Nation State & Cultural Diversity in India

edited by
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Reading Material for School Teacchers

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Preface

Indian society has always been remarkable for its religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. These diversities are also tied up with the challenges that positive streams of social progress have had to face at various points of time, as is the case even today. One major challenge which school teachers have to face is that posed by cultural and religious particularities during the teaching and learning processes. Students with diverse backgrounds are marked by different sets of particularities based on the culture and religion they come from. These differences lead to certain practical difficulties while teaching them together in school, and there is little sensitivity in the usual approach towards this reality.

School teachers are part of this very society, and are, therefore, subject to the influence of diverse religio-cultural values and qualities. Given this context, it is necessary that the initiative to strengthen secular values in India must begin at the school level itself. Towards this end PEACE has developed a 'training module' accompanied by relevant 'readings' that would help understand the various types of difficulties faced during the teaching of students, especially those from minority communities, particularly muslim and christians- the biggest minority communty of

India, as well as the role played by teachers in this. It is also our aim to go beyond merely understanding the problem, by suggesting the kind of 'educational intervention' that can guide our quest for possible solutions. The purpose of brining out this book is to inculcate secular and democratic values among the school teachers.

In preparing this module, the foundation has been provided by the 'cyclical method of experiential learning and teaching', and at the core of the approach is the spirit of 'participation'. The accompanying readings are expected to contribute towards greater clarity on the related subjects. Before they were finalised, the readings were subjected to a serious discussed held at Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh, in which 140 individuals participated, including schoolteachers, educationists, social activists and representatives of organisations working in the sphere of education. Significant suggestions that emerged from the discussion have been incorporated in the readings, in an effort to improve the content.

We chose to start with schools from Rajasthan and Delhi in the first phase as their curricula contain some seriously prejudiced and deceptive 'facts'. We organised workshops with teachers of schools from the two states, including schools run by social welfare organisations, and tried to build a deep understanding of the subject. The quality of the module and readings, and how effective they can be, was the theme of an assessment workshop with the same group of teachers, which brought to the fore several important suggestions that we incorporated in the draft documents.

In completing this whole process the contribution of social welfare organisations, schoolteachers

his support to this initiative and addressed one
the teachers workshop in Jaipur. We are greatly
thankful to Abhai Sinha, Piyush Pant, Siraj Ahsen,
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intellectual input in preparing these modules.

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(MRG), London for their indispensable support
for the project "Pluralism and diversity in Asia:
Protecting the Rights of Religious Minorities
Through Education and Training", which help us
in taking this process forward. We will consider
our endeavour meaningful if this training module
and the accompanying readings truly reach out to
achieve the objectives for which they were
prepared.

Anil Chaudhary

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India : The State, the Nation and the Nation-State

Nations and States may seem identical, but they aren't. And the distinction is more than purely academic. States govern a territory with boundaries. They have laws, taxes, officials, currencies, postal services, police and (usually) armies. They wage war, negotiate treaties, put people in prison and regulate life in thousands of ways. They claim sovereignty within their territory – a kind of exclusive jurisdiction that goes back to the rule of kings. Nations, by contrast, are groups of people claiming common bonds like language, culture and historical identity.

While the State is a pernicious and coercive collectivist concept, the nation may be, and generally is, voluntary. The nation properly refers, not to the State, but to the entire web of culture, values, traditions, religion and language in which the individuals of a society are raised. While making a crucial distinction between the nation (the land, the culture, the terrain, the people) and the State (the coercive apparatus of bureaucrats and politicians), the great libertarian Randolph

Bourne made the conclusion that one may be a true patriot of one's nation or country while – and even for that very reason – opposing the State that rules over it.

The nation-state is a certain form of State that derives its political legitimacy from serving as a sovereign entity for a nation as a sovereign territorial unit. The State is a political and geopolitical entity; the nation is a cultural and/or ethnic entity. The term nation-state implies that the two geographically coincide, and this distinguishes the nation-state from the other types of State that historically preceded it.

The origins and early history of nation-states are disputed. A major theoretical issue is the question, "which one came first: the nation or the nation-state?" For nationalists, the answer is, "the nation existed first, nationalist movements arose to present its legitimate demand for sovereignty, and the nation-state met that demand". Some "modernization theories" of nationalism see the national identity largely as a product of government policy, to unify and modernize an already existing State. Most theories see the nation-state as a 19th-century European phenomenon, facilitated by developments such as mass literacy and the early mass media. However, historians also note the early emergence of a relatively unified State, and a sense of common identity, in Portugal and the Dutch Republic.

The idea of a nation-state is associated with the rise of the modern system of States – often called the "Westphalian system" in reference to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). Balance of power, which characterizes that system, depends for its effectiveness upon clearly defined, centrally controlled, independent entities, whether empires or nation-states, which recognize each other's sovereignty and territory. The Westphalian system did not create the nation-state, but the nation-state meets the criteria for its component States (assuming that there is no disputed territory).

The concept of the nation-state is part of a great modern ideological discourse that began in the 18th century. This discourse is legitimized by a collection of myths and symbols associated with a presumed national unity and its theoretically shared past. In due course all nations, dominated by the culture of their establishments and ruling classes, develop discourses predicated upon a selective interpretation of their written and lived history.

Thus France, the ideal republic, nourishes its national myth by an ample dose of revolution and heroic anti-German images of the resistance. In Britain, at least up to 1939, the empire sustained the national myths. The US, another republic, is consumed by a belief in a so-called free world dominated actually by a hegemonic capitalism committed to anti-communism. In the erstwhile USSR, the patriotic super-structures were supported by a combination of Marxism and Stalinist history. In China, a mixture of ancient imperial prestige, communism, and growing economic and military power reinforces the Han tradition.

In less-sovereign former colonies like India, the politically idealized nation-state, shaped by anti-colonialism, is buttressed by the glorified icons of the freedom movement. That's why the emphasis lies on "unity in diversity", instead of the much-needed, and officially neglected, transformation of the social relations of production and exchange throughout the country.

The increasing emphasis during the 19th century, on the ethnic and racial origins of the nation, led to a redefinition of the nation-state in those terms. Racism, which in Boulainvilliers's theories was inherently "anti-patriotic" and "anti-nationalist", joined itself with colonialist imperialism and "continental imperialism", most notably in pan-Germanic and pan-Slavic movements. This relation between racism and ethnic nationalism reached its height in the fascist and Nazi movements of the 20th century.

The specific combination of nation ("people") and State, expressed in such terms as the Völkische Staat and implemented in laws such as the 1935 Nuremberg laws, made fascist States such as early Nazi Germany qualitatively different from non-fascist nation-states. Obviously, "minorities", who are not part of the Volk, have no authentic or legitimate role in such a State. In Germany, neither the Jews nor the Roma were considered part of the Volk, and they were, therefore, specifically targeted for persecution. However, the "German nationality law" defined "German" on the basis of German ancestry, excluding all non-Germans from the Volk.

In the modern era, the most important form of political organisation is the nation-state. The norms of most nation-states reflect a universal conception of human nature. In this account, all human beings are equal. Paradoxically, despite their colonial ventures around the world, European nation-states were the first prototypes for these norms. It helped that the citizens of each European country also mostly share the same language and religion; universality is easier to legitimize if everyone is recognisably like you.

But India is clearly not such a place. Here, nearly everyone is recognisably unlike you, in politically significant ways. And that raises the question, "what happens when the prototype and the norm of the nation-state differ from each other?"

The nation-state is a formal system with a well-defined constitution, strict criteria for citizenship and, most importantly, a monopoly over violence. This has one evident weakness: nation-states are structurally incapable of being flexible. In the formal system, deviance from the norm comes across as an existential threat. Inevitably, therefore, the nation-state performs poorly when it confronts an internally differentiated populace that does not agree on the basic rules. Faced with dissent from a subset of its population that disagrees with the rules, many nation-states have tended towards ruthlessness and systematic oppression – such as

those of Jews in Europe and Tibetans in China.

A less violent choice is to assimilate the diverse population into a normative mean, like the American melting pot. But in this case too, the nation-state does not tolerate true difference; it merely coaxes the different groups towards a mean that they are willing to live with together, while the differences persist.

The discourse of the nation-state, which underscores much of the armchair classless patriotism espoused by the petty bourgeoisie, is rich in contrariety. In India, the discursive contradictions of the nation-state surface regularly in everyday life, but look most poignant on days Indians celebrate their Independence and Republic days because significant aspects of the presumed national past are recreated on these holidays. Similarly, other special days dedicated to the large patriotic sentiments are October 2, November 14 and January 30. On these days cinema, academia and media resurrect a valiant national history that cannot really be compressed in a single ideological frame, and is inherently contradictory. An Indian scarcely needs to be reminded that the culmination of the national struggle was as much national independence as national slaughter. Indeed, the current ascendancy of Hindutva nationalism can be causally linked to the symbols and forces mobilised during the national struggle.

Is there an alternative to the nation-state that is more tolerant to differences? One alternative – albeit a ghastly one – that the world has tried, is empire. Among other things, an empire is a hierarchical organisation of peoples with a centre (say London) and a periphery (say Delhi). An empire contains various peoples, but it accords rights to its citizens according to their distance from the centre. In other words, while an empire accepts difference, it makes no pretence of providing equality and autonomy. But, we are looking for is – a positive example of tolerance for differences. And it is in this regard that India has a useful contribution to make to modernity.

In recent years, the nation-state's claim to absolute sovereignty within its borders has been much criticized. A global political system based on international agreements, and supra-national blocs characterized the post-war era. Non-state actors, such as international corporations and non-governmental organizations, are widely seen as eroding the economic and political power of nation-states, potentially leading to their eventual disappearance.

Nation-states have their own characteristics, differing from those of the pre-national States. The most noticeable characteristic is the degree to which nation-states use the State as an instrument of national unity, in economic, social and cultural life.

The most obvious impact of the nation-state, as compared to its non-national predecessors, is the creation of a uniform "national culture", through State policy. The model of the nation-state implies that its population constitutes a nation, united by a common descent, a common language, and many forms of shared culture. When the implied unity was absent, the nation-state often tried to create it. It promoted a uniform national language, through its language policy. The creation of national systems of compulsory primary education, alongwith a relatively uniform curriculum in secondary schools, was the most effective instrument in the spread of the national languages. The schools also taught the national history, often in a propagandistic and mythologized version, and (especially during conflicts) some nation-states still teach this kind of history.

Language and cultural policy was sometimes negative, aimed at the suppression of non-national elements. Language prohibitions were sometimes used to accelerate the adoption of national languages, and the decline of minority languages.

In some cases these policies triggered bitter conflicts and more ethnic separatism. But where it worked, the cultural uniformity and homogeneity of the population increased.

Conversely, the cultural divergence at the border became sharper: in theory, a uniform French identity extends from the Atlantic coast to the Rhine, and on the other bank of the Rhine, a uniform German identity begins. To enforce that model, both sides have divergent language policies and educational systems, although the linguistic boundary is, in fact, well inside France, and the Alsace region had changed hands four times between 1870 and 1945.

The notion of a unifying national identity also extends to countries which host multiple ethnic or language groups, such as India and China. The most obvious deviation from the ideal of "one nation, one state" is the presence of minorities, especially ethnic minorities, which are clearly not members of the majority nation. An ethnic nationalist definition of a nation is necessarily exclusive: ethnic nations typically do not have open membership.

Negative responses to minorities within the nation-state have ranged from State-enforced cultural assimilation, to expulsion, persecution, violence, and extermination. The assimilation policies are usually State-enforced, but violence against minorities is not always State-initiated: it can occur in the form of mob violence such as lynching or pogroms. Nation-states are responsible for some of the worst historical examples of violence against minorities – that is, minorities that were not considered part of the nation.

However, many nation-states do accept specific minorities as being part of the nation, and the term national minority is often used in this sense. Multiculturalism is an official policy in many States, establishing the ideal of peaceful existence among multiple ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups. Many nations have laws protecting minority rights.

Nation and Nation-State in India
India at one point or another has been, or is, like Spain, Belgium and Canada, to mention three democratic federal states with multi-national components – a nation-state for

most citizens, a State to which they owe allegiance, but not a nation in the classical sense for significant minorities, and a State that is contested by some minorities on its periphery. Of course, there are divergent visions of that nationhood, some which would exclude from the nation those people who feel they are Indian without having to share an exclusivist conception of the nation. There are many people who feel for other identities, sometimes equally strong, sometimes somewhat stronger than the Indian national identity. There are certainly citizens of India who do not question the Indian State, but feel very strongly for another identity which can serve as a potential basis for a nationalist sentiment and political movement. This has been the case with a minority of Sikhs identifying with the project of Khalistan as an independent Sikh State. There are some groups in the Northeast, who feel a distinctive national or, or at least, tribal identity. They have, at one point or another, even questioned the authority of the Indian State and fought for some independent status, but some, like Mizoram, have been reintegrated into the Indian State and participate, thanks to federalism, in the Indian political process.

India has two identities – one as a nation and the other as a nation-state – and despite their similarities, the two are different along some important dimensions. For one, by their nature, nations engage with demands for autonomy far more creatively than nation-states. Second, unlike empires, the nation is a formation of equals: to use a term from Gandhi, it is a voluntary association of the governed. Its primary objective is to ensure the autonomy and freedom of its citizens.

The nation is an organic system whose amorphous structure is constructed through geography and history, rather than by an abstract system of law. The geographical boundaries of the Indian nation have always been fluid, though there is a natural boundary coinciding with those of South Asia. The Indian nation also has a genuine history. The Mauryan emperor Ashoka and the Mughal emperor Akbar are part of

the history of the Indian nation, but not that of the Indian nation-state.

A hundred years ago, we had a State, but we didn't have a nation. The British justified their rule by its supposed capacity to bring the rule of law to an unruly collection of peoples. When the people rebelled, they were put down by force. In response to British Statism, the Indian freedom struggle claimed that India was a nation, not just a State, and the British did not have the authority or the legitimacy to rule the Indian nation.

A central aspect of the nationalist argument was the historical continuity of India all the way back to the Indus valley civilization. A national identity was crucial to sustain a mass political movement with the goal of achieving true swaraj. The nation's priority over our consciousness persists. Consider this: the major components of the nation-state, namely, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, the police and the army, are all descendants of their colonial predecessors. Nevertheless, in our hearts we have rejected the colonial State in recounting the Indian nation's "authentic" history. We are far more likely to invoke Chandragupta than Curzon in our evocation of national identity. It is as if we rejected the history of the nation-state for the history of the nation.

Once Independence was achieved, however, the goal of nationhood lost priority to the goal of establishing the nation-state. The Congress went from being the party of the nation to being the party of the nation-state. However, the nation did not disappear from the imagination. The 1975-77 Emergency was a decisive factor in the two conceptions of India. Indira Gandhi justified Emergency by alluding to threats to the nation-state, but the Indian people rejected her reasoning. Since then, the nation-state has always been tempered by ideas of nationhood. The emergence of regional and lower caste parties, and the permanence of coalition governance, points to a future where the nation will have further triumphed over the nation-state.

Of course, this picture of nationhood is not complete without pointing out its underbelly. The nation-state's hegemony over the nation has led to the worst violence. The Nazi State stripped Jews of their citizenship before transporting them to concentration camps. In the worst case, the bureaucratic violence of the nation-state can collude with the baser instincts of nationhood to perpetrate genocide. India is no stranger to this phenomenon. The Gujarat riots are the most chilling acts of violence precisely because of the clever combination of nation and nation-state in the acts of the Hindu Right.

At present, India defines its secularism as sarva dharma sambhaava – equality of all religions before the State. The Western model, on the other hand, requires the State not to be an arbiter between communities – helping with Haj subsidies here, and armed protection or procuring Chinese visas to carry out pilgrimages there – but to confine itself purely to secular administration. Until that comes about, the chances of nationalist fervour getting expressed in religious terms would continue to pose a dilemma for our country, with unsavoury consequences for the State and its subjects.

Under the guidance of the cosmopolitan Jawaharlal Nehru and his descendants (Indira and Rajiv Gandhi), India followed a policy of "secularism" (which, however, is rather differently understood here than in the West) and protection of minorities within the predominantly Hindu country. The last two decades, however, have revealed a widespread disillusionment with such policies and the underlying conception of national identity that accompanies them. The stunning ascendance of Hindu nationalism and the electoral successes of the Bharatiya Janata Party that represents it are the most important political developments in India of the past twenty years. India, many argue, should be conceived and reconstituted as a "Hindu nation" – although what, precisely, that means is debated even among the religious nationalists.

Early Indian Nationalism

The nationalist agenda of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, which arose to overcome colonialism, shares fully in the aspects of imperialism discussed above. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer capture this overlap succinctly: "Nationalism is not the answer to Orientalism as implied in Said's book. Rather nationalism is the avatar of Orientalism in the later colonial and postcolonial period."

A clear exposition of the influence of Orientalism on nationalism is meticulously worked out by Gyan Prakash. It will be best to quote him in full since it will help us understand the theoretical framework that guides contemporary protagonists of Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva: "The first significant challenge to this Orientalized India came from nationalism and nationalist historiography, albeit accompanied by a certain contradiction. While affirming the concept of an India essentialized in relation to Europe, the nationalists transformed it from passive to active, from dependant to sovereign, capable of relating to history and reason."

It is pertinent to underscore the long native roots of this hegemonic form of Brahminic religious synthesization of the dominant pan-Indian identity – something in place well before the advent of Western colonialism. David Scott suggests that dimensions of Orientalism involving the dual process of valorizing the normative aspects of the Self (Brahminic) and denigrating the differentiated aspects of the Other (Dalits, tribals and foreigners) were extant well before the colonial enterprise in South Asia. By analysing the power operating in pre-colonial discourse, specifically by means of the monopoly of Sanskrit knowledge and its dominance in interpreting the Dharmic law, Scott makes us aware of the local and autochthonous roots of Orientalism in India's past.

Contemporary Hindu Nationalism

Nothing can be more alarming than the resurgence of Hindu

nationalism today, but it is hardly unexpected since it is the contextual manifestation of colonialism and Indian nationalism. It is complex because it has many context- and region-specific expressions. And yet, the definition of a nationalist suggested by Andre Beteille is general enough: "A nationalist, in the ideological sense, is someone who seeks to subordinate every attachment and every loyalty to attachment and loyalty to the nation, for himself [sic] and for all others."

So far things seem innocuous. The Hindu nationalist, however, goes further by building on the train of thought worked out by the colonialist and the Indian nationalist, namely identifying being Indian with being Hindu.

Thus the Hindu nationalist is someone who, by fostering the myth of internal and external threat to national stability and security, places maximum moral value on affirming that India's core consists of "eternal Hindu tenets" (loyalty), and defending these with the conviction and zeal of "patriotic duty to the country" (attachment).

Local Resources for Remembering Pluriformity

What vigilant and beneficial response can uphold the human right to be religiously different in India? Something concrete and positive must be done to support the forces resisting the Hindutva phenomenon! The first aspect of a helpful response has to do with what ought not to be done. In seeking a solution to this unitary, exclusive and hegemonic ideology, one must be careful to repudiate it as a paradigm. The general temptation, after all, is to fight one form of exclusivism with another form of the same, leading to a situation of competing fundamentalist or essentialist paradigms.

Particularly in situations of social conflict and political uncertainty, people opt for elementary, facile and unequivocal categories. The need of the hour is to get out of

the colonial and national models that sanction the rejection of a plurality of religious expressions. Only then can one embrace an alternate model that empowers all religions to live out their difference, while holding the variety of human communities' self-expressions within a humane framework.

For Christian communities, rejecting the Hindutva philosophical framework means being careful not to buy into its presuppositions. It means being suspicious of using the same essentialist and exclusivist model that valorizes any one religion at the expense of others. In the case of Christians, it means becoming self-reflective, and self-critical of the possible imperialistic objectives of mission. The mandate to make every Indian a Christian in a fixed period of time, arises from the same unitary, exclusive and hegemonic paradigm of cultural and religious monopoly advocated by Indian and Hindu nationalism. In terms of conceptual models, there seems to be little difference between wanting to reconvert all Indians into Hindus, on the one hand, and seeking to convert all Indians into Christians, on the other.

This does not mean that conversion from one religion to another must be banned in India. Indeed, that too is a human right protected by the Indian Constitution. However, any model that undercuts the plural forms of being religiously and culturally human disrespects the right of human beings to be different. And Indian history suggests that when this unitary, exclusive and hegemonic model is institutionalized, it not only threatens human rights, but is also destructive of the secular, that is, non-religious, character of the nation-state that is guaranteed in the Constitution.

Above all, we need to garner more pluralistic frameworks for harnessing the diversity of religious expressions in our communities. The onus is on cultural and religious communities that experience and assert their cardinal differences from the Hindutva ideology to promote worldviews more amiable to plurality and less hostile to difference. Such models are extant in local Indian

communities; they just need to be recognized as worthwhile paradigms for collective human living.

It must be quite clear that participating in more than one religio-cultural tradition does not mean an opportunistic putting together of a featureless mass of religious resources. It should be noted that most local religious worldviews have a primary and a secondary structure. Religious conversion occurs when the primary structure is exchanged for another primary structure; when the secondary structure is exchanged for another secondary structure, it is, rather, an internal enrichment within a continuing faith, and a commitment for fuller human self-expression. In both of these processes there is an inevitable element of comingling and transmutation; as the Roman Catholic scholar Robert Schreiter has compellingly argued, syncretism and synthesis are not unrelated, but share common structures and processes.

Thus, an assertion of the right to be religiously human, which involves choosing, transforming and inhabiting the world of "my" or "our" religion in accordance with "my" or "our" changing experiences, plays an important role in forming local religious identity. It is not as though communities participate indiscriminately in dual or multiple religious traditions. In India many religious communities live abundantly from their own particular religious heritage, while also living partially, but intently, from the richness of another or other religious tradition(s). Others' religions are not to be feared or overthrown; they can form temporary "spaces" of hospitality and nurture.

It is imperative, therefore, that progressive voices should not shy away from emotion and passion in favour of abstract ideals. We should not cede religion to fundamentalists; we should not let extremists define our national ideals. The nation is not an exclusive entity - for a particular race, religion or ethnicity. For India to emerge as a good prototype of nationhood, it has to be informed by good norms.

Democracy in India

The term democracy indicates both a set of ideals and a political system. Democracy – literally, rule by the people – was coined from the Greek words, demos ("people"), and kratos ("rule"). According to Aristotle, "Democracy is a rule of the many, which is based on a false assumption of equality." Much later, Abraham Lincoln (1809-65) famously announced, "Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people". To JW Garner, the great political scientist, "Democracy has been variously conceived as a political status, an ethical concept, and a social condition." James Bryce defined democracy as "the rule of the people who exPressed their sovereign will through votes". For Seeley, democracy is "a government in which everyone has a share". According to Dicey, "It is a form of government in which the governing body is a comparatively large fraction of the entire nation."

Types of Democracy

The world has seen several models of democracy, at various points of history, in different places, up to the present time. These include the following:

a) Direct democracy: A form of government in which the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the whole body of citizens, acting under procedures of majority rule. Switzerland is a country that still maintains certain systems that retain the essence of direct democracy, including

1) Referendum, by which the people directly exPress their opinion on governmental policy or decision;

2) Recall, by which the people call back a representative before the completion of his term when (s)he goes against the interests of the public;

3) Initiative, through which people can take preliminary steps to suggest a legislation that they think necessary; and

4) Plebiscite, through which people exPress their opinion on specific political issues.

b) Representative democracy: A form of government in which the citizens do not exercise the right to make political decisions directly – that is, not in person – but through representatives chosen by and responsible to them.

c) Constitutional democracy: A form of government, usually a representative democracy, in which the powers of the majority are exercised within a framework of constitutional restraints designed to guarantee all citizens the enjoyment of certain individual or collective rights, such as freedom of speech and religion.

Values of Democracy

- Freedom
- Equality
- Autonomy
- Fundamental rights
- Social justice

These are some of the values that are pre-conditions for democracy. However, the nature of democratic government

varies according to the particular principles (freedom, autonomy or equality; fundamental rights or social justice) that are identified as the focus. For example,

a) Privileging the value of freedom led to New Right in Europe or the libertarian tendency. The theorists of this are Nozick and Hayek. Libertarians propagate withdrawal of the State from economic life and untrammelled opening up of the market.

b) Privileging the value of equality led to social democracy, which was propagated by CB Macpherson and Carole Pateman. Social democracy points to the democratization of the society itself, as exPressed by its manners and customs, and particularly by the belief in what Bryce called "equality of estimation".

c) Privileging the value of autonomy leads to participatory democracy, which emphasizes community. The main theorists are John Stuart Mill and Rousseau.

d) Privileging the value of autonomy in alliance with the principle of freedom and equality leads to deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy is, to quote one of its advocates, David Miller, "one whose members reach political decisions through a process of open discussion to which each participant is able to contribute freely, but is equally willing to listen to and consider opposing views, so that the decision reached reflects the weight of the arguments put forward on each side, and not simply the prior interest or prior opinion of the participants".

Principles of Democracy

a) **Separation of power:** It is an instrument to divide the power of the ruling agencies of a State as an insurance against arbitrariness.

b) **Majority rule:** The government is formed by representatives elected through the choices made by a majority of citizens while casting their votes.

c) **Rule of law:** Constitutionalism is the normative idea for the rule of law or limited government. It can be seen in

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the relationship between the State and the individual as individual rights restrict State power.

How to Measure Democracy?

Robert Dahl proposes two indicators:

1) Public contestation, the extent of public opposition and political competition; and

2) Right to participation (in the system of public contestation), through the right to vote, contest for office etc.

Both are compulsory for democratization. In The Third Wave, explaining the importance of free-and-fair vote, Samuel P. Huntington argued that it is the "essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non. Governments produced by elections may be inefficient, corrupt, short-sighted, irresponsible, dominated by special interests, and incapable of adopting policies demanded by the public good. These qualities make such governments undesirable, but they do not make them undemocratic. Democracy is one public virtue, not the only one, and the relation of democracy to other public virtues and vices can only be understood if democracy is clearly distinguished from the other characteristics of political systems".

David Beetham emphasizes the principles of popular control and political equality.

Indian Democracy

India is a democratic State and its Constitution is sovereign. It has borrowed the parliamentary system, with a president as its titular head, from its colonial ruler, Britain. India, at the very outset, showed commitment towards democratic values, and announced it clearly in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution. Our Preamble says:

"We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular,

Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens:

Justice, social, economic and political;

Liberty of thought, exPression, belief, faith and worship;

Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation…"

The Preamble acts as tool to measure the success and failure of Indian democracy, to which this essay shall return later.

The Indian Constitution arms its citizens with rights to check unrestrained State power. Part III of the Constitution contains articles 12-32 under the heading "Fundamental Rights". This part can be further divided into six categories as given below:

a) Right to equality (Articles 14-18)
b) Right to freedom (Articles 19-22)
c) Right against exploitation (Articles 23-24)
d) Right to freedom of religion (Articles 25-28)
e) Cultural and educational rights (Articles 29-30)
f) Right to constitutional remedies (Article 32)

Other than guaranteeing individual rights, our Constitution also upholds all the values and principles that have been associated with democracy. There can be two ways to assess how democratic is Indian democracy, either as

a) **Procedural (formal) democracy,** that is, whether there are free-and-fair elections, legislative assemblies and

constitutional government; literal separation of power between the executive, the legislative and the judicial organs of State; and political participation of citizens in choosing the government;

Or as

b) **Substantive democracy,** whether the society is peopled by truly equal citizens who are politically engaged, tolerant of different opinions and ways of life, and have an equal voice in choosing their rulers and holding them accountable.

Procedural (formal) democracy tends to ignore many socio-economic inequalities that make even democratic outcomes unjust. No wonder the defenders of substantive democracy argue that the democratic project is incomplete until meaningful exercise of the equal rights of citizenship has been guaranteed to all.

Evolution of Indian Democracy
The evolution of India democracy can be classified into three periods: under Nehru; under Indira Gandhi; and Globalization onward.

I Nehru and Democracy

For Nehru, democracy "is the best of all the various methods available to us for the governance of human beings. Democracy gives an individual full opportunity to develop, and discipline is self-imposed. The ultimate end of democracy is to put an end to the difference between the rich and the poor." Nehru's commitment to democracy was borne out by the respect he showed to the opposition, the Press, and those with whom he disagreed.

When Indian democracy was in its nascent phase, many thinkers believed that it wouldn't survive for long because of its mind-boggling diversity and inherent contradictions. JS Mill had opined that democracy is "next to impossible" in multiethnic societies and completely impossible in

linguistically divided countries. Selig S. Harrison had predicted in 1960, in line with Mill's argument, that Indian democracy would fail and/or face territorial disintegration: "The odds are almost wholly against the survival of freedom and ... the issue is, in fact, whether any Indian State can survive at all."

Thus, Nehru, as the first prime minister, had a great many challenges to face: nation-building, inclusive economic progress, and establishing secularism in India. Trained as a liberal politician, he called upon the citizens of the newly independent country to sort out their differences and act unitedly for national progress. "Unity in Diversity", was his call:

"Behind India's unity, there is an enormous and magnificent variety. If you had traveled with me, you would have gone, say to Kashmir, right on the northern tip of India and would have crossed the high Himalayas, the glaciers, and the snows. You would have gone to Ladakh right between Kashmir and Tibet, the vast stretch of land with no trees, nothing but magnificent high mountains, terribly cold. Some people imagine that India is a hot country, but it is frightfully cold too. You go to the southern tip of India, say Travancore. You will find a tropical climate, so completely different from Ladakh's. Naturally if the climate is different, the people living there are also different in many ways. I have just come from Madras, a very big city, a very gracious city, a fine city, very different from the cities in the north. Should I, because I happen to live now in Delhi want to make Madras or Bombay like Delhi or like Allahabad, where I was born, or like Kashmir, where my family came from? I cannot do it and I do not want to do it, I like the variety of India."

His economic ideals and policies were greatly influenced by Fabian socialism – a variety of socialism practised by some Britishers. Thus, he opted for heavy industrialization against Gandhi's village economy model. A firm believer in

State control over the economic sectors, he advocated a kind of mixed economy. To lift India from political to economic independence, he knew he had to reduce the economic disparity between the landed and the landless classes, and so he introduced laws for land redistribution. One of his key economic reforms was the introduction of the Five Years Plan in 1951. It was introduce to determine the mode of government expenditure and grants in important development sectors like agriculture, industries and education.

On the issue of secularism Nehru had led by example. Indifferent to religion, he never favoured any religion over another. He introduced legal reforms in Hindu religion in order to maintain public order and raise the level of social morality. The Hindu code bill (1955) and the law on untouchability were few of them.

Nehru worked very hard to institutionalize and strengthen democratic values in India, and promoted freedom of the Press and free-and-fair elections, and introduced initiatives such as the Community Development Programme (1952) and the Panchayat system. Speaking in Parliament regarding freedom of the Press, he said: "I am convinced of the freedom of the Press" (29/5/1951); "Press is one of the vital organs of modern life, especially in a democracy. The Press has tremendous powers and responsibilities. The Press must be respected and it must also have cooperation" (16/5/1951).

At the Newspaper Editor's Conference (1950), he said:

"To my mind, the freedom of the Press is not just a slogan from the larger point of view but it is an essential attribute of the democratic process. I have no doubt that even if the government dislikes the liberties taken by the Press and considers them dangerous, it is wrong to interfere with the freedom of the Press. By imposing restrictions you do not change anything; you merely suppress the public

manifestation of certain things, thereby causing the idea and thought underlying them to spread further. Therefore, I would rather have a completely free Press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom than a suppressed or regulated Press" (Speech at the 3/12/1950).

Nehru deserves credit for bringing the ideals of liberalism into reality. But his programme began to fade away alongwith his personal charisma. The economic programme did not yield the expected results. Land reforms failed to find support from the state Congress leaders, and took the form of defective legislations that actually aggravated the existing inequalities. Unemployment and poverty were rampant, fomenting the rise of Naxalism as well as communalism.

As many as 92 riots occurred in 1961. Then there was the mysterious disappearance of a religious relic from the Hazratbal mosque in Srinagar on 2 December 1963 triggered off extensive riots. Another notorious riot in Kolkata (then Calcutta) in January 1964 spread to 215 villages around the metropolis – according to one estimate, 1,500 Muslims were butchered. The worst rioting took place at Telco – the locomotive and truck factory operated by Tatas in collaboration with Mercedes-Benz. In Rourkela, Odisha, about 5,000 Muslims were killed.

In short, although Nehru aspired to entrench secularism in India, but elements within and outside Congress and leaders at the local levels were opposed to it, and he failed to institutionalize secularism in the polity and civil society.

II Indira Gandhi and Democracy

Starting on a promising note Mrs Gandhi's rule violated all the basic principles of democracy. Her rule will forever be associated with centralization of power, corruption, suppression of the Press, sycophant public servants in the

name of "committed" bureaucracy, and other such anti-democratic phenomena.

When she took over as prime minister, Congress was plagued with political factionalism and contestation between the old guard ("syndicate") and those loyal to her. To counter the experienced leadership, she opted to split the party and took the help of the CPI to grab power. The result was "garibi hatao", bank nationalization, and an end to the "privy purse" system of the State paying for the upkeep of the erstwhile "princes". However, corruption under her own regime led to the rise and growing popularity of Jaya Prakash Narayan's sampurna kranti ("total revolution") campaign against her government.

By then, Mrs Gandhi's narrow pursuit of power had dispensed with all hesitation in breaking rules – moral-ethical or political-constitutional. This aspect of her conduct has wrought the worst damage on the social and political edifice of the country by legitimizing all sorts of amorality and corruption.

As surely had Nehru presided over the building up of a whole set of political institutions, just as surely did Mrs Gandhi preside over their weakening. She amended the Constitution to suit her own case. Exceptional powers were used in routine fashion and new powers were obtained to secure a tamed Press and allow massive detentions without trial. The main casualty was Centre-state relations. It was during her reign that the "national disintegration" thesis took off.

The misplaced determination to concentrate power was seen not only in relations with the states, but in all the major institutions of the Centre itself. The downgrading of the Cabinet was consolidated by expansion of the prime minister's secretariat to dwarf that of the Cabinet, by the drawing into the hands of the prime minister the control of the security forces and intelligence agencies, and by the

steadily growing importance of a quite informal circle of varied but personally approved advisors.

It was also during her tenure that organs like Parliament, the administration and even the judiciary were affected by the malaise of de-institutionalization. The administration was not significantly a beneficiary of this process; indeed, harassment by parliamentary probes is really much less troublesome to officials than the kind of job-anxiety that became the norm. Ever since Mrs Gandhi declared that what was required of civil servants was "commitment", there has been some uncertainty in the official mind. While it seemed plain that more was required than an honest day's work without fear or favour, what would be found pleasing could only be discovered by trial and error, and by a quiet inspection of fast-changing postings and promotions. Esprit de corps was eroded quite rapidly in these conditions. The same applied in surprising measure to the judiciary, as established seniority rules were replaced by a quasi-political lottery system, ensuring that a calm frame of judicial mind arrived only with the proximity of retirement.

III Globalization and Democracy

Many attributes of Mrs Gandhi's politics continue to exist even after the end of her era. However, globalization has had the strongest influence ever on the ways of governance at large, even as the rich become richer and the poor, poorer. Despite this, the poor are showing faith in the democratic institutions – they come out to vote in large numbers, especially in the rural areas. Some call this the "deepening of democracy". At the same time, however, governments mostly focus on formulating policies to benefit the middle classes and the industries that employed them, through lots of tax exemptions.

In this phase, we can see decentralization of the polity through Panchayati Raj institutions, even as power is being

increasingly centralized in the hands of the Union government, and the state governments are being weakened. Further, the rise of coalition politics gave leverage to the regional parties in various states, even as a bi-polar political equation emerged at the Centre.

And today, in this era of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG), the Indian nation-state has come under the direct grip of US imperialism, where the success of democracy is measured by the performance of the market. If the market flourishes, so too would democracy. Thus, for BJP India was "Shining" and for Congress, it's "Incredible India!"

Indeed, it's incredible that governments do not care about the farmers who have been committing suicide because of the effects of globalization. Recent data show that nearly 50 Indian farmers commit suicide every day, and an estimated 2,16,500 farmers have committed suicide since 1997 – 17,368 in 2009 alone.

Similarly, the judiciary fails to pronounce timely verdicts and thereby save many citizens from long years of unnecessary under-trial detention. In fact, the recent record of the higher judiciary shows that the imperative of upholding civil liberties, socio-economic rights and environmental protection has been subordinated to the agenda of the "war on terror" and "development" for satisfying corporate and other ruling-class interests. Far from remaining faithful to the motives behind the institution of PIL (public interest litigation), the Supreme Court has often tended to act against the interests of socio-economically backward classes and sections.

Nobody cares about the rise of unemployment and casualization of jobs, and its negative political by-products. This has led to the breaking-up of class politics, which has been giving way to politics based on identities. Politicization of caste through Mandal and communal

politics through "kamandal" has dominated this phase of democracy.

Indeed, very deliberately, the controversy over Mandal Commission's recommendations is being centred exclusively on the scheme of reservations in jobs and seats in educational institutions for the OBCs. Following the Supreme Court injunction that overall reservation should not exceed 50 per cent, it's only 27 per cent reservation that's proposed – 27 per cent for people who constitute 52 per cent of the population. After the Mandal scheme is accepted, total reservation would be 49.5 per cent only, within the limits drawn by the Supreme Court, even though OBCs, SCs and STs together constitute 74.5 per cent of the population.

In 2006 the Left-parties-supported UPA-I government introduced reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in educational institutions, including central professional institutes such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs). As our political and social structures are based on discriminatory principles, reservation acts as an instrument that guarantees a place to those who have been historically oppressed and discriminated against.

This again brings forth the issue of social justice, merit and equality. Anti-reservation campaigners argued that the government is keen to compromise on the best that the country could achieve, and so democracy is surely doomed. But the fact is, merit became an issue only when it came to the question of providing access to those who had been denied education for centuries.

This issue has galvanized the imagination of all the political actors in Indian democracy, who either support reservations or argue against it. Even as public sentiment, especially among OBCs, polarized in favour the National Front government led by VP Singh, the Bharatiya Janata

Party (BJP) raked up the Ram Mandir issue to counter the erosion of its social base among these sections. The mandir campaign was a significant challenge to the idea of secularism. The ascent of Rightwing forces, starting with Advani's rath-yatra and the subsequent communal riots, shook Indian democracy to the core.

Beyond manipulation by the Rightwing, however, there has always been prejudice in one or the other form among the majority of the population in India against Muslims – something that, like untouchability, cannot be eradicated merely by legal safeguards. The law is inadequate. For instance, provisions under Articles 347 and 350(A) are discretionary, not mandatory.

Democracy without secularism, where the protection and development of minorities is not guaranteed, is nothing but hoax. Democracy is a participatory system of self-governance based on the principles of equality, freedom, justice and reason. Even when a decision is made by the majority principle, the rights and viewpoint of the minority have to be respected. The minority has to respect the same principles and ensure that it becomes internally democratic.

Conclusion

After more than 60 years as the world's largest democracy, it is important to analyse how the system really functions in India. Has it helped us move towards the goals enshrined in the Constitution? In the 1960s Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish economist, had described India as a "soft State", unwilling to enforce its own rules and regulations. Has anything changed since then?

We stand 124th on the Human Development Index and rank very low on the Transparency International Index (72 of 91) – remember transparency is a measure of corruption. We are able to provide indoor sanitary facilities to less than a fifth of our population (Bangladesh fares far

better with 44 per cent), and primary education to barely half the children. As for democracy, one wonders whether in practice we are not closer to a feudal system than to a truly modern democratic one.

In terms of governance, perhaps the weakest institution in the country is the legal system. In fact, we have the somewhat strange spectacle of the courts being forced to intervene in what are surely administrative matters, even as the backlog of millions of pending cases continues to mount. There have also been allegations of corruption by judges.

In the field of corruption – both material and moral – politicians are the worst breed, the source as well as end of corruption. It is true for both elected representatives and those who aspire to get elected. Bribe, nepotism, favouritism, communal violence, and caste and/or regional divisions are the most preferred means to shape one's political career. It is because of this that all the positive attributes of identity politics have withered away.

Secularism in India

Introduction

India contains a medley of religious, linguistic and ethnic groups. According to the 2001 census, out of the 1,028 million population, a little over 827 million (80.5 per cent) have returned themselves as followers of Hindu religion, 138 million (13.4 per cent) as Muslims or the followers of Islam, 24 million (2.3 per cent) as Christians, 19 million (1.9 per cent) as Sikh, 8 million (0.80 per cent) as Buddhists and 4 million (0.4 per cent) as Jain. In addition, over 6 million have reported professing other religions and faiths, including tribal religions, different from the six main religions.

Secularism in India was conceived as a system that sustained religious and cultural pluralism, given the diversity in faith and cultures. Religious diversity could only exist without persecution in a secular State. Secularism, however, had emerged in the West mainly from the conflict between the Church and the State.

The mainstream of Indian nationalism, which led to Independence in 1947, had a decidedly secular orientation throughout most of its history. Secularism

emerged as the dominant principle during the freedom struggle, and nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and Maulana Azad were deeply committed to the ideal. The nation was exhausted by Partition and sectarian riots at the eve of Independence. The circumstances necessitated secularism as State policy for the nation. Under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the concept of a secular nation-state was officially adopted as India's path to political modernity and national integration. Thus, secular principles got enshrined into the Constitution of Independent India. The Preamble to the Constitution declares that India is a secular State (the original Preamble did not mention the word secular, it was added later by the 42nd amendment in 1976).

In post-Independence India, the process of secularism went on at a slow pace. By the 1970s-80s communalism, which was never dead, started attacking secularism in a big way. And in the succeeding decades, secularism in India had to deal with a violent blow from religious fundamentalism.

Before engaging with secularism in India further, it is important to understand the meaning and origin of the concept, how is it different from its Western counterpart, and what are its features?

Concept of Secularism and its Evolution

The concept of secularism is derived from the liberal-democratic tradition of the West and its most common Anglo-American usage is "separation of Church and State". Secularism has its origin in Europe. When it was first used at the end of the Thirty Years' War in Europe in 1648, "secularization" referred to the transfer of the properties of the Church to the princes. Similar transfer of Church properties to the State also formed a part of the achievements of the French Revolution. Later, in England, George Holyoake coined the term "secularism" to refer to the rationalist movement of protest that he led

in 1851. As the result of the process of Enlightenment and industrialization in Europe, the religious view of the world was replaced with the scientific and rational approach, which rejected metaphysical and theological explanations for understanding the workings of the world. It brought about a differentiation or separation of the political sphere from the religious sphere, that is, separation of religion and politics. The State was taken as a political entity and politics, a separate domain. In simple words, secularism became the process by which an ecclesiastical State or sovereign is converted to a lay one. In earlier times, religion used to provide divine legitimation to the power and authority of the king through coronation, rites, ceremonies and so on. But the democratic State derives its authority from a secular source – the consent of the governed – and is not subordinate to ecclesiastical power.

Secularism is also understood as the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed or separated out from religious symbols and institutions so as to constitute their own domains. Only by this "wall of separation" could differing religious communities coexist on a basis of equality, in a State built upon a secular concept of citizenship. Thus secularism came to be seen as an ideology of progress. Secularism these days refers to the State's separation from, or indifference towards, religion. It seeks neither to promote nor to interfere with religion. USA is the classic example of a secular State in modern times. In the UK, however, a State-Church system exists simultaneously with broad freedom of religion and a democratic conception of citizenship.

In a secular State, all religions are, in one limited respect, subordinate to as well as separate from the State. Religious groups are under the general laws of the State and responsible for the proper discharge of civil obedience (payment of taxes, maintenance of public order etc.). Religious groups can organize their own

creeds, frame their own regulations, found their own educational institutions, and finance their own activities, all without interference from the State. Thus under the principle of separation, both religion and the State have freedom to develop without interfering with one another.

Separation of State and religion is, moreover, a constitutional arrangement in the secular State, to which the individual is only a citizen and not a member of a particular religious group. Religion, thus, becomes entirely irrelevant in defining the terms of citizenship; rights and duties are not affected by the individual's religious beliefs.

Secularism in India: Meaning, Features and Constitutional Provisions

The usage of "secularism" in India is accompanied by a significant variation. Here, secularism is often translated as dharma-nirapeksha (no discrimination between religions). Indeed, India is a country where religion is very central to the life of people. The concept of Indian secularism is largely based on the age-old philosophy expounded in the Hindu scripture, the Upanishads, and called "Sarvadharma Sambhava" – that is, equal respect for all religions -- rather than on the dichotomy between the State and religion. This Indian variant of secularism is also called the "Nehruvian model of secularism" by academics in India. This secularism is based on the principle of accommodation and neutrality. The State should not discriminate among the country's many religions and be tolerant of all, thereby ensuring equidistance between the State and the religious identities of the people.

As secularism in the West refers to the State's separation from, or indifference towards, religion, the Western antonym of secular is religious. But in India, by contrast, the antonym is communal.

Secularism is used to describe the relationship that exists, or ought to exist, between the State and religion. The underlying assumption of this concept – that is, religion and the State function in two basically different areas of human activity, each with its own objectives and methods, with political power kept outside the scope of religion's legitimate aims – is also applicable to India where a secular State means a non-communal, non-sectarian and non-theocratic State, not a non-religious or anti-religious one.

Indeed, the basis of the secular State in India is not a "wall of separation" between the State and religion, but rather a "no-preference doctrine", which requires only that no special privileges be granted to any religion. Secularism to the individual citizen is secured in the Constitution through the provisions mentioned below:

1. Equal freedom of conscience and religion to all – that is, individual freedom of religion.

2. No discrimination by the State against any citizen on grounds of religion. Some articles of the Constitution specifically rule out any religious considerations in defining the rights and duties of citizens [Article 14 (right to equality before the law and equal protection of the law) and Article 15(1) (the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, sex or place of birth)].

3. No communal electorates.

4. Power to the State to provide for "social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus".

5. Power to the State to regulate through law any "economic, financial, or other secular activity" which may be associated with religious practice.

6. Outlawing of untouchability (Article 17).

7. Right of every religious denomination to establish and operate institutions for religious and charitable purposes, subject to public order, morality and health.

8. Right of all religious minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice, which cannot be discriminated against by the State while granting aid to educational institutions.

9. Outlawing of discrimination against citizens on grounds of religion for employment or office under the State, for admission into educational institutions maintained or aided by State funds, and in voting and representation in legislatures [Article 15(1), 16(1), 16(2)].

10. No use of public revenues to promote any religion. (However, specified amounts of money from the Consolidated Fund of the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu are to be paid annually to their Devasom Funds for the maintenance of Hindu temples and shrines transferred to them from the State of Travancore-Cochin.)

11. No religious instruction in educational institutions wholly maintained out of State funds, with the exception of those State-run educational institutions, whose founding endowments or trusts require such instruction to be provided in them. Moreover, no person attending any educational institution "recognized" or aided by the State can be required to take part in any religious instruction or worship that may be conducted in it unless (s)he or her/his guardian has given consent to it. [Article 28(1), (2),(3)]

12. Fundamental duty of all citizens to "preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture" (brought in by a constitutional amendment in 1976).

13. Complete autonomy to all religious denominations or organizations in the matter of deciding as to what rites and ceremonies are essential according to the tenets of their religion, with no outside authority allowed any jurisdiction to interfere with such decisions [Article 26(b)].

14. Power to the State under the principle of protective discrimination, to discriminate among citizens on grounds of religion, caste etc. when providing for the advancement of certain sections of the population [Article 15(4)].

Moreover, the Indian Penal Code (Sections 295-98) makes it a crime to injure or defile a place of worship etc., even when such actions are sanctioned by the offender's own religion. Section 298 provides upto one year imprisonment for deliberately "wounding the religious feelings of any person by word, sound or gesture". Section 295-A provides upto two years imprisonment for deliberately insulting "the religion or religious beliefs" of any class of citizens.

Clearly, one of the main features of Indian secularism is constitutional sanction for extensive State interference in religious affairs or the collective freedom of religion, even as individual freedom of religion is largely not interfered with. Such State intervention has been justified on two grounds:

i.   The right to freedom of religion is subject to public order, morality and health;

ii. Article 25(2) authorizes the State to regulate any secular activity associated with religion to legislate social reforms (e.g., abolition of untouchability, admission of Harijans into Hindu temples etc.).

Indeed, sometimes State intervention is important as the matter involved is not only social or religious, but has consequences in other realms, and the State aims at ensuring justice and equality irrespective of religion, caste etc. of the individual citizen. Important areas in the Constitution permits State interference in religious matters include, for example, the financial administration of temples and maths, or the modification of religion-based personal laws. The main reason for such interference is that sometimes an urge

for effective social and religious reform (that characterizes present-day India) can only be satisfied by State action. Thus, the strict "wall of separation" that existed in the West does not apply in Indian conditions.

India recognizes personal laws based on religion. Religious communities like Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Parsis are governed by their own religious laws. The existence of separate personal laws is considered diametrically opposed to the fundamental principles of secularism. There have been demands from time to time to replace these with a uniform civil code so that religious systems can be reduced to their core of private faith, worship and practice.

There is no provision regarding an official State religion in the Indian Constitution, nor any recognition to the religion of the majority. Myanmar, by contrast, in its 1961 Constitution recognized Buddhism as the State religion with these words: "Buddhism being the religion professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union shall be the State Religion" [Article 21(1)].

In countries with a State religion, individuals may be compelled by taxation to support the official religion, or may be disqualified from the highest office in the State by virtue of one's profession of another religion. Under Article 27 of the Indian Constitution, however, no person shall be compelled to pay taxes for the support of any particular religion.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan declares itself a theocratic State. The Preamble begins: "Whereas sovereignty over the entire Universe belongs to Almighty Allah alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Pakistan within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust..." The Indian Constitution, on the contrary, makes no reference to God except in the form of oaths or affirmations contained in the Third Schedule.

Ministers of the Union, members of Parliament, judges, and such other State functionaries either "swear in the name of God" or "solemnly affirm" that they will faithfully perform the duties of their respective offices. There is no Ecclesiastical Department in the central government, such as existed during the British period.

Can One be Secular and Religious at the Same Time?

This is a very interesting question. Secularism in the Indian context is based on equal respect for all religions. Thus, it allows individual citizens to be devout and religious individuals as well as secular at the same time by giving equal respect to other religions. Mahatma Gandhi was not a "secularist" in the Western sense of the term as he opposed the dichotomy of religion and politics. He called himself a Sanatani, but emphasized mutual respect and tolerance. He underlined the possibilities of inter-religious understanding and spiritually justified the limitation of the role of religious institutions and symbols in certain areas of contemporary life.

Secularism in Practice

In the last four decades, the concept of secularism in India has seen the most endearing challenges questioning its very existence and utility. This period saw manifold increase in incidents of communal disturbances and fanaticism. The 1970s-80s saw instances of Sikh and Muslim fundamentalism, alongwith the emergence of large-scale Hindu militant organizations both in rural and urban areas and a rise in sporadic outbursts of communal violence throughout the country. In 1992-93, the Ramjanmbhoomi controversy erupted over the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, leading to rampant communal carnage. A decade later, in 2002, Gujarat witnessed some of the most devastating communal violence involving Hindus and Muslims since Partition. Kandhamal (Odisha) saw religious tensions between

Hindus and Christians in 2008. The earlier gruesome murder (burned by Hindu fanatics in January 1999) of a Christian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two minor sons points to growing culture of religious intolerance in the country.

According to some academics (such as TN Madan, Veena Das and Ashis Nandy), secularism as an ideology has emerged from the dialectic of modern science and Protestantism, and not from simple repudiation of religion and the rise of rationalism. While secularism was adopted in India in the backdrop of Partition, an emerging Indian nation-state, and a society comprising a diversity of cultures, languages, religions and customs, it has not been able to take roots here – perhaps because it is based on the scientific temperament. They argue that, firstly, secularism is a Western value which is out of place in the Indian cultural context, and secondly, as South Asia's major religious traditions – Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism – are totalizing in character, it is not possible to relegate them into private sphere of the individual. Indeed, these religions claim almost every sphere of the follower's life, so much so that they are constitutive of the society itself.

It must be noted, however, that no religious faith teaches violence; all profess universal values in general. These religious values need to be strengthened and popularized, for enabling a firmer and more widespread belief in tolerance, peace and co-existence, and to help in checking divisive tendencies. As for scientific temper, secularism in India is based more on the indigenous belief that all religions are different paths to God.

One of the biggest impediments to secularism in India is the rampant misunderstanding about religions. Misunderstandings about other religions lead to suspicion and hostility. Mutual hostility among different religious denominations in India has always existed and

little has been done to dispel it. The main reason is that communal politicians have successfully used the economics of inequality, uneven development and underdevelopment to reinforce their stranglehold over society. As early as 1936, Nehru had said, "The communal problem is not a religious problem; it has nothing to do with religion." It was not religious differences as such, but its exploitation by calculating politicians for the achievement of secular (i.e. non-religious) ends that produced the communal divide.

Misunderstanding about one's own religion leads to fanaticism and fundamentalism. It is the fundamentalists who resort to violence and terrorism. Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya, an academician who has studied the resurgence of majority and minority fundamentalism in India, says that the emergence of over 500 competing communal Senas and Dals and their activities both in urban and rural India have created a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. He criticizes Indian secularism as "majoritarianism" – secularism subordinated to the nationalism of the Hindu majority.

The most important contemporary challenge to Indian secularism has been put up by the forces of Hindu nationalism (or Hindutva). Since the mid-1980s, the revivalist Hindu organizations (BJP, Sangh Parivar, Shiv Sena etc.) have criticized Indian Secularism as "pseudo-secularism" and demanded for removal of special rights (positive discrimination by the State) for the minorities. They aim at the creation of a Hindu identity and Hindu consolidation. They strive for the creation of a religion-based, emotionally charged sense of nationalism and citizenship based on Hindu religion and culture. A new type of "positive secularism" has been put forward by BJP leader Advani – one that must be based on one's own religion! It means that religion should be equated with nationalism, and that Indian nationalism is Hindu nationalism.

This Rightwing interpretation of secularism, which empties it of its very essence, has stoked the fires of communalism in the political life of the country once again. These "positive secularists" seek to mobilize the Hindu masses on the basis of a Hindu interpretation of the past. They attempt to establish the roots of Hinduism in the past to create a coherent Hindu religious community, so that this constructed past can be used to give legitimacy to their present political purposes. Part of this communal project involves a refusal to recognize the contributions of Muslims and other minorities to India's history and culture, coupled with a selective focus on intolerant Muslim rulers, extending their often brutal conduct (like that of rulers from other religions, including Hindu) to the entire period of Muslim rule, and even to all Muslims. Such prejudices have slowly but steadily gained legitimacy and become part of mainstream opinion.

Noted historian Romila Thapar calls this an attempt to distort history and create false notions of "Indian culture". She says, "Hinduism did not constitute a single historically evolved religion. The sects within Hinduism developed independently. They came together in a kind of mosaic of distinct cults, deities and sects often as a response to special needs". It means that the efforts to homogenize and create a single Hindu community are based on a false argument that it existed from the ancient past.

The present Indian culture is a composite culture which has developed through a complex historical process as an admixture of several cultures. It was developed from the influences that came from different religious orders – Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, and religious influences coming from outside like Christianity and Islam. Thus, Indian society is composite in cultural terms and has evolved through synthesis and interaction among the various influences. There is, however, a tendency to deny

the rich legacy of the medieval period – a denial of history. Hindu nationalists describe it as the age of decadence and Muslim tyranny – a purely biased view. They largely ignore the reign of Emperor Akbar and the architectural splendour of this period.

This Rightwing attempt to falsify history extends to modern Indian history as well. Even the nationalist movement and its leaders are not spared. Some national leaders (Sardar Patel, Gandhi and Tilak) are also being claimed as Hindu leaders. It is just an effort to serve communal goals by denying the people of India their past. History, after all, is not about any particular religion; it is about the past of the people and needs to be treated as legacy.

However, such misleading interpretation and its repercussions in the past have proved to be disastrous. It is a major challenge to the liberal and largely accommodative Nehruvian model of secularism. Ashis Nandy too has criticized Hindu nationalism as a "construct" and a Hindu State as far from reality.

Conclusion

The real spirit of secularism in India is inclusiveness, religious pluralism and peaceful co-existence. However, religious tolerance – supposed to be the essential ingredient of Indian secularism – seems to be missing today from large sections of Indian society, and this has allowed the divisive forces to zealously dig away at the roots of secularism. Truly, the threat to secularism is a threat to Indian democracy. But, fortunately, there is a significant section still holding on resolutely to the view that secularism is the only path by which India can achieve peace, stability and democratic unity.

Although the Constitution lays down many secular provisions, for them to be effective, the spirit of secularism needs to be reflected in the way the Indian

masses live and think. Not just the State but the people too need to function in a secular way. The masses need to be educated about the different religions in the country and their basic principles, so that they are not misled by the power mongers. There is need for genuine debate and discussion in the democratic spirit so that mutual hostilities and suspicions can be dispelled. People who misinterpret religious scriptures must be firmly dealt with.

And lastly, Asghar Ali Engineer has rightly said that it is politics which has proved to be divisive, and not religion. Indeed, in a multi-religious society like India, politics need to be based on issues and not on identities, otherwise it will create mind-boggling dissensions and mindless violence.

Religious and Cultural Diversity

Religious and cultural diversity is a simple recognition of the fact that numerous distinct ethnic, religious or cultural groups co-exist within one nation. Arnold Toynbee defined "civilization as a pattern of interactions between challenges and responses. The challenges may come from different directions; say from environment or from social and cultural stresses." Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister, wrote in his book The Discovery of India that unity is not something imposed from outside but rather, "it was something deeper and within its fold, wildest tolerance of belief and custom was practised and every variety acknowledged and encouraged." It was Nehru who coined the phrase "unity in diversity" to describe India. Indeed, India's democratic and secular republic is "premised on a national belief in pluralism".

The subcontinent's long and diverse history has given it a unique eclectic culture. Its philosophy is the underlying pan-Indian philosophy. The diversity of Indian culture is not merely in its ethnic or racial composition, but it is reflected in every aspect of national life, including the vast inter-regional differences in geography and climate,

religion, custom and traditions, attitudes, languages, food habits, dress, art, music, theatre and so on. No two regions alike in these matters. In spite of the cultural and religious diversity, the people of the country are united and they have tremendous faith in Indian nation. They have also demonstrated solidarity whenever the threat came from outside.

In the words of MC Chagla, "Indian-ness and Indian ethos were brought about by the communication and intercourse between many races and many communities that have lived in this land for centuries." But "there is an Indian tradition, which overrides all the minor differences that may superficially seem to contradict the unity", he added. He believed that it is this that holds India together. `

Foreigners have been coming and settling in the Indian subcontinent for centuries, including Greeks and Sakas, Persians and Aryans, Kushans, Huns, Arabs, Turks, Mughals and Europeans. Many of these races have settled down here permanently. They brought their religion, culture and traditions with them. Judaism, Zoroastrian, Islam and Christianity came to India. The uninterrupted flow of foreigners for centuries has rendered the Indian scene complex and colourful. The process of assimilation and amalgamation spread over a long period of time.

India is a truly multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious society bound together by a shared value system where multiculturalism is an accepted norm that is promoted by the State to maintain peace and harmony. It encourages social cohesion by recognizing distinct groups within society and allowing those groups to celebrate and maintain their cultural or religious identities. Indeed, diversity has always been recognized as a source of India's strength that has helped in maintaining its unity and integrity.

India is the most religiously diverse country in the world

where over a billion people, belonging to different religions, live in harmony. Religion is central to the life of the people. It is often regarded as a model of harmonious religious and linguistic co-existence under a single State. India's age-old philosophy as expounded in Hindu scriptures is "sarva dharma samabhava", which means equal respect for all religions. This shows its tolerance towards other religions and it is also a fact that India has never been a mono-religious country. Christianity and Islam added more religious traditions to the existing traditions. There was a tradition of tolerance among religions in ancient and medieval India mainly because of Ashoka and Akbar's policy of religious tolerance. Both the kings attached great significance to religious life of India. Besides, the Sufi and Bhakti traditions in Islam and Hinduism were based on respect for other religions. The Sufi-Bhakti saints were extremely tolerant of other faiths. They never adopted sectarian attitudes and mostly kept away from politics or State affairs. The large majority, cutting across religious lines, was greatly influenced by these traditions and helped in developing India's composite culture.

In India, the followers of Hindu religion form the majority – they constitute more than 80 per cent of the population. However, they are divided in various castes and the religion is not monolithic. They have different religious and cultural traditions and customs in different regions, and speak different languages.

Many outsiders and invaders who came and adopted India as their home had also brought with them their culture and religion. The Adivasis and Dravidians are supposed to be original inhabitants of India. Aryans who came from Central Asia were the first settlers. They brought with them their culture and religious practices. In order to maintain peace and harmony, they were the first to adopt some of the local customs and traditions, and started developing a composite culture in India. Later, Sakyas, Huns and Greeks

also left their impressions on India.

With the rule of various Muslim dynasties in the Sultanate as well as the Mughal period, Islam started spreading in India. Turks, Tughlaks, Khiljis and Mughals have made significant contributions to Indian culture. The liberal Islamic tradition of Persia greatly influenced the people of this country. Muslim rulers introduced Persian as the court language in the country; this not only became popular among the elites, but also made significant impact on other Indian languages. The large majority, however, preferred to communicate in the local languages.

The Urdu language, which is considered as a symbol of composite culture, emerged in this period. It was born in the bazaar by the mixing of different communities like Turks, Mughals, Hindus, local Muslims and others. Basically, it's a mixture of local Indian dialects like Brijbhasha, Awadhi, Haryanvi, and other languages like Marathi, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and so on. Hindu festivals like Holi, Dussehra and Diwali alongwith Navroz were officially celebrated in the Mughal courts with great pomp and pageantry. The Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata were translated into Persian and Arabic.

However, communal or sectarian tensions emerged whenever the Muslim rulers tried to impose their religious agenda on the people. The problem was further compounded with the establishment of the British rule in India when the rulers adopted the policy of "divide and rule".

The colonial rulers used this strategy to gain control of the large territory of India by keeping its people divided along the lines of religion, language, race and caste. The policy was employed in British India as a means of preventing an uprising against the Raj. Partition of India was the logical culmination of this policy. The colonial rulers succeeded in maintaining their rule for almost two centuries over the Indian subcontinent.

In 1835, Thomas Macaulay articulated the goals of British colonial imperialism clearly: "I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and therefore, I propose that we replace the old and ancient education system, her culture, because if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native self-culture, and they will become what we want them to be, a truly dominted nation."

Economic and political competition between Hindus and Muslims has also contributed to sectarian tensions. The Hindu elite was quick to adjust to new realities and took to modern education and commerce and industries, whereas the Muslims under the influence of orthodox ulemas or clergy resisted the new secular education and were left far behind in commerce and industry. Initially, the Hindu and Muslim elites cooperated with each other, but the competitive nature of the political and economic structure, established by the British colonial rulers, drove a wedge between the two and sectarian tensions began to emerge.

The Indian National Congress in 1885 adopted a secular democratic agenda to re-establish the multi-religious nature of Indian society. Initially, both Hindus and Muslims responded positively to the Congress appeal and jointly fought for independence, but latter Muslims got divided and a section under the leadership of Muslim League demanded a separate homeland for Muslims. It is important to note that the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, an organization of Indian clerics or ulemas, had opposed Partition and the establishment of Pakistan. Even after Partition, the majority of Muslims remained in India mainly because of the peaceful co-existence of various

religious communities in the country for centuries. The other factor was the secular and democratic nature of the freedom movement led by Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and others. Indian diversity has always been recognized as a source of strength and it was reflected during the freedom movement when people belonging to different cultural, religious and regional backgrounds came together to oppose British rule. They worked together to decide joint actions, they went to jail together, and they found different ways to oppose the colonial rulers.

Communalism has played a key role in shaping the religious history of modern India. The movement for establishment of Pakistan brought division on religious lines, and since then, communal tensions and religion-based politics have become more prominent. Colonial rule ended with Partition of India along religious lines into two states – the Muslim-majority Dominion of Pakistan and the Hindu-majority Republic of India – accompanied by riots among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs that killed more than 5,00,000 people, and turned 12 million into refugees. This was one of the largest mass migrations in modern history. Even though there were anxieties about the future of Muslims in a Hindu-dominated society, a significant number of Muslims chose to stay in India. Thus, the newly Independent Indian government let by Nehru had to face the daunting challenge of ensuring equality for all religious communities living in India.

After the formation of the Indian republic, the leaders of the freedom movement decided that India would be a secular democratic polity and encourage multiculturalism in order to maintain unity and communal harmony. Beyond recognizing the fact of cultural diversity, this view also held that differences should be respected and publicly affirmed. This could be possible only in a democratic and secular set-up; therefore, Nehru gave a lot of emphasis on secularism. His concept of secularism was different from

European secularism. The Indian State would have no official religion, but the people of India would be free to follow any religion of their birth or adoption.

Thus India is politically secular, but its people remain religious. Since the time of freedom movement, the main contradiction was not between the religious and the secular, but between the secular and the communal. Even after Independence, the sectarian forces that had emerged during the British Raj did not die and they continue to fight for a share in power using their religions in their struggle for power. Secularism in India meant equal respect for all religions and cultures, and non-interference by religion in governmental affairs. In India, an overwhelming majority of people are religious but tolerant, and they respect other religions and are secular in the Indian context.

India's religious diversity extends to the highest levels of government. The Constitution of India declares the nation to be a secular republic that must uphold the right of citizens to freely worship and propagate any religion or faith. The Preamble to the Constitution proclaims India a "sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic". It mandates equal treatment and tolerance of all religions. India does not have an official State religion; it enshrines the right to practise, preach and propagate any religion. No religious instruction is imparted in government-supported schools. The Supreme Court of India has held that secularism is an integral tenet of the Constitution. The right to freedom of religion is a fundamental right of all Indian citizens.

The Constitution also suggests a uniform civil code for all citizen as a directive principle. However, this has not been implemented until now. It is believed that the Indian society is not yet prepared for it The Supreme Court has further held that the enactment of a uniform civil code all at once may be counterproductive to the unity of the

nation, and only a gradual progressive change should be brought about. Major religious communities continue to be governed by their own personal laws. Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Zoroastrian and Jewish communities have their own personal laws. For legal purposes Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs are classified as Hindus and are subject to Hindu personal law.

The Constitution guarantees that all citizens of India, irrespective of their religion, caste or gender are equal and have the right to vote. All enjoy the same rights without discrimination on any ground. All those who reside in India are free to profess, practise and propagate the religion of one's choice. Even conversion to the religion of one's choice is a fundamental right.

The Constitution of India has guaranteed different rights under Articles 29 and 30 to the minorities. These are mostly cultural and educational rights. According to Article 29, any religious and linguistic minority in India has the right to maintain or protect its distinct language, script or culture, and they have the right to conserve these through their institutions. Article 30 guarantees that no citizen shall be denied admission in any educational institution maintained by the State, or denied aid out of State funds on the grounds of religion, race, caste or language. Minorities also have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice and they are entitled to get financial assistance from the government in much the same way as the educational institutions run by the majority community. The spirit behind these provisions is to give minority children the best education to help them compete with the majority community. In fact, some of the best educational institutions in India are run by the minority Christian community. These rights were granted to minorities so that they would not feel isolated and separated. It is part of the true spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity. The minorities are guaranteed these rights in order to ensure their safety and protect their religion,

culture and language, so that they remain distinguished from the majority community even as they make progress and contribute freely to Indian society.

Besides religious and linguistic diversity, there are also issues concerning Dalit and tribal communities – the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SCs & STs) – that have been historically denied access to social and economic goods. Respecting the diversity embodied in their way of life, the Constitution identifies some areas where tribal communities have lived with some form of "protective segregation" as "excluded" or "partially excluded" regions. In these identified areas, tribal communities have been given special rights to govern themselves in accordance with their customary laws and distinct social and religious practices. At the same time, to ensure that these communities are not entirely segregated from the Indian polity, separate representation was provided to members of SCs and STs. This was intended to give voice to these communities without undermining their cultural distinctiveness.

India is a land of different ethnic, religious, caste and linguistic minorities affiliated to distinct belief systems, sub-cultures and regions. Integration of these diverse communities has been a central preoccupation of the Indian government since Independence. In order to improve the condition of minorities, besides the maximum constitutionally guaranteed rights, the government has also set up various institutions and commissions to monitor their progress.

No doubt, with the grant of such rights, the condition of minorities has certainly improved drastically since 1947, but they still face discrimination, violence and atrocities. These problems are not confined to minorities alone; caste conflicts within the Hindu majority have also not been resolved, and atrocities against Dalits by upper caste Hindus are also quite common.

Sectarian violence have taken place many times in the country, whether it was the Gujarat genocide of 2002 where more than 2,000 Muslims were killed, or the mass killing of Sikhs in Delhi following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. In recent times, communal riots have also taken place in many towns where minorities form a substantial part of the populace. Several churches were also burnt down by the Hindu fanatics who consider Islam and Christianity as foreign religions, whose followers have colonized the country for thousands of years. The fanatics, therefore, call upon Hindus to get rid of all the "foreign" cultures in India and establish a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation-State).

Hindu nationalist forces, represented by RSS, believe that the secularists have introduced many provisions in the Constitution to appease the minorities and for using them as their vote-bank. They want personal laws for the various minorities to be replaced with a common civil code, and demand the repeal of the "freedom of conversion" clause in the Constitution. RSS accuses Congress and other secular parties of indulging in "pseudo-secularism" – that is, these parties allegedly pamper Muslims because they are the biggest minority community. RSS and its allied organizations are also accused of violence against minorities and were banned by the government several times in the past.

The rise of militant Islam in the region, frequent Islamic militant strikes in several cities, and the growing caste conflicts in India have helped the forces of Hindutva to gain support among the majority community. But they have not been able to get enough support to form the central government independently. The BJP-led NDA government backed by RSS failed to implement its anti-minority agenda because of the opposition by allied partners in the government. And post the Gujarat genocide, this coalition was voted out of power not because of the minority community's vote, but because it lost considerable support among the majority community.

Dalits, Adivasis and religious minorities also face problems due to caste and communal feeling and biases within a section of the bureaucracy. As a result, several government schemes meant for the economic and social development of minorities are not implemented properly.

India is the most culturally, linguistically and diverse geographical entity in the world, with a population of over one billon, including Hindus (80.5 per cent), Muslims (13 per cent), Christians (2.3 per cent), Sikhs (2.1 per cent), Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, Baha'is, Ahmadias, Jews and others. Religious diversity is coupled with enormous linguistic and cultural diversity. State boundaries in India are mostly drawn on linguistic lines. Indians are generally tolerant of other religions and have a secular outlook. Inter-community clashes have never found widespread support in the social mainstream, and it is generally perceived that the causes of religious conflict are political rather than ideological in nature.

Over the years, India has accommodated different kinds of diversity, which is best summarized by Gurpreet Mahajan of Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, as follows: "Religious communities enjoy extensive cultural rights but no separate political rights. Identified linguistic communities enjoy cultural rights as well political rights. In many regions they form the federal units which have some degree of political autonomy to govern themselves. Tribal communities, particularly in the hill regions, have special cultural rights, political rights of separate representation and the right to govern themselves. There is a lingering mistrust, or liberal anxiety, about granting political rights to religious communities. In any case, most religious communities are scattered through the country. Linguistic communities and tribal populations, particularly when they are concentrated in a given region, enjoy some political rights. These rights have promoted diversity while simultaneously deepening democracy."

The minority communities also suffer because they are stigmatized and represented negatively in the cultural history of the nation. Hence, policies seeking to promote cultural diversity need to be accompanied by a positive acknowledgement of the contribution of minority communities. The commitment to cultural diversity has been challenged very fundamentally by frequent communal violence, where members of one community are systematically targeted by another. Even though incidents of communal violence have decreased over the years, they remain a permanent reminder of the vulnerability of the minority communities. Communal violence not only vitiates existing bonds, but also generates a feeling of mistrust among communities. The majority community sees the accommodation of diversity as "appeasement" of the minority and the minority remains vulnerable, unable to contribute significantly to the public and political life of the polity.

Peaceful co-existence of different communities, therefore, requires both a vigorous defence of the basic rights of individuals as citizens, and an institutional and normative framework that acknowledges and values diverse ways of life.

Violence and Peace

Towards the end of the 20th century the problem of violence posed a tremendous challenge before us. It is surprising that we have addressed it so casually. We have not made much progress in learning how to conduct our conflicts more peacefully. Instead, we have increased the lethality of our combat. The news, every day, is replete with violence and war, bookstore shelves are full of books on war, and it seems as if humanity is at war with itself.

The reason, perhaps, is the fact that all human beings do not think alike or feel alike. They have, therefore, no escape from having to encounter differences. Differences can lead to intolerance, intolerance can lead to confrontation, and hostile confrontation can lead to conflict.

Thus conflict is not an instant occurrence, meaning something that occurs without warning, without a build-up or without gestation. The conflicts originate from differences in perceptions about likes or dislikes, truth or justice, rights or interests. These perceptions arise, or are formulated, in the mind; the desire or determination to establish the ascendancy of, or to secure the acceptance of, one's perception also arises in the mind. It is the mind that illumines or chooses or fashions the means by which one decides to assert one's perception. It is for these reasons that

we say conflicts originate in the minds of human beings. If it is in the minds that they originate, and it is the human mind that chooses and fashions the means that are employed in conflicts, it is in the human mind that one has to grapple with problems relating to the precipitation of conflicts.

Conflict can be defined as the existence of non-compatibility or disagreements between two actors (individuals, groups, organizations or nations) in their interaction over the issues of interests, values, beliefs, emotions, goals, space, positions, scarce resources etc. According to Fink, conflict is defined as any "situation or process in which two or more social entities are linked by at least one form of antagonistic psychological relation or at least one form of antagonistic interaction".

Psychological antagonisms include such things as incompatible goals, mutually exclusive interests, emotional hostility, factual or value dissensions, and traditional enmities; while antagonistic interactions "range from the most direct, violent and unregulated struggle to the most subtle, indirect and highly regulated forms of mutual interference".

Lewis Coser defines conflict as "A struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources, a struggle in which the aims of opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals". Galtung describes it as "Some type of incompatibility, one goal standing in the way of another", and says, "Conflict may take two forms. In the less crystallized form it is an incompatibility between the objective interests of parties in a society. In its crystallized form it is an incompatibility between the subjective goals of action in a society." He explains his theory of conflict through the triangle model.

In a way, we can say that conflicts occur when people (or other parties) perceive that, as a consequence of a disagreement, there is a threat to their needs, interests or

concerns. Although conflict is a normal part of organizational life, providing numerous opportunities for growth through improved understanding and insight, there is a tendency to view conflict as a negative experience caused by abnormally difficult circumstances. Disputants tend to perceive limited options and finite resources available in seeking solutions, rather than multiple possibilities that may exist 'outside the box' in which we are problem-solving.

A few points are worth reiterating before moving ahead:

- A conflict is more than a mere disagreement – it is a situation in which people perceive a threat (physical, emotional, power, status etc.) to their well-being. As such, it is a meaningful experience in people's lives, not to be shrugged off by a mere, "it will pass…"

- Participants in conflicts tend to respond on the basis of their perceptions of the situation, rather than an objective review of it. As such, people filter their perceptions (and reactions) through their values, culture, beliefs, information, experience, gender and other variables. Conflict responses are both filled with ideas and feelings that can be very strong and powerful guides to our sense of possible solutions.

- As in any problem, conflicts contain substantive, procedural and psychological dimensions to be negotiated. In order to best understand the threat perceived by those engaged in a conflict, we need to consider all of these dimensions.

- Conflicts are normal experiences within the work environment. They are also, to a large degree, predictable and expectable situations that naturally arise as we go about managing complex and stressful projects in which we are significantly invested. As such, if we develop procedures for identifying conflicts likely to arise, as well as systems through which we can constructively manage conflicts, we may be able to discover new opportunities to transform conflict into a productive learning experience.

- Creative problem-solving strategies are essential in positive approaches to conflict management. We need to transform the situation from one in which it is 'my way or the highway' into one in which we entertain new possibilities that have been otherwise elusive.

Further, cooperation and conflict are two modes of human behaviour. While the cooperative behaviour promotes, by and large, social unity, cohesiveness and peace, the conflicting behaviour, by and large, disrupts normalcy and development. If conflict is not properly handled, it may even lead from low-intensity to high-intensity and then large-scale war, threatening human survival itself. At times, the cooperative behaviour of a particular society or community may affect the peaceful life of others in the society. For example, the extreme form of nationalism of a particular country affects its relations with its neighbouring countries. In the same way, the conflicting behaviour of a given society may develop group cohesiveness and strong identity – for instance, at the time of war and emergency, people generally show national solidarity.

Attitudes and behaviour are usually assumed to be negative when they are related to conflict. These negative manifestations can take the form of sudden bursts of hatred or direct violence. But they can also take the more institutionalized form of generalized social distance and structural violence.

Generally speaking, the less crystallized the conflict, the more structural the negative manifestations (social distance and structural violence). It is when the conflict crystallizes the non-structural that the bursts of hatred and direct violence occur. It is usually in this stage that escalation takes place and conflict generally attracts more attention. Galtung sees conflict as the expression of objective, structural dichotomy (asymmetrical relationship/interaction between the top dog and the underdog).

Based on the different expressions and terminologies used to describe the term conflict, conflict theories are conceptualized and classified into the following:

1. Individual characteristics theories look at social conflict in terms of the nature of the individuals who are involved.

2. Social process theories look at conflict as a process of social interaction between individuals or groups and seek to make generalizations about the nature of this process.

3 Social structural theories look at conflict as a product of the way society is formed and organized.

4. Formal theories seek to understand human social conflicts in logical and mathematical terms (conflict as drama and game) – for instance, see Schellenberg's work.

Conflict is further classified into destructive and constructive conflicts on the basis of the conflict process. Deutsch says, "A conflict clearly has destructive consequences if its participants are dissatisfied with the outcomes and they feel they have lost as a result of the conflict. Similarly, a conflict has productive consequences if the participants are satisfied with their outcomes and feel that they have not lost as a result of the conflict."

Destructive conflicts tend to escalate a cyclic conflict and violence, and may develop a conflict helix. However, Deutsch's explains that any conflict can be transformed into the productive type, if it is dealt with in a cooperative rather than a competitive way. Cooperative behaviour springs up when the conflicting parties understand the nature and dynamics of conflict – it dispels the misconception of conflict as complex, violent, destructive, threatening, humiliating and dangerous, and develops the knowledge, skills and the ways of dealing with conflicts.

Dimensions of Violence
Since the second half of the 20th century, there has been too much violence all around. This violence has many

dimensions. There are wars between nations for territory (often for the control of natural resources), wars within nations (civil wars), wars induced by the Military Industrial Complex (the root cause for most of the large-scale violence around the world), violence instigated by religious groups, hostage threats, violence against women and children, violence against minorities, violence against Dalits, etc.

Continuing Wars between Nations: The Israel-Arab War

The longest war in contemporary world history is perhaps the Israel-Arab war. It started with the creation of Israel in 1948, and has continued all along on a small scale for long durations and on a large scale for small durations. Conflict was inherent in the creation of Israel, because its territory was carved out of Palestine by the Western nations, especially the US and the UK. Major wars between Israel and its neighbouring Arab nations broke out in the years 1948-49, 1956 and 1967. Violence and skirmishes have continued non-stop. Though this conflict could also be constructed as one between Jews and Muslims, religion is not the issue. The main issue is that of the territory that was arbitrarily allotted for the creation of Israel in 1948. In the subsequent wars, Israel has occupied more territory from the neighbouring Arab nations and refuses to return those areas. The message of peace and non-violence has no impact here.

Wars in the African Continent

Wars seem to be a permanent feature in the African continent. There were wars for national liberation in Kenya, Algeria, Congo and many other African nations till the ninth decade of the 20th century. South Africa had its own internal violence generated by its apartheid policy. One by one the African nations became free in the last 50 years or so. South Africa also gave up its racial segregation and the non-white people are now free citizens.

The surprising and also depressing feature is that in almost every African nation which got freedom from its colonial master, an internal civil war broke out between different tribes or sects, or even different parties or personalities. Examples are those of Belgian Congo (now Zaire Republic), Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Chad, Uganda, Central African Republic etc. It is unbelievable that the people in these countries were mad and war-mongering and started fighting with each other (within each country) as soon as the colonial master left. After all, we have a classic example right in our nation. Freedom at midnight on 15 August 1947 was followed by bloodshed. That was the gift from our British masters. By their divide and rule policy they had ensured that the Hindus and the Muslims, who in normal times live in peace like friends and brothers, were induced to get at each other's throats. The same happened in all the African nations. If anything, what happened in these African nations was much worse than what happened in the Indian subcontinent. The colonial masters of the African nations wanted to control the natural resources - gold, copper, plutonium, diamond, petroleum etc. – and so they fomented conflicts resulting in huge loss of life and property. These conflicts also ensured that those nations remain dependent and impoverished

Violence against Women and Children

Women, throughout the world, are most vulnerable to violence. Media all over the world is full of news of violence against women and children. No country in the world, developed or developing, is free from this menace. Apart from rape, women are subjected to beatings by their husbands or other male relatives. Similarly, children are battered by either or both of the parents, or step-mothers, uncles, aunts, siblings etc. While rape cases get a wider coverage in the media, battering of women and children within their homes is ignored and given a go-by as a domestic matter. Of course, in many countries such

offences are punishable by law; but only a small percentage of cases get reported.

Violence against Dalits

This problem is peculiar to India. It was Mahatma Gandhi who first highlighted this problem and offered a solution. He called these outcaste groups Harijans – a term that the present generation of this oppressed group does not seem to like. Gandhiji often chose to live with these families. The Constitution of Independent India provides safeguards and reservation quotas for Dalits in education and government services. This privilege is often contested and disliked by other caste groups. Violence on people belonging to a different caste is shameful.

Violence by Fundamentalist Groups

Violence by fundamentalist groups has assumed number one position among violent conflicts all over the world. Though only some minority Muslim groups like the Wahhabis had been raising war cries, they got organized, armed and trained by the CIA in Afghanistan in the 1980s during their war with the Russians. The Russians were thrown out of Afghanistan. The Taliban took over. Under the leadership of Bin Laden major militant Islamic group emerged that called itself Al-Qaeda. It is this group that has been the major cause of violence in Russia, Britain, India, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Egypt, the Philippines, Indonesia and other countries. The climax was reached on the 11 September 2001 when New York and Washington were attacked.

When other nations, including India, were the victims of Al-Qaeda's attacks, they had to fend for themselves. But when America was attacked, suddenly it became an international issue. America declared war on Afghanistan. The war had no UN sanction. Yet almost all nations extended their support or acquiescence. The exceptions were Iraq, Libya, Palestine and Cuba. This exception does not mean or count for much since the rest of the world was on the American side.

A government friendly to the US was installed in Afghanistan, and Bin Laden was killed much later by US troopers in Pakistan. But Taliban and Al-Qaeda have not been subjugated and still pose a major danger to all peace-loving nations.

Communal Violence

There is a general recognition of the growing assault on democratic space across the world, whether through war or fundamentalism, as a central feature of world politics at the present stage of history. Religious fundamentalism is a growing trend; the case of Odisha (India) and Gojra (Pakistan) are just the visible part of the iceberg of what is occurring on a global scale. As cultural boundaries become looser and globalization extends pluralistic societies, in-group identities become sharper and their attempts to preserve mono-cultural societies, more violent.

Secularism and democracy have always been the founding principles of India. Lately, however, they are threatened by some Hindu fundamentalists. Their intent is to create a Hindu State; hence they pursue this goal by executing explosive hate campaigns and misguiding the poorest layers of society through slogans like "If you do not protect Hindu religion, you are not Hindu".

The attacks against the Christian and Muslim Dalits in Odisha and Gujarat were indeed unprecedented – one of the most violent caste and religious persecution in the post-Independence history of India. Reportedly, more than 100 Christians and 2,000 Muslims were killed during the attacks, and those who survived, fearful of their lives, were forced to run into the forest and other states to reach a safer place. Today, fear has not vanished from the hearts and minds of the victims who, displaced in camps, are still living a dreadful experience. The conditions for a return to their villages provide no space for negotiation: convert to Hinduism, dress the traditional Hindu way, and perform Hindu rituals.

Persecution of Dalits is a case of two-fold discrimination – caste-based and religious. It did not start in 2002; there were attacks in 1989, 1992 and 1997. Each time, the pre-emptive action of the central government failed, leaving the victims isolated and unaided. But the central government is not the only one responsible for the isolation of Dalits. Even humanitarian agencies have not done much in this regard.

In neighbouring Pakistan, violence against Christians, Hindus and Ahmadis has reached the same level of atrocity. In Gojra, on 1 August 2009 seven Christians, including women and children, were burnt alive, several dozen persons injured, and nearly 180 houses looted and destroyed. These were not isolated events. "This is a type of violence we were not used to. After Pakistan the situation is dramatically worsening. There are several cases that could explode anytime," said Peter Jacob, Executive Secretary, Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan.

Blasphemy laws, meant to protect the Prophet Mohammed and the Holy Koran, are the key detonator. The text of the blasphemy laws is religion-specific and highly discriminatory. Pakistan is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country (4 per cent of their population represents religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis, Bahá'ís, Ahmadis and Kalash) and if laws that protect only a specific religion are established, the result will most probably be more abuse. In addition, including such provisions in the Penal Code will mostly affect the weakest categories of society (children, the mentally challenged, non-believers). These laws leave dangerous room for private justice as the accusation of blasphemy can be made by anyone without any subsequent investigation, and hold a subversive potential that cannot be ignored. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief has observed that the punishments accompanying blasphemy laws are disproportionate to the

offence. Some Islamic scholars have also condemned the existence and application of these laws.

The problem of religious minorities, however, is wider and more complex than the simple consideration of the blasphemy laws as it is inherent in the system. Without any link to the rule of law, the system guarantees special administrative privileges to a part of the society.

Mixing religion and politics is not a sign of a healthy democracy, and the civil society calls for a ban of all extremism and extreme ideologies. Taking a purely administrative approach to religious discrimination does not solve the problem and will not stop fundamentalists from pursuing their campaigns of hate.

States should promote a climate of dialogue and integration by ensuring the prosecution of those who pursue these campaigns of hate against minorities. Moreover, a strong and independent judiciary has to give just recognition to the victims, as peace-building starts only where justice prevails.

On 16 September 2009, on the occasion of the 12th session of the Human Rights Council, Franciscans International held a side event on "Communal Violence and its Effects on Religious Minorities". The event provoked an interesting debate on the growing and worrisome trend of religious fundamentalism, and confirmed the reluctance of the international community to link religion to human rights.

Fundamentalism is growing, shrinking democracy all over the world due to the clash between static and monolithic identities and a multi-polar and dynamic culture. Our role as civil society is that of promoting dialogue and integration, as well as calling for the end of impunity since peace cannot be achieved without justice. To paraphrase the words of Martin Luther King Jr., the danger lies "not

(in) the words of our enemies but (in) the silence of our friends".

Religion and Conflict

A casual glance at world affairs would suggest that religion is at the core of much of the strife around the globe. Often, religion is a contentious issue. Where eternal salvation is at stake, compromise can be difficult or even sinful. Religion is also important because, as a central part of many individuals' identity, any threat to one's beliefs is a threat to one's very being. This is a primary motivation for ethno-religious nationalists.

However, the relationship between religion and conflict is, in fact, a complex one. Religiously motivated peace-builders have played important roles in addressing many conflicts around the world.

Religious extremists can contribute to conflict escalation. They see radical measures as necessary to fulfilling God's wishes. Fundamentalists of any religion tend to take a Manichean view of the world. If the world is a struggle between good and evil, it is hard to justify compromising with the devil. Any sign of moderation can be decried as selling out, more importantly, of abandoning God's will.

Religious revivalism is powerful in that it can provide a sense of pride and purpose, but in places such as Sri Lanka and Sudan, it has produced a strong form of illiberal nationalism that has periodically led to intolerance and discrimination. Some religious groups, such as the Kach and Kahane Chai parties in Israel or Egypt's Islamic Jihad, consider violence to be a "duty". Those who call for violence see themselves as divinely directed, who must, therefore, eliminate all the obstacles on their path.

Religious fundamentalists are primarily driven by displeasure with modernity. Motivated by the

marginalization of religion in modern society, they act to restore faith to a central place. There is a need for purification of the religion in the eyes of fundamentalists. Recently, cultural globalization has in part become shorthand for this trend. The spread of Western materialism is often blamed for the rise in gambling, alcoholism, and loose morals in general. Al-Qaeda, for example, claims it is motivated by opposition to neo-imperialism as well as the presence of foreign military forces in the Muslim holy lands. The liberal underpinning of Western culture is also threatening to tradition by prioritizing the individual over the group, and by questioning the appropriate role for women in society. Of course, the growth of the New Christian Right in the US indicates that Westerners too feel that modern society is missing something.

Religious nationalists too can produce extremist sentiment. Religious nationalists tend to view their religious traditions as so closely tied to their nation or their land that any threat to one of these becomes a threat to one's existence. Therefore, religious nationalists respond to threats to their religion by seeking a political entity in which their faith is privileged at the expense of others. In these contexts, it is also likely that religious symbols would come to be used to forward ethnic or nationalist causes. This has been the case for Catholics in Northern Ireland, the Serbian Orthodox Church in Milosevic's Yugoslavia, and Hindu nationalists in India.

Popular portrayals of religion often reinforce the view of religion being conflictual. The global media has paid significant attention to religion and conflict, but not the ways in which religion has played a powerful peace-making role. This excessive emphasis on the negative side of religion and the actions of religious extremists generates interfaith fear and hostility. What is more, media portrayals of religious conflict have tended to do so in such a way so as to confuse rather than inform. It does so by

misunderstanding goals and alliances between groups, thereby exacerbating polarization. The tendency to carelessly throw around the terms 'fundamentalist' and 'extremist' masks significant differences in beliefs, goals and tactics.

Religion and Latent Conflict

In virtually every heterogeneous society, religious difference serves as a source of potential conflict. Because individuals are often ignorant of other faiths, there is some potential tension, but it does not necessarily mean the breaking out of conflict. Religion is not necessarily conflictual but, as with ethnicity or race, religion serves as a way to distinguish one's self and one's group from the Other. Often the group with less power – political or economic – is more aware of the tension than the privileged. When the privileged group is a minority, however, such as the Jews historically were in much of Europe, they are often well-aware of the latent conflict. There are steps that can be taken at this stage to ward off conflict. Interfaith dialogue can increase understanding and intermediaries may help facilitate this.

Religion and Conflict Escalation

With religion a latent source of conflict, a triggering event can cause the conflict to escalate. At this stage in a conflict, grievances, goals and methods often change in such a way so as to make the conflict more difficult to resolve. The momentum of the conflict may give extremists the upper hand. In a crisis, group members may see extremists as those that can produce what appear to be gains, at least in the short term. In such situations, group identities are even more firmly shaped in relation to the other group, thereby reinforcing the message of extremists that one's religion is threatened by another faith that is diametrically opposed. Often historic grievances are recast as being the responsibility of the current enemy. Because at this stage tactics often come detached from goals, radical interpretations are

increasingly favoured. Once martyrs have been sacrificed, it becomes increasingly difficult to compromise because their lives will seem to have been lost in vain.

What is to be Done

In the eyes of many, religion is inherently conflictual, but this is not necessarily so. Therefore, in part, the solution is to promote a heightened awareness of the positive peace-building and reconciliatory role religion has played in many conflict situations. More generally, fighting ignorance can go a long way. Interfaith dialogue would be beneficial at all levels of religious hierarchy and across all segments of religious communities. Where silence and misunderstanding are all too common, learning about other religions would be a powerful step forward. Being educated about other religions does not mean conversion, rather it may facilitate understanding and respect for other faiths. Communicating in a spirit of humility and engaging in self-criticism would also be helpful.

It is hard to dispute that communalism, particularly in its most horrifying manifestation of Hindu-Muslim riots, poses the gravest threat to the cohesiveness and stability of the society and State in India. The social, economic and human costs of communal violence are enormous and, in fact, incalculable.

Communal Violence in India

Sixty-two years after our Independence was won on the basis of the ideals of secular democracy, we see more and more communal violence, and the minorities feel increasingly insecure and deprived of their right to a honourable and dignified existence. In fact, leaders of our freedom struggle like Gandhi, Nehru and Abdul Kalam Azad had expected that with the passage of time communal rancour would be forgotten and all citizens, as propounded in our Constitution, would be able to lead an honourable, secure life, enjoying all the fundamental rights.

But not only has this goal not been realized, it is receding ever further.

Religion plays a vital role in India's way of life. Religious laws govern the people's clothing, food, marriage and even occupations. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis are the major religious communities of India. Religion as an element of personal belief remains the biggest force in India. The trouble arises when personal faith is converted into communal antagonism. Religion comes into the fray because it is a part of the social order in which men live, and cannot be disassociated from the modes of thought that characterize a society. While religion as such has not been responsible for the origin and growth of communalism, religiosity – deep emotional commitment to matters of religion – has been a major contributing factor by imparting passion and intensity at the popular plane.

Religious tolerance in India finds expression in the definition of the nation as a secular State, within which the government since Independence has officially remained separate from any one religion, allowing all forms of belief equal status before the law. Although India has been committed to what is referred to as "unity in diversity", there have been frequent clashes between the different linguistic, regional and religious groups in the country. Of these conflicts, the relationship between Hindus and Muslims has been particularly salient.

Hindu-Muslim Communal Violence in India: Historical Perspective

The roots of communal disharmony and violence between Hindus and Muslims in India go back to the history of several centuries. Historical analysis of Hindu-Muslim communal conflict, its causes and preconditions, has been highly contentious in character. Contemporary historians of India do not even agree that there were Hindu or Muslim communal identities before the 19th century, or that Hindu-Muslim conflicts were endemic. Historians like

Sarkar view Hindu-Muslim conflict as an essentially modern phenomenon; indeed, communal riots do seem to have been significantly rare till the 1880s.

Others argue that there is more continuity between the past and the present, extending back to the early 18th century, and in some arguments, to the earlier period of Mughal rule. In this view, inter-religious strife and riots that resemble contemporary Hindu-Muslim conflict were present, even endemic, in pre-modern times. Victimization of one religious community by the other started with the sectarian suppression initiated by those who invaded India.

When the British established their dominance in India through the East India Company, they initially adopted the policy of patronizing Hindus, but after the First War of Independence in 1857 in which Hindus and Muslims fought shoulder to shoulder, the colonizers adopted the policy of divide and rule – fostering communal tensions for keeping intact their hegemony. Relations between Hindus and Muslims were strained further when power politics came into play during the freedom struggle. Thus, though antagonism between Hindus and Muslims is an old issue, Hindu-Muslim communalism in India can be described as a legacy of British rule during the freedom struggle.

According to Bipan Chandra, Congress from its very inception adopted a policy of "unity from the top" – the effort was to win over the middle-class and upper class Muslims who were accepted as leaders of the Muslim community, leaving it to them to draw the Muslim masses into the movement, instead of making a direct appeal to the anti-imperialist sentiments of both the Hindu and the Muslim masses. This approach could not promote Hindu-Muslim cooperation in fighting imperialism. During the Khilafat movement launched by the Muslim League against British interference, Congress only extended its support to this struggle. All the serious efforts between 1918 and 1922 at bringing about Hindu-Muslim unity were in the nature

of negotiations among the top leaders of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities, on the one hand, and Congress, on the other.

Often, Congress acted as an intermediary among the different communal leaders instead of acting as an active organizer of the forces of secular nationalism. There was thus an implicit acceptance within the early nationalist leadership that Hindus and Muslims were distinct communities which shared only the political and economic concerns, but not the religious, social and cultural practices. This is how the seeds of communalism were sown in the first and second quarters of the 20th century. It was only after 1942 that the Muslim League emerged as a strong political party and claimed the right to speak for all Muslims. They described Congress as a "Hindu" organization – a claim that the British supported. At the same time, Congress could not purge its ranks of communal elements

The slogan of Pakistan was first articulated by the Muslim League in Lahore in 1940. Different sections of the Muslim population had different perceptions of Pakistan. For the Muslim peasant, it meant freedom from the exploitation of the Hindu zamindar; for the Muslim business class, it meant freedom from a well-established Hindu business network; and for the Muslim intelligentsia, it meant better employment opportunities.

Later, when the Congress leaders accepted Partition in 1946, it resulted in 1947 in the displacement of millions of Hindus and Muslims amid bloodshed and carnage. Both nations became Independent, yet more bloodshed followed Partition as one of the largest population transfers in history occurred, with many Muslims leaving India to reside in Pakistan even as Hindus moved to India.

Communal violence had come to be institutionalized in the State structures during British rule to weaken the unity and

resistance of the people, and to be used as a pretext to further attack them and cause divisions. This communal nature of the institutions of State did not change with the transfer of power in 1947, which itself was done in the midst of communal carnage.

The birth of Pakistan in 1947 did not, however, settle Hindu-Muslim differences or end conflicts. On the contrary, all the old problems not only remained intact, but also became more complex – now they involved more than simply a difference in values. Indeed, violence and communal strife have defined the relationship between Muslims and Hindus since Partition.

Communal riots in India have mostly been between Hindus and Muslims, but they have occasionally involved other minority communities as well. Even before Independence, there were serious communal riots in Varanasi (1809), Lahore and Delhi (1825), Kolkata and Dhaka (1926), Bareilly (1871), Ahamadabad and Mumbai (1941), and of course, the horrendous countrywide riots of 1946-47.

Communal Riots: 1947-2002

Partition in 1947 led to widespread violence, resulting in the death or displacement of millions of people. Since then, communal riots have occurred every year, with varying degrees of severity. The occurrence of communal violence in the post-Independence period can be divided into five phases: 1951-60, 1961-70, 1971-80, 1981-93 and 1994-2002. The period immediately after Partition saw eruption of communal violence between Hindus and Muslims on an unprecedented scale resulting in massacre of more than half a million people. This was the direct result of Partition and led to the displacement of population on a massive scale. This Partition violence continued right up to 1950.

The period between 1951 and 1960 was relatively calm. One finds very few instances of communal violence during this

period. Muslims in India were terrified by the Partition riots and were keeping a low-key existence. This non-assertiveness on the part of Muslims was important in maintaining communal peace. Communal riots again broke out in Madhya Pradesh (Jabalpur) in 1961 – the first major riots between Hindus and Muslims after Partition.

By then the Muslims had regained their confidence in Indian democracy and were asserting themselves for their rights. The process of democratization had made them more assertive, but that, ironically, led to the beginning of communal violence on a major scale in post-Independence India. The Jabalpur riots was followed by a series of riots in the eastern parts of India – Jamshedpur, Rourkela, Ranchi and several other places. Most of these riots were instigated by the tales of woes of Hindu refugees from Eastern Pakistan. Some riots also took place due to the 1965 Indo-Pak war.

Towards the end of the 1960s, some major riots in western India took place due to basic changes in Indian politics. Indira Gandhi had succeeded in sidelining the big political bosses in the Congress party and consolidated her position as the supreme Congress leader besides being prime minister. This led to a split in the Congress party. Those opposed to her regrouped alongwith other opposition parties and tried to weaken her position by instigating communal violence. Thus Gujarat witnessed major communal riots in 1969. Again, Bhivandi-Jalgaon in Maharashtra saw eruption of communal violence in 1970, mainly instigated by the Shiv Sena, which had emerged as mjor political force that was trying to consolidate its position in Maharashtra politics.

The period 1971-77 was again relatively peaceful. This was firstly due to India's involvement in the liberation of Baangladesh, and then because the nation's attention was focused on Jaya Prakash Narayan's movement against corruption. As a result of this movement, Mrs Gandhi

imposed Emergency in 1975, which lasted up to 1977. Because of these developments, communal clashes subsided during this period. Moreover, during Emergency those responsible for instigating communal violence were in jail.

However, a fresh bout of communal violence broke out from 1978 to 1980, which ended with the cataclysmic Moradabad riot in which more than a thousand persons perished. Most of these riots, for instance, the ones in Jamshedpur, Aligarh and Benares (1978-79) were instigated by RSS to assert its existence, at that time threatened by the merger of the Jan Sangh in the newly formed Janata Party. The dual membership controversy led to these riots.

The decade beginning with 1981 witnessed the maximum number of communal riots, triggered either by political controversy or economic competition. At the heart of the present-day dispute is the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. On 6 December 1992, this 16th-century mosque was demolished by a mob mobilized during the preceding months as part of a movement involving Rightwing political parties, religious groups and cultural organizations, including the BJP, RSS, VHP and Shiv Sena. These Rightwing forces had called for the construction of a temple on the site of the mosque – they saw this as an integral move in their struggle for Hindu Rule (a Hindu Rashtra that enforces Hindutva values, based on a so-called Hindu way of life). A mob of over 1,50,000 kar sevaks (voluntary workers) converged on Ayodhya, where they attacked and tore down the three-domed mosque (Human Rights Watch, 1996).

Interestingly, the number of major communal riots went down considerably for nearly a decade post the Babri Masjid demolition. Only three major riots took place in this period: Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu (1997), Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh (March 2001) and Malegaon, Maharashtra (October 2001). However, the post-Babri period also saw the growth of communal terrorism and the spread of the

communal virus to the southern part of India.

In 2002, however, communal violence in India reached an unprecedented level with the genocide of Muslims in Gujarat. Between 28 February and 2 March 2002, a three-day killing spree by Hindus – sought to be explained away by rank Hindu communalists as "spontaneous retaliation" for the Godhra carnage on 27 February in which kar sevaks were burnt to death – left hundreds of Muslims dead, and tens of thousands homeless and dispossessed, marking the country's worst religious bloodshed in a decade. Looting and burning of Muslim homes, shops, restaurants and places of worship was also widespread. Tragically consistent with the long-standing patterns of attack on minorities and the previous episodes of large-scale communal violence in India, in Gujarat too, scores of Muslim girls and women were brutally raped before being mutilated and burnt to death. According to official records, since 27 February 2002, more than 850 people have been killed in communal violence in Gujarat, most of them Muslims. Unofficial estimates peg the death toll at 2,000 (Human Rights Watch 2002).

In post-Independence India, the majority of riots have started as clash between the two communities on issues related to religion – desecration of religious places, insult of religious identities, and rumours related to such things. Although the rise and growth of Hindu and Muslim fundamentalist outfits has indeed fanned the fires of communal violence, the dynamics of these group clashes between Hindus and Muslims should not be sought in religion or caste, but in other material factors like distribution of economic and political power and resources. In fact, the creation of Pakistan itself was basically motivated not by Islam or Islamic teaching, but by the political dynamics of the time.

How to Establish Peace

India has been a multi-religious, multicultural and multilingual society for centuries. Forces of tolerance have

always been rooted firmly in its soil. Besides others, Emperors Ashoka and Akbar have been great symbols of tolerance and openness to other religions. Throughout the medieval ages, one hardly finds instances of inter-communal clashes, though among the religious priesthood there was bigotry and sectarianism, which was exposed by poets like Kabir.

Indeed, the Sufi and Bhakti movements acted as bridges between communities. They effectively countered the narrowmindedness of the priestly class, and spread love and humanism. The Sufi and Bhakti saints were more spiritual than religious in the ritualistic sense. Their whole emphasis was on love, peace and harmony. They had their roots among the common people – those who were poor and of lowly origin. They kept their distance from rulers and ruling classes.

It is important to note that it is the clash of interests that brings about unrest and communal tensions in society, not a clash of religions. Religions do not clash; it is vested interests that do. In the medieval ages the religious communities were not politically organized; they were distinctly different, yet not hostile to each other as they did not cater to political needs.

It was rather the ascent of colonialism and, subsequently, parliamentary democracy that led to the politicization of religion and religious communities. Thus, inter-religious clashes are, in fact, political clashes. Different political parties carve out their vote-banks among different religious communities, and target one community in order to emerge as the champion of another. In fact, they are champions of their own political interests, rather than the interests of any community.

In India communal divisions have come about mainly due to colonial machinations, which ultimately led to Partition. This political vivisection became a running sore for the

people of India, particularly for the Hindus who blamed Muslims for Partition. Truth is, Muslims as a community were not responsible for this, but only a section of the upper class Muslim elite in collaboration with the British colonial power. In fact, ordinary Muslims have to bear the brunt of Partition even today.

Rightwing Hindu politicians exploited the issue of Partition to the hilt with an eye on Hindu votes, and often incited communal violence. This violence intensified during the 1980s. Most of the major riots in Independent India took place in the period from 1980 to 1992-93. There are a number of reasons for this. By the time the 1980s dawned, it was already more than 30 years since Independence. The democratic processes intensified and brought more democratic awareness among the minorities and weaker sections of India, who had got better organized by then to demand their due share in power.

Upper caste Hindus felt that in the years ahead they would have to yield more and more share of power to minorities and low-caste Hindus (Dalits), and hence the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), mainly representing the political and economic interests of the upper caste Hindu elite, raised alarm and began a propaganda blitz against minorities and Dalits, leading to heightened communal and inter-caste tensions. BJP used the Ram temple controversy as a powerful symbol to mobilize Hindu votes, and ultimately rode to power in 1999 and held on till 2004.

The Sangh Parivar (which includes RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, BJP and other Hindutva-based organizations) tried to weaken secularism and thoroughly Hinduize the Indian State during the BJP-led NDA regime. It was in this period (BJP was in power both at the Centre and in Gujarat) that the State-sponsored riot in Gujarat took place in 2002, in which officially 1,000 and unofficially 2,000 Muslims were brutally killed. Thus, inter-religious violence achieved its

climax during the rule of BJP – a party whose politics is based on hatred of minority communities.

It was again during BJP rule that attacks against the miniscule minority of Christians also began. An Australian Christian priest James Staines, working for lepers among tribals in a distant village of Odisha in East India was burnt to death alongwith his two young children. Many other Christian priests and nuns were also attacked or murdered. This was indeed the darkest period of secular India.

The people of India, however, rejected the BJP because of its communal excesses and voted the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government led by Congress to power in 2004 elections. Thus, the people of India once again proved their secular credentials, their values of tolerance, and their desire for communal harmony and better inter-religious relations. Indeed, it can be said that the common people of India desire peaceful co-existence and do not appreciate communal turmoil in the country.

However, the dark side of economic development – the vast, stark poverty-stricken underbelly of India (India is ranked 137th among 139 countries in terms of malnutrition and deaths caused by hunger) – cannot but have political implications. The ruling classes exploit caste and communal divisions to divert attention from such horrors of existence, and many politicians are tempted to resort to communal-based, instead of issue-based, politics. The 2002 Gujarat riot took place precisely when the BJP government was signing various international trade treaties and further liberalizing the economy for the benefit of a handful of the elite.

Thus, in the coming 30 years one cannot expect smooth inter-caste and inter-communal relations as the ruling classes would certainly be tempted to employ emotional issues to catch the votes of common people without solving their problems. This process of emotionalizing and communalizing politics is aided and abetted by the media,

which itself is controlled by the political and economic elite.

Six years of controlling State power has given the Sangh Parivar considerable opportunity to consolidate its base. It has disciplined cadre, and thus a great capacity to communalize politics and provoke communal violence. However, there are countervailing forces too that go in favour of secular democracy.

Though upper caste Hindus have been successful at times in using Dalits for their own political ends, sweeping them off their feet by powerful emotional propaganda, but Dalits, on the whole, tend to be an anti-Hindutva force. As they are mainly victims of upper caste elite politics, their leaders try to counter communal politics in order to keep their caste flock with them. Caste awareness is increasing with the spread of education and democratic consciousness among Dalits. Though with minorities they remain far behind in the field of education, yet more and more are getting educated and becoming aware of their political rights. The greater the political awareness among Dalits and OBCs (other backward classes), the more challenging it would be for communal politicians to manipulate religious and communal sentiments.

Another factor is the ascent of globalization, which has contradictory effects as far as the communal situation is concerned. On one hand, it intensifies the urge for religious and cultural identities to face the homogenizing global processes, and on the other, it opens up economic opportunities for the educated middle classes and induces their out-migration, thereby reducing their communal potential.

Interestingly, today there is increased awareness among Muslims in India to make a concerted effort to better their position through better education and economic opportunities, and to avoid emotional issues that bring nothing but disaster for them. They had got entangled in

Ramjanmabhoomi politics and suffered a great deal. Thus, with only a few exceptions, Indian Muslims are shedding their communal past and preparing themselves for better future prospects.

Moreover, communal forces are losing credibility among the people of India at large. They have no achievement to show except communal rhetoric and bloodshed. Before coming to power they had claimed to be different and non-corrupt. However, with many corruption scandals coming to light in which their leaders were involved, on this count too, they have now lost much ground.

Thus, in the coming 30 years, communal forces would find it very difficult to regain their lost ground and communal politics will be weakened. However, much will depend on the performance of the secular forces. Communal forces thrive more due to the failure of secular forces than on account of their inherent strength. They gain strength only when secular forces fail to assert and perform. Communal forces, it appears, would lose more ground and one will see greater urge among people for co-existence and harmonious leaving in the years ahead.

Thus communalism can be successfully defeated by economic and academic uplift of the minorities, educating the masses about the divisive nature of the communal forces, strengthening the secular forces, and exposing the designs of communal politicians.

Conflict and Dialogue

Introduction

For believers of the doctrine of "peaceful mutual co-existence", a peaceful world order is not merely a Utopian thought. However, for achieving this objective it is imperative to understand the nature of conflict and the methods of its resolution. It is also important to understand the causes of conflict, the types of conflict, and the vested interests deliberately perpetuating a conflict and benefiting from the status quo. Besides, we would also need to understand and appreciate the social, political and economic costs of conflict as well as the promises and benefits of conflict resolution and peace-building.

Conflict is the primary cause of disturbance of peace and, therefore, engaging the conflicting parties in dialogue is the only way to establish peace. Indeed, dialogue is the key to mutual coexistence.

The old concepts of homogeneity and standardization have given way to the new ideas of heterogeneity, fragmentation, differentiation and pluralism. In the highly celebrated notion of 'democratic politics', pluralism works as the

guiding force permitting peaceful co-existence of differences in identities. The core of this concept is the firm belief that the process of "conflict and dialogue" can lead to the realization of the "common good" that is most suitable for all members of society.

What is Conflict?

Conflict can be understood as the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values or interests. A proper understanding of this concept is crucial to explaining aspects of social life such as conflict of interests, social disagreement and fights between individuals, groups and organizations. A proper grip on the notion of conflict can lead us to understand the root causes of war among nations, and that can help us in finding ways to prevent such eventualities.

What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is a "carefully structured communication technique" that is crucial to proper understanding of the respective perspectives of adversaries. Dialogue has proved its utility in preventing violence and bloodshed in historic events such as the end of the Cold War. Even the elusive peace in the Middle East has often been chased through the process of dialogue.

The Difference between Dialogue, Conversation and Argument

Dialogue is not just another word for conversation. Dialogue is a way of communication where the emphasis is on understanding and exploring ideas and information. It incorporates the interests of both sides involved and draws on their combined wisdom.

Dialogue is also different from argument. In a dialogue we understand and accept that there are differences of opinions. However, at the same time, we believe that there lies a mutually acceptable solution. The objective of the dialogue is to find that solution.

The distinctive elements of a dialogue include focusing on common interests while avoiding the divisive ones, and starting from specific cases to reach the general issues of conflict.

What is Conflict Resolution?

Conflict resolution involves methods and techniques directed towards eliminating or alleviating the sources of conflict. Conflict resolution is also known as dispute resolution. Negotiation, mediation and diplomacy are the three elements of the process of conflict resolution.

Role of Dialogue in Mediation

Mediation or 'alternative dispute resolution' mainly relies on the process of dialogue between the disputed parties. In all types of disputes involving individuals, communities, organizations or states, the dialogue is directed towards reconciling the differences. The mediators often use appropriate skills and techniques to open up a dialogue process that facilitates the conflict resolution.

Morton Deutsch, in his discourse on "Conflict Resolution", published in the Political Psychology (September 1983), observes that by nature there are only a few conflicts which can be categorised as "win-lose conflicts". Most of the conflicts can be resolved through a "win-win" approach. The approach to win-win solution requires "cooperative problem solving orientation that focuses on the interests of the different parties (and not their positions)".

Highlighting the crucial role of dialogue in this process of conflict resolution, Deutsch argues, "A full, open, honest, and mutually respectful communication process should be encouraged, so that the parties can clearly express and understand empathetically one another's interests."

Types of Conflict

Conflict could be among individuals, communities or nations.

The nature of conflict could be economic, emotional or ideological. Examples of conflict include inter-societal, interpersonal, military, diplomatic, organizational and relational conflicts. Intra-State conflicts such as civil wars and election campaigns are among the most prevalent types. Conflict based on religion has repeatedly haunted the history of mankind. In the modern world, conflict over environmental resources, organizational conflict, workplace conflict and international conflicts are among the most prominent.

At the micro-level, when the conflict is among two individuals, the parties in conflict are obvious. However, as we graduate from the micro- to the macro-level, identification of conflicting parties becomes increasingly difficult.

Causes of Conflict

Conflict among two parties could be based on economic interest, religion, race, ethnicity or gender. Further, the nature of conflict could also be ideological. Environmentalists may find themselves in conflict with the proponents of rapid development. Similarly, socialists may find themselves in conflict with the capitalists. The perceived national interest of States is often the primary reason for conflict among nation-states.

At the micro-level, the causes of conflict could be communication failure, personality differences and differences in goals; it includes lack of cooperation and differences regarding authority. Competition over resources, differences in races and religion alongwith differences in values are among the major causes of conflicts at the macro-level. When values are the root cause of conflict, it becomes extremely difficult to resolve them. Identifying the type of conflict is the crucial first step to conflict resolution. For instance, when the conflict is over values, it becomes extremely difficult to prove it either 'right' or 'wrong'. Religious or ideological conflicts may be cited as examples of

this type. Such conflicts can be resolved by involving a facilitator who can identify the specific type of conflict. The practitioners of "non-violence" have devised a number of strategies and methods of solving such conflicts. Dialogue is the key ingredient of such strategies and techniques.

Methods of Conflict Resolution

The origin of most conflicts is in a clash of interests. Under the circumstances, conflict resolution requires the twin approach strategy that includes articulation of one's own concerns while at the same time understanding the concerns of the other party. The strategy of solving such conflicts should be based on "win-win" approach.

In the primitive world, the wishes of the powerful always prevailed, since it was easy to silence the opponent by mere use of physical force. However, as we progressed to the modern world, the relationship among people became increasingly complex. In such a scenario, the use of might is not a panacea for all ills. In some cases, to stop acts of injustice, the legal agencies might be allowed to use physical power. But that is only towards maintaining order in society.

It is now commonly accepted that violence among people and communities has the property of further vitiating their lives. The use of force can best be explained as delaying the solution to the inherent problem. Even when nations are at odds with each other, war among them potentially aggravates and antagonizes their relationship. History has amply proved that the use of force has often aggravated the problems among nations. Moreover, we are all clearly witnessing how the "doctrine of war" in recent times has vitiated the peace and harmony of the world.

So, as the use of might is not right, what other options do we have if we want peace? The answer lies in appreciating and understanding "the power of dialogue". Dialogue is a powerful tool for mediators to use for eliminating almost all kinds of conflict.

Conflict Resolution through Dialogue

Let us take a case-by-case approach to understand and learn how dialogue can be used to attain the dream of world peace and eliminate or mitigate conflict between two parties, whatever the nature of the parties – individual, community, race or nation.

Conflict at Individual and Community Levels: Conflict resolution among individuals and communities requires a self-assessment approach. Before getting into the communication mode, a proper assessment and analysis of the self should be done. The problem may lie in the self rather than in the other person or community. This approach of self-reflection and the other-centred technique helps in solving many problems of family and other relationships. If there are issues that lie in others, then they can be conveyed only if we master the proper communication skills. This approach is mostly used while managing interpersonal conflicts in an organization, family disputes and conflict in communities.

Conflicts in Religion, Races and Ideologies: Since religion is a matter of faith, understanding the psychology of the faithful is the important first step towards mitigating such conflicts. An accommodating approach based on the understanding of religious differences is the key to peace and mutual co-existence. Here, the scholars can play a crucial role by impersonal dialogue through their research and writings, and by propagating the shared interests among varied religions. Here, due consideration and respect should be given to the perspectives and worldview of the others.

Cultural Conflicts: Conflict resolution among differing cultures is among the most contentious issues. The only method of approaching this issue is by fostering communication among the disputants. This facilitates problem-solving where the underlying needs of respective cultures may be identified. The aim of the mediator is usually

to find a win-win solution. This approach has been highly successful in the Western cultural context such as in Canada and the US.

In non-Western cultural contexts such as in China, Vietnam, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, direct communication has often proved difficult due to the differing perceptions of the conflicting groups. In such situations, a more effective way has been to involve tribal, religious or community leaders in communication alongwith the involvement of a third party for conflict resolution. In such situations, the role of effective diplomacy in mitigating deep-rooted mistrust and antagonism cannot be overemphasized.

Conflict among Nation-States: National interest has often been the driving force in relationships among countries. A clash in such interests gives rise to the conflicts among nations. The nature of this conflict may be economic, ideological or strategic. In any case, the approach to conflict resolution should always be through dialogue. The principle of dialogue that applies to resolving conflicts among individuals equally applies to resolving conflicts among nations. While engaging in such dialogues, the broader values of liberty, human rights and justice should be closely adhered to. This helps in understanding the perspectives of others and engaging in meaningful dialogues.

Limitations of Dialogue in Conflict Resolution

If we zealously pursue the policy of dialogue and still find that peace is elusive, then instead of losing our faith in the doctrine of peaceful mutual co-existence, we should stop for a moment and think about the causes of our failure. The following causes may be behind the failures when dialogue is applied as a tool to mitigating conflicts:

- Lack of understanding of perspectives of conflicting parties.
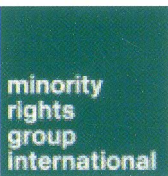- Vested interest of the third party.

- Lack of a enthusiasm in the mediating agency.

Attending to these causes may bring forth the desired result and help in resolving conflicts through dialogue. However, in case of protracted conflict such as the one evidenced by the Israel-Palestine peace deadlock, while resolution of the conflict is important, it is also imperative to look for "reconciliation" as an intermediary measure, until the conflict is finally resolved. Daniel Bar-Tal of Tel Aviv University, in his paper "From Intractable Conflict through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis", published in Political Psychology (June 2000), has amply emphasized the role of negotiation, dialogue and reconciliation in the ultimate resolution of intractable conflicts.

Daniel Bar-Tal points out, "Intractable inter-group conflicts require the formation of a conflictive ethos that enables a society to adapt to the conflict situation, survive the stressful period, and struggle successfully with the adversary." Analysing the intractable conflict, he further observes that the "formal termination of such a conflict begins with the elimination of the perceived incompatibility between the opposing parties through negotiation by their representatives – that is, a conflict resolution process". And the process of dialogue is the key to such negotiations.

Conclusion

Applied properly, the policy of dialogue is bound to bring the desired result. And the desire of all civilized people should be the attainment of a peaceful world order based on mutual respect and peaceful co-existence. Dialogue is the key to managing all types of conflicts, and it is through meaningful dialogues that we should try to resolve our conflicts and strive for a better and more peaceful world.