

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

Domenic Marbaniang

© 2005, 2009, 2011

Reprinted in *Secularism in India* (Lulu, Amazon, 2011)

Marbaniang.com

VII

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

1. Atheistic or Irreligious Perspective

The atheistic or irreligious view of secularism in India is that the truly secular development of India can only be possible with the complete divorce of religion from every avenue of human life. Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891), President of National Secular Society (of England) believed that the logical consequence in the acceptance of secularism must be that man gets to atheism "if he has brains enough to comprehend."³⁹⁷

Atheism is not a novel phenomenon in India. As has already been seen, the Charvakas were atheist. Jainism itself is an atheist religion and Buddhism avows no faith in a Supreme Deity. However, it is the form of atheistic secularism as inherited from the West (Renaissance and the Enlightenment) that has impressed on the scientific mind of those Indians who are hostile towards any religious interference in Indian politics. Examples of such iconoclasts are not lacking in the entertainment world. Movie producers are well known for their T.V. debates on the absurdity of censorship.

In his *Towards a Perfect Democracy – Alternatives*, Hemant Goswami argues that religion serves no purpose, especially in politics. He writes:

'The need of religion in the Universe or for a smaller section of World i.e. a Country can be questioned? The biggest question which will arise is, If we need any religion any more? I am of the opinion that it's certainly not required, the past couple of thousand years have shown us this, religions have outlived their purpose and objective, if any. In the present times they have done more

³⁹⁷ Kazi Anwarul Masud, How fares secularism in India? The Daily Star, <http://www.thedailystar.net/2003/09/07/d30907020318.htm>

Secularism in India

harm than good. In the age of logical thinking and reason different religions are providing reasons for being unreasonable and negatively emotional. Religious and cultural differences have provided illogical reasons for countless wars and bloodshed. More people have died because of religion than for any other reason or by any single weapon.³⁹⁸

'People are supreme, their interests are supreme, if religion is to be sacrificed for common good, it must go to the altar. It must be always remembered that, God is only a possibility and man a reality.'³⁹⁹

Thus to an atheist, religion represents superstition, primitive fear, and suppression. Such blind faith is antithetical to the rational and scientific character of secularism. While religion looks beyond the world, secularism looks within the world for answers. Nehru who represented this atheistic form of secularism wrote in his Autobiography:

'India is supposed to be a religious country above everything else.. The spectacle of what is called religion or at any rate organised religion in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it. Almost always it seemed to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation, and preservation and exploitation of vested interests.'⁴⁰⁰

Nehru's aversion towards religion is well known. He is said to have 'always grimaced painfully whenever he had to go

³⁹⁸ Hemant Goswami, Towards a Perfect Democracy – Alternatives, (Www.OnlineIndiaWeb.com, 2001), p. 98

³⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 100

⁴⁰⁰ Kazi Anwarul Masud, How fares secularism in India? The Daily Star, <http://www.thedailystar.net/2003/09/07/d30907020318.htm>

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

through even the most perfunctory religious observance.⁴⁰¹ He once even angrily waved away a Hindu sadhu who tried to anoint him with holy water at a dam dedication.⁴⁰² During the Independence Struggle, it was Nehru, Jinnah, and Subhash Chandra Bose who maintained that it was wrong for religion to interfere in politics.⁴⁰³ From 1920 onwards, Nehru's view that all human enterprise should be delivered from religious dominance became more apparent.⁴⁰⁴ As an agnostic, he believed in rationality, secularism, and a scientific approach as the true means of progress in India.⁴⁰⁵ He understood that the destruction of religious superstition by secularism was the only means to a peaceful India.⁴⁰⁶ In a country divided by religious differences, of fundamental nature, Nehru looked at secularism as a great cementing force of the diverse people of India.⁴⁰⁷ Secularism had to displace the religious outlook if people of India were to live and grow together in unity and fraternity.

Nehru represented the Western form of secularism very well. While Gandhi stressed on the equality of all religions and religious pluralism, Nehru was more inclined towards the modernity of the Enlightenment.⁴⁰⁸ In fact, Kazi Anwarul Masud considers him to be the first in India to have accepted Western secularism. He writes:

'While Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Azad spoke of secularism from the perspective of religion, Pandit Nehru was the first in the sub-continent to accept the western concept of secularism.'⁴⁰⁹

When he became the Prime Minister of Independent India, he confessed that it had been extremely difficult for him as a Prime Minister to build a secular State out of a religion-

⁴⁰¹ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, p. 76

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 76

⁴⁰³ Laxminidhi Sharma, *Dharma Darshan ki Rooprekha*, p. 434

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 434

⁴⁰⁵ Tapan Raichaudhuri, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia, (Microsoft Corporation: 2001)

⁴⁰⁶ Kazi Anwarul Masud, *How fares secularism in India*.

⁴⁰⁷ Engr. Asghar Ali, *Future of Secularism in India*,

<http://pakistanimes.net/2003/11/24/guest1.htm>

⁴⁰⁸ Laxminidhi Sharma, *Dharma Darshan ki Ruprekha*, p. 434

⁴⁰⁹ Kazi Anwarul Masud, *How Fares Secularism in India*.

Secularism in India

dominated nation.⁴¹⁰ It was the able leadership of a secular visionary such as Nehru that held India together through out the early turbulent years of the country.⁴¹¹ In a country where the population in majority was Hindu (one reason behind the Muslim League's skepticism regarding the possibility of true secularism in India), it was the secular vision of Nehru that helped him maintain the 'rule of law' in a democracy which was continually in danger of falling into the 'rule of people.'⁴¹² India, therefore, owes a lot to Nehru for the development of a form of secularism in India that was Constitutional and not majoritarianist. To the chagrin of the Hindutvavadis, it is this form of secularism that makes possible for people of all religions to live together under legal protection and keeps any community in majority from violating the rights of the minority. Nehru's agnosticism and rationalism had no place for religious dictates in political matters. Therefore, he was able to see religion with a scientific eye and keep religious fundamentalism from sabotaging Indian politics.

2. Hindu Perspective

There have been mainly two sets of views among the Hindus regarding secularism in India. One view is that secularism in India can only be possible with the adoption of pluralism by every Indian citizen. The other view is that secularism is a Western concept that is unsuitable for the Indian context and must be replaced with cultural nationalism. The former view is represented by Mahatma Gandhi and the latter view is represented by the Sangh Parivar.⁴¹³

a. Pluralist Perspective: Most Hindus can see no problem in worshipping two deities at the same time. This polytheistic nature of popular Hinduism helps Hindus to be pluralist and open to other religions as well. Gandhi viewed secularism from a religious perspective. He believed that religion and the State are inseparable, that irreligiosity encouraged by the State leads to demoralization of the people and that,

⁴¹⁰ Laxminidhi Sharma, *Dharma Darshan ki Rooprekha*, p. 434

⁴¹¹ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, p. 76

⁴¹² Vishal Mangalwadi, *India: The Grand Experiment*, p. 12

⁴¹³ See Nitin G. Raut, *The Debauching of Secularism in India*, <http://www.liberalsindia.com/freedomfirst/ff453-06.html>

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

therefore, the State's religious policy should be pluralistic with equal respect to all religions.⁴¹⁴ Mahatma Gandhi believed that all deities were manifestations of the One and all religions led to the same goal. It was this kind of a pluralistic approach to religion that made him to oppose religious conversions.

Though claiming to be liberal, Gandhi opposed religious conversions, especially of the Untouchables, on arguments based on religious pluralism. This, however, caused a lot of agitation among the leaders of the Untouchable community.⁴¹⁵ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was against this pluralistic perspective of Gandhi. He said that Gandhi opposed religious conversions for political reasons. In his Writings and Speeches, he wrote:

'That Mr. Gandhi is guided by such factors as the relative strength of the Mussalmans and Christians, their relative importance in Indian politics, is evident....'⁴¹⁶

However, Gandhi said that his opposition to conversions, especially Christian conversions, originated from his own position that all religions were fundamentally equal and that equal respect, (Sarva-dharma-samabhava) not mutual tolerance, was the need of the hour.⁴¹⁷ He also accused Christian Missions of using social services to net in converts. He argued that the Harijans had 'no mind, no intelligence, no sense of difference between God and no-God' and that they could no more distinguish between the relative merits than could a cow.⁴¹⁸ Thus, the Gandhian pluralistic perspective of secularism disfavors conversions, especially among the Harijans for at least two reasons:

1. Since no religion can claim absolute truth and since all religions are fundamentally equal, conversions (or the use of the right to freedom of conscience) are out of question.

⁴¹⁴ Laxminidhi Sharma, *Dharma Darshan Ki Rooprekha*, pp.432-433

⁴¹⁵ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, pp. 280-281

⁴¹⁶ D.C. Ahir (Ed.), *Ambedkar on Christianity in India*, (New Delhi: Blumoon Books,1995), p.30

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 26

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 27

Secularism in India

2. The secularism that provides freedom of religion to all people alike without considering their intellectual ability is unjust. Bluntly put, the Harijans do not qualify to exercise their right to freedom of religious conversion.

After going through all such arguments of Gandhi against religious conversions, Ambedkar concluded that they were all invalid arguments based on false premises.⁴¹⁹ Following are the arguments that Ambedkar advanced:

Regarding the argument that all religions are fundamentally equal and, therefore, religious conversions unwanted

'...If I have understood him correctly then his premise is utterly fallacious, both logically as well as historically. Assuming the aim of religion is to reach God – which I do not think it is – and religion is the road to reach him, it cannot be said that every road is sure to lead to God. Nor can it be said that every road, though it may ultimately lead to God, is the right road. It may be that (all existing religions are false and) the perfect religion is still to be revealed. But the fact is that religions are not all true and therefore the adherents of one faith have a right, indeed a duty, to tell their erring friends what they conceive to be the truth.'⁴²⁰

Regarding the argument that the Untouchables were no better than a cow

'That Untouchables are no better than a cow is a statement which only an ignoramus, or an arrogant person, can venture to make. It is arrant nonsense. Mr. Gandhi dares to make it because he

⁴¹⁹ Ibid p. 31

⁴²⁰ Ibid, p. 31

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

has come to regard himself as so great a man that the ignorant masses will not question him in whatever he says.⁴²¹

Regarding the argument that the Christian Missions were baiting native converts by means of social services

'It is difficult to understand why Mr. Gandhi argues that services rendered by the Missionaries are baits or temptations, and that the conversions are therefore conversions of convenience. Why is it not possible to believe that these services by Missionaries indicate that service to suffering humanity is for Christians an essential requirement of their religion? Would that be a wrong view of the process by which a person is drawn towards Christianity? Only a prejudiced mind would say, Yes.'⁴²²

Laxminarayan Gupta has pointed out that Gandhi had perceived that in an intellectually developing society, segregations over castes will only result in depopulation of Hindus in India. Gandhi also said that if the Harijans were to be kept from joining the Christian fold, the Hindus themselves must embrace them.⁴²³

Ambedkar, the leader of the Dalits, as has been seen, was sceptical towards the absolute claims of any religion. The impossibility of equality and absoluteness of any religion, according to Ambedkar, makes the propagation of religious beliefs even more necessary. Plurality of religions necessitates choice of religion on the basis of rational and secular analysis. Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism itself was based on purely secular reasons, namely the liberation of the lower castes.

⁴²¹ Ibid, p. 31

⁴²² Ibid, pp. 31, 32

⁴²³ Laxminarayan Gupta, History of Modern Indian Culture, (Agra: Prem Book Depo, 1973), p. 281

Secularism in India

Contrary to the contention of Ambedkar and other pure secularists, pluralists still believe that pluralism is the only solution of religious plurality in India. For instance, in the preface of his *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, T.N. Madan states the thesis of his book:

‘Throughout *Modern Myths, Locked Minds* runs the conviction that participatory pluralism, rather than a hegemonic and homogenizing secularism, is what will serve India’s interests best.’⁴²⁴

Of course, secularism that claims hegemony over all facets of the people and tries to bring every aspect of the citizen’s life under its supervision cannot be acceptable to the Indian context. Secularism in India simply has to be a non-intermingling of religion and politics.

In his article *Religious Tolerance and Secularism in India*,⁴²⁵ Sudheer Birodkar argues that secularism has become possible in India only because of the pluralistic and unorganized nature of Hinduism, the religion of the majority in India. However, it has already been shown that secularism in India is a concept borrowed from the West and that it could never have been possible if the Colonialists had not contributed towards education, laws, unification, and reforms in India. It was the religious interference in politics by Hinduism that stipulated the dharma of Brahmins to be priests, of the Kshatriyas to be warriors (politics), of the Vaishyas to be traders, and of the Shudras to be servants of all. The State and religion were never, therefore, separate in Hindu politics. Secularism, contrary to the Hindu pluralist’s contention, has never been a characteristic of Hinduism.

Cox has rightly said of India that ‘...India’s vast variety of sects and religions, beside which North America’s so-called pluralism must appear dully homogeneous, can survive only within a secular state. Also, since the deeply divisive castes represent remnants of kinship and tribal groupings, only further secularization will release Indians from the social

⁴²⁴ T.N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xxi

⁴²⁵

http://www.hindubooks.org/sudheer_birodkar/hindu_history/secularroots.html

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

fetters that caste imposes.’⁴²⁶

Thus, pure secularism based on a humanistically and scientifically directed mutual tolerance and respect, not pluralism, is the solution for religious plurality. India cannot be united religiously; however, it can stand united politically and secularly. The scientific and rational mind needs to become the deciding factor in Indian democracy, not a pluralism based on blind-faith. However, the atavistic perspective of Gandhi was far from accepting any notion of pure rationality in matters of religion. Nirad Chaudhuri has explained that this inherent deficiency of civilization and reason in Gandhism led to its ‘descent towards the old rancorous and atavistic form of Indian nationalism.’⁴²⁷

b. Fundamentalist Perspective. The Sangh Parivar is a combination of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bajrang Dal, Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha, and other similar groups.⁴²⁸ Hindutva, meaning ‘Essence of Hinduism’ or ‘Hindu Principles,’ is the name of the ideology that the Sangh Parivar upholds.⁴²⁹ While the pluralistic perspective endorses secularism, although contending that it cannot be maintained without pluralism as an ideological basis, the fundamentalist perspective of the Sangh Parivar is totally anti-secularist.⁴³⁰ The Sangh Parivar views secularism as its enemy. It describes secularism in India as a Western concept unsuitable for Indian culture and Indian society and has also accused the Congress and its allies as being ‘pseudo-secularists’ bent on ‘appeasement of minorities’⁴³¹ at the expense of the majority Hindus. Critics have raised concerns that the BJP advances all such high-pitched propaganda to cultivate Hindu vote bank thus seriously

⁴²⁶ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, p.77

⁴²⁷ Vishal Mangalwadi, *Missionary Conspiracy*, p. 99

⁴²⁸ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2002), pp. 169-176

⁴²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 168

⁴³⁰ Asulya Ganguli, *Not So Strange Bedfellows*, *Hindustan Times*, August 6, 2004, p. 6

⁴³¹ Asghar Ali Engineer, *India Shining*, <http://www.islamicvoice.com/march.2004/view.htm>

Secularism in India

damaging inter-community relationships.⁴³² Following are some of the view-points and practices of the Sangh that demonstrate their view of religion's relationship to the state:

(1) Religious Nationalism. The Sangh Parivar believes that only a Hindu can be a true citizen of Hindustan and so positions Hinduism as a pre-requisite of Indian Nationalism.⁴³³ It, therefore, has come up with several plans to stop religious conversions of Hindus and tribals to other religions. Sangh activists detest the liberal and humanist form of secularism in India since it comes in their way of materializing their vision of a **Hindu Rashtra** and of **Rama Rajya**. This concept of the Hindu Rashtra (Hindu State), as opposed to the Constitutional declaration of India as a Sovereign, Socialist Secular Democratic Republic, is plain in the Prayer (Prarthana) of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) cadres given below:

Affectionate Motherland, I eternally bow
to you.

O Land of Hindus, you have reared me
in comfort.

O Sacred Land, the Great Creator of
Good, may this body of mine be
dedicated to you.

I again and again bow before you.

O God Almighty, we the integral part of
Hindu Rashtra salute you in reverence.

For your cause have we girded up our
loins.

Give us your blessings for its
accomplishment.⁴³⁴

Some have equated the Sangh practices with the fascist principles of racism that Hitler once upheld, and on the basis of which he targeted the Jews, as enemies of German

⁴³² Ibid

⁴³³ C.V. Matthew, *The Saffron Mission*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), p. 190

⁴³⁴ Shamsul Islam, *Know the RSS*, (New Delhi: Citizen's Forum Delhi, ND), p. 4

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

nationalism, for ethnic cleansing.⁴³⁵ The Sangh holds campaigns against Christians and Muslims of India and plans either the re-conversion of them back to Hinduism or a fascist or communist styled revolution of violence against them that would overthrow the present system of government.⁴³⁶ The Sangh has determined that Muslims and Christians should be treated as second-class citizens and must either leave the country or live in the country at the mercy of Hindus and without any citizen's rights.⁴³⁷ The following words of M.S. Golwalkar, who became Sarsangchalak of the RSS in 1940, from his book *We Or Our Nationhood Defined* (1938), clearly illustrate this point:

'There are only two courses open to the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or to live at its mercy so long as the national race may allow them to do so and to quit the country at the sweet will of the national race. That is the only sound view on the minorities problem. That is the only logical and correct solution. That alone keeps the national life healthy and undisturbed. That alone keeps the nation safe from the danger of a cancer developing into its body politic of the creation of a state within a state.

'From this standpoint, sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but hose of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their

⁴³⁵ Vishal Mangalwadi, *India: The Grand Experiment*, p. 284 & Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Hindutva as a Political Religion: A Historical Perspective*, *Dharma Deepika*, July-December, 2004, p. 26

⁴³⁶ Amulya Ganguli, *Not So Strange Bedfellows*, *Hindustan Times*, August 6, 2004, p. 6

⁴³⁷ See "Campaign to Stop Funding Hate" (<http://www.stopfundinghate.org/resources/FAQ.htm>).

Secularism in India

separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation: let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races who have chosen to live in our country.⁴³⁸

In addition to the identification of the minorities as national enemies, the Sangh has also brandished several religious symbols as marks of nationalism. The Ayodhya Temple is used as a symbol to unify all Hindus as one political community.⁴³⁹ Madhu Kishwar has argued that the Sangh Parivar has less to do with religion and more to do with politics. Therefore, the Lord Rama that it worships is more a national hero than a Hindu deity.⁴⁴⁰ This combination of religion and politics at the expense of true religiosity is even more manifest in the Hindutvavadis' insistence that the Muslims sing Vandemataram,⁴⁴¹ that Vandemataram be adopted as the national anthem rather than Jana Gana Mana,⁴⁴² and that anyone who did not sing Vandemataram must not be allowed to stay in India.⁴⁴³

(2) Religious Racism. The Sangh's philosophy of racial nationalism is regarded by some as prototype of Hitler's Nazism. In his book, *Hindutva: Who Is A Hindu* (1929), Vir Savarkar explained the Hindutva view of Hindu nationalism in pure racial terms. He wrote:

'Hindus are not merely the citizens of the Indian state because they are united not only by the bonds of love they bear

⁴³⁸ As cited by Shamsul Islam, *Know the RSS*, p. 15

⁴³⁹ Madhu Kishwar, *Religion at the Service of Nationalism: An Analysis of Sangh Parivar Politics*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.248

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 257

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 258. Staunch Muslims are not in favor of singing this song as it contains words that contradict the Islamic perspective of God and worship.

⁴⁴² H.G. Balakrishna, *Hindutva and its Challenge to National Integration*, *TBT Journal*, Vol3/1/2001, p. 37

⁴⁴³ Madhu Kishwar, *Religion at the Service of Nationalism*, p. 258

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

to a common motherland but also by the bonds of a common blood..All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic forefathers.⁴⁴⁴

Sarvarkar went on to combine this concept of a common motherland with the concept of a common holy land, concluding finally that since only Hindus could claim India as their holy land, therefore, only Hindus were the true inheritors of India.⁴⁴⁵ Thus, Savarkar combined the concepts of common blood (race) and holy land (religion) to form a new concept of religio-racial nationalism. The words 'mighty race' used by Savarkar above, are expressions of the racist pride of racial superiority and purity as inherited from Italian and German fascism. It also is suggestive of the evolutionary principle of the survival of the fittest as the justification for the rule of the majority (the Hindus) over the minority (i.e., the Christians and the Muslims). Golwalkar has clearly spoken of this ideological relationship of the Sangh with the fascists:

'To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic Races – the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.'⁴⁴⁶

Such fascist racism of the Hindutvavadis has only brought shame to the name of Indian civilization. It is, therefore, not a surprise that even though the BJP were successful in displaying the scientific advancement of the country through the nuclear tests, they accrued much infamy for the several communal riots that took place during their past tenure.

⁴⁴⁴ As cited by Brenda Cossman & Ratna Kapur, *Secularism's Last Sigh*, (NP: Oxford University Press, ND), p. 36

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 36,37

⁴⁴⁶As cited by Vishal Mangalwadi, *India: The Grand Experiment*, p. 284

Secularism in India

Asgar Ali Engineer notes the BJP period of Government was a period of communal disharmony. He writes:

'The BJP has been in power since 1999. There was not a single year under it that did not witness communal violence. According to our research based on news paper reports and other sources number of riots took place every year, in the year 1999, 52 riots took place in which 43 people were killed and 248 injured. In the year 2000, 24 riots occurred in which 91 people were killed and 165 injured. In the year 2001, 27 riots erupted in which 56 were killed and 158 injured. In the year 2002, 28 communal riots were recorded (including Gujarat) in which 1173 persons lost their lives and 2272 were injured (unofficially in Gujarat alone more than 2000 people were killed according to private counts). And in the year 2003, 67 riots took place in which 58 people were killed and 611 were injured.'⁴⁴⁷

Brahmanism is central to Hindutva. The Hindutva protagonists contend that the Aryans are the highest race of the world and their civilization and culture are the best of the world. On being accused that as Aryans they do not qualify for the claim that they are the original inhabitants of India, they reply that the secular historians have wrongly written Indian history and that true historical research shows that the Aryans were the original race of India. However, contrary to such assertions, recent research in genetics has shown that the Aryans may be close relatives of the 'white man' - Caucasoid, and might have migrated to India around 3,000 B.C.⁴⁴⁸

(3) Religious Culturism. News of Sangh activists tearing down posters of controversial movies, destroying secular art

⁴⁴⁷ Asghar Ali Engineer, India Shining, <http://www.islamicvoice.com/march.2004/view.htm>

⁴⁴⁸ Supriya Bezbarruah with Samrat Choudhury, White India, India Today, July 30, 2003, pp. 64-6

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

works, and attempting arson of Muslim Museum⁴⁴⁹ has been frequent in recent years. Vishal considers 'Hindu cultural fascism' as an accurate name for such phenomenon.⁴⁵⁰ It is fascist in ideology but cultural in garb; in fact, the garb is only illusory. The Sangh Parivar argues that the culture of India is Hindu and that only those who are Hindus qualify to be called Indians. Despite the fact that India is a multi-cultural sub-continent, the Sangh Parivar holds to the myth that India has just one culture.⁴⁵¹

This myth of Hindutva is a product of its own cultural bias. To the Sangh Parivar, 'Indian culture' is synonymous with Sanskrit or Aryan culture.⁴⁵² The fact, however, is that many of the Indian cultures, like the Dravidian, Austric, and the Mongoloid were never part of the Sanskrit culture.⁴⁵³

The campaign for cultural orthodoxy goes back to the days of Tilak. It will be remembered that when Sir Andrew Scoble put forward the 'Age of Consent' bill in order to raise the minimum age of a child-bride from 10 to 12 years, before one could have intercourse with her, Tilak raised a battle cry of 'religious tradition in danger.'⁴⁵⁴

The cultural fascism of the Sangh Parivar is manifest in its maintaining that the Hindu culture is superior to all other cultures.⁴⁵⁵ The Parivar believes in the purity of Hindu culture despite its degenerating contact with the debased civilizations, of the Muslims and the Europeans for the last ten centuries.⁴⁵⁶ It has, however, been seen that the period of the Colonialists was a great period of reforms in Hindu culture. Women were emancipated to get educated and find jobs, sati and child-marriage were banned, the position of the Dalit was uplifted, the caste-system made illegal, literacy made available for all, and rationality and modernity introduced among Indians. The Hindutvavadis' contention that Hindu culture is the same as it was in the past is mythical. It is a utopian vision of the past asserted as true in the present, yet false. The BJP's attempt to de-culturize and

⁴⁴⁹ Shamsul Islam, Situation in Azamgarh, www. Truthindia.com

⁴⁵⁰ Vishal Mangalwadi, India: The Grand Experiment, p. 286

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, p. 286

⁴⁵² Ebe Sunder Raj, The Confusion Called Conversion, p. 39

⁴⁵³ Ibid, p. 39

⁴⁵⁴ Vishal Mangalwadi, Missionary Conspiracy, pp. 150-1

⁴⁵⁵ C.V. Matthew, The Saffron Mission, p. 188

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 188

Secularism in India

Hindutvavize the Indian mind through rewriting History textbooks⁴⁵⁷ and introducing Vedic subjects such as Astrology at the University level, to cultivate a pride in a mythical history of Indian genius, were all aimed at destroying the effects of Western secularism in India. No doubt, its attempts were met with tough opposition from both the academia and the media.

The process of secularization, as Cox and Madan have described, is inevitable and irreversible.⁴⁵⁸ However, ideologies can impact practices and also reverse processes; for intelligence governs matter.

3. Dalit Perspective

The Dalit views secular humanism as his redeemer and views religion, especially Hinduism, as the symbol of oppression. In the words of Prof. Gangadhar Pantawane, the Dalit 'does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy Books, teaching separatism, Fate and Heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism.'⁴⁵⁹

The Dalit's conversion to any religion is more sociological rather than spiritual or religious; it aims liberation and dignity in this world rather than well being in Heaven.⁴⁶⁰ Even then, it is claimed that such conversions have only miserably failed.⁴⁶¹ Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism all practice caste-system and the Dalit, on converting to these religions, finds himself in the same position that he was in before.⁴⁶² Therefore, the Dalit distrusts religion in general. Some of the Depressed Classes, in Maharashtra, who converted to Buddhism, realized that they were not even

⁴⁵⁷ Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Hindutva as a Political Religion*, Dharma Deepika, July-Dec., 2004, pp. 24-5

⁴⁵⁸ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, p.18 & T. N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, p. 6

⁴⁵⁹ As cited by Jebaraj Devasahayam, *Dalit Movements*, in Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2002), p. 264

⁴⁶⁰ This does not mean that there are not many Dalits who convert for spiritual purposes. The statement above concerns Dalit conversions in order to escape the oppression and suppression of the High Castes.

⁴⁶¹ Vatsala Vedantam, *Still Untouchable: The Politics of Religious Conversion*, <http://www.religion-online.org>

⁴⁶² *Ibid*, D.C. Ahir (ed.), *Dr. Ambedkar on Christianity in India*, pp. 32-64, & Ebe Sunder Raj, *The Confusion Called Conversion*, pp. 182-3

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

absorbed adequately into the world community of Buddhists.⁴⁶³ They came up with their own new version of Buddhism called Neo or Ambedkarite Buddhism. A few of them worship Ambedkar as god. Most, however, see this New Buddhism as a religion of liberation of the oppressed in society. They view Buddhism as a 'humanistic, secularistic, democratic, and scientific' religion.⁴⁶⁴ Thus, the Dalit's religion is a secularized religion.

The Dalit believes in humanism. He believes that all humanity is essentially one, that divisions are not God-instituted but Man-made. It was this humanistic conception of humanity that made Ambedkar burn the Manusmriti in public on December 25, 1927.⁴⁶⁵ Secular history has already shown that the Manu theory of caste originating from the body of Brahma is totally false. Caste originated with the Aryan invasion of (or migration to) India. Thus, secular history has contributed to the emancipation of the Dalit from the bondage of religious oppression. Secular humanism, inherited from the Renaissance has shown to the Dalit the equality and dignity of being a human. Secular politics in India that developed out of the Colonialist contribution marked out ways of protecting the Dalit's rights and of lifting up his position in society.⁴⁶⁶ Therefore, the Dalit looks to secularism as his emancipator and protector.

However, the Dalit considers that Indian secularism has not been very successful in restoring the rights of the Dalit. By bringing religion and the issue of religious conversion as a factor in the laws the concern the upliftment of the Dalit, the Government has only limited the Dalit's true exercise of liberty. By the Presidential Order of 1950 any person who professed a religion different from Hinduism was not to be considered as a member of the Scheduled Caste,⁴⁶⁷ and thus

⁴⁶³ Yoginder S. Sikand, *Islam and the Dalit Quest for Liberation in Contemporary India*, <http://www.truthindia.com>

⁴⁶⁴ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, p. 151

⁴⁶⁵ Dhananjai Keer, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*, (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1981), p. 106

⁴⁶⁶ V. Davasahayam, *Pollution, Poverty and Powerlessness*, in Arvind P. Nirmal (ed.), *A Reader in Dalit Theology*, (Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, ND), p. 2

⁴⁶⁷ National Coordination Committee for Dalit Christians, *Demand for Restoration of Equal Rights for Christian Dalits*, Nov. 1996, in Ebe Sunder Raj, *The Confusion Called Conversion*, p. 167

Secularism in India

was bereft of any Governmental privileges provided to the Scheduled Castes. This Order is understood by Dalits as an instance of discrimination on the basis of religion, which does not at all accord with the secularity of the Republic of India. It is also considered to be a negation of and threat to secularism in India.

'...to deny them (Scheduled Castes) the Constitutional protection of reservation solely by reason of change of faith or religion is to endanger the very concept of Secularism and the *raison d'être* of reservations.'⁴⁶⁸

The Dalits argue that the concept of caste as only restricted to religion does not stand true to the test of experience. Caste, sanctioned by the Hindu religion, has become a sociological, economical, racial, and political problem of the Dalit. The tentacles of caste have so gripped Indian society that even religious conversion does not totally solve the problem and the convert stands under the same bane of casteism even after conversion, although the new religion might be against the caste-system.⁴⁶⁹ The economical condition of the Dalit normally does not change even after conversion.⁴⁷⁰ Therefore, the withdrawal of the Dalits's privileges of reservation after conversion is unjustified and not keeping with the secular nature of the State. The Dalit problem is also a racial one. Caste system is practiced only in India against the Dalits. Converts to Hinduism in Europe and America do not have the practice of discrimination on the basis of caste since each of the countries is united racially and caste-distinction is out of question. The Dalit in India suffers the brunt of caste even though he converts to another religion that disfavors caste because of his race.⁴⁷¹ The mark and stigma of caste that the Aryan religion left on the Dalit is not erased or forgotten forever by conversion. Since religion does not solve the Dalit problem, the Dalit expects that secularism would solve it. But the Dalit problem can never be solved adequately if the State interferes with

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 182

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 182

⁴⁷⁰ Vatsala Vedantam, Still Untouchable: The Politics of Religious Conversion, <http://www.religion-online.org>

⁴⁷¹ Demand for Restoration of Equal Rights, The Confusion Called Conversion, pp. 167-8

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

the religious freedom of the Dalit and lures him to remain within the Hindu fold, regardless of his conscience and faith.

However, a Dalit who comes to know the freedom of secularism but does not understand the ethics of humanism can be a real problem to society. Of course, secularism and humanism have opened the eyes of the dalit to see that he is not untouchable but is a dignified human. However, when this knowledge is not mixed with mutual love and respect for all humans alike, it can lead to hatred and strife. It is not untrue that this tragedy is already a fact in India. Places like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are full of news about wars between the upper, the backward and the lower castes.⁴⁷² The danger inherent in the anti-caste movement is that instead of targeting caste as a social evil and enemy, the Dalit considers people belonging to the upper caste his enemies,⁴⁷³ which again is not in keeping with the principles of humanism.

4. Sikh Perspective

Dr. Swaraj Singh, Chairman of Washington State Network for Human Rights, and Chairman of Central Washington Coalition for Social Justice, believes that the seeds of Indian secularism were found in the Bhakti movement of the 15th century which represented the highest development of the ideas of tolerance, love, and peaceful coexistence.⁴⁷⁴ Sikhism, accordingly, was the peak of this Bhakti movement.⁴⁷⁵

As is known, Sikhism arose as an attempt to bring into harmonious relationship the two greatest rival religions of that time, namely Hinduism and Islam.⁴⁷⁶ Nanak (1469-1538), a Kshatriya, took Mardana, a Muslim, and with him toured through out north India preaching of the universality

⁴⁷² Vishal Mangalwadi, India: The Grand Experiment, p. 27

⁴⁷³ Vishal Mangalwadi, Missionary Conspiracy, p. 244 & J. Devasahayam, Dalit Movements, Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India, foot note 1, p. 282

⁴⁷⁴ Sawraj Singh, Secularism: Eastern and Western Concepts, <http://www.indolink.com/Religion/r14.php>

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid

⁴⁷⁶ Robert E. Hume, The World's Living Religions, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 89

Secularism in India

of God from the Upanishads and the Koran.⁴⁷⁷ He preached that 'there is no Hindu and no Musalman,' but that both were united under the One True God of all people.⁴⁷⁸ In the Asa Ki War, Guru Nanak sings to God these words:

By Thy power were produced the Veds,
the Purans, the Muhammadan books,
and by Thy power all compositions....⁴⁷⁹

However, this attempt at syncretism soon met with rejection by the Muslims who, in turn, had become very hostile and intolerant towards the followers of Nanak. Religious tolerance cannot be possible unless it is mutual: both the parties need to agree on the philosophy behind this practice. But, pluralism itself is an exclusivist and fundamental position that considers itself to be the greater truth than the ones it unites in itself. And since religions conflict fundamentally, it is not possible to conceive of religious tolerance religiously. Consequentially, Sikhs also had to take to arms to defend themselves as a community. Guru Har Govind (16016-1638) was the first to assume the sword as a badge of leadership, to build a Sikh stronghold, recruit a military, and transform the Sikhs into a warrior community, just to fight against the Mughal rulers of India.⁴⁸⁰ Since then, the Sikhs had been constantly at war with the Mughals. Stories of martyrs and heroic tales of Sikh saints from the period of fanatic Muslim rulers such as Aurangzeb abound among the Sikhs and provide powerful religious lessons for Sikh children. Needless to say that the Sikh attempt towards harmony failed as far as relationship with Islam was concerned. Evidently, its influence on secularism cannot be considered to be as significant as Swaraj Singh claims to be.

Soon after the death of the last guru, Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, Hindu ceremonies, rituals, caste-system, sati, and Brahmanism took over Sikhism.⁴⁸¹ The Singh Sabha Movement and the Gurudwara reforms of the 19th century were geared with a purpose to restore to Sikhs their true

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 97-100

⁴⁷⁸ S.E. Frost, Jr. (ed), *The Sacred Writings of the World's Great Religions*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), p. 355

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 361

⁴⁸⁰ Robert E. Hume, *The World's Living Religions*, p. 105

⁴⁸¹ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, p.

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

identity, tradition, culture, temple, and religion.⁴⁸² Thus, the seeds of secularism cannot be claimed to have been present in the preaching of Nanak.

As far as modern Sikhism is concerned, the Sri Guru Singh Sabha came into being on October 1, 1873 as a reaction against the conversion of four Sikh students of the Amritsar Christian School to Christianity.⁴⁸³ The anti-conversion attitude of this Sabha itself was evidence of the non-secular nature of its constitution, which is normal for any religion unless motivated by fanatic fundamentalism and notions of the community as above the individual. One aim of this Sabha was to restore Sikh apostates back to Sikhism.⁴⁸⁴ Other Sabhas were founded, eventually leading to the founding of the General Sabha in 1880 to provide a central organization for all Singh Sabhas. The non-liberal position of these Sabhas is evident from the fact that when the low-caste Sikhs, particularly the Rahtias (weavers) from the Jullundur Doab, demanded that the Singh Sabhas erase the caste system, the Singh Sabha leaders did not respond. Consequentially, the Rahtias had to turn to the Arya Samaj for emancipation.⁴⁸⁵

Thus, the Sikh concept of religious harmony began as a syncretistic and pluralistic attempt. However, with the passage of time, the Sikhs came to realize that their pluralism was of no sociological avail when the opposite party and political power was fundamentalist and fanatical. Even in its modern form, Sikhism prides in itself as a religion of peace, unity, equality, and harmony. As Swaraj Singh writes:

'The Sikh concept of secularism, which can be considered the highest developed form of Eastern secularism, leads to the unity and integration of people. Guru Nanak was revered by both Hindus and Muslims, and the teachings of many Hindu saints and Muslim Sufis were integrated into Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the

⁴⁸² Ibid, pp. 52-62

⁴⁸³ Ibid, p. 53

⁴⁸⁴ Krishna Reddy, Indian History, p. C80

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, p. C81

Secularism in India

Sikhs.⁴⁸⁶

Thus, the Sikh concept of secularism is still of religious pluralism. The Sikhs have come to understand that this form of religious pluralism can only possible through the hand of political pluralism. As seen earlier, the monolithic polity of the Mughal Empire was the greatest blow to the Sikh cause of religious pluralism. In the same manner, the attempt to monopolize Indian politics under a Hindutva banner will only lead to the monopolization of religion and the end of secularism or, say in the words of a Sikh, pluralism. Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University, Patiala, writes:

Political pluralism alone can realise participation and partnership of all sections of society on an equal footing in a truly representative dispensation as envisioned by Guru Arjan, the fifth Prophet of Sikhism.....

Political pluralism is correlative to religious pluralism, which simply does not mean the co-existence of different faiths and various religious communities, or even equal respect for all religions. What is more important is the conceptual basis of religious pluralism.⁴⁸⁷

The pluralism of Sikhs coupled up with a general ignorance of their own scriptures⁴⁸⁸ keeps them from becoming very fundamentalist, so that most of them find no problem in practicing idolatry contrary to the Granth concept of God as the Formless One.⁴⁸⁹ Thus, according to modern Sikhism secularism can only be possible in a pluralistic political context that is based on the principles of religious pluralism and not just mutual tolerance and respect for all. However, the Sikh himself cannot escape the apparent paradox of this political pluralism based on religious pluralism itself

⁴⁸⁶ Sawraj Singh, *Secularism: Eastern and Western Concepts*.

⁴⁸⁷ Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, *The Sikh Doctrine*,
<http://www.punjabheritage.com/doctrine.html>

⁴⁸⁸ S.E. Frost, Jr. (ed), *The Sacred Writings of the World's Great Religions*, p. 356

⁴⁸⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_in_Sikhism

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

becoming a monolithic philosophy of a, thus shaped, monolithic polity which he himself detests. Therefore, as has already been seen, syncretism and pluralism are not the solutions to religious plurality. Only the 'rule by law,' based on commonly agreed secular political philosophy, can make possible any amount of religious freedom in the State.

5. Muslim Perspective

Secularism directly conflicts with the State-building principles of Islam. Secularism believes in the privatization of religion while Islam believes in the inseparability of society, individuality, and politics from the sovereignty of God, authority of the prophet, and revelation of the Scriptures.⁴⁹⁰ However, contrary to the desire of conservative Muslims, several Muslim-dominated nations in the past have opted for the secularization of politics and society. Shafaat notes:

'Secularism is an ideology which either denies that there is a God, prophethood and revelation or declares that the role of these is limited to the personal and inner life of man and that in the political or social sphere of human life, God, prophethood or revelation cannot by their very nature play any fundamental role. Even a cursory glance through the Qur`an and Hadith is enough to show everyone that this ideology conflicts with the very mind and heart of Islam. Yet in all parts of the Muslim world many "Muslims" are consciously or unconsciously accepting this un-Islamic ideology. There even exist political movements that have either established or are trying to establish secularist systems of government in various Muslim countries: Kemalists in Turkey, Baathists in the Arab world, Mujahideen-e-Khalq in Iran, some groups affiliated

⁴⁹⁰ Ahmad Shafaat, Secularism and How to Deal With it, Islamic Perspectives, <http://www.islamicperspectives.com/Secularism.htm>

Secularism in India

with the People's Party in Pakistan.⁴⁹¹

In India, however, most Muslims are in favor of the moderate form of secularism that rejects any interference of religion or communalism in politics. The Muslim perspective of secularism in India is well represented by the Aligarh Movement, the Jamiat, and the Jama'at. The Aligarh Muslim University is known in the Islamic world for its secular and scientific learning.⁴⁹² Contrary to the Islamic orthodox position regarding women, the University encourages female education and has made great contributions towards the same.⁴⁹³

The Jamiat-ulama-i-Hind, founded by Mulana Husain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957) in 1920 also has played a major role in the propagation of secular ideas among the Muslims. During the Independence struggle, the Jamiat opposed the two-nation theory on the grounds that as long as they did not interfere in each other's religious affairs, there was no need for Partition. Maulana Madani and the Jamiat's theologians believed that 'democratic secularism, such as that advocated by the Congress was sufficient guarantee for the cultural and religious freedom of the minority Muslims.'⁴⁹⁴

Also the work of Jama'at-i-Islami, founded by Sayyed Abul 'Ala Maududi in 1941, towards the removal of communal tension and distrust and its efforts towards elimination of class conflict is well known.⁴⁹⁵ Its resolution of July 1961 explicitly stated:

'Linguism, racism, regionalism, communalism, are all threatening the unity of the country. Every religion and the culture should feel that there is no threat to their identity; there is no scope for them to flourish and expand.'⁴⁹⁶

However, the Jama'at views secularism from a religious

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements in India*, p. 49

⁴⁹³ Ibid, p. 49

⁴⁹⁴ Manoj Joshi, *Indian nationalists at Deoband*, Review, *Hindustan Times*, Bhopal, Nov 14, 2004, p.14

⁴⁹⁵ Aleyamma Zachariah, *Modern Religious and Secular Movements*, p. 178

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 178-9

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

perspective. The Jama'at members do not participate in parliament because of their understanding that the majority of the citizens in India do not accept divine guidance.⁴⁹⁷ The Jama'at views secularism as the philosophy whereby religion and politics do not interfere with each other. It rejects the Western form of secularism that emphasizes on the privatization of religion and the secularization of society. It also strongly opposes the form of atheistic secularism that is practiced in the Communist countries.⁴⁹⁸ This aversion towards irreligious secularism is not peculiar only to the Muslims of India; it has also been witnessed in the Middle East countries.⁴⁹⁹ It is, therefore, quite intriguing to see how an Islamic religious organization such as the Jama'at relates itself to a non-Islamic and religiously plural nation such as India, despite the fact of Islam itself being a State-building religion. The key to the Jama'at's approach is its conviction of Islam as the true religion and 'the rule of Allah' as the most perfect rule on earth, but that, under the present circumstances (of religious plurality and communal tensions), peaceful persuasion of the truth of Islam rather than forceful conversion is the way to fulfil Allah's will.⁵⁰⁰ Thus, the Jama'at keeps itself from any compromising position. Therefore, though it endorses faithful and full co-operation with the state, it opposes any form of 'nation-worship', which it considers to be akin to polytheism and the cause of much strife and tension.⁵⁰¹

This approach is similar to that of Dr. Ahmaad Shafaat who also recommends a moderate approach to secularism. Arguing against the form of secularism that denies the significance of the divine in human history, he implores Muslims to take up their stand against such atheistic secularism. However, he does acknowledge the right of freedom of expression even to the secularists, but contends that this right does not mean that believers must silently listen to whatever blasphemy or heresy anyone wishes to

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 184

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 185

⁴⁹⁹ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Secularism and Democracy in the Middle East*, (2003), http://www.islam-democracy.org/4th_Annual_Conference-Shakman-Hurd_paper.asp

⁵⁰⁰ Yoginder Sikand, *Islamic Mission and Inter-Religious Dialogue in A Minority Context: The Jama'at-I-Islami of India*, <http://www.truthindia.com>

⁵⁰¹ Ibid

Secularism in India

preach.⁵⁰² Shafaat advocates a rational confrontation of such secularism through appeal to Divine signs in human history. Force, which rarely proves to be useful, must be avoided.⁵⁰³

Thus, it has been seen that the favoring of secularism by Muslims in India is either influenced by Western secularism, as in the case of Sir Syed, or is a result of the conviction that a fundamentalist approach to religion and politics is both unsuitable and useless, as in the case of the Jama'at. While the Aligarh Movement is known to favor secularism out of its commitment to scientific education, the Jama'at favors secularism not only because of its modern and humanist approach but also because the only alternative left would be communalism to the endangerment of the Muslim community itself. This view is also shared by the average Muslim.

6. Christian Perspective

The average Christian in India believes that secular humanism, not communalism, can guarantee freedom of religion to Christians in India. In his *The Secular City*, Harvey Cox asks the reason behind such support of secularism in India by Christians, especially of the form of secularism advanced by Nehru. He answers it by saying that Christians support this form of secularism because the only alternative, especially since the partitioning of Pakistan, would probably be a Hindu sacred society.⁵⁰⁴ Indian Christians, no doubt, had to support and struggle for a secular state. To Cox, India represents a pluralistic context in which the value of secularization and secularism, despised by fundamentalist Christians, becomes apparent. He concludes:

‘...Such societies show with unusual clarity how secularization functions as emancipation, and Christians, as numerous pronouncements by Indian church leaders have indicated, should support it.’⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰² Ahmad Shafaat, *Secularism and How to Deal With it*.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid*

⁵⁰⁴ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, p. 77

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 77

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

From a Christian point of view, Bishop R. Paulraj sees secular humanism as completely powerless when it comes to delivering man from his wickedness and meaninglessness.⁵⁰⁶ Truly, though intellectually progressing, secular humanism lacks spiritual power. However, the Bishop agrees on the point that the form of secular humanism that India follows is favorable for the peaceful coexistence of and cooperation between people of different faiths. It provides all citizens freedom of religion and freedom to confess and propagate their religions,⁵⁰⁷ and as such, is favorable to Christianity. Of course, a religiously plural nation as India cannot subscribe to Christian humanism. But, secular humanism ensures the protection and provision of human rights for all irrespective of caste, creed, color, and language.

On the other hand, Vishal Mangalwadi views Christianity as the only hope for India. Though viewing secularism as better than communalism that threatens the peace of the nation, Vishal Mangalwadi considers it to also be destructive. He points to secular humanism as the culprit behind the sexual revolution, divorce, broken homes, and the ecological crises from the de-sacralization of man, marriage, and nature.⁵⁰⁸ He argues that the Christian ideas introduced in India by the missionaries led to the regeneration of India; however, the rejection of them has begun its degeneration.⁵⁰⁹ According to Vishal, British secular humanism hijacked the modern educational system of India to promote Western individualism; the result was, focus on individual rights that undermined the practical value of duties and led to rapid splitting of families and society.⁵¹⁰ Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can set India free from corruption and moral degeneration.⁵¹¹ But, political freedom begins with individual freedom,⁵¹² says Vishal. And so, before there could be political freedom, the individual needs to be delivered from destructive traditions, values, and beliefs. Conversion, therefore, and the right to convert become very valuable.

⁵⁰⁶ Brian Wintle, Emmanuel James, et.al. (ed.), *Work, Worship, Witness*, (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust), pp. 361-8

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 361

⁵⁰⁸ Vishal Mangalwadi, *Missionary Conspiracy*, p. 119

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 318

⁵¹⁰ Vishal Mangalwadi, *India: The Grand Experiment*, p. 140

⁵¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 25

⁵¹² Vishal Mangalwadi, *Why Must You Convert?*

<http://www.vishalmangalwadi.com/convdeb.htm>

Secularism in India

Therefore, in a religiously plural context such as India, the secular state is much valuable, since it ensures the freedom of religion to all citizens alike.⁵¹³

The roots of secularism can be traced back to the Reformation and the ensuing developments that led to the division of the Church and the State. In India its seeds were sown during the Colonial rule, through its various policies. Christians know that if it were not for secularism, Christianity would have been easily suppressed and ousted by the fanatic and orthodox Hindus of the country. It has also been seen that during the time of Independence, the Muslim League still hosted such doubts against Hinduism and feared that under the rule of Hindus, Muslims could never be free. However, the ideas of secularism had so deeply penetrated the Indian life that the Muslim League's fear was found to be greatly unfounded. Under the able leadership of the very secular minded Prime Minister Nehru, India saw much freedom and equality for all people.

However, this freedom was not uniform and homogenous everywhere. For instance, the Presidential Order of 1950 declared anyone who professed any religion other than Hinduism or Sikhism to be not a member of a Scheduled Caste; thereby, devoiding the Dalits who had converted to Christianity of any privileges of Reservations provided by the law to the Scheduled Castes.⁵¹⁴ Christian Dalits have contended that this religionizing of a minority or depressed or backward class is unjust and not keeping with the principles of secularism that the State avows. The backward classes' backwardness doesn't wholly improve by religious conversion. In the Indian context caste cannot be considered to be merely a religious problem. It crosses religious barriers and presents itself in almost all religions making it more a racial rather than a religious problem.⁵¹⁵ Dalit Christians, therefore, consider this religionizing of a secular situation as non-conforming with secular principles. Thus, some Christians from the Dalit background are not wholly satisfied with this law of secular India that tempts Dalits from converting to any non-Hindu religion.

⁵¹³ Ibid

⁵¹⁴ Ebe Sundar Raj, *The Confusion Called Conversion*, p. 147

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, 167

Perspectives on Indian Secularism

Thus, it has been seen that Christians, above all, stand in favor of secularism. Paul Mohan Raj delineates six factors that can contribute to national integration and yet keep the Christian from becoming syncretistic or pluralistic in his/her approach to the religiously plural context of India. These factors are in keeping with the principles of secular humanism, but still built on the Biblical perspective. They are: Respect for Diversity, Respect for Uniqueness, Respect for Human Rights, Respect for Human Worth and Dignity, Respect for Religion, and Respect for Life.⁵¹⁶ The Christian concept of witnessing for Christ that is based on the law of loving one's neighbor as oneself is both biblical and humanistic. Thus, not only are human worth and rights respected, but also the love of God towards humankind communicated in its truest way. It can, therefore, be positively stated that the Christian perspective of secularism is not only in favor of secularism, in its humanist form, but also contributive to its healthy development, which consists in the integration of the nation on the basis of mutual respect, love, and sharing of truth.

⁵¹⁶ Paul Mohan Raj, *Plurality of Religions and National Integration: An Ethical Perspective*, TBT Journal, Vol.3, No.1, 2001, pp. 92-3