

THE HINDU NATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE ON
SECULARISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE
“ORGANISER”: 1985 – 2002

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

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Submitted by

Malavika Menon



*CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110 067*

INDIA

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Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, India

Tel. : 011-26704413
Fax : 011-26717603
Gram : JAYENU

CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the dissertation entitled 'The Hindu Nationalist Perspective on Secularism: A Critical Analysis of the "Organiser": 1985 – 2002' by Malavika Menon is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree in this University or any other University and is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Pai', written over a horizontal line.

Prof. Sudha Pai
(CHAIRPERSON)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gurpreet Mahajan', written over a horizontal line.

Prof. Gurpreet Mahajan
(SUPERVISOR)

Chairperson
Centre for Political Studies,
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

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Malavika Menon
Malavika Menon

CONTENTS

Chapters	Title	Page Nos.
Preface		
Chapter I	The Concept of Secularism	1-29
Chapter II	The Hindu Nationalist Perspective: The Idea of Nation and Community	30-63
Chapter III	The Hindu Nationalist Perspective: Minorities and the Indian State	64-105
Chapter IV	Emerging Idea of Secularism and Pseudo Secularism: A Critical Appraisal	106-116
Bibliography		

Preface

Liberal democratic politics provides a public space for the representation of, and deliberation between diverse groups in a society. Any individual, group or ideology that seeks to monopolise this public space deviates from the basic norms that a liberal state promotes. Individual rights, equal liberty and equality of citizenship are principles common in democratic states across the world. So is the case in India.

Though democracy was the accepted form of government at the time of Indian independence, the nation has experienced different strands of ideological politics in its short history as an independent state. The workings of the real politik and various institutional mechanisms, have at times, led to the predominance of a certain set of beliefs and practices over others. For a long period before and after independence, Indian politics experienced Congress hegemony. With powerful figures like Nehru at the forefront, the Congress came to be associated with democratic secular politics. However, during the Congress regime itself, these credentials seemed shaky especially under the leadership of Indira Gandhi. The presence of a dominant national party like the Congress started receding in the background with the emergence of other state and regional parties which had begun to assert themselves.

This simultaneous, though gradual process of party formation outside the Congress hegemony also witnessed the establishment of parties such as the Jan Sangh or the Bharatiya Janata Party of today. On the societal front, so-called cultural organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh were slowly working towards expanding their ideological base. This expansion meant not only the mushrooming of RSS branches in different states across the country, but also the establishment of sister organizations such

as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal. With the decline in Congress power, the public space faced a vacuum that the Sangh Parivar has sought to occupy ever since, and in recent times has experienced a measure of success to this end.

Among the many repercussions of the decline in Congress hegemony and the characteristic 'coalition politics' of India today, is the emergence of the 'secular' versus 'non-secular' camp. The Sangh Parivar (associated with the latter), in trying to establish its hegemony in the past two decades has sought to reshape certain principles that have been the pillars of the Indian state. Secularism, as this study would examine, has been one of them.

The present study on 'The Hindu Nationalist Perspective on Secularism' is an attempt to examine the contours of the Hindutva ideology. Though there exists scholarly work in this area, the present study relies heavily on the text of the primary source- the RSS mouthpiece, the *Organiser*. The *Organiser* is a platform for the expression of views that lend support to, or believe in the ideology propagated by the RSS. The term 'Hindu Nationalist' itself was used, since a large portion of the study is devoted to an understanding of this dimension of Indian politics. More so, the term encapsulates the core of their ideology i.e. a renewed nationalist movement for Hindu revival. This not only reveals the distinction they make between 'Indian' and 'Hindu' nationalism, but also reflects their belief that India has yet to attain 'cultural' freedom. The period starting 1985-2002 was selected keeping in mind the phase of gradual importance that the Hindu Nationalist Movement has gained from the 80's till 2002, when the Godhra incident revealed that their ideology had gained ground in the Indian State for such an incident to have been perpetrated.

The study begins with a conceptual understanding of secularism, the purpose of which is also to provide a framework for the analysis of the Hindu Nationalist perspective on secularism vis-a vis Indian secularism. Moreover, this study does not really attempt to trace the trajectory of events leading to the predominance of the Hindu Nationalists movement and the growth of communal politics in the country. Its purpose is to examine in detail, what the Hindu Right have to say on crucial aspects of the Indian state. Hence, the second chapter deals with the Hindu Nationalist idea of the Indian nation, of 'what' or 'who' they associate the identity of India with; and whether this understanding promotes its multicultural existence. Chapter Three deals with their perspective on secularism and the status of religious minorities in the Indian state. The second and third chapters form the basis for the fourth chapter that attempts to portray the emerging idea of a 'secular India' that the Sangh envisions and if such an idea can at all be termed secular. The study is therefore an addition to the existing literature on secularism and Hindu nationalism.

Chapter One: The Concept of Secularism

“ When India is said to be a secular state, it does not mean that we reject the reality of an unseen spirit, or the relevance of religion to life, or that we exalt irreligion. It does not mean that secularism itself becomes a positive religion or that the state assumes divine prerogatives. We hold that not one religion should be given preferential status. This view of religious impartiality or comprehension and forbearance has a prophetic role to play within the national and international life ”¹ – Dr. Radhakrishnan.

The quotation given above addresses certain commonly held apprehensions regarding secularism and the nature of a secular state. Secularism, as it has evolved over time, has been associated with the idea of ‘separation of Church and State.’ Although this idea of separation has been modified to suit the needs of different political systems across the world, it remains the yardstick to judge the secularity of a state. Hence, it is this conception of secularism that has been under scrutiny and much scholarly research.

The separation of state and Church has led to two issues – one, situations where states find it difficult to implement this separation in totality and two, in states where religion occupies center stage in the social order i.e. when religious symbols, rituals and religious affiliations are central to the politico-social order, the overlap becomes inevitable. In cases such as these, the idea of secularism as separation leads many to conclude that it either rejects religion or subordinates it to the state, both of which are said to undermine the importance of religion in the lives of the citizens. Such a view is expressed by a certain section of the Indian intellectuals and politicians as well. However, there are other countries, the best example

¹ *Constitution of India*, with selective comments by P.M. Bakshi, Universal Law Publishing, Delhi, 2002.

being the United States of America, which have found it increasingly difficult to implement the 'wall of separation' that does not seem impenetrable. Over the years, the religious and secular overlap has been unavoidable.

This chapter deals with a conceptual understanding of secularism and examines some of the models proposed by different scholars. These models focus on various aspects of the term 'secular', thereby going beyond the paradigm of separation. The focus, however, would be largely on the Indian state.

I

Secularism as a concept can be understood in terms of non-discrimination in religious matters² i.e. a secular state, would, as a matter of policy, refrain from discriminating against any individual or community on the basis of their religious identity. To this end, the state would ensure and protect the religious identity of its citizens by granting rights that ensure religious liberty and equality. Furthermore, citizens would be free to profess and practice a religion of their choice without fear of state persecution.

Separation of religion and politics is sometimes carried out to realize the goal of non-discrimination. Separation of Church and state means that "the government may not establish a particular Church or religious faith, legislate on behalf of religion itself or a specific institutional expression of religious faith, or interfere with an individual's free exercise of religion. By staying clear of religious activities, the government ensures that all citizens possess full liberty"³ We see in this definition, that a secular government seeks a policy of separation to ensure individual liberty in matters of religion. Since the government is

² Gurpreet Mahajan, 'Secularism as Non Discrimination: the Religious and the Particular in the Indian Context', *India Review*, Vol.1, Jan. 2002, Frank Cass Journal.

³ *International Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Vol.2, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, London, 1995. p. 1175.

forbidden from endorsing a particular religion, the citizens enjoy religious freedom vis-a-vis the state.

It is the established hegemony of a single Church like the unreformed Anglican Church in England and the established Roman Catholic Churches of Italy and Spain that led to issues of Catholic discrimination and persecution of dissenters. In this case, the established religion implies that 'a single Church or religion enjoys formal, legal and official monopolistic privilege through a union with the government of the state – the motivation being to privilege one religious group over all others. In such cases, equality among religions is absent and it is the established religion that enjoys religious liberty. Separation of Church and state was initiated to counter such discrimination, and over the years this idea came to be associated with secularism. The target was not religion per se, but the establishment of one religion, the tyranny of which curbed the religious freedom of all other denominations and persecuted dissenters and non-conformists. This struggle was aided by the Protestant Reformation that ended the unity that characterized medieval Europe. The secular tradition as it exists today, can be traced within the traditions of western Christianity, wherein, aided by Reformation, the 'values of legal order, political freedom, individual autonomy and progressive reform came to be identified with secular ideologies. The greatest impetus came from Enlightenment, which stressed that society be founded on moral principles devised by rational inquiry into the universal nature of human social life. The rational principles of social organization, however, were often presented as antithetical to religious traditions resting on faith.'⁴

Secularism, however, operates differently in different states. Some countries such as the United States of America follow a policy of disestablishment; U.K. despite formal

⁴ Victor Lidz, 'Secularisation', in *The Social Sciences Encyclopedia* (ed) Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1985, p.737

establishment of churches in England and Scotland is in many respects secular, so is France. India, which follows a policy of state neutrality⁵, is secular (though at many points in time, the neutrality of the state has been questioned). However, in each of these cases, the principle of secularism has been confronted with new problems arising from differences emerging from the plurality of religions and cultures. What follows is an examination of secularism in France, the United States and India and the challenges faced by it.

1.1 Secularism in the West

Secularism in France emerged through many phases before the 'separation law' of 1905 was finally passed. The French Revolution and the ideas that it cultivated led to a decline in the dominance of the Church and the revolutionaries tried to introduce a civil religion.⁶ Napoleon successfully minimized the role of the Catholic Church, subordinating it to the state – this clause was established by the Concordat of 1801 and accepted by the Pope. After Napoleon's downfall, emerged a romantic vision that focused on the 'pristine utopian Christianity', a vision enshrined in the book on Christianity by Chateaubriand (1802). The restored Bourbons, by making the Catholic Church the dominant part in the state restored the lost glory where 'religion and politics were in the same hands and France reigned supreme'. This was reflected in the education system, since by 1850, the entire primary and secondary educational system was under the direction of the catholic clergy.

In 1864, the Pope published the 'Encyclical', which condemned eighty errors that were incompatible with the true faith i.e. of the Catholic Church. Among other things, it constituted the following: no man was free to embrace any religion which he felt to be true; it dismissed

⁵ Neutrality – a situation in which the state shows no preference for, or bias against any specific expression of religion.

⁶ Civil religion is defined in the International Encyclopedia of Sociology, 'as a set of religio- political beliefs that unifies a people, gives sacred meaning to the ongoing political life of the community and provides common goals and values for society's existence.'

the notion that Protestantism was another branch of the Christian religion; in cases where there was a conflict between civil and ecclesiastical law, the latter would prevail; it did not recognize the separation of state and Church, and finally, the Catholic religion was regarded as the 'true' religion.

While on one hand, the catholic majority supported the Encyclical, there was a section of the population, constituting anti Catholic elements and the bourgeoisie who were gradually gathering strength, advocating a separation of state and Church, civil marriage, divorce and secular education. By 1882, the Republican secularists established a national system of free, secular, primary education and divorce was legalized in 1884. The last straw in this struggle was the Dreyfus case of 1894, (where it was found that the army had fabricated evidence to convict a Jewish officer of the artillery of having revealed military secrets) which revealed the discrimination of the Catholic Church, the aristocracy and the anti- Semitic elements. This gave an impetus to secularists who were already gaining a stronghold to come to power. Once in power, they passed a number of anti- clerical laws namely, the Association of Law 1901, suppressing all Catholic orders in France; and the Separation Law 1905, Separating Church from the state. At present, France, though a secular state, exhibits certain religious and ethnic strains. Though not of an extreme kind, they are manifested in the treatment given to the Jews and the coloured who are subject to continuous police harassment; and the Muslim minority in the country which demands special privileges and the need for an Islamic social life, thereby challenging fundamental principles of secularism.⁷

⁷ R. Srinivasan, 'The Wall of Separation between Church and State- The Influence of Locke's Letter (1685), *The Radical Humanist*, Jan 1996, pp 11-17

1.2 The United States of America, on the other hand, was at the very start clear on its policy towards matters of religion. When the founders prohibited “religious tests” for holding federal office, they were doing so in the knowledge of British history and common practices in colonies. They observed how some of the North American colonies by establishing an official faith, denied religious freedom to members of minority religions and demanded religious qualification for public office, thereby paving the way for an allegiance between an absolute state and a powerful Church. Restrictive features of colonial law that required conformity to official faith as a condition of residence, and dissent as the ground for expulsion or death, were enough to convince the founders that there would be no establishment of a national faith. Such support was deemed bad for the state as it promoted false values, undermined respect for the law, and introduced an unhealthy fanaticism to public affairs.⁸ To this end, the following was enshrined in the American constitution: The First Amendment stated, “the Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”. In addition to this, Article 6 stated, “ no religious test shall ever be required as qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Initially, the First Amendment was applicable only to the Federal government, till 1940, when the Supreme Court reached a position by which the State Governments came under the jurisdiction of the First Amendment.

Justice Hugo Black said the following regarding the formal establishment of Church- state relations- “the ‘establishment of religion’ clause in the First amendment means at least this: neither the state nor the federal government can set up a Church; neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor

⁸ Kenneth D. Wald, ‘*Religion and Politics in the United States*’, Popular Prakashan, 1992.

influence a person to go to, or to remain away from Church against his will; or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for Church attendance or non-attendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion. Neither a state nor the federal government, can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa (1947.)⁹

Various issues and concerns influence the Church- state relations in the United States. With the increasing intervention of the Church in welfare activities, the question confronting the state is how to deal with the Church on one hand, and Constitutional provisions and Supreme Court interpretations on separation of religion and state on the other. The Churches, over the years, have become multipurpose agencies, providing services ranging from formal education, social welfare, medical care, libraries etc. This immense involvement has acquired a strong interest of Church in government policies. The government, on the other hand is faced with the dilemma of what legal status to grant institutionalized religion i.e. the Church; on whether it should treat it as just another interest group or restrict its role. This decision has to be in the light of the importance that religion has in the lives of people. The other challenge confronting the government is regarding secular and religious behaviour. The issue being what the individual should do when confronted with a situation where both the Church and state provide conflicting guidance about appropriate or permissible behaviour. What emerged from this was the free exercise controversy – one that recognizes the possibility that free exercise of religious beliefs can run afoul beyond limits established by secular law. The wall

⁹ Ibid

of separation involving rights and privileges of two different institutions questions the legal status granted to Churches- this is known as the boundary problem.

Another issue that needs to be discussed here is with regard to Supreme Court rulings that have played an important role in defining Church-state relations. It became a topic of political discussion in the 1940's when the U.S. Supreme Court began to reinterpret the First Amendment's language on religion. During the years from the 1940's till the 70's, the Supreme Court departed from previous church-state doctrine in three important respects: first, it abandoned the traditional distinction between national and state action towards Churches. The First Amendment which applied to the federal government was extended to the state and local levels of government. Second, the court attempted to strengthen the boundary wall between the state and church by broadening the list of government actions that constituted an impermissible establishment of religion. Initially understood to forbid only actions that treated religious groups unequally, establishment was seen as encompassing many activities that appeared to favour religion in general. Lastly, the courts became more sensitive towards claims that government rules and regulations unconstitutionally interfered with the free exercise of religion; before this the court struck down only those practices that seemed to force individuals to endorse religious beliefs that might be contrary to their own; which the court extended to include a wide range of actions that produced the same effect.

Over a period of time, the wall of separation grew higher. By 1948 school facilities could not be used for religious instruction; in 1962, a judicial decision banned organized prayer in public schools; by 1963, the Supreme Court declared as unconstitutional the repeating of the Lord's prayer or verses from the Bible as part of the daily opening exercise in public schools.

A case involving tax exemption for properties used for religious worship in 1970 laid the basis for the justices to develop a series of tests to evaluate government involvement in the religious realm. Known as the 'Lemon Tests' (1971), it set standards to judge whether a law could be deemed compatible with the anti-establishment language of the First Amendment; i.e. whether a law served a primarily secular purpose (if the stated law advanced or inhibited religion), primarily secular consequence (the stated law should not foster or oppose religion) and excessive entanglement of Church and state (the stated law must not require a high level of governmental involvement to ensure that the effect of a programme is not helping or hindering religion).

Thus, this was the manner in which the wall of separation was implemented in the U.S. There were times when the boundary lines were not well defined especially concerning use of religious symbols on public property, state funded legislative and military chaplains, ceremonial proclamation such as the Year of the Bible, the National Day of Prayer, tax exemptions enjoyed by Church property etc. In the field of education, the separation clause was challenged by Catholics demanding public assistance for their schools; and the free exercise clause was challenged in the Jehovah's Witness case, where the Jews and atheists refused Christian religious observance in classrooms, which they felt limited their right to propagate their faith. Such instances also led to a tussle between the accommodationist, no preference and separationist approaches.¹⁰

¹⁰ The accommodationists believe in benevolent neutrality, urging the government to protect the Judeo-Christian heritage of the nation. They espouse that the government extend benefits to religion in a non-discriminatory manner. The strict neutrality doctrine espoused that the government should neither confer benefits nor disabilities on individuals on religious lines. In terms of establishment, strict neutrality insists that religious groups be treated no differently from other organizations i.e. neither should they be given exclusive rights nor subject to any particular limitations.

The American experience shows that separation, though desirable is not free of problems, especially with respect to the rigid demarcation of the religious and political spheres. In the West, as also in countries like India, the problem is centered not so much on the separation of religion, but in the failure to distinguish between what is 'religious' and 'non-religious'.¹¹ Hoover attributes the success of secularism in the United States and Europe to an accommodation between the majority and minority regarding the freedom of the latter to engage in a set of practices without risking state persecution. This accommodation is sought through a series of specific treaties and acts that agree upon certain beliefs and practices. This consensus protects the minorities from state intervention and discrimination. However, since there is no consensus regarding meanings of terms such as 'religion' and 'religious institutions', the state when confronted with new groups, that were not part of the original consensus found it difficult to accommodate new practices and beliefs (for instance the headscarf issue in France). The point being that there needs to be a more exhaustive definition of what constitutes religion and religious institutions, then secularism would be a relatively easy ideal to realize.

II

Secularism has been one of the cornerstones of Indian democracy. It is an ideal that still has to be realized to its full potential. The Indian state had the challenge of ensuring a peaceful coexistence of many dominant, and all encompassing religions. India, at the time of independence, was home to Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, among the major religions, and the Buddhist, Jain and Parsi traditions as well. Secularism was endorsed not only to confront and combat Hindu dominance, but also to ensure non-discrimination of all

¹¹ Jakob De Roover, 'The Vacuity of Secularism- On the Indian Debate and its Western Origins', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Sept. 28,2002, pp. 4047-53.

religions, to ensure equality among all religions, to guarantee religious liberty to all individuals and establish a peaceful and stable state and civil society. Secularism in India, thus, is a multi- value doctrine.¹²

There was a consensus among Indian leaders regarding the need for a secular state in India. Differences arose on how to go about implementing it. Both Gandhi and Nehru endorsed the idea of a secular Indian polity. Gandhi regarded religion to be a personal matter that had no place in politics, especially in a free India- “If a free India is to be at peace with herself, religious discrimination must entirely give place to political divisions based on consideration other than religious.”¹³ He gave great importance to the individual as against mere recognition of religious groupings. He said, “The state is bound to be wholly secular. I go so far as to say that no denominational institution in it should enjoy state patronage. All subjects will thus be equal in the eyes of the law. But every single individual will be free to pursue his own religion without hindrance, so long as it does not transgress the common law. The question of the ‘protection of minorities’ is not good enough for me; it rests upon the recognition of religious groupings between citizens of the same state. What I wish India to do is to assure liberty of religious profession to every single individual. Then only India can be great, for it was perhaps the one nation in the ancient world which had recognized cultural democracy, whereby it is held that the roads to God are many, but the goal is one, because god is one and the same.”¹⁴ For Nehru, secularism was an unquestioned part and parcel of his vision of an India on the way to political, economic and social development. He was not against religion

¹² Rajeev Bhargava, ‘Is Secularism a Value in Itself?’ in Imtiaz Ahmed, Partha S Ghosh and Helmut Reifeld (ed). *Pluralism and Equality: Values in Indian Society and Politics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2000.

¹³ Kumkum Sangari, “A Narrative of Restoration: Gandhi’s Last Years and Nehruvian Secularism”, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 30, Nos. 3-4, Mar-Apr.2002, p.3-27

¹⁴ Ibid

per se, but associated it with beliefs, superstition and rituals, which posed as obstacles towards the establishment of a rational society. He was of the opinion that religion would automatically be pushed to the background when the country moved towards progress and prosperity; scientific temper was to replace dogma and rational thinking was to replace superstition.

2.1 Secularism in India

It is this philosophy that guided the founding fathers of our Constitution. They had to keep in mind many aspects while drafting the constitution. Since religion occupied an important place in Indian society, the task before the constitution makers was to ensure that the secular – religious overlap, which was likely to occur, would not curb religious freedom or lead to the discrimination of any religious community. In the course of the drafting of the Constitution various issues were discussed and debated. Keeping in mind the religious inclination of the Indian people, the Constituent Assembly members realized that the American wall of separation would be difficult to establish in India. Thus, many aspects were discussed, especially those articles that dealt with polemical issues such as that of religious liberty, conversion and propagation. Hence, a brief account of some of these concerns is important since they reflect many concerns that face the country at present. Among the many that were debated, the provision on the right to conversion and the right to propagate were heatedly debated.

2.2 Constituent Assembly Debates on Religious Conversions and Propagation:

The provision on conversion does not find any place in the constitution. Sardar Patel moved a resolution to include clause 17 in the fundamental rights that read as follows, “conversion from one religion to another brought about by fraud, coercion or undue influence shall not be

recognized by law.”¹⁵ K.M. Munshi, later moved an amendment for substitution of article 17 by the following clause: “any conversion from one religion to another of any person brought about by fraud, coercion or undue influence or of a minor under the age of eighteen shall not be recognized by law.”¹⁶The part mentioning that of a ‘minor below eighteen’ was objected to by F.R. Anthony, who felt that after granting the right to propagate as a principle fundamental right, it would be unfair to include a clause regarding conversion of minors. He recommended that the following be added to Munshi’s amendment, “Except when the parents or surviving parents have been converted and the child does not choose to adhere to its original faith. He added further, “having once conceded the right to propagate, to concede this in consonance with the principles of family law and in consonance with the principles of natural¹⁷ law and justice.”

The clause on conversion was also countered by P.D. Tandon who maintained “what we gave the Christians with our right hand is that they have a right to convert others by an appeal to reason and after honestly changing their views and outlook. The three words, ‘coercion’, ‘fraud’ and ‘undue influence’ are included as provisos and are meant to cover the cases of adult converts. These words are not applicable to converts of immature age. Their conversion is coercion and undue influence under all circumstances...we agreed to keep the word ‘propagate’ out of regard for our Christian friends. But now to ask us to agree to minors also being converted is, I think, Sir, going too far.”¹⁸ P.R.Thakur was against conversion of the depressed class and held that the term ‘fraud’ should include conversions of depressed classes as well.

¹⁵ Anirban Kashyap, ‘*Communalism and the Constitution*’, Lancer Books, 1988, p131.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.132

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.132-33

¹⁸ Ibid, p.136

J.N. Lal said, “We do not concede the right to do propaganda. I want to appeal to those who profess to speak for the minorities not to press for too much...that would be taking undue advantage of the generosity of the majority. I think the amendment tabled by Mr. Munshi becomes essential if the right to propagate is conceded.”¹⁹ M.A. Ayyangar vociferously opposed conversion- “what has religion to do with a secular state? Our minorities are communal minorities for which we have made provisions...all people have come to the same opinion that there should be a secular state here; so we should not allow conversion from one community to another. I therefore want that a positive fundamental right must be established that no conversion shall be allowed, and if occasion does arise like this, let the person concerned appear before a judge and swear before him that he wishes to be converted.”²⁰ In the end, the motion by Patel that this clause be excluded from the fundamental rights was adopted.

Another closely debated provision was that on the ‘*right to propagate*’ Religious worship alone was considered to be too narrow a definition. The Minorities Sub Committee demanded the right to practice and propagate religion. However, many members like Amrit Kaur, Jagjivan Ram and Ambedkar were apprehensive of too broad an interpretation of religion, which was likely to legitimize anti social practices such as purdah, child marriage, sati, polygamy etc. In addition, such a provision was likely to conflict with and contradict provisions regarding abolition of untouchability, and other laws for enactment of social reform and welfare.

In the Constituent Assembly, Tajamul Husain moved an amendment for substituting the words ‘practice and propagate’ by the words ‘practice religion privately’, his contention being

¹⁹ Ibid, p.139

²⁰ Ibid, p.141

that religion was a private affair between oneself and the creator. He believed “that a secular state should not have anything to do with religion. So I would request you to leave me alone, to practice and profess religion privately.”²¹

Lokenath Mishra while questioning the importance of religion said, “Do we really believe that religion can be divorced from life or is it our belief that in the midst of many religions we cannot decide which one to accept? If religion is beyond the ken of our state, let us clearly say so and delete all reference to rights relating to religion. But this unjust generosity of tabooing religion and yet making propagation of religion a fundamental right is somewhat uncanny and dangerous. If people should propagate their religion, let them do so. Only, let not the constitution put it as a fundamental right and encourage it. Fundamental rights are inalienable and once they are admitted, it will create bad blood.... let us say nothing about rights relating to religion. Religion will take care of itself. Drop the word ‘propagate’ in Article 19 at least”²²

K.M. Munshi defended the right to propagate by saying that propagation should not be seen in the light of the old regime where Christian missionaries, especially who were British were at an advantage. He said, “In the present set up that we are now creating under this constitution, there is a secular state. There is no particular advantage to a member of one community over another; nor is there any political advantage by increasing one’s fold. In such circumstances, the word ‘propagate’ cannot possibly have dangerous implications.”²³

Ultimately, the right to propagate was conceded. Hence, freedom of religion was extended to the ‘right to profess, practice and propagate religion’ though subject to public order, morality and health.

²¹ Ibid, p.154

²² Ibid, p.15

²³ Ibid, p.163

It was important to discuss these issues here since they are the grounds on which much of the criticism of secularism in India is based. For instance, the right to propagate religion that allows conversions, the provision of social reform limited mainly to Hindu temples and Hindu laws etc. are contentious issues. Other problematic areas have been regarding special educational and cultural rights given to the minorities, Article 290-A that requires the governments of Tamil Nadu and Kerala to pay money to the Travancore Devasom Fund from the consolidated fund of the state, religious processions carried out in public places²⁴ etc.

Secularism at present forms a part of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution, though the term itself was added to the Preamble by the forty- second amendment, 1976. Secularism as enshrined in the constitution²⁵ entails the following:

- a) The state, by itself, would not espouse, establish or practice any religion
- b) Public revenues would not be used to promote any religion
- c) The state has the power to regulate any 'economic, financial or other secular activity associated with religious practices [Art.25 (2b)]
- d) The state, has the power, through law, to provide for social welfare and reform or throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of public character to all classes and sections of Hindus {Art. 25(2b)}
- e) The practice of untouchability is constitutionally outlawed

²⁴ On the point of religious processions, P.C. Chatterjee in his book '*Secular Values For Secular India*' argues that religious processions are permissible and does not render the state any less secular. Making a distinction between private and public rituals, he says that rituals held within a home or a religious place fall within the private realm; barring some like the Devadasi system that stands abolished by the Constitution. Public processions during Hindu religious festivals and the 'tazia' processions on the occasions of Muharram are permissible under the Constitution though subject to 'public order, morality and health.' Therefore, such instances are not against the secular culture of the state as many claim.

²⁵ In addition to these provisions certain other articles in Part III of the Constitution reflect secular principles- Art. 15, which prohibits state discrimination on religious grounds; Art. 16, which prohibits discrimination on religious grounds in matters of public employment; Articles 25-28 granting freedom of religion and Articles 29 & 30 granting cultural and educational rights to religious and linguistic minorities. Part IV of the constitution – DPSP, provides for a uniform civil code under Article 44.

f) Every individual has an equal right to freedom of conscience and religion, subject to public order

g) The Supreme Court shall have the final say in adjudging state action.²⁶

The Constitution clearly indicates the nature of the secular state in India. The very fact that the state intervenes in religious matters to maintain order shows that the state is not entirely separate from religion. The Indian state is committed to secularism, but so is it to social justice and social upliftment. Thus, although the state guarantees religious freedom to all individuals and communities alike, it has to intervene to realize goals, other than secularism. Those who criticize the secular character of the Indian state fail to understand that secularism cannot be understood as having just one feature i.e. separation of religion and state. This is only a certain, and commonly accepted standpoint. Nor is secularism a rigid principle incapable of any modifications. Hence, problems arise when secularism is understood in watertight compartments. The following sections will deal with theoretical explanations of secularism keeping in mind the secular state in India. Since it is evident that India has not erected a wall of separation like the U.S., one has to examine the nature of secularism in India and the values that it preserves and promotes.

III

A secular state is tied to certain substantive values that it seeks to promote- the value of liberty, the value of equal citizenship and the value of democracy.²⁷ The value of liberty deals with two aspects: that of individual liberty and liberty to religious communities. Individual liberty is often forsaken for the sake of community values and opinion. Most often, there is

²⁶ Upendra Baxi, 'Redefinition of Secularism in India: Some Preliminary Observations', in Rudolf C Heredia and Edward Mathias (ed), *Secularism and Liberation*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1995.

²⁷ Rajeev Bhargava, 'Is Secularism a Value in Itself?' in Imtiaz Ahmed, Partha S Ghosh and Helmut Reifeld (ed). *Pluralism and Equality: Values in Indian Society and Politics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2000.

within every religious community, a tendency for one or more dominant interpretations of the religious core. Given this dominance of certain practices and beliefs, it is important that the individual, be given the right to criticise, revise or challenge these dominant interpretations.²⁸

The liberty of the individual in religious matters extends also to reject the religion she is born into, or to remain without one. The other aspect of liberty deals with granting non-preferential treatment to all members of every religious community.

The second value that a secular state is committed to is that of equal citizenship. (This is important since every citizen could be granted liberty by the state, but it could be limited i.e. an individual might be able to challenge the authority of his community but not the authority of the state. The point being that a degree of religious liberty could easily go hand in hand with second-class citizenship.) Equal citizenship has two dimensions- active and passive²⁹. Passive citizenship entitles one to physical security, a minimum of material well being, and a sphere of one's own in which others ought not to interfere. Hence, the benefits of citizenship should be available to all without discrimination on religious grounds and state agencies and the system of law should not work in favour of one religious group.

Active citizenship, on the other hand, entails the recognition of citizens as equal participants in the public domain. This is in danger of being denied in two ways: through brutal exclusion and, through the denial of social acceptance with regard to a particular set of beliefs, most often due to the superiority of one group in the public domain. The value of citizenship that secularism is tied to conveys a community-wide acknowledgement of equal respect for everyone in the public domain. Thirdly, secularism is tied to the value of democracy, since it

²⁸ Rajeev Bhargava, 'India's Secular Constitution' in Zoya Hasan, E. Sridharan and R. Sudarshan (ed). *India's Living Constitution: Ideas, Practices, Controversies*, Permanent Black, 2002.

²⁹ Ibid, pp.109-10

is only a democracy that can provide the requisite conditions for secularism to survive. This is not to say that religious freedom cannot be realized in any other system of governance, or that every democracy is wholly secular, just that democracy provides the institutional and intellectual support for secularism to flourish. Both are indispensable in countries home to diverse religions that seek to accommodate differences arising from this plurality.

At the core of these values lies the idea of non-discrimination. Hence, within a value-based paradigm, secularism cannot imply separation or exclusion, but 'principled distance' Principled distance³⁰, according to Bhargava, is not mere equidistance, but is a strategy whereby, the 'state intervenes or refrains from action depending on which value is protected or advanced.' Thus in order to realize a particular value, one religion might require greater state intervention than another. This intervention, however, does not, and should not deny secularity to the state. Thus, principled distance, in order to realize substantive values of secularism, would intervene in religion to promote certain values; and depending on the social and historical conditions of the relevant religion, the degree of interference might be greater than in other religions. Bhargava maintains that if secularism is understood in this manner then it implies that a secular state neither excludes all religions, nor is it blindly neutral towards them.

Based on the idea of principled distance, Bhargava refutes the criticism put forth by many with respect to the reform carried out in Hinduism.³¹ He argues that the immediate concern is

³⁰ Principled distance built upon the idea that derives from a distinction drawn by Dworkin between 'equal treatment' and 'treating everyone as equal'. Equal treatment entails that the state treat all citizens as equal in the relevant respect, for instance, in the distribution of a resource of opportunity. However, treating everyone as equal implies that everyone be treated with equal concern and respect. This, at times, involves unequal treatment. According to Bhargava, differential treatment is consistent with treating as equal, especially with respect to principled distance that permits state intervention for the realisation of substantive values.

³¹ Some of the social reforms enacted were: The Hindu Code Bill, 1955, The Madras Devadasi (prevention of dedication) Act, 1947, Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, 1951.

not which groups it encompasses but whether or not they are consistent with the values of secularism. State intervention was limited to Hinduism, because the reformed laws were relevant only to the Hindus- for instance, abolition of child marriage, recognizing inter-caste marriage, abolishing untouchability, devadasi dedication and the introduction of the right to divorce were to reform these dominant and exploitative practices within Hinduism. Most of these laws were redundant for Muslims. Another reason, for greater state intervention is with respect to the legitimacy of the reform process. Bhargava maintains that laws in liberal democracies require the consent of at least the representatives of the communities in question. If consent has been obtained from one community the reform should be enacted. He says, "it is wise to apply the general principle in stages, rather than not have it at all." Thus, a state that interferes in one religion more than in another does not depart from secularism, since secularism requires principle distance, not exclusion or equidistance.³²

3.1 The principle of citizenship is central to any democracy. In order for the complete fruition of rights and privileges that accompany citizenship it is essential that the state regard the individual as the primary unit of society and the state. It was argued before that right to religious liberty in India extends primarily to the individual. This not only grants the citizens the right to profess a particular religion but finds a place for atheists as well. This is also central to understanding the problems of minority rights. Religious liberty as enshrined in the

³² Adi Doctor gives an explanation regarding the point on Hindu reforms in an article titled 'Secularism – A Modernising Force'. He says that the best way for a state to show equal respect to all religions is to separate religion from politics and by treating religion as a citizen's private affair. Secularism if understood as substituting a religious ethic by a secular ethic entails separation of religion from politics, since the state undertakes reform and legislation solely on humanist, rational ground of promoting the well being of citizens and not on the basis of scriptures, holy books etc. In this context, the concern regarding a uniform civil code should not be over the Hindu and the Muslim, but on the need to take marriage out of the purview of religion altogether and make it strictly a civil affair to be regulated by state laws.

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Constitution guarantees individual freedom of conscience and the right of every individual to profess, practice and propagate the religion of one's choice. The emphasis on the importance of the individual as a citizen and, thus, as the primary unit of a secular state was emphasized in the Constituent Assembly by the likes of K.T. Shah and M. Masani. G.B.Pant proclaimed, "The individual citizen who is the backbone of the state...has been lost here in that indiscriminate body known as the community." The right to freedom of religion grants a wide range of liberties to the individual citizen – from embracing a religion of one's choice, to the right to criticize and challenge the tenets of one's religion, or to embrace another religion.

Western democracies give greater importance to the identity of the individual, regardless of the person's cultural background. India, on the other hand, while recognizing the individual tends to give greater importance to the community to which she belongs. It is this preference that is reflected in group rights for religious and cultural minorities. It is likely that in such situations, where individuals are treated more like cultural entities than individual persons, the privileges of citizenship might not be realized by all. This tends to get aggravated when an ideal like secularism is understood in terms of majorities and minorities as fixed and permanent entities. The state, then recognizes only official minorities and is oblivious to the process of minoritisation.³³ Unlike the making of minorities, minoritisation is not a product of minority consciousness within the community, but occurs without the knowledge of the community concerned in certain political contexts. (For instance, the Sikhs found themselves targeted in the 1984 riots and the south Indians in Bombay who were targeted by the Shiv Sena who accused them of supporting DMK secessionism) Secularism being confined to that

³³ Dipankar Gupta, 'Secularisation and Minoritisation: The Limits of Heroic Thought', in D. L. Sheth and Gurpreet Mahajan (ed). *Minority Identities and the Nation State*, OUP, New Delhi, 1999.

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of the majority-minority paradigm also ignores the dynamic process of secularization.³⁴ Hence, one has to go beyond the definitions of fixed and permanent minorities, and acknowledge the process of secularization that throws up new minorities and the process of minoritisation that can create minorities out of a majority as well. Thus, in order for secularism to be fully realized, the majority-minority understanding should give away to a greater emphasis on the identity of the individual as a citizen of the country. Only then is it possible to protect the individual from majority-minority legislations and the political manipulation of these categories, which undermine secularism.

IV

This section will deal with the views of those who regard secularism as an outdated principle, unable to conquer the challenges posed by religion and unsuited to the Indian nation from the very start. Common to their perception of secularism is the idea of separating religion and the state, much on the lines of the United States. They examine secularism within this paradigm and criticise it since it has often fallen short of meeting the requirements of the 'separation model.'

The most common criticism voiced in this respect is the fact that secularism is alien to India. It is regarded as a western concept imposed on a traditional Indian society that is highly religious in nature. To this end, Madan opines, "secularism in South Asia as a generally shared credo of life is impossible, as a basis for state action impracticable and as a blueprint for the foreseeable future, impotent."³⁵ Explaining this statement, he claims that it is

³⁴ Secularisation is a process that inaugurates a functional differentiation of the social order, freeing the individuals from the stratified differentiation of traditional societies. Other forms of ascriptive identities also lose their status as systemic principles of organization.

³⁵ T.N. Madan, 'Secularism in its Place', in Rajeew Bhargava (ed) *Secularism and its Critics*, OUP, New Delhi, 1998

impossible as a credo of life since most of the people are active adherents of some or the other religion; as a state action, it either protects the minorities or finds it difficult to maintain state neutrality. Finally as a blueprint for the future, it is incapable of countering religious fundamentalism and fanaticism. Regarding secularism as a product of Enlightenment, he says that it entails an inherent rationality that cannot be applied to the religious sphere. It becomes even more problematic in countries like India, home to religions like Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism that are totalizing in nature...influencing the everyday life of its adherents. In such a situation, secularism, in seeking to create a private and public space violates the very freedom of the people. He adds that the success of secularism in the west can be attributed to the distinction between the sacred and the secular within Christianity, which is easily reflected in society as the private and public. This scenario is absent in India since the religions are so 'totalizing' in character it is difficult, according to him, to 'privatize religion' However, he does not talk of dispensing with secularism. Instead, he maintains that in order for it to become a success in India, it should transform itself into a national ethos, embracing believers and non-believers alike. In order to be an effective ideology, secularism would have to break away from its western counterpart and operate within the dynamics of the Indian state and its pluralist tradition.

However, Madan's critique based on arguments of secularism as a product of Enlightenment and his distinction of the sacred and the secular are refuted by scholars. The first claim is countered by Javeed Alam who argues that secularism does not have to be defined as a culturally fixed doctrine limited to the Christian societies, but is capable of extensions. He argues that modernity led to an individuation of persons and interests on a mass scale, which in turn gave rise to the notion of the private realm. Diverse notions of social good emerged

from existing contradictions in society, which on the one hand, resisted modernity, and on the other, sought to reap the benefits of the same. Secularism, according to Alam, emerged to address these competing notions of good, and to prevent them from debasing interactions in the public sphere. Secularism is hence, more than a mere separation of state and church; it prevents social strife and sectarian contentions from disrupting public life.³⁶ He adds that secularism does not have to be projected as a product of modernity, the advent of which, did not quite transform all that was not modern; instead it led to a recreation of tradition itself.

On the point of distinction of the sacred and the secular within the Christian doctrine, P.C Chatterjee claims that religions in India- Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Sikhism are also characterised by such dichotomies: of the observable historical facts about religion, and the inner core that serves as the essence of spiritual life. Thus, to render secularism as western on these grounds would be erroneous.³⁷

4.1 Secularism is also described as a “hegemonic discourse popularized by western intellectuals”³⁸ unacceptable to the Indians since religion is understood within different paradigms. Religion in India, according to Nandy, is understood as ‘an ideology’ and as a ‘faith’. As a faith it serves as a way of life and is a more reliable solution to conflicting claims.³⁹ Religion as ideology, on the other hand, serves as a “sub national, national or cross-national identifier of populations, contesting for, and protecting socio-economic interests, the kind most modern states prefer to deal with”⁴⁰. As opposed to the western meaning of

³⁶ Javeed Alam, ‘Indispensability of Secularism’, *Social Scientist*, Vol.27, July-Aug, 1998, pp.3-18.

³⁷ P.C. Chatterjee, *Secular Values in Secular India*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1995.

³⁸ Ashis Nandy, ‘The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance’, in Rajeev Bhargava (ed), *Secularism and its Critics*, OUP, New Delhi, 1998.

³⁹ Nandy supports this claim with various instances such as that of 200,000 Indians who declared themselves as Mohammedan Hindus in the Census of 1911. However, religion as ideology, prompted certain Punjabi speaking Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue, thereby differentiating between Sikhism and Hinduism

⁴⁰ Ibid

secularism, he talks of secularism as 'an equal respect for all religions', which can be identified more with countries like India. It implies, that the public sphere must provide a forum for a continuous dialogue among religious traditions and between the religious and the secular. Emphasizing on principles of tolerance, he adds that it is the non-modern section of society that plays a constructive role in contemporary politics. Secularism did serve a purpose at one point in time, though, over the years, it has lost much of its purpose. The reasons for this, he gives as follows: one, there can no longer be a separation of religion and state, since religion is used by parties as a potent instrument for political mobilization, vote bank politics and in extreme cases, to organize communal riots. Two, secular state, in which a majority tells the minority to soften its faith, it actually seeks their integration in the nation, which becomes a point of discontent for those who are deeply religious. Secularism is emerging as the new religion, a statist imposition, part of the modern day package of development, scientific growth and nation building. Lastly, rising fundamentalism and communalism have proved false the claims of a secular state to abate communal violence and the promise of a richer political life. Nandy believes that the politics of religious and ethnic violence is basically the politics of secularism and secularization⁴¹. He claims that secularism as an ideology can thrive only in a society that is predominantly non-secular. Once societies begin to be secularised, or getting cleansed of religion, the political status of secularism changes. In such societies people become aware of an increasingly desacralised world and start searching for faiths to give meaning to their life and retain the illusion of being part of a traditional community. Coming to India, he says that secularism acted as a balancing principle and a form of legitimate dissent

⁴¹ Ashia Nandy, 'The Twilight of certitudes: Secularism, Hindu Nationalism and other masks of Deculturation', in Veena Das, Dipamkar Gupta and Patricia Uberio (ed), *Tradition, Pluralism and Identity*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999

when Indian public life was non-modern. He says, “Over the last fifty years or so, secularism has had a good run. It has served, within the small but expanding modern sector in India, as an important public value and as an indicator of one’s commitment to the protection of minorities. Now⁴² the concept has begun to deliver less and less. By most imaginable criteria, institutionalized secularism has failed.” He uses this theory to explain the rise of Hindu nationalism. He says that the secularizing society throws up its own versions of religion to cater to the changing psychological and cultural needs of the citizens. Hindutva thus, is meant for those whose Hinduism has worn off. He describes it as a “ware meant for the supermarket of global mass culture where all religions are available in their consumable forms, neatly packaged for buyers.”

4.3 While most theorists lay emphasis on the state as a guarantor of secularism, Partha Chatterjee, attempts to find an arena outside the state to protect secular interests, minority rights in particular. He calls it the strategic politics of tolerance and in order to explain it makes use of Foucault’s idea of governmentality. Putting forth a critique of a liberal state and its inability to deal with issues centered on religion, he speaks of the sphere of governmentality which locates a specific form of power that entrenches itself in a society aimed at the well being of its population. However, once a particular group asserts its right against governmentality by refusing to enter the deliberative space, such a conception exhausts its possibilities. The strategic politics of tolerance, attempts to find a way out of this stalemate.

Tolerance, if understood as the willing acceptance of something that one disapproves of, is justified on one of the following grounds: a *contractualist* argument- persons entering the

⁴² Ibid, p.406

social contract would be unaware of which religion they belong to, or the status of their religion in the public arena, and will thus agree to mutual tolerance; the *consequentialist argument*- consequences of exercising tolerance are better than in not doing so and, an *argument about respect for persons*, which is a moral argument for toleration setting limits to toleration i.e. if there are practices that fail to show respect for persons, they need not be tolerated. Hence, a group has to practice tolerance within a community, towards its own members, only then can it claim tolerance from others outside of its community.

Toleration also permits, a group to refrain from giving reasons for their decisions and actions in certain political contexts. However, in such cases, the concerned group must choose a forum for deliberation within the community and give reasons therein. Avoiding deliberation, therefore does not imply that a group is undemocratic ...it just means that there are certain issues best understood by the community itself. In this way the communities engage in a two-fold process, they not only resist homogenization from outside, but also seek democratization from within their communities by pushing for change and reform. Hence, in talking of toleration, an attempt is made to locate a public space that is not the result of state legislation, but a product of political processes within each minority group. These institutions, however, must have the same degree of publicity and representation that is demanded of all public institutions having regulatory functions. He prefers that minority rights be the initiative of the concerned groups themselves, which can lead to greater democratization.⁴³

⁴³ He gives the example of the 1920 reform campaign of Sikh Gurudwaras where there was a demand made from within the Sikh community that Sikh Shrines and religious establishments be handed over to elected bodies, leading to the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill 1925. Also gives the example of the SGPC, which was the first legally, constituted public body in colonial India in which universal suffrage was recognized. Also, the Ulema in 1920 demanded that Wakf committees be replaced by elected representative bodies by local Muslims.

The concept of secularism, implying in its literal intent, 'matters of this world', as against spiritual matters has been at the center of much scholarly debate. The distinction between this worldly and spiritual however is not so simply applied in the existential reality. When ideology is the key factor in determining the course that a nation takes, the idea of the 'secular' is likewise modified.

Secularism is an accepted norm in liberal- democratic states. The need for secularism to be an integral part of the philosophy of a modern nation state is accentuated by identity politics and contesting claims to state resources. Hence, to have a single notion of secularism as a separation of state and religion is not feasible. At the core of the secular principle lies the objective of non-discrimination in religious matters. It was in pursuit of non-discriminatory practices that the idea of separating the Church and state was first initiated. However, separation does not have to be a universal norm, though it serves as a vantage point for much of the scholarly research on secularism.

Coming to the Indian state, secularism was considered a necessity, given the turn of events at the time of independence. The debate on secularism most of the times ends up as a confrontation between the Hindus and the Muslims. This is because there exists a cultural fault line in the Indian state and society. It is this fault line when exploited for narrow interests, manifests itself in Hindu-Muslim antagonism, communalism and other forms of cultural contests in society. It is this fault line that Gandhi acknowledged, realizing thereby, that there could not be one leader who would be popular with both communities. Cultural symbolism and contestation in an attempt to restructure power relations only deepens the fault line.

There is also a likelihood of ascriptive identities being given preference in mass based politics. It is for this reason that the Congress is hailed as a secular party with a communal tinge, since it has at times leaned towards one community or another. ⁴⁴This however is acceptable as long as it does not threaten values of liberal secular democracy. Thus, no justification can be extended for political manipulation to establish the cultural hegemony of one community over the plurality of others.

Given this situation secularism has to be understood as a principle that seeks non-discrimination on one hand, and helps in the realization of the values of liberty, equality and citizenship on the other. More so, the secular state does not imply irreligiosity, nor does it propose exclusion. Religion remains the private matter of the individual. The state intervenes only to protect the religious liberty of its citizens. The public space provided by the secular ideology is to facilitate a deliberative process that would enable contesting forces to resolve differences. This space should not be monopolized by dogmatic or aggressive politics, whether of the majority or the minority. Current political events in India show that the Hindu nationalists tend to usurp this public space to perpetrate an ideology that runs parallel to the secular state. What this ideology constitutes and how it interprets secular provisions in the Indian state is what will be examined in the next two chapters.

⁴⁴ Shashi Joshi explains this with the '*cultural internality*', thesis, which establishes cultural limits to all politics, especially mass based politics. In such situations, parties and organizations involved utilize symbolic codes of communication in order to garner support.

Chapter Two: The Hindu Nationalist Perspective: The Idea of Nation and Community.

I

“Yes, we are a nation by ourselves. Because religious, racial, cultural and historical affinities bind us ultimately into a homogeneous nation and added to it we are most pre-eminently gifted with a territorial unity as well. Our racial being is identified with India – our beloved Fatherland and our Holyland above all, and irrespective of it all, we Hindus will to be a nation, and, therefore, we are a Nation.

It is absurd to call us a community in India. Germans are the nation in Germany and the Jews a community. The Turks are a nation in Turkey and the Arab or American, a minority community there. Even so, the Hindus are the nation in India- in Hindusthan, and the Muslim minority, a community.”⁴⁵

The quote above is an extract from Savarkar’s Presidential address in the Nagpur session of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1938. It reflects most of the characteristics that form the core of the present day Hindu nationalist ideology: a sense of national pride rooted in the ‘Hinduness’ of the Indian state and society, Hindus as forming a holistic nation and a sense of nationality linked to, and as a continuum of the past, in particular, to the original inhabitants of the subcontinent, known as Sindhus. This is reiterated when Savarkar in clear terms defines a Hindu as “a person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the seas as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland, that is the cradle of his religion.”⁴⁶ This serves as the guiding force behind the politics of the Sangh Parivar, as well as the foundations of the Hindu

⁴⁵ Savarkar’s Presidential address, “Hindu Nationalists- Do not aim to usurp what belongs to others”, *Organiser*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2, May 31, 1987, p.11.

⁴⁶ V.D. Savarkar, “*Hindutva- who is a Hindu?*”, Hindi Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi, 2003

Nationalist movement and a blue print of the Hindu Rashtra. Savarkar was explicit in his support for a Hindu state. The Hindu nationalists at present, though having similar aspirations, are unable to implement their scheme in totality since they have to operate within a democratic polity and hence are limited by democratic mechanisms. Despite these limitations they have emerged as a formidable force in Indian politics and have sought to challenge the secular character of the state and seek to replace it with a homogeneous Hindu identity.

Savarkar justified Hindu nationalism by saying, “the Hindu nationalists do not aim to usurp what belongs to others. Therefore, even if they be called Hindu communalists they are justifiably so and are about the only real Indian nationalists. For, real and justifiable Indian nationalism must be equitable to all communities that compose the Indian nation. But for the same reason the Moslems alone are communalists is an unjustifiable anti- nationalist and treacherous sense of the term. For it is they who want to usurp to themselves all that belongs to others. If to defend the just and equitable rights of Hinduism in their own land is communalism, then we are communalists par excellence, and a sense of glory in being the most devoted Hindu communalists, which to us means being the truest and the most equitable Hindu nationalists.”⁴⁷

This spirit of cultural pride and ethnic rejuvenation is expressed by Golwalkar, who has the following to say in his description of India- “Our concept of the Hindu nation is not a mere bundle of political and economic rights. It is essentially a *cultural* one. Our ancient and sublime cultural value of life forms its life breath, and it is only an intense rejuvenation of the

⁴⁷ Ibid; 47.

spirit of our culture that can give us a true vision of our national life, and a fruitful direction to all our efforts in solving innumerable problems confronting our nation today.”⁴⁸

The intention behind quoting Savarkar and Golwalkar at the very start was to highlight the thought process of the Hindu nationalists and also to show that this ideology was as much a part of the Indian polity in the pre- independence times as it is now.

1.1 *Hindu Nationalism: Prior to 1947*

In pre independence times, the Hindu nationalist ideology existed alongside the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Muslim League (ML). The INC served as the vanguard party for the freedom struggle. However there existed other parties and organizations, which were not under the Congress umbrella or were factions of the INC. The Hindu Mahasabha led one such movement. For a long time it struggled with a dual existence – following its own ideology (which was in the making) and that of the freedom struggle associated with the Congress. From its existence as dispersed local organizations, it became an all India movement with an agenda for freedom, not so much a struggle against the British, but a struggle to rid the country of ‘alien’ rule and its restoration to the Hindus- the original inhabitants of this land. This notion of the other is reflected as a continuum in the Hindu nationalist ideology. It includes not only the British, but other non-Hindu religious groups as well. This aspect will be dealt with in much greater detail in the following chapters. The struggle for independence thus, was not merely of political independence, but a cultural one, to establish a nation identified with the Hindu – a term that describes a public culture which

⁴⁸ M.S. Golwalkar, ‘*Bunch of Thoughts*’, Vikram Prakashan, 1996.p.26

seeks to assimilate all other cultures within its ambit.⁴⁹ This was the aim of the Hindu Mahasabha in the past, and is of the Hindu Right at present.

The reinterpretation of Hindu tradition in the twentieth century initially occurred in provinces of Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab. Such an interpretation gradually spread to other parts of the country and was consolidated in the Hindu Nationalist Movement, which ran parallel, to both the INC and the Muslim League. However, unlike the INC that served as a platform for the Nationalist movement and the League that succeeded in fulfilling its demands, the Mahasabha, despite concerted efforts, was unable to enforce its agenda, most often eclipsed by the freedom struggle.

Prior to 1922, the Hindu Mahasabha was an inter-provincial organization, linking the movements in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Initially, there were many Hindu Sabhas across the country engaged in reform and a defence of tradition. The formation of the Muslim League in 1906 and the 1911 census, indicating a decline in Hindu population in the future, heightened anxieties and provoked the Hindu Sabhas to think of a more broad based all India organization, which would protect Hindu communal interests. .

However, in its initial years, the Hindu Nationalist agenda suffered from ambiguities. It tended to vacillate between the mainstream nationalist movement identified with the INC, and in forwarding its agenda of Hindu centered politics. Instances of this can be found, when in 1908, the Hindu Sabha politics gained greater momentum and drifted away from the INC. A series of letters published under the title 'The Dying Race' in the *Bengalee* highlighted the decline of Hindus in relation to all other religious groups and predicted the disappearance of

⁴⁹ The term 'public culture' is used by Thomas Hansen to describe a public space where a society and its constitutive individuals and communities imagine, respect and recognize themselves through a political discourse and representation of state and civil society organizations, that embraces all other cultures within its ambit and seeks to establish a sovereign, disciplined national culture rooted in the past.

the community in the future. This led to allegations against the INC, which according to the Hindu sabhas was unable to protect Hindu interests. In 1915, the first All India Hindu Conference in Haridwar witnessed the formation of the *Sarvadeshak Hindu Sabha*, which had as a part of its agenda, among other things, to promote union and solidarity among all sections of the Hindu community, to protect and promote Hindu interests and to provide good feelings between Hindus and other communities.⁵⁰

However, the organization soon ran into problems and was rechristened as the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, an all India movement launched in 1921. Soon after its formation, incidents such as the Moplah rebellion in South India and the conversions of Rajputs⁵¹ led to disputes between the ML and Mahasabha that sparked off anti-Hindu and anti-Muslim campaigns. The issue of conversions also led to the Shuddhi Movement. What remained absent was a coherent workable ideology of the Hindu nationalists, which led many among them to divert their attention to the non-cooperation movement. However, this was to be resolved under the able leadership of Bhai Parmanand and Savarkar.

The leadership provided by them established the Hindu Mahasabha as an all India Hindu nationalist movement with its core agenda as the formation of a Hindu nation and its explicit Hindu Nationalist stand as opposed to the INC and the League. Parmanand was of the view that the Hindus alone could defend their community, for which a party like the Mahasabha was appropriate. Their ideology was defined by 'one nation, one religion, one culture', thereby seeking to establish a unitary nation. Territorial independence served as a means to the ultimate end- a Hindu religious, racial and cultural identity. This was described well by

⁵⁰ Kenneth W. Jones, 'Politicised Hinduism: The Ideology and Program of the Hindu Mahasabha', in Robert D Baird (ed), *Religion in Modern India*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1981.

⁵¹ The Malkan Rajputs were forcibly converted to Islam and wanted readmission to Hinduism. The Mahasabha obliged them. However, this led to widespread protests by the Muslims, which only served to heighten tensions between the two communities.

Savarkar, for whom a Hindu was a person who regarded 'Bharatvarsha as his fatherland and holyland'. Golwalkar opined that describing India as a 'Hindu Nation' captured the essence of what the nation constitutes: unlike the term Bharatiya, which is likely to be misconstrued as including all other communities like Muslims, Christians etc. The Hindu Mahasabha represented the interests of a small section of the population. Most of the Hindus were a part of the INC. The social base of the Mahasabha consisted of landlords, merchants and the aristocracy, thereby limiting its outreach. In independent India, the Mahasabha gradually lost support and the mascot of preserving and promoting Hindu interests was taken over by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Jan Sangh.

1.2 It is these strains of Hindutva that have been consistently put together by the RSS over the years and has given birth to the Sangh Parivar, which influences not only national politics, but garners support from its international counterparts as well. Over the years, the Hindu nationalist movement has come to occupy center stage in Indian politics. Their ideology runs parallel to the values intrinsic to the Indian state and constitution. The Hindu Right has challenged many values of the Indian state- democracy, secularism and Indian nationalism itself. Of paramount importance to them is the identity of a 'Hindu', which according to them is inherently secular, tolerant and democratic. They give credit to the 'Hindus' for years of peaceful coexistence that India has successfully had. Their aim, then, is to restore the dominance of the 'Hindu' in the political, social, economic, and most importantly cultural pockets of India. For this they seek to establish a Hindu state, which is spearheaded by the Hindu nationalist movement. The Hindu nationalist movement then, is primarily a cultural critique of the Indian state. It not only questions the cultural plurality of the Indian state but also seeks to rectify it by assimilating everyone under the ambit of the Hindu. It is this

tendency of the Hindu nationalist movement that would lead one to examine their ideology and their understanding of secularism. As stated in the first chapter, secularism in most societies, especially in India, cannot be applied as a separation of Church and state. However, nor does it imply the notion of the 'melting pot' that the Hindu nationalists seek to impose. Secularism not only implies non-discrimination on religious grounds, but also mandates the state to give to every community that much liberty and equality, required to preserve and promote its needs and assert its rights. How the Hindu nationalists comprehend this shall be examined soon. However, at the start, it would be useful to examine the Hindu nationalist idea of the state and what they imply when they speak of cultural nationalism. This will reveal their perception of a nation state, which would in effect reflect an understanding of their idea of secularism.

The present study seeks to examine some of these issues by undertaking a review of the '*Organiser*', which is an authentic source since it serves as platform for debating and expressing Hindu nationalist opinion on various issues and also reflects their ideology. It is one of the oldest circulated weeklies, which hit the stands a few weeks before partition. The website of the *Organiser* among other things, holds that the weekly has come to believe that "resistance to tyranny is obedience to God". In addition it holds that for 'clear, straightforward, impartial views on subjects of national and international importance and for imbibing unadulterated patriotism, it is useful to read the *Organiser*.' The *Organizer* is a weekly that addresses various issues of national and international importance. Apart from reporting current events, it dedicates a large section of its journal in addressing issues that relate to the Hindu nationalists, including ideas on secularism, conversions, and minority rights, which are discussed in most issues. Among others, are a critique of Congress style

politics, communalism, critique of Gandhian and Nehruvian politics and accounts of the status of Hindus in foreign countries, especially in Islamic states. Through all these, direct or indirect, their intention is to stress on the Hinduness of the Indian state, a kind of aggressive assertion of the Hindu identity as opposed to the liberal multicultural identity that is often reflected in the functioning of the Indian state.

II

2.0 Idea of the India: The Nation as a Cultural Construct.

The Hindu nationalist movement is the Hindu right's "freedom struggle" to gain cultural freedom and establish the historical supremacy of the Hindu community. Hence, their idea of a Hindu Rashtra and cultural nationalism, as we will see in this section, draws largely from an appreciation of this ancient culture, portrayed as tolerant, inclusive and based on the wisdom of sages.

In response to common apprehensions regarding the Hindu Rashtra, which for many would imply the dominance of religion in the public sphere, with superstition and obscurantism replacing a modern and scientific outlook, it is maintained that, "The term 'Rashtra' connotes the entire gamut of the life of the people constituting the nation. It has several limbs and organs. The state is just one limb, albeit an important one. It is intended to serve a particular function...there are several other aspects of economic, social, cultural etc"⁵². The Hindu Rashtra regards "the nation as having a pivotal role, a philosophy to live by. No political party has the right to change the basic pattern of the nation's values of life."⁵³ The basic pattern in this case includes the basic structure of the constitution and embodies other deeper values as well.

⁵² H.V. Seshadri, 'Hindu Rashtra and Politics', *Organiser*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 18, Sept. 15, 1985, p.9

⁵³ Ibid

The recurring trends that emerge in the text of the Organiser highlight two broad aspects:

2.1 *Hindu Rashtra is a cultural entity that has existed through centuries*: This is evident in the following: “Ours is not a nation born after August 15, 1947. It is an ancient nation with a long unbroken tradition of certain unique life ideals. Whoever accepts this verdict of our history has no other way but to fall back on the concept of Hindu Rashtra. Whether one prefers to call it by that name itself or by any other name for the sake of political compulsions, the facts remain the same.”⁵⁴ In the above statement, one sees not only a willing acceptance of the Hindu as constituting the cultural core of India, but a recognition also of the existence of other aspects of the modern state, such as supremacy of the constitution and the need to abide by it. Of course, a greater weightage is given to cultural values, but there seems to be a note of acceptance of the present set up. However, it also reflects their notion that the independence of 1947 was merely political, and that true independence lies in cultural freedom, a struggle they claim to initiate and carry on. Another instance of the cultural supremacy in constituting the idea of the nation is revealed in the following: “the nation is above politics – not merely a conglomeration of individuals; it also embraces certain life ideals, which politics reflects and protects. Such a concept has no place for divisive tendencies; instead it serves as the basic impulse for national harmony and integration.”⁵⁵ This unity underlying India is attributed to the Hindu ethos as explicitly mentioned in this excerpt, “A nation must have some common roots and our roots are Hindu. This is what has kept us together through centuries of foreign rule, whether Muslim, British or Portuguese. Those who argue that religion cannot be a common factor in nationhood are talking nonsense. There can be no nation without the common element of culture, and culture is an amalgam of religion and language. Religion is

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

just another form of communication, which is why people go to temples and churches to commune together. It is out of this communing together that a community is born, and out of a community, a nation. National formation thus happened long before the advent of the Muslims or invaders like Prithviraj Chauhan and Shivaji.”⁵⁶ Here the process of nationhood is defined not in political terms, but as a process of gradual cultural formation, facilitated by the commingling of religion and language and the subsequent development of a common culture resulting from years of formation. In India, this is attributed to the Hindus, who serve as a unifying force.

2.2 Hindu as an inclusive and tolerant culture: The other aspect that is most often emphasized is that the Hindus represent a culture that is tolerant and inclusive, thereby more adaptive and accommodative to changes brought about by diverse cultures. “The rise of Hindu power—whether under Vijaynagar, Shivaji, Guru Gobind or Ranjit Singh never witnessed such a scene (referring to fanatic Islamic and Christian states that reduced other religions to serfdom or led to their total annihilation). The Hindu has always welcomed loyal non-Hindus to participate in the political. The patriotic among them were even given crucial military assignments. Not only in the political sphere, in every other field, including the religious, they were given full and equal opportunities. There was not a single right or privilege enjoyed by the Hindus which was denied to others. All that was expected of others was observance of certain national norms and traditions. Application of Hindu Rashtra concept to statecraft means just that.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Jay Dubashi, ‘Ayodhya is the Center of Our Nationhood’, *Organiser*, Vol.43 (Special issue) May31, 1991, p.42.

⁵⁷ Ibid

This could be interpreted as a critique of the Hindu nationalists, who regard secularism as minority appeasement. For them, equality means identical treatment of all. The article in indicating that in ancient times all non-Hindus were treated equally, is a pointer to the Indian state at present, which gives a special status to the minorities.

Further insights about the Hindu Rashtra are given, describing the concept as “based on Sarva Dharma Sambhava. There is absolute freedom of worship and faith in the concept of Hindu Rashtra. Indian secularism is not attached to any community or text. The word ‘Hindu’ is a representation of a nation of people having a common tradition, history, culture and sociology. Those who call us communal are confused, and do not have a clear- cut vision of either secularism or nationalism.”⁵⁸

The idea of Sarva Dharma Sambhava and freedom of worship, reflecting the inclusiveness of Hindu culture is reiterated in the following, “We are a religious people and by the national ethos of the Hindu, entirely tolerant of ways of worship. We received with open arms fringe people like Jews and Parsis, and our motto of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakom’ asserts that it takes all sorts to make the world of spiritual seekers at all levels. By becoming a Hindu nation our outlook on international relations will improve greatly and we shall be worthy of our national motto of Satyameva Jayate⁵⁹.”

“Only a Hindu state can enable the country to prosper. Hindutva as a way of life is unlike any structured unitary religion and gives its citizens freedom of worship. Hindutva is described as an outlook on life and not a prescription for society. As Hindutva embraces all, it does not make a distinction between secular, non- secular and anti-secular.”⁶⁰ On similar lines is the

⁵⁸ B. Sharma, ‘Free India’s Worst brutalities perpetrated in Ayodhya on Nov.2’, *Organiser* Vol.XLII, No. 15,Nov.18, 1990,p.13.

⁵⁹ Dr. M. Verma, ‘Rationale of a Hindu State’, *Organiser*, Vol. XL, No. 25, Dec.11, 1998, p.9.

⁶⁰ Prafull Goradia, ‘Value of Hindutva to Modern India’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLII, No.41, May 19, 1991, p.5, 10.

following, “ Hindutva is a way of life and the Supreme Court has also supported this view. People in different countries have connected themselves with their nation with different names. For example, people in Europe say ‘fatherland’, while several countries including India have recognized their nation as ‘motherland’. Ours is not a nation born yesterday. It has been here for ages, in fact long before other nations of the world appeared on the stage. Nor was it primitive or uncivilized. ‘Hindu’ is a way of life. Unity in diversity is its basis. This only makes it a Hindu Rashtra. This is the universal truth.”⁶¹

2.3 A Hindu state is regarded as an already existing entity by virtue of an overwhelmingly large Hindu population. It is interesting to note how the Hindu nationalists interpret certain contentious constitutional provisions to suit their design. “The question is why even talk of, let alone guarantee special protection to minorities, unless the dominant status and position of the majority are proclaimed for all times to come. Had the majority community not been accorded superior status, there would be no question of referring to a part of the total Indian polity separately as minorities, because every section or part of the Indian polity would be covered under ‘persons’ and ‘citizens’.”⁶² The writer goes to the extent of saying “the word ‘secular’ in the Indian constitution actually implies that the Hindus assured the other religions that they would not be converted to Hinduism. The first step towards deviating from the constitutional mandate of India being a Hindu Rashtra would be to abolish special provisions made for minorities or other religions and to banish from the constitution the words ‘minorities’ and ‘religion’. One has to accept that India is a Hindu state which is magnanimous enough to provide a special status for its minorities. There can be no question

⁶¹ K.S. Sudarshan, ‘Political Power alone is Not a tool for Social Change’, *Organiser*, Vol.LIV, No.21, Dec.8, 2002, p.20.

⁶² H.S. Gupta, ‘The Constitution Ordains a Hindu State’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLII, No.14, Nov.11, 1990, p.13.

of minorities or special provisions if India is not a Hindu Rashtra. As of today, India is a Hindu Rashtra as per its constitution.”⁶³

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) voices a sentiment of inclusiveness when it holds that “India is already a Hindu Rashtra and not something yet to become. The word ‘Hindu’ does not stand for a religion, but stands for a civilisation. It does not stand for one way of life but encompasses within itself a number of ways of life...the partition did not settle the question of Hindu supremacy even in divided India. The struggle is still on. The Hindus have got a country but have not got powers since the ruling parties have to depend on minority votes. Much of the tolerance is born out of our defeatist mentality.”⁶⁴

An assertion of the Hinduness of the Indian state is made in the following extract, “What do you mean by Hindu Rashtra? An Indian nation with Indian culture, as against Roman and Arabic culture. Bharat is a Hindu Rashtra, not because RSS says so, but due to the fact that Hindus are in an overwhelming majority. Muslims in India are converts from Hindus. A few lakh Afghans and Turks who came as invaders have long lost their identity. What differs is their way of worship, but otherwise, culturally, historically and geographically they are Hindus. The concept of Hindu Rashtra given by RSS is cultural, historical and geographical. Even under Muslim rule it was Hindu Rashtra, although the rulers were Afghan and Turk invaders. Revered Shivaji just wanted to establish Hindu rule in a Hindu Rashtra.”⁶⁵ The above quotes express clearly two things: one, that the Hindu nationalists take pride in their past which has been dominated by the Hindus. Their ideology reflects an insistence on their part to assert this historical continuity till the present. It is a history where even during foreign

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Girilal Jain, ‘If the Ram temple cannot be constructed in India, will it be built in New York or London?’ *Organiser*, Vol.XLII, No.4, Sept.2, 1990, p.9

⁶⁵ Pran Salhotra, ‘Congress Secularism Breeds Dual Nationality,’ *Organiser*, Vol.XL, No.26, Dec.18, 1988,p.11

rule the culture was predominantly Hindu. Many of the non-Hindus according to them are converts, thus only proving that many of the present day minorities were erstwhile Hindus. Two, they attribute minority safeguards to the Hindu state, not so much to protect the minorities from majority discrimination but as being bestowed upon them by the majority. This as will be seen at a later part of this study, totally contradicts their opinion on minority rights.

The meaning of the term 'Hindu' is not consistent over time and tends to contradict the inclusiveness they propagate. The VHP defines a Hindu "as the one who follows any religion originated in India though he may live anywhere in the world."⁶⁶ Such a definition quite obviously rules out Islam and Christianity, since they originated outside India. This is in keeping with the 'Holy land' criteria that Savarkar talked of. Another definition seems more inclusive-" the word 'Hindu' does not denote any particular religion or community. During the last hundred years and more, it has been a nomenclature used to refer comprehensively to various categories of people for purposes of personal law. It has been applied to dissenters and non-conformists and even to those who have entirely repudiated Brahmanism."⁶⁷ Such a definition comes somewhat closer to the notion of the secular. However, such moderations have a limited scope and application in the Hindu nationalist ideology. More often than not they contradict themselves or seek to impose a homogeneous nomenclature of the Hindu across all sections of the Indian population as is expressed in the following: "Hindu is not a religion. It is a geo-cultural concept. The identity of those who live in England are known as English or British. Their identity and nationality are defined by the word English or British. Similarly, the word 'Hindu' denotes nationality. That is why Muslims and Christians living in

⁶⁶ Anadshankar Pandya, 'National Unity and Hinduism', *Organiser*, Vol.XLIX, No.26, Jan.25, 1998, p.47-48.

⁶⁷ Arun P. Sathe, 'The Right Perspective', *Organiser*, Vol.XLVII, No. 27, Feb.4, 1996, p.9

India should be known as Mohammedan Hindus and Christian Hindus respectively. The term 'Hindu' defines the nationality of India."⁶⁸ However, in stating this the Hindu nationalists overlook the fact that the manner in which Hindu or Hindutva is most often defined, denies the other communities their distinct status. The term Hindu Mohammedan itself is a contradiction since both communities follow different tenets and have distinct ideologies. More so, such a category contradicts the Hindu nationalists idea of a Hindu, which are from time to time expounded. For instance K.S. Sudarshan, while addressing a rally described the term 'Hindu' as a "geo-cultural concept, the culture that has been growing for ages, with its essence of 'unity in diversity'. It is a culture based on the teachings and ideas of our rishis and munis, the culture that embraces all faith and communities of India. The RSS is the epitome of this Hindu culture and stands for peace and discipline to ensure all round development of the society."⁶⁹

Another interesting point made by the Hindu nationalists that reflects the distinction of the 'cultural' and 'political' within their ideology is the manner in which they perceive the Hindu identity vis-à-vis the Hindu citizen, emphasizing more on the latter: "To understand the word Hindu, it is necessary to understand the difference between citizenship and nationality. By becoming a citizen, one does not become a Hindu. Citizenship is a political process. It can be granted on completion of certain requirements, and it can also be terminated. Nationality, on the other hand, is a natural process, and once acquired cannot be terminated. Its acquisition takes a long time and process. If the Hindu wave that is currently perceptible seeks only a political basis, there is again a danger. It can prove beneficial only if it has a wider basis of

⁶⁸ M.M. Joshi, ' In Kashmir, it is not a Hindu- Muslim quest, it is India versus anti- India', *Organiser*, Vol.XLIII, No.27, Jan 26, 1992, p.7

⁶⁹ Jyotilal Choudhury, 'India Should Teach Pakistan a Lesson', *Organiser*, Vol.LIII, No.36, Mar.24, 2002, p.3

Hindu philosophy. There is now a race to call oneself Hindu.”⁷⁰ Before this becomes a political fashion, the article maintains that this process should be halted.

2.3 Critique of Congress (secular) Politics:

The Hindu nationalists not only present a cultural critique of the India state, but also accuse the Congress of ‘appeasement of minorities’ and acting in defiance of the Hindu ethos. For them, Congress politics forbade the formation of a Hindu state, which has ever since led to communal clashes in the country, starting with the partition. “That we are not a Hindu Rashtra is due to the betrayal of Hindus by the Congress of Gandhi and Nehru. They had no mandate from the people for partitioning the country on religious grounds and secularism, the brainchild of Nehru, for whom religion served as a tool for political manipulation of the people with no sincerity attached to it. The legacy gives us recurrent communal riots, communal pockets like Kashmir, Mallapuram and the congeries of tiny Christian states that are being formed. Is it not a quirk of fate that a tiny people collected from the Diaspora have the Jewish state of Israel, and eighty-five crores of Hindus do not have a ‘homeland’ to call their own? And to nullify this claim, efforts are being made to reduce our percentage in the population as a glance at census reports will show.”⁷¹ Defending the establishment of a Hindu state, the writer continues, “after all England is formally Anglican and the Queen is the ‘defender of the faith’, and in America even Presidents go to the Church, but there is no discrimination made among people on religious grounds. By reason of our historical record and religious ethos, there is not the remotest chance that our becoming formally a Hindu nation will mean any hardship to any group. We cannot be like the Arab states, which systematically annihilate or persecute religious minorities. We are a spiritual and civilized

⁷⁰ Muzaffar Hussain, ‘Hindutva-The Modern Context’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLI, No.26, Dec.18, 1988, p.9

⁷¹ Dr. M. Varma, ‘Rationale of a Hindu State’, *Organiser* Vol. XL, No.25, Dec.11, 1998, p. 9

people corrupted by the long tenure of the Congress in office.”⁷² Thus, the “advantages of our becoming a Hindu state are innumerable, the first being that the “secularists” reproducing pre-partition, inter communal fracas will be automatically checkmated.”⁷³

III

3.1 *Hindutva as Synonymous with Cultural Nationalism:*

There has been a lot of confusion on the usage of the term ‘Hindutva’, which is often described as ‘a way of life’. However, such a definition only adds to the lack of coherence that exists in the Hindu nationalist ideology. Savarkar who coined the term admitted that Hindutva was so comprehensive that it was difficult to encompass its implications in a single definition: “The ideas and ideals, the systems and societies, the thoughts and sentiments which have centered round this name are so varied and rich, so powerful and so subtle, so elusive and yet so vivid that the term Hindutva defies all attempts at analysis, ... Hindutva is not a word but a history. Hinduism is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of Hindutva. Unless it is made clear what is meant by the latter the first remains unintelligible and vague.”⁷⁴ Over the years, however, the Sangh has attempted to define Hindutva. As will be seen at a later point the essence of what constitutes Hindutva remains the same- an all-encompassing ideology aimed at cultural revival.

a) The driving force behind the cultural revival of the Hindus is their attempt to fight what they call ideological aggression of the Muslims and Christians. However, this aggression is located in a historical context. It is said “Ideological aggression, if not resisted in proper time, leads invariably to physical aggression. Hindu society has been facing ideological aggression

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ V.D. Savarkar, ‘*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*’ Hindi Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi, 2003.

from Islam for more than thirteen hundred years; with the result that Islam has gained a large population of converts who have staged repeated rounds of violence besides partitioning the country and forming permanently hostile states on both sides of our borders. Hindu history goes to show that Hindu society has rarely put forward an ideological defence and all along tried to correct the aggressor by the catholicity of its spiritual culture.

While Hindu society has survived due its intrinsic strength, it has not been able to stop ideological aggression followed by physical aggression, and has suffered staggering losses in terms of territory, population and morale.”⁷⁵ Most likely referring to the Muslims and Christians, the following is said, “the aggressive ideologies operating within the Hindu homeland have entrenched themselves in the shape of whole communities and have many centres and seminars which send out an ever increasing number of ideologically equipped cadres for spreading their tentacles farther afield. Being foreign in their origins, these ideologies have powerful international allies who provide to them massive aid and abetment. It is high time for Hindu society to take up a determined stand against ideological aggression and organize its own defence on an ideological basis. The defence has to be simultaneous on two fronts: strenghting, reforming, revitalizing and reaffirming our own religious, cultural, educational and social institutions and traditions, exposing the true character of aggressive ideologies with reference to their own sources and history and in the light of Hindu thought.”⁷⁶ Emphasising on the need for nationalism to continue as a simultaneous process alongside politics it is said that, “divorcing of nationalism from politics since independence was a great tragedy. The fissiparous tendencies in the country could be attributed to the lack of a binding force like a national ideology. Only a common spirit of nationalism could bind

⁷⁵ Sita Ram Goel, ‘Ideological Defence of Hindu Society’, *Organiser*, Deepavali Special, Oct. 8, 1998, p.32

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

people together.”⁷⁷ “Nationalism is a natural indigenous growth. It was, and is, unity in diversity...the recognition of basic cultural unity of all communities of India - Hindu, Muslim, Christian etc.- does not mean denying them their separate identities. They are like separate branches of a common tree. The principle of ‘unity in diversity’ is applicable for India as a whole. The RSS believes in this principle. The basic cultural unity of India as a whole is happily accompanied by sub-cultural diversities of different religions and their sects. The identity of any particular community depends on viewing these two aspects together, and not on one, to the exclusion of the other.”⁷⁸ The quotes above reveal a dichotomy in the Hindu nationalist approach to politics. On one hand, they seek nationalism to counter the Muslim and the Christians, while on the other they regard minorities as a part of the whole. It is also seen in their account of history, where on one hand the Hindu culture is said to be inclusive, embracing religions and cultures from foreign lands. However, at the same time, this Hindu culture is antagonistic towards these very religions, a hostility that is used well by the Hindu nationalists at present to further their agenda. It is such an understanding that often contradicts their claims of Hindutva as all- encompassing ideology striving for unity in diversity. This, when reflected in day-to-day politics transforms itself into an aggressive quest that seeks to subsume pluralities in a unified entity of the ‘Hindu’.

b) *Cultural revival as central to Hindutva:*

Coming to the idea of cultural nationalism, it is observed that the Hindu Right’s perception of nationalism not only reflects revivalist tendencies,⁷⁹ but a critique and a response to

⁷⁷ H.V. Seshadri, ‘Open Debate on Hindu Rashtra’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLI, No. 33, Mar.11, 1990, p. 10

⁷⁸ Prof. S.G. Kashikar, ‘Hindutva and its Critics’, *Organiser*, Vol.LIV, No.14, Oct.20, 2002, p.11.

⁷⁹ “The concept of cultural nationalism is nothing but an exhortation to every citizen to come out of his narrow confines of community, race, caste and language and share in the national wealth of the cultural mosaic that symbolizes the uniqueness of Bharat in this world.” B.P. Singhal, ‘Save Democracy, Save Secularism’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLVIII, No.3, Aug 18, 1996, p.9-10.

secularism and to show that Hindutva is a more inclusive creed which has an intrinsic propensity to embrace diversity: “Hindutva or cultural nationalism is not a narrow, communal, bigoted, exclusivist or theocratic concept. It defines the national identity of India, rooted in her inclusive, assimilative, integrative and secular culture. This is in sharp contrast to the exclusivist, intolerant, communal and coercive nationalism of Pakistan.”⁸⁰

“Awakening of Hindutva and organization of Hindu society is the remedy to all ills the country is suffering from today. The need of the hour is to devote more and more time to this cause...though the country has achieved political independence, it is yet to attain national and cultural independence. The dream of Ramrajya or Swarajya that Vivekanand, Tilak, Aurobindo and Gandhi had is yet to be realized. National rejuvenation can be achieved only through the philosophy of Hindutva.”⁸¹ Elaborating more on the foundations of Hindu nationalism, they claim that it should be based on the works of the stalwarts of Indian philosophy- “The Hindu Renaissance of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century was characterized by the recovery of India’s ancient heritage through a rational examination of the foundations of its culture and achievement. Such a progressive movement had its leading figures as Dayanand Saraswati, Vivekanand and Sri Aurobindo- all of whom attached great importance to the power of reason. It is their approach built on a foundation of ancient Indian history and culture, revitalized by a scientific attitude that should have been the basis of nationalism⁸².... Indian nationalism cannot hide behind slogans like

⁸⁰ Correspondent, ‘BJP for a qualitative change in relationship with Muslims’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLVIII, No.47, June 22, 1997, p.4

⁸¹ H.V. Seshadri, ‘Hindutva: Remedy to all Ills’, *Organiser*, Vol.LII, No.50, July1, 2002, p.4

⁸² The importance of the historical context is reiterated when it is said “the history of India is the history of Hindu society, of Hindu culture and Hindu spirituality; it is the history of a Hindu nation and not the history of foreign invaders as we are being taught today. But a Hindu is called a communalist in his own homeland. This is the greatest wonder of the world.” Anandsahnkar Pandya, ‘National Unity and Hinduism’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLIX, No. 26, Jan25, 1998, p.47-48

Gandhism, secularism and the like. Nothing should be accepted on faith or on authority and nothing should be above debate...this means going back to the age of enlightenment.”⁸³

There are certain other explanations of cultural nationalism that could be interpreted as a critique of the secular state in India, especially when Hindutva is described as a “guarded wail for equality with the minorities especially the Muslims who, during the past fifty years have politically come to be regarded as the most chosen people. Towards this very end the propounders of Hindutva cry for a common civil code and removal of discriminatory provisions of Articles 29 and 30 and Article 370, restoration of sites of Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi, which were demolished in order to erect Muslim mosques.

Throughout the freedom struggle, Hindus, including Gandhi, talked of getting freedom from thousand years of slavery- not only from the ‘Raj’, but also from the traces of the earlier oppressive Islamic rule since the day of Mahmud of Gahzni.”⁸⁴

Hence cultural nationalism is “inclusivist and would like to include all the minorities under its wing. It proposes to be secular in the sense that all religions would be treated as equal as guaranteed under Article 15 of the Constitution...essentially cultural nationalism is a reaction to Nehruvian socialism cum secularism. It has no pretensions to be the fulfillment of a Hindu dream; especially after all the Muslims demands were allowed to be personified by partition. It should, however, be remembered that there has so far not been a clear line between the two nationalisms. Many members of the Parivar harbour both sentiments- cultural as well as Hindu.”⁸⁵

⁸³ N.S. Rajaram, ‘A New National Vision Needed,’ *Organiser*, Vol.XLVIII, No.40, May 4, 1997, p.2, 12.

⁸⁴ Ram Gopal, ‘Mystery of the Wailing Muslim, Ailing Hindu’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLVIII, No.29, Feb 6, 1997, p. 2,15.

⁸⁵ Prafull Goradia, ‘Two Nationalisms- Hindu and Cultural’ *Organiser*, Vol.LIV, No. 14, Oct.20, 2002, p.10.

c) *Hindutva based on Patriotism and Sanathan Dharma:*

It is a spirit of patriotism, claim the Hindu nationalists, which renders India distinct in the world of nations. It is this factor that sustained India as a cultural entity, surviving adversity through the ages- “What was the spirit and motivation that kept Bharat or Hindustan alive as a distinct entity when in the process most of the ancient cultures decayed and died? In modern terms, I would call this spirit, motivation, disposition or habit of the mind or political behaviour underlying cultural unity, the stimulus of patriotism. Patriotism in India has preceded nationalism.”⁸⁶

Patriotism is described as “transcendental nationalism that is India’s unique contribution. It is a sublime experience which binds you inseparably to the country in a manner *janani janmabhoomi cha swargadapi gariyasi* conveys the sentiment of total allegiance. The motherland is not merely a land of birth, it is paradise par excellence. The feeling that the territory is sacred not because it physically sustains us or provides means of enjoyment or prosperity, but because we love it and worship it as a goddess – such a feeling is patriotism. Patriotism is born of one’s inherent devotion. This devotion is not a mere evocation at the time of wars or calamities of one sort or another, but is a perennial source of the spirit of sacrifice for the children of mother Earth. It entails an inexpressible faith in the Rashtra and its destiny.”⁸⁷

“Patriotism is not a negative feeling of aggrandisement nor is it governed by the aspirations of racial superiority. It is on the other hand, a positive attitude of pride in one’s own way of life and its tested value system. As an ideal, patriotism involves a selfless service to society as a duty or dharma. Patriotism, thus, is an ennobling concept, which subsumes all separatist and

⁸⁶ M.M. Sankhdher, ‘Politics sans Patriotism’, *Organiser*, Vol. XXXIX, No.17, Sept. 27, 1987, p.6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

fissiparous tendencies in the interest of an abiding, everlasting unity. It demolishes the barriers of caste, creed, religion, language; in a way, it is founded on a profound comprehension of the triumph of truth over falsehood, of unity over disunity.

Above all, patriotism is not a revivalist creed but an incessant struggle for safeguarding the interests of the people against coercion, suppression and repression. It demands a high degree of political consciousness for social ends. It is a political mission, full of zeal and enthusiasm for the progress of an ancient society tempered by classical knowledge, wisdom and experience into a modern scientific society organized for the advancement of the values of truth, righteousness and valour.”⁸⁸ This essentially sums the vision of a Hindu Rashtra.

The apprehension regarding the term Hindutva arises from the fact that it identifies itself, or more likely distorts Hinduism to serve its needs. It is this tendency of the Hindu nationalists to use religion to serve communal ends that poses a danger to a secular state. However, most often the Hindu nationalists deny having any links with Hinduism “Hinduism and ‘Hindutva’ are two different things though they have some commonalities. Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma, as Sri Aurobindo called it, is life itself. Hindutva, on the other hand, is cultural in content, and not political or religious. It upholds nationalism, and encompasses in its fold all communities of India and is not averse even to the concept of one universal family.”⁸⁹ Unlike Hinduism, which is a “complex body of social, cultural and religious beliefs and practices.... the ‘Hindu’ in the conviction and constitution of the RSS is a cultural and civilisational concept and not a political or religious dogma. The term as a cultural concept will include, and did always include, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims, Christians and Parsis. It is a

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 76.

historical fact as well that the Muslims, Christians and Parsis are Hindus by culture, though as religions they are not so.⁹⁰

To expand more on the idea of Santana Dharma and Hindutva, it is maintained, “Hindutva is an outgrowth of Sanatana Dharma as well as an essential part it. Its main goal is to serve, defend and nurture Sanatana Dharma. It is not an aggressive or an imperialist ideology. It seeks to destroy no one except those that want to destroy spiritual freedom.”⁹¹

“It is important to note that ‘dharma’ does not mean religion or creed or sect, but a way of life, a code and a body of knowledge. Sanatana Dharma is this body of knowledge acquired through the ages by sages, rulers and the common people. And for India to rise again and find its place in the world, it must rediscover the message of its ancient sages. Hindutva is the practical and political manifestation of Sanatana Dharma. It exists to defend Sanatana Dharma, while threatening no one.”⁹² The confusion regarding religion, dharma and Hindutva is attributed to a western understanding of the term, as well as the absence of a single entity identified with holy book or prophet. “The concept of religion tied down to a prophet, a book and a fixed dogma was unknown to India till the entry of Semitic religions in it. Hindus were wedded to the concept of dharma – the code of moral values having universal application. Hindu states were guided by dharma and not by religion. They were all secular states.”⁹³

“There is much confusion regarding Hindutva, especially to the West which mixed up religion with dharma. The West could not understand and appreciate the meaning and scope of dharma, which was carried forward by the English educated Indians. The confusion about Hindu dharma arises to a large extent because Hinduism has no single founder, nor does it

⁹⁰ ‘Hindus Include Muslims, Christians, Part I and II, *Organiser*, Vol. XLIV, No.44 & 45, June 6 & 13, 1993, p.2

⁹¹ N.S. Rajaram, ‘Hindutva in the 21st Century-II, *Organiser*, Vol.XLII, No.47, June 10, 2001, p.15

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Balraj Madhok, ‘Religion and Politics’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLV, No.5 Sept 5, 1993, p.2

have a single holy text, leaving the common man confused regarding Hindu beliefs and action.”⁹⁴

d) *Ramjanmabhoomi Movement: Beginnings of Hindu Revival*

The demolition of the Babri Masjid was considered a blatant attack on secularism in India. It not only posed a threat to minority identity in the country but was also a warning that if communal tendencies were not controlled they would spell danger to democracy. More so, it was an indication of the power that the Hindu nationalist movement had gained and the limits they were ready to cross in their quest for ‘national’ self-assertion. A perusal through the *Organiser*, reveals that the demolition was considered a heroic deed by the Hindu nationalists—a step closer to the formation of a Hindu state. It was symbolic of their victory over years of suppression by symbols of imperialism and invasions.

The demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1991, was the culmination of a process that had its beginnings in the late 80’s. The Dharmayatra started in 1989 was followed by numerous rallies and processions across the decade. The aim of these rallies was to spread propaganda on the need for Hindu revivalism and sensitize the public on the centrality of ‘Ramjanmasthan’ and its importance in their scheme. “The Dharmayatras are of social significance for four reasons: first, it is a mass contact and mobilization programme for Hindus all over India. Two, it is a programme which emotionally involves and integrates the Hindu society to a national cause. The Ram Shila Poojan connects every individual to the national memorial of Shri Ram. In a way it is a memorial, which will be built by mass participation, brick by brick. The Dharmayatras of all sects of Hinduism have come together in a common platform and are actively participating in the mass mobilization of Hindus for a

⁹⁴ D.B. Thengadi, ‘Hindu Dharma is for Humanity’, *Organiser*, Vol.LIX, No.29, Feb 15, 1998, p. 16.

sacred cause. Dharma Sansad will gain moral and social strength and may become soon, the voice of Hindus. Lastly, the awareness created by this issue will serve as a deterrent to the party in power along with its secularist political allies. They will hereafter have to remember that Hindus cannot be taken for granted and that they will resist with all their strength, any injustice to them. The emergence of the Hindu factor in Indian politics is not in any sense the emergence of majority communalism, but a moral deterrent of unprincipled and undemocratic politics.”⁹⁵

The Dharmayatra was symbolic of the ‘saffron wave’ that was to sweep the country in the next decade. It was addressed not only to the Hindus, but the entire cross section of Indian society. The zest with which the propaganda was undertaken was the Hindu nationalists expression of one could call another struggle for freedom. It was to be mass based and was to inculcate a sense of pride and belongingness to one’s culture and nation. On the Dharmayatra, the following is added, “this event should serve as a warning to anti-Hindu secularist parties including Congress-I that Hindus are in a politically assertive mood and the Hindu wave will engulf the whole country by Nov. 9. The event is not intended to terrorise any community belonging to any religion. But it certainly announces the truth that all the symbols of Hindus are the national symbols of India. The birthplaces of national heroes, avatars and prophets are not to be decided in courtrooms. They have a seal of history and of faith of the people. The government has only to accept the fact and to respect historical places.”⁹⁶

“The Dharmayatra, Ram Shila Poojan all over the country and the foundation ceremony of the memorial for Shri Ram should be considered as the beginning of an era in the life of

⁹⁵ B.K. Kelkar, ‘Resurgence of Hindu Consciousness for Ramjanmabhoomi is a Warning to the Pseudo Secularists’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLI, No. 14, Oct. 15, 1989, P.7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

independent India. It will be the era of moral politics; value based social life, emotional unity of India and equality. The new memorial of Shri Ram should be the cornerstone of the moral state (RamRajya), which was the dream of Gandhiji. The Hindu legacy has been neglected, even kept away from our cultural life. The tremendous support that the VHP is getting from the Dharmacharyas and the common Hindu in India and abroad is the expression of dormant Hindutva. It marks the beginning of a new era. The Ramjanmabhoomi, therefore, cannot be an election issue. Any settlement of this issue even outside the court will be handing over with goodwill the birthplace of Shri Ram to Hindus. The Muslims and the pseudo secularists must accept without any mental reservation, a historical truth that Hindu culture is the national culture of India. The basic idea behind a secular state of Sarva Dharma Samabhav is ingrained in the Hindu mind and blood. Ram Rajya is the ultimate goal that is to be achieved by changing the attitude of Hindus.”⁹⁷

Ramjanmabhoomi Movement as Intrinsic to Hindu Self Assertion:

The following views were expressed on the Ramjanmabhoomi movement⁹⁸ and its importance to cultural nationalism: “The present agitation to liberate the Sri Ram Janmabhoomi is a battle for national self assertion. The movement is nothing short of a phase of struggle for the liberation of the nation’s soul. The national life is essentially Hindu, with its imprints engraved on every one of its facets.”⁹⁹ “In the final analysis, the Ramjanmabhoomi issue is

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “The whole purpose of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement is to change the history of India, nothing less, nothing more. Those who do not see this do not know what India is. For the first time in several centuries, the history of India is being made by Indians; call them Hindus or anything else. The Ayodhya movement is a far more historic movement. Freedom does not mean flying your own flag or having your own government. Freedom means making your own history. As I said earlier, fate precluded us from doing so for so many centuries. Now the time has come to open the pages of time and begin writing what every great race in this world has been doing for so long, every great race except the Hindus.” Jay Dubashi, ‘November 9 will Change History’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLI, No. 18, Nov. 19, 1989, p.2.

⁹⁹ H.V. Seshadri, ‘Wiping Out the Blot of Foreign Slavery’, *Organiser*, Vol.XXXVII, No.34, Jan.5, 1986, p.5.

not so much of a problem in itself, but the symbol of a problem, the outward manifestation of the deep-rooted festering sore of discrimination against the Hindu nation, which is being cheated of its rightful place in its own land.”¹⁰⁰

Ramjanmabhoomi Movement as a Unifying force: “The movement for the construction of Sri Ram temple on the Ramjanmasthan at Ayodhya is an expression of national aspiration of the people. The movement has brought together the Hindu society transcending all differences of caste, creed, region and language. This movement has changed the course of the national polity and redefined distorted political idioms. It is in this background and for the noble aims and ideals manifest in the movement that the RSS has identified itself and given unqualified support to this great mass movement in the national history.”¹⁰¹ “At a time when cynicism and self aggrandisement governed public life, the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation offered an alternative idealism, in the same way as social reform movements had done in the past.”¹⁰²

Ramjanmabhoomi as a movement against Islam and the Remnants of its invasion:

“The Ramjanmabhoomi movement should not be mistaken as a mere movement to build a temple. It is aimed at exposing the designs of Islamic fundamentalists dreaming of the formation of a Dar-ul-Islam in India. The present direction of Muslim politics is not different from that of a Babar or an Aurangzeb. Their involvement in compulsive separatist movement in all lands all over the world arises from their instinctive imperialist tendencies sourced in

To assert this point, the writer cites the examples of the renovation of the Somnath temple and quotes Indira Gandhi, who on her visit to Rameshwaram commented that it was ‘a symbol of national unity’. Similarly, he mentions C. Achuta Menon who declared that the ‘roots of our age old nationalism lies in the Hindu faith.’

¹⁰⁰ Badlu Ram Gupta, ‘Ramjanmabhoomi-the Real Issue’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLI, No.52, July 29,1990, p.8

¹⁰¹ Seshadri Chari, ‘Faith wins a Round’, *Organiser*, Vol. LIII, No.36, Mar. 24, 2002, p.3

¹⁰² Swapan DasGupta, ‘Ramjanmabhoomi movement promises revival of idealism and dharma’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLII, No.23, Jan.13, 1991, P.14.

their religious texts. The Ramjnambhoomi movement has not only started a discussion focusing in this direction, but also exposes the hollowness of Indian secularism.”¹⁰³

The following comment was made on the demolition of the Babri Masjid: “ I don’t like the word ‘demolition’. It is simply not true that the Hindus demolished the so-called mosque in Ayodhya. What they did was to ‘liberate’ Ramjanmabhoomi from alien hands. The structure (it may have been a mosque some decades ago but it ceased to be one a long time ago) had to go because you cannot liberate the sacred spot without removing it. If anybody is responsible for the demolition it is the man who built the structure...who tore down a temple and built a mosque in its place. It was only natural that one day the followers of Sri Ram would liberate the hallowed piece of land where he was born, and that is what they did on December 6- liberate Ramjanmabhoomi.”¹⁰⁴

A more forceful defence of the movement is found in a debate, “to understand this peculiar phenomenon, we must recognize that just as the Ayodhya temple is seen as a national symbol, the Babri Masjid has become a symbol around which anti- national interests can gather. What we are witnessing over Ayodhya is a battle between rising nationalism and residual imperialism. The Macaulayite secularists and the residue of earlier Islamic imperialism see the Babri Masjid as their symbol of hope. In all this there is a perversion of both values and

¹⁰³ M.K. Jain, ‘Positive nationalism- an idea whose time has come’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLII, No.21, Dec 30, 1990, p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ Jay Dubashi, ‘Hindus Can and Will Do It’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLIV, No.22, Jan.3, 1993, p.5

L.K. Advani expresses a similar sentiment at a public function, “Hindu heritage is the bedrock of our national unity. We should be proud of it. The policy of appeasement and pseudo secularism has always failed to accomplish anything. The Ramjanmabhoomi is not a dispute between a mosque and a mandir, but between Sri Rama, representing our age old national ethos and Babur representing alien aggression and philosophy.” *Organiser*, VolXL. No.43, Apr. 30,1989, p. 14.

language; it is 'communal' to talk about Rama at Ramjanmabhoomi, but somehow 'secular' to support rebuilding the Babri Masjid."¹⁰⁵

"The Babri Masjid was never intended as a place of worship. The same can be said of every mosque built on the site of demolished temples during the Islamic period. The real question is who gave Babur (and others) the right to destroy temples and erect mosques in their place? Babur's ideology in constructing the mosque involved the 'triumph of Islam'¹⁰⁶. Accepting the legitimacy of the Babri Masjid at Ramjanmabhoomi means acknowledging the superiority of Babur's ideology over that of the overwhelming majority of the people of India, and his right to impose it on others by force."¹⁰⁷

There have been instances when the Hindu nationalists have seemingly adopted more deliberative means of resolving the Ram temple issue through negotiations, though the actual intent leaves little choice for deliberation. This is evident in the following: "Let it be said straightaway- the tussle over the Ramjanmabhoomi in Ayodhya is not something connected with law or property rights. Plainly it arises out of human emotions...it cannot be solved in a court of law. If that were the case, it wouldn't have taken ten long years for a decision to be handed down. The issue is not of right or wrong: plainly it is a matter of pride. It would not even occur to this section that a Muslim would consider it a sacrilege for a temple to be built

¹⁰⁵ N.S. Rajaram, 'Sense and Nonsense About Ayodhya', *Organiser*, Vol. LII, No.25, p.2

¹⁰⁶ Speaking of temples and mosques as symbols of power rather than cultural symbols it is claimed "Babur equated the mosque with the temple as a physical symbol of faith. He sought to demolish these symbols and replace them with Islamic symbols in order to disintegrate that elusive fabric of nationhood he encountered. The Babri Masjid was always a tool for a statement of conquest by a superior military power. It had no other intrinsic purpose. It was atoll for consolidating a foreign ruler over India. Today it is still that: a means to focus the attention of the nation on the fact that the seeds of those invasions are more vibrant and reproductive than ever. The nation is being dismembered. It faces another partition because the clever description of religion had been used to closet the issue that limited distorted context." Patricia Bachelet, 'Ramjanmabhoomi Movement – the Real Issues', *Organiser*, Vol.43, Aug 18,1991, P.35-39.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

in Mecca. And for millions of Hindus, Ayodhya has about the same sanctity as Mecca has for Muslims.”¹⁰⁸

“Even now if only the Babri Masjid Coordination Committee (BMCC) would graciously concede all the land, disputed and undisputed to the VHP in an act of unprecedented generosity and nobility of spirit, overnight the Hindu- Muslim equation will change, winning for the Muslims not only the applause, but the eternal gratitude of all Hindus everywhere.

It would be an adequate compensation for all the humiliation that the Hindus underwent over five centuries of Muslim rule, when thousands of temples were erased. Let the BMCC make one great and noble gesture in the matter of the Ram Mandir to erase an unhappy past and put Hindu- Muslim fellowship on a high pedestal. Is the Muslim leadership so lacking in statesmanship that it is incapable of making one positive gesture for its own sake and for the greater good of the country? What have we come to?”¹⁰⁹

“Wrongs of a medieval past cannot be righted by similar wrongs in modern times. Corrective measures would have to be taken by due process of law. That was precisely what the BJP had committed to the people when it spoke of constructing the Ram Temple at Ayodhya. No law-abiding citizen can condone unlawful acts or decline to abide by the court’s verdict. But let it be understood by all concerned that litigation is no solution to the Ayodhya imbroglio. It is a highly emotive issue and whatever the judicial verdict, it would be almost impossible to implement it in the absence of a broad national consensus. There is great merit in the argument that the courts may decide property disputes but cannot adjudicate on matters of faith. A solution to the Ayodhya tangle will have to be found through negotiations or by

¹⁰⁸ M.V. Kamath, ‘A Matter of Grace and Goodwill’, *Organiser*, Vol.LIII, No.33, Mar.3, 2002, p.6

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

legislation.”¹¹⁰ Ironically, the statement above was made by L.K.Advani, who was involved in the demolition of the Babri Masjid. It is a contradiction especially when he is in agreement that the ‘wrongs of the past cannot be righted by wrongs in the present’...if this was the case there should have been a complete absence of hostility towards the Muslims. As a matter of fact, the very foundations of the Hindu nationalist ideology would be threatened as it is based largely on portraying the ‘other’ as inimical to Hindu culture and ethos.

National formation is a continuous process. Nations are often identified by their language, religion, a shared past and so on. Thus, nations can be best described as cultural entities. This also implies that these factors play an important role in nation building and identity formation. However, in some countries they are expressed by an overwhelming majority who tend to subsume all other identities under the prevalent one- it could be language, race, religion etc. This leads to a situation where most often the minority either is assimilated in the dominant population or faces discrimination if it attempts resistance. It is a similar situation in the case of India, where the Hindu nationalist movement seeks to subsume and ultimately erase all plurality. Hence, Hindu nationalists view the nation as a cultural community.

Broadly speaking, nationalisms are of two types: political and cultural. When a nation is viewed as a political community, it is held that the point of allegiance to the nation is primarily in terms of shared citizenship regardless of ascriptive identities and loyalties. For theorists of this view, nations are ‘invented traditions’, that a belief in historical continuity and cultural purity is a myth created by nationalism to sustain itself. Thus, nationalism creates

¹¹⁰ Shyam Khosla, ‘Advani puts Ayodhya Tangle in Perspective’, *Organiser*, LII, No. 40, Apr.22, 2001, p.5.

nations (Hobsbawm).¹¹¹ Similarly, the modern nation is considered as an artifact, and 'imagined community', constructed and supported by the media, education and a process of political socialization (Benedict Anderson). Political nations constitute many ethnic groups. However, since these entities are based on considerations other than cultural or ethnic, their heterogeneity is not threatened. Examples of such states are the U.S (melting pot) and South Africa (Rainbow society).

On the other hand, when nations are regarded as primarily ethnic communities, the unifying factors are centered on religion, language, race etc. The nation is portrayed as a cultural community with an emphasis on ethnic ties and loyalties. The political factors exist, but are influenced, if not determined by ethnic ties. Cultural nationalism is often taken to be a new source of cultural cohesion in societies marked by industrialization and modernisation. Cultural allegiance was to give to industrial societies what feudal bonds and loyalties gave to agrarian societies (Gellner).

Another view on nationalism, establishes a continuity between modern nations and premodern ethnic communities or 'ethnies'.¹¹² For Smith, ethnic identities predate national formation. Nations were born only when ethnies were linked to the emerging doctrine of political sovereignty. An 'ethnie' is defined as "a named human population of alleged common ancestry, shared memories and elements of common culture with a link to a specific territory and a measure of solidarity."¹¹³ He argues that the advent of the modern state has led to a drive for cultural homogeneity and the universalisation of ideas of chosenness¹¹⁴ in rival

¹¹¹ Andrew Heywood, *'Politics'*, Palgrave, New York, 2002.

¹¹² Anthony D. Smith, 'Culture, Community and Territory: the Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism', *International Affairs*, July 1996, pp. 445-58.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ By 'chosenness' Smith is seeking to convey the idea that every nation must possess an authentic identity and have a distinct ethnic culture. It is this distinctiveness of a nation that enables it to make its unique contribution

communities, and a growing attachment to shared memories. The situation is aggravated since modern nations often omit from their accounts, the role played by ethnies, since many of the modern nations are built on the foundations of pre-existing ethnies and shared memories, symbols myths and values.

In the light of the above, one can say that Hindu nationalists consider themselves as the chosen ones to carry forward this ethnic history of the Hindu community to the future. They however do not seek cultural purification by annihilating the minorities, but by assimilating them in their culture. The contradictions arise when they are unable to clearly establish how they will go about doing so. On one hand, they are bound by the loyalty to their ideology, and on the other they are well aware of the fact that it does not take long for democratic and pluralistic mechanisms to upset their programme. However, in the minds of the Hindu nationalists, Indian culture is limited only to the Hindus. For them, the history of India starts from ancient times and continues till the present, with all other communities as either an outgrowth of the Hindu or a result of impositions from foreigners. In reviving the 'Hindu' ethos, they seek to exclude from historical accounts all events, places and people that they consider as outside of their constructed identity. If at all the 'other' is invoked, it is to ridicule their past actions and to provide fodder for their propaganda and as a justification for their 'inclusive' ideology. They seek not only to locate a purely Hindu version of history, but also attempt to put together the fragments of the past in order to have a coherent ideology. How far they have succeeded is evident from present day events, in terms of the BJP losing power and discontent over various issues within the Sangh Parivar.

to the world. This idea of 'chosenness', which was in earlier times the domain of the religious has now been taken over by nationalism.

Chapter 3: The Hindu Nationalist Perspective: Minorities and the Indian State

I

The Indian state as a part of its policy of positive discrimination grants special rights to cultural and linguistic minorities. These rights are guaranteed by Articles 29 and 30 titled 'cultural and educational rights' in Part III of the Indian Constitution. These rights enable a section of the Indian citizenry to protect their language, culture and script and also gives them the right to agitate to this end. These rights, however, have been a point of contention for the Hindu nationalists who view minority rights as 'discrimination against the majority'. Since the term culture has not been well defined, these rights tend to protect certain religious practices of the minority community. This, the Hindu nationalists maintain, contradicts the idea of a secular state.

The previous chapter examined the Hindu nationalist approach to understanding the Indian Nation. It was evident from the text of the organizer that the Hindu right, irrespective of whether they claimed to embrace diversity, portrayed the Hindu community as representing the Indian nation. This idea would reflect their understanding of a secular Indian state and the subsequent status of religious minorities. Since the term 'secular' has not been explicitly defined in the Indian Constitution, the Hindu nationalists interpret and reinterpret the 'secular' to suit their ideological needs.

Secularism in India is a positive concept, in that it permits religious freedom, while at the same time intervening to protect and promote the plurality of cultures. This runs contrary to the Hindu nationalists credo of 'one nation, one culture'. Taking the study forward, this

chapter examines the Hindu nationalist perspective on secularism, minority rights and conversions.

1.0 Hindu Ethos as Inherently Secular:

“Secularism implies equality of beliefs, philosophies of different religions and harmonious ties among a religiously varied people. More than a Constitutional provision, it is a gift from a particular cultural ethos of a people. It should not be treated as a compromise in a given situation among the religious communities with varied numerical strength. It is a qualitative measure based on a common goal for a corporate national life. Hindu culture has had secular undercurrents since time immemorial. That is why repeated aggressions in the medieval period and partition could not deter Hindus from practising secularism. The RSS subscribes to patriotism as the highest religion. It is a value which Hindus have politically accepted, though one doubts whether all communities in India have emotionally and mentally accepted it.”¹¹⁵

In an address to the Brent Council in London, L.K. Advani makes it clear that secularism should not imply discrimination against the majority. Drawing once again on Hindu culture, he stated, “the secular principle did not allow non-Hindus to undermine Hindu rights and traditions. A theocracy was alien to the traditional Indian polity. Despite repressive practices against Hindus in Pakistan and the Gulf countries, discrimination would not be tolerated in India under the Hindu ideology. However, the seculars principle did not allow non-Hindus to undermine Hindu rights or traditions. The BJP did not share the belief of federal or autonomous status for the differing groups but was committed to the integrity of the Indian nation as one people.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Rakesh Sinha, ‘Will they come out in the open’, *Organiser*, Vol.LII, No.23, Dec. 24, 2000, p. 19.

¹¹⁶ Surinder Cheema and Jayanti Patel, ‘Secularism does not allow non Hindus to undermine Hindu rights and Traditions’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLII, No.1, Aug.5, 1990, p. 5.

Here, once again, the acceptance of diversity is attributed to the 'Hinduness' of the Indian state. In citing examples of Pakistan and the Gulf countries, one fact is overlooked – that India is a secular democracy, which through its Constitution and institutional mechanisms protects its citizens. – minorities as well as majorities. To compare the situation in India, to that of Pakistan, which at the time of independence declared itself to be an Islamic state seems absurd. This is not to say, however, that minorities in a secular state would be treated well and those in theocracies would be ill-treated.¹¹⁷ However, when the value of secularism is enshrined in the constitution of a nation, it becomes the duty and responsibility of those in power to uphold such values. The Hindu nationalists need to accept this reality and refrain from approaching secularism in watertight compartments such as the following, “there are two ways of viewing the concept of secularism. One, to see it as a natural expression of Hinduism with its wide vision, tolerance, accommodating spirit and broad mindedness. The other is to see it as a means of blocking the expression of Hindu ethos and personality. As it has been implemented, it served the second purpose- a pretext for keeping down the Hindu ethos and personality.”¹¹⁸ It is precisely such a definition that renders the Hindu nationalist ideology as communal. On one hand they describe the Hindu ethos as tolerant, accommodative etc., on the other they spearhead destruction in Ayodhya and Godhra, thereby contradicting their claims. Also, there is nothing in the Constitution that prohibits the expression of a tolerant or accommodative spirit. The Hindu nationalists, have at best

¹¹⁷ This point is highlighted in an article that talks of secularism and communalism. “When a particular religious group tries to manipulate the state apparatus to the discomfiture of another religious group, then it is called communal. However, it is not so if a religious group manipulates the state apparatus (cites the example of Muslim countries). The operative clause then is the other group suffering. In the case of India, it is two religions clashing, thereby acquiring a communal colour. However, if secularism implies a divorce of religious motivations it need not lead to its opposite – a communal state. A theocratic state can be totally non-communal while a wholly secular state can fan any amount of communal fires. Favouritism or discrimination on part of the state towards a religious group/groups creates communalism.” P.K. Nijhawan, ‘Secularism vs. Communalism’ *Organiser*, Vol.XLII, No.28, Feb. 27, 2000, p.2, 19.

¹¹⁸ Girila Jain, ‘Hindus assert themselves’, *Organizer*, Vol.XLIV, No.26, Jan. 31, 1993, p. 7.

manipulated Hinduism, and present a distorted picture of the Hindu ethos. In their vision, secularism in India “ can serve the cause of society and nation only if it operates on the basis of dharma, the universal spiritual religion.”¹¹⁹ “Dharma Rajya has nothing to do with a theocratic state. Dharma is that which accomplishes material prosperity and spiritual emancipation. Hence, there is no need to call India a secular state since secularism is inherent in dharma. That is why in the history of India, the priestly order, though it attained eminence, was never allowed to rule. The power of the state was not used to propagate any religion. ‘Sarva dharma sambhava’ was the basic tenet of Hindu dharma, the same is with the Hindu Rashtra¹²⁰.”

Hence, what follows from such an understanding of dharma is that “India has not accepted secularism as a western value, but because of its own Vedantic approach to life. Hindus never believed in statism. They always considered the state and society as separate entities. Hence to be a Hindu is not to be communal or anti-secular.”¹²¹

As is evident from the above, the Hindu nationalists believe that India is a secular state by virtue of it being Hindu and to that end the country need not be called secular as long as its based on dharma. Tolerance then is also a part of the Hindu ethos, though reality shows otherwise. However, the following is said in defence of their acts of intolerance. One of the occasions where this tolerance was tested was during the controversy surrounding the movie ‘Water’- “The freedom of expression guaranteed by the fundamental rights are limited to ‘selective freedom’ i.e. to criticize and explore certain topics and not others. This has led to acts of violence and threats, which have provoked the tolerant groups to resort to similar

¹¹⁹ M.V. Kamath, ‘Secularism as bogus as bogus can be’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLVIII, No.45, June 8, 1997, p.16.

¹²⁰ M.G. Vaidye, ‘Dharma and Secularism’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLIII, No.41, May 17, 1992, p. 9, 10.

¹²¹ B.K. Kelkar, ‘Communal Quotas – Euphemism for National Disintegration’, *Organiser*, Vol.XXXVIII, No.19, Sept. 21,1986, p. 7.

tactics. This selective freedom implies a selective license to express on topics that are not harmful to a particular group with a propensity for violence. The sensitivities of Hindus are attacked since they tend to be tolerant. Tolerance is not treated as a virtue to be emulated but as a weakness to be exploited.”¹²² So as to stress the point, the writer quotes K.M. Munshi from a letter he addressed to Nehru, “In its (secularism) name, again, politicians adopt a strange attitude, which, while it condones the susceptibilities – religious and social- of the minorities, it is too ready to brand similar susceptibilities in the majority community as communalist and reactionary. These unfortunate postures have been creating a sense of frustration in the majority community. If, however, the misuse of this word ‘secularism’ continues...if every time there is an inter-communal conflict, the majority is blamed, regardless of the merits of the question...the spring of traditional tolerance will dry up. While the majority exercises patience and tolerance, the minorities should adjust themselves to the majority. Otherwise, the future is uncertain and as explosion cannot be avoided.”¹²³ The article is concluded with this statement, “Ayodhya and its aftermath were an inevitable outcome of the inequity among different religions.”¹²⁴

In response to the Godhra carnage and the subsequent insecurity of the Muslim community, the *Organiser* carried an article, which stated, “It is necessary to recognize that the majority community feels beleaguered by what it sees as a neglect of its interests and misrepresentation of its concerns by politicians and a large segment of the intelligentsia. Driven by a drumbeat of what is seen as a hostile propaganda against their beliefs and values in the name of secularism, Hindus are beginning to gravitate towards extremism. In particular, they feel that

¹²² N.S. Rajaram, ‘Deepa Mehta and Leni Riepenstake’, *Organiser*, Vol.LI, No.31, Feb. 27,2000, p. 2,19.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

they are being asked to bear the burden of protecting secularism, while the minority communities enjoy special privileges that are not extended to the majority community. It is difficult to explain these within the framework of a secular government, which means that the government is neutral with regard to all, or at least, it treats all religions the same. Whatever the merits of this belief of secularism as neglect of Hindu interests, if not anti-Hinduism, its existence across a wide segment of the Hindus is undeniable. This did not come about overnight; it is the result of complacency, based on the belief that unlimited patience on the part of the Hindus may be taken for granted. The Hindus see their tolerance being treated as a weakness, exploited by others who feel no need to make compromises and take shelter under the nebulous claim of secularism.”¹²⁵ To justify acts of violence in the name of preserving the Hindu ethos or to respect majority sentiment is undemocratic. For a majority to complain of special privileges for minorities also reflects their understanding of democratic functioning. To demand similar rights for themselves is unreasonable since the minorities are given special rights to protect them against majoritarianism. No matter how tolerant the majority is, it serves as a guarantee against its potential tyranny. In India, with such an aggressive, dogmatic and extremist section of the Hindus it becomes more of a necessity. Thus, the Hindu nationalists idea of secularism is what facilitates the realization of a Hindu state. Most of them are of the view that India, by virtue of having a large Hindu population is already secular. One can now examine what the Hindu nationalists have to say about the secular state, as it exists in India.

1.2 *Secularism as majority bashing:* “Five decades of Constitutional working has perverted the very system of secularism that has now become synonymous with majority bashing.

¹²⁵ N.S. Rajaram, ‘Secularists Time of Reckoning’, *Organiser*, Vol.LIII, No.45, May 26, 2002, p.11.

Rights of minorities have been duly protected under the Constitution, but it should not be allowed to result in discrimination against the majority. The right to profess, practice and propagate religion guaranteed to all citizens under article 25 (1) has been construed as a fundamental right to convert others to one religion, though the apex court specifically stated that it was not so. Conversions are a major source of communal tensions and riots in the country. The time has come to have a fresh look at article 25(1) to prevent this mischief.”¹²⁶

“Indian brand of secularists are a strange breed. While claiming to represent liberal values, they invariably end up on the side of the most reactionary groups like the B.M.A.C. They also wear blinders that make it impossible for them to acknowledge elementary truths – a spirit of compromise on the part of the Muslim leadership would go a long way towards resolving the Ayodhya imbroglio and improving the climate for communal harmony in the country, though their secularism rests entirely on the Hindus. Their recent behaviour following the Godhra massacre and its aftermath has served to expose the secularists. They have lost all credibility. More significantly, one can see that what is behind their behaviour is not any ideology, but fear- fear that the present institutional set up, which is loaded against the majority community, but has served them well, is unraveling.”¹²⁷ This sentiment of majority bashing is provoked by certain constitutional provisions and practices of the Indian state. Common arguments put forth in this respect are “the communist party which demarcated Malappuzha in Kerala as a Muslim majority district. The Congress party and the Shah Bano case which mollified Muslim fundamentalism and the Haj subsidy given by the Government of India.”¹²⁸ So as to reiterate this point, it is held that, “the sovereign state of India lost its real secular character

¹²⁶ Shyam Khosla, ‘A Comprehensive Review is Called For’, *Organiser*, Vol.LI, No.30, Feb.20, 2000, p.11.

¹²⁷ N.S. Rajaram, ‘Beginning of the End for Secularists’, *Organiser*, Vol. LIII, No.37, Mar.31, 2002, p. 2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 118.

the day it retained the Muslim personal law and failed to formulate a common civil code of the country in a uniform way. This arbitrary and unjust application of secularism by the state has created an impregnable barrier in the way of unity and national integration.”¹²⁹

A demand for a Hindu state when termed ‘communal’ is also seen as an instance of discrimination against the majority, “When Hindus demand their legitimate right to establish Hindu Rajya in truncated Hindustan, as a logical corollary of partition, on the basis of religion, they are dubbed communal. When they talk of abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, they are called communal. When they talk of abolition of Mohammedan law in a secular country and demand a uniform civil code for citizens, which are the basic principle of secularism, they are accused of communalism. When they urge upon the secular government to impose a ban on proselytisation activities of the Christian missionaries and Muslim fundamentalists, they are condemned as communal. It is a tragic irony that Hindus are criticized and condemned as fanatic and fundamentalist, when they protest that the makers of the Indian Constitution negatively discriminated against the citizens on the basis of religion, which was against the fundamental principle of secularism. In theory they have declared the country as secular and accepted non-discrimination between one citizen and the other on the basis of religion and equal status of all citizens before law as the basic principle of secularism, but in practise they have divided the whole population of the country on communal lines, a schism of minority and majority.”¹³⁰

1.3 *Secularism as Burden Sharing: A Critique of the Minorities:* Stressing on the need for secularism to be a value upheld by all citizens, the Hindu nationalists argue, “Secularism is not a burden to be borne only by Hindus. The Muslim populace- indeed the entire ‘minority’

¹²⁹ Ibid, 118.

¹³⁰ Kanayalal M. Talreja, ‘Who are Communal’, *Organiser*, Vol.LII, No.27, Jan.21, 2001, p.14.

population has divine duty to share that burden. There are several issues over which the majority community – and a long-suffering community it has been – would appreciate minority understanding.”¹³¹ Minority understanding extends to fulfilling the following demands; “Atal Behari Vajpayee owes no apology to anyone for saying that the rebuilding of the Ram Mandir on the site that rightfully belongs to it, is his party’s unfinished business. The Muslims must help him in his endeavor instead of constantly harping on secularism. Secularism is a burden not for Hindus alone to bear. The Muslims have a solemn duty to share that burden.

How can the burden of secularism be shared by the minorities? It has been pointed out that Nawab Shuja-ud-din in his time donated fifty bighas of land to build a temple. High minded though it may be to demand of the majority community, to alone bear the burden of secularism, the minorities must do some heart searching on their own to ask whether their expectations are fair and equitable. Secularism is a cross to which the minorities and secularists want to nail the Hindus. It is time they realize the enormity of their existence and crime.”¹³²

Thus, they analyse secularism in relation to the minorities¹³³. In addition to asserting the secular character of Hinduism and Hindutva, they also critique the minorities for their lack of

¹³¹ M.V. Kamath, ‘Help us Bear the Burden of Secularism’, *Organiser*, Vol.LII, No.24, Dec.31, 2000, p. 16-17.

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ Another starting point for the Hindu nationalists critique of secularism is to expose the inherent incompatibility between Islam and Hinduism as expressed, “Islam as well as Hinduism are not only religious in the stricter sense of the word, but are really different and distinct social orders governing practically every individual and social aspect of their adherents. It should be clear beyond doubt that Hindus and Muslims cannot evolve a common nationality. This is so as the Hindus and Muslims derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, different heroes and different episodes. Very often a hero of one is a foe of the other and likewise, their victories and defeats overlap.” V.P. Bhatia, ‘Jinnah’s Cat and Mouse Game with the Congress’, *Organiser*, Vol. LI, No. 28, Feb .6, 2000, p.13. The above quote was apparently part of Jinnah’s presidential address to the Muslim league. The purpose of quoting it is to express the opinion of Muslims regarding Hindu-Muslim relations.

accommodation in the Indian polity. This is evident from what they focus on in matters of the secular state. For instance they claim that, “The debate on secularism should not be on whether Hinduism is tolerant and pluralistic, but whether Christianity and Islam can live at peace in a pluralist society like India. History, and their scriptures suggest that they cannot. Otherwise, there would be no need for the rise of secular humanism in the West. Secularism was an antidote to the anti-humanism inherent in Christianity. In India, anti-humanism is safeguarded in the name of secularism by protecting the powers of the Christian and Muslim clergy under Articles 29 and 30.”¹³⁴

“The rules of the debate are clear – debate issues that will enable Christianity and Islam to give up their exclusivist and expansionist claims, to live at peace with themselves and with others in a pluralistic society. Begin to debate by examining conditions that have led to theocratic states within the state – protected by Articles 29 and 30 – operating behind a mask of secularism. This was debated in the West two hundred years ago; but theocrats and their friends in India- calling themselves secularists want to run away from any such debate.”¹³⁵

The Hindu nationalists are convinced that the very nature of Islam is antithetical to a secular and integrated nation. “Leaving aside a small section of Indian Muslims, the majority is by no means ‘secular’, it is religious minded in the sense that in its outlook even on worldly life the majority of Muslims are guided by religion. But the main reason of their resistance to secularism appears to be their conception of Islam. They think their religion restrains them from accepting the autonomy of worldly life, which is the basis of secularism. In Islamic thought itself, religion and politics have been so closely inter-woven that they could not be conceived of separately. The Muslim community of India also welcomed the idea of a secular

¹³⁴ N.S. Rajaram, ‘Colonial Anachronism’, *Organiser*, Vol.L, No.34, Mar.21, 1999, p.9-11.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

state because they feared the alternative would be a Hindu state. Many of them seem to believe that the state must remain secular but the Muslims should be saved from secularism.”¹³⁶ The article claims that, “In such a situation where a Muslim believes that he is supposed to carry the divine message to the entire world...he can hardly accept the proposition, even in the name of secularism, that all existing religions are true.”¹³⁷

1.4 *Hindutva's Critique of Indian Secularism:*

The commonly accepted paradigm for understanding secularism is the ‘separation of religion and state’. However, in a country like India, where the welfare state has to, in its capacity legislate on various matters, it becomes difficult to exclude its role in the religious sphere, especially with regard to the implementation of social reforms and eradication of other unfair practices (esp. those related with religion) that the Indian Constitution provides for. The problem confronting the secularists has been to determine spheres of influence of the state and to what extent, and under what conditions state intervention is permissible. For the Hindu nationalists, this serves as an appropriate critique of secularism and for the country to revert back to ‘dharma’, which has secular characteristics. For them, secularism, indicates the following:

i) Secularism as a colonial legacy—“Secularism is a gross misnomer. Secularism means unrelated to religion, but in India it means accommodation of Christians and Muslim theocracies (under Articles 29 and 30). Secularism is based on an amalgam of every imperialist ideology that is hostile to Hinduism. It is natural, therefore, that its proponents should see Hindutva as a threat to their existence. This is how the British reacted to the rise of

¹³⁶ P. S. Yog, ‘National Integration and the Muslim Minority II’, *Organiser*, Vol. XL, No.52, July 2, 1989, p.9.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

nationalism. This exposes Indian secularism as the successor to colonialism.”¹³⁸ An argument on similar lines describes secularism as “the new religion of India’s pseudo intellectuals. The concept of secularism is the last wedge driven by the departing colonial power into the Indian society to make it perpetually divided. In fact, there is no need for the term ‘secular’ to appear in the constitution or dominate all our political debates. It is high time we remove this stigma and colonial stamp from our national identity.”¹³⁹ To this end, they criticize the secularists, the Congress to be more precise; “In view of the burning desire in the hearts of pseudo secularists to enjoy power by hook or crook, they hurriedly surrendered to the demands of the Muslims and Christians. Besides, they, in the name of ‘minority’ pampered other communities with all liberties at their command. Even the norms set by the UN prescribed a sect as a ‘minority sect’ if its percentage of population is below 10% of the total population. Ironically, the percentage of the Muslim population in India has gone well above ten percent but still they are called a minority community in India.”¹⁴⁰

ii) On secularism as the separation of religion and state: “It is impossible to separate religion from politics. The correct course is to separate religion from government, so that the government cannot discriminate on the basis of religion. This will mean the collapse of vote bank politics. But it will also bring a better life to the beleaguered victims of this brand of politics. Then India will have true secularism, rather than the fraudulent version that prevails today.”¹⁴¹ The Hindu nationalists denounce the ‘western’ notion of secularism and maintain, “The present brand of secularism as borrowed from the West is a post industrial society phenomenon. It was born after the feudal society in Europe broke down. To the new emerging

¹³⁸ N. S. Rajaram, ‘Colonial Anachronism’, *Organiser*, Vol.L, No.34, amr.21, 1999, p. 9-11.

¹³⁹ Dr. C Abraham Verghese, ‘Secular Stigma must be Removed’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLIX, No.45, June7, 1998, p. 2,19.

¹⁴⁰ Kanayalal M. Talreja, ‘Who are Communal?’ *Organiser*, Vol.LII, No.27, Jan.21,-2001, p.14.

¹⁴¹ N.S. Rajaram, ‘What ails India?’ *Organiser*, Vol.XLVIII, No.5, Sept.1, 1996, p. 2.

social forces, the hold of religion started appearing as a negative pull, incongruent with their social goals. The other strand of thought that influenced Nehru's thinking about religion were the socio-economic developments as a result of industrial revolution on one hand, and Marxian atheism on the other. Hence, where the time tested Indian secular thought was based on the affirmation of religion, the one borrowed from the West was based on the negation of religion."¹⁴²

"From time immemorial, India has been a secular country in the sense that the state has never interfered in the religious beliefs and practices of any of its citizens or groups of citizens. Religious coercion of whatever kind has not been tolerated and there have been revolts against it. There has been a universal respect for all paths of worship and even dissent has been tolerated and encouraged in an exemplary manner. The Syrian Christians, Arab Muslims and Zoroastrians were welcomed without any perception that their faiths militated against the mother faith of India- Hinduism. Therefore, Hinduism has always prided in diversity and welcomed the enrichment of spiritual tradition in this manner, making secularism as the basic credo of Indian ethos."¹⁴³

iii) Secularism as equal treatment of all: Enumerating the principles followed in other secular states like the U.S. and U.K. a comparison is drawn with Indian secularism, "the state should not discriminate among citizens on the basis of their religion or form of worship; the existence of universal laws for all citizens irrespective of their religion and that all citizens be equal before law."¹⁴⁴ It is concluded that that "secularism as projected and practiced in India goes counter to all these postulates. Discrimination in favour of the Muslim minority has become

¹⁴² P.K. Nijhawan, 'The Party of India's Future', *Organiser*, Vol.XLI, No.29, Feb.26, 1990, p.36.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Prof. Balraj Madhok, 'The National Agenda', *Organiser*, Vol.XLIX, No.27, Feb 1, 1998, p.11.

its hallmark. A uniform civil code for all citizens which is an essential postulate of secularism and the secular state by article 44 of the Indian constitution is being opposed in the name of secular. Similarly, Article 370, which enabled successive governments in Srinagar to discriminate against Hindu refugees who settled in Jammu and Kashmir state after partition, are defended in the name of secularism. Secularism has thus in effect been reduced to a euphemism for a policy of appeasement of Muslims. It is anything but secularism.”¹⁴⁵

The idea of secularism involving positive discrimination in favour of the minorities is rejected by them and termed as pseudo secularism. They view ‘equality’ in terms of identical treatment and find no means of attaining substantive equality. While on one hand, they criticize the state for interfering in the religious sphere (in granting special minority rights), on the other; they demand the implementation of a uniform civil code that entails state intervention. Their idea of positive secularism is one where the “ state has always been a civil institution, which respects all religions equally and which makes no distinction between one citizen and another on grounds of religion.”¹⁴⁶

In conclusion, for the Hindu nationalists, “the concept of secularism itself appears to have failed secular India. In principle, though, it purported that statecraft would be free from religious influence, in practise it stood for a slackening of the psychic and spiritual tenacity of Hindus, they being condemned as communal forces. The policy of appeasement adopted by politicians and the Constitution makers created discrimination and communalism in our society. There is no country in the world where the Muslim minority community gets the treatment they do in India. Instead of promoting irreligiosity in the name of secularism they

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ B.P.Singhal, ‘Save Democracy, Save Secularism’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLVIII, No.3, Aug.18, 1996, Pp 9-10 and 59-62

could ask society to follow ‘violence free’ religion to enable it to strengthen the national character of India.”¹⁴⁷

Before concluding this section, a comment on the Hindu nationalists understanding of ‘equality’ in the secular state. For the Hindu nationalists, ‘equality of all implies’ identical treatment. However, an understanding of equality in theoretical terms, and an application of the same in real situations are two different aspects. What the Hindu nationalists adhere to is a concept of ‘formal equality’, implying that the secular state in India would treat all religions equally without making any distinctions – Sarva Dharma Sambhava. However, such a principle when applied to unequal groups does not rectify their inequality, instead it perpetuates it.¹⁴⁸ The inequality of the minority can arise, of course, from being numerically weak, and also due to historical reasons. In such a situation, their being a minority can also deprive them of their freedom to hold and practise their religious beliefs and practices. It is for this reason that equality when applied to state and society has to be understood as ‘differential’ treatment and positive discrimination to realize ‘substantive’ equality. This is the point that the Hindu nationalists fail to grasp, when they demand special rights for all or for none. Thus, rights have to be distributed unequally to ensure equality, as well as protection of existing minority rights through institutionalization of measures that are not required for the majority.¹⁴⁹ Hence, to realize secularism, one has to adopt differential rights as well as protective measures. The broader principle of sarva dharma sambhava helped to regulate relations between communities in general and minority rights ensured that majoritarianism would not usurp what was due to the religious minorities. Thus, the Hindu nationalists adhere

¹⁴⁷ Dr. Balram Mishra, ‘Has Secularism Failed India?’ *Organiser*, Vol.LIII, No.49, June 23, 2002, p.

¹⁴⁸ Neera Chandhoke, ‘On Formal and Substantive Equality’ *Muslim India*, June 2000, p.278.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

to formal equality, which leads them to regard positive discrimination as a contradiction of secularism. However, secularism in India, among other things, aims at the realisation of substantive equality.

Linked to this is the aspect of state intervention. While on one hand they claim that a secular state should separate religion and politics, on the other, they claim that the state should formulate a uniform civil code (UCC). It is a fact that this provision is enshrined in the Constitution under DPSP. However, the point is, in order to arrive at a UCC, state intervention would be an essential pre requisite to mediate and regulate negotiations between the different religious communities. State intervention would also be unavoidable to realize substantive equality, in terms of legislating rights for minorities and assist in the institutionalisation of their rights. In addition, the Constitution provides for state intervention, while granting the fundamental right to freedom of religion. If this at times leads to greater intervention in one religion than in another, it does not imply discrimination against the majority, nor does it deny secularity to the Indian state.

II

A logical consequence of discrimination against the Hindus, results in majority backlash as was evident from the Hindu nationalists views on tolerance and how the Hindus were running out of patience (p.68-69, footnote, 124). Communalism, then, is also justified on similar lines. It is a true that communalism can be of the minority as much as it can be of the majority. However, to have apprehensions of minority communalism because of partition or minority rights being granted to protect religion seems unfounded.

In order to understand the majority-minority syndrome and subsequent communal tendencies, one has to understand what is meant by communalism. A distinction can be made between

'community' identity and 'communal' identity.¹⁵⁰ While community identity is an existential reality, communal identity is a construct placed upon this existential reality. Thus, one can always be a part of a community and not allow its communal transformation¹⁵¹. Secularism as it exists in India, is based on community identity, and hence does not denote a denial of one's religion. However, communal identity can be used for peaceful purposes (religious festivals) or more destructive purposes¹⁵². In the case of the Hindu nationalists, it is seen that they seek to transform community identity to communal identity, and that too for destructive purposes i.e. in an attempt to homogenize, rather than accepting heterogeneity. Celebrating majoritarianism in a secular state, it is maintained that, "India in keeping with the national ethos of its majority, the Hindu society, has adopted a secular Constitution even though partitioned by the British along religious lines. Although flanked by theocratic countries, it has continued to maintain the idea of religious pluralism and separation of religion from state, meaning thereby that no citizen of this country is to be discriminated on the basis of his or her religion in the matter of rights, privileges and opportunities. However, because of the greed of political leaders, secularism has lost its original concept and has become a perverted vehicle for pelf and power. For them secularism has come to mean appeasement of numerically strong minority community, little realizing that an excessive dose of minorityism is the sure antidote of national integration."¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Bidwai, Mukhia and Vanaik (ed), '*Religion, Religiosity and Communalism*', Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1996.

¹⁵¹ Ibid

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ R.P. Srivastava, 'Secularism: Indian Ethos and Present Distortions', *Organiser*, Vol. XLVIII, No.40, May 4, 1997.

2.0 Communalism as a Product of The Pseudo Secular Culture:

The following statement not only reflects their communal tendency but also their aversion to plurality in India, “To be a Hindu is not to be communal or anti-secular. To protect the constitutional rights of all religious minorities is our national commitment. But if our perverted sense of religious tolerance tends to become anti Indian, all Indians will have to oppose it without any sense of guilt. A strong national power centre supported by Indian nationalists and Hindu nationalists is a political compulsion of India. Any concept, any movement or any political party, which sponsors, leads or gives support to a polycentric party should be considered as anti India. This should be the practical guide of national integration. India is a multi-state nation and not a multi – nation state. If any step or government goes against this political goal, it should be fought unitedly by Indian and Hindu nationalists.”¹⁵⁴ This shows the priority given to Hindu nationalists to nationhood than statehood.

Attempts are also made by the Hindu Right to demonise the Muslim community by labeling them as communal. “Those who believe that the struggle in India is essentially between Hindus and Muslims, forget that Muslims can kill each other even more ruthlessly. The most recent instance is at Mecca- Holy of Holies- where Iranian Muslims were gunned down by Saudi Muslims. There were no Hindus there.”¹⁵⁵ In India, it is said, “Whatever else one might say of our state governments, communal killings are not inspired by them. There have been demonstrable acts of partiality, it is true and they are not to be condoned, but by and large,

¹⁵⁴ B.K. Kelkar, ‘ Communal Quotas- Euphemism for National Disintegration’, *Organiser*, Vol. XXXVIII, No.19, Sept.21, 1986, p.7

¹⁵⁵ M.V. Kamath, ‘Religion and Politics’, *Organiser*, Vol. XXXIX, No.18, Oct.4, 1987, p.4

communal killings have often been spontaneous and often the results of deep rooted economic imbalances or historical misconceptions with which neither the people nor the elected governments have come to terms.”¹⁵⁶ Criticizing the other parties, the Hindu nationalists feel the responsibility of fighting communalism lies entirely on its shoulders.¹⁵⁷

However, the above article was written in the late 80’s and are a far cry from the reality of the present situation, where in 2002, in Gujarat, the state government played an active role in annihilating a large part of the Muslim minority population. The onus of violence is once again put on the Muslims. A statement made by the RSS in the post Godhra carnage reads, “This is the moment of the test of tolerance of the Hindu society. We appeal to the Hindus not to take law into their hands and thus play in the hands of Muslim terrorists. We should help wholeheartedly the Gujarat government handle the situation effectively. The RSS expects the leaders of the Muslim community to come forward and do their best to control the violent and terrorist elements in their society, so that such extremely provocative incidents are not repeated. It has been made known to us that this was a planned attack of about two thousand Muslim anti social elements at Godhra. The RSS is extremely grieved by this heinous act and condemns it in the strongest possible terms.”¹⁵⁸

The massacre of the Muslims was not regretted, instead, it only reaffirmed their belief in the Hindu movement, “...although people have anger against the culprits, they are firm on going

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ This is clear when they attack the Communist and Congress party: “The Communists claim that they alone will fight communalism. It was the CPI, which in the 1940’s gave the strongest support to the partition of India on religious lines, not the Hindu Mahasabha. In Kerala, it is the Communists who gave to Muslims, a separate Muslim majority district against all secular logic. That was no way to fight communalism. Rajiv Gandhi now wants “mass political action” to fight communalism when he should know that the party he represents has always thrived on communalism and sectarianism. How often have candidates not been chosen for their communal strength in a given area? All electioneering has all along been primarily based on communal considerations. The Congress party can say it is truly seculars the day it chooses a Muslim candidate in a Brahmin constituency and a Hindu candidate to fight in an election in a predominantly Muslim constituency.”

¹⁵⁸ Correspondent, ‘RSS Condemns the Killings and Calls for Restraint’, Organiser, Vol. LIII, No.34, Mar. 10, 2002, p. 3

to Ayodhya to participate in the temple reconstruction work. They feel that such an incident will further energise the Hindu society to go to Ayodhya for the cause of the Ram temple. Quoting one of the victims, 'the incident has strengthened our determination and now we will be going ahead for the temple with double zeal. Now is the right time to teach a lesson to 'them' and even woman should join the activity to reconstruct the Ram temple.¹⁵⁹'

Hindu communalism thus stands justified as long as it is posited against the minorities, especially the Muslims: " If secularism means non discrimination by the state against a religious minority, no one committed to egalitarian democratic dogma can quibble over it. But if secularism means negation of faith in transcendence as a central point of democratic politics, if it means atheism, denying the existence of a supreme being, then it is time to fight, to end this potentially pernicious dogma. Such dogma is the beginning of atheistic totalitarianism, totalitarian dictators, usurping the powers of God, are the arch 'heretics' of our time. What is called Hindu communalism is very often a protective reaction to minority militancy that thrives on the macho myth."¹⁶⁰

Quoting the Chairman of the Minority Commission who mentioned two points that needed to be discussed on the debate on communalism called for by the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, "The first is that 'the country should be placed above religion by citizens of a country with mass religions. A man may not need any religion for his existence, but he requires a country for his own welfare. Secondly, religion should be considered as a private affair and personal affair.' Based on this the writer argues that such private and personal loyalty should not be considered as greater than the loyalty to one's own country. If all Indians follow these

¹⁵⁹ Seshadri Chari, 'Faith wins a Round', *Organiser*, Vol. LIII, No.36, Mar. 24, 2002, p.3.

¹⁶⁰ Hari N. Dam, 'The Lotus and the Sword- Need to End Hindu Difference', *Organiser*, Vol. XXXIX, No.36, Feb.21, 1988, p.9

two principles in thought and action, the root cause of communalism in India will disappear. The minority communities in India want a special status in India. Unless they abandon this attitude they cannot be national in outlook. The usage of the words minority and majority based on religion goes against secularism. The need for such a wrong usage is the politics of votes.

If the secular politicians and intellectuals want communalism to go, the circulation of words like majority and minority should be done away with. As far as Hindus are concerned, their Dharma teaches them that truth is expressed in a variety of ways. The difference is only in appearance and not in reality. *Sarva dharma samabhava* is the basis principle of Hindu philosophy. To encourage communalism in the name of secularism is, therefore, anti India, anti national and anti Hindu.”¹⁶¹

An excerpt from Muslim India in response to the Organizer’s allegations of ‘Minority theocracies’. “ The self conscious identity of a religious community (Muslim) does not detract from their duty or right to be equal partners to transform India into a strong and prosperous country. This transformation does not require the various identifiable sections of our people – identified by religion, caste, race or language, to lose their identity or to assimilate themselves into the dominant religion, caste etc. Every identifiable community seeks to participate in politics not only to serve the interests of the ‘whole’, but also to protect and promote its legitimate aspirations and interests. This can’t be dubbed as communalism or separatism. Simple majority is associated with homogenous societies. In a heterogeneous society, the majority tends to become a permanent majority, becoming unmindful of the interests and aspirations of other groups, which constitute minorities. There is no such thing as minorityism

¹⁶¹ B.K. Kelkar, ‘Call a Spade a Spade in the Proposed National Debate on Communalism.’ *Organiser*, Vol.XXXIX, No.9, July 26, 1987, p.7.

– it is a figment of the majoritarian imagination. Only when minorities are ill treated is there a fear of balkanisation; more of the emotional kind, even when physical balkanization is not possible.”¹⁶²

III

The issues raised by the Hindu nationalists regarding the secular state are not confined to merely the nature of secularism in India, but extend to certain Constitutional provisions guaranteed in the chapter on fundamental rights, as well as their objection to Article 370 giving special status to Jammu and Kashmir. This section deals with their opinions on the right to propagate religion and its repercussions.

Article 25 (1) granting the right to propagate religion was a controversial issue while drafting the Constitution and it has been brought to the forefront by the Hindu nationalists as contradictory to the freedom of religion guaranteed by the secular state in India. Article 25 (1) states, ‘Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to profess practise and propagate religion.’ The right to propagate was at the outset regarded as an exclusive Christian right. While a discussion on granting the right to propagate was underway, many issues were raised, such as the right not being applicable to minors; that another right to counter unfair conversions be passed etc. At present, the Hindu nationalists’ concerns on the right to propagate center broadly on two issues: that the right has been interpreted by the Christians as a ‘right to convert’ people by fraudulent means, in the garb of social service; that the very idea of conversion runs parallel to a secular state, which guarantees freedom of religion to all communities.

¹⁶² Shahabuddin, *Muslim India-207*, March 2000, p.142.

3.0 Concerns of the Hindu Nationalists-‘Fraudulent Conversions’:

The apprehensions of the Hindu Right as regards conversions are dealt with reference to the debates that took place in the Constituent Assembly on the same subject; the most common being, a threat to the Hindu population and the fear of another partition. “We are under attack. We don’t want that the numerical strength of Hindus and other communities should diminish and after ten years they may again say that they are a separate nation. These separatist tendencies should be crushed.”¹⁶³

This concern was accentuated by the activities of the Christian missionaries. As Shri C. Subramaniam commented, “There was concern that religious missionaries from abroad were already known to be spreading their faith through incentives and allurements in the form of medical help and educational services...the Constitution makers adopted a two pronged approach in dealing with this question of the right to religious conversion. They called upon the state, through Directive Principles of State Policy, to take the basic services everywhere as quickly as possible so that they can no longer be used as instances for promoting religious conversions. At the same time, they had enough faith in the religious leaders and the common man that the freedom to propagate and convert will not be generally misused and thereby threaten communal harmony and social peace. Let us take special steps to see that the rich native customs and beliefs of our tribal brethren do not become prey to outside influences that are keen to notch up more conversions to their religious systems. Let the apparatus of the state ensure that the basic services are made available everywhere, particularly in the remote areas as a matter of national priority. Let all religious orders have the freedom to supplement

¹⁶³ Shyam Khosla, ‘Need to Review Article 25 (1)’, *Organiser*, Vol.L, No.36, Apr.4, 1999, p.7-8.

government efforts in this regard and make these facilities available, but with no strings attached.”¹⁶⁴ After much deliberation it was decided not to have a fundamental right against conversions, though legislation on laws prohibiting forcible and fraudulent conversions was to be the discretion of the states. Only Orissa and Madhya Pradesh have enacted laws to this end. More recently, a Supreme Court judgement while not banning conversions declared that it could not be a fundamental right: “Conversions would impinge on the freedom of conscience guaranteed to citizens. It further stated that if such an action disturbed community life, it would amount to ‘disturbing public order’. The Orissa High Court on the other hand, maintained that propagation was the right of a Christian citizen, but also stated that ‘conversions by inducement’ were prohibited. Defining the terms ‘force’ and ‘inducement’, it said that ‘any show of force or a threat of injury of any kind, including threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication implies force.’ It said inducement implied the offer of any gift or gratification, either pecuniary or otherwise.”¹⁶⁵

A similar Supreme Court ruling in the same year (Stainslaus case) held that, “Article 25 (1) is not the right to convert another person to one’s own religion but to transmit or spread one’s religion by an exposition of its tenets. It guarantees freedom of expression to every citizen and not merely to followers of any particular religion, and that in turn, postulates that there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one’s own religion, as distinguished from his effort to transmit or spread the tenets of his religion, that would impinge on the freedom of

¹⁶⁴ G.N.S Raghavan, ‘Discouraging Proselytism: Promoting Interfaith Understanding’, *Organiser*, Vol.L, No.34, Mar.21, 1999, p.43

¹⁶⁵ Liz Matthew, ‘Conversion not a Fundamental Right, says Supreme Court’, *Organiser*, Vol.L, No.26, Jan 24, 1999, p.23

conscience guaranteed to all citizens of the country. The freedom of religion enshrined in the article is not guaranteed in respect of one religion only, but covers all religions alike.”¹⁶⁶

Based on the above, the Hindu nationalists claim that the “Missionaries and fundamentalist Christians are now openly defending conversions through allurements and fraud. Not only that, they strongly resent reconversions as if only the Christians have the exclusive right to convert people to their faith.

Recent clashes in Dangs district of Gujarat between Christian and Hindu tribals, which were grossly misrepresented in English language and international media as ‘attacks on Christians and Churches’, is yet another instance of missionaries arrogating to themselves the exclusive right to convert tribals to their faith while strongly and physically resisting Hindu religious leaders’ attempts to reconvert them. A recent field study has shown that large-scale proselytisation has not only created religious conflicts but also disrupted the social fabric of the tribals. Converts are cutting themselves off from other members of their cultural group. It is eroding their sense of unity and solidarity within society.”¹⁶⁷

3.1 Conversion vs. Assimilation:

A critique of the provision on conversions extends to an analysis by the Hindu nationalists on the nature of Christianity. “The problem with all personality based religions is their exclusiveness, intolerance and inflexibility. Being totally based on mere faith, it leaves little scope for rational analysis of dogmas, creeds and rituals. The do’s and don’ts are supposed to be followed without questioning, as they are God’s commands, the questioning of which

¹⁶⁶ Shyam Khosla, ‘Need to Review Article 25 (1)’, *Organiser*, Vol.L, No.36, Apr.4, 1999, p. 7-8

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

amounts to heresy. Exclusive religions also lead to a clash of personalities, each claiming to be superior to the other.”¹⁶⁸

An attempt is then made to portray Hinduism as being more conducive to a secular state: “In contrast, the Indian tradition is aimed at assimilation, not conversion. Unlike Christianity, one does not have to give up one's faith or belief in God to embrace Hinduism. Just as Lord Buddha is revered as the tenth avatar (by all Hindus), Jesus Christ could well have been the eleventh. If this has not come to pass, there must have been some reason. Perhaps, the reason is that the Christian Church has erected a barbed wire fence of exclusiveness round Jesus Christ. The Christians would have us believe that salvation lies only through Jesus Christ and none else. They tell us to turn our faces away from Buddha, Mahavira, Guru Nanak, Rama and Krishna...to disown our spiritual heritage, old culture and tradition and tread only a single track. However, no secular state can be supported by an exclusive personality based religion; only an ‘all-inclusive’ religion or spiritual discipline can sustain a secular state. A clash of ideologies – of India’s spiritual tradition stressing on tolerance and assimilation- and the Church propagating a religion based on a singular personality, conformity and conversion, are likely to lead to dangerous consequences. It is in the interest of a secular state like ours to enact laws prohibiting organized religious conversions under the garb of social service. It is equally necessary to stop the inflow of foreign money and resources singularly aimed at conversion.”¹⁶⁹

3.2 Fraudulent Conversions as Illegitimate Acts:

Elaborating more on fraudulent conversions, the Hindu nationalists claim, “The legitimate claim to conversions on grounds of social service, used in particular by Christian missionaries

¹⁶⁸ Dinesh Manmohan, ‘Conversion or Inversion’, *Organiser*, Vol. LI, No.35, Apr. 9, 2000, p.17.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

is not considered secular in character. Service without motive or reward is secular in character.”¹⁷⁰ The subject of conversions takes on a more serious note since the “Christians promote conversion as a democratic freedom, even though their view of religion is authoritarian, not democratic, accepting only one way, and not honouring pluralism in approaching the Divine. The Christians are promoting a medieval religion that will not honour other religions and is still seeking world domination by any convenient means.”¹⁷¹

Gandhi’s views on conversion have also been dealt upon in the *Organiser* to support their viewpoint, “Christianity in India is inextricably mixed up for the last hundred and fifty years with British rule. It appears to us as synonymous with materialistic civilisation and imperialist exploitation by the stronger ‘white’ races, of the weaker races of the world.”¹⁷² On the work of Christian missionaries, Gandhi held, “I distrust mass movements of this nature. They have as their object not the upliftment of the untouchables but their ultimate conversion.... I disbelieve in the conversion of one person by another. My effort should never be to undermine another’s faith, but to make him a better follower of his own faith. This implies belief in the truth of all religions and respect for them.”¹⁷³ It was important to mention the above since it these statements given by such eminent personalities that the Hindu nationalists quote in order to gain legitimacy for their claims, since they reiterate just one point everytime

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Examples are given of countries like Ethiopia, Philippines and India under British rule to show that, “these countries remained largely poor and downtrodden, exploited and oppressed, despite being Christian countries, or in the case of India, which was under the rule of a Christian country. Even during colonialism, the British gave a red signal to missionaries to engage in the work of conversion. Hence, conversion is the real motive under the garb of social service.”

¹⁷¹ David Frawley, ‘Christians Under Siege in India: a Missionary Ploy’, *Organiser*, Vol.LII, No.3, Aug.6, 2000, p.11. It is maintained that the “Christian missionaries have more freedom of operation in India than in the rest of Asia. They are banned in Islamic countries and strictly monitored in China. Christians are under direct attack in Indonesia, where hundreds of Christians have been killed recently. But it is India that is being called to task in the world forum for its oppression of Christians! The reason is simple. India allows missionary activity and so is a soft target.”

¹⁷² Ram Gopal, ‘Mahatma Gandhi and Makers of the Constitution on Conversion’, *Organiser*, Vol.LI, No.50, July 2, 2000, p.14.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

that “The Hindus have always been, and are tolerant to every honest conversion of the informed and intelligent and non- destitute in search of better spiritual faiths. They cannot be expected to tolerate organized conversions with the help of huge sums of money coming from all quarters of the world for converting people to faiths, which are alienating the converted from their brethren among the unconverted and also leading to secessionist movements and disintegration of the country. The Hindus tolerate any act, committed even against them, if it is dharmic – moral, legal, ethical and open, and not subversive of social harmony and national integrity.”¹⁷⁴

3.3 Concerns over Christian Propaganda:

The circulation of certain pamphlets and speeches made by Christians confirms the fears of the Hindu Right. One cannot account for the seriousness of these propositions, but they definitely add to the concerns of the Right wing, especially the following speech made by the Pope, on a visit to India, “Our goal is to make Christianity a global religion. We should have Christians as the highest population in the world. Our target is to convert fifty thousand Indians every week to Christianity. Those helping will get full support of the international community in terms of money and facility. Rural and semi urban places in India do not have good schools and institutions except low rated government schools. In such places our missionaries have a good share in patronage of Christian schools and institutions from Indians. At such a point we can exploit our target of making thousands of Christians.”¹⁷⁵

“Freedom of religion includes freedom to convert. If one wants to change one’s religion and get converted, no one has any right to bring about a change in one’s intention, directly or indirectly. In the first thousand years after Christ, Christianity was established in Europe, in

¹⁷⁴ V. Ramachandrudu, ‘Exploiting Tolerance’, *Organiser*, Vol.LI, No.11, Oct.10, 1999, p.2

¹⁷⁵ R.C. Batura, ‘Pope’s Apology of an Apology’, *Organiser*, Vol.LI, No.40, Apr.23, 2000, P.5, 7

the second millennium in Africa, and in the third millennium, Christianity should reap good harvest in India.”¹⁷⁶

In response to this speech, the Organiser carried an article that said, “If one wants to be affluent, perhaps one can achieve it through other religions. If one craves for fulfillment, one need not forsake Hindu religion, as it accepts that there are several paths leading to God. That is why a true Hindu respects people following other religions as well. And this is how Christianity and Islam could strike roots and flourish in India. Hindu religion never says, ‘if you don’t accept my religion, you will languish in hell’. However, this respect towards other religions should not mean that the Hindus will welcome the instigation to desert Hindu religion. It is one thing to be convinced and get converted; it is altogether another to attempt converting en masse to effect a “harvest”. The Pope’s visit has also driven home the point that if one has the right to propagate the positive aspect of conversion, one also has the right to propagate the negative aspect of conversion. The visit has also focused on the point, that though it may be difficult to accept some methods of the Hindu organizations, there really exists a valid reason for their concern.”¹⁷⁷

3.4 On the Christian Demand for Dalit Reservations:

They counter the claim for dalit reservations¹⁷⁸ by claiming that the rights of minorities should be limited only to the benefits they receive from Articles 29 and 30. “Christian institutions in India already qualify for benefits under Articles 29 and 30. Unlike Hindu

¹⁷⁶ Cho Ramaswamy, ‘Thanks to the Pope’, *Organiser*, Vol.LI, No.23, Jan.2, 2000, p.12

¹⁷⁷ Cho Ramaswamy, ‘Thanks to the Pope’, *Organiser*, Vol.LI, No. 23, Jan, 2000, p.12.

¹⁷⁸ “The GOI Scheduled Castes Order, 1936, which was in force till the Constitutional Order, 1950 was promulgated by the President of India under Article 341 (1) of the Constitution came into effect, stipulated that ‘No Indian Christian shall be deemed to be a member of the Scheduled Caste.’ This was so because the SC benefits which were primarily for untouchables did not exist in Christianity. Para 3 of the 1950 Order states, ‘No person who professes a religion different from the Hindu religion shall be deemed to be a member of Scheduled Caste. Our Constitution clarifies that Hindu religion includes Sikhs and Buddhists. The Dalit Christians are not entitled to reservations.’ Shankara Khanderi, ‘Is There a Scheduled Caste within Christianity?’ *Organiser*, Vol.XLVIII, No.22, Dec. 29, 1996, p. 2.

institutions, which are taxed, and also subject to government interference, Churches and other Christian organizations, by virtue of being minority institutions are exempt from both. In addition they engage in conversion by promising to end caste discrimination. By demanding reservations for Christian dalits, they have broken their promise made at the time of conversion.

The vulnerable segment of the community of dalit Christians is victim to the self-serving priesthood and other church officials. Their demand for reservation for dalit Christians is arrogant and immoral. To solve this problem, all institutions that receive benefits under Article 30 should be disqualified if they discriminate against anyone. All priests and Church officials who practise discrimination should be prosecuted. Ultimately, the best solution is to repeal Articles 29 and 30 and make all discrimination a criminal offence.”¹⁷⁹

Consequently the problem that arises from the above is the reduction in reservations for Hindus, “In pleading for reservations for dalit Christians, it aims at reducing reservations for the Scheduled Castes and encourages religious conversions. The idea is to make more sections of the Hindu majority renounce their faith to gain the privileges of minorities. It is also proposed that Hindus of Kashmir and the north-east be given a minority status, thus legitimizing the communal divide.”¹⁸⁰

3.5 On the Hindu Right to Reconversion:

This right is asserted against the proselytising minorities as well as the secularists. “The Indian Constitution, like the Hindus down the ages, is the most magnanimous with regard to religious freedom. It gives full freedom to every citizen to profess, practise and propagate his

¹⁷⁹ N.S. Rajaram, ‘Reservations for Dalit Christians is Morally Wrong’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLVIII, No.28, Feb 9, 1997, p.2, 19.

¹⁸⁰ Rakesh Sinha, ‘Opposing Hindutva to “Uplift” Minorities’, *Organiser*, Vol.L, No.20, Dec. 13, 1998, p.2

religion. This, however, is interpreted by the Christian missionaries and Islamic proselytizers to mean that they alone as “minorities” and not the Hindus have the freedom to propagate. The Christians have been practicing conversion through fraudulent means, luring the untouchables and other downtrodden Hindus to a seemingly more ‘egalitarian order’. In proportion to the intensification of the conversions, the Hindus also want to exercise the freedom guaranteed by the Constitution to profess, practise and propagate their religion. Propagation also means defense of Hindu religion against falsehoods and calumnies against it and education of the vulnerable people against conversion. It is this organized education and resistance to proselytisation and the protection of the illiterate, ignorant and poor, from being beguiled into converting that is taken as intolerance, so uncharacteristic of Hindus.

The secularist parameter says religious conversion is compatible with the Constitution. Somehow reconversion to Hinduism is provocative and fascist.”¹⁸¹

The subject of conversions was dealt with more frequently in the late 1990’s and after. Attacks on Christian missionaries perpetrated by the Sangh were frequent in the same period. The Hindu nationalists allegations of the fraudulent conversions are flawed since most of the tribal groups and castes convert in order to escape discrimination within the Hindu caste hierarchy. Religious change, in these cases functioned as one such mode of upward mobility. To the converts it was ‘not merely a religious event but also a search for equality, as such a political act. So in the late 19th and 20th centuries dalits made the option of turning their caste movements into conversion movements.’¹⁸² For instance, the Meenakhshipuram conversions of 1981 involved dalits with good education and government jobs, but were continually

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 173.

¹⁸² Walter Fernandes, ‘Attacks on Minorities and a National Debate on Conversions.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, Jan. 16-23, 1999, pp .81-83.

discriminated against by the dominant castes. Similarly, their allegation that many tribals are being converted from Hinduism to other religions can be refuted by the historical fact that despite the presence of interplay between Hindu caste society and tribal society, the two have been distinct and mutually exclusive formations.¹⁸³ The agitation over the issue of conversions by the Hindu nationalists is a political-cultural argument. It is a ready instrument to further their communal agenda. Instead of trying to fight forces outside Hinduism, it might be useful for the Hindu nationalists to struggle against caste discrimination inherent in the 'Hindu culture' as they put it. Otherwise, these issues serve as mere propaganda. According to a critic of the Hindu nationalists, 'myths are created and propagated for this purpose (towards fascism), in 1984 rumours were spread that Sikhs celebrated the assassination of Indira Gandhi; in 1992 it was the myth of a mosque built over a temple¹⁸⁴. Now it is forced conversions.'

IV

4.0 Articles 29 and 30 are 'Cultural and Educational Rights' granted to the religious and linguistic minorities of the country. Article 29 states that 'any section of the citizens residing in territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. Article 30 states, 'all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.'

The above are the rights granted by the Indian Constitution to the minorities. However, the Hindu nationalists are candid about such "privileges" being given to the minorities at the

¹⁸³ Ranjit Hoskote, 'Conversion and Inversion: the Paradoxes of India's Present', *Seminar* 475- Mar.1999, pp. 65-68.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 131.

“cost of the majority”. They opine the following with respect to Articles 29 and 30¹⁸⁵, “The rights under Article 30 (1) being enjoyed by all minorities based on religion or language, is to be viewed fundamentally as a cultural right and not as a religious right. Articles 29 and 30 are to conserve the cultural mosaic of the country from the inroads of intolerant and dominant cultural invasions or assaults.

The educational institutions should have as its purpose the conservation of the culture of the community; the institution should be established by the will of the community and should be administered by the community. This follows that the establishment and administration of the institutions should be vested in the elected representatives of the community. Today, most of the so-called minority educational institutions which seek the protection of Article 30 (1) are administered by persons who are not the elected representatives of the minority community, but a coterie parading themselves as representing the minority community. Institutions, whose management does not draw from the willing consent of the members of the community in this country, should not be allowed to enjoy the privileges under minority rights. Accountability and transparency have to be ensured in these institutions.”¹⁸⁶

4.2 The Hindu nationalists present a critique of minority rights by pointing out discrepancies in the Indian state as well as by giving an account of the treatment of Hindus in countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh.

¹⁸⁵ It is contended that while “all other fundamental rights, including the right to religion, are subject to public order, morality and health, there is no such limitation on the minority rights. As a result, animal sacrifices by the majority community can be banned on grounds of public order, morality and health, while animal sacrifice by the minorities is protected under Article 29. Similarly, the right to property has ceased to be a fundamental right for all, but is available to the educational institutions of minority communities under Article 30.” Ram Gopal, ‘Minority Rights: Unwarranted Appendage to Constitution’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLIX, No.16, Nov.16, 1997, p.11

¹⁸⁶ Correspondent, ‘Christian Community has no say in Minority Educational Institutions’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLVIII, No.39, Apr. 27, 1997, p.4.

a) *Rights of Minorities*: “Secularism as enshrined in the Indian Constitution divides people on the basis of religion as majority and minority...it institutionalizes double standards- one for the majority and another for the minority.”¹⁸⁷ Minority rights are a contradiction of the secular state as in “making religion as the basis for the grant of special minority status to a group of people is dangerous and repugnant to the very principles that India stands for on a different footing, opposite to a theocratic Islamic state of Pakistan or Bangladesh.”¹⁸⁸

b) *National Minorities vs. Religious Minorities*:

Another matter that disturbs the Hindu nationalists is that the minorities by getting these special privileges are one up on the Hindus. “Indian minorities are enjoying an enviably higher status than that of the Hindu majority. Minority communities now have a vested interest in retaining their separate identities even at the cost of national security.... unqualified loyalty of each member of the minority community or group to the state it belongs to, is an essential condition for the grant of a protective minority status. Also, the special protection rights are intended to be a shield, and not a weapon to overawe the majority community.”¹⁸⁹

As if to negate the relevance of these rights the Hindu nationalists draw a distinction between ‘national minorities’ and ‘religious minorities’, a distinction not recognized by the Indian Constitution, say the Hindu nationalists. “National minorities are based on differences in three aspects: race, culture and language. Culture is defined as a broad term, which incorporates the way of thinking of a people, its beliefs and customs...the culture of a people is a product of certain historical and geographical forces which exert their influence through several

¹⁸⁷ N.S. Rajaram, ‘Secularism: A Cover for Communal Behaviour’, *Organiser*, Vol.LIII, No. 52, July 14, 2002, p.2

¹⁸⁸ Ram Gopal, ‘Minority Rights: Unwarranted Appendage to Constitution’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLIX, No.16, 1997, p. 11.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid

centuries, and which create for a particular people, a culture that is distinct from the cultures of all other peoples. Religion plays a negligible role in the creation of culture, more of a historical influence than an immediate and direct influence.”¹⁹⁰

Based on the above, it is concluded that the, “Muslims do not constitute a national minority. Religion does not play much of a role in deciding the separate identity of a national minority, and a ‘religious minority’ and ‘national minority’ cannot mean the same thing.

The Muslims do not constitute one homogeneous culture – for instance, the culture of Bengali Muslims is more akin to Bengali Hindus. Similar is the case in Kerala. As a race also, the Muslims in India today are Hindu converts. Similarly, Urdu is not a common language of all Muslims across India. The mother tongue of the Muslims is not Urdu, but the language or dialect spoken in a particular region.”¹⁹¹

Special rights are given to minorities as a form of positive action; making it possible for them to preserve their characteristics and traditions, and are as important in achieving equality of treatment as non-discrimination. Thus, it is only when a minority is able to use its own language, run its own schools etc. is it able to achieve the capacity to come up to the status that the majority has taken for granted. However, to say that religion plays a small role in determination of ‘minority status’ would be erroneous. For many communities or groups their religion could play a major part in influencing culture. For that matter, even the Hindu nationalists base their entire ideology on Hindu culture, which has been greatly influenced by Hinduism. Similarly, Islam draws much of its socio-cultural understanding from the Quran.

¹⁹⁰ J.P.Singh, ‘The Folly of Treating Religious Minorities as National Minorities’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLIX, No.16, Nov.16, 1997, p.11

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

However, such an argument by the Hindu Right is just another futile attempt of theirs to prevent the institutionalization of minority rights.

Another point being, that rights exist only where the power to enforce them is present. Thus, there are no rights without political power. It is for this reason that minorities in India can demand the fulfillment of the rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution and raise their voice against discrimination. However, to expect a similar treatment in countries where there is no political will or state agency to support these claims, rights are non-enforceable, as is in the following instances of minority discrimination in some countries.

C) Treatment of Hindus in Islamic States: The articles dealing with this issue center mainly on the states of Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the Hindus were the victims of the 'Enemy Property Act', a remnant of the Pakistan legacy. The Organiser, in giving such instances not only seeks to expose the discrimination of the Hindu minority living in other countries; but also uses it as a tool to express its displeasure of the "privileges" being granted to Muslim minorities in India.

"A Black Act in Bangladesh called Enemy Property Act is applied essentially to the Hindu citizenry. The then Pakistan government introduced this act after the Indo-Pak war in 1965, which is still effective in independent Bangladesh. It serves as a readymade tool for confiscation of Hindu properties, which has been going on for years, even before 1965, by violence and forced ousters. By the power of this Act, if a Hindu is a co-sharer of Hindu property of a Hindu migrated to India, then even his/her property will be declared as Enemy Property, even if he is a Bangladeshi citizen. After taking over the property, the government can lease it out to the particular co-sharer, neighbour or any third party, according to what the

concerned official deems right. According to this Act, if a Hindu migrates to India, then the Hindu Succession Act will not be applicable there. However, the Enemy Property Act is not applicable in case of migrants to countries other than India, and thus the abandoned property declared 'Enemy property must be Hindu, but not a Muslim property, wherever the Muslim owner might go.'¹⁹² Other forms of atrocities have taken the form of communal violence against Hindus, "Lakhs of Hindus throughout Bangladesh have been rendered homeless, thousands of Hindu women raped and kidnapped, and an unaccountable number of Hindus killed before and after the election in Bangladesh. Pogroms of Hindus although confined in some areas for a few days before the election, are now going on unabated throughout Bangladesh with more zeal to wipe out the last face of Hindus in Bangladesh after the new government is formed. According to local newspapers in Tripura, Mullahs are announcing throughout Bangladesh in broad daylight that if any Hindu tried to perform puja, he will be killed, Muslims imposed 'jazia' on the Hindus and are attacking them, asking them to leave Bangladesh or to face consequences- looting, arson, rape, kidnapping of Hindus are the order of the day."¹⁹³ A similar situation is highlighted in an article, which states, "Though the Hindu community of Bangladesh bore the brunt of the Pakistan army's barbarity during the liberation of that country, these Hindus have once again become the target of Muslim fanaticism. What happened to the Hindus after partition and again during 1971 is being repeated now. After the installation of the Khalida Zia regime a few months ago, the Hindus, especially their women folk, have been subjected to atrocities and humiliation. That Hindus

¹⁹² Special Correspondent, *Organiser*, Vol.XL, No.,2, July 3, 1988, p.14.

¹⁹³ Correspondent, 'Pogrom of Hindus', *Organiser*, Vol.LIII, No.17, Nov. 11, 2001, p.4.

who made many sacrifices during the liberation of Bangladesh should now become targets of Muslim fanaticism is a revealing commentary on the politics of that country.”¹⁹⁴

“A powerful movement among the Hindus of Bangladesh is the need of the hour. They have to pay a price. A homeland cannot be achieved through polite diplomacy. The people concerned will have to fight for it. They must launch a mass non-violent campaign to achieve their goal. But care should be taken to ensure that the campaign will not turn violent. Every democratic forum, both inside and outside Bangladesh should be used by the leaders of Bangladeshi Hindus to press for a homeland. They must know that a separate homeland will never come on a platter, nor in response to plaintive diplomatic appeals.”¹⁹⁵ It is an irony that the Hindu nationalists, who fear separatism of Muslim dominated areas in India (and accuse the secular state in India of giving shelter to theocracies in the form of minority rights), would call for a homeland of Hindus in Bangladesh. They must take note of the fact that in the presence of their ideology and an absence of the secular state (that they desire) a similar demand for a homeland could be made by the minorities in India. Hence, it is by virtue of India being a secular state that the country remains united. This fact, the Hindu nationalists must make note of.

The creation of separate electorates and certain discriminatory laws have been topical issues in Pakistan. “The creation of separate electorates in Pakistan has the minorities and their leaders. Not only are they cut off from the mainstream of political life, but do not find easy recourse against oppression.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ N. Krishna, ‘Hindus of Bangladesh- Time for a Permanent Solution’, *Organiser*, Vol.LIII, No.49, June 23, 2002, p.7.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ S.K. Gupta, ‘Article 370 can be Revoked by a Presidential Order’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLI, No.40, May 6, 1990, p.11

Another area of concern was the “Hudood laws, under the provisions of which, non-Muslims can be convicted on the evidence of Muslim males, but Muslims cannot be convicted on the evidence of non-Muslims. Thus, the Hudood laws and separate electorates have reduced the minorities to second-class citizens. Whereas in India, such discrimination can be challenged in a court since the law is non-discriminatory, in Pakistan, Hudood laws have introduced discrimination into the law as well.”¹⁹⁷

The opinions of the Hindu nationalists on the state of affairs in Pakistan is summed up in the following as a response to the attack on a Christian Church: “Tolerance is a word unknown in the Islamic history, not to mention respect for others’ faith. This is not the first time that minorities are targeted in Pakistan. The merciless gunning down of innocent Christians seems very much in keeping with the trend in the Islamic land of Pakistan, where, irrespective of who is in power, minorities are unwelcome and unwanted. No Pakistani regime has been compatible with a Church or a temple, however small or insignificant they may have been. The social scene has been initiated with the divide not only between the majority and the miniscule minority, but with virtual street fights between Shias and Sunni, Punjabis and Sindhis, Baluchis and Muslims, to mention a few. The situation has been worsened by attempts of successive regimes to institutionalise discrimination against minorities. The most dubious way was to keep the minority under check by imposing blasphemy laws under which any non-Muslim alleged to be saying or doing something against Islam is tried under this law. No minority victims booked under this law has ever been let off; even judges who

A similar apprehension was felt nearly a decade later when the Jamhooria Islamia (JI) had the following agenda for Pakistani minorities if it came to power, “If JI comes to power in Pakistan, it will abolish the voting rights of women and minorities. Only the Muslim men can participate in voting or for standing in elections. Minorities’ will have to pay jaziya. The idea of jaziya is not protection money, but a monetary force on the non-Muslims.” Correspondent, ‘make India a Muslim Nation’, *Organiser*, Vol.LIII, No.22, Dec.16, 2001, p.10.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

acquitted any person accused under blasphemy law were gunned down. In most of the Islamic countries, the religious dictates are supreme and considered unalterable. There is no place for coexistence of faith or accepted norms of respect for other people's faith. Democracy is unknown and unacceptable in this part of the world where principles of civil governance are subject to religious interpretation by asset of fanatical clergy.”¹⁹⁸

Article 370, giving special status to Jammu and Kashmir is also viewed as discriminatory and as promoting separatist tendencies. It is said, “Article 370 threatens the political unity of the state. It is a divisive instrument and encourages separatist movements. An important pre requisite to political unity is that no separate political status be given to any region or religion. Also there should not be any religious minorities in a secular state. It is also dangerous to think of India as a state that constitutes many cultures – it has only one cultural core which has integrated different cultural shades.”¹⁹⁹

In other articles the core concern of the Hindu nationalists is that this article could encourage tendencies of separatism.²⁰⁰ One of the articles states that, “In giving importance to Article 370, one negates the crucial importance of Article 1, a permanent provision, that makes all the states of India, including J&K and Union Territories an integral part of India that is Bharat and a ‘Union of States’ (distinct from a federation). By focusing on Article 370, one is helping terrorists and secessionists. Even this article is subject to Article 1.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Editorial, ‘State of Intolerance’, *Organiser*, Vol.LIII, No.17, Nov.11, 2001, p.2

¹⁹⁹ B.K. Kelkar, ‘Article 370: Loophole of the Indian Polity’, *Organiser*, Vol.XXXVII, No.52, May 11, 1986, p.7

²⁰⁰ “The Constitutional position of Indian states imply that territorial and political matters of any part of the country are matters of concern to the people of the whole country as represented in the Union parliament and not one for the people residing in the immediately affected part alone. As such the territorial and other questions of J&K are matters for the people of the whole country and not just of Kashmir alone. Any commitment made by the army, political party, leader or official against the constitutional position has no validity. The main concern is that this special status will encourage secessionists not only in J&K, but elsewhere in India as well.” S.K.Gupta, ‘Article 370 Can be Revoked by a Presidential Order’, *Organiser*, Vol.XLI, No.40, May 6, 1990, p.9.

²⁰¹ *Organiser*, Vol.XLII, No.35, Apr.7, 1991, p.7

Thus, keeping such consequences in mind it is held, “Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this article, the President may, by public notification, declare that this article shall cease to be operative or shall be operative only with such exceptions and modifications and from such date as he may specify.”²⁰²

Hence, it is evident that the Hindu nationalists aspire to have their version of secularism or more appropriately Hindutva. A state where political power has its foundations on cultural history and where rights are given keeping in mind the sentiments and needs of the majority. The Hindu nationalists discourse on every topic of the secular state, is based on their desire to form a Hindu Rashtra; and their critique is centered on ‘discrimination against the majority.’ This itself reveals their majoritarian tendencies inherent in their conception of a Hindu state. The concept of a Hindu Rashtra not only forms the core of the Hindu nationalist movement, but is the ideology itself. It is the means and the end. It is the only way to fight discrimination, the way to be secular. For them the question of plurality does not arise, since the ‘ancient Hindu culture’ was liberal enough to embrace change. As true as this claim is, it would seem that the Hindu nationalists, instead of embracing this culture, are in effect refuting all that it stands for. The Hindu Right is selective in its reading of history as it is in examining the present scenario. Instances of discrimination, violence etc. have been a reality of both the majority and minority community. However, this is inevitable when there are strong contending forces fighting for state resources. At times, keeping in mind certain historical, cultural and political factors, some of these provisions are designed to support one community, more than another. However, as far as this is not done at the cost of the other, if it does not impinge upon, or take away the rights of the other, it is permissible.

²⁰² S.K. Gupta, ‘Article 370 Can be Revoked by a Presidential Order’, *Organizer*, Vol.XLI, No.40, May 6, 1990, p.9.

Thus, the state in India is secular not because it 'discriminates in favour of the minority', or because it gives the majority 'the burden of secularism.' The Indian state is secular, as it has more or less succeeded in deliberating between contending religious forces in order to give to all, equal liberty and rights. The concluding chapter would analyse the trends in the Hindu nationalist movement examined in this study to decipher their idea of the secular Indian state.

Chapter 4: Emerging Idea of Secularism and Pseudo Secularism – A Critical Analysis.

1.0 The Hindu nationalist movement has been a dominant force in Indian politics since the late eighties. With landmark events such as the Ram Shila puja, the Rath Yatra, and the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Hindu nationalists have sought to make explicit, their demand for a Hindu state.

Chapters two and three of the study undertook a detailed examination of the Hindu Right's perspective on the Indian nation and the secular state. This chapter would infer whether the implications of such an ideology are anywhere close to the idea of the 'secular', if not, to see what is this idea that the Hindu nationalists so vociferously support and claim to represent.

The idea of the secular is associated with non-discrimination in religious matters. As we build on the notion of non-discrimination, it is realised that the secular, when it forms an essential characteristic of a working democracy seeks to promote certain values. Values of liberty, equality and citizenship are granted irrespective of the religious identity of individuals in a secular state. This has so far been the understanding of secularism that has dominated the political and academic discourse in India.

However, in a country like India, where there are clear-cut distinctions of majority and minority identities, there is a likelihood of the majority becoming tyrannical. The presence of a movement like Hindu nationalism, which magnifies the differences between various communities, only adds to such concerns. Keeping this in mind the secular state provides for certain rights that are exclusive to cultural minorities. Since the distinctions between culture and religion are vague and overlaps are inevitable, these rights are subject to much criticism. The paradox lies in the fact that these rights are granted to groups on the basis of their

religious identities. Though the intentions behind granting such rights have been noble, it enables the Hindu nationalists to criticize the 'secular' credentials of the Indian state. The Hindu nationalists' have problems with the idea of secularism and the secular provisions guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. For them, secular-democratic politics is represented by Hindutva or cultural nationalism. From a review of the literature in the Organiser one gathers that the Hindu nationalist perspective on secularism can be analysed on the basis of three broad issues: on their vision of the "Hindu" state, their critique of secularism and their vision for the secular state in India.

1.1 Modern nation states today are represented primarily as political entities. Processes of liberalization and globalization have led to migration and the resultant exchange in population has led to the formation of multi-cultural states. This is not to say that these factors alone have led to multicultural states, but that it has facilitated the process. However, contrary to popular belief, the modernizing forces have not resulted in the subsuming of ascriptive identities. Instead, ethnic conflicts across the globe having been causing unrest. Keeping this in mind, democratic states have the additional responsibility of preserving and promoting distinct identities and preventing inter group conflicts within the available democratic mechanisms.

The state in India, being home to diverse religions and cultures is faced with a similar challenge, more so since the Constitution declares India to be a secular state. However, this has led to many instances where the fine balance between the state and society has been upset. It is at such times, that religion has been misused for political benefits and electoral gains. Communalism of the majority as well as the minority has thus been a recurrent feature of the Indian state. However, none have sought to re-articulate the basic structure upon which the

Indian state rests. The Hindu nationalists however, seek to do just that when they reinterpret secularism.

We shall see why the Hindu nationalist ideology is a far cry from the commonly accepted secular norms. To begin with, it is their perception of the Indian state that completely negates the plural identity of Indian citizens. The secular state is required when there exists a multi-cultural, multi-religious society. Where a dominant majority exists, there is a likelihood of discrimination on religious grounds. The Hindu nationalists, however, go a step further. Their emphasis is more on culture than on religion. India then is more of a cultural, than a political entity. This aspect of Hindu nationalism has led some scholars to maintain that the Hindu nationalists' are secular in the literal sense of the term²⁰³ i.e. they are focused on this worldly matters and use cultural symbols for political ends. Hence, Ram is hailed as a national hero and not a religious figure. This however does not make them secular. It is true that the purpose behind using Ram is to depict a cultural and not religious sentiment. But this is where the danger lies. Ram is a religious symbol, though manipulated as a cultural symbol for aggrandizement of Hindu power. This leads to heightened concerns when the Hindu nationalists associate the identity of a multi cultural state with just one culture, that too the dominant culture making it as dangerous as giving preference to a particular religion. The Hindu nationalists' seek to establish a mono communitarian identity in a multi community state. This is acceptable as long as the minority is given space to freely practise its own culture. However, in this case the Hindu nationalists are not only aggressive in their propagation of a Hindu state, but are simultaneously engaged in belittling the minority communities. For them a nation is born of a community and since they give a primary status

²⁰³ Madhu Kishwar (ed), *Religion at the Service of Nationalism and Other Essays*, OUP, New Delhi, 1998.

to the Hindu community, it is but natural for them to trace the nationhood of India to the Hindus. It is for this reason that they define nationality in more permanent terms than citizenship, which being of a political nature can be bestowed upon anyone, or revoked as and when required. Nationality, on the other hand, is defined more in terms of a gradual process of nation formation that shapes the identity of a community which shares a common culture, beliefs etc. Another very obvious manner in which the Hindu nationalists subordinate minority identity is by defining minorities as Hindu Muslim and Hindu Christians. This perception is itself flawed for two reasons: one, because the culture of the communities in question are vastly different, making it very difficult for their differences to be subsumed under a single identity. This only indicates assimilation. Two, such a proposal runs contrary to the image that the Hindu right portrays of the Muslim and Christian minorities. To find unity in diversity in the Hindutva ideology is the biggest paradox.

This paradox is clearly reflected in the drawing up of a historical account wherein the Hindu community is depicted in a positive manner and the others communities are portrayed as enemies and invaders. Though there is an element of truth in such a discourse, it tends to be selective in its narrative of Indian history. This is an attempt on the part of the Hindu nationalists to gain acceptance with the Indian (Hindu) masses. However, it has serious repercussions since an already alienated minority is further pushed to the background. The consistent anti-minority propaganda only adds to the crisis of “minority” identity that the Hindu nationalists would rather overlook.

1.2 It is this idea of the predominance of the Hindu community that is reflected in their perspective on secularism. However, since they are aware of the mechanisms of a liberal state, they pretend to embrace an idea of the secular or ‘positive secularism’ that is based on their

critique of the existing notion. This leads to inconsistencies and contradictions, which are evident in their perspective. For one, they claim that secularism is a Western concept that has no place in Indian politics. A separation of state and religion is impossible. However, they are also at pains to prove that the idea of the secular is an inherent part of Indian state and society. It is to support this claim that they identify with cases in ancient India, where the ruling class and priestly class were separate. Hence, on one hand they reject the idea of separation, but at the same time support this claim. Their incoherence on the matter is evident from the fact that while they tend to lean towards separation at times, they also use it as a vantage point to criticize the Indian state. This reflects the dichotomy in their thinking. Again, they accuse the secular state in India for granting minority rights on religious grounds, while also claiming that it was because India had a dominant Hindu population that minorities were granted such privileges.

Similarly, they also claim to abide by the principle of 'Sarva dharma samabhava' implying equality of all religions, a value that the Indian state promotes. However, the Hindu nationalists' interpretation of the same principle reveals that they seek to promote majoritarianism. This is because they interpret 'equality of all' as identical treatment. It is on this basis that they propose that minority rights be scrapped from the Constitution. According to them, either rights should be given to all or to none. This is regarded as discrimination against the majority. This again reveals how secular they are. They are against the institutionalization of minority rights. However, these are guarantees against the majority and our Constitutionally protected.

In identifying the state in India solely with the Hindu community, they commit two errors: the first is to disregard the identity of the individual and the rights due to her as a citizen of the

state. Two, is the status of citizens belonging to a minority community. For by giving primacy to the community, the Hindu nationalists deny rights and liberties to the individual citizen. In their understanding the individual has no existence outside the community to which she belongs. The situation is aggravated if the individual happens to belong to a minority community. Then the chances of exercising citizenship rights are further diminished. Most often the individual is just a passive citizen and does not actively participate in the affairs of her community or that of the nation.

Another paradigm within which the Hindu nationalists examine secularism is the notion of tolerance. Though many theorists adopt this understanding in their analysis on secularism, the implications of their analysis are positive. This is so since tolerance implies an effort on the part of the state to provide the requisite space to different religious groups, especially the minorities, to deliberate upon contending claims. It also gives the liberty to deliberate within groups and initiate reform. However, for the Hindu nationalists, tolerance is an attribute of the Hindus, which comes across as a more benevolent attitude. It has a negative implication since tolerance implies majority condescension as long as the minorities operate within the parameters set by the majority. Any dissent on the part of the minorities would lead to a communal backlash and justifiably so, as admitted to by the Hindu nationalist. This tendency has led many to compare Sangh Parivar politics with fascism. Among many common factors that are highlighted is the fact that the Hindu Right uses violence as an instrument to annihilate the minorities- Muslim and Christian. This not only reveals the coercive tendencies of this ideology but its similarity to Hitler's treatment of Jews. Another commonality being, their idea of a cultural unity located in the 'Hindu' which is compared to the Aryan race theory of Hitler. The RSS, however, denies their ideology as having any trace of racial

superiority. As matter of fact, since it is maintained that the Hindu embraces all, the question of superiority does not arise, since the Hindu nationalists do not acknowledge the presence of any other community, except if it serves to promote the positives of a Hindu Rashtra.

In portraying the tenets of Hinduism as representing the philosophy of the Indian state they again divert from secular norms. It is said that the Hindu nationalists' idea of positive secularism and critique of minority appeasement serves to build a consensus for a Hindu state. More importantly, it is considered instrumental in redefining and reordering Hinduism itself into a more syndicated, monolithic aggressive form.²⁰⁴ This claim can be supported by much of the literature in the Organizer that articulates the philosophy of Hinduism and how it should serve as the philosophical basis for a Hindu state. Here again, the Hindu nationalists are hesitant to regard Hinduism as a religion. However, the pertinent issue here is not whether Hinduism is a religion or not, but the fact that even within its tenets, the Hindu right selects only those aspects that help it to perpetuate its course of action. On one hand, it denies the use of religion, but on the other they portray Hinduism vis-a-vis Islam and Christianity, with the former being more tolerant, assimilative and 'secular'. This highlights even more, their dislike of differences.

This brings us to the next point, that of assimilation. The Hindu nationalists claim that the Hindus are secular since their culture is open to change. However, no matter how tolerant the majority is, in a multicultural state, this assimilative tendency only adds to the insecurity of the minorities. This is because assimilation is carried out in two ways: by persuasion or by force and coercion. In the former case, the minority in question would give its consent to adopt majority practices to live a more secure life. However, this denies the minority

²⁰⁴ Aijaz Ahmed, *On Communalism and Globalisation: Offensives of the Far Right*; Three Essays Collective, New Delhi, 2002.

community the full benefits of citizenship rights, since after assimilation the group is a passive recipient of benefits bestowed upon it by the majority. The other option, however, leaves no democratic choice for the minority, since an aggressive majority threatens its very existence. It is said that in countries such as the United States of America, there exists a process of assimilation or the 'melting pot'. However, the common space for this togetherness is located not in any culture, religion, language or ethnic ties but in a civil religion, where identities are subsumed to a heterogeneous American way of life. In India, however, the Hindu nationalists' claim to assimilate by persuasion. However, recurrent attacks on the minority population and culture reveal otherwise. The demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Godhra massacre, atrocities and killings of Christian missionaries are some of the few instances one can cite as an expression of majority assimilation. The actions of the Sangh Parivar contradict any claim that they make in the literature they publish and runs contrary to the philosophy they claim to live by.

1.3 In the light of the above, one can conclude that the Hindu nationalists ideas of positive secularism or pseudo secularism are mere euphemisms for secularism. Their secularism is flawed at the very start since it negates the plurality of the Indian state. Hence, any further exposition of their views reflects this singular, monolithic vision of India that they hold strongly to. However, a perusal of the Organiser reveals that within the Sangh, there are degrees of aggressiveness that are reflected by its component parts. For instance, organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal are more militant in their approach towards minorities and in their demands for a Hindu Rashtra. These are the organizations that mobilize people for violent clashes and communal agitations. The RSS, though the parent organization, seems more reasonable in its approach towards a vision of the

Indian state. At least in the arguments they put forth, they tend to highlight the benefits of having a Hindu state. Though the stress is always on the cultural ethos of the Hindu community, they make efforts to portray themselves as tolerant of diversity. However, it is this irony in the ideology of the Sangh that is likely to retard its growth after a period of time. They are unable to arrive at a well-defined idea of Hindutva. While a certain section of the Hindu nationalists define Hindutva in territorial terms, thereby excluding the minorities, another section defines it in more inclusive terms embracing all cultures. While some speak of secularism, the others reject it. The common platform for acceptance is the Hindu culture that they draw from historical accounts. However, they tend to differ on how it shall be articulated for the establishment of a Hindu state. It is this distinction that causes problems within the Sangh. With the BJP as the political wing of the Sangh, many variations have to be introduced from time to time. The lack of a coherent ideology only adds to the problem. The Hindu nationalists do not have a clear understanding of the secular. They just propagate an ideology of cultural oneness and out of compulsion attempt to embrace democratic secular ideals. They practise Hindutva and not secularism. In doing so, they overlook the divisive tendencies within Hindu culture that protects and promotes the caste system. Instead of criticizing other religions for their faults, the first step of the Hindu nationalists should be to reform unfair practices within Hinduism.

Therefore, we see, that the Hindu nationalists reject the cultural distinctiveness of the Indian state. However, the secular state in India, has also suffered from certain gaps that have been taken advantage of by organizations such as the Sangh. Political manipulation of religious symbols and adherence to community identities to further electoral gains has led to the communalization of religious identities. Although this is at times inevitable in democratic

politics, it is the sustained movement of the Sangh that has enabled it to carve a niche in Indian politics. However, there are certain issues raised by the Sangh that cannot be ignored. What they term as 'minority appeasement' is a perception held by many. The secular state in India provides for inter-group equality. However it falls short of encouraging intra-group equality. This is what the critics of the secular state tend to target. Thus, relations between different religious groups are regulated by the state. However, within religious groups the state is hesitant to intervene, especially with regard to the practices of the minority community. This hesitation is understandable, though not always acceptable. In a country like India, where religions are many and philosophies diverse, the state has to locate a public space where these religions can deliberate and reach a broad consensus to facilitate the smooth functioning of the democracy. Such a state would face a handicap if it has to accommodate very closed communities that refuse deliberation, or those which aggressively promote communitarian interests.

The advent of the Hindu nationalist movement has expanded the understanding of the Indian state, beyond its secular character. By contesting the diversity of the Indian state, the Hindu nationalists discourse challenges a multicultural understanding of the nation. The multicultural understanding demands that the majority find legitimate means of realizing unity in diversity without imposing cultural uniformity. Hindutva in giving importance to one community, while demeaning the minorities, serves to reinforce the feeling of second-class citizenship. Secularism protects and complements a multicultural state. It is important for the, secular state to promote values that encourage diverse cultural and religious communities to realize that different cultures represent different ideas of a 'good life' or 'ways of life'. Hindu nationalism in this context exhibits a closed culture contrary to what they claim. This is

because they define their identity in terms of their difference with others and feels threatened by them. However, as is evident the concerns of the Hindu nationalists are unfounded since the Hindus continue to form a majority of the Indian population. It is ironical that Hindu nationalism calls for Hindu revival in a state having a Hindu majority. It is time they assess how the minorities would feel given their “minority” status, especially with the kind of treatment that is being meted out to them. The reassurance, however, lies in the fact that protection of minorities in terms of special rights is guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. Though the BJP did initiate a review of the Constitution when they were in power, it is evident that they have not succeeded in changing the basic structure of the Constitution.

Thus, the Hindu nationalists in reinterpreting secularism have seemingly replaced it with cultural nationalism. However, in a heterogeneous state like India, it is not possible for an ideology such as this to survive for long. The Hindu nationalists in addressing issues of democracy and secularism have only served to add a new perspective, which does not have to transform into reality. Cultural nationalism, therefore is a parallel ideology to secularism and the existence of such an ideology reflects the vibrancy of Indian democracy.

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