimised the state in the eyes of the citizens and gave it a moral authority as well.

In the view of the critical traditionalists, the Indian State's claim on its citizen is purely legal. It derives its legitimacy from its commitment to preserve and revitalise its established way of life. Primarily India is a Hindu state based on Hindu civilization. The non-Hindu elements are recognized but they have been absorbed and integrated into its civilization. The rights of minorities to preserve their identities are recognised but the cultural base of the nation remains Hindu.

"India could only be and ought to aspire to be a nation state in the sense of resting the Indian state on the Hindu nation."³³

All these ideologies are present in India today and the pulls in different directions create a number of tensions and at times even create doubt about its viability as a nation.

The Renaissance and Hindu Perceptions of the Past

In the literature of the period written by Hindu writers two important strands could be distinguished. It was largely pro-British and implicitly if not explicitly anti-Muslim. This could be seen in the historical novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Romesh Chandra Dutt. Bankim was able to dominate Bengali literature of the period and prove that Bengali prose was adequate to deal with a wide range of subjects and made Bengalis take pride in their language. Subsequently his novels

were translated into other Indian languages and his fame spread all over India and indirectly contributed to the rise of nationalism.

"What mattered in the history of Bengal was the opinion of his work held by his own people. He had provided nationalism in Bengal with its own native idioms."³⁴

Bankim's nationalism was Hindu nationalism, it was the highest point of human evolution and for the Hindu it had divine approval

"... in his essays and novels, he consistently treats the terms 'Hindu' and 'Indian' as synonyms, and uses either in any context without discrimination. I have found no context in which 'Indian' can be interpreted to include 'Muslim'. Though he never explicitly said so, the implication of this terminological usage is clear. Muslims are not Indians, they are aliens. Whenever Bankim described warfare, the contestants were Hindu Indians and alien Muslims."³⁵

In his novels Hindu heroes and heroines represent what is good, great and noble, while Muslims are

"cast in the roles of tyrant and oppressor. They are the abductors of women, and the rapacious collector of taxes. Their cruelty is often for cruelty's sake."³⁶

Bankim's treatment of the British is more sympathetic. He admires their courage and the benefits they have brought to India, although he resented their racialism. In his greatest novel 'Anandamath', which includes 'Vande Mataram', India's national song", Bankim says,

"There are no enemies, the English are friends as well as rulers. And no one can defeat them in battle."

The message was clear, Muslim rule has been destroyed, but the Hindus are not yet ready to take power, so the British shall rule. Clark sums up Bankim's attitude which indicates the views of Hindus in general:

- a) British rule is necessary for India, which can only profit by it. Its establishment is no affront to Indian feelings because it was made possible by the defeat of the Muslim kings by the Indians themselves.
- b) British rule is friendly. It will provide the opportunities for growth that India needs. It can supply India with the knowledge it needs, and establish conditions of peace in which Hinduism can revive.
- c) British rule will continue until Hinduism is purified, and until Hindus are 'wise, virtuous and 'strong'."37

As a great literary figure and Hindu nationalist Bankim Chandra

"... was born to speak just what he did speak at the very period in time, when the ears of his fellow-countrymen were tuned to listen, their minds to agree, and their hearts to respond."38

The other novelist Romesh Chandra Dutt also idealises the past in his first four historical novels, but

"he was quick to realise that an idealisation of the past that carried with it unambiguous desecration of much that was associated with the Muslims could not but deepen internal divisions along communal lines."39

In his later novels he continues to idealise the Hindu/Buddhist past but avoids the anti-Muslim bias of his earlier novels. But he does not stop at that, he looks at the future which belongs to the young. For the young the past lives in the present. They see

more than human skills and human fervour in their ancestors who built the historical and religious monuments. To them revivalism meant experiencing the past in the present. To Dutt

"Rapport between the orthodox old and the educated young is essential to his scheme of idealising the past ... the culturally deracinated educated youth, should discover his heritage and through it, his true national identity. He should also be able to relate this identity with the life and values of the older generation around him from whom he has been estranged."⁴⁰

Dutt's concept of the Indian nation is decidedly religious and cultural and predominantly Hindu orientated which includes Buddhism but not Islam; the words 'India' and Hindu are used synonymously.

Dutt's influence spread over a wide spectrum and influenced a considerable body of intellectuals. B.K. Thakore who became an eminent Gujarati poet, critic and historians was greatly influenced by Dutt's writing. Similarly Maithilisharan Gupta who was hailed as the national poet of India was inspired to write 'Bharat-Bharti' his poetical masterpiece by his reading of Dutt's 'History of Civilization in Ancient India'. Both Thakore and Gupta were moved by Dutt's description of the glories of ancient India and the great achievements of Hindu Civilization, which is vividly contrasted with the present low status and low esteem of the Hindus.

An interesting development was the attitude of Christian converts from Hinduism. They accepted Jesus as the Saviour, an escape from an unsatisfying faith but not from their cultural heritage. Rev. Krishna Mohan Banerji took pride in his Aryan ancestry and Hindu culture. He asserted that Christ was foreshadowed by Prajapati and the Bible anticipated in the Vedas! Similarly Dutt has asserted that Buddhism was the forerunner of Christianity in Palestine.

"Buddhist communities were living and preaching their moral precepts of forgiveness and love in Palestine when Jesus Christ was born."⁴¹

Here it is relevant to note that intra-religious and inter-religious polemics was not unknown in Hinduism. The Saivite - Vaishnavite polemics in South India is well known, which survives to this day. Krishna Mishra's 'Prabodhachandroya' a Sanskrit play written in the 11th century reviles Buddhists, Jains and Kapilikas in most offensive terms. Its popularity continued until the early decades of the present century. However, these polemics had not created permanent antagonism between different religious groups and prevented the growth of a national identity. But the polemics against the Muslims seems to have a deeper significance. The Muslims rejected Indian or more correctly Hindu civilization as having any real value for them and considered themselves with some pride as aliens and were so considered by the Hindus. Even Tilak the doyen among ultra-nationalist Congressmen while inaugurating the Shivaji festival stated,

"God has not conferred on the 'Mlecha' [unclean and by implication the Muslims] grant of Hindustan inscribed on imperishable brass."⁴²

Obviously mere differences of opinion based on religion even of a polemical nature need not result in mutual hostility among castes and religions.

"If hostility did ensue in particular cases, it happened through the mediation of other factors which found manifestation along lines of traditional social division. In a society where even new social unities, besides being incipient, had their members identified on the basis of caste and religion, it was different to see social tensions in terms that did not correspond to the traditional categorisation. Gandhi had the perspicacity to make this point when, in the Hind Swaraj, he compared Hindu-Muslim differences with differences between the vedic religion and Jainism or between Vaishnavism and Shaivism."⁴³

Pre-Congress and Non-Congress Movements and Hinduism

Indian nationalism did not begin with the Indian National Congress. The ground work was laid by writers and civil leaders in Bengal. In fact Bengal led the various movements for social, religious and political reforms. Such movements had an all-India significance and influence. The novels and other books written by Bankim Chandra and R.C. Dutt were available throughout India in their translations and influenced the thinking and inflamed the patriotic feelings of people all over India.

The earliest political organisation in India was the British Indian Association founded in Calcutta in 1851. The authorities consulted it and citizens in different walks in life turned to it to redress their grievances. The pioneer in this field was Surendranath Banerji. His outlook was cosmopolitan, his ideas applied to the whole of India and his vision was for the advancement of the nationalist cause to gain freedom for his people. He was inspired in his venture by the Italian patriot Mazzini. His views may be considered 'secular' in the sense that there was no anti-Muslim sentiment in it; but still his vision was pre-dominantly Hindu. He believed that glorification of the past provided the surest ground for the rise of nationalism. In 1876 he addressed the Young Men's Association of Calcutta thus,

"... What Hindoo is there, who does not feel himself a nobler being altogether, as he recalls to his mind the proud list of his illustrious countrymen, graced by three immortal names of a Valmiki and a Vyasa, a Panini and a Patanjali, a Gautama and a Sankaracharya? For ours was a most glorious past."⁴⁴

The various Hindu religious movements had a subtle and often an open political motive as well. The Arya Samaj movement in the Punjab was in some aspects a militant Hindu movement. It was anti-Muslim as well as anti-British. It believed in re-conversion of Muslims and Christians to Hinduism.

"The young Arya Samajists openly declared that they were waiting for the day when they would settle their account both with Moslems and the Britishers."⁴⁵

More moderate was the stance of swami Vivekananda. He was both a saint and a nationalist. To the youth of India he commended the novels of Bankim Chandra especially 'AnandaMath' and its patriotism. Swami Vivekananda's propagation of Hinduism,

"... not only restored the self-confidence of the Hindus in their culture and civilization, but quickened their sense of national pride and patriotism. This was evident from the sentiment echoed and re-echoed in the numerous public addresses which were presented to Swami Vivekananda on his home-coming by the Hindus all over India, almost literally from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas. It was a great contribution to the growing Hindu nationalism."⁴⁶

R.C. Majumdar calls Swami Vivekananda the father of modern Indian nationalism as he embodied in his life the highest and noblest elements in it. Gradually Hinduism was being identified with national interests and even with Indian nationalism.

"The newly born Indian nationalism was gradually assuming a decidedly Hindu character. This received further stimulus from the activities of Vivekananda and the teachings of the Theosophical Society."⁴⁷

The Congress Party and Communalism

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 and had its first session in Bombay under the Presidency of W.C. Bonnerjea. Although it was conceived as an all India organization it was criticised as an organization of Bengali 'Babus'. Syed Ahmed Khan urged the Muslims to keep out of it and his criticism was more polemical than factual. No doubt the leadership was predominantly Hindu, with some

Parsis and Britishers, but it was by no means a Hindu organization. Its third, session at Madras was presided over by Badaruddin Tyabji a prominent Muslim whose appeal to the Muslims to join the organization had some effect. As William Wedderburn, one of its leaders remarked it had to undergo three stages in its development like any other organization, ridicule, hostility and then growth. At this stage it was by no means a mass organization, but dominated by middle class professionals. It was moderate and believed in the fairness of British rule. Its method of redressing grievances was to present petitions to the government and pass resolutions at its annual meetings. The Presidential address of Sir C. Sankaran Nair in 1897 was typical of the Congress attitude towards British Government. He said,

"We are also aware that with the decline of British Supremacy, we shall have anarchy, war and rapine. The Mahomadens will try to recover their lost supremacy. The Hindu races and chiefs will fight among themselves. The lower castes who have come under the vivifying influence of western civilization are scarcely likely to yield without a struggle to the dominion of the higher castes."⁴⁸

The Congress could not even envisage at this stage the withdrawal of British rule. It could only hope for eventual home rule. The Muslim leaders viewed it with suspicion and hostility as an attempt by the Hindus who had taken advantage of and benefited by British rule to dominate them. At the fifth session of the Congress held in 1889 a Muslim delegate demanded that there should be equal number of Hindu and Muslim members in the Imperial and Provincial Councils. The proposal was voted down but the sign was ominous for the future.

Hindu Sentiments and Symbols in the Congress

The ideas pursued by the Congress may be secular, but it cannot be denied that there was a tendency to orientate towards Hindu ideals and symbols. For example B.G. Tilak used Hindu festivals and sentiments to boost the national identity of the

Hindus. In 1894 he revived the Ganesh festival to glorify the Peshwa period. The Shivaji festival was organised in 1896 as a counterweight to the Muslim Tazia movement. Its appeal was implicitly communal to affirm the Hindu identity against the British and Muslims

"The strange fact that Ganesh and Shivaji should have been run in tandem and the latter turned into a national hero and an inspiration for a new 'raja suya yagna' shows how much Hindu religion has been politicised and politics religionised."⁴⁹

Similarly the division of Bengal was perceived by the Hindus as a threat to their rising political aspirations and interests and the agitation against it indicated the growing self-consciousness and self-confidence of the highly influential Hindu national ideology in the national movement.

No one would accuse Gandhi of being a communalist, but his extensive and deliberate use of Hindu Symbols and idioms has contributed to the suspicion in the mind of Muslims that the ultimate aim of the Congress was to create a Hindu State. His 'Rama Rajya' may be the Indian equivalent of Utopia but nevertheless the idiom is Hindu. It can also be argued that religious symbols and idioms were some of the few tools available to translate political ideas in a language accessible to the masses and to communicate with them, but its significance may be misunderstood by others. Moreover, there have always been leaders within the Congress fold who were sympathetic towards Hindu communal organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rastriya Swayam Sewak Sangh. It may also be argued that the Congress Party never took a serious view or a strong line with regard to the communal minded individuals and leaders within its rank.

"The freedom struggle suffered from major weaknesses in this respect. Firstly, a vigorous political and ideological struggle against communalism and its feeders, religiosity, caste, social

distance, the Hindu tinge in nationalist thought, the communal interpretation of history, obscurantism etc. was not carried out."⁵⁰

Due to these factors the Congress Party was not completely able to refute the allegation that it was a Hindu dominated party. But Jennings's criticism that,

"The Indian National Congress obtained strong support from the Hindu villagers, but it was a quasi-religious movement dependent on the emotional appeal of Mahatma Gandhi"⁵¹

is not quite correct.

The State and Hindu Communal Parties

It is true that the Congress Party dominated Indian politics during the first half of the present century and was able to contain and constrict the role of Hindu communal parties, but they continue to exercise an influence disproportional to their number because of the presence of leaders sympathetic to their views within the Congress. The views of the communal parties were that the Muslims were aliens and will continue to be aliens unless they accept Hindu culture as the basis of their culture. The published constitution of the Hindu organization The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh is significant. It states,

"The aims and objects of the Sangh are to weld together the diverse groups within the Hindu Samaj and to vitalize and rejuvenate the same on the basis of its 'Dharma' and 'Sanskriti', that it may achieve an all sided development of 'Bharatavarhsa'."⁵²

History was given an interpretation closer to the Hindu ethos medieval history was re-interpreted to reinforce communal arguments. R.C. Majumdar gives some credibility to the argument that the Hindus and Muslims have been permanently divided communities since the middle ages. In his view medieval India remained,

"permanently divided into two powerful units, each with a marked individuality of its own, which did not prove amenable to a fusion or even any close permanent co-ordination."⁵³

The ideal state envisaged by the Hindu communal parties was a Hindu state, dominated by Hindus and ruled according to Hindu dharma as perceived by them.

"The non-Hindu peoples in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture ie they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ungratefulness towards this land and its age long traditions but must also cultivate the position attitude of love and devotion instead, in one word, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights."⁵⁴

Golwalkar justified the above view by referring to the Muslims as foreigners and invaders to whom India was not a home but a rest house. India was home only to the Hindus.

Independence and the Wane of Hindu Communalism

It would be interesting to know of other Asian writers' view on Indian secularism and the cause of its failure. It is worth noting that neither secularism as adapted by India nor the state of Pakistan based on theocracy have been great successes. According to the Indonesian writer Eka Darmaputera, Indian secularism has been a failure as it could not prevent the division of the country on a religious basis. Similarly, the adoption of Islam as the basis of a state by Pakistan was equally a failure as it could not prevent the separation of Bangladesh. To Darmaputera it was not merely a political failure, but the failure of a national ideology or the absence of one.

"When after independence India was divided into a Secular State India and an Islamic Pakistan, and Pakistan was again divided with

the establishment of Bangladesh, Indonesia has managed to keep its amity, unity which was based on Panca Sila."⁵⁵

It is a debatable point whether a national ideology by itself would have created a 'unity in diversity'. However, the Indonesian experiment at least points at a possibility which perhaps has been overlooked in the case of India. Moreover, the 'Panca Sila' has been presented as a natural growth of a native product and not as a desirable foreign product which is I suggest the main weakness of Indian secularism. This point will be pursued in the last chapter.

The years following independence, it must be admitted, saw a downward trend in communal politics. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi gave Hindu communalism an image of intolerance. The RSS was banned and the Hindus turned to the Congress of Nehru. Similarly Muslim communalist, abandoned by their leaders who migrated to Pakistan, turned to the Congress for support and protection. But the disappearance of communalism was more apparent than real. The Muslim League continues to exist and appeal to Muslim sentiments and their special identity based on the Koran and the Sharia. The two nation theory was expressed in provincial terms such the claim for 'Moplastan'. Hindu reaction was not long in coming. It was an error on the part of the Congress party to behave as if nothing had changed with the separation of Pakistan. The policies of one was bound to affect the perception of the other. Dr. S.P.Mookerjee resigned from Nehru's Cabinet and formed the Jana Sangh in protest against Nehru's failure to stop the flow of Hindu refugees from East Bengal. Pakistani propaganda followed the Muslim League line that the Muslims in India were being oppressed by the 'Hindu Raj' in India. In spite of political propaganda against communalism ie religion based politics and 'casteism' both of these tendencies were re-inforced. Caste based identities were re-inforced by granting certain castes special rights and privileges on the grounds that they were economically and educationally backward. Similarly the Indian Constitution

recognised religious minorities, and not ethnic minorities, and granted them special rights to run their own religious and educational institutions. However, under Nehru the communal problem was contained and marginalised. The Jana Sangh was unable to make much inroads into the Hindu constituency. After the death of S.P. Mookerjee the party's fortune further declined. Within the Congress Nehru reasserted his authority over those who were working to realize a state which embodied Hindu traditions and values.

Nehru steered the Congress Party in the direction of secularism and socialism. Nehru could contain but not eliminate communalism. Even Nehru was forced to make concessions and compromise with communalism in Tamil Nadu and Kerala due to local pressure and political expediency. Such compromises not only gave a new lease to communalists but even made communalism respectable.

Rise of Hindu Communalism

Communalism is not a phenomenon that suddenly materialises and becomes part of the political process. According to Rajni Kothari, Hindu revivalism is an upper caste phenomenon.

"Deprived of their traditional privileges over the lower castes, upper caste Hindus seek to re-establish the fundamentals of proper belief and behaviour. These twice-born Hindus resent being left out of the benefits of secular society where everyone else (Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, ex-untouchables) gets privileges. Indeed such pioneer Hindu organizations as the Arya Samaj, The Brahmo Samaj and The Ramakrishna Mission have sought and obtained Court orders declaring them to be non-Hindu and therefore qualified for the benefits and protection granted to minority communities under Article 29 and 30 of the constitution."⁵⁶

One of the main reasons for the rise of Hindu Communalism is the perception that the minorities are a privileged group and the consequent resentment felt towards them.

Obviously it was the weakness of the secular state which prepared the ground for the rise of Hindu communalism. At best secularism was a weak ideology weakly sponsored by the State, and at worst an ill-defined attitude of the westernised urban elite. The elite under Nehru's leadership failed to provide a strong basis for secularism in spite of dominating the commanding heights of political and economic power, and the high prestige bestowed on them as the nationalist leaders of the independence movement. Further, it suffered from the limitation of being an ideology with foreign orientation. In Indian languages it was often translated as being a non-religious or even an anti-religious state.

"We have undoubtedly constituted ourselves as a secular nation. However, secular nationalism has never been an integral part of our religio-cultural concepts. It never formed part of our traditional polity and culture. It was something borrowed from the west."⁵⁷

Hinduism may have its roots and its being in Hindustan, but Hindu secularism has its roots and being in foreign countries. Its roots in India are rather shallow. Even the Muslims whose security and preservation of identity depended on the success of the secular state were sceptical if not suspicious of it.

"Nehru, whose policies had shallower roots in popular sentiment by comparison, [To Gandhi] could never have been a national figurehead of secularism without the neutralisation of the Muslim minority by partition, with the remaining Muslim minority on Indian territory relegated in effect, to the status of an 'external caste'."⁵⁸

I have already mentioned the critical reference being made to Gandhi's use of Hindu religious vocabulary to communicate political ideas. As Richard Lannoy points out, he associated his nationalist religious syncretism with only one of the two communal

entities. This was not due to political expediency but due to a partly intuitive and partly shrewd social analysis that Indian nationalism could only be articulated in a religious vocabulary easily understood by the masses. In this he was more realistic than his critics for he understood Indian society better than they.⁵⁹ Whatever may be the merits or the absence of them in Gandhi's approach to politics, it is not an approach that is available to politicians in the post-independence period whose aims and ambitions are poles apart from that of Gandhi.

"In the post-British era, politicians in all South Asian States have succumbed to the easy alternative of mobilizing support along religious lines and have thoroughly mixed religion and politics. Whereas political leaders during the pre-independence era had usually used religious imagery and metaphors only to establish rapport with the masses, their post-independence successors have regularly used religion to rouse communal passions and thereby bargain with other centres of political power."⁶⁰

Hinduism and Cultural Unity

The Jana Sangh's pursuit of unity was based on a Hindu cultural identity; Indian nationalism was equated with Hindu culture which was given on historical orientation.

"In essence, Hindu nationalism is a theory of Hinduism which demonstrates its characteristics by the exposition of a historically derived doctrine of what Hinduism has as a cultural force and what it could become given the right condition."⁶¹

The Sangh's argument was that since the ancestors of the Muslims and Christians were Hindus, they shared in the cultural heritage of India. The resistance to Muslim rule was depicted as a resistance of the nation against oppressive intruders. Akbar was credited with attempting the 'Indianisation' or 'Hinduisation' of Islam which was checked by Aurangzeb. The process, continued by the Marathas, was thwarted by

the British who established their rule and introduced their policy of divide and rule. In the Jana Sangh's view the Indian National Congress was an artificial creation of the British for use as a safety valve to perpetuate their rule. Balraj Madhok the Jana Sangh leader criticized the Congress for agreeing to separate electorates for Muslims in 1916 and associating its non co-operation movement with the Khilfat movement which encouraged Muslim separatism and culminated in Pakistan. He said that the nationalism of the Congress had,

"revived Muslim separatism and communism. It has failed to relate to the ancient resilient culture of India. It is neither national nor secular, but has compromised with separatism and communalism for political gains. It is un-Indian, un-Hindu and against Indian culture."⁶²

In spite of its plausible rhetoric the Jana Sangh failed to make an impact on the majority of Hindus. In spite of its claim to speak on behalf of the Hindus in the whole of India, in the South it was considered to be a North Indian Hindu party. As Bruce Graham has pointed out the Jana Sangh's obsession with the advancement of Hindi, its pre-occupation with peculiar problems of the North such as refugees and Kashmir gave its policies a northern orientation which prevented it from gaining support outside the Hindi areas. Even in northern India its influence was limited. Nehru's support for minority interest in all its manifestations did not find a ready support among the Congress leaders in the Hindu belt, especially in Uttar Pradesh. In practice the Congress policy was not much different from the policy advocated by the Jana Sangh. The U.P. Government stuck to its 'Hindi only policy' and resisted even Nehru's expressed wish to give Urdu a pride of place in administration. When Hindu public opinion accepted the division of Punjab along 'communal lines' the Jana Sangh lost ground. The Jana Sangh

"had identified itself with predominantly North India issues like promotion of Hindi and refugee problems. Moreover, its

interpretation of Hinduism was restrictive and hence lacked popular appeal."⁶³

Moreover, Nehru's policy of diverting the Congress Party from Hindu traditionalism and towards 'secular values' was gaining general acceptance within the middle class. His economic policies based on socialism, planning and expansion of the public sector were becoming more popular and appeal to Hindu traditionalism was treated with disdainful superiority by the self-assured middle class. As Bruce Graham correctly points out,

"Any party attempting to mount a major challenge to Nehru's Congress had to gain the attention and respect of India's influential middle classes and to demonstrate that it was an open and democratic organization, capable of responding positively to their ideas about the nature of parties and party politics."⁶⁴

Dr. S.P. Mookerjee could have solved these problems in his own way, but his early death deprived the party and the nation of an able democratic politician. The majority of Hindus did not feel threatened in the fifties and sixties and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism was a long way off. Hindu dominance was not threatened but felt secure under Congress leadership.

"The fact is that many Hindus, and particularly these in the northern states, did indeed see themselves as a political community but they also saw the Congress party rather than anyone of the Hindu nationalist parties as their principal defender."⁶⁵

Rise in Hindu Consciousness

The end of the Nehru era, the split in the Congress Party and its loss of power at the centre in the seventies, led to a new equation in the political process. In the eighties it led to a rise in Hindu consciousness. Social mobility and a modicum of prosperity gave a new status and resurgence of self confidence to the middle classes.

Religiosity as a status symbol to assert one's political or economic power has a long history in the development of Hinduism. Religiosity confers status on those who have acquired power or wealth. The newly rich asserted their status by building temples and organizing Ramayana recitations. Hindu confessional politics has become a form of cultural nationalism in the Hindi heartland. The rise to power of the Janata Party in 1977 put Hindu confessional politics in power at the centre.⁶⁶ The Janata Party's unsuccessful effort to restrict the rights of Christian missionaries to proselytize and its effort to withdraw textbooks which depict Hinduism in an unfavourable manner and gloss over Muslim misrule indicates the rise of Hindu consciousness and the Party's attempt to accommodate it.

In this context two factors are relevant and important. Firstly, Hindu consciousness was at this stage in the South Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh marginal as regional identity based on language and race was dominant. It could therefore be assumed that they will remain so in the foreseeable future and hence Hindu consciousness of the north has to be circumspect and less militant if it is to make political gains in the South and attract the followers of centrist policies throughout India. This view is at best an explanation of an existing situation and at worse a risky prediction of the future based on inadequate data. The rise of the 'Hindu Munnani' in Tamil Nadu and the influence of RSS in Kerala indicate that any political party aspiring for power will have to take these factors into consideration. The AIADMK leader's decision in the 1991 election not to have an agreement with the Muslim League is a pointer in this direction.⁶⁷ Secondly whether this rise in Hindu consciousness is likely to be a temporary phenomenon is a further consideration. In the 1980s the rise of Sikh extremism permeated national consciousness and politics for the first time. Similarly the mass conversion of Harijans to Islam in Tamil Nadu created a furore in India. The centrist parties, especially the Congress, which has hitherto taken a pro-minority stance to benefit from the 'vote bank' were charged with

appeasing the minorities out of political expediency, and they therefore became acutely aware of the threat of a Hindu backlash.

"The Indira Gandhi led Congress (I) government that was returned to power in the 1980 parliamentary election was the first congress government openly to court Hindu support. This was evident in the Kashmir assembly and Delhi municipal corporation elections in 1983 when voters who had traditionally voted for the Hindu-oriented Jana Sangh supported Congress (I) candidates."⁶⁸

Indira Gandhi's much publicised visits to Hindu temples, priests and gurus was an attempt to identify herself with the rise in Hindu consciousness. The assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards and the mass killing of the Sikhs in retaliation, the retreat of Rajiv Gandhi in the Shah Bano case heightened Hindu consciousness especially in the North.

"By the mid-1980's the secularism of India's centrist consensus no longer commanded the understanding and commitment of the post-independence generation."⁶⁹

Hindu Consciousness and the Bharatiya Janata Party

Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress Party might have retreated from a conscious policy of appeasing Hindu revivalist politics. But it proved to be more resilient than its proponents and opponents envisaged. As the Rudolphs have said only regional parties in Kerala, Punjab and Kashmir subscribe to communal politics; but their survival and their relevance to all-India politics will continue to fuel Hindu communalism. Hindu communal parties like the BJP will continue to prosper, as minority communal parties continue to make demands on the state based on their religious identity.

What factors favoured the rise of 'Hindutva', in the late 1980's? It may be assumed with some justification that the BJP was not the creator of Hindu consciousness but a vehicle of it. L.K. Advani made use of the dissatisfaction to project 'Hindutva' as a fair alternative to Government projected secularism. He had shrewdly put forward the suggestion that before 1947 the Congress Party was perceived as a Hindu Party by its opponents, a label which the secularists are keen to fasten on the BJP.

"In fact, Mahatma Gandhi and other Congress leaders used to observe all those rituals which Nehru Secularists would dub as communal. Mr Advani was also shrewd enough to understand that success brings with it post facto respectability".⁷⁰

The result was BJP members in parliament rose from two to eighty eight in 1989. This shows it has become a force to be recognized and has frustrated the efforts of the leftists and other 'progressive forces' to marginalise it. But the leftists refuse to acknowledge their faulty perceptions.

"The ideology of militant Hinduism is on the rise only in the sense that it is becoming more aggressive, not that it has become more predominant in society".⁷¹

In the 1991 elections its membership in Parliament shot up to 119 seats. Thus making it the second largest party in Parliament, besides capturing power in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India. No doubt the 'Ram Janmabhumi' issue gave the 'Hindutva' ideology an emotional content, but as Swapan Dasgupta observes, it is a question of 'majority alienation'. The Muslim reaction to the 'Shah Bano' judgment and indifference to the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir valley have created a 'siege mentality' among the Hindus. So Advani's assertions of distortions of Indian secularism as 'pseudo secularism' have fallen on receptive ears.

The strident criticism on the 'Ram Janmabumi' agitation is viewed as an anti-Hindu bias of the westernised elite.

"Furthermore, there is the horrible intellectual condescension of the 'secular' cosmopolitan intelligentsia towards their 'communal' provincial counterparts, as was in evidence during the public discussions on the anti-Ram Janambhoomi pamphlet produced by the stalwarts of Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University. With the bastions of elite decision-making ranged decisively against them, it is no accident that the votaries of 'Hindutva' also perceive saffron as the colour of rebellion".⁷²

It is implied that secularism requires that the rights, liberties and cultural identities of the minorities will have to be protected by the State, but that it will lack the moral authority and even political legitimacy if it is viewed by the Hindus as an instrument of irresponsible minorityism.

The BJP Heir to Right Wing Policies

In political terms the BJP may also be seen as the heir to right wing policies. In 1989 it captured more parliamentary seats than the combined Swatantra Jana Sangh parties. It is also significant that the BJP won the seats without much help or even against the opposition of feudal elements.

"If anything, the defeat the BJP could inflict on the Maharaj of Jaipur in the Jaipur Lok Sabha constituency would suggest the BJP has arrived as a right wing party rather than just a communal outfit."⁷³

Indira Gandhi had defeated rightist parties in the 1970's, thus creating a void. Rajiv Gandhis' policies to move away from public sector priorities and the planned economy have made right wing policies more respectable. The BJP has been given the opportunity to develop into a party with an alternative social, economic and political ideology not as a party of mere Hindutva ideologues.

"The outcome of its national executive's meeting last week suggest that the [BJP] party leadership recognizes the problem".⁷⁴

The disarray in the Congress ranks with regard the secularist ideas has benefited the BJP. It falls between the Nehruvian view as articulated by M.J. Akbar and the soft 'Hindu' policy advocated by Vasant Sathe; if the first gives pre-eminence to ideology the second gives priority to real politics. Dileep Padgaonkar argues that to meet the challenge posed by the BJP's 'Hindutva' the secularists need to take a hard look at their ideological assumptions not only from the point of view of philosophers but within the eclectic traditions of Hinduism itself.⁷⁵

The politics in India have undergone a sea change since the 1950's and 60's. The logic that the weight of minorities in more than one hundred Lok Sabha seats makes it necessary for any political party with more than local ambition to be secular was a myth propagated by the Congress Party. The BJP rejected this thesis in 1987 and went ahead with its policy of projecting its Hindu image.

".... the BJP leaders were determined to convince the country of the folly of the Nehruvian formulation that the communalism of the majority was more dangerous and undesirable than the communalism of the minority."⁷⁶

The socialists and the communists committed the folly of dismissing the BJP, as they had the Jan Sangh in the 1950's and 60's, as an urban based party catering to the psychological need of the traders and migrants from Pakistan. But the socio-economic base of the whole of North India has changed and the BJP has taken advantage of it. The party has in Gujerat and Maharashtra attracted the Harijans and other backward classes to its ranks. Moreover, the party has created an image of respectability for 'Hindutva' and has political sophistication to attract the support of professionals and academics. One need not be a man of primordial loyalties and a

political reactionary to support a 'Hindu' political party. To attribute the BJP success to the political weakness of secular, socialist, atheistic, liberatory forces, which could be remedied, is to misread political events. It is exactly the conglomerate of anti-Hindu, non-Hindu and 'liberal Hindu' forces with the official support of westernised secular establishment which has given the BJP its mass appeal as a saffron clad anti-establishment force. The superiority of secularism and the undesirability of Hindu consciousness are no longer accepted as established truth. By adding the word 'pseudo' to secularism the BJP has put the state sponsored 'secularism' under a negative light; secularism has ceased to be an unquestionable sacrosanct idea. It has to compete on an equal basis for acceptance in the market place. Hindu consciousness can no longer be tackled by being dismissive or derogatory.

"Unless the secular response is prompt, firm and in line with India's vibrant and multi-faceted culture, Mr. Advani's offensive cannot be checked, let alone reversed."⁷⁷

Majority Alienation and its Results

The rise of the BJP in the 1980's could be attributed mainly to one factor-majority alienation from the secular political parties. To argue that the Hindus are so fragmented that they could not act as a cohesive political force is no longer correct. The Hindu community seems to be no longer willing to assume the responsibility for secularism.⁷⁸ If D.E. Smith is correct in his assertion that the minorities in India are the natural custodians of secularism, perhaps they should take more of it and be committed to it. As Hindus constitute nearly 85% of the population even if a substantive number is attracted to the Hindu brand of communalism it could do great damage to the nation. As Ratna Naidu says,

"In any case anti-majority resentments are less pernicious in their effect than anger against minorities, since the majority community is

in a position to render greater damage to inter-communal relations."⁷⁹

To some extent the perception by the Hindu community of the minorities especially the Muslims has become more negative in the 1980's. They are seen as groups less than loyal to the secular state of India, and having extra-territorial perceptions and loyalties based on pan-Islamic ideology. At the same time they enjoy special secular privileges based on their religious identity which itself is a contradiction. This contradiction is identified by certain pejorative words such as 'pseudo secularism' and 'minorityism'. Not even the BJP wanted to abolish 'secularism' as an ideology, but would like to have real secularism based on 'Hindu culture' thereby providing every Indian or 'Bharatiya' with a common cultural base. Obviously the minority communities are opposed to this course of action. Their perceptions of the secular state and its future direction should be of equal importance. The next chapter shall be devoted to throwing some light on this vexatious and emotional issue to see whether there is any common ground to reconcile the differences, so that the basis of the secular state could be strengthened, if necessary by re-defining secularism itself, or at least no attempt should be made to undermine the security and stability of the state.

Footnotes - Chapter 7

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Chapter 8

The Secular State and Minorities, Views of Muslims, Sikhs and Christians

Muslim Influence in India

Reuben Levy in his book 'The Social Structure of Islam' has placed India as an area 'with strong Muslim minorities'. Although Muslims constitute only 11% of the population in India, they are not only the largest minority, but their vast number of about eighty million makes them potentially a group with considerable influence in Indian politics. In fact there are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan, the homeland created for Muslims from undivided India. Moreover, they constitute a more coherent and homogenous group than the Hindus who are divided into various castes and linguistic groups. Their connection with the Pan-Islamic group outside India, and the desire of Indian leaders to present India as a secular, tolerant state give the Muslims a powerful lever to influence the policies of the state. Hence the perception of the Muslims of the state in India as secular, their perception of Hindus and their self-perception as citizens of India are important in evaluating the success or otherwise of the secular state in India.

The Muslim view of the state has an important impact on its policy directions and in shaping political and social institutions. Their support is essential which again depends on their commitment and loyalty to the state ideology, in this case secularism, for its wide acceptance and success. The crucial question to a Muslim is whether India is Dar-ul Islam, the land of peace i.e. a state whose direction is in the hand of Muslims, or Dar-ul-harb or a state of war i.e. a state in the hand of the infidels since India is neither 'the land of peace' 'nor the land of war' but a secular republic, the Muslims had to re-think and re-formulate their ideas of state and their attitude towards the Indian secular state. As Abdul Kalam Azad puts it, the Muslims, like the Hindus

and Christians, are heirs to two heritages, Islamic and Indian. Without being false to either the Muslims can be loyal to both. He can establish a common identity in Indian citizenship with the followers of other religions in India. The Indian Muslims would like to have full religious autonomy with their own personal law and full equality as citizens. This would be the position of nationalist Muslims. Of course some liberal Muslims hold the view that wherever a Muslim Community can live in peace is Dar-ul-Islam, but this appears to be the view of a minority.¹

The Muslim Concept of State and Society

In Islamic theory Allah is the sovereign of the Universe. God revealed this message through a number of prophets beginning from Adam. All the prophets of the Old and New Testaments are recognized by Muslims as messengers of God. The last and the greatest of them was Muhammad.

"Muhammad the Prophet was the agent through whom believers were made aware of the divine laws, which were explicitly or implicitly embodied in the Koran (the Prophet's) sunna - the sum total of his ordinary doings and sayings".²

He created the 'umma' or Muslim community. They had in fact become a religious community. There was no separation between Church and state. The Prophet's political power was derived from his divine office. the Caliphs who succeeded him were called 'Commanders of the Faithful'. The first four Caliphs were chosen by 'consensus' that is by the companions of the Prophet, from one among themselves. Mu'awiya established the Ummayyad dynasty in Damascus and from this time onwards the Caliphate became hereditary. From the early period the Muslim community evolved into a theocratic state. In theory the Caliph had no power of legislation, as God is the law giver and he had declared his will in the Koran as revealed by the prophet. Any doubt could be cleared by referring to the 'Sunna' that is a record of the prophets' sayings and doings. In case of any uncertainty the interpretations of the four

schools of Islamic jurisprudence and the Imams learned in theology could make matters clear. However, in practice the Caliphs were forced to initiate legislation with the help of those learned in theology and law. He could and often did reject the advice of the legal advisers in the name of public expediency, or 'maslaha', impose laws which were against the 'shar', the written law, or suspend its application. On the other hand in times of crisis the Ulama gave a lead to the community and even powerful rulers found it useful to work with them.³ The men of religion also knew how to trim their sails to the wind. In 1258 when the Mongol Hulagu conquered Baghdad the Muftis ruled that a just unbeliever had greater claim of respect than an unjust believer, thus accepting his rule over the Muslim community.⁴

In the Indian context the Muslims believe that the Muslim states are the custodians of the Shariah which dominates all aspects of Muslim life. But as Professor Mujeeb of Jamia Millia Islamia said,

"In political and administrative matters the decrees or commands of the Sultans are overriding authority. The Shariah and the laws of the Sultans differed in the matters of punishments, the Sultans disregarding altogether the Penal Code of the sharia".⁵

In matters concerning trade and commerce the shariah could not be enforced as they were in the hands of non-Muslims. Most rulers, however, found it expedient to consult the Ulama, the body of Islamic scholars, as in the case of succession to the throne. Strictly speaking there was no precedent for succession to the throne. The death of a ruler is often followed by a war of succession, in such cases the support of the ruling ulema can be crucial, hence the need to project oneself as a true and zealous Muslim can be an added advantage. Arurangzeb's accession to power is attributed to the fact of his being a true and even zealous Muslim. To pronounce oneself as a true Muslim and the state an Islamic state gave credibility and legitimacy to one's rule. So a nexus existed between the sacred and the secular and religion and politics.

The self-perception of Muslims in India

How do the Muslims in India look at their historical role and their present position as citizens of a non-Muslim albeit secular state? Here again the Muslims throughout India do not have the same views. To the North Indian Muslims the seven hundred years of Muslim rule beginning from the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate constitute the golden age. They perceive themselves as the rulers and conquerors of the materially and morally degenerate natives which was the culmination of their superior religious wisdom and martial valour. With the rise of nationalism, they asserted their superiority and superior claim to succeed the British Raj. The rule of the majority would lead to Congress rule which is nothing but Hindu Raj, an anathema to them. Jinnah puts the Muslim view quite candidly,

"...if the British handed over the Government of India to the Muslim League, they 'will be making full amends to the Muslims by restoring the Government of India to them from whom they had taken it".⁶

Establishing a common identity as citizens of an independent state based on secular values, sharing power based on common interests and cultivating a non-religious identity in the public sphere were strange unaccountable notions to them. For seven hundred years they have ruled over a large part of India, and for two hundred years they were ruled by foreigners. Fear of Hindu majority rule and suspicion of their intentions sowed the seeds of an assertion of separate identity based exclusively on religion and ultimate separation.

In South India too there were Muslims, before Muslims came to North India. They came to Tamil Nadu and Kerala as traders and missionaries, not as conquerors and rulers. They settled in the country, married local women, traded and prospered and lived amicably with their Hindu neighbours. They spoke the same language and were influenced by the Hindu society.⁷ In Tamil Nadu due to the influence of the sufism and local contacts a form of local syncretism developed which blurred the

dividing line between Hinduism and Islam. Hindu legends, folk tales and motifs became identified with Muslim saints and their lives. The dargahs of Muslim saints became the centres of pilgrimage for Hindus as well. Muslim leaders competed for Hindu temple honours. Hindus and Muslim rulers offered patronage to Hindu and Muslim shrines.⁸

'Foreign' and 'Native' Muslims

There is no doubt that the overwhelming number of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent are native converts and their descendants. The upper-class Muslims assert their separateness from the natives by claiming Arab, Turco-Afghan or Persian origin or descent. As descendants of foreign conquerors and rulers they distanced themselves from pure native converts. In North India the Ashraf Muslims claim to be the custodians of Islamic culture and set the standard of the Islamic identity. Linguistically Urdu is associated with Islamic identity and culture.⁸ Hence the South Indian Muslim is looked down upon because he speaks the regional language and not Urdu. Some Muslim historians would de-link the Indus valley civilization and attach it to the Middle East civilization of Sumers and claim Agra and Delhi as part of Islamic and Pakistani civilization. It would ignore Indian history of 2,000 years i.e. circa 1000 BC to 1000 AD as of no significance at all. This flight from 'Indian-ness' makes the Muslim feel an 'alien' in an alien land.

"Two inevitable consequences were bound to flow from this attitude. The first was the growth of a feeling among the Muslims of living in an alien land, an inability and reluctance to receive and participate in the cultural experience of India's history, a constant pull towards the land of Islam, and to the age when it was a dominant power. Extra-territorialism, already implied in Islam, became an integral party of the Muslim mental make up".⁹

This partial view of history is justified by the Aligarh intellectuals. Zakaullah, who became professor at Allahabad in his Tarikh-e-Hindustan writes thus,

"that in administration, law, manner and customs, in arts, in literature, the Hindus had nothing worth mentioning - at least nothing that could be compared with those of the Muslims whose rule, therefore, brought civilization to India".¹⁰

With such an attitude it is obvious why an Urdu speaking Muslim wished to assert his separate identity as an alien living in an alien land. In the Muslim self-perception, he is not only a man endowed with martial valour and a member of the ruling class, but also the inheritor of a superior civilization. He could wield the pen and the sword with equal facility.

The Muslims and Indian Civilization

Having rejected their Indian origin and Indian identity it is only a short step to reject Indian civilization and its inherent values. It is easy enough to reject it as basically Hindu, an inferior degenerate civilization of idolaters, ridden with inequalities and inequities. So the Indian Muslim

"...flees from Indian-ness and would extra-territorialize even Mohenjodaro (linking the ancient Indus valley civilization with Sumer and Elam) as well as Taj (yet though left in India, the monuments and buildings of Agra and Delhi are entirely outside Indian tradition and are an essential heritage and part of Pakistan culture)".¹¹

They look back with pride on the Muslim civilization of the Abbasids and the Umayyads in Spain than even to that of Muslim medieval India. Under these circumstances the tendency of the Muslims is to reject their Indian and by implication their Hindu ancestry.¹² Even Nehru's plea that India's ancient past belonged to all Indian people Hindus, Muslims and Christians and others because their forefathers had

helped to build it made no impression.

A religious identity which by its very nature implies extra-territorial loyalty, reinforced by historical antagonisms, an emphasis on foreign origin and insistence on a perpetual culture separateness are poor ingredients to build a secular state based on a composite culture with an attractive but ineffective idea of 'unity in diversity'.

This is not to deny that are elements in Indian Islam which work towards syncretism and accommodation with other religions.

"...a study of these (sufi) records gives us the history of the Muslims in its Indian setting, the influence which the Hindu religion and Civilization exerted on the inner transmutation of Islam, the hopes and fears of the Muslims in the midst of a dynamic though subservient majority and the silent infiltration of Hindu customs, manners and ways of thought into Muslim Society".¹³

There are also some Muslim liberals who take a positive and accommodating attitude towards the Hindu community and towards India's historical past. Humayun Kabir and Abid Husayn look for the meaning of Muslim culture within the complex of Indian unity in diversity as an integral component.

In South India this spirit of accommodation has a long history; the reason being its history and its perceptions although operating within the framework of an all-India identity, have a different historical experience. The region south of Deccan has either been on the periphery of Muslim domination or outside it. Muslim traders and missionaries carried on with their trade and practised and propagated their religion peacefully under the patronage of Hindu rajas. Titles and honours conferred as leaders of the Muslim Community by Hindu rajas added to their status and prestige,

"...eminent Muslim trading families took pride in using honorifics and titles which identified them with the ideals of Islamic high culture and, simultaneously, with the traditions and symbols of

indigenous Hindu Kingship".¹⁴

Endowments to temples by rulers has a long tradition in South India. This Hindu tradition has been followed by Muslim rulers who came after them, this was considered to be part of the process of state formation.

"In South India all holy places were perceived as repositories of power, and there was no clear distinction here between spiritual or sacred power and the power accruing to Kings and would be state builders. Peasant magnates and dry zone warriors had come to express their new found power through the endowment of temples and the acquisition of prestigious festival honours".¹⁵

In keeping with this tradition the Nawabs of Carnatic had made sizeable donations for the construction and maintenance of Hindu temples.¹⁶

The pre-nationalist Period

The decline of the Muslim power began long before the rise of British power in India. The Mughal Emperor had become a shadow of his former glory, but the Muslims held on to this symbol however irrelevant it had become to current realities. The Kingdom of Oudh had more substance; but Lord Dalhausie annexed Oudh for misgovernment and gave notice that the empty tittle of the Mughal Emperor would cease with the current holder of the title. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 was the last attempt of the feeble Muslim past to assert its relevancy. It ended in its complete destruction, leaving behind a myth that the British took over the Muslim Empire.

"By 1860, therefore, the Muslim Community in India lay apparently prostrate, with little but its imperial memories to sustain it... And it was not only Hinduism which now confronted it. The Christian-Secular influences from the West were pouring in to bring attacks on the ethical and rationalistic fronts. If Islam withstood absorption by Hinduism it might yet disintegrate under the impact of Western scepticism and moral criticism".¹⁷

Faced with the challenge from syncretistic Hinduism, loss of political power and Western rationalism and moralism, the Muslims retreated from public space and turned to inner renewal. They turned to the theology of Shah Wali-Ullah who lived in the 18th century and still further to Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi who lived in the 16th century. One group was content to eliminate Hindu practices prevalent among Muslims, while another group called the Wahabis took to violence to assert their Islamic identity.

Muslims and the Rise of Indian Nationalism

The Hindus took advantage of and benefited by the spread of English education, which gave them status and opportunities for employment under the British Raj. The sullen resentful Muslims kept away from both. Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan is one of the three national heroes of Pakistan. He had earned his place by consistently upholding Muslim rights, opposing the nationalism of the Congress party equating it with Hindu domination and opposing any constitutional advance towards self-government as leading to Hindu rule.

"The basis of the Sayyid's position was that Islam could be reconciled with the thought of the Western World; the practical implication that young Muslims should take up Western education and resume their rightful place in the public life of their country".¹⁸

His policy was to co-operate with the British to protect Muslim interest against the Congress which he identified with the Hindus. In 1893 he founded the Anglo-Oriental Defence Association which was open to Britons and Muslims only, thus cementing a Muslim-British concord. His influence with the Muslim Community remained even after his death. The Muslim League was formed in 1906. From then onwards every advance towards a constitutional government required electoral concessions to the Muslims in the form of 'separate constituencies' and weightage in the allocation of seats in the legislatures. The process began with the Government of India Act of

1909. This policy had far reaching consequences.

"The fear of majority rule expressed by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was spread by Beck and others, resulting in the demands for nominations, separate electorate and finally for Pakistan".¹⁹

Khilafat - the Great Divide

There is much controversy with regard to the ultimate effect of the Khilafat Movement. To Gandhi it was an opportunity of a lifetime to bring Hindus and Muslims together. At best the alliance was temporary, based on false perceptions. Indian Muslims were completely erroneous in their view that the World Muslim Community supported the Sultan of Turkey.

"Equating Islam with Turkey and interpreting 'Arab independence' as a slogan inspired by anti-Turk Europeans, Muhammad Ali and a great majority of Indian Muslims of his time ignored Arab-Turk conflict".²⁰

Arab nationalism contributed to Turkish defeat and the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire. The Movement came to an end when Mustafa Kamal abolished the Khalifat.

As Rajmohan Gandhi has stated the ultimate aim of Hindus and Muslims were different, the Hindus wanted independence, the Muslims security in a non-Muslim State. When the temporary alliance ended mutual suspicion surfaced. The Khilafat Movement revived Muslim religiosity. It coalesced into religious extremism. It exacerbated the already tense Hindu-Muslim antagonism. In Malabar the Khilafat degenerated into a violent anti-Hindu movement. The news of mass killings and forcible conversions of Hindus in Malabar spread all over India, giving rise to 'sangatan' (organization) and 'shuddhi' (purification) for re-conversion to Hinduism. The Muslims started their own Tabligh (preaching) and Tanzim (discipline) campaigns. Accused of being a follower of Mahatma Gandhi in his religious

principles, Muhammad Ali had to reassert his Muslim identity thus,

"As a follower of Islam I am bound to regard the creed of even a fallen and degraded Mussalman (as) entitled to a higher place than that of any other non-Muslim irrespective of his high character, even though the person in question be Mahatma Gandhi himself".²¹

There were different perceptions of the Kohat riots between Gandhi and Shaukat Ali. Gandhi undertook a twenty one day of purificatory fast as he was

"...in deepest grief over the ingratitude of the Mussalmans and the sufferings of the Hindus and the indifference and heartlessness of the Musslman leaders".²²

The United front and Hindu-Muslim unity were at an end. A negative aspect of the Congress-Khilafat Alliance was that it tended to support orthodox Muslims against liberal Muslims like Jinnah who was acting as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity.

The Gulf Widens

The assassination of Swami Shraddhanand in 1926 by a Muslim fanatic and the increase in communal riots widened the gulf between the Hindus and Muslims. The Delhi Proposals sponsored by Muslims led by Jinnah and Muhammad Ali were moderate, imaginative and perhaps the last opportunity to narrow the differences between the Hindus and Muslims and lay the foundation of a United India. It envisaged the granting of a measure of self-government to the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan, the creation of a separate province of Sind, and Muslim majorities in Punjab and Bengal. In return the Muslims would give up separate electorates and accept one third of seats in the central legislature. The Nehru Report, so called because it was drafted by a Committee headed by Motilal Nehru, favoured the establishment of the three new Muslim provinces, the end of minority weightage in all provinces and separate electorates, but granted only 25% of seats in the Central

Legislature to the Muslims in keeping with their population ratio. Moreover, the Nehru Report was in favour of a strong central government. The All Parties Convention held in Calcutta in December 1928, rejected the Jinnah-Muhammad Ali offer in spite of the intervention in its favour by the elder statesman Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. Some Muslims led by Azad and Ansari stood with the Congress, but the majority supported the leadership of Muhammad Shafi and Muhammad Ali and Jinnah.

The Rise of Muslim Separatism

The Congress Party had a last opportunity to mend fences with the alienated Muslim minority in 1937. Jinnah offered to co-operate with the Congress in forming ministries in the various provinces. The overwhelming success in the elections made the Congress reject Jinnah's offer. Jinnah proclaimed that the aim of the Muslim League was an independent homeland for Muslims in India called Pakistan. The areas to be included in the new state were deliberately left vague. he said

"India is not a nation, nor a country. It is a sub-continent composed of nationalities".

In March 1940 the Muslim League passed the 'Pakistan Resolution'. As far as Jinnah and the Muslim League were concerned the notion of India as a unified state was dead. The Muslims were a separate nation, a common Indian identity based on citizenship was rejected by the Muslim community. This policy created Pakistan, where religion was the basis of one's identity, not nationality. This thinking has influenced the Muslims in India as well. It is articulated as the desire of Muslims to preserve their separate identity based on their culture (Islamic civilization originating in the Middle East), religion (Islam), language (Urdu) their personal law (The sharia) in fact an 'imperium in imperio'. How far this separatist tendency could be accommodated in a secular state depending on a common nationality based on a

common citizenship is a problem which has to be addressed seriously.

Independence and Pakistan

The strength of the Muslim League lay in the provinces where the Muslims were in a minority and feared Hindu domination. It was weak in the Muslim majority provinces. The partition of India left the strongest supporters of the two-nation theory in India. Will they now abandon their posture of incompatibility with the infide and accept a secular state and a common citizenship? After Partition Azad chided the Muslim masses for supporting Jinnah who played on their fears, but he asked them to trust the Hindus. It slowly dawned on the Muslims that they would have to continue in India and that Pakistan was not meant for them. The Muslims in India accepted the secular state not out of conviction or commitment but out of necessity as it was preferable to a 'Hindu State'. Before 1920 even Azad was of the view that while the Hindus could revive their national identity on the basis of secular nationalism, this was not possible for the Muslims who could define their collective identity only in terms of Islam.²³

Azad's view was borne out by subsequent events in India and Pakistan. In India Muslim members in the Constituent Assembly were demanding separate electorates for Muslims and exemption from the Civil Marriages Act, and representation in the civil service on the basis of their religious identity. In the Pakistan Constituent Assembly the Hindu leaders asked for a joint electorate and no special rights, but only the right to participate in national life as full citizens. The orthodox ulema rejected any arrangement which would merge the Kafir (infidel) with the faithful in a common citizenship. Joint electorates pre-supposed a theory of territorial nationalism which ignored Islam.²⁴ The Muslim League leaders argued that the Hindus did not know what was good for them. The anathema of common citizenship in the mind of the Muslims is brought to notice by the Constitution Commission in Pakistan

"The Constitution Commission [of Pakistan] in its 1961 report asserted that many of the Caste Hindus had families in West Bengal and were under the influence of India. In these circumstances their demand for joint electorate seems clearly to be for some ulterior purpose other than the welfare of Pakistan".²⁵

So Jinnah's assertion that the Hindus and Muslims represent two different nations and civilizations was implemented in Pakistan. His liberal view that Pakistan was to be one nation and that,

"...in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state"²⁶

remained mainly rhetorical to be resurrected at will.

Citizens and Hostages

In his Pakistan Jinnah wanted to include the whole of Bengal and Punjab besides the Hindu majority province of Assam. The idea seemed to be to have as many Hindus as possible in the new Muslim state to serve as 'hostages' for the good behaviour of Hindu politicians towards the Muslims in the Hindu majority provinces. This attitude was nothing new. In the 1920's,

"Muhammad Ali said that the Indian Muslims would reject any unitary form of government. Only a federation would do. They would also want, he added, assurance of Muslim rule in Muslim majority provinces. 'That gives us our safeguard, for we demand hostages as we have willingly given hostages to Hindus in other provinces where they form huge majorities'.²⁷

On this matter Ayesha Jalal states,

"Implicit in this demand (Pakistan as a territorial expression of the Muslim claim to a nation hood) was the claim that the League spoke for all Indian Muslims, and political geography ensured that the Muslim nation would have almost as many citizens beyond its borders as inside them. Jinnah had tried to get around this problem by asserting that the two main Muslim-majority provinces, Punjab and Bengal, would keep their existing boundaries (and hence their large non-Muslim minorities)".²⁸

Of course Jinnah was thinking of a Muslim state in an All-India set up and Jalal uses the word, 'minority Muslims outside the Muslim territory would be protected', but the implication is obvious and a common citizenship based on a constitution and the rule of law was outside the thinking of Muslim leaders.

Indian Muslims in the Nehru Age

After partition when the Muslim intelligentsia left for Pakistan, the leadership of the community fell into the hands of the backward looking Maulavis and other leaders of similar standing. Even after four decades of independence they still play an important if not a decisive role in the affairs of Muslims in India. They were not interested in politics, but were content if the Sharia laws were left alone, and law and order maintained, and so kept a low profile politically and generally switched support to the Congress Party. The Muslim middle class were dependent on the government and the private sector for employment. The upper class were land owners. Such considerations made them support the Congress Party and accept the 'secular state' as the best guarantee for the future. Nehru's credentials as a secularist and as a pro-Muslim politician were beyond reproach.²⁹ Self interest made the Muslims by and large support Congress and secularism, although there was no commitment to Congress as a party or to secularism as an ideology.

"In India, on the other hand, the presence of a secular leadership more significantly Nehru, gave the Muslims assurance that their lives and personal property will be protected. The Muslims living in areas which were not directly affected by communal riots largely stayed on

even though many of them were involved with the idea of Pakistan".³⁰

Nowadays intellectuals explain the policy of the Nehruvian state in terms of socialism, parliamentary democracy, secularism and non-alignment. But this explains only a part of the political process.

"The foundation of the Nehruvian political equilibrium was a certain social alliance. The power of the Nehru Congress rested in the North on the alliance of the upper castes - with Brahmins at the helm - with Harijans and Muslims".³¹

As far as Hindu Communal organizations were concerned Nehru took a strong attitude and branded them as fascists. He was unsparing in his criticism of the Hindu Mahasabha, the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh and the Jana Sangh, but his criticism of Muslim Communal organization was muted.

"They (the central and state governments and the Congress Party) have often permitted and sometimes encouraged the intrusion of religion into politics. they have opportunistically even allied with the communal parties and individuals, for example the Muslim League in Kerala and the Akalis in Punjab".³²

Through such 'opportunistic alliances' Nehru was able to retain the confidence and the mass support of the Muslim electorate.

This Nehruvian consensus began to show its weakness even when Nehru was alive. In a negative way it assigned a passive role in the political process for the Harijans and Muslims. Politics in North India was still dominated by the upper caste Hindu elite. The other backward castes and the Harijans having tasted power began to demand a more decisive role in politics and more openings for them in government service which commanded status and privilege. The Muslims too have shaken off their 'guilt' feelings as propounders of Pakistan and demanded a greater share in the

power set up. The new generation of Muslims, who were too young or too remote to take part in the Pakistan Movement, felt no attraction or sentimental commitment to Pakistan. Their Muslim identity did not obliterate their 'Indianness'. The increase in the number of middle class Muslims among them drifted from the support of the Congress. Some joined the revived Muslim League, others joined the leftist parties. Imtiaz Ahmed has mentioned that the Muslims had special regard for Nehru as they considered him as a shield protecting them against Hindu extremists in the Congress Party itself. If this view is correct it is obvious that with the demise of Nehru the Muslim support of Congress would erode. The Nehruvian consensus ended with Nehru.

The Post-Nehruvian Period

The first sign of this Muslim alienation from the Congress was the formation of the All-India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat to consolidate Muslim influence and articulate their grievances. It offered to support any political party that would accept its 'nine-point mandate'. Whether such consolidation of interests to promote a religion based identity is likely to promote secularism is a debatable point. Some Muslim writers argue that the integration of a minority group in wider body politic should be preceded by a consolidation of the minority group.³³ Unfortunately the experience in India has been that the consolidation based on religion has led to separatism not integration.

With the coming into power of Indira Gandhi, the political equation has changed. Although committed to secularism she has not been averse in using sectarian and communal idioms to consolidate her power.

"She owes her power to articulation of various sectional interests and she can scarcely press for programmes which run counter to the prejudices of large sections of society".³⁴

In a bid for personal power Indira Gandhi tried to revive the Nehruvian consensus, but the growing problems in Punjab and Kashmir in 1976-77 undermined her efforts. By 1983 the consensus had more or less ceased to exist. The assassination of Indira Gandhi and the impending crisis, created the condition for a renewal of the consensus, but it proved to be a temporary phenomenon. This period was marked by the rise of Hindu revivalism and Muslim fundamentalism. While Hindu leaders considered the rise in Hindu consciousness to be the result of Islamic fundamentalism in India, and an extension of the same from the Middle East, Muslim leaders felt that it was a reaction to the rise in Hindu extremism.³⁵ As one secular newspaper editor has said it is futile to argue about the origin of the rise of extremism as it is simply an anti-secular and hence an undesirable development.³⁶ As the veteran national leader Gokhale remarked to Wedderburn more than a century ago,

"The Moslem league is anti-Hindu, the Hindu Samaj is Anti-Moslem and both are anti-national".

Any revival of religious fundamentalism is bound to be intolerant, reactionary, prone to violence, anti-secular and anti-national.

The secular parties have often succumbed to the temptation of playing communal politics choosing the side of the orthodox to gain votes. In 1989 Rajiv Gandhi played for the Muslim votes by a constitutional amendment to reverse the decision of the Supreme Court in the Shah Bano case against the wishes of the more liberal minded Muslim leaders. To revive his standing with the Hindu revivalist he allowed the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to install Hindu religious artefacts in the disputed Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi site. He pleased neither, and lost the election. Similarly V.P. Singh of the Janata Dal accepted the demands of the Imam of the Delhi Juma Masjid and allowed his list of Muslim Candidates to be vetted by the Imam. This type of unprincipled politics is described by some Marxist writers as "majoritarianism".

"...if electoral calculations demand a short term policy of minority appeasement, majoritarian parties will be found pandering to minority communalisms. The passage of Muslim Women's Protection of Rights and Divorce Bill by the Congress Government under Rajiv Gandhi in 1986 is only a recent example of this policy in operation".³⁷

The Jamat-e-Islami describes India as dar-ul-harb (land of war) and advises Muslims not to join the political process until political power is restored to the Muslims. They hope to turn India into a Muslim majority state in due course by missionary activities (presumably the harijans are the targets) and declare India as dar-ul-Islam.³⁸ Such activities create hostility among the Hindus. They accuse the Muslims of being pro-Pakistan and disloyal to India. Another vexed question is the status of Urdu. The North Indian Muslims argue vehemently that without Urdu the Muslims could not conserve their culture. In South India the Mapillas of Kerala and the Tamil Muslims have accepted Malayalam and Tamil as their respective mother tongues and their contribution to the literature in these two languages is substantial. In the process they have not lost their cultural identity or religiosity. Such ignorance and fear have to be shed before the Muslims can look at the problems facing them objectively.

The argument that the Hindus, as the majority community, should take the major if not exclusive responsibility for secularism is propounded by some Muslim leaders, and is a view resented by a good number of Hindu leaders. The question is often raised "Is secularism only for Hindus?"³⁹ D.E. Smith considers the Muslims and other minorities to be the custodians of secular values. Perhaps the Muslims should be more forthcoming in their commitment to secularism. The different perceptions and divergences should be perceived as such and not as irreconcilable differences. Real grievances and apprehensions should be put forward with a view for reform and conciliation.

The Problem of Sikh Identity

The Indian political idiom 'minority' means the Muslim minority, with its aura of special identity, religiosity, separatist tendencies, special rights and cultural and linguistic assertions. Many of these characteristics are shared by the Sikhs as well, although they constitute only two percent of the population and have no history of national antagonism towards the Hindus. In fact the Hindus consider them to be almost Hindus. Some even consider them to be a sect of the Hindus. Given time even Guru Nanak may be elevated to the level of a Hindu deity as the Hindus feel and the Sikhs fear. The fear for a Sikh identity exists, and it is best to look at it than ignore it.

Sikhs and the Constitution of India

The Indian Constitution recognizes both the separateness from and affinity towards the Hinduism of the Sikhs - Article 25, 2(b) of the Constitution states

"The wearing and carrying of Kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion".

"In sub-clause (b) of clause 2, the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly".⁴⁰

The Constitution neatly describes the ambivalent attitude of the Sikhs towards the Hindu majority. For nearly four decades this clause in the Constitution appeared perfectly innocuous to the Sikhs. Only in the 1980's it appeared to impinge on their identity. It indicates how the politicization of non-issues can be transformed into major issues.

The Sikh Identity and Hindus

Historically the Sikhs and Hindus have shared many experiences and even acknowledged an identity of interests. To many Hindus the Sikhs are a reforming sect and so part of Hinduism.

"whether the Sikh gurus intended the creation of a separate faith and community for their followers is a subject of theological debate..."⁴¹

It was Guru Gobind Singh the tenth and last guru who established the Khalsa or the Sikh brotherhood and gave them the outward symbol of a separate identity, but a number of Hindu customs and traditions remained with the Sikhs. They were bound with the Hindus by ties of kinship and marriage. A member of a Hindu family may become a Sikh but still remain a Hindu as well, both sharing a common Punjabi identity.

In the 19th Century there arose a number of reform movements. The Singh Sabha Movement was led by a number of Tat Khalsa Reformers who asserted their orthodoxy by enforcing a communal boundary between Hindus and Sikhs. To them only those who conformed to the symbols of the Khalsa were Sikhs, others were Hindus or apostates. The Tat Khalsa reformers were enormously successful in establishing a firm Sikh identity. It was the beginning of the emergence of Sikh consciousness and communal separatism. During this period the superiority of the Sikhs was asserted by presenting a coloured version of history.

"Writing at the end of the nineteenth century when Sikh communalism was being born, Bhai Vir Singh created a double or two faced communal version of history to promote Sikh communalism which could be antagonistic to both Muslims and Hindus. His heroes and heroines were persecuted by villainous Muslims and were left undefended by the cowardly Hindus. Either brave Sikhs saved them from Muslim tyranny and Hindu cowardice or they became Sikhs to acquire the characteristics of brave and

The partition of India and the antagonism towards the Muslims kept the Sikh hostility towards Hindus dormant. But the rise of Sikh consciousness and the fear of losing their identity revived ancient rivalries and prejudices. The caricature of the cowardly Hindus and the brave Sikhs has found expression in the modern political idiom of the Sikhs. Bhindranwale's description of the Hindus as 'spindly legged cowards' is part of the restructuring of Sikh history and vocabulary.

Miri and Piri: the Sacred and the Secular

The founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak stressed both the spiritual and temporal aspect of human life. At this stage it may be considered to be a reformist movement. The basic concepts were Hindu, except that he rejected idol worship, the authority of the brahmins and the caste system

"Nanak was succeeded by a line of nine gurus, who propagated his gospel until the death of the tenth guru, Gobind Singh, in 1708. According to Sikh tradition the ten gurus are not to be seen as a succession of mystics, but as ten manifestations of the same guru propagating the faith".⁴³

The Muslim oppression in the 17th Century onwards led to the growth of militancy and emphasis on secular power. The third guru Arjun was declared the "saccha padshah" or the true or real king. Guru Har Gobind carried two swords miri and piri to represent the spiritual and the temporal side of his authority. With the formation of the Khalsa brotherhood by Guru Gobind Singh the transformation of the Sikhs into a highly organized militant body was complete. Thus religion and politics were combined in the Sikh tradition. To complete the transformation he declared the end of the line of gurus and thenceforth the sacred book of the Sikhs the Guru Granth Sahib would take the place of the Guru as the spiritual authority while the temporal authority of the Guru would be found in the collective wisdom of the community. The Sikh

conception of divinity was reinterpreted to lay stress on the martial aspects of the divine being. Thus the Sikhs are heirs to two traditions Guru Nanak's peaceful and spiritual tradition and Guru Gobind Singh's martial and political tradition.

"Nanak is usually portrayed in meditation holding a string of prayer beads. Gobind Singh, on the other hand, usually carries a quiver of arrows and a bow, holds a falcon on his wrist, and wears a bejewelled turban, almost a crown".⁴⁴

In recent years Gobind Singh and the Khalsa tradition seem to have acquired greater popularity. It is also significant how history and its re-interpretation could influence the political thinking and alignment of a group of people.⁴⁵

The Three Strands in Sikh History

Compared to other religions, Sikhism has a more recent history which can be related to the present lives of the Sikhs. The British official Malcolm records the conversation with an old Sikh, a centinarian, who remembered the deeds of Guru Gobind Singh and had witnessed the glories of the age of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This gives the religion a present day reality denied to other religions, whose realities are shrouded in myths and legends. Sikhs history has three recognizable strands. The first is folk or popular history, the second academic history and the third rhetorical history. All three types interact and influence each other and co-exist, but in Punjab, rhetorical history has come to dominate Sikh consciousness.

The folk history has its source in popular stories, myths and legends. It is passed on from one generation to another and myths and realities are so mixed up that it is difficult to separate them. Its tradition is oral and has a deep influence on the consciousness of the particular group, influencing the other two categories and the objectivity of academics. As Nilakanta Sastri observes,

"...though legend is not history, the historians can never afford altogether to neglect the memory races which often takes these fascinating if enigmatic shapes".⁴⁶

Malcolm's record of his conversation with the old Sikh falls under this category.

The academic history is more scientific as it is based on records and interpretations of past historians, biographers and literary men. Academic history originates from the late eighteenth century. Many of the glorious chapters in Sikh history which took place in the 18th and 19th centuries are fully recorded. But it has not prevented some historians from idealising or even exaggerating and even fabricating evidence. This aspect of Sikh history will be referred to later.

After the creation of the Sikh majority Punjab state in 1966 three new universities were created in the region. As German historians of the 19th Century found scientific history in fostering German nationalism by idealising German rulers in the 18th Century, Sikh academics found new opportunities in the new universities to glorify their past. Moreover, academic history is closely connected with government activity and sponsorship. The Punjab Government was lavish in promoting Sikh identity and Sikh glory of the past. In the process, academic impartiality and objectivity suffered. Academic historians privately admitted to foreign academics that fear of consequences forced them to keep within the orthodox view. One historian was shunned because he dared to suggest that Guru Tej Bahandur's martyrdom need be re-examined. Another historian complained that Maharaja Ranjit Singh has been portrayed as nothing less than a 'god on earth'.⁴⁷ Academics have to be conformists for survival.

The third category is, namely rhetorical history or created history. It has a long past and assured future. The British started it by declaring the Sikhs to be a 'martial race' in 1857, highly gratifying to the Sikhs self-image. The establishment of the

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee to manage Sikh shrines, through legislation in 1925 was another milestone in the march towards rhetorical history. By these measures the Khalsa Sikhs were identified as the real Sikhs. The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee is referred to as the 'Religious Parliament of the Sikhs', is the stepping stone for anyone to achieve political power, an imperium in imperio. It is significant that this religious body, presumably organized to administer Sikh religious institutions has become the path to secure political power in a secular state. Therefore it is not surprising that the Sikhs are agitating to have an act of Parliament to bring all gurudwaras in India under the SGPC's control. The Committee is engaged in publishing 'official' accounts of Sikh history. Not only academics, but also Sikh businessmen are involved in its activities. The Chairman of the Punjab and Sind Bank has been commended for his zeal in promoting Sikh history. Another person is a Sikh holy man and politician.⁴⁸ In such an environment academics find it prudent to accept myths and legends as history. It is safer to conform and accept than enquire and be critical.

Distortion of Historical Facts

Rhetorical history can often not only distort facts but can also propagate falsehood. It is significant that the Sikh leaders in their memorandum to the Boundary Commission put forward their claim to include certain areas in Punjab in India for historical reasons, but did not refer to any promise of 'self-determination'. The Sikhs' claimed that under the Treaty of Lahore 1848, the British became custodians of the Sikh state and had promised them self-determination and an eventual sovereign Sikh state. More recently in 1947 it was claimed that, the British Government had offered the Sikhs a homeland when Mountbatten, Nehru, Liaquat Ali Khan and Baldev Singh went to London and the Sikhs nobly refused the offer after receiving assurances from Nehru. It makes no difference to Sikh historians that no such offer has ever been made and Nehru, Liaquat and Baldev Singh never left India in 1947. It is safer for

historians to accept folk tales, legends and orthodoxy than historical facts that jeopardize their career or invite physical violence on their person.

The Geographical Myth

Punjab, land of the Sikhs is another myth propagated by Sikhs and has become part of the idioms used by journalists and academics. The question is which Punjab is referred to? The territorial limit of the Punjab was different in various periods, ie.

"...the Guru period covering the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the heroic age up to the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849, the Colonial phase lasting until 1947 and finally the post Colonial period...".⁴⁹

In the Guru period the term Sikh merely designated a section of the population.

"It is hardly surprising that attempted identification with the territory of the Punjab played no critical role in the construction of the Sikh identity during the Guru period".⁵⁰

The Sikhs reached the height of political power during the heroic age culminating in the Sikh Empire of Ranjit Singh, but

"in the metacommentaries of the period there is no conscious expression concerning the territory of the Punjab. As yet, Punjab had no role in the construction of the collective selfhood of the Sikhs".⁵¹

It was only during the colonial period that the Sikhs established a corpus identity. Faced with the imminent division of Punjab and the division of their community between two states the Sikhs asserted their Punjabi identity and made their historic claim.

"The Sikhs historical claim to Punjab was a myth. So was the

identification of Punjab with the Sikhs, and Sikhs with Punjab. It was alleged that the claim to Sikhistan was due to their betrayal by the non-Sikh political leaders".⁵²

It is significant that the Sikhs were never even a substantive minority during the Sikh Empire period, or the colonial period, or even in the Indian part of the Punjab after 1947. It was by the creation of the Punjabi Subha in 1966 which gave the Sikhs, for the first time in history, a state where they were in a majority. So the myth that Punjab was a Sikh homeland received a semblance of reality.

"To Marx's famous dictum on how men make their own history, we may add the voice of Vico and state that men also make their own geography".⁵³

The Rise of Sikh Extremism

After the division of Punjab in 1947 the Sikh population in the Indian state of Punjab rose to 33%. All the Sikhs were virtually driven out of Pakistan. The re-organization of states on a linguistic basis gave the Sikhs an opportunity to raise the issue of a state of their own. As a religion based state would be unacceptable, the Sikh state was projected as the claim for a Punjabi speaking state. Just like Urdu, language became identified with a religious group. Punjabi written in the Gurmukhi script became identified with the Sikhs. The reaction of the Hindus in Punjab was predictable; they rejected Punjabi and identified themselves with Hindi and the nagari script. After many twists and turns, finally the Punjabi Subha was conceded in 1966, in theory a Punjabi speaking state, in practice a Sikh majority state. But problems of division continued, problems connected with common capital, disputed areas, and division of water resources continue to strain the relations between the new states of Punjab and Haryana. To their chagrin the Sikh Akali Dal found that power still eluded them. They could only appeal to Sikh votes, while the Congress could appeal to both the Hindu and Sikh votes. Delhi had always held a negative image in the psychology of the Sikhs. Provincial grievances were transformed as Sikh community

grievances.

"...Since Mughal days, the 'throne' of Delhi has been the main source of "treachery" against the Sikhs. The Akali leaders may 'moderate' such beliefs when talking to the outside world, but they gave them free reign when addressing the Panth [The Sikh Community]. In the end, their stand is highly ambiguous".⁵⁴

During the Janata interlude a co-operation based on self-interest developed between the Hindu based, urban oriented Jana Sangh and the Akali Dal in Punjab.

According to Murrari J. Leaf the Congress leaders Sanjay Gandhi and Zail Singh financially supported Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the future terrorist leader of the Sikhs, to undermine the co-operation between the Sikh Akali Dal and the Hindu Jan Sangh to undermine the influence of the Janata Party in the Punjab.⁵⁵

The Alkalis in opposition resurrected their 1977 Anandpur Sahib Resolution. Basically it was a reasonable demand based on consensus in Punjab. But the problem was not addressed seriously and the problem remained to strain the relations between the state and centre.

From Extremism to Terrorism

Scruton defines 'terrorism' as the intentional creation of widespread fear and dismay by violence, in particular by violence of a random and arbitrary kind.⁵⁶ The victims chosen by the Sikh extremists are 'Nirankari Sikhs' ie. moderate Sikhs for their co-operation with the enemy; prominent Hindus, police and army personnel and others of similar standing. In addition ordinary Hindus who happened to be bus or train passengers were indiscriminantly killed to strike terror in the hearts of Hindus in general.

In the opinion of the terrorists, however, violence is not random or indiscriminate,

"it is part of a war not of individuals against individuals but of a righteous community against an unrighteous one. In this context, the innocence of an individual caught in the crossfire of war is a regrettable irrelevancy".⁵⁷

The significant fact that the widespread violence of Sikh terrorists against Hindus has not created large scale violence by the Hindus in retaliation. Arguably the Hindus see Sikh violence as the action of an unrepresentative minority since it is also directed against the moderate Sikhs.

"The answer of the violence faction is that of course the majority is not with them. Dulled to true religion, the majority has accepted the arguments and the way of life of the enemies of the faith and by doing so have become enemies of the faith".⁵⁸

They are equally hostile to the secular state. Nothing but Khalistan (land of the pure) established under their exclusive control based on pure religious principles as defined and defended by them would suffice. The will of the majority has no place in it.

"Their [Bhindranwale and his supporters] vision of a good society, their utopia, was in conflict with that of the Indian National State, with its allegiance to secularism. For Bhindranwale secularism as defined by the Indian government was a thin disguise for Hindu religious and cultural imperialism".⁵⁹

It was the All-India Sikh Students Federation under its president Bhai Amrik Singh aligned with Bhindranwale in 1978 which started a wave of violent acts. In 1981 Bhindranwale moved into the Sikh Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar and used it to promote and propagate violence. Rapidly other gurudwaras became sanctuaries for terrorist activities. In June 1984 the army moved in, and Bhandranwale and many of

his supporters were killed. Inside the temple the army found substantial quantities of arms and ammunitions and a grenade factory.

The Sikhs interpreted the action of the Indian army as an attack on their religion by the central government. A large number of terrorists went underground. In October 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. In a wave of violence two thousand Sikhs were killed in Delhi and ten thousand rendered homeless. In 1985 the President of the Akali Dal, Sant Harchand Singh Langowal and the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi signed an agreement. The agreement was based on a spirit of compromise, but was denounced by other leaders, whilst others called him a traitor. In August he was assassinated by the extremists. The election of an Akali Dal Government the same year, had no effect on terrorist incidents. The subsequent imposition of President's rule in the Punjab because of the Akali Dal's failure to tackle the terrorist problem, marked the end of any conciliatory policy, due to its failure to quell terrorist activity. The success of intimidation by the terrorists in forcing the Sikhs to boycott the state election in 1992 is recent history. At present there is an uneasy stalemate in Punjab, though terrorist incidents continue.

In the view of Sikh extremists there is no legitimacy in the power exercised by the Indian state or the electoral process. Secularism itself is merely another name for Hindu domination. It may be true, as Andrew Major remarks, that 'Khalistan' may be more popular among Sikhs in the United States and Canada. In India Sikhs have to live with realities not with utopias, although they are not without value in shaping the self-image of an important community which has played a significant role in shaping the history of India.

"The Punjab crisis, has not fundamentally, been a clash between Sikhs and Hindus, nor between Sikhs and Indira Gandhi, nor between Akalis and Indira Gandhi. It has been a clash between two visions of the future and of India's proper political and social constitution. The basic questions remain unanswered".⁶⁰

The Christian Community: Some Characteristics

The Christians are mainly concentrated in South India especially in Kerala where they constitute nearly twenty per cent of the population. If India is taken as a whole, they barely come to two percent of the population. In spite of their small number and regional concentration, they are less parochial and more cosmopolitan in their outlook. There has been no claim for a 'Christian State' or special reservation quotas. In the nationalist movement some of them played a leading role, the most notable being George Joseph. In the post Independence period they have made great contributions in many walks of life. In fact they have integrated well into Indian society and have accepted 'secularism' without reservation. They seem to be more familiar with church-state separation and its implications. Perhaps next to the Jews they are the oldest immigrants who have made India their home. Unlike the other minorities they are the least worried about the fear of Hindu domination or creeping assimilation. Having lived with Hindu neighbours for nearly two millenniums, under the benign rule of Hindu rulers, who have often been called to settle even their religious disputes, they have developed a high degree of self-confidence, and have enjoyed a high social status within the Hindu community until the advent of the Europeans. Long association with the Hindus has resulted in the absorption of some Hindu customs and traditions.⁶¹ They were, until recently, uninterested in proselytization.

"One strange fact, however, of Syrian Christianity is that over the centuries it did not spread out to the rest of the sub-continent, not even into neighbouring Tamil Nadu but kept itself as distinctive and independent, developing its own social frame and tradition".⁶²

The Historical Background

The Christians in Kerala are referred to as Syrian Christians or St Thomas Christians. The gospel came from Syria and many claim a Syrian ancestry. A large number of them claim that their ancestors were high caste Hindus who were converted to Christianity by the apostle St Thomas. Whatever the historical validity of these claims, the fact remains that the language of the liturgy of the Syrian Christians was Syriac and their mother tongue is Malayalam.

"The Syrian rite, or form of public worship is perhaps the oldest in the Christian church. In Kerala, it became part of the culture of the local population and although maintaining from time to time its links with the parent church, became native to the soil so that the Christian religion and way of life was at home here long before the missionaries from Europe came with their Latin culture and liturgy."⁶³

They accepted their position in the Hindu caste hierarchy and social order which perhaps prevented them from seeking converts from the low caste Hindus.

Western Intrusion - The Portuguese

In the 16th Century the Portuguese arrived in the triple role of traders, conquerors and missionaries. Their intolerance and desire for dominance of all aspects of Indian life created

"misunderstanding and conflicts ...sects and schisms which have persisted down to our own day created fissures within the Christian church and providing the opportunity to ecclesiastical wordlings to fish in these troubled waters".⁶⁴

The Syrian Christians close relations with the West Asian prelates was anathema to the Portuguese who considered them to be vile Nestorian heretics who robbed the

Portuguese priests of their legitimate rights and privileges. They harassed the Syrian Christians, sought their own client groups and sponsored a new pilgrimage centre at San Thome in Madras. Conversion from the lower castes was a new phenomenon which Kerala society had to face; with the arrival of Portuguese missionaries. As they were backed by Portugal, Christianity became politicized and in turn affected the hierarchical society in Kerala.

"Even the strong ecumenism of the post-Vatican era in which we live, has had little power to heal the wounds of the past and make all Christians feel one in Christ".⁶⁵

As the Portuguese intrusions in North Kerala created the conditions for Hindu-Muslim enmity, their intrusion in central and South Kerala sowed the seeds of dissension between the Hindus and Christians, socially and politically.

The British Period

The short Dutch period of domination in Kerala was relatively peaceful as they kept strictly to trade and left religion alone. The British period marked a more active phase in promoting the Protestant version of Christianity. Colonel John Munro, British Resident of Travancore and Cochin politically intervened to make the Syrian Christians a loyal client group. In the process both Munro and the missionaries misunderstood the status and respect commanded by the Christian community in Kerala. He provided state funds and state patronage to 'rescue' and 'uplift' them. He prevented state officials from collecting money from Christians for Hindu religious festivals. He failed to realize that the Christians were eager to pay and participate, since it gave them a high social and religious status in the Hindu social and religious hierarchy.

"Indeed, as in so many other aspects of South Indian life, there was no clear distinction between 'secular' administrative tasks and the organization of corporate rituals. Both served to order and integrate

the state's political networks, and both fall within, the domain of Hindu office holders".⁶⁶

Moreover, the Church Missionary Society, and the non-conformist London Missionary Society were active in proselytizing the Harijans. They demanded for their proteges, the high ritual status enjoyed by the Syrian Christians. The result was by 1855 the high caste Hindus began to treat the Syrian Christians as a ritually polluting group. The low caste converts were not uplifted, but the Syrians were downgraded.

"As in their dealings with other supposedly oppressed groups, British officials displayed an immense capacity to create problems where non had previously existed."⁶⁷

Christianity in Tamil Nadu

The early Christian missionaries who came with the Portuguese, converted the low castes and projected Christianity as part of Western Community. The high caste Hindus considered them as degraded and defiled. Robert de Nobili disclaimed any connection with the unclean Parangi and as a missionary he took the life style of a Brahmin renouncer. He even took the name of "Tattuvabodhakar", or teacher of reality. De Brito who followed de Nobili, was known under the Tamil title of 'Arulanandar Swami', and Beschi who was honoured by the Madurai Tamil Sangham with the title 'Viramamunivar', not only spread the Gospel but made important contributions to Tamil literature in the classical Tamil tradition. His great epic 'Thembavani' (the unfading Garland) is a Tamil classic incorporating Christian ideas. Their contributions made Christianity less foreign, more indigenous and hence more acceptable to people of Tamil Nadu. But what was decisive,

"was the Poligars and not just the European pioneers like Nobili who helped to make Christianity part of an intelligible and truly indigenous pattern of faith and worship in South India. Through their acts of patronage, Christianity was transformed into something

that was no longer alien and unassailable - no longer the faith of the 'parangi kulam'".⁶⁸

The Modern Period

Among the minorities in Independent India, the Christians seem to be the only group not perturbed by the fear of creeping 'Hinduisation' engulfing them, although they constitute only about two percent of the population. In fact they are so self-confident that they have taken steps to Indianize themselves further without any fear of losing their Christian identity. The part played by Christians in Tamil Nadu in the contemporary renaissance of art and music is significant.

"The use of Carnatic music in Tamil liturgy, the presentation of biblical themes in the forms of dance-dramas, films, radio-broadcasts etc... have greatly helped national integration".⁶⁹

The Christians in Tamil Nadu are less than five percent of the population and they play no significant role in the politics of the state. In Kerala, however, they play a direct role in politics through their own political party, the Kerala Congress. Secular politics in Kerala is in the hands of a number of communal parties. The United Democratic Front led by the Congress Party, and the Left Democratic Front led by the Marxist Party are both conglomerates of a number of communal parties.

The major concern of the Christian community in Kerala, as elsewhere, is their right to propagate their religion and proselytize. Their constitutional right to run their own educational institutions has been upheld by the courts. In 1959 the Communist Government in Kerala attempted to bring the mission school under its control. An agitation mounted by the Catholic Church together with the support of the Congress Party as well as by some Hindu Communal parties led to the dismissal of the Marxist Ministry and the reversion of their attempt to control education institutions. The Christians insist that secularism means non-interference by the State in their right to run their own educational and other institutions, and in their right to practise and

propagate (which the Christians insist includes proselytization)⁷⁰ the Gospel of Christ without let or hindrance. The Catholic Archbishop of Madras told me that 80% of the beneficiaries of their educational and medical institutions are non-Christians. Unfortunately more adverse publicity is given to their missionary activity than to their medical and educational activities. He said most of the people converted to Christianity are tribals who are not Hindus but animists. The commitment of every Christian is to serve humanity in general and those who need it most. The tribes need spiritual and material help most and they should get it.⁷¹

Religion and Proselytization

The most controversial subject which has engaged the minds of Christians and Hindus were those with regard to the preaching, practising, propagating and proselytizing aspects of Christianity. The Hindus allege that the Christian preaching and propagation of their religion includes the denunciation and denigration of Hindu religious practices, especially the evils and demonic nature of the caste system.⁷² C.P. Mathew expresses forcefully a layman's point of view on religious conversion as he says

"This is a matter of individual religious or philosophical opinion. A secular state like ours can have no view on it, without ceasing to be secular".⁷³

In the view of Christian clerics, propagation of religion guaranteed by the Constitution includes proselytization. To them the Gospel is not merely the truth, but the ultimate Truth. To be a true Christian one must practice, profess and propagate Christian values. The words 'proselytization' and 'conversion' are often misused and do not convey the true meaning of the spreading of the message of the Gospel. The correct word would be 'evangelisation', the spreading of the message contained in the Bible. It is an invitation to accept Jesus and his Divine Grace. There is no compulsion in

accepting Christ, moral or material. The acceptance should be voluntary, based on an individual's own decision. Conversion i.e. acceptance of Jesus as our saviour is an act of God, the human agency is merely an instrument of God. Any attempt to restrict these rights would be against the freedom of religion in which Nehru passionately believed and against the creed of Mahatma Gandhi who respected all religions.⁷⁴ Finally any such restrictions unilaterally imposed by the State on the Christian Churches would undermine the very basis of the secular state.

Christianity and Politics

All Christian religious leaders deny that they have ever interfered in politics. But in the Kerala context the dividing line between religion and politics is very thin indeed. In the 1950's the Communist Party as part of their political propaganda introduced a play "You Have Made Me A Communist" which became quite popular. As a counterblast the Catholic Church under Brother Vadakkan's direction put up a play called "You Have Made Me A Non-Communist". The Catholic Church's role in toppling the Communist ministry in Kerala in 1959 is well known. Since 1960 many unsuccessful attempts have been made to restrict the political role of religious organizations. In the 1960's the Catholic Bishops issued a warning of ex-communication to all Catholics who were members of the Communist Party or the Revolutionary Socialist Party. Subsequently Parliament rejected the Bill to restrict

"the use of the Catholic Church for political purposes and the participation of ecclesiastical personnel of the Catholic Church in political activity".⁷⁵

The Catholic as well as other Church leaders deny that they were ever involved in politics. They have a moral right to guide the Christians and explain the issues involved which will affect them as Christians, and the Church. The Communists are atheists and against the moral order of society. Their ultimate aim is to destroy the Churches, religion and the moral and ethical values in society. So the Church as an

organization must oppose the Communist ideology. The Church as such does not take part in politics, but as individuals and as Indian citizens the Catholic clergy as well as other priests have the right to participate in politics if they so desire.⁷⁶ The intervention of church leaders in political matters has been criticised by Communists, atheists and even confirmed secularists as religious interference in secular matters. However, they in turn have attacked religion as a negative factor in society to be eliminated. This attitude has created the impression that secularism as an ideology, and the secular state are anti-religious. As a reaction to relentless Communist attack on religion, church leaders have taken it upon themselves to issue encyclicals, asking the faithful to support parties favourable to them. The formation of the Kerala Congress, a purely Christian party, could be viewed in this context. Thus religion has indirectly entered politics. If religion is expected to leave politics alone, politics should leave religion alone and atheist political groups camouflaged as social reform groups should cease supporting the self-styled secular parties before and during election times.⁷⁷ Otherwise the various secular parties would face a credibility problem and the secular ideology itself would be undermined.

Different Groups, Different Perceptions

Although the Muslims, Sikhs and Christians are all classified as minorities they do not have similar interests or similar perceptions of the secular state. Their view of the secular state is not only different from the Hindu political parties and social and cultural organizations, but also from one another. The Muslims are prepared to tolerate it as an alternative to a 'Hindu State' but are not prepared to commit themselves to it ideologically. Their view is that the state should not interfere in their personal law, but should support it if necessary with an amendment to the Constitution. They would like to express their identity in religious term. The Muslim identity and cultural identity is perceived and expressed in terms of the views of the Ashraf Muslims in North India. Only Urdu is identified as the language of the

Muslims. By this projection the South Indian Tamil Muslims and the Moplas of Malabar are marginalized and their 'syncretized' Islam rejected as an aberration.

The Sikhs problem is to define their newly discovered identity and distance themselves from Hindu religious practices. The 'Panth' has been identified with the 'Jat Keshdari Sikhs'. Their assertion of religious identity has led to the demand from a territorial identity within the Indian Union in the form of the 'Punjabi Subha', to the independent State of Khalistan. Concessions do not always contain separatism but may encourage it. The 'Panthic' violence has not spared the Sikh silent majority who do not necessarily subscribe to the formation of a medieval Sikh State based on theocracy. 'Punjab, the land of the Sikhs', is a myth and part of the Sikh legend; but some myths and legends exercise a powerful influence on the psychology of a group in search of a fresh identity based on a heroic past. However irrelevant such claims of the Sikhs appear to be, its significance for Sikh psychology, Sikh self-perception and Sikh identity cannot be underestimated. As long as they do not impinge on or undermine the search for a national identity, it should be treated with a large measure of sympathy and understanding.

The Christians are closest to the secular ideology. The Christian religious leaders have agreed that the secular state has generally worked in their favour, although they do have their grievances. Their main complaint is that Harijans who convert to Christianity do not qualify for benefits as scheduled castes. Their economic and social status have not improved at all. In such cases the government should take into consideration their economic needs. For example in Kerala more than fifty percent of the Latin Catholics are in the lowest economic category.⁷⁸

What about the future of the secular state? What are the problems and prospects of the secular state and also that of the secular ideology as it stands today? Perhaps a brief look into some neighbouring states with a multi-racial and multi-

religious population could be of some help. But it must be remembered that each nation develops according to its own historical experience and political leadership in its formative phase. We will address ourselves to this problem.

Footnotes - Chapter 8

1. Passim - Interviews with Muslim leaders in South India July-August, 1991.
2. Reuben Levy - The Social Structure of Islam - Cambridge University Press, London, 1969, p. 242.
3. Ibid., p. 296.
4. Ibid., p. 296.
5. Quoted in Ziya-ul Hasan Faruqui in D.E. Smith (ed) South Asian Politics and Religion Princeton University Press, N.J. 1966, p. 142.
6. Bipan Chandra - Communalism in Modern India - Vikas Publishing House pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1987, p. 220.
7. I am referring to matrilineal tradition of the Moplas and the architecture of their mosques which resemble Jain Temples. Please see Roland E. Miller - Mappila Muslims of Kerala - Orient Longmans, New Delhi, 1976.
8. An Indian Muslim girl, a fellow undergraduate in the University of Singapore told me assertively that she is not Indian, but Persian. I know a number of Indian Muslims in Singapore who claim to be 'Pakistanis'.
9. A.B.M. Habibullah in C.H. Philips (ed), Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon - OUP, London, 1961 p. 486.
10. Ibid p. 490.
11. William Cantwell Smith - "Modern Muslims Historical Writings in English" in C.H. Philips (ed), op. cit. p. 322-323.
12. Incidentally this perception is shared by some Christians as well. Bishop M. Azariah of Madras told me in a personal interview in Madras in July 1991 that he felt upset when Swami Chinmayananda suggested that his ancestors were Hindus. The Bishop claimed that his ancestors were animists or more correctly 'worshippers of nature' and had never been 'Hindus'.
13. Abdul Rashid - "The Treatment of History by Muslim Historians in Sufi Writings" in C.H. Philips (ed) op. cit. p. 128.

14. Susan Bayly - Saints and Goddesses and Kings - Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, page 82.
15. Ibid. page 48.
16. Dr S.K. Khadri and U.M. Khalilullah - A Brief History of the Nawabs of Carnatic and the Princes of Arcot, Madras, 1990, p. 8.
17. Percival Spear - A History of India - vol II, Penguin Books, London, 1990, p. 224.
18. Ibid, p. 226.
19. R.C. Majumdar - An Advanced History of India, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1961, p. 898.
20. Rajmohan Gandhi - Understanding the Muslim Mind - Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1990, p. 97.
21. Maulana Muhammad Ali quoted in - Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi vol XXIII - Publication Division, Govt. of India, New Delhi, p. 568.
22. Rajmohtan Gandhi - Understanding the Muslim Mind op. cit., p. 112.
23. D.E. Smith - India as a Secular State - Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 144.
24. D.E. Smith (ed.) South Asian Politics and Religion. Princeton University Press, Princeton N.J. 1966, p. 27.
25. Ibid, p. 27.
26. Ibid, p. 26.
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Chapter 9

Problems and Prospects of the Secular State

The Secular State as it is perceived, accepted and adopted in India by the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution is closer to the Western model. The state guarantees freedom of religion individually and collectively and deals with citizens as individuals without reference to his religion. It does not show particular preference to any religion and neither does it interfere with or promote any religion.¹

The Indian secular state does not exactly fit in with the western model. India is declared to be a secular state but its meaning has not been clearly spelt out. It has not been precisely defined nor been elevated to the level of a national ideology to serve as a reference point for individuals and political parties. Its general acceptance is assumed, even though a number of writers have questioned its authenticity and relevance based on Indian religions, policy and culture.

"We have undoubtedly constituted ourselves as a secular nation. However, secular nationalism has never been an integral part of our religio-cultural concepts. It never formed part of our traditional polity and culture. It was something borrowed from the west."²

The research undertaken here shows that Indian secularism is facing a deep political crisis. In fact many believe that there appear to be no viable solution to it. However, on the basis of findings reported here it can be suggested that the basic structure of the state is sound, but it needs to be reinforced through appropriate policy changes to make it acceptable to all sections of the community. The South Indian, Malaysian and Indonesian experiences offer insights that are helpful to the Indian model. While the

historical experiences of South India, Malaysia and Indonesia have their specificities a close look at these models could give us a new insight of what may appear to be an old model. Such a fresh approach to the problem could perhaps provide some useful ideas which may offer a practical solution to what appear to be an insoluble problem which threatens the democratic framework of the state.

The Congress Heritage

The post-independence secular state was the result of the commitment of the Congress Party since its inception, in spite of periodical aberrations, to build a secular state based on democratic principles. In 1931 the Karachi Congress declared that,

"The state shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions'. The secularism of the constitution of 1950 was thus the fulfilment of a pledge made by the Indian National Congress nearly two decades before."³

It was not the fear of damaging its image but its commitment to the principle of secularism that made the Congress Party opt for a secular state. Before going into the problem further, perhaps it would be useful to briefly look into the politics of two multi-racial and multi-religious nations.

The Malaysian Experiment

Historically speaking Malaya (as Malaysia was then called) was in 1951 in the same position as India was in 1927. The Delhi Proposals would have abolished separate electorates, assured the Muslims one-third of the seats of the central legislature and created five Muslim majority provinces. It could have possibly avoided partition and started the process of re-conciliation between Hindus and Muslims. But it was wrecked by the Hindu dominated secularism of the Congress.

Malaysia in 1951 rejected the non-communal secular approach of Dato Sir Onn bin Jaffar and adopted Tunjku Abdul Rahman's inter-communal politics. By this policy, which is still in place, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) represented the Malays, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) represented the Chinese and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) represented the Indians in a conglomerate party known as the UMNO-MCA-MIC Alliance. Under this arrangement each component retained its autonomy as a political party but functioned as a united party in Parliament and in the state legislatures. Hard bargaining took place before the Malaysian Constitution took shape and before elections seats were allotted to each partner after careful negotiation and compromise. Each party represents their own racial group and shares in the decision making process. In spite of divergences and occasional tension the system has worked fairly well. In theory, the Malay party, the (UMNO) could have formed a government on its own because of its overwhelming strength in the rural areas, but for pragmatic reasons it prefers to co-operate with its partners.

"One result of this qualitative difference between the Indian and Malaysian Communalism has been the readiness of Malaysian leadership to openly recognize community based political interests. Whereas the Indian leadership has continued to deny the legitimacy of political manoeuvrability based on the communal question."⁴

The Malaysian experiment has reduced tension, but not eliminated it, and has produced a workable inter-communal government. The 1909 Morley-Minto Reforms introducing separate electorates has created the environment for the evolution of an inter-communal party. The failure to pursue this line of development perhaps made the partition of India necessary in 1947.

".... it is well to remember that community-based politics is fundamentally not of a different genre than class, religion or occupation based politics. It would be well for political leaders,

public administrators and researchers to recognize this rather than to merely condemn it with value-loaded - judgements."⁵

Secular government based on western concepts of separation of church and state need not be the only form of government to espouse liberal and democratic principles. The Malaysian Government is a good example. Islam is the state religion, conversion of Muslims to other religions is prohibited. The sultans are the heads of Islam in their respective states. The Head of State (chosen by the sultans among themselves to serve for five years) is the head of Islam for the whole of Malaysia. Yet, a wide degree of religious freedom prevails. Churches and temples are built. A citizen is free to preach and practice his religion. Islamic laws only apply to Muslims. The Government is based on the western liberal model. Parliamentary democracy has survived and prospered since independence in 1957. The three major parties which have formed a coalition to rule are communal in origin but have espoused the cause of parliamentary democracy.

The Indonesian Innovation

In a number of ways Indonesia bears a close resemblance to India. At least geographically India is a compact sub-continent, but Indonesian territory is widely dispersed, it has a common maritime boundary with both India and Australia. It looked as if it is a country earmarked by nature, history and geography for disintegration.

"Ethnically and culturally, Indonesia also belongs to the more heterogeneous countries in the world. There are over three hundred different ethnic groups and more than fifty languages spoken ... Then with regard to the religious life in Indonesia, we can say that, with the exception of Judaism and in addition to a wide range of 'indigenous religions' all the major and important religions are represented, all of them notably alive and strong."⁶

In addition it contains the largest Muslim population in the world which constitutes 87.5% of its total population. Yet, Indonesia is not an Islamic State, neither is it a secular state which the Indonesians consider as a western innovation. As President Suharto declared, Indonesia is neither a theocratic state nor a secular state but a multi-religious state.

Unity in Diversity

The Indonesian motto is, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika", various, but one, diverse but united. It represents the consensus of the vast majority of the Indonesian population.

"It expresses a strong desire to achieve unity despite the immense heterogeneous character of this newly built state and the existence of his common will in turn presupposes the existence of common cultural characteristics underlying the apparent heterogeneity."⁷

Indonesian civilization is made up of three different layers, Indonesian, Indic and Islamic. Though not mutually exclusive, each stratum is clearly identifiable. Indian culture was strong but it never uprooted indigenous culture, but strengthened it. Its strength lay in its absorbing capacity. Indian themes were given an Indonesian interpretation. The nexus between the 'kraton' the court with its high Hindu Buddhist culture and the 'desa' the rural district, with its largely indigenous culture continued strengthening each other. Islamic influence never replaced the culture of the Hindu-Buddhist Javanese State.

"Buddhist mystic practices got Arabic names, Hindu Rajas suffered a change of title, to become Moslem Sultans, and the common people called the wood spirits jinns but little else changed."⁸

After 1965 there was a resurgence of Hinduism and Buddhism. These two religions claimed to be the living embodiment of the glorious age of the pre-Islamic Majapahit

Empire. Indonesians claim with some justification that, Indonesia is a unity in diversity and a diversity in unity. What made it possible is the national ideology 'Panca Sila'.

Panca Sila: the National Ideology

To Indonesians Panca Sila is the creation of the genius of the Indonesian people which adjusts itself automatically to the specific needs of every situation. The aim of a national ideology is to unite people in a political organization for effective political action to strengthen the feelings of the citizens in their ultimate and overriding loyalty to the state, and a feeling of common identity not common interest with their fellow citizens. It does not exclude or prohibit loyalty to one's own group be it political, religious or ethnic, but the state should have the ultimate claim to one's loyalty. Obviously to realize this ideal the ideology must be based on the culture and value system of at least the majority of the people in the state.

"One of the real tests of the effectiveness of an ideology like Pancasila, however, is whether or not it has root in the culture and value orientation of at least a majority of the people."⁹

Early in its independence Indonesia was confronted with the problem of its national identity. As the great majority of the Indonesian people were Muslims, the claim to establish an Islamic State was overwhelming. As Justus M. Vander Kroef puts it,

".... on theological grounds a collaboration of Muslims with non-Muslims, based on freedom of religion in the state is an impossibility Freedom of religion in the traditional Islamic view means in fact the freedom to establish the Muslim community in the state, not to give freedom to heresy."¹⁰

The non-Muslim minority, on the other hand, was equally eager to establish a secular state. Confronted with the insoluble choice between an Islamic state or a secular state Sukarno offered 'Panca Sila' which avoided the 'either or' choice.

In the final form 'Panca Sila' encompasses the five components of state ideology, Belief in one God, Internationalism, Nationalism, Democracy and Social Justice. The Muslims and Christians were happy with the principle of monotheism, The Buddhists and Hindus found it acceptable because it did not imply a personal God. Moreover, the word Allah Maha Esa in the Preamble of the Constitution was changed to Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa (Lordship) to please the Balinese Hindus. Internationalism recognises Indonesia as a member of the comity of nations. Nationalism emphasised Indonesians' claim to be a united nation. Democracy envisaged the peoples right indirectly to participate in the decision making process of the state and social justice indicated the right to have a decent standard of living. Purists may argue that there is nothing intrinsically Indonesian in these guiding principles, but Sukarno internalised them as an Indonesian contribution to a world ideology. The Panca Sila or five principles were condensed to Trisila or Three Principles, Belief in one God, socio-nationalism ie Indonesian nationalism as part of the brotherhood of the human race, and social-democracy ie democratic government as a means to achieving social justice. Finally the entire principle of Government was reduced to Eksila or the one important socio-economic principle which has guided traditional Indonesian society namely, Gotong Royong, or mutual self-help.

'Panca Sila' was debated at length by the Indonesian Constituent Assembly and approved. Even the advocates of an Islamic State conceded that it did not contradict the teachings of Islam. Indonesians claim with some reason that an Islamic State would have resulted in the dismemberment of the Indonesian nation and secularism would not have been able to accommodate the diversity in the Indonesian nation and hence weakening it in the long run. Only the State ideology of 'Panca Sila' could cater

for unity in diversity. Neither secularism nor theocracy could unite a nation or provide the flexibility necessary to accommodate the divergent interests in a secular state and at the same time maintain its unity as a nation. Only an ideology deeply rooted in the culture of the people would have the necessary flexibility and general acceptance of the people based on consensus to solve the problems of the State as and when they arise in a constantly changing world. In 1951 President Sukarno disclaimed that he was the progenitor of 'Panca Sila'. He was merely the communicator of the deep feelings of the Indonesian people. It was the feature of the character of the Indonesian people. Decades later President Suharto repeated Sukarno's sentiments. He said 'Panca Sila' represents the noble values which for centuries have been part of Indonesian history and culture.

"When after independence India was divided into a secular state of India and an Islamic Pakistan, and Pakistan was again divided with the establishment of Bangladesh, Indonesia has managed to keep its amity, unity which was based on 'Panca Sila'." ¹¹

The Indian Constitution and Secularism

Although implied in its working the Indian Constitution which came into effect in 1950 did not state that India was a secular state. No ideology such as 'secularism' enjoyed an official status. Its definition was vague, divergent and contradictory. The reason was those who called themselves secularists included atheists who would like to establish an anti-religious state like the Soviet Union. While liberal democrats like Nehru would like to define the secular state as a non-religious state, Marxist-Secularists would like India to be closer to the Soviet Union. Others followed the strict western interpretation that the state should not interfere with religious institutions or practices. A third group felt that the state should not interfere in the social relationship of individuals, even if certain social practices were inequitable if such social practices have religious approval. The state's duty should be limited to

maintaining the status quo. The absence of even the word secularism in the constitution and its various conflicting definitions undermined its position in society, thus it lacked legality and even an official status.

In 1976 by a constitutional amendment to the Preamble secularism was introduced in the Constitution, giving it legal status, and it became a symbol of the state. But its presence was symbolic because it still lacked a precise definition. Its status was not beyond question, as an ideology it lacked content, and its implication for state and society was vague. It looked like a pious hope rather than a political commitment of all political parties. Unlike the Indonesian 'Panca Sila' there was no serious debate, and no consensus was arrived at. Consequently no political party or leader felt committed towards it in a particular form. If the founding fathers of the constitution and its adherents in 1976 expected its vagueness to give it a high degree of flexibility and amorphous strength they failed. It became an ideological appendage disowned by the many and discarded by the rest, but periodically resurrected as a point in political debate to abuse one's opponents.

The Weakness of the Nehruvian Secular State

Nehru's commitment to the secular ideology was never in doubt. To him it was an article of faith and his commitment to it was total. He pushed forward his version of secularism vigorously inside and outside parliament. To all he represented the state, and to millions he was the State. He saw clearly that while minority communalism would undermine the state, majority communalism would destroy the secular state. He denounced Hindu communalism in all its forms. Hindu communal parties such as the Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Jana Sangh came under his relentless attack. In his lifetime he was able to marginalise the impact of Hindu communalism and Hindu political consciousness. The electoral success of the Jana Sangh was minimised and the party was marginalised, restricted to

some pockets of influence in North India. If Nehru had criticised minority communalism, with equal vigour, perhaps he could have marginalised all forms of communalism and laid the foundation of the secular state on a firm footing. But he granted special rights to minorities to maintain their social, cultural and educational institutions. The secular constitution recognized not only racial and linguistic minorities but religious minorities, thus creating a basic contradiction in the constitution itself.

Politics and Secularism

Even when Nehru was at the height of his power, the Congress Party seldom secured fifty per cent of the valid votes. The huge majority in parliament was the result of an electoral arithmetic. The solid support of Brahmins, Harijans and Muslims gave the Congress Party its majority. In himself Nehru represented the upper caste, as a socialist and democrat he believed in equality and promoted Harijan welfare. He was considered to be the most pro-Muslim politician in the Congress Party and won their solid support. At best this support was a temporary alliance as the political and economic interest of the three groups and their perceptions of the secular state were seldom identical. This consensus began to erode even during Nehru's time, it did not survive him. Moreover, this consensus was built around the personality of Nehru, it was a vote of confidence in Nehru not in the Congress Party or in the secularism which Nehru represented. The consensus was personalised but not institutionalised. This failure of Nehru is summarised by Imtiaz Ahmed thus, "...the death of Nehru, whom the Muslim considered a shield and protector, the erosion of the image of the Congress Umbrella as the protector of religious minorities, the change in character of the Congress leadership, and the consolidation of the conservative communal forces in the country as a whole alienated the Muslims from the Congress and encouraged a tendency toward political consolidation among them."¹²

Inconsistencies and Contradictions

Nehru's failure to condemn minority communalism has already been mentioned. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu he gave communalism a new image of respectability by giving tacit support to the Congress Party to form electoral alliances with the Muslim League in Kerala and the Dravida Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu. In Kerala, veteran Congress leaders like K.P. Kesava Menon and Moidu Maulavi opposed this unprincipled alliance; but the pragmatists won the day. In Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Kazhagam leader E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker openly declared that they were not supporting the Congress Party but Kamaraj. Tamil chauvinism has found patrons within the Congress Party itself.

Nehru has been a critic of Hindu religious practices condemning them as superstitious.

Nehru seems to have been more tolerant of Buddhist religiosity than of the Hindu variety. In 1949 he ceremoniously received the sacred relics of two of Buddha's disciples, Sariputta and Mogallana, from the British Government.

Nehru had always taken pride in his scientific view of the universe. His commitment to human values was based on nineteenth century British liberalism.

Unfortunately those who adopted this view were mostly the westernized elite who were isolated from the religious outlook of India.

When Nehru became aware that his advocacy of a scientific temper, and his personal agnosticism created the impression of an anti-religious state, he was quick to assure that the secular state meant a state which treats all religions with equal respect.

However, his equivocal position had created more doubts about the secular state and its direction. The weakness of the Indian secular state is that Nehru personalised secularism and secularism was personalised in him. If he had instead used his enormous prestige to define it in the Constitution, and institutionalised secularism as a national ideology claiming for it an Indian antecedent and buttressed it with the consensus of all political leaders, it would have been more acceptable to the people and would have served as a reference point to all political parties and leaders who aspire to play a national role. Nehru's failure in this respect was the failure of Indian secularism.

Are Hindus More Secular?

If secularism is defined as exercising a broad degree of tolerance of all religions, perhaps Hinduism would qualify as a more tolerant religion. But if tolerance merely indicates indifference based on assumed superior values it would merely be a negative quality. The concept of 'Sarva dharma Sama bhava (equality of all religion) and 'Sarva dharma Sadbhava' (good will towards all religions) would indicate a more positive attitude. Azad's view is relevant here.

"Before 1920 his [Azad's] view was that, while the Hindus could revive their national identity on the basis of secular nationalism, this was not possible for the Muslims, who could define their collective identity only in terms of Islam."¹³

But Hinduism also contains a negative element; it is an ethnic religion, the faith of one particular people with a definite territorial identity in India. It is also an exclusive religion admitting only those who are born into it. If such a religion with a definite territorial identity is identified also with an exclusive national culture and nationalism it could lead to intolerance.

The Muslim Dilemma

The strongest support for Pakistan came from Muslim minority provinces in India. After partition they found themselves in India having to live with Hindus in a Hindu dominated state. Their historical memory was that of being the dominant power in India for seven hundred years and being under foreign rule for two hundred years. There has never been under Hindu rule except in South India. The new situation was psychologically traumatic especially after the communal rioting during the partition period. Strictly speaking a national identity based on common citizenship with its implication of a territorial identity is unacceptable to Muslims.

"Jews, Christians and Sabians are people of the book disarmed and accepted as tributary communities, others not even tolerated. Strictly speaking the very existence of other communities was forbidden."¹⁴

In these circumstances the Muslims were prepared to accept the secular state as a lesser evil than a Hindu State, but historically and psychologically they were unable to support it.

"In general, the Indian Muslims are prepared only to tolerate the idea of secularism. They are not ideologically equipped to support it actively and to strengthen its basis."¹⁵

To the Muslim fundamentalists the nation states are an aberration, only the umma is the ultimate reality.

"The umma is not a 'concerted Islamic nation': it is a global organism of all Muslims The nation states are an alien and temporary imposition on Islam and will soon be consigned to the dustbin of history. The umma will re-emerge in its global political role, with all the necessary power at its command."¹⁶

No doubt such views are propagated by the extremists to further their interests, but a considerable body of Muslims believe in it. However, liberal Muslim academics like Professor M. Mujeeb. The former vice-chancellor of the Jamia Millia Islamia who said that,

"Wherever there is a believing Muslim there is 'Dar-ul-Islam'".

If such an attitude is generally accepted by the Muslims, religion could be personalized rather than communalized.

Secularism, Whose Responsibility?

Some writers feel that the minorities would be strong supporters of the secular state. Although there may be little in the traditions of the Muslims and Sikhs to support secularism they could strengthen secularism by chiefly guarding the rights of their respective communities. It is arguable whether any community which does not subscribe to secularism or claim any tradition based on it will ever be able to enhance its value. Imtiaz Ahmed is more forthright in his assessment.

It has been argued that in a multi-ethnic society the responsibility to promote secularism rests largely on the majority community as it dominates society and the political process. The Muslim attitude is only a reaction to Hindu attitudes and actions.¹⁷

Unfortunately every reaction of the Muslim community cannot be accounted for in terms of Hindu action as Muslim reaction has often been vigorous to incidents outside India and having nothing to do with Hindus or India. As Muslims and other minorities have shown less and less regard for secularism, more and more Hindus have shown an unusual degree of receptivity to Hindu communal propaganda. The

success of Indian secularism depends on the ability of the political leadership to present it as a collective achievement based on common responsibility. Any other course could only lead to its discredit and final demise.

Communalism and Secularism

In Indian political terminology the terms 'Communalism' and 'Secularism' are on the opposite sides of the political spectrum. However, some recent attempts have been made to prove that political consolidation based on religion could be the first step towards national integration. In other words, religion based politics of the minority community could lead to secularism.¹⁸ The leader of the Muslim League K.M. Seethi Saheb made the position quite clear.

He affirmed that an organization of the majority would be bound to be communal. But when a minority organization is formed to serve its needs, it is clear ... that it is not communal ... In brief, the League was at the same time asserting that it was communal and that it was non-communal.¹⁹ It was left to the aged Muslim nationalist Moidu Maulavi to remark wryly to this extraordinary statement,

"If the Muslim League is not a communal organization, there is no communal organization in the world."²⁰

This political prognosis leads to two conclusions; firstly it is not communal or against the secular state for minority communities to organize on the basis of religion and make secular demands on the state based on their religious identity, secondly if the majority community did the same it would be communal and against secularism. Such an argument will only fuel the fire of Hindu communalism which describes secularism as practised in India as 'psuedo-secularism' and 'minorityism'. It will add credibility and respectability to such communal slogans. This communal dichotomy has a long

and plausible history. Gandhi and Nehru subscribed to the view that the Hindus should not only be just but be generous to Muslim Communal demands.

"Gandhiji had laid down his formula for solving the communal problem. According to him, it could only be solved by goodwill and the generosity of the majority group, and so he was prepared to agree to everything that the Muslims might demand. He wanted to win them over, not to bargain with them."²¹

S. Gopal is highly critical of this approach.

"This view in itself, despite the call to magnanimity, assumes a communal approach, however sub-conscious. The argument is based on the belief that the majority community is a privileged one, and the minority community has reason to be communal... The implication that there was something to choose between Hindu and Muslim Communalism was dangerous in its possibilities".²²

If minority communalism is not opposed as vigorously as majority communalism, two negative results are likely; in the first place it concedes the right of communal leaders to represent the minority communities and secondly makes it difficult to overcome majority communalism. In these circumstances the majority community will also organize along communal lines using cultural and religious slogans to neutralise minority influence, marginalise them and even eliminate them from all positions of authority and power. This is no idle speculation. Atal Behari Vajpayee stated that the politics of vote banks had become the bane of the country and it should be ended.

"He said it was the vote bank policy that had set Punjab burning, the Congress(I) and The National Front, he alleged were trying their best to ensure vote banks..."²³

By 1979 the Jan Sangh - Akali Alliance was in place. In my view it was the best alternative to communal conflict although both represented "communal" ideologies, but they represented a class interest as well, the urban Hindu lower middle class and

the rural Jat Sikhs. To defeat this alliance Sanjay Gandhi and Zail Singh promoted Bhindranwale and his more extreme form of Sikh communalism. On a short term basis it destroyed the Janata party and promoted the Congress, but on the long term it lighted the fire of Hindu-Sikh Communal conflict, which "had set Punjab burning".

Before 1947 when the minorities felt threatened, they always appealed for British rule to continue or demanded separation as a solution. Similarly in 1982-84 Sikh communalists appealed to the United Nations or demanded Khalistan. On neither occasion did the communalists think of appealing to secular and democratic force within the country when warned that minority communal demands were undermining democracy and secularism, and could lead to the rise of Hindu communalism and to fascism,

"the apologists and exponents of Muslim and Sikh Communalism have been putting forward the dangerous theory that Hindus can never be solidified around Hindu identity or Hindu Communalism".²⁴

As Hindus constitute the overwhelming majority, even if only a substantial minority among them supported communalism it would be a greater threat to democracy and secularism. This fact was overlooked by minority communalists. The rise of Hindu consciousness in the 1980's and the Bharatiya Janata Party as its vehicle could have convinced even the sceptics about the possible danger from such a source.

Caste and Communalism

The secular state and democracy has not made caste irrelevant. It has given it a new identity and salience. The rise of regional parties and power brokers has made caste an important factor in the pursuit of political power. The All-India political

leaders have to appeal to a wider audience and could articulate only in terms of a national identity and national interest. This group stood, at least in public, for secularism, socialism and economic development. The pre-Independence national movement gave them a national identity and broader vision. Nehru was the most popular figure of this group.

"The other group consisted of provincial leaders amongst whom commitment to the ideals of secularism, and socialism was considerably diffused, varying in its form, character and intensity. Moreover, these provincial leaders retained their political influence through an articulation of various regional and local interests. Sometimes these interests ran counter to the ideals accepted at the all-India level."²⁵

The basis of caste based politics is the desire to obtain for one's own caste the most allocation from scarce state resources, even to the extent of ignoring the needs of the really deserving group. Caste appeal and bloc votes have become the accepted norm of regional politics. The whole approach has created and revived caste based politics and a vested interest in 'backwardness'. Perpetration of caste loyalties has weakened the secular state and has given a new meaning to religion based politics.

Urdu and the Muslim Identity

The status of Urdu as a means to preserve the Muslim identity has exercised the minds of Muslim politicians in India. It is considered to be the language of Muslims and essential for the preservation of their identity and culture.

"...The threat of reform of Muslim Personal Law and the decline of their language are some of the factors which have contributed to their [Muslims] sense of insecurity and to their belief that their cultural heritage is threatened by the resurgence of Hindu culture".²⁶

Some academics seem to support the view that Urdu is essential to the preservation of Muslim culture. However, at best this is only a partial view. As Theodore P. Wright says,

"A noted Muslim lawyer of Bombay told me that he did not think that Urdu language could be preserved in the long run since study in the Urdu medium disadvantaged Muslim youth in competition for jobs. He argued that the great religious and poetic works could be translated, as they were earlier from Arabic and Persian to Urdu itself. The experience of the Malayalam speaking Maplas of Kerala would seem to bear this out"²⁷

Urdu is not the mother tongue of Muslims in Bengal, Kashmir, Andhra, Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala.

"The Mappila is a Malayalee through and through and the more enlightened among them tend to laugh at the question some sherwani clad North Indian Muslims sometimes ask in contempt; 'what, you don't know Urdu? And you call yourself a Muslim?' Why not? Mappilas are by and large devout practising Muslims, who say their daily prayers and observe fast during the month of Ramzan. But at the same time they are culturally Malayalis - in dress, in behaviour, in the books they read, in the movies they see"²⁸

History, the Great Divide

History can unite as well as divide. It looks as if in India, history tends to divide rather than unite. So when R.C. Majumdar wrote in 1957 that India during the Muslim period remained

"permanently divided into two powerful units, each with marked individuality of its own, which did not prove amenable to a fusion or even any close permanent co-ordination"

he was not taking a communal approach but recording a fact of history. The North Indian Muslims who dominate Muslim thinking in India could only think of

themselves as a ruling class who politically dominated India for over seven centuries and were dispossessed by the British. The pre-Muslim period is ignored as politically irrelevant and culturally insignificant. Historically and culturally even the medieval Muslim period in India is not as important as the Islamic civilization of West Asia as signified by the Ummayyad and Abbasid dynasties. The Islamic Empire in India was merely an appendage to the glorious Islamic civilization of West Asia. To the Hindu revivalist the glory of Indian civilization lay in the pre-Islamic period; sub-consciously he equates Hindu civilization with Indian civilization. The medieval period was the period of foreign conquest, national humiliation, the destruction and desecration of what he holds as the core and pinnacle of the achievement of Hindu India, namely the great temples, ie. the monuments of ancient Indian architecture and art. The British period was welcomed as a relief from Muslim tyranny. It was a long period of renaissance and reassertion of Hindu identity as a prelude to Hindu domination of the ancient land. The novels of Bankim Chandra and R.C. Duff capture this spirit of renaissance.

In the South, the experience has been different. Here, especially in Kerala the relationship between Hindus and Muslims has been based on mutual interest, respect and accommodation. In due course a form of religious syncretism developed. Religious difference did not mean antagonism but mutual adjustments.

"Social distinction between Hindus and Muslims remained. But within the embrace of Hindu receptivity and neighbourliness the Mappilas lived in apparent peace and co-operation for eight centuries".²⁹

The Portuguese intrusion shattered this co-operation of centuries. For the Mappilas the Portuguese period was one of economic regression, hostility towards the Hindus and Christians and religious militancy. Another foreign intervention heightened this feeling of hostility between Hindus and Muslims. Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan

sharpened this antagonism. The third period which heightened tension was with the arrival of the Muslim League and the two nation theory. This indicates how delicate is communal harmony and how 'foreign' influence can upset the balance if the appeal is to the religious sentiment.

Ratna Naidu's assessment of the relationship between the Hindus and other communities in India seems to be rational as well as historical.

"The Parsee community in India, for instance has an excellent pluralistic adjustment with nationally dominant Hindus. This is less so in the case of the Christians, and not at all in the case of the Muslims. The explanations for these have to be sought in historical factors which have defined relations between the various groups which constitute the nation".³⁰

Religious Pluralism and Hinduism

Is religious pluralism a purely Hindu concept, and if so is it acceptable to religious minorities in India?

"The Hindu secularists consider the fears of the minority religious communities are exaggerated. They point to the commitment of India's secular leaders from Nehru onwards to secular values. But the minority communities fear that values such as 'all religions are true' are predominantly Hindu concepts and in due course due to the overwhelming numerical superiority Hindu values will dominate the national ideology".³¹

Nehruvian principles based on humanism and liberalism are anathema to Muslim ideologues as they conflict with their idea of what constitutes a Muslim identity and a Muslim religious community, and they are rejected as religious pluralism based on Neo-Hinduism. Ainslie Embree comments that the failure of this Neo-Hindu solution is proved by the increase in inter-religious riots in recent years.³² Paradoxically, if religious pluralism is accepted it could help to solve the perennial

problem of communal conflict endemic in India which has shown a recent tendency to increase in frequency and intensity. In the past it has proved to be of use in South India especially in Kerala and Tamil Nadu under Hindu rulers.

"Pluralism as a value implied tolerance of other styles of life while preserving ones' own. Hinduism, the dominant religion of India, was essentially tolerant and instead of abruptly converting, it gradually assimilated other faiths... Hindus believed in the existence of multiple paths leading to the same ultimate goal. Thus the faiths of Muslim conquerors, Christian colonial rulers, Parsi merchants and traders etc. not only survived but prospered for centuries in India".³³

The rejection of pluralism in religion would amount to a rejection of secularism itself. Obviously it springs from the fear of the absorbing capacity of Hinduism as a religious and cultural entity.³⁴ Possibly the minority reluctance to support secularism unreservedly owes its origin to this fear; on the other hand it is assumed, and insisted upon, that the Hindus should support secularism in order to maintain political stability. The rise of Hindu consciousness in the 1980's indicates that the Hindus no longer feel obliged to accept this agenda.

The Progress of the Secular State

India is a secular state because the Hindus are in an overwhelming majority, there is no secularism, nor are there any secularists in an Islamic state.³⁵ This point has been stressed by a number of Hindu leaders to me in Madras in personal interviews. This attitude indicates the alienation of Hindu intellectuals from the policies and practices of the secular state if not from the ideology itself. Some academics feel that it is not even an ideology, but an attitude of the westernised middle class intellectuals.³⁶ So it is not surprising that secularism has come under various stresses and strains, it is only surprising that it has not fallen apart. Its survival itself is a sort of compliment to the founding fathers of the constitution. Minority resentment will weaken secular ideals, majority resentment will destroy it.

The weakness of secularism is that it has never been spelt out in the Constitution. Even the terminology 'socialism and secularism' was introduced only in 1976 in the form of a Preamble. No doubt its adherents claim that secularism was implied and the absence of any precise definition has given it a flexibility and resilience which it would not have otherwise. Nehru was committed to both secularism and socialism. It looks as if he has personalised these ideologies in himself. Two conclusions may be drawn from this position; firstly with his demise, the ideology will be weakened if not eroded as his successors could not be expected to have the same commitment as he himself had; secondly the support extended to him and the ideology by the minorities was personal to him and to the administrative and political policies pursued by him and not necessarily to the ideology as such and did not imply any commitment towards it. Possibly this was meant when Muslim writers such as Imitaz Ahmed says

"the death of Nehru whom the Muslim considered a shield and protector"³⁷

alienated the Muslims from the Congress. In 1946 Jinnah suggested to the viceroy Lord Wavell, that the British should remain in India to maintain the equipoise between the Hindus and Muslims. Similarly, the Sikh communalists appealed to the U.N. and demanded Khalistan, instead of appealing to secular and democratic forces. It should be obvious, even to the secularists, that minority communalism does not believe in secularism or democracy as they perceive both to be favouring the majority community. Even Nehru's unique position as a secularist depended on majority compliance not minority commitment.

"Nehru whose policies had shallower roots (than Gandhi's) in popular sentiments by comparison, could never have been a national figurehead of secularism without the neutralization of the Muslim

minority by partition, with the remaining Muslim minority on Indian territory relegated, in effect, to the status of an 'external' caste".³⁸

The Past and the Future

The Aligarh Muslim Inquiry Committee recommended the building of strong departments for the study of languages associated with Muslim culture such as Arabic, Persian and Urdu and the development of a strong history department to emphasize the contribution made by Islam to Indian polity, thought and art. It was an objective assessment of the needs of a University. It must also be emphasized that the ancestors of most of the Muslims in India were Hindus and they have also contributed to the development of an Indian civilization. Indian civilization did not begin with the Muslim conquest or Aryan migration, but has a more ancient beginning. In his address to the Aligarh Muslim University in 1948 Nehru declared,

"You are a Muslim, and I am a Hindu. We may adhere to different religious faith or to none; but that does not take away from that cultural inheritance that is yours as well as mine".³⁹

It was a plea to de-link religion from culture and to remind the audience that both Hindus and Muslims share a common ancestry. The views of Nehru should be more clearly reflected in the history syllabi of all universities. But this should not encourage 'secular' historians to distort history in the name of re-interpretation. For example, the Mappila rebellion is given a new version by some.

"The contemporary attempt to 'save' the Mappila reputation by a bland overlooking or re-interpreting of these events [of communal violence] is not a favour either to historical accuracy or to the need for Mappila self-understanding".⁴⁰

Indonesia has successfully separated culture from religion and all Indonesians have no difficulty in acknowledging their animist and Hindu-Buddhist past and the cultural

contributions made by their animists, Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic ancestors. A shared common historical and cultural identity is an essential step in the direction of secularism and building a national identity.

Secularism and the Search for a Common Identity

It would seem to be that the failure to elevate secularism to a state ideology has resulted in its weakness and a lack of commitment to it even by those who profess to be secularist. Perhaps secularism could be made more acceptable by re-defining it. The Indonesian state was based on Javanese culture which has created an accommodating and flexible society. As E. Darmaputera says,

"Panca Sila has been the most viable option for Indonesia precisely because it is rooted in this 'common culture', rather than being merely a reflection of one of the three cultural layers. Not only is it acceptable to all but, more than that, all of the cultural layers see themselves represented in it".⁴¹

Indonesia has successfully detached culture from religion; hence all Indonesians, whatever their religion may be, have a common cultural identity. On the other hand the Indian secular state tried to keep its distance from all religions but has failed to keep religion out of politics and politics out of religion. In Indonesia the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata' are part of the cultural heritage of the Indonesian people. In India they are part of the Hindu cultural identity. The South Indian model is different from both as Susan Bayly has pointed out,

"The Muslims in Tamil Nadu did not become part of a fully Islamised society like in Bengal or Punjab or part of an accommodating and flexible society as in Java".⁴²

Consequently a syncretic form of Islam has developed in South India which while adopting Hindu motifs and idioms has maintained its own identity. The South Indian model may be worth looking into.

Religious Pluralism and Secularism

In a deeply religious state with a multi-religious population the only way to secure a permanent place for secularism is through religious pluralism, i.e. equality for all religions and accepting as an altruism that all religions are true. Whether this policy is considered as an imposition of Neo-Hinduism or condemned as an attempt to smuggle surreptitiously Hindu cultural values into national values, there is no alternative. Those who condemn tolerance are to be condemned not accommodated.

"...the only feasible meaning of secularism under Indian conditions is religious pluralism. And, authentic religious pluralism requires not only that religious collectivities co-exist and respect one another but also enter into creative and critical dialogues so that they can jointly shape a humane and just social order".⁴³

The alternative would be separatism based on religion and strife. As Ratna Naidu asserts

"The division of India did not solve the communal problem. It exacerbated it".⁴⁴

The Communist alternative of a gradual erosion of religious values leading to its ultimate demise is neither feasible nor desirable. The revival of religion in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union is an illustration of this.

In spite of numerous problems, India has shown remarkable resilience in maintaining its democratic institutions and has made small but significant progress in

building up a fairly tolerant society based on compromises and mutual accommodation. A fair assessment would be to compare its political, social and other institutions to other third world countries than to the west. In the past it has confounded its critics who predicted its disintegration and collapse and pointed to its fragile democratic institutions. Quite often it had moved uncertainly towards its objectives and even reversed its progress. The declaration of emergency by Indira Gandhi was one such move. But it has picked up the pieces and continued to move forward. The greatest challenge it has to face is its commitment to secularism and the democratic ideals which it encompasses. Its effort will be watched with interest, sympathy and understanding by its friends. Its success would be an encouragement to other third world countries to emulate its policies and methods.

Footnotes- Chapter 9

1. D.E. Smith puts it rather well -

"The Secular State is a state which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with individuals as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion nor does it seek either to promote or interfere with religion".

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3. D.E. Smith - India as a Secular State - Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1963, pp. 92-93.
4. Ratna Naidu - The Communal Edge to Plural Societies. India and Malaysia - Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980, p. 53.
5. Ibid. p. 90.
6. E. Darmaputera - Pancasila and the Search for Identity and Modernity in Indonesian Society. E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1988, p. 20.
7. Ibid. p. 19.
8. Ibid. p. 49.
9. Ibid. p. 180.
10. Ibid. p. 168.
11. Ibid. p. 179.
12. Intiaz Ahmed - "Secularism and Communalism" Economic and Political Weekly vols. 28-30, July 1969 p. 1152.
13. D.E. Smith "India as a Secular State" p. 144.
14. Ibid. p. 17.
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16. Kalim Siddiqui - The Times, London Dec. 30, 1992.

17. Imitiaz Ahmed op. cit. p. 1156.
28. Ibid. p. 1155.
19. Roland E. Miller - Mappila Muslims of Kerala - A Study in Islamic Trends, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1976 pp. 179-80.
20. Ibid. p. 180.
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23. The Hindu - International Edition, April 27, 1991, Madras.
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25. Imitiaz Ahmed op. cit. p. 1147.
26. Imitiaz Ahmed op. cit. p. 1152.
27. Theodore P. Wright in D.E. Smith (ed), South Asian Politics and Religion , Princeton, N.J., 1966, p. 136.
28. The Hindu, International Edition October 10, 1992.
29. Roland E. Miller op. cit., p. 60.
30. Ratna Naidu op. cit., p. 148.
31. Ainslie T. Embree - Utopias in Conflict, University of California Press, Oxford, England 1990, p. 130-131.
32. Ibid. p. 46.
33. T.K. Oomen - State and Society in India - Studies in Nation Building, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p. 102.
34. Incidentally this absorbing capacity is claimed by the civilization of China, which the Chinese attribute to their superior culture. China may be conquered politically but not culturally subdued by the barbarians. They have two choices be 'sinified' or withdraw.

35. Prof. K.V. Raman, Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras - personal interview, July 1991.
36. T.N. Madan - Secularism in its Place - The Journal of Asian Studies vol. 46, No. 4, 1987 p. 750.
37. Imitiaz Ahmed, op. cit., p. 1152.
38. Richard Lannoy - The Speaking Tree - A Study of Indian Culture and Society - OUP London, 1971, p. 23.
39. Quoted in D.E. Smith - 'India as a Secular State', p. 386.
40. Roland E. Miller op. cit., p. 47.
41. E. Darmaputera op. cit., p. 198.
42. Susan Bayly - "Saints, Goddesses and Kings - Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society" 1700-1900 - Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989, p. 15.
43. T.K. Oomen op. cit. p. 20.
44. Ratna Naidu op. cit. p. 16.

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1. Prof. T.S. Srinivasa Sastri, Retired Professor of Sanskrit, Deccan College, Pune.
2. Swami Sat Swarupananda - Hindu Religious Preacher. Pune.
3. Prof. Rajendra Vora, Professor in Politics, Pune University.
4. Mr M. Natarajan, AIADMK, Politician, Madras.
5. Mr P.V. Subbier, Life Member, Tamil Nadu Brahmin Sangham, Madras.
6. Mr S.A. Padmanabhan, Superintendent, Sri Parthasarathy Temple, Madras.
7. Dr. S. Viswanatha Sivachariar, - Retired Professor of Sanskrit, Madras University. Presently, Head Priest Sri Kapaleswarar Temple, Madras.
8. Prof. K.V. Raman, Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Madras.
9. The Prince of Arcot, Nawabzada Mohammed Abdul Ali, Secretary General, Harmony India, Madras.
10. The Most Rev. Dr. Casimir Gnanadikam S.J., Roman Catholic Archbishop, Mylapore, Madras.
11. Gyani Balbir Singh - Head Priest, Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sangh Sabha, Madras.
12. Mr N.S. Ramachandran, Joint Commissioner, Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department, Madras.
13. Mr N. Ram, Editor, Frontline, The Sport Star, The Hindu Group of Newspapers, Madras.
14. Maulavi Hafiz Quari Abu Usman Mohamed Haroun Mazahiri Saharanpuri, The Imam, Walajah Mosque, Madras.
15. Mr S. Ramaswamy, Editor, Tugluq Fortnightly, Madras.
16. Mr M.V. Rama Das, Commissioner, Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department, Madras.
17. The Rt. Rev. M. Azariah, Bishop, The Church of South India, Madras.

18. Mr C.G. Venkatramanan, Chairman, Tamil Nadu, Brahmins Association, Coimbatore.
19. Mr Sukhi Sivam, Hindu Religious Preacher Coimbatore.
20. Mr C.P. Seshadri, Asst. Editor, Indian Express, Madras.
21. P.S.M. Syed Abdul Kader, Member, Seethakathi Trust, Madras.
22. Justice M.M. Ismail, Retired Chief Justice, High Court, Madras.
23. R.A. Abdul Aziz, Secretary, Wakf Board, Madras.
24. R.S. Narayanaswamy - Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Madras.
25. Mr Anand Viswanathan, Correspondent, "India Today", Trivandrum.
26. Imam Hafiz P.H. Abdul Gaffar Maulavi Al-Kazuri, Juma Masjid, Trivandrum.
27. Mr R. Ramachandran Nair, Minister for Health and Devaswom, Kerala Government, Trivandrum.
28. The Rt. Rev. Soosai Pakiam, Latin Catholic Bishop, Trivandrum.
29. Mr M.V. Gopinatha Pillai, Secretary, Travancore Devaswom Board, Trivandrum.
30. Mr P. Kunhali Kutty, Minister for Industries, Social Welfare and Wakf Board, Kerala Government, Trivandrum
31. Mr K. Karunakaran, Chief Minister, Kerala Government, Trivandrum.
32. Dr Palande, Director, Artha Bodi, Pune.

Personal Interviews in Singapore, 1992

1. Swami Jayadevananda - President, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Singapore.
2. Rev. John Stephen - Pentecost Evangelical Church and Director, Committee for the Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts.

Glossary

Aasethu Himachala - from Rama's Bridge near Cape Comarin to Himalayas - the geographical expression of an Indian identity.

Aswamedha - the horse sacrifice indicating the nominal overlordship of the King over other Kings.

desa - a rural district in Indonesia - by implication the indigenous culture associated with it.

dharma - one's duty in Hindu society according to one's caste and situation in life.

dharma nirapekshata - neutrality of the state towards all religions.

dharma maharajadi rājā - Great King who rule according to dharma.

gotong-rajong - mutual self help in the Indonesian context.

Kraton - literally the Javanese court, by implication the 'Superior' Hindu-Buddhist Culture.

Mahamalla, Ahavamalla - Great warrior.

maharajadiraja - Great King of kings.

mantra - words and phrases indicating divinity, chanted to invoke divine blessing.

onam - the harvest festival of Kerala, based on the legend of Mahabali the ancient ruler of Kerala.

parangi kulam - originally indicated a Portuguese but later referred to all foreigners from Europe.

sarva dharma sadbhava - goodwill towards all religions.

sarvadharmam samabhava - equal respect to all religions.

Appendix 1

Administrative Policies Regarding Schools in Tamil Nadu

For Schools run by Hindus (Non-Minorities)

1. Opening of New Schools

The Educational agency should get the prior permission of the competent authority before a school is opened (Sec. 5 of the Tamil Nadu Recognised Private Schools Regulation Act 1973).

2. Creation of Endowment for Schools

As per rule 9(2) these schools should create an Endowment for the amounts noted against each type of school,

Primary Schools Rs 25,000

Middle Schools Rs 50,000

High Schools Rs 100,000

3. Appointment of Teachers

The Educational Agency should follow the communal roster as per General Rules for state and subordinate services for appointing teachers and others i.e. for SC's 18%, for BC's 50% Rule 15(7) and (8) of the Rules framed under the Tamil Nadu recognized Private Schools (Regulation) Act 1973 as amended in G.O. No. 1896 Edn. dated 21.10.78.

For Schools run by Minorities

The Minority management need not get prior permission. They can open the School and then apply for recognition (Sec. 9 of the Tamil Nadu Recognized Private Schools Regulation Act, 1973).

These Schools need not create any Endowments.

The Minority Schools need not follow the communal roster for appointing teachers and others. They can appoint any teacher as they like, provided that they are qualified to hold the post. (GO 2080 Edn. dated 14.9.77).

For promotion of teachers and others the management are expected to consider the qualified persons employed in the School. If not they should get the prior permission of the Chief Educational Officer rule 115 (4)(2).

They need not follow this principle.

4. Employment Exchange List

The teacher and others can be appointed only after notifying the vacancy at the Employment Exchange and after getting a list of qualified persons. Even for part time posts under non-teaching side for an all inclusive salary of Rs 70/-pm the list should be obtained from the Employment Exchange.

The Management themselves can appoint teachers of their choice, provided they are qualified for the post.

5. Admission of Children as per the Communal Roster

The Schools are expected to adopt communal representation for admission of students. SC's/ST's 18%, BC's 50%.

There is no restriction in the admission of pupils. It is open to the Schools even to admit cent per cent of the pupils belonging to their own community, provided they have the minimum qualification for admission.

6. Formation of School Committees

As per Rule 15 of the Act, every School shall have a duly Constituted School Committee in which 3 or 4 teachers employed in the School including the Head Master shall be members.

No School Committee is contemplated in the case of Minority Schools.

7. Code of Conduct for Teachers

Teachers employed in these Schools are subjected to abide by the Code of Conduct for Teachers (Rule 16).

No Code of Conduct for Teachers is contemplated in the Tamil Nadu Minority Schools (Recognition of Payment of Grant) Rules 1977 issued in G.O. No. 977 Edn. dated 14.9.77.

8. Disciplinary Actions against teachers and others

Rules and procedures for taking disciplinary actions against teachers and others have been laid down in Sec. 22 of the Act. According to this Section the Department has to be consulted and their consent obtained before imposing major punishments the Management are not at liberty to impose major punishments on the basis of the gravity of the offence without consulting the Departmental authorities.

The Management may themselves impose any penalty on any teacher for offences. The Department will not interfere with the action of the management on penalties imposed on teachers and others. They will not entertain any appeal. So a teacher employed in a Minority School has no service security.

9. Transfer of Correspondentship or Secretaryship

In the case of non-Minority Schools, the prior permission of the competent authority is required for the change of Secretary or any office bearer or for reconstituting the School Committee with three years period of office.

No Departmental approval is necessary for the change of correspondentship etc. It is enough if they intimate the fact to the Department Officers.

10. Withdrawal of Recognition

The recognition directly granted by the Department can be withdrawn by the competent authority, for violating the conditions of recognition.

In the Tamil Nadu Minority Schools (Recognition and Payment of Grant Rules 1977) issued in G.O. No. 2080 Edn. dated 14.9.77, there is no provision to withdraw the recognition once granted to such Schools.

11. Taking over the Management

As per section 34 of the Act, the Government may take over the management of Schools for a maximum period of 3 years; if the managements neglect to discharge any of the duties imposed on them or to perform any of the functions entrusted to them under the act after giving due notice.

There is no provision to take over these Schools by the Government.

* Table taken from Annexure I from R.S. Narayanaswami M.A. - Discrimination Against Hindus in Constitution and Law.

Appendix 2

Questionnaire on Religion, Politics and the Secular State in India

Interview Schedule

Categories of respondents

1.	Officials of the Hindu Religions and Charitable Endowments	- 3
2.	Temple Administrators (of Hindu Temples)	- 2
3.	Politicians, party members.	- 4
4.	Hindu Temple priests and Association officials.	- 4
5.	Muslim Imams and Christian priests.	- 7
6.	Officials of caste/religious Associations.	- 5
7.	Ordinary devotees/members of temples, church and mosques.	- 1
8.	Other.	- 8
Total		<u>34</u>

Questionnaire

Open ended questions

I The Ideal Situation

1. What should be the role of religion in society, government and public life?
2. With reference to Government in particular, what should be its role in religious matters?
3. Is the Government in your state doing what it should do?

4. Has the role of the Government in religion increased in the 70's and 80's than before?
If so, has it been to the advantage/disadvantage of any particular religion, e.g. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism.
5. Supplementary questions.
6. What should be done by the Government.

II Evaluation of the Present

1. What positive and negative factors have emerged since independence in state and society from the religious point of view?
2. Supplementary questions to elaborate and elucidate the answers given to the above question.

III Religion and Everyday Life

1. What role does religion play in the life of an average citizen?
2. What does an ordinary man understand by religion and religious life?
3. What do you understand by religion and religious life?
4. Has religiosity increased or decreased in the past decade in the public and private lives of citizens?
5. Do you think a religious revival will re-instate morality in public life?
6. What are your views on the attempts to increase religious feelings and the rise in religious extremism?

IV On Current Issues

1. What according to you led to the dispute on the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmaboomi controversy?

2. Do you think funds from Hindu Temples could be sued for secular purposes e.g. free midday meal for primary school children?
3. Could such funds be used for Hindu religious purposes?
 - i) publishing religious tracts;
 - ii) providing religious materials for libraries and reading rooms;
 - iii) propagation of religion among Hindus?
 - iv) founding of educational institutions such as schools and universities with a strong religious content;
 - v) any other suggestions.
4. Should there be religious education in schools and colleges?
5. Should the surplus funds from Hindu Temples be invested in commercial banks or deposited in government treasury?
6. Do you think surplus funds from rich temples could be used to renovate and subsidise less well known and "poorer" temples?

V Personal Background of those Interviewed

1. Age Below 30 ☐ 30-50 ☐ above 50 ☐
 Sex M/F Caste/religion Occupation _____
2. Educational and Social Background
 primary/secondary/university lower/upper middle/rich
3. Knowledge of Indian and foreign languages.
4. Religiosity and general attitude towards religion.
 - i) belief in any particular religion/subsects
 - ii) frequency in visiting temples etc.
 daily ☐ weekly ☐ monthly ☐ infrequent ☐

iii) offerings made to temples etc.

cash ☐ materials ☐ personal services ☐

VI Close ended Questions

Specific questions on and related to Government Policies, Issues and Controversies

1. Cow slaughter.
2. Secularism and Secular State.
3. Loyalties to one's religion and state.
4. Equality, social and religious.
5. Are religious men and religious institutions becoming more materialistic?
6. Should the state recognize all religions?
7. Should India be a "religious state" like Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Burma?