

RGICS Paper No. 29
1995



**SECULARISM,
NATIONALISM
AND MODERNITY**

by
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on
The Politics of Secularism and the
Recovery of Religious Tolerance
by
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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Institute.

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Suggested citation: Akeel Bilgrami, *Secularism, Nationalism and Modernity*, Ashis Nandy, *The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance*, RGICS Paper No.29 (New Delhi: Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1995) [PDF Version: 2010]

SECULARISM, NATIONALISM AND MODERNITY

1

The deployment of the term 'modernity' in the rhetoric of contemporary culture is various, and variously nuanced. The source of this variety lies partly in its being what J.L. Austin once called a 'boo/hurrah' word, that is in its deployment both as a term of commendation and opprobrium. In this paper I will look at the present tendency of certain sections of the Indian intelligentsia to see modernity as the source of our present communal troubles. I will be opposing this tendency. But I will not necessarily be doing so with a view to praising 'modernity' so much as burying it as a category of analysis. I will argue that there should be a moratorium on terms such as 'modernity' and the disputes surrounding them for they are not categories that enhance explanation and understanding of political and cultural developments in contemporary Indian politics and history.

The specific target of the recent attack on 'modernity' is the conception of a modern and secular state that emerged during the ideological articulations of the nationalist movement and flowered as a full-fledged vision in the years of independence under Nehru's leadership, mostly due to his own explicit articulations and efforts at construction of a modern nation state. I don't particularly want to defend Nehru so much as to say that the whole dispute is ill-configured.

Though the present anti-modernist and anti-nationalist mood is very widespread and may be found in a variety of scholarly and journalistic writing, I will, for the sake of precision and detail, focus on the writings of Ashis Nandy, which grapple with the issue of communalism and secularism in Indian politics ¹. His work has been widely influential not only in the academy but also in the general intelligentsia because we have all been so struck by the extremity of recent communalist tendency, that we yearn for that extremity to be matched in an exaggeratedly radical explanation of it, which turns out to be on offer by the unambiguous anti-modernist historical analysis Nandy's writings provide.

Let us then begin with a question that is perhaps on all our minds.

For seventeen initial years the leadership of independent India fell into the hands of Nehru and the Congress party. Nehru's vision of a modern, secular India is usually conceded by even his most vocal critics to be a genuine and honourable commitment. A comparison with the long stretches of either anti-secular or undemocratic regimes in Pakistan after the untimely death of Jinnah (who after leading a communal nationalist movement adopted much the same vision as Nehru's for the newly created Muslim nation), and also a comparison with what might have happened if some other leaders had been at the helm in India instead of Nehru, must allow the conclusion that, to a considerable extent, Nehru did succeed. But if we look around us today in the period before and after the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya, we can only judge the secular success of his long rule as, at best, a holding process. To describe Nehru's success in terms of a holding process is of course to describe it as a success of a very limited sort. So the question is: Why is it that the Nehruvian vision of a secular India failed to take hold?

Nandy's answer and the general sense of the intelligentsia is that there was something deeply flawed in the vision itself. On this there is a mounting consensus, and indeed I think it would be accurate to say that in the last few years there is widespread and accumulated deflation of Nehru's stature to be found in the intellectual and political mood of the country. I want to briefly assess this mood because though I think that there is much that is mistaken in its main claims, I do also think that there is a strand of truth in it which does not emerge clearly in Nandy's polemic but which is worth stressing because it may prove to be an instructive basis for how to re-think the methodological and philosophical basis for secularism in India. However, I will not be able to substantially develop any positive suggestions in this brief discussion.²

The contemporary critique of Nehru usually begins by laying down a fundamental distinction in the very idea of religion, a distinction between religions as faiths and ways of life on the one hand and as constructed ideologies on the other. This is intended as a contrast between a more accommodating, non-monolithic and pluralist religious folk tradition of Hinduism and Islam on the one hand, and the Brahmanical RSS and Muslim League versions of them on the other. The latter are said to amount to constructed religious ideologies that were intolerant of heterodoxy within themselves as well as intolerant of each other. The critique's target is by implication modernity itself for its claim is that it is the polity in its modern framework of *nationhood and its statecraft* which is the source of such ideological constructions that distort those more 'innocent' aspects of religion which amount to 'says of life' rather than systems of thought geared to political advancement. The critique then suggests that once one accepts the inevitability of the ideological framework of modernity, then there is nothing left to do in combating sectarian and communal sentiment and action than to formulate a secular vision which *itself* amounts to an oppressive nationalist and statist ideology. Thus Nehru. As they would describe his vision, it is one of a modernist tyranny that just as surely (as the narrow communalisms) stands against the pluralist and tolerant traditions that existed in the uncontaminated traditions of religions as faiths and ways of life prior to modernity's distortions. That was Nehru's primary contribution, then: a perversely modernist and rationalist imposition of a vision that was foreign to the natural tendencies of Hinduism and Islam in their traditional pre-modern spiritual and societal formations, a vision accompanied by all the destructive modern institutional commitment to centralized government, parliamentary democracy, not to mention heavy industry as well as metropolitan consumption and displacement of traditional ways of life. The echoes of Gandhi here are vivid and Ashis Nandy is explicit in describing this alternative secular vision in Gandhian terms.

This critique of Nehru is careful (though perhaps not always careful enough) to be critical also of contemporary Hindu nationalism in India, as was Gandhi himself, despite his Hinduism and his traditionalism. Nandy makes great dialectical use of the fact that Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu Nationalist, arguing that Gandhi's politics and pluralist version of Hinduism posed a threat to the elitist pseudo-unification of Hinduism which flowered in the ideology of upper-caste Hindus and in orthodox Brahmanical culture, as represented paradigmatically in the Chitpavans, the caste to which Nathuram Godse (his assassin) belonged.

Now it should be emphasized that what is novel and interesting about this critique of Hindu nationalism is that it is intended to be part of a larger critique in two different ways.

First, it is intended as part of a *general* diagnosis in which Hindu Nationalism is to be seen as a special instance of the more general wrong that is identified in nationalism itself, which is a modern state of mind, in which the very ideal of 'nation' has built into it as a form of necessity the ideal of a nation-*state*, with its commitment to such things as development, national security, rigidly codified forms of increasingly centralized polity, and above all the habit of exclusion of some other people or nation in its very self-definition and self-understanding. There is apparently no separating these more general wrongs of nationalism from what is wrong with Hindu Nationalism, for otherwise we would have missed the more hidden explanatory conceptual sources of this particular movement.

And second, the critique of Hindu Nationalism is intended to be *of a piece* with the critique of Nehruvian secularism. That is, such a communal nationalism, itself a product of modernity, owes its very existence to the oppositional but at the same time *internal* dialectical relation it bears to that other product of modernity, Nehruvian secularism. The claim is that the latter is an alien imposition upon a people who have never wished to separate religion from politics in their every day life and thinking, and therefore leaves that people no choice but to turn to the only religious politics allowed by modernity's stranglehold, i.e. Hindu nationalism. Thus secular tyranny breeds Hindu nationalist resistance, which threatens with the promise of its own form of tyranny. Such are the travails that modernity has visited upon us.

There is something convincing about this argument but its explanatory virtues are greatly marred by its narrowing and uncritical anti-nationalism, its skewed historiography, and its traditionalist nostalgia. What is convincing in it is much more theoretical and methodological than anything that surfaces explicitly in the critique's articulation. But before I get to that, let me first say something by way of scepticism about some of its central diagnostic claims.

First of all, though there is no gainsaying the humanism inherent in Gandhi's politics, it is also foolish and sentimental to deny the Brahmanical elements in it. There is the plain and well-known fact that Gandhi, no less than the Chitpavan nationalist Tilak (however different their nationalist sensibilities were in other respects), encouraged the communal Hindu elements in the national movement by using Hindu symbolism to mobilize mass nationalist feeling. As is also well-known, his support of the reactionary Muslim Khilafat movement had [exactly the same motives and] the same communalist effect on the Muslim population. I won't say a word more about this since this point is very well understood by many who have studied the national movement, even cursorily.

More importantly, there is some strenuous simplification in the critique's insistence that nationalism was the bad seed that turned a more pristine Hinduism and Islam into communal ideologies in India.

Both Nandy and the Hindu Nationalists he is criticizing share an assumption despite their deep differences, the assumption that nationalism is a single and transparently grasped thing. It is not a single category. It is far more omnibus and frustrating to analyze than either Nandy or the Hindu Nationalists allow and for that reason it is unlikely that it can be an explanatory concept at all. The variety of nationalisms, indeed the variety of ingredients that go into particular nationalisms at different stages and sometimes even at the same stage, make this inevitable.

As we have been routinely and rightly reminded in other contexts, it would serve no purpose, for instance, to lump together, say, Palestinian Nationalism with Zionist nationalism; or to lump together German Nationalism in the following four periods: before 1848, after 1918, under Bismarck, and under Nazism. Closer to our specific area of interest, it would be pointless, for instance, to integrate in any explanation, on the one hand Jinnah's and the Muslim League's nationalism in its first two decades with, on the other, his nationalism after several frustrated dealings with the Congress party in the twenties and his return to India after his failures in England. Even just these three examples respectively show that nationalism can displace a people from their homeland or strive to find a state for a displaced people, it can have an intrinsic tie to social democracy, liberal democracy, autocracy, or fascism, it can work harmoniously with other communities and its representatives in an anti-imperialist struggle or it can be as divisive of a people in its anti-imperial struggle as the imperialism it struggles against is in the policies by which it rules over the same people. All of these ingredients of nationalism are themselves explained by underlying economic and social forces and interests in different periods, or sometimes warring with one another in the same period. The Indian National Congress, almost throughout its long history, has provided a home for most of these ingredients of nationalism and has, not surprisingly, represented a variety of the underlying social and economic interests. We cannot therefore assume that the failures of Nehru's secularism are going to be usefully and illuminatingly diagnosed in any terms that give a central and clear place to some transparently grasped notion of 'nationalism'.

There is a sort of desperate last-ditch retort of those who resist the point I am making here against Nandy's generalized anti-nationalism. The points remember is not merely that not all nationalisms are bad, but that 'nationalism' is not transparently characterizable. The retort is that for all this lack of transparency, there is an undeniable defining exclusivity which unites all the many kinds of nationalism that I am insisting on.

The significance of this claim is highly questionable. One of the frustrating features that go into making "nationalism" the compendious and opaque notion it is, is that some of its most narrowing and tyrannical aspects are a product of it being neurotically inclusivist, (as for example in the national image of Pakistan during Zia's regime.) To say, in these contexts, that nationalism is defined upon exclusivity rings false because the fact that it excludes some people or other is innocuous and academic, when compared to the fact that what is most salient about it is that it produces a tin ear for the demands of regional autonomy because of its *inclusivism*, (in the name of Islam, in our example). In these contexts, that inclusivism is its defining feature, the exclusivism is peripheral.

Now it is possible to respond in defence of Nandy, and in a sense respond correctly, that in most cases of such inclusivism there is an *underlying* exclusivity having to do with the fact that a set of dominant economic interests at the centre find it necessary to *exclude* regional interests, particularly the interest of the regional masses, even as they insistently *include* them *superficially* into the ideal of the nation (in Pakistan's case via an appeal to Islamist ideology). That is to say, the inclusivist, unifying nationalist image of an Islamist Pakistan is an ideological perpetration in order for an underlying exclusivist agenda for a dominant, centrist, Punjabi ruling-elite to maintain their hold over the bureaucracy (and the military) and thereby eventually of the investible resources of the economy and the various elements which concentrate it in their hands. In the erstwhile Soviet Union (to take another example) the rampant

inclusivism that gave no quarter to regional demands for autonomy was also based on an exclusivism of dominant Russian interests at the centre which kept a Russian elite in control of a fantastic-sized state-capitalist apparatus.

I don't wish to quarrel with this interpretation of the inclusivity in nationalism that I was pointing to, as harbouring a deeper and underlying exclusivity in the agenda of ruling elites (in our examples, a Punjabi-dominated or a Russian-dominated ruling elite). But notice that if we grant its essential correctness, we are granting something that takes the burden of the exclusivism away from *nationalism* to one or other set of economic interests, that is to say from nationalism to an elite-dominated capitalism in its less and more statist forms. This shift in emphasis however is a concession to my overall criticism that the real work here is not being done by nationalism in the way Nandy requires, but by the quite different categories by which exclusivism is now being explicated. If that's what is doing the real work, it makes no *distinctive* point to say that it is nationalism that is the bad seed that accounts for the failure of Nehru's secularism. With such exclusivism, we have come such a distance from Nandy's critique that we cannot recognize it as his position any more. I don't doubt that Nandy has it in mind to *integrate capitalism too* with statism, nationalism, modernity, and secularism in a single apocalyptic diagnosis. But this does not mean that this interpretation of an exclusivist element in nationalism can be assimilated to his critique. Even if there is no denying the fact that the regional elite economic interests surrounding capital which gave rise to the exclusivism in our examples are distinctly interests of the modern period, and even if they are often accompanied by secular postures, the weight of analysis in Nandy's integrated diagnosis is not on these interests but on very different elements. As a result this interpretation which stresses these interests need not in any way be implicated in his overall critique of modernity and secularism at all.

So I will return to his position proper rather than this defence of his position, which is no defence at all, but its abandonment.

These remarks about the bootlessness of using 'nationalism' to explain anything only begin to uncover the misidentifications in Nandy's diagnosis of the failure of Nehruvian secularism. Lying behind the uncritical anti-nationalism is a specific sort of naiveté in the critique's historiography. As I said, Nandy makes much of the idea that religions as tolerant ways of life in the sense that Gandhi embraced and promoted were undermined by the ideological religious constructions and institutions of modernity. In the case of Hinduism, it is the Brahmanical ideological constructions which distracted from the pluralist and quotidian religious habits of ordinary people. But such a historiography, with its crude periodisation in such categories as 'modernity', hides the fact that all the basic elements in the construction of Brahmanism (especially in North India) were in place well before the deliverances of modernity. This should give us general pause about the somewhat glib tendency to say that communalism like nationalism is a purely 'modern' phenomenon.

The idea of a monolithic, majoritarian, pseudo-unifying Hinduism is, as we tend to say today, a "construct". This is indeed what Nandy says about it. But as construction often will, the process goes back a long way into the recesses of Indian history and has helped to perpetuate the most remarkably resilient inegalitarian social formation in the world. It is the product of a sustained effort over centuries on the part of the upper castes to sustain their hold not only on the bases of political power but on the Hindu psyche. Brahmanical ascendancy had its ancient origins in a priesthood which

made its alliances with kings and their officials as well as with the landed gentry. Through the control of religious ritual and the language of ritual—Sanskrit—and with the force of the Kshatriyas (the predominantly military caste) behind them it gradually created a nation-wide hegemony for the upper castes. Under both the feudal rulers during the period of Muslim rule and later in the colonial state, upper caste Hindus flourished in the state apparatus. And in the colonial period this abiding hold over the centres of power, aided by the codifications of language and custom in the Orientalist discursive space, allowed this Brahminical ideological tradition to co-opt all efforts at the reform of Hinduism, from the Arya Samaj movement in the north to the Brahmo-Sarnaj movement in Bengal; even intellectual and social movements which started with the avowed intention to raise the status and the political consciousness of the lower-castes deteriorated into either elitist or anti-Muslim organizations.

I say all this to stress that the construction began to take shape much before the onset of modernity. And it does no favours to historical understanding to let the periodization inherent in the very category of ‘modernity’ and its opposites (however we describe them, whether as ‘pre-Enlightenment’ or ‘post-modern’) shape *from the outside* how we must diagnose and explain particular social phenomena. When any such political or social phenomenon (such as Brahmanism, which is central to Nandy’s identification of the modern source of communalism) has a deep and longstanding antecedent strain, it is better to adopt a historiography that places upon it, particular and different historical explanations for why the phenomenon with some abiding core characteristics shifts its salencies or takes on new complexions or why it increase its levels and thresholds of urgency in different historical periods. To take an example of the latter: despite the long history of the Brahminical construction, the particularly frenzied communal passion of the Hindu nationalists that have been unleashed in the last four years can partly be explained as a violent, and in many respects fascistically modelled, effort to arrest the quickly accumulated ideological effects of recent efforts to *undermine* Brahminical hegemony, and to expose the dissimulations of a unified, majoritarian Hindu society by adopting affirmative action policies in favour of the backward castes. I make this point with a very specific theoretical end in mind, which is to show that local historical explanations can be given for the changes and the rise and fall of intensity in what is a longstanding social phenomenon. Nandy’s own appeal to various aspects of the modern and colonial period in the understanding of Hindu nationalism should, I believe, be read as local in precisely this way rather than in the way he presents them, (though obviously it is a good deal less local than the particular explanation I have just rehearsed of the *most recent* communal outburst). This reading lowers the high-profile given to periodization in Nandy’s implicit historiography, and hence allows us to say something very different from his main claim. It allows us to say that to the extent that categories such as ‘modernity’ have explanatory force at all, it is only because this or that aspect of modern life and polity offer *local* explanations of *local* changes in *non-local* phenomena (such as Brahmanism) that often predate modernity.

Now this last point has no small effect on how we must think of Nandy’s own alternative to the Nehruvian secular ideal, for which he is right to resist the label ‘secularism’, in fact which he is happy to call ‘anti-secularism’.

If the construction of a unified, Brahminical version of Hinduism, which (on Nandy’s own account) is the basis of Hindu nationalism, pre-dates modernity, a question arises as to what new complexion it did acquire in colonial and post-colonial India? The answer is that what electoral politics in the provinces under the last many decades of

British rule, as well as certain forces in the national movement, brought into this construction is a growing mass element. And industrialization introduced a more variegated caste-complexion through a co-opting of the commercial castes into the constructed hegemony of a monolithic Hinduism. This answer is by no means complete, but the instructive underlying moral I want to stress is that once we give up the primacy of periodization and accept the fact of the accumulation and consolidation of long-present tendencies in our understanding of Hindu nationalism, we are less likely to think of these modern consolidations of it as effaceable for a return to a more traditional Hindu mentality that Nandy favours.

The current idiom which has it that such social phenomena as Brahmanical Hinduism are ‘*constructed*’, and to which I have succumbed, must now have its bluff called. “Construction” implies that there are constructs. And constructs are *not figments*, though the anti-objectivist philosophical commitment that leads to the rhetoric of ‘constructivism’ in the first place may tempt us to think so. They cannot then be thought of as effaceable, nor even easily malleable, simply by virtue of having been diagnosed as ‘constructions’. They are as real and often as entrenched as anything that any more traditional idiom and objectivist philosophical tendency described. So the more subdued and low-profile understanding of historical periodization suggested above should instruct us that we would do better to recognize constructs, not as figments, but as fused into the polity, and into the sensibility of citizens, and increasingly consolidated by modern developments; and therefore instruct us in turn to look instead for *constraints to be placed upon them* rather than to think in terms of their eradication or effacement.

The separatist electoral politics which were first introduced by the British and whose vote-bank mentality is now entrenched in a functioning formal democracy, as well as all the other institutions of modern statecraft and an increasingly modern economy, are not exactly disposable features of the Indian political sensibility. It goes without saying that there may and should be fruitful and sensible discussion about matters regarding the deliverances of modernity—about matters such as: should there be so much stress on capital-intensive technologies, should there be so much centralized government, etc. But even if we laid a great deal more stress on labour intensive technologies, even if we stressed decentralized local government and autonomy much more than we have done so far, this would not coincide with Nandy’s conception of a pre-modern political psyche where there will be no potential for the exploitation of one’s communal identity in the political spheres of election and government. These spheres are by now entrenched in Indian society and just for that reason the sense in which religion is relevant to politics today cannot any longer be purely spiritual or quotidian and ritualistic as Nandy’s somewhat selectively Gandhian politics envisages. It is, in turn, just for this reason again that Nehruvian secularism thought it best to separate religion from politics, because given the existence of these spheres it thought the linking of politics with religion could only be exploited for divisive and majoritarian ends. It seems to me quite one-sided then to place the blame for Hindu nationalism on its internal dialectical opposition to Nehru’s secularism, for it seems quite wrong under these circumstances of electoral democracy that are here to stay, to see a yearning to bring religion back into politics as something that is an “innocent” protest against the tyrannies of Nehru’s secularism. It misdescribes matters to say that the yearning *itself* is innocent but modernity disallows the yearning to be fulfilled by anything but a divisive communalism. The right thing to say is that in these circumstances of an ineradicable modernity, particularly if one views modernity as a fallen and sinful condition, the yearning of a religious people to bring their religion

into politics cannot, simply cannot, any longer be seen as obviously innocent. For its entry into politics is fraught with precisely the dangers that Nehru and his followers, say, dangers that have been realized in scarcely credible proportions of menace in the last three years.

Though the underlying flaw in the prevalent anti-Nehru intellectual climate is to misdescribe the sense in which religion may enter politics in India, given the realities of a slowly consolidating democracy and modern state, this is by no means to suggest that the Nehruvian insistence on a separation of religion from politics is feasible either. Indeed my acknowledging that his secularism amounted to no more than a holding process is an acknowledgement of the unfeasibility of that separation in a country with the unique colonial and post-colonial history of communal relationships that India has witnessed. Neither the pre-modern conception of an innocent spiritual integration of religion and politics, nor the Nehruvian separation of religion and politics can cope with the demands of Indian political life today.

II

What I see as a strand of truth in the contemporary critique of Nehru is roughly this. Nehru's secularism was indeed an imposition. But the sense in which it is an imposition is not that it was a modern intrusion into an essentially traditionalist religious population. It is not that because as I said the population under an evolving electoral democracy throughout this century willy nilly has come to see religion entering politics in non-traditionalist modern political modes. It is an imposition rather in the sense that it assumed that *secularism stood outside the substantive arena of political commitment*. It had a constitutional status, indeed it was outside even of that, it was in the preamble to the constitution. It was not in there with Hinduism and Islam as one among *substantive* contested political commitments to be negotiated as any other contested commitment must be negotiated, one with the other.

I should immediately warn against a facile conflation. It may be thought that what I am doing is pointing to an imposition by *the state* of a doctrine of secularism upon a people who have never been secular in this sense. And in turn it may be thought that this is not all that different from Nandy's (and others') charge of an imposition made against Nehru, since states which impose entire ways of life upon a people are wholly a project of modernity.³ Let me leave aside for now the, in any case dubious, idea that only modern states impose ways of life upon people, dubious because it seems to me a wholly unjustified extrapolation to go from the fact that the *scale* of imposition that modern states are capable of implementing is larger, to the idea that it is a *novelty* of the modern state to impose ways of life. That is not the conflation I had in mind. The conflation is the failure to see that in charging Nehru with imposing a non-negotiated secularism, I am saying something quite orthogonal to the charge that his was a statist imposition. Perhaps his was a statist imposition, but that is not what my charge is claiming. Rather it is claiming that what the state imposed was not a doctrine that was an outcome of a negotiation between different communities. This critique cannot be equated with a critique of statism, leave alone modern statism, because it may be quite inevitable in our times that, at least at the centre, and probable also in the regions, even a highly negotiated secularism may have to be adopted and implemented by the state (no doubt ideally after an inflow of negotiation from the grass-roots). There is no reason to think that a skepticism about Nehru's secularism along these lines should amount in itself to a critique of the very idea of statehood, because there is nothing inherent in the concept of the state, which makes it logically impossible that it should

adopt such a substantive, negotiated policy outcome, difficult though it may be to fashion such a state in the face of decades of its imposition of a non-negotiated secularism.

Proof of the fact that my critique of Nehru does not coincide with a critique of statehood lies in the fact that the critique applies to a period before independence, i.e., before statehood was acquired. It is very important to point out that Nehru's failure to provide for a creative dialogue between communities is not just a failure of the immediate post-independence period of policy formulation by the state. There are very crucial historical antecedents to it, antecedents which may have made inevitable the post-independent secularist policies whose non-substantive theoretical status and non-negotiated origins I am criticizing. For two or three decades before independence the Congress under Nehru refused to let a secular policy emerge through negotiation between different communitarian voices, by denying at every step in the various conferrings with the British, Jinnah's demand that the Muslim League represent the Muslims, a Sikh leader represent the Sikhs, and a Harijan leader represent the untouchable community. And the ground for the denial was simply that as a secular party they could not accept that they *not* represent *all* these communities.⁴ Secularism thus never got the chance to *emerge* out of a creative dialogue between these different communities. It was *sui generis*. This Archimedean⁵ existence gave secularism procedural priority but in doing so it gave it no abiding substantive authority. As a result it could be nothing more than a holding process, already under strain in the time of its charismatic architect, and increasingly ineffective after his death. It is this archimedeanism of doctrine, and not its statist imposition, that I think is the deepest flaw in Nehru's vision and it has nothing essential to do with modernity and its various Nandian cognates: Rationality, Science, Technology, Industry.

Though I believe it with conviction, given the brevity with which I have had to make this criticism of Nehru, I should add several cautionary remarks in order to be fair to Nehru's position. For one thing, I do not mean to suggest that Jinnah and the Muslim League represented the mass of the Muslim people at these stages of the anti-colonial movement; he only represented the urban middle-class and was not in an ideal position to play a role in bringing about the sort of negotiated ideal of secularism that I am gesturing at. Nor am I suggesting that these various elitist fora at which Jinnah demanded communal representation could be the loci for the sort of creative dialogue between communities that would have been necessary. However, neither of these cautionary remarks spoil the general point of my criticism of Nehru's position. The general point was to call attention to the horizon of Congress high command thinking about secularism in the pre-independence period, a horizon on which any conception of a negotiated ideal of secularism was not so much as visible. Putting Jinnah and the elitist conferrings aside, the fact is that even Congress Muslim leaders such as Azad were never given a prominent negotiating voice in a communal dialogue with their Hindu counterparts in conferrings within the supposedly mass party of which they were members. The question of the need for such a dialogue within the party in order to eventually found a substantive secularism in the future never so much as came up. The transcendent ideal of secularism Nehru assumed made such a question irrelevant.

However, the last and most important of the cautionary remarks I wish to make might be seen as attempting to provide an answer to this line of criticism of Nehru. It is possible that Nehru and the Congress leadership assumed something which to some extent is true; that the Congress Party was a large and relatively accommodating and (communally speaking) quite comprehensively subscribed nationalist party in a way

that the Muslim League had ceased to be. And on the basis of that premise, they could draw the conclusion that an implicitly and tacitly carried out negotiation between the component elements in the subscription was already inherent in the party's claims to being secular. In other words the secularism of a party, premised on the assumption of such a comprehensive communal subscription, had built into it by its very nature (that is what I mean by 'tacitly' or implicitly) the negotiated origins I am denying to it. This is a subtle and interesting argument which I think had always been in the back of Nehru's mind in his rather primitively presented writings and speeches on secularism. And I think the argument needs scrutiny not dismissal.⁶

I say that this argument was at the back of Nehru's mind partly because it was often pushed into the background by the rhetoric of a quite different argument that Nehru voiced, which was roughly the argument of the Left programme, viz., that a proper focus on the issue of class and the implementation of a leftist program of economic equality would allow the nation to bypass the difficulties that issued from religious and communal differences. Speaking generally, this argument is a very attractive one. However, except for a few years in the nineteen thirties even Nehru did not voice this argument with genuine conviction; and in any case, if he were thinking honestly, he should have known that it would have been empty rhetoric to do so since he must have been well aware that the right-wing of the party was in growing ascendancy in Congress politics despite his central presence, and there was no realistic chance of the programme being implemented. Given that fact, the negotiative ideal of secularism became all the more pressing. And it is to some extent arguable that it should have been pressing anyway.

To return to what I am calling Nehru's argument from "implicit" negotiation for his secularism, I strongly suspect that scrutiny of the argument will show, not so much that its premise (about the Congress Party's comprehensive communal subscription) is false, but that the very idea of 'implicit' or 'tacit' negotiation, which is derived from the premise and which is crucial to the argument, is not an idea that can in the end be cashed out theoretically by any confirmational and evidential procedure. As a term of art or theory 'implicit negotiation' (unlike the real thing: negotiation) yields no obvious or even unobvious inferences that can be observed which will confirm or infirm its explanatory theoretical status. Hence the argument is not convincing because there is no bridge that takes one from the idea that an anti-colonial movement and a post-colonial party is "composite" (a favourite word of the Congress to describe its wide spectrum of communal representation) to the idea that it stands for a substantive secularism.⁷ My point is that to claim that the *mere fact* of "compositeness" amounts to an "implicit" negotiation among the compositional communal elements which would yield such a secularism, is a sophistical move which does nothing to bridge that gap in the argument. It is a mere fraudulent *labelling* of a non-existing bridging argumentative link between "compositeness" and, what I am calling, a "substantive" secularism. The label "implicit" just serves to hide the fact that the commitment to genuine negotiation (which alone could build the necessary bridge from the party's compositeness to a substantive secularism) was manifestly avoided by the Congress party.⁸

In reaction to this failure it would be a mistake to formulate an alternative vision of secularism which harked back nostalgically to the idea of a pre-modern India. Since, as I have argued, the sense in which it is a failure is not so much to do with it being a modernist imposition on a traditional people, but rather with its rarefied non-negotiable status, the right reaction to it should be to acknowledge that secularism can

only *emerge* as a value by negotiation between the substantive commitments of particular religious communities. It must emerge from the bottom up with the moderate political leadership of different religious communities negotiating both procedure and substance, negotiating details of the modern polity, primarily the codification of law.

To take the crucial example in the vital domain of the law, negotiation among leaders and representatives of the different communities may deliver the conclusion that Muslims have better laws for orphans, say, while Hindus have better laws for divorce and alimony; and so on. A civil code, had it emerged in this way, would very likely have preempted the present controversy surrounding the idea of a 'uniform' civil code. By giving participatory negotiating voice to the different communal interests, it would have preempted Muslim fears about the idea of a 'uniform' civil code and Hindu resentment at Nehru's failure to endorse that idea. Because of the archimedean rather than emergent character of India's adopted secularism, Nehru and other leaders found themselves inevitably providing special status to Muslim law. It was the *internal logic* of its non-negotiated methodological character that it find this special status the only fair treatment of India's most substantial minority, thus yielding aggressive resentment among the Hindus which in turn bred reactionary fear of giving up the special status among the Muslims. In short, I am arguing that it is precisely the refusal to acknowledge the existence of communities and communitarian commitments in the first place that leads the state eventually to constantly capitulate to the demands of the most reactionary communal elements within the communities on visible public issues such as, for instance, Ayodhya or the Muslim Women's Bill.

An alternative secularism, emergent rather than imposed in the specific sense that I have defined, sees itself as one among other doctrines such as Islam and Hinduism. Of course there is still a difference of place and function in the polity between secularism and Islam or Hinduism. But once we see it as a substantive doctrine, this difference can be formulated in quite other terms than the way Nehru formulated it. In my conception, what makes secularism different from these specific politico-religious commitments is not any longer that it has an archimedean and non-substantive status, but rather that it is an outcome of a negotiation among these specific commitments. This gives secularism a quite different place and function in the polity, and in the minds of citizens, than Islam or Hinduism could possibly have. Yet this difference does not amount to wholesale transcendence from these substantive religious commitments in politics. If secularism transcends religious politics in the way I am suggesting, it does so *from within*, it does not do so because it has a shimmering philosophical existence separate from religious political commitments, nor because it is established by constitutional fiat by a pan-Indian elite unconcerned and unrealistic about the actual sway of religion in politics. It does so rather because *after* climbing up the ladder of religious politics (via a dialogue among acknowledged substantive religious commitments in politics) this emergent secularism might be in a position to kick that ladder of religious politics away. There is no paradox here of a doctrine emerging from its opposite, no more so than in any movement of synthesis, for the point is essentially Hegelian. Unlike the pure liberal fantasy of a secularism established by an ahistorical, philosophical ('transcendental', to use Kant's term) argument, the argument being proposed is essentially dialectical, where secularism emerges from a creative playing out (no historical inevitability is essential to *this* Hegelian proposal) of a substantive communal politics that is prevalent at a certain historical juncture.

When it is hard won in these ways, secularism is much more likely to amount to something more than a holding process. And this is so not merely because (unlike Nehru's secularism) it acknowledges as its very starting-point the reality of the inseparability of religion from politics, but also because, at the same time, it does not shun a realistic appreciation of the entrenched facts of modern political life, which Nehru (unlike his contemporary critics) was right to embrace wholeheartedly. This way of looking at things gives a philosophical basis to the widespread but somewhat vague anti-Nehru feeling (shared by a variety of different political positions today) that in a country like India we cannot any longer embrace a secularism that separates religion from politics. And it does so without in any way ceding ground to those who draw quite the wrong conclusions from this vague feeling: it cedes nothing to the Hindu nationalist, nor to the Muslim communalist, nor even to Ashis Nandy's nostalgia for a bygone pre-modernism. The crucial importance of seeing things this way lies precisely in the fact that it counters what is a dangerously easy and uncritical tendency today, the tendency to move from this vague but understandable feeling of the inseparability of religion from politics to one or other of these conclusions. It counters this tendency by a very specific philosophical consolidation of this feeling, so that these conclusions which are often derived from it now no longer seem compulsory. Or, to put it more strongly (and more correctly), this philosophical consolidation of this understandable feeling allows us to see these conclusions derived from the feeling as simply *non-sequiturs*.

I have tried in this paper to distinguish between two notions of secularism by criticizing the Nehruvian vision from a quite different angle than Ashis Nandy's. Unlike as with Nandy, I did not argue that the failure of Nehru's secularism flowed from its being an Enlightenment-laden ideological imposition of modernity I argued that it was characterized more by a deep methodological flaw, which made it an imposition in a far more abstract sense. It was a failure in the quite different sense that it pretended, both before and after independence, to stand outside of substantive and contested value commitments, and was thus not able to withstand the assault of the reactionary and authoritarian elements in the value commitments that never pretended to be anything but substantive and contested, the commitments, that is, of the nationalist Hindu, the communalist Muslim and the nationalist Sikh.

NOTES

1. Nandy is most widely influential partly because his audience is not restricted to the academy. Others among the anti-modernists, despite their many differences, are T.N. Madan, Veena Das, Partha Chatterji, and in recent years even a longstanding feminist like Madhu Kishwar. For the argument in Nandy that I sketch in the text below, see particularly his 'An Anti-Secularist Manifesto' in *Seminar* Vol. 314, pp.14-24 and "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance", in Veena Das (ed.) *Mirrors of Violence*, (Oxford University Press, 1992).

2. In a sequel to this paper entitled 'Secularism and the Moral Psychology of Religious Identity, I do develop in more positive detail the alternative conception of the secular ideal only passingly hinted at the end of this paper. These and other related themes get a much more extensive treatment in my forthcoming *Internal Dialectics: The Moral Psychology of Cultural Identity* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

3. This charge of statist imposition against Nehru's vision is made very explicitly by Nandy, Madan and the others cited in Footnote 1.

4. I do not intend this remark to be in the spirit of recent works written in defence of Jinnah against Congress caricature, useful as that project might be. See footnote 6 for the reason why.

5. By using the term 'archimedean' as a description of Nehruvian secularism I mean for it to echo 'Archimedes' boast that he could move the universe if he were only given some position outside it. Thus my point that the Nehruvian secular ideal stood outside or *external* to the arena of substantive political commitments and did not emerge from a process of genuine negotiation and dialogue between these commitments. For this latter kind of secularism which emerges from an *internal* dialectic between communities, I use the labels 'emergent' or 'substantive' secularism in the text below.

6. One of the things that the longer project mentioned in footnote 2, of which this paper is a part, does is look much harder and longer at this argument, particularly on the claims of the Congress that its Muslim leaders were representatives of the Muslim community in a sense that amounted to the community having negotiating status: This is a very controversial and troublesome claim and needs a careful historical look at the role of Azad and others in Congress politics. It is one of the fundamental inadequacies of (the otherwise very useful) recent defences of Jinnah against Congress caricature that they do not look at this issue thoroughly enough, nor demonstrate why the position of Congress Muslim leaders on the shape and direction of the nationalist movement was not superior to his. To demonstrate it would precisely require an assessment of this argument relying on this problematic idea of 'implicit negotiation' within the 'composite' Congress party.

7. This point is generalizable to a number of anti-colonial national movements and post-colonial parties in other parts of the world with multi-communal and multi-tribal societies, as the African National Congress is discovering.

8. There is scope for misunderstanding here. I have no *general* scepticism against the qualifier 'tacit' or 'implicit' attaching to some theoretical and explanatory notion. I have no doubt that in history and social theory as elsewhere, such qualifiers have an important role to play in our understanding of various theoretical phenomena. To take one example somewhat far a field from our present concerns, Chomsky's notion of 'tacit syntactic knowledge' has a very powerful explanatory role in generative grammar. But that role is so secure only because the idea of tacit syntactic knowledge, as Chomsky demonstrates, explains so much of the observable linguistic performance of individual speakers. That sort of demonstration is precisely what is not forthcoming for the idea of 'tacit' negotiation which the argument I am criticizing invokes.

THE POLITICS OF SECULARISM AND THE RECOVERY OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

By

Ashis Nandy

I

Faith, Ideology and the Self

A significant aspect of the post-colonial structures of knowledge in the third world is a peculiar form of imperialism of categories. Under such imperialism, a conceptual domain is sometimes hegemonized by a concept produced and honed in the West, hegemonized so effectively that the original domain vanishes from our awareness. Intellect and intelligence become IQ, the oral cultures become the cultures of the non-literate or the uneducated, the oppressed become the proletariat, social change becomes development. After a while, people begin to forget that IQ is only a crude measure of intelligence and some day someone else may think up another kind of index to assess the same thing; that social change did not begin with development nor will it stop once the idea of development dies a natural or unnatural death.

In the following pages, I seek to provide a political preface to the recovery of a well-known domain of public concern in South Asia, ethnic and especially religious tolerance, from the hegemonic language of secularism popularized by the westernized intellectuals and middle classes in this part of the world. This language, whatever may have been its positive contributions to humane governance and to religious tolerance earlier, has increasingly become a cover for the complicity of the modern intellectuals and the modernizing middle classes of South Asia in the new forms of religious violence that have entered the Asian scene. These are the forms in which the state, the media and the ideologies of national security, development and modernity propagated by the modern intelligentsia and the middle classes play crucial roles.

To provide the political preface I have promised, I shall have to first describe four trends which have become clearly visible in South Asia during this century but particularly after the Second World War.

The first and the most important of these trends is that each religion in our part of the world has been split into two: faith and ideology. Both are inappropriate terms but I give them, in this paper, specific private meanings to serve my purpose. By faith I mean religion as a way of life, a tradition which is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural. I say 'definitionally' because, unless a religion is geographically and culturally confined to a small area, religion as a way of life has to in effect turn into a confederation of a number of ways of life, linked by a common faith having some theological space for heterogeneity.

By ideology I mean religion as a sub-national, national or cross-national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic interests. Such religions-as-ideologies usually get identified with one or more texts which, rather than the ways of life of the believers, then become the final identifiers of the pure forms of the religions. The texts help anchor the ideologies in something seemingly concrete and delimited and in effect provide a set of manageable operational definitions.

The two categories are not mutually exclusive; they are like two axes on which could be plotted the state of contemporary religions. One way of explaining the difference between the two is to conceive of ideology as something that, for individuals and people who believe in it, needs to be constantly protected and faith as something that the faithful usually expect to protect them. For a faith always includes a theory of transcendence and usually sanctions the experience of transcendence, whereas an ideology tends to bypass or fear theories and experiences of transcendence, except when they could be used for secular purposes.

The modern state always prefers to deal with religious ideologies rather than with faiths. It is wary of both forms of religion but it finds the ways of life more inchoate and, hence, unmanageable. Even though it is faith rather than ideology which has traditionally shown more pliability and catholicity. It is religion-as-faith which prompted 200,000 Indians to declare themselves as Mohammedan Hindus in the census of 1911; and it was the catholicity of faith which prompted Mole Salam Girasia Rajputs to traditionally have two names for every members of the community, one Hindu and one Muslim¹. It is religion-as-ideology on the other hand, which prompted a significant proportion of the Punjabi-speaking Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue, thus underlining the differences between Sikhism and Hinduism and sowing the seeds for the creation of a new minority. Likewise is religion-as-ideology which has provided a potent tool to the *Jarnat e Islami* to disown the traditional, plural forms of Islam in the Indian subcontinent and disjunct official religion from everyday life, to produce a pre-packaged Islam for Muslims uprooted and decultured by the process of engineered social change in the region.

Second, during the last two centuries or so, there has grown a tendency to view the older faiths of the region through the eyes of post-medieval European Christianity and its various off-shoots-such as the masculine Christianity associated with nineteenth-century missionaries like Joshua Marshman and William Carey in South Asia or its mirror image in the orthodox modernism vended by the likes of Frederich Engels and Thomas Huxley. Because this particular Eurocentric way of looking at faiths gradually came to be associated with the dominant culture of the colonial states in the region, it subsumes under it a set of clear polarities: centre versus periphery, true faith versus its distortions, civil versus primordial, and great traditions versus local cultures.

It is a part of the same story that in each of the dyads, the second category is set up to lose. It is also a part of the same story that, once the colonial concept of state was internalized by the societies of the region through the nationalist ideology, in turn heavily influenced by the western theories of state and statecraft,² the nascent nation-states of the region took upon themselves the same civilizing mission that the colonial states had once taken upon themselves vis-a-vis the ancient faiths of the subcontinent.

Third, the idea of secularism, an import from nineteenth century Europe into South Asia, has acquired immense potency in the middle-class cultures and state sectors of

¹ Shamoan T. Lokhandwala, 'Indian Islam: Composite Culture and Integration', *New Quest*, March-April 1985, (50), pp. 87-101

² For instance, Partha Chatterjee, *National Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

South Asia, thanks to its connection with and response to religion-as- ideology. Secularism has little to say about cultures—it is definitionally ethnophobic and frequently ethnocidal, unless of course cultures and those living by cultures are willing to show total subservience to the modern nation-state and become ornament or adjuncts to modern living—and the orthodox secularists have no clue to the way a religion can link up different faiths or ways of life according to its own configurative principles.

To such secularists, religion is an ideology in opposition to the ideology of modern statecraft and, therefore, needs to be contained. They feel even more uncomfortable with religion-as-a-faith claiming to have its own principles of tolerance and intolerance, for that claim denies the state and the middle- class ideologues of the state the right to be the ultimate reservoir of sanity and the ultimate arbiter among different religions and communities.³ This denial is particularly galling to those who see the clash between two faiths merely as a clash of socio-economic interests, not as a simultaneous clash between conflicting interests and a philosophical encounter between two metaphysics. The westernized middle classes and literati of South Asia love to see all such differences as liabilities and as sources of ethnic violence.

Fourth, the imported idea of secularism has become increasingly incompatible and, as it were, uncomfortable with the somewhat fluid definitions of the self with which many South Asian cultures live.⁴ Such a self, which can be conceptually viewed as a configuration of selves, simultaneously shapes, invokes and reflects the configurative principles of religions-as-faiths. It also happens to be a negation of the modern concept of selfhood acquired partly from the Enlightenment West and partly from a rediscovery of previously recessive elements in Indian traditions. Religion-as-ideology, working with the concept of well-bounded, mutually exclusive religious identities, on the other hand, is more compatible with and analogous to the definition of the self as a well-bounded, individuated entity clearly separable from the non-self. Such individuation is taking place in South Asian societies at a fast pace and, to that extent, more exclusive definitions of the self, too, are emerging in these societies as a byproduct of secularization.⁵

A more fluid definition of the self is not merely more compatible with religion-as-faith, it also has—and depends more upon—a distinctive set of the nonselves and anti-selves (to coin a neologism analogous to anti-heroes). At one plane, these anti- selves are similar to what Carl Rogers used to call, infelicitously, the ‘not-me—and some

³ Jyoti Ananthu has drawn my attention to the inadequacy of the term ‘tolerance’, used more than once in this paper, because it itself is a product of the worldview. She gives the example of Kakasaheb Kalelkar, distinguished fighter and Gandhian, who used to talk of *samanvaya* (crudely syncretism), which cannot be based only on tolerance. Trilokinath Madan (‘Secularism in Its Place’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 1987, 46(4), pp.747-59.) has used ‘understanding’ which seems less demanding than Kalelkar’s term. I reluctantly retain the expression ‘tolerance’ because it presumes least from the citizen by way of knowledge and empathy.

⁴ Though I am speaking here cultural selfhood, this description is compatible with psychoanalytic studies of self and separation, particularly boundaries, in India. For a recent example, see Alan Roland, ‘Psychoanalysis Indian and Japan: Toward a Comparative Psychoanalysis’, *The American of Psychoanalysis*, 1991, 51(1), pp. 1-10.

⁵ Cf. Donald F. Miller, ‘Five Theses on the Question of Religion in India Today: A Response to Ashis Nandy’s “An Anti-Secularist Manifesto”’, paper presented at the Conference on ‘What’s Happening to India?’, Melbourne, December 4-7, 1986.

others call rejected selves At another plane, they, the anti-selves, are counterpoints without which the self just cannot be defined in the major cultures of this part of the world. It is the self in conjunction with its anti- selves and its distinctive concept of the non-self which define the domain of the self. Religion-as-faith is more compatible with such a complex self-definition; secularism has no inkling of this distinct, though certainly not unique, form of self- definition in South Asia. This is because secularism is, as T.N. Madan puts it, a gift of Christianity, by which he presumably means a gift of post-medieval, European Christianity.

It is in the context of these four processes that I shall now discuss the scope and limits of the ideology of secularism in India and its relationship with the new forms of ethnic violence we have been witnessing.

II The Fate of Secularism

I must admit at this point that I am not a secularist. In fact, I can be called an anti-secularist. I say this with some trepidation because in the company in which I move, this is not a fashionable position to take. Fortunately, such is the pull of the ideology of secularism in India today that recently, when I wrote an anti-secularist manifesto, many interpreted the article to be a hidden homage to secularism.

I call myself an anti-secularist because I feel that the ideology and politics of secularism have more or less exhausted their possibilities. And we may now have to work with a different conceptual frame which is already vaguely visible at the borders of Indian political culture.

When I say that the ideology and politics of secularism have exhausted themselves, I have in mind the standard English meaning of the word 'secularism'. As we know, there are two meanings of the word current in modern and semi-modern India and, for that matter, in the whole of this subcontinent. One of the two meanings you can easily find out if you consult any standard dictionary. But you will have difficulty finding the other, for it is a non-standard, local meaning which, many like to believe, is typically and distinctively Indian or South Asian. (As we shall see below, it also has a western tail, but that tail is now increasingly vestigial.)

The first meaning becomes clear when people talk of secular trends in history or economics, or when they speak of secularising, the state. The word 'secularism' has been used in this sense in the West for more than 300 years. This secularism chalks out an area in public life where religion is not admitted. One can have religion in one's private life one can be a good Hindu or a good Muslim within one's home or at one's place of worship. But when one enters public life, one is expected to leave one's faith behind. This ideology of secularism is associated with slogans like 'we are Indians first, Hindus second' or 'we are Indians first, then Sikhs'. Implicit in the ideology is the belief that managing the public realm is a science which is essentially universal, that religion, to the extent it is opposed to the Baconian world-image of science, is an open or potential threat to any modern polity.

In contrast, the non-western meaning of secularism revolves around equal respect for all religions. This is the way it is usually put by public figures. Less crudely stated, it implies that while the public life may or may not be kept free of religion, it must have space for a continuous dialogue among religious traditions and between the religious

and the secular—that, in the ultimate analysis, each major faith in the region includes *within* it an in-house version of the other faiths both as an internal criticism and as a reminder of the diversity of the theory of transcendence.

Recently, Au Akhtar Khan has drawn attention to the fact that George Jacob Holyoake, who coined the word secularism in 1850, advocated a secularism accommodative of religion, a secularism which would moreover emphasize diversities and co-existence in the matter of faith. His contemporary, Joseph Bradlaugh, on the other hand, believed in a secularism which rejected religion and made science its deity.⁶ Most non-modern Indians (that is Indians who would have reduced the late Professor Max Weber to tears), pushed around by the political and cultural forces unleashed by colonialism still operating in the Indian society, have unwittingly opted for the accommodative and pluralist meaning, while India's westernized intellectuals have consciously opted for the abolition of religion from the public sphere.

In other words, the accommodative meaning is more compatible with the meaning a majority of Indians, independently of Bradlaugh, have given to the word 'secularism'. This meaning has always disconcerted the country's westernized intellectuals. They have seen such people's secularism as an adulterated one and as compromising true secularism. This despite the fact that the ultimate symbol of religious tolerance for the modern Indian, Gandhi, obviously had this adulterated meaning in mind on the few occasions when he seemed to plead for secularism. This is clear from his notorious claim that those who thought that religion and politics could be kept separate understood neither religion nor politics.

The saving grace in all this is that, while the scientific, rational meaning of secularism has dominated India's middle-class public consciousness, the Indian people and, till recently, most practising Indian politicians have depended on the accommodative meaning. The danger is that the first meaning is supported by the accelerating process of modernization in India. As a result now, there is a clearer fit between the declared ideology of the modern Indian nation-state and the secularism that fears religions and ethnicities. Sociologist Imtiaz Ahmed euphemistically calls this fearful, nervous secularism the new liberalism of the Indian elites.

Associated with this—what then the South Asians perceive as the more scientific western meaning of secularism—is a hidden political hierarchy. I have spelt out this hierarchy previously elsewhere but I shall nevertheless have to restate it to make the rest of my argument. This hierarchy makes a four-fold classification of the political actors in the subcontinent.

At the top of the hierarchy are those who are believers neither in public nor in private. They are supposed to be scientific and rational, and they are expected to ultimately not only rule this society but also dominate its political culture. An obvious example is Jawaharlal Nehru. Though we are now told, with a great deal of embarrassment, that he believed in astrology and *tantra*, Nehru rightfully belongs to this rung because he always made the modern Indians a little ashamed of their religious beliefs and ethnic origins, and convinced them that he himself had the courage and the rationality to neither believe in private nor in public. By common consent of the Indian middle classes, Nehru provided a perfect role model for the twentieth-century citizens of the

⁶ Imtiaz Ahmed, 'Muslims and Boycott Call: Political Realities Ignored', *The Times of India*, 14 January 1987.

flawed cultural reality called India. It is the Nehruvian model which informs the following charming letter, written last year by a distinguished former Ambassador, to the editor of India's best-known national daily;

M.V. Kamath asks in his article 'Where do we find the India? My dear friend and colleague, the late Ambassador M.R.A. Beg, often used to say: 'Don't you think, old boy, that the only Indians are we wogs [Westernized Oriental Gentlemen]?' However quaint it may have sounded 30 years ago, the validity of this statement has increasingly become apparent over the years.⁷

On the second rung of the ladder are those who choose not to appear as believers in public despite being devout believers in private. I can think of no better example of the type than Indira Gandhi. She was a genuine non-believer in her public life (she after all died in the hands of her own Sikh guards, rather than accept the advice of her security officers to change the guards) but in private she was a devout Hindu who had to make her seventy-one—or was it sixty-nine?—pilgrimages. Both the selves of Indira Gandhi were genuine and together they represented a sizeable portion of the Indian middle classes. (A number of rulers in this part of the world fit this category—from Ayub Khan to Lal Bahadur Shastri to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Though the westernized literati in the South Asian societies •have never cared much for this model of religious and ethnic tolerance, they have been usually willing to accept the model as a reasonable compromise with the 'underdeveloped' cultures of South Asia.)

On the third rung are those who are believers in public but do not believe in private. This may at first seem an odd category, but one or two examples will make clear its meaning and also partially explain why this category includes problematic men and women. To me the two most illustrious examples of genre from our part of the world are Mohammed Au Jinnah who was an agnostic in private life but took up the cause of Islam successfully in public, and D.V. Savarkar who was an atheist in private life but declared Hinduism as his political ideology. More recently when Bhimrao Ambedkar converted to Buddhism, he probably entered this category from the first.

Such persons can sometimes be dangerous because to them religion is a political tool and a means of fighting one's own and one's community's sense of cultural inadequacy. Religion to them is not a matter of piety. Their private denial of belief only puts the secularist off-guard who cannot fathom the seriousness with which the Jinnahs and the Savarkars take religion as a political instrument. On the other hand, their public faith puts the faithful off-guard because the latter never discerns the contempt in which the heroes hold the common run of the faithful. Often these heroes invoke the classical versions of their faiths to underplay, marginalize or even delegitimize the existing ways of life associated with their faiths. The goal of those holding such an instrumental view of religion has always been to homogenize their co-believers into proper political formations and, for that reason, to eliminate those parts of religion which smack of folkways and which threaten to legitimize diversities, inter-faith dialogue and theological polycentrism.

At the bottom of the hierarchy are those who are believers in private as well as in public. The best and most notorious example is that of Gandhi who openly believed both in private and in public, and gave his belief spectacular play in politics. This category has its strengths and weaknesses. One may say that exactly as the category

⁷ Gurbachan Singh, 'Where's the Indian?' *The Times of India*, 21 September, 1986.

manifests its strength in someone like Gandhi, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and Maulana Bhasani, it shows its weakness in others like Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran or Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in the Punjab. The category can even throw up grand eccentrics. Chandhuri Rehmat Au fifty years ago used to stand on Fridays outside the King's College gate at Cambridge and chant like a street hawker, 'come and buy Pakistan—my earth-shaking pamphlet'.⁸

The four categories are not neat and in real life they rarely come in their pure forms. Often the same person can move from one to other. Thus, Rahi Masoom Raja, being a scriptwriter for commercial Hindi Films and being at home with spectacular changes of heart, comfortably oscillates between the first two categories.

This Babari Masjid and Ram Janambhoomi temple should be demolished... We as Indians are not interested in Babari Masjid, Ram Janambhoomi as secular people we must crush the religious fanatics.⁹

Only ten months earlier Raja had, with as much passion, said:

I, Rahi Massom Raja son of the late Mr. Syed Bashir Hasan Abidi, a Muslim and one of the direct descendents of the Prophet of Islam, hereby condemn Mr. Z.A. Ansari for his un-Islamic and anti-Muslim speeches in Parliament. The Quran nowhere says that a Muslim should have four wives.¹⁰

For the moment I shall not go into such issues. All I shall add is that in India, we have been always slightly embarrassed about this modern classification or ordering in our political life, for we know that the Father of the Nation does not fare very well when the classification is applied to him.

Fortunately for some modern Indians, the embarrassment has been resolved by the fact that this classification is not working well today. It is not working well because it has led neither to the elimination of religion and ethnicity from politics nor to greater religious and ethnic tolerance. This is not the case only with us; this is the case with every society which has been put to the Indians, some time or other, as an ideal secular society.

Thus, problems of ethnicity and secularization haunt today not merely some of the capitals of the world, Washington, Bonn, Paris and Moscow, they even haunt the country which the older South Asians have been trained to view as remarkably free from the divisiveness of ethnicity and religions. For instance, for some hundred and fifty years the Indians have been told that one of the reasons Britain dominated India and one of the reasons why the Indians were colonized was that they were not secular, whereas Britain was. That was why the Indians did not know how to live together, whereas Britain was a world power, perfectly integrated and fired by the true spirit of secular nationalism. Now we find that after nearly three hundred years of secularism, the Irish, the Scots and the Welsh together are creating as many problems for Britain as some of the religions or regions are creating for the Indians.

⁸ Mulk Raj Anand, New Light on Iqbal, *Indian Express*, 22 September 1985.

⁹ Rahi Massom Raja, in 'How to Resolve the Babari Masjid—Ram Janrnabhoomi Dispute', *Sunday Observer*, 18 January 1987.

¹⁰ Rahi Massom Raja, 'In Favour of Change' (letter to the editor), *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 16 March 1986.

Why is the old ideology of secularism not working in India? There are many reasons for this; I shall mention only a few, confining myself specifically to the problem of religion as it has got intertwined with the political process in the country.

First, in the early years of Independence, when the national elite was small and a large section of it had face-to-face contacts, one we could screen people entering public life, specially the upper levels of the public services and high politics, for their commitment to secularism. Thanks to the growth of democratic participation in politics—India has gone through ten general elections and innumerable local and state elections—such screening is no longer possible. We can no longer make sure that those who reach the highest levels of army, police, bureaucracy or politics believe in old-style secular politics.

To give one example, at the time of writing, two ministers of the central cabinet in India and a number of high-ups in the ruling party have been accused of not only encouraging, organizing and running a communal riot, but also of protecting the guilty and publicly threatening civil rights workers engaged in relief works. One chief minister was recently accused of importing rioters from another state on payment of professional fees to precipitate a communal riot as an antidote to violent inter-caste conflicts. Another organized a riot three years ago so that they could impose a curfew in the state capital to stop his political opponents from demonstrating their strength in the legislation.

Such instances would have been unthinkable only ten years ago. They have become thinkable today because India's ultra-elites can no longer informally screen decision-makers the way they once used to; political participation in the country is growing, and the country's political institutions, particularly the main parties that increasingly look like electoral machines, are under too much of a strain to allow such screening. Religion has entered the public life but through the backdoor.

Second, it has become more and more obvious to a large number of people that modernity is now no longer the ideology of a small minority; it is now the organizing principle of the dominant culture of politics. The idea that religions dominate India, that there is a handful of modern Indians fighting a rear-guard action against that domination, is no longer convincing to many modernizing Indians. These Indians see the society around them—and often their own children—leaving no scope for a compromise between the old and new and opting for a way of life that fundamentally negates the traditional concepts of a good life and a desirable society. These Indians now sense the 'irreversibility' of secularization and that they know that, even in this subcontinent, religion-as-faith is being pushed to the corner. Much of the fanaticism and violence associated with religion comes today from the sense of defeat of the believers, from their feelings of impotency, and from their free-floating anger and self-hatred while facing a world which is increasingly secular and desacralized.

Also, when the state makes a plea to a minority community to secularize or to confine itself to only secular politics, it in effect tells the community to 'soften' its faith, so that it can be more truly integrated in the nation-state. Usually it also simultaneously offers the community a gesture in the form of a tacit promise that it would force the majority also to ultimately dilute its faith. What the state implicitly says to a religious community, the intelligentsia often explicitly tells the individual, 'give up your faith, at least in public; others will do so too and together everyone will live in freedom from religious intolerance.' As it happens, however reasonable the solution may look

to the already secularized, it is hardly appealing to the faithful, to whom religion is an overall theory of life, including public life, and life does not seem worth living without a theory, however imperfect, of transcendence.

Third, while appealing to the believers to keep the public sphere free of religion, the modern nation-state has no means of ensuring that the ideologies of secularism, development and nationalism themselves do not begin to act as faiths intolerant of other faiths. That is, while the modern state builds up pressures on citizens to give up their faith in public, it guarantees no protection to them against the sufferings inflicted by the state itself in the name of its ideology. On the contrary, with the help of modern communications and the secular coercive power at its command, the state frequently uses its ideology to silence its non-conforming citizens. The role of such secular ideology in many societies today is no different from the crusading and inquisitorial role of religious ideologies. And in such societies, the citizens often have lesser protection against the ideology of the state than against religious ideologies or theocratic forces. Certainly in India, the ideas of nation-building, scientific growth, security, modernization and development have become parts of a left handed, quasi-religious practice—a new demonology, a *tantra* with a built-in code of violence.

In other words, to many Indians today, secularism comes as a part of a larger package consisting of a set of standardized ideological products and social processes—development, megascience and national security being some of the most prominent among them. This package often plays the same role visa-vis the people of the society—sanctioning or justifying violence against the weak and the dissenting—that the church, the ulema, the sangha, or the Brahmans played in earlier times. Finally, the proposition that the values derived from the secular ideology of the state would be a better guide to political action and to a less violent and richer political life (as compared to the values derived from the religious faiths) has become even more unconvincing to large parts of Indian society than it was a few decades ago. It has become increasingly clear that, as far as public morality goes, the culture of the Indian state has very little moral authority left; nor have the ideologies that tend to conceptualize the state as the pivot of guide a devout Hindu, Muslim or Sikh in his or her day-to-day public behaviour lies splintered around us. The deification of the state may go well with those Indians who have access to the state or thrive on its patronage, but pails on most decent citizens outside the charmed circle of the state sector. Obviously, we are at a point of time when old-style secularism can no longer pretend to guide moral or political action. All that the ideology of secularism can do now is to sanction the imposition of an imported language of politics on a traditional society that has an open polity. Let me spell this out.

In most post-colonial societies, when religion, politics or religion- and-politics is discussed, there is an invisible reference point. This reference point is the Western Man. Not the Western Man in reality or the Western Man of history, but the Western Man as the defeated civilizations of our times have construed him. This Western Man rules the world, it seems to the defeated, because of his superior understanding of the relationship between religion and politics. To cope with this success, every major religious community in the region has produced three responses—I should say two responses and one non-response. These responses have clear-cut relationships with the splitting of religions described at the beginning of this paper; actually, they derive from the split.

The first response—it is not easy to capture its spirit—is to model oneself on the Western Man. Here something more than mimicry or ‘imitation’ is involved. The response consists in a desperate attempt to capture, within one’s own self and culture, traits seen as the reasons for the West’s success on the world stage. Seemingly it is a liberal, synthesizing response and it is often justified as a universal response. For long it has been part of the political and cultural repertoire of modern India. A neat example is my friend, mathematician philosopher, Raojibhai C. Patel’s lament on the decline of the secular state in India, in which the analysis is almost entirely in terms of the western experience with religion and politics, and the conclusions are all about India.¹¹

The second response to the Western Man is that of the zealot. The zealot’s one goal is to somehow defeat the Western Man at his own game, the way Japan, for instance, has done in economic affairs. This is a crude way of describing a complex response but it does convey that what passes as fundamentalism, fanaticism or revivalism is often only another form of westernization becoming popular among the psychologically uprooted middle classes in South Asia. (A recent newspaper interview of nuclear physicist A. Q. Khan of Pakistan is a copy-book instance of the same response)¹²

In India at least, the heart of the response is the faith that what Japan has done in economy, one can do in the case of religion and politics. One can, for example, decontaminate Hinduism of its folk elements, turn it into a classical Vedantic faith, and then give it additional teeth with the help of western technology and secular statecraft, so that the Hindus can take on and ultimately defeat all their external and internal enemies, if necessary by liquidating all forms of ethnic plurality within Hinduism and India, to equal the Western Man as a new *ubermenschen*. The zealot judges the success or failure of a religion only by this criterion.

Historian Giri Deshinkar gives the example of a book on Mantrasastra written by one of the Sankaracharyas known for his zealotry which justifies the sacred book by claiming that its conclusions are supported by modern science, as if that made the text more sacred. The title page of the book—a commentary on an ancient text by a guru of the world, a *jagadguru*—also says that its author is a B.A., LLB. If this is the state of India e’lite’s cultural self-confidence, it is not surprising that newspapers carry every other month full-page advertisements by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi suggesting that Vedanta is true because quantum physics says so.

Such responses of the zealot are the ultimate admission of defeat. They constitute the cultural bed on which grows the revivalism of the defeated, the so-called fundamental movements in South Asia, based on the zealot’s instrumental concept of religion as an ideological principle for political mobilization and state formation. Modern scholarship sees zealotry as retrogression into primitivism and as pathology of traditions. On closer look it turns out to be a byproduct and a pathology of modernity. For instance, whatever the revivalist Hindu may seek to revive, it is not Hindusim. The pathetically comic, martial uniform of khaki shorts, which the RSS cadres have to wear, tell it all. Modelled on the uniform of the colonial police, the Khaki shorts not only identify the RSS as an illegitimate child of western colonialism, but as a direct

¹¹ Raojibhai C. Patel, ‘Building Secular State, Need to Subordinate Religion’, *The Times of India*, 17 September, 1986.

¹² ‘Pak a Few Steps from Bomb’, *The Times of India*, 29 January, 1987.

progeny of the semiticizing, Orientalist concepts of 'proper' religion and upon the modern western concepts of the nation-state, nationality and nationalism. Once such concepts of religion and state are imported into Hinduism, the inevitable happens. One begins to judge the everyday lifestyle of the Hindus, their diversity and heterogeneity negatively, usually with a clear touch of hostility and contempt. Likewise, there is nothing fundamentally Islamic about the fundamentalist Muslims who have to constantly try to disenfranchise the ordinary Muslims as peripheral and delegitimize the religious practices of the huge majority of Muslims the world over as un-Islamic. The same forces are operating within Sikhism and Sri Lankan Buddhism, too.

There is however a third response that comes usually from the non-modern majority of a society, though to the globalized middle-class intellectuals it may look like the response of a minority. This response does not keep religion separate from politics, but it does say that the traditional ways of life have, over the centuries, developed internal principles of tolerance and these principles must have a play in contemporary politics. This response affirms that religious communities in traditional societies have known how to live with each other. It is not modern India which has tolerated Judaism in India for nearly two thousand years, Christianity from before the time it went to Europe, and Zoroastrianism for more than twelve hundred years; it is traditional India which has shown such tolerance. That is why today, as India gets modernized, religious violence is increasing. In the earlier centuries, according to available records, inter-religious riots were rare and localized; even after Independence we used to have only one event of religious strife a week; now we have more than one incident a day. And more than ninety per cent of these riots begin in urban India and, within urban India, in and around the industrial area. Even now, Indian villages and small towns can take credit for having mostly avoided communal riots. (Thus we find that after ten years of bitterness since the mid- 1980s the Punjab villages are still free of riots; they have only seen assassinations by small gangs of terrorists and riot-like situations in the cities.) Obviously, somewhere and somehow, religious violence has something to do with the urban-Industrial vision of life and with the political processes the vision lets loose.

It is the awareness of this political process which has convinced a small but growing number of Indian political analysts that it is from non-Modern India, from the traditions and principles of religious tolerance encoded in the everyday life associated with the different faiths of India, that one will have to seek clues to the renewal of Indian political culture. This is a less difficult task than it at first seems. Let us not forget the great symbols of religious tolerance in India over the last 2000 years have not been modern, though the moderns have managed to hijack some of these symbols.

For example, when the modern Indians project the ideology of secularism into the past, to say that Emperor Ashoka was 'secular', they ignore that Ashoka was not exactly a secular ruler; he was a practising Buddhist even in his public life. He based his tolerance on Buddhism, not on secularism. Likewise, the other symbol of inter-religious amity in modern India, Emperor Akbar, derived his tolerance not from secularism but from Islam; he believed that tolerance was the message of Islam. And in this century, Gandhi derived his religious tolerance from Hinduism, not from secular politics.

Modern India has much to answer for. So have the cosmopolitan intellectuals in South Asia who have been insensitive to the traditions of inter-religious understanding in

their societies. These traditions may have become creaky but so is, it is now pretty obvious, the ideology of secularism itself. As we are finding out the hard way, the new forms of religious violence in this part of the world are becoming, paradoxically, increasingly secular. The anti-Sikh riots which took place in Delhi in November 1984, the anti-Muslim riots in Ahmedabad in 1985 during the anti-reservation stir, and the ‘anti-Hindu’ riots in Bangalore in 1986—they were associated not so much with religious hatred as with political cost-calculations and or economic greed.¹³ The same can be said about the riots at Moradabad, Bhiwandi and Hyderabad earlier. Zealotry has produced many riots, but secular politics, too, has now begun to produce its own version of ‘religious riots’. As for the victims of a riot, the fact that the riot might have been organized and led by persons motivated by political cost- calculations and not by religious bigotry can hardly be a solace.

The moral of the story is this: it is time to recognize that, instead of trying to build religious tolerance on the good faith or conscience of a small group of de-ethnicized, middle- class politicians, bureaucrats and intellectuals, a far more serious venture would be to explore the philosophy, the symbolism and the theology of tolerance in the faiths of the citizens and hope that the state systems in South Asia may learn something about religious tolerance from everyday Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Sikhism rather than wish that the ordinary Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs will learn tolerance from the various fashionable secular theories of statecraft.

III

The Heart of Darkness

The last point needs to be further clarified, and I shall try to provide this clarification by putting my arguments in a larger psychological and cultural frame. The accompanying table gives an outline of the frame. (Though the table also shows the dangers of clarifying a live issue by casting one’s argument in the language of the social sciences, for the argument, as it is summarized in the table, has already become, I can see, somewhat reified and opaque.)

The table admits that the western concept of secularism has played a crucial role in South Asian societies, it *has* worked as a check against some forms of ethnic intolerance and violence; it *has* contributed to humane governance at certain times and places.

| Sectors involved | Typical violence | Model of violence | Locus of ideology | Nature of motives | Effective counterideology |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Non-modern, peripheralize believers | Religious wars | Traditional sacrifice (of self or other) | Faith | Passion | Critiques of faith! agnosticism |
| Semi-modern zealots | Riots | Exorcism/search for parity | State | Passion and | Secularism |

¹³ A comparable example from outside India will be Sunil Bastian, ‘Political Economy of Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka: The July 1983 riots’, in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 286-304.

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|--|---|------------------------------|----------|--|
| | | | | interest | |
| Modern rationalists | Manufactured riots or assembly-line violence | Experimental science (vivisection) or industrial management | Bismarckian concept of state | Interest | Critiques of objectification and desacralization |

By the same token, however, the table also suggests, secularism cannot cope with many of the new fears and intolerance of religions and ethnicities, nor can it provide any protection against the new forms of violence which have come to be associated with such intolerance. Nor can secularism contain those who provide the major justifications for calculated pogroms and ethnocide in terms of the dominant ideology of the state.

These new forms of intolerance and violence are sustained by a different configuration of social and psychological forces. The rubrics in the table allude both to these forces as well as to the growing irrelevance of the broad models proposed by a number of important empirical, social and psychological studies done in the fifties and sixties—by those studying social distance in the manner of E. Bogardus, by Erich Fromm in his early writings, by Theodor Adorno and his associates working on the authoritarian personality, by Milton Rokeach and his followers exploring dogmatism, and by Bruno Bettelheim.¹⁴

The stereotyping, authoritarian submission, sado-masochism and the heavy use of the ego defences of projection, displacement and rationalization which went with authoritarianism and dogmatism, according to some of these studies, have not become irrelevant, as Sudhir Kakar shows one again in a recent paper.¹⁵ There are resolute demonologies that divide religious communities and endorse ethnic violence. But these demonologies have begun to play a less and less central role in such violence. They have become increasingly one of the psychological markers of those participating in the mobs involved in rioting or in pogroms, not of those planning, initiating or legitimizing mob-action.

This is another way of saying that the planners, instigators and legitimizers of religious and ethnic violence can now be identified as secular users of nonsecular forces or impulses in the society. There is very little continuity between their motivational structures and that of the street mobs which act out the wishes of the organizers of a riot. Only the mobs now represent, and that too partially, the violence produced by the predisposing factors describe in the social – science literature of the earlier decades. In the place of these factors have come a new set of personality traits and defence mechanisms, the most important of which are the more ‘primitive’ defences such as isolation and denial. These defences ensure, paradoxically, the primacy of cognitive factors in violence over the affective and the conative.

¹⁴ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1941); Bruno Bettelheim, *Surviving and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979); T.W. Adorno et al, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Norton, 1950); Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1960).

¹⁵ Sudhir Kakar, ‘Some Unconscious Aspects of Ethnic Violence in India’, in Das, *Mirrors of Violence*, PP.

The involvements of these newly important ego defences in human violence were also first noticed in the fifties and sixties. But those who drew attention to these defences did so in passing (for instance Erich from in one of his incarnations and Bruno Bettelheim) or from outside the ambit of empirical social sciences (for instance Joseph Conrad and Hannah Arendt).¹⁶ Moreover, these early analyses of the ‘new violence’ were primarily concerned with ‘extreme situations’ to use Bettelheim’s term, and not with the less-technologized and less extreme violence of religious feuds or riots. Even when the violence these analyses dealt with did not directly involve genocide and mass murders, they involved memories of genocide and mass murders, as in the well known book by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich.¹⁷

Only now have we become fully aware of the destructive potentials of the once-low-grade but now-persistent violence flowing from objectification, scientization and bureaucratic rationality. The reasons for this heightened awareness are obvious enough. As the modern nation-state system and the modern thought machine enter the interstices of even the most traditional societies, those in power or those who hope to be in power in these societies begin to view statecraft in fully secular, scientific, amoral and dispassionate terms.¹⁸ The modernist elites in such societies then begin to fear the divisiveness of minorities and the diversity which religious and ethnic plurality introduces into a nation-state. These elites then begin to see all religions and all forms of ethnicity as a hurdle to nation-building and state-formation and as a danger to the technology of state-craft and political management. The new nation-states in many societies tend to look at religion and ethnicity the way the nineteenth-century colonial powers looked at distant cultures which came under their domination- at best as ‘things’ to be studied, ‘engineered’, ghettoed, museumized or preserved in reservations; at worst as inferior cultures opposed to the principles of modern living and inconsistent with the game of modern politics, science and development, and therefore deservedly facing extinction. No wonder that the political cultures of South Asia have begun to produce a plethora of official social scientists who are the perfect analogues of the colonial anthropologists who once studied the ‘Hindoos’ and the ‘Mohammedans’ on behalf of their king and country.

This state of mind is the basic format of the internal colonialism which is at work today. The economic exploitation to which the epithet ‘internal colonialism’ is mechanically applied by radical economists is no more than a byproduct of the internal colonialism I am speaking about. This colonialism validate the proposal—which can be teased out of the works of a number of philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Herbert Marcuse—that the most extreme forms of violence in our times come not from faulty passions or human irrationality but from faulty ideologies and unrestrained instrumental rationality. Demonology is now for the mobs; secular rationality for those who organize, instigate or lead the mobs. Unless of course one

¹⁶ Erich Fromm, *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973); Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Viking, 1963); and *On Violence*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969); Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

¹⁷ Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour*. (New York: Grove, 1984)

¹⁸ That is, in terms of what, Tarique Banuri calls the impersonality postulate in his ‘Modernization and its Discontents: A Cultural Perspective on the Theories of Development’, in Frederique Apffel Marglin and Stephen Marglin (eds.) *Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture and Resistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 73-101. See also Ashis Nandy, ‘Science, Authoritarianism and Culture: On the Scope and Limits of Isolation Outside the Clinic’, *In Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 95-126.

conceptualizes modern statecraft itself as a left-handed, magical technology and as a new demonology. (Thanks to a few secretly taken photographs some of the participants in the violence, one image that has persisted in my mind from the days of the anti-Sikh pogrom at Delhi in 1984 is that of a scion of prominent family, which owns one of Delhi's most exclusive boutiques, directing with his golf club a gang of ill-clad arsonists. I suspect that the image has the potentials to serve as the metaphor for the new forms of social violence in modern India.)

As I have already said, this state-linked internal colonialism uses legitimating core concepts like national security, development, modern science and technology. Any society, for that matter any aggregate, which give unrestrained play or support, to these concepts gets automatically linked to the colonial structure of the present-day world and is doomed to promote violence and expropriation, particularly of the kind directed against the smaller minorities such as the tribals and the less numerous sects who can neither hit back against the state nor any more live away from the modern market.

Secularism has become a handy adjunct to this set of legitimating core concepts. It helps those swarming around the nation-state, either as elites or as counter-elites, to legitimize themselves as the sole arbiters among traditional communities, to claim for themselves a monopoly on religious and ethnic tolerance and on political rationality. To accept the ideology of secularism is to accept the ideologies of progress and modernity as the new justifications of domination, and the use of violence to sustain these ideologies as the new opiates of the masses.

Gandhi, an arch anti-secularist if we use the proper scientific meaning of the word 'secularist', claimed that his religion was his politics and his politics was his religion. He was not a cultural relativist and his rejection of the first principle of secularism—the separation of religion and politics—was not a political strategy meant to ensure his political survival in an uniquely multi-ethnic society like India. In fact, I have been told by sociologist Bhupinder Singh that Gandhi may have borrowed this anti-secular formulation from William this formulation is becoming the common response of those who have sensed the new form of man-made violence unleashed by post-seventeenth-century Europe in the name of the enlightenment values. These forms of violence, which have already taken a toll of about a hundred million human lives in this century, have come under closer critical scrutiny in recent decades mainly because they have come home to roost in the heart of Europe and North America, thanks to the Third Reich, the Gulag, the World Wars, and the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Many modern Indians who try to sell Gandhi as a secularist find his attitude to the separation of religion and politics highly embarrassing, if not positively painful. They like to see Gandhi as a hidden modernist who merely used a traditional religious idiom to mobilize his anti-secularism, which in true came from his unconditional rejection of modernity. And he never wavered in his stand. Note the following exchange between him and a correspondent of the *Tribune Chicago* in 1931:

“sir, twenty-three year ago you wrote a book Hind Swaraj, which stunned India and the rest of the world with its terrible onslaught on modern civilization. Have you changed mind about any of the thing you have said in it?”

'Not a bit. My ideas about the evils of western civilization still stand. If I republish the book tomorrow, I would scarcely change a word.'¹⁹

Religious tolerance outside the bounds of secularism is exactly what it says it is. It not only means tolerance of religious but also tolerance, outside the ideological grid of modernity. Gandhi used to say that he was a *sanatani*, an orthodox Hindu. It was as a *sanatani* Hindu that he claimed to be simultaneously a Muslim, A Sikh and a Christian and he ranted the same plural identity to those belonging to other faiths. Traditional Hinduism or rather *sanatan dharma* was the Hindu nationalists who killed him-that too after three unsuccessful attempts to kill him over the previous twenty years- did so in the name of secular statecraft. That secular statecraft now seeks to dominate the Indian political culture, sometimes in the name of Gandhi himself. Urban , westernized, middle-class, brahmanic, Hindu nationalists and Hindu modernists often flout Gandhi's tolerance as an indicator of Hindu catholicity but that religious tolerance, to be tolerance, must impute to other faiths the same spirit of tolerance. Whether a larger enough proportion of those belonging to the other borrowed this anti-secular formulation to religious traditions show *in practice and at a particular point of time and place* the same tolerance or not is a secondary matter. Because it is the imputation or presumption of tolerance in others, not its existence, which defines one's own tolerance in the Gandhian worldview and praxis.

That presumption must become the major source of tolerance for those who want to fight the new violence of our times, whether they are believers or not.

¹⁹ Quoted in T.S. Ananthu , going Beyond the Intellect: *A Gandhian Approach to Scientific Education* (New Delhi, , Gandhi peace Foundation, 1981), mimeo.,p.1