

Secularism Versus Pseudo-Secularism

An Indian Debate

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Introduction

The events that preceded and followed the demolition of Babri masjid structure indicate that the days of the liberal bourgeois democratic state in India are numbered. Not that there is any sign of a proletarian revolution in the near future. Far from it, the wheels of Indian history now seem to be moving towards fascism—thanks to the communal forces that Advani's "*Ram*" could release. If their efforts materialize, in that future state which is likely to take the familiar Indian name, *Ram Rajya*, terms such as secularism and democracy become anachronistic. However, it is interesting to observe that in India, which seems to be on the threshold of such a *Ram Rajya*, one hardly comes across an individual or a political party which openly denounces the concept of secularism. Even if communalism has become a ritual in Indian life, no one in India admits his or its communal character. Almost all political parties—starting from Congress to Communist, Muslim League to B.J.P—claim that they are there only to uphold the banner of secularism in India. They argue that their opposition is only to 'pseudo-secularism' practiced by others; not to the idea of secularism as such. Such a logic becomes possible in this country because the term, 'secularism' does not have a single accepted meaning. Like liberal Hindu gods who can take different forms and give a chance to the devotees to worship in any form they like, in India the concept of secularism has acquired so many interpretations and it now means different things to different groups of people. Such a liberal attitude towards a historically evolved concept—a precedence, perhaps, not visible anywhere in the world—could allow everyone living in India to become secular and at the same time pseudo-secular.

Any scholarly study aiming at comprehending the practice of secularism in India should, therefore start with recognition of the fact that there is not one but many traditions in this country claiming to be secular. Though there are difficulties in classifying all these interpretations, on the basis of the ideologi-

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cal stand they take and the functional role they perform in the political arena, one can group them, under three traditions, namely, rational secular tradition, Indian secular tradition and Hindu communal tradition. All these streams were in vogue in India even before independence. But their relative strengths changed over the period. Even though the rational secular tradition was weak from the beginning, its advocates could play a positive role at the time of adoption of the Indian Constitution and later during the hey days of Nehruvian era. Afterwards, from 1960 to 1980 the Indian state remained under the hegemonic influence of Indian secularism. Since 1980, the *Sangh Parivar* started popularizing its own brand of secularism, compatible with their goal of *Hindu Rashtra*.

For the students of contemporary Indian politics, familiarity with the basic facts is very essential. But what is more important is to examine the historical and ideological roots of different brands of secular traditions and comprehend how communal ideology could raise its head from within the so called secular ideological milieu. While attempting to develop this theme, the present paper argues that in addition to the impotency of rational secular forces, what has been theorized and practiced so far in the name of Indian secularism created the necessary conditions for the rise of Hindu communal ideology, now masquerading itself as "positive secularism".

Secularism: Western Rational Tradition

In the West, secular states emerged as a logical culmination of a series of historical events that followed the dawn of renaissance. Development of secular thought in Europe was intimately related to many factors or events such as advancement of science and technology, birth of new ideas opposed to theological beliefs, experience of Protestant reformation, development of the modern bourgeois class, assertion of state autonomy vis-a-vis Church domination and finally, to the birth of liberal bourgeois democratic regimes in various countries. As a political doctrine, this tradition of secularism called for complete separation of political and religious spheres by making religion a personal preference of the individuals concerned. While guaranteeing an individual's right to religion, these secular states decline to patronize any religion as the state religion. They oppose religious intervention in political and other temporal affairs of the society. This brand of secularism is not merely a political concept. At the philosophical level, it stands for non-recognition of any supernatural entity and advocates the spirit of enquiry and rational outlook. It advocates individuality of man, equal citizenship rights and rule of law. As an ethical concept, it calls for a new morality based on tolerance and recognition of human necessity. The bourgeoisie gained political power in many Western countries only after this rational secular tradition

could acquire hegemony over cultural and ideological domains (Gay 1966; Glasner 1977; Toynbee 1979).

Society in pre-colonial India was akin to medieval Europe in many ways. Although there was no organized Church in India as was in the West, religion had a powerful hold on all aspects of social life. Despite all their philosophical differences, the two dominant religions in India, namely, Hinduism and Islam, had rationalized the feudal order. By justifying social inequalities and by giving sanctity to various social evils, both religions had become reactionary institutions. As such, as in the West, India was also in need of a social revolution similar to the Renaissance and Reformation. However, the much needed change was considerably delayed due to the persistence of self-sufficient village communities, the existence of a caste based division of labour and the absence of a strong indigenous bourgeois class. It should be admitted that the winds of social change were blowing at the end of the 18th century. But before they could become effective enough to transform the whole of society, India fell a prey to the British expansionism. As a result of British policies, Indian history took a new turn. Unlike other foreigners who tried to establish their political authority without disrupting the socio-economic basis of the Indian society, the new masters were compelled to initiate structural changes to facilitate their own colonial exploitation. By destroying the self-sufficient village economy and by creating new political and administrative structures in the place of the old, British rule unconsciously sowed the seeds of capitalism in India (Marx 1983: 488-499). English education introduced by the colonial government gave an opportunity for the Indians to have access to modern ideas and ideologies. It was during the British rule that India, for the first time, became a single political and economic unit. This political and economic unity later became the material base for the rise of Indian nationalism.

All Indians did not respond to these material changes in the same way. While the Muslims as a community kept itself away from the mainstream changes for many decades, the Hindus took advantage of the new changes. Naturally, they were among the first to take a new look at religion, society and politics, influenced by new ideas of nationalism, liberalism and democracy. The English educated, progressive sections of the Hindu society, began to take a critical view of their own religion and society. Having realized the negative role that the traditional religion had been playing, many leading personalities, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Eshwara Chandra Vidyasagar and Jyotirao Phule, initiated social reform movements. Their crusade against social evils such as *sati*, child marriage and polygamy were, in one sense, sincere attempts to extricate the temporal affairs of the individuals from religious clutches. Their fight for rule of law, liberal education and women's emancipation were very

much in conformity with the rational secular tradition. This new philosophical tradition in India had influenced many moderate political personalities of the day. Early nationalist leaders like Dadabhai Nauroji, Ranade, Pherozshah Mehta and Gokhale introduced this liberal secular tradition in Indian politics. These personalities did not accept the British rule in a fatalistic manner. Nor did they oppose the Britishers on religious or ethnic grounds. Instead, they based their nationalist logic on a rational interpretation of the socio-economic problems affecting the native Indians under the British rule. In the later years, the rational secular tradition was upheld by leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Bhagat Singh. Nehru's *Discovery of India* and *Glimpses of the World History* can be designated as secular attempts to look at the history of India and of the world without any religious bias. Bhagat Singh went ahead of Nehru's agnosticism and declared himself an atheist. His booklet, *Why I Became an Atheist* was a testimony to his rational approach to the problems confronting man and society. In South India, reformers, like Narayana Guru, Veereshalingam and Periyar, tried to instil the rational spirit among the people. During the nationalist movement, this tradition was upheld in the field of literature by many writers like Sharat, Nazrul, Rahul Sankrityayan and Grurjada Apparao (Ghosh 1992: 292-302). In the last phase of freedom struggle socialists, communists and radical humanists took the lead in propagating this tradition.

Secularism: Hindu Liberal Tradition

Had the rational secular tradition been able to exercise hegemony over the nationalist movement, social transformation in India would have taken the Western path. But the history of India took a dramatic turn with religious revivalism overtaking the Indian renaissance at the initial stages itself. As mentioned earlier, the Hindus were among the first Indians to take advantage of the opportunities thrown open to them by the British rule. Naturally, they were also the first to be drawn to the ideas of nationalism. If the Hindu community as a whole, was influenced by the Western secular ideas and if those Hindus had succeeded in winning the Muslims and other minorities to their line of thought, then the Indian history would have been very different. But the reality was that the rational secular tradition initiated by Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar, was able to touch only a segment of the English educated Indians. Perhaps, these reformers could have succeeded in extending their hegemony, if some more time was given to them. But the growing anti-imperialist sentiments among the Hindus could not wait that longer. The extremists among the Hindus wanted an instant ideology which could unite them and inspire them to fight the alien rule. Hence they started looking back into history to gain inspiration to face the British authority. This practice of looking back into history was not something specific to India alone. The bourgeois revolutions in the West also underwent similar experiences. How-

ever, unlike the West which could look back to the Greeks and Romans, India did not have a dominant secular materialist history with which all Indians can relate themselves. So long as one remains a traditional Hindu, it is not possible for him to relate even to the ideas of the Buddha or Charvakas. If such a Hindu tries to look at the past to face the present challenges, he would only identify with real or perceived greatness of Hinduism—its rulers, its scriptures and its traditions. It was precisely what the Hindu revivalists like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Aurobindo did. By invoking the supposedly glorious history of the Hindus, they tried to instil national pride and unite all Indians against the alien rule. But they were aware of the fact that the traditional Hindu order was not conducive to nationalist goals and hence they also initiated reforms within the Hindu society. Far from attempting to preserve the medieval social order, they infused a humanistic and nationalistic spirit in their religious teachings. In their hands the Hindu scriptures such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas* acquired new meaning.

These revivalists, however, should not be clubbed with rational secular reformers, just because both of them advocated social reforms. For, while the revivalist initiated reforms broadly within the religious framework, the latter attempted social reforms to weaken the hold of religion on man and society. One appealed for action based on faith, while the other called for action based on reason. Reformers like Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar advocated freeing education and other temporal affairs of man from religious clutches. But the ideologies of religious revivalism could not conceive of the state, politics, ethics and education, being independent of religious consideration. If looked at from the Western point of view, these revivalist reformers cannot be called as secularists. However, in a country where the term, 'secularism', was superficially understood as religious tolerance, the revivalists could also claim themselves secularists because they also advocated tolerance and opposed communalism. They argued that since India has the tradition of respecting and accommodating people of all religious faiths, the spirit of secularism was not at all new to the Indian soil. This belief in the innate liberal character of Hinduism became the basis for, what has been popularized later as, Indian secularism.

While the Hindu saints like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Aurobindo laid the philosophical foundation for this tradition of secularism, the leaders like Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi popularized these ideas in the political domain, Tilak consciously introduced Hindu religious symbols in the nationalist movement with a view to unite all Hindus against the British rule. Being a product of Hindu revivalist tradition, even Gandhi could not conceive of disassociating politics from religion. Gandhi made this point clear when he said: "For me, there is no politics without religion, not the religion of the

superstitions and the blind, religion that hates and fights, but the universal religion of toleration. Politics without morality should be avoided" (Gandhi 1927). Reiterating the point, he asserted: "Indeed religion should pervade everyone of our action. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means belief in the ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes and gives them reality" (ibid 1940). Thus, having identified God with truth and religion with morality, he believed that spiritual values cannot be acquired without having faith in religion and God (Kher 1961). It is true that Gandhi introduced many Hindu symbols and slogans in nationalist politics. But he was never a fanatic Hindu. He called for accepting and believing the truth of all religions. Instead of rejecting any or every religion, this liberal Hindu view expected the state to support all religious communities and subsidize all religious activities. Elaborating this point, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan said: "When India is said to be a secular state, it does not mean that we reject the reality of a unseen spirit or the relevance of religion to life or that we exalt irreligion. It does not mean that secularism itself becomes positive religion or that the state assumes divine prerogative." Identifying secularism with religious impartiality, he claimed that secularism is "in accordance with the ancient religious tradition of India. It tries to build up a fellowship of believers, not by subordinating individual qualities to the group mind, but by bringing them into harmony with each other (Radhakrishnan 1973). To put the theme in the words of Gajendra Gadghkar, former Chief Justice of India, this brand of secularism " subscribes to the Hindu philosophical tenet that all religions have elements of truth and no religion can claim monopoly of truth. . . . The spirit of toleration is the foundation of the theory of secularism" (cited Ghose 1973:12).

This tradition which later gained currency as Indian secularism has its roots in the liberal Hindu tenet of '*sarva dharma sambhav*'. It pleads for the religious tolerance and is opposed to communalism. It stands on the belief that all religious paths lead to the same goal. Indian secularists advocate the principle of unity in diversity. They aim at achieving this unity not by making people raise above their religious consideration but by invoking "true" religious faith among the people. It expects people to retain their religious identities and at the same time remain non-communal. Unlike the Western rational secularist, the votaries of Indian secularism sanctify religious intervention in the temporal affairs of man, on the plea that such an intervention is essential to save society from spiritual and moral degradation. They do not find any contradiction between truth and religion and they even believe that it is possible and even desirable to integrate science and religion. This theme articulated by Radhakrishna has its roots in the teachings of Vivekananda who had once remarked: "We want today Europe's bright sun of intellectuality

joined with the heart of Buddha—the wonderful infinite heart of love and mercy. The union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends. This will be the religion of the future and if you work at it out, we can be sure that it will be for all times and all people” (cited Srivatsava 1982: 37). At epistemological plane, this brand of secularism has nothing to do with the Western rational secularism. But in India, both the traditions came to be treated as secular just because both of them were opposed to communalism.

Secularism and the Indian Nationalist Movement

The Indian nationalist movement was influenced by cross currents of rational secularism as well as Indian secularism. The first generation of leaders of the Indian National Congress belonged to the rational secular tradition. They made sincere efforts to highlight the problems of Indians groaning under the British rule. However, their non-confrontationist attitude towards the British authority allowed others to brand them as moderates. Moreover, the support base of the Indian nationalism under their leadership remained very narrow. In such conditions, the impatient nationalists like Bala Gangadhara Tilak started utilizing Hindu religious festivals and processions for preaching nationalist politics. As ideological justification to the use of religion for political ends, was already given by the revivalist thinkers like Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra and Dayananda Saraswathi, the extremists did not have any difficulty in attracting the Hindu middle classes. Apart from Tilak, many petty bourgeois revolutionary groups also started utilizing Hindu symbols to inspire their cadres. A majority of these leaders were against communal politics. They saw religion as a pragmatic means to inspire and impart nationalist feelings among the people. As most of the Indians who first responded to the nationalist movement happened to be Hindus, these leaders did not find anything wrong in using Hindu religious symbols for attaining their nationalist goals. It was because of their theory and practice that the nationalist movement in India acquired liberal Hindu orientation at the beginning of the twentieth century itself.

As the Hindu society was not secularized along rational lines, a majority of Hindus did not find anything wrong with the ‘Hinduisation’ of the nationalist movement. But this shift created suspicions in the minds of people professing other religious faiths. Being more backward, the Muslims who were drawn into the nationalist mainstream a few decades later, hesitated to join the nationalist movement which had by then attained a Hindu orientation. The conservative elements among the Muslims utilized these natural dilemmas to preach and promote a communal mind among the Muslim masses. As a reaction to the rise of Muslim communalism, the Hindu communal elements also began to take organizational shape outside the Congress Party.

Mahatma Gandhi should be given credit for widening the mass base of the Indian nationalist movement. But even Gandhi, as Shibdas Ghosh rightly pointed out, "instead of coming out of all sorts of religious complexes and thereby integrating all different faiths into a homogenous nation, adopted the tolerance and broadness of the Hindu religion to unify them into nation" (Ghosh 1992:177-178). In practice his secular politics led to the appeasement of both Hindu and Muslim religiosity. His symbol and slogans like *Ram Rajya* and cow protection, appealed to Hindu religious sentiments. But they did create apprehensions in the minds of Muslims, even if Gandhi would sing, "*Eshwara Allah Tere Naam*". He sought to win over the support of the Muslims by supporting the Khilafat movement aimed at restoring the reactionary authority of the Caliph in Turkey. Instead of integrating the Hindus and the Muslims, his methods only further strengthened the communal identities and facilitated the growth of communal parties. Other nationalist leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Ambedkar, Lohia and Jayaprakash Narain, were against mixing religion and politics. But they were not strong enough to turn the course of nationalist movement guided by Gandhism. Inability of these rational secular leaders to confront Gandhian 'secularism', gave opportunity for both Hindu and Muslim communal forces to criticize the Congress Party and perpetuate communal divisions among the Indians by injecting communal thinking in the minds of the people. Unlike many European states where the bourgeoisie fought for rational secular values the Indian bourgeoisie compromised on the question of religion. They wanted people's unity against imperialism but it was not in their class interest to infuse the same people with rational secular ideas. Hence the Indian national bourgeoisie consciously supported Gandhi's religiously oriented nationalism. The Indians had to pay a heavy price for these compromises by accepting the partition of India along communal lines.

However, the communal trauma that the Indians had to experience on the eve of partition compelled all non-communal forces to unite to combat the communal menace. Though at the epistemological level the rational secular tradition and Indian secularism stand poles apart, the exponents of both the traditions came together at the Constitutional Assembly to give shape to a non-communal Constitution for independent India. It is interesting to find that though there were frequent references to secularism in the Constitutional Assembly debates, a critical analysis of the debate would show that the members saw secularism more as non-communal technique of integrating the people professing different faiths; not as a way of looking at man, nature and society (Ghouse, 1973: 3). Their joint efforts founded synthesis in the Indian Constitution which laid down certain general principles about the citizen's right to religion and the state's powers vis-a-vis religious matters. But the Constitutional Assembly did not attempt to define the term, secularism. For

that matter, the word 'secularism', was not at all included in the Preamble at the time of adoption of the Constitution. In fact the advocates of rational secularism and Indian secularism tried to accommodate each other without inviting antagonisms at that moment. Lack of clarity on this issue helped to bring all non-communal forces together at that point of time. But at the same time, it allowed people to interpret secularism in any way they liked.

Secularism and Indian Politics

In the West, secular states emerged as political culminations of the secularization processes initiated in the socio-cultural domains. But in India, the post-colonial state accepted certain secular norms purely out of political compulsion to integrate the nation by checking communal elements. Though the communal forces could be politically checked to an extent, the roots of communalism were not altogether eliminated. The Indian society remained religious and to an extent, had even turned communal. To change such a society, into a real secular state, in the Western sense of the term, was not an easy task for the rational secularists whose status rose to an extent after the death of Mahatma Gandhi. Reviewing the situation, M.N. Roy rightly pointed out: "Constitutionally, India will be a secular state that goes without saying. But her political life dominated by the party in power, is not secularized, far from it. As a matter of fact, Congress attained its present position in the country by exploiting the religious sentiments and prejudices of the backward masses. Religious ritualism has always been associated with all public functions of the Congress. Indeed, Congress politics, ideologically and in popular demonstration has never been secular. All these factors of life of the party in power are bound to influence the state in actual operation, if not in form" (Roy 1968:148). Even Jawaharlal Nehru, a strong advocate of rational secularism, was aware of the problems involved in realizing secularism for his vision in India. He rightly referred to secularism as an "ideal to be aimed at", not an ideal achieved. He admitted that "they were all products of the past, carrying in their hearts and minds the taint of communalism". However, unlike M.N. Roy, Nehru believed that economic growth, technological development and increase of educational opportunities would bring about new ethos and values compatible with rational secular goals.

As the first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru did his best to advance the cause of a rational secular tradition. During his period, taking advantage of the constitutional provisions permitting state intervention in what was previously considered to be exclusively a religious domain, legislation was passed against social evils like *sati*, child marriage, the *devadasi* system and the practice of untouchability. Much against the wishes of orthodox Hindus, legislation permitting the entry of *harijans* in Hindu temples was

passed by various state governments. Nehru took personal interest in codifying Hindu personal laws. Some of the High Court and Supreme Court decisions also ratified the state intervention in social and financial matters pertaining to the Hindu places of worship.

All the above mentioned efforts were, indeed, in the direction of giving autonomy to the temporal affairs of man by confining religion to its own sphere. Had these efforts made during the Nehruvian era, been continued even after Nehru's death the rational secular tradition would have taken deeper roots in the Indian soil. But neither Nehru's other colleagues—with the exception of a few like M.G. Krishna Menon—nor his successors shared the vision that Nehru had for India. During Nehru's days itself, contemporaries like Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel, S. Radhakrishnan, preached and practiced certain things which cannot be justified as secular in the Western sense of the term. Practices such as starting public functions with religious prayers, making visits to religious places at public expense, meeting religious leaders in their official capacities, declaring public holidays for all religious festivals etc., were in vogue even when Nehru was alive. In fact, Nehru was very critical of Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, for following and encouraging such practices. Radhakrishnan, the second President also justified and promoted such practices in the name of Indian secularism. It should however, be admitted that these early votaries of Indian secularism never supported the misuse of religion for narrow political gains. They only expected religion to spiritualize politics and restore morality in public life. They were then not clearly conscious of the fact that once religious intervention was sanctified, it could be misused for ulterior goals.

Being the products of the anti-imperialist struggle, the first generation of Congress politicians—notwithstanding their ideological differences—had certain values and ideals in life. But once this generation was replaced by more pragmatic, power hungry politicians, religion started playing altogether a different role than the one that the exponents of Indian secularism had dreamt of. As one's political power in this formal democratic set-up depends on the votes gathered, the new breed of Congress politicians started looking at religion as a convenient tool for building vote banks. They used the ideology of Indian secularism for their own advantage and appeased all kinds of religious fundamentalism for their political purpose and made India virtually a multi-theocratic state. The rational secular tradition, which got further weakened in the Congress Party after Nehru's death, was not in a position to expose the negative trend that started within the Indian secularist tradition. The socialists and the communists outside the Congress systems also did not take effective steps to stop the misuse of religion by the Congress politicians for narrow political gains. What was worse, the Communist Party of India, which

had to be the bastion of rational secularism, itself had a short honeymoon with Muslim League in Kerala. It is alleged that Mr. Namboodiripad was responsible for carving out a few districts in Kerala exclusively for the Muslims. When the communists themselves become victims of pragmatic politics, it is not a wonder if other bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties fall in line with the trend set by the new votaries of Indian secularism.

In order to win seats in the assemblies and Parliament, almost all political parties vied with one another to appease one or the other religious communities. In this scramble for power, all these parties conveniently forgot the necessity of reforming religion and society. Far from making sincere efforts to counter the ideology of communalism, some of the parties advocating rational secularism or Indian secularism themselves encouraged communal hatred and perpetuated ethnic division. They misused other organs of the state such as the judiciary, police and educational system for their political gains. As a result, the state organs which are expected to be neutral, started getting communalized. Though other political parties also have their share in this process of change, the Congress Party should take the credit for initiating the change. Almost up to 1980 the Congress Party appeased minority communalism for its electoral gains. Minority fundamentalism which developed under the patronage of the Congress politicians, in turn gave a fresh lease of life to Hindu communalism. Mrs. Indira Gandhi could at once grasp the potentiality of communalization process taking place within the majority community. Hence at the beginning of 1980s when the Bhartiya Janata Party itself was muddling through the secular card, Indira Gandhi declared her intention to play the majority card. She and Rajiv Gandhi who succeeded her, consciously promoted Hindu communalism for their petty political gains. The Blue Star Operation, massacre of thousands of innocent Sikhs following Indira Gandhi's assassination, opening the gates of the so called *Ramajanma Bhoomi*, and allowing *Shilanyas* to take place near the Babri masjid structure—all these events followed one after the other during the Congress regimes. Apart from them, Sikh fundamentalism in Punjab and Muslim fundamentalism in Kashmir were also the offshoots of Congress politics. Thus by the end of 1980s the Congress itself created all the necessary ideological and political conditions to enable Hindu communal forces to stand on their own feet and then dictate their agenda to the whole nation.

Ideology and Social Base of Positive Secularism

It was only in the eighties that Hindu communalism emerged as a powerful organised force in India. But one can trace its roots at the beginning of the twentieth century itself. It was upon the ideological base created by men like Dayananda Saraswathi, Hegdewar and Golwalkar that Hindu communal

organisations like the Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) took their birth during the freedom movement. In addition to opposing their Muslim counterparts, at that time itself the Hindu communal leaders used to criticize the Congress and the Communists for 'appeasing' the Muslim community and openly advocated *Hindu Rashtra*, and hailed the virtues of fascist rule in Germany and Italy. As those leaders were very vocal, it was not difficult to see through their communal and anti-Muslim attitude. Though the Indian nationalist movement was also Hindu oriented, it could not turn the Hindus communal-- thanks to the ideological hegemony of Gandhism. It was only at the time of partition that the Hindu communal organizations could make some headway. However, the assassination of Gandhi gave a big jolt to the communal forces and it took several years for them to regain their lost image.

Hence, in the post-colonial India the Hindu communal organization like the RSS and the Janasangh, gave priority to the task of image building. While continuing with their demand for *Akhanda Bharat*, these organizations started speaking of values such as discipline, devotion, character building, social service and patriotism (Baxter 1971; Misra 1980, Goyal 1980). In a country where humanist values started degenerating almost immediately after independence, the Hindu communal leaders ably projected themselves as honest and upright persons. Their involvement in JP's movement in the seventies enhanced their public image and popular support. Later, when they became a part of the Janata Government, they even gave up the slogan of *Akhanda Bharat*. Afterwards when Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was formed, for some time, the leaders even tried to project themselves as secularists and even Gandhian socialist. Ultimately, taking advantage of the conducive political and ideological conditions created by the Congress and other political parties, the BJP could rise to the status of the biggest opposition party in India.

How BJP and other members of the *Sangh Parivar* communalized the whole nation by utilizing the Ram card, is still fresh in people's memory. However, even at this point the BJP-RSS leaders do not openly admit their communal character. Claiming themselves to be 'positive secularist', their leaders argue that they stand for the principle of equality for all and appeasement to none. According to them the concept of *Hindutva* does not contradict secular principle as Hinduism, by its very nature, is secular (Chowdhary 1993). These positive secularists intelligently utilize the arguments of Indian secularist to assert that since Hinduism is an eclectic and accommodative religion, in their *Ram Rajya* far from annihilating other religions, *Hindu Rashtra* would protect and promote all religious faiths. These positive secularists endorse the Indian secularist definition of secularism as *Sarva Dharma Sama Bhav* and argue that Western secularism has no relevance to Indian conditions as Hinduism never had an organised Church (Malkani 1990). They

characterize Hinduism as a *dharma* not a religion and Shri Ram as a national hero, not a mythological character. From this it naturally follows that according to them *Ramjanma Bhoomi* movement is not a communal movement but a patriotic movement for the cultural identity of Indians; a movement for national resurgence. These persons identify the nation with a particular religion and plead that if they were wrong in using religious symbols for national goals, then leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Tilak should also be branded as communal. Such is the ideology of "positive secularism" professed and propagated by BJP and the *Sangh Parivar*.

If one critically examines this neo-Hindu communal ideology, now masquerading as "positive secularism," it becomes clear that its arguments are irrational and dogmatic. In countries like the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, there were no organised Churches (Smith 1963). Even then, they opted for rational secular models. As such, whether there is an organised Church in India or not, is not at all the criterion for justifying or opposing Western rational secularism. Again, secularism should not be seen as a concession given to the minorities. As Cantwell Smith rightly pointed out, "in view of the fragmentation of the Hindus into several sects with fundamental differences between them on essential matters of religion, India would have needed secularism, even if it had Hindus only" (Ghouse 1973: 9). Moreover as in medieval Europe, religious ideology in India rationalized the feudal political authority and justified many undemocratic practices such as *sati*, the *devadasi* system, child marriages and caste hierarchy. For centuries, brahminical ideology exercised hegemony over all aspects of Indian life. A modern democratic nation cannot be built on the foundations of such ideology and practices. Here it is interesting to note that the BJP-RSS combine only opposes rational secularism, not the capitalist economy or bourgeois political institutions which have their origin in the West. Again, they speak highly of the eclectic and accommodative nature of Hinduism, but at the same time try to transform Hinduism into a centralized, monotheistic and regimented religion. Even liberal scholars like Rajni Kothari, D.E. Smith, Max Weber and Arnold Toynbee believed in the tolerance and accommodative nature of Hinduism. However, the practice of Hinduism does not seem to prove this point. Hinduism permitted an endless variety of opinions and beliefs, but only so long they did not question the social base of Hindu society. The fate of Buddhists and Charvakists in India bears ample testimony to "Hindu tolerance". Even otherwise, this freedom to speculate was restricted to Brahmins alone. In the Hindu hierarchical social order, the upper castes enjoyed many rights and privileges but a vast majority of the Hindus belonging to the lower castes remained the victims of suppression and exploitation. Citing these instances, V.K. Sinha rightly claimed, the "tolerance" of Hinduism is one of the myths of modern Indian thinking, kept alive by uncritical repetition" (Sinha 1968: 23).

If Hinduism is only a *dharma*, what is the necessity of carrying out vicious communal propaganda against the Muslims? Shri Ram may be an ideal god relevant to the Hindus, but what right does anyone have to insist the people professing and practicing other religions to accept him as their hero? Even if Shri Ram is accepted as a historical figure, for argument sake, how relevant is his life to the contemporary democratic ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity? The "positive secularists" have no rational answers to these questions. But they are capable of shelving all such questions by arguing that faith is above reasoning and beyond any scientific enquiry. BJP's arguments about the existence of Ram temple in Ayodhya and its justification of the demolition of Babri masjid structure, show how the Hindu communal forces promote blindness and support obscurantist practices to reach their self-professed goals.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of Hindu communal forces since the 1980s was facilitated by many factors and events. As discussed earlier, far from putting an end to communalism, the ideology and practice of Indian secularism and the impotency of rational secular forces, have only helped Hindu communalism to consolidate its ideological base. On their part, the ideologies of *Hindutva* have effectively exploited the mistakes and weakness of the so called secular parties in the country. By branding all their critics as 'pseudo-secularists appeasing the minorities', these self-styled positive secularists could attract the attention of a considerable section of the Hindu community. In the absence of rational and scientific temper among the people, they did not find it difficult to manipulate India's communal history to their own political advantage.

When this sporadic growth of Hindu communalism is examined in the context of India's changing political economy, the reactionary social role assigned to these forces of *Hindutva* becomes apparent. In India monopoly capitalism has already become the rock bottom foundation of its economy. In the domain of politics, the bourgeois parliamentary institutions have started becoming obsolete even to the bourgeoisie. In ethical and cultural spheres, while the bourgeois humanist values have lost their progressive character, the proletarian culture has not yet taken roots in the Indian soil. As the crises has started deepening, the masses affected by them are gradually losing faith in the system. The leftists in India failed to channelize the frustrations of the people in a positive direction and the people are left without an alternative vision to life. The *Sangh Parivar* tactfully utilizes this vacuum to promote its own interests. By injecting spiritualism, communalism, obscurantism and national jingoism into the minds of the people, it has succeeded in widening its political

base. Having realized the potentialities of *Hindutva* to serve its own class interests, a conscious section of the bourgeoisie has started lending monetary and media support to BJP and other Hindu communal organizations. With the tacit backing of the ruling classes, these zealots of *Hindutva* now professing "positive secularism", are actively engaged in preparing a conducive ideological atmosphere for the rise of fascism in India.

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