

Challenges and Opportunities to/of Indian Secularism in the Era of 1990-2010

Atif Iqbal*, Muhammad Ilyas Khan

PhD Candidate International Islamic University Islamabad

Received: June 15, 2017
Accepted: September 17, 2017

ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the opportunities provided and challenges posed to Indian secularism during the era (1990-2010). India being a pluralist society religiously, culturally and linguistically, it has, therefore, adopted secularism as a toll to keep intact this multi-featured society so that people might exercise their religious, cultural and social life with freedom. Resultantly, it provided economic and political stability and it has earned to herself the status among the world stable economies and democracies. However, in the presence of this fundamental principle of her constitution i.e. secularism, India has to face numerous challenges throughout its history. In comparison to its neighboring countries, the security situation of India is far better. However, the issue of communalism has fostered fear among the minorities. The other alarming challenge to Indian secularism is the emergence of and increasing popularity of the right wing political parties in the mainstream politics of the state. The BJP- the second popular party of the country- is one of the examples which emerged and achieved popularity among the masses under the philosophy of Hindutva

KEY WORDS: Religion, Secularism, Indian Secularism, Hindutva

INTRODUCTION

Secularism being an integral part of Indian Constitution has provided a lot of opportunities to the Indian people domestically as well as internationally in this era of globalization. Resultantly, India has gained the status of prestige unmatched by any other country of the developing world on account of this important characteristic of its constitution. India is a pluralist society religiously, culturally and linguistically, it has, therefore, adopted secularism as a toll to keep intact this multi-featured society so that people might exercise their religious, cultural and social life with freedom. Economic stability which India nowadays enjoys is the other feature which was made possible only because of secularism. It cannot be achieved until or unless society is dealt on equal footings. As a result, India has earned to herself the status among the world stable economies. However, in the presence of this fundamental principle of her constitution i.e. secularism, India has to face numerous challenges throughout its history. In comparison to its neighboring countries, the security situation of India is far better. However, the issue of communalism has fostered fear among the minorities. The other alarming challenge to Indian secularism is the emergence of and increasing popularity of the right wing political parties in the mainstream politics of the state. The BJP- the second popular party of the country- is one of the examples which emerged and achieved popularity among the masses under the philosophy of Hindutva. This chapter will highlight the challenges confronted to Indian secularism. Besides, it will also discuss the opportunities provided to India by its version of secularism.

Conceptualization of Key Concepts

Secularism and Politics

Secularism although is a western originated philosophy but today it has become a global one. It is regarded to be of plural nature. The main object of this philosophy is to marginalize the role of religion in politics. It can be defined as an anti-religious philosophy. Moreover, it seeks to eliminate the role of religion from politics. It is a complete ideology which has its own political doctrine with system of governance. Secularism can also be regarded as a moral philosophy that helps to understand the world we live in. Scientific methods are enough as it can counter completely the issues of mankind. Therefore, one could not make religion as a compulsory tool to operate the affairs of the world.¹

Defining secularism is a complicated and tough task as it is often mix with secularization but there is a thin line of difference between the two. Secularization is the term used for the process of modernization of the society. It is an evolutionary process in which slowly and steadily the religious contents are reduced from the state institutions. Sometimes, it also abolishes the religious role from political, educational and economic setup of the

¹Slavica Jakelić. *Secularism: A Bibliographic Essay*. ([www.iasc-culture.org/HHR/Archives/Fall2010/Jakelic lo.pdf](http://www.iasc-culture.org/HHR/Archives/Fall2010/Jakelic%20lo.pdf))

state or society. It is under the process of secularization that world has seen the changes in the shape of Protestants Reformation in Europe during the Middle Ages. The introduction of new political setup in the politics of the world in the form of Nation States which proved to be an absorbing agent for the successful launching of secularism along with these major changes that have brought new dimensions to the politics of world as the world moved from traditionalism towards modernism and liberalization. Secularization also brought major changes in the fields of education, law and domestic politics and diverted the attention or dependency on religion.²

Historically, the origin of secularism is linked to the emergence of battle between reason, progress and modernity against the religion in the West. Here, it is referred to the bloodiest thirty years of war between Protestants and Catholics which influenced the whole Europe. While some regard its emergence to the victory of science over religion. But it was the result of an evolutionary process as the stage for its launching was only made in the time that has been discussed above. The history of secularism started the time when the people started to believe in themselves that they can construct and reconstruct their destiny and also society according to the wishes of their own. They refused to put their destiny in the hands of any ecclesiastical authority or divine authority.³

The word Secularism was introduced in 1851 by an English philosopher George Jacob Holyoake but has links to ancient times which are clear from the writings of Ancient and Medieval Western political philosophers. The writings of Immanuel Kant suggested that there should be demarcation between what is moral and what is miraculous in religion. These were evident signs of his demand for eliminating religion or church authority from public life. Similarly, John Locke addressed this issue by openly referring to church as its relations are linked to spirituality that is why it should be eliminated from state affairs that are linked to worldly matters. Auguste Comte is another philosopher who emphasized on church-state separation. He demanded of the replacement of traditional religion with the new religion of humanity as the latter is an imaginary while the former is a reality. Similarly, Karl Marx prophesied about the disappearance of religion from politics at the end of history. These are all the historical proofs of secularism existed in one way or the other in the thoughts of ancient scholars.⁴ In political terms, secularism is often referred to the separation between politics and religion. More specifically, it is the separation between state and religious institutions. The important supplement for nurturing secularism is that of democracy which helps in achieving the goal to establish an open society under the principle of equality regardless of individual identity or background. It is the philosophy that provides its full support to the democratization of the world. However, all the secular countries from East to West and from North to South failed to observe the fundamental spirits of democracy as they fail to marginalize the role of religion and religious institutions in their respective states. At present, politically secularism is going through crisis either it be in the West or America, South Asia or Africa because world is going through the phase where religious fundamentalism is spreading in its full force. Besides, it is challenged by the modern concept of globalization because mass immigration has converted majority of the societies into a religiously plural one and to eliminate religion from their lives is a tough challenge to ask. So this rebirth of religion in the global politics is of great value. It felt its presence at regular intervals while posing serious challenges to secularism to maintain its popularity among the masses.⁵

Indian Secularism

Like all other secularism of the world, Indian secularism sticks to the basic concept of the philosophy that rejects religion to be made official of the state. It also pursues the policy to eliminate the role of religion in the politics. But as it is culturally, socially and politically different society from that of the Western societies, the architects of Indian secularism made various changes in their form of secularism to make it presentable before their own masses. There are various distinctive features of Indian secularism that make it unique from western form of secularism. Followings are some of its features that give it a unique status of its own.

Western Secularism believes in the complete divorce between the religion and politics and complete abolishment of the religious authority's role in politics. Indian secularism has no such features or intentions as the people of India are culturally and socially so much attached with their religion. The complete elimination of religion from their political life is, therefore, impossible. Moreover, Indian secularism is distinctive as religious matters are in the hands of religious authorities while public issues are dealt by the state.⁶

The second distinctive feature of Indian Secularism is that of the equality of all before state. India is the land of multiple religious identities. The unification of this diversity under the umbrella of Indian Nationalism is only possible when the religions of minorities are also placed on equal footing with the religion of the majority. However, any discrimination would result in weakening the concept of nationalism or unity. India has,

² Ibid

³ Micheal Allen Gillispie. *The Theological Origin of Modernity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, pp.30-48.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Winifred F Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, p.43.

⁶ Mani Shankar Aiyar, *India Destiny: Secularism or Hindutva?*, Islamabad: Pan Graphics (Pvt) Ltd, 2003, p.4.

therefore, no official religion. Besides, it preaches the concept that no one should be favored or harmed because of one's religious affiliation.⁷

India has uniform criminal law and most of the civil law and personal law are based according to one's religious beliefs. The critiques of Indian Secularism often criticize this feature of Indian Secularism as no secular country has such characteristic. It is also against the basic principles of secularism. Indian Secularists justified it on the ground that India is the land of diverse nature in respect of religion, culture, and social practices. So to unite them under uniform civil law is not possible. That is the reason why matters of personal law are based on the religious customs of one's respective religions. The critiques of this feature belong to the religion of the majority i.e. Hindus of the state. They also enjoy the same right but they criticize that no such right should be given to any religion of the minority.⁸ This is the most unique feature of Indian secularism which no other secular states have.

Along with religious freedom, religious authorities are fully independent in establishing their educational institutes for the preaching of their religious thoughts and transferring them to the generations to follow. The basic reason for this is that people should feel themselves religiously secure and the state has no intentions to develop an irreligious society. Constitutionally, India is a secular state, and, therefore, religions are free to exercise according to their doctrines and also free to expand.⁹

The concept of multi-secularism is also its unique feature as India is the land of multi-religions where religious freedom is ensured to every religion. So each religion has different perspective of secularism. This develops the concept of multi-secularism and various definitions of secularism.¹⁰

Secularism and Politics

Secularism although is a western originated philosophy but today it has become a global one. It is regarded to be of plural nature. The main object of this philosophy is to marginalize the role of religion in politics. It can be defined as an anti-religious philosophy. Moreover, it seeks to eliminate the role of religion from politics. It is a complete ideology which has its own political doctrine with system of governance. Secularism can also be regarded as a moral philosophy that helps to understand the world we live in. Scientific methods are enough as it can counter completely the issues of mankind. Therefore, one could not make religion as a compulsory tool to operate the affairs of the world.¹¹

Defining secularism is a complicated and tough task as it is often mixed with secularization but there is a thin line of difference between the two. Secularization is the term used for the process of modernization of the society. It is an evolutionary process in which slowly and steadily the religious contents are reduced from the state institutions. Sometimes, it also abolishes the religious role from political, educational and economic setup of the state or society. It is under the process of secularization that world has seen the changes in the shape of Protestants Reformation in Europe during the Middle Ages. The introduction of new political setup in the politics of the world in the form of Nation States which proved to be an absorbing agent for the successful launching of secularism along with these major changes that have brought new dimensions to the politics of world as the world moved from traditionalism towards modernism and liberalization. Secularization also brought major changes in the fields of education, law and domestic politics and diverted the attention or dependency on religion.¹²

Historically, the origin of secularism is linked to the emergence of battle between reason, progress and modernity against the religion in the West. Here, it is referred to the bloodiest thirty years of war between Protestants and Catholics which influenced the whole Europe. While some regard its emergence to the victory of science over religion. But it was the result of an evolutionary process as the stage for its launching was only made in the time that has been discussed above. The history of secularism started the time when the people started to believe in themselves that they can construct and reconstruct their destiny and also society according to the wishes of their own. They refused to put their destiny in the hands of any ecclesiastical authority or divine authority.¹³

The word Secularism was introduced in 1851 by an English philosopher George Jacob Holyoake but has links to ancient times which are clear from the writings of Ancient and Medieval Western political philosophers. The writings of Immanuel Kant suggested that there should be demarcation between what is moral and what is miraculous in religion. These were evident signs of his demand for eliminating religion or church authority from public life. Similarly, John Locke addressed this issue by openly referring to church as its relations are linked to spirituality that is why it should be eliminated from state affairs that are linked to worldly matters. Auguste Comte is another philosopher who emphasized on church-state separation. He demanded of the replacement of

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Rajeev Bhargava, *Political Secularism*, (www.queensu.ca/edg/Bhargava_Political_Secularism.pdf), accessed on 14 May 2011.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Slavica Jakelić, *Secularism: A Bibliographic Essay*. ([www.iasc-culture.org/HHR_Archives/Fall2010/Jakelic lo.pdf](http://www.iasc-culture.org/HHR_Archives/Fall2010/Jakelic%20lo.pdf))

¹² Ibid

¹³ Micheal Allen Gillispie. *The Theological Origin of Modernity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, pp.30-48.

traditional religion with the new religion of humanity as the latter is an imaginary while the former is a reality. Similarly, Karl Marx prophesied about the disappearance of religion from politics at the end of history. These are all the historical proofs of secularism existed in one way or the other in the thoughts of ancient scholars.¹⁴ In political terms, secularism is often referred to the separation between politics and religion. More specifically, it is the separation between state and religious institutions. The important supplement for nurturing secularism is that of democracy which helps in achieving the goal to establish an open society under the principle of equality regardless of individual identity or background. It is the philosophy that provides its full support to the democratization of the world. However, all the secular countries from East to West and from North to South failed to observe the fundamental spirits of democracy as they fail to marginalize the role of religion and religious institutions in their respective states. At present, politically secularism is going through crisis either it be in the West or America, South Asia or Africa because world is going through the phase where religious fundamentalism is spreading in its full force. Besides, it is challenged by the modern concept of globalization because mass immigration has converted majority of the societies into a religiously plural one and to eliminate religion from their lives is a tough challenge to ask. So this rebirth of religion in the global politics is of great value. It felt its presence at regular intervals while posing serious challenges to secularism to maintain its popularity among the masses.¹⁵

Challenges to Indian Secularism

Although India is declared as a secular state, yet there is gap between theory and practice as this fundamental principle of Indian constitution has to face a number of challenges. Communalism is one of the issues that has challenged its secular status on regular intervals. The other striking challenge secularism has to tackle is that of Hindu revivalism in Indian polity. This revivalism has given birth to the sense of insecurity amongst the minorities. This sense of insecurity is resulting in the shape of separatist movements of various kinds amongst the minorities that have threatened the integrity of the state. Moreover, the presence of religious political parties and a bulk of religious organizations in the politics of the state are putting serious questions on its secular status.¹⁶

Communalism

i) Communal Violence in the Punjab

The Punjab is ethnically a plural society mostly occupied by Sikhs and Punjabi speaking Hindus. After independence, Sikhs were the largest ethnic group of India who were deprived of their rights i.e. of having their own state (province) like other ethnic communities in India. This community not only shares religious unity but also linguistic commonalty. It generated serious problem in making the Punjab a Sikh majority state. Here the question arises what were the serious hurdles in the way of the establishment of a Sikh State. This state of affairs put the cherished philosophy of India i.e. secularism into question. However, it was in the second half of 1960s that the boundaries of the Punjab were redrawn. Thus the Punjab was made a Sikh dominant state after the separation of two states i.e. Haryana and Himanchal Pradesh. Resultantly, Sikhs stood in majority with 61% and Hindus with 37% of the total population of the Punjab. This move was regarded as a landmark bid to overcome the ethnic violence in Indian politics but it failed to bear any fruit.¹⁷

The majority of Sikh community was against this division. They regarded it unjust on economic and social grounds. They held that they were given deliberately under developed and the poorest region of the parent province i.e. the Punjab. However, the economic issue was tackled wisely by the state government under the shadow of Green Revolution.¹⁸ Thus, the efforts of the government in collaboration with the people transformed the fate of this poorest region of the country making it an economic hub. The real issue was of social insecurity. Resultantly, people thought of losing their cultural and traditional values. The community had fears that this state of feelings might not turn the youth towards militancy. However, this assumption proved correct in the emergence of Jarnail Singh Bhindrawala, the most audacious leader of Sikh militancy.¹⁹

The political scenario in the Punjab was also passing through transitional phase. The emergence of Akali Dal as a strong competitor to the Congress was felt hard by the ruling party i.e. the Congress while challenging its long hold over the years. The inclination of central government towards Hindus and anti-Sikh actions were the main reason of the popularity of Akali Dal. This biasness of the central government was responded with agitations. However, the government termed the agitation as civil disobedience. As a result, emergency was imposed when Indra Gandhi suspended Akali Dal government in the Punjab. To strengthen its position there, the Congress

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Winifred F Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, p.43.

¹⁶ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Muslims and India*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2006, pp.137-140

¹⁷ Erja Marjut Hanninan. *The Contest of Indian Secularism*, University of Helsinki, 2002, pp. 61-63.

¹⁸ Green Revolution is the introduction of new seed varieties in Indian Agriculture to Reduce hunger.

¹⁹ Charles Hauss, *Comparative Politics, Domestic Responses to Global Challenges*, Canada: Thomson Wadsworth Canada, 2008, p.359.

supported Jernail Singh Bhindrawala to counter its rivals. The act of imposing emergency was not hailed by the people and communal violence throughout the country broke out. All those acts of the Congress resulted in the loss of its popularity in the Punjab as well as nationwide.²⁰

J.S Bhindrawala turned against his master i.e. the Congress. It further worsened the whole scenario. In 1984, he, along with his supporters, took shelter in the Golden Temple, the most sacred temple of Sikhs, in Amritsar. The government launched crackdown against him. The Akali Dal leaders also joined him in the temple considering it to be a safe-haven. Under the "Operation Blue Star", the Temple was raided that resulted in the death of J.S Bhindrawala along with his supporters. However, the majority of the casualties were reported that of the innocent worshippers. On the other hand, the leaders of Akali Dal were arrested alive. Sikhs responded to this massacre and Indra Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguard in October the same year. As a result, the worst ever anti-Sikhs violence broke out throughout the country.

Indra Gandhi has been blamed for this sad episode of Indian history. Her approach towards this whole crisis was criticized. In the past, Nehru had resolved the Sikhs uprising by taking into confidence the true leaders of their community whereas Indra Gandhi deputed the politicians whom she could easily influence according to her whims.²¹ Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded his mother, followed the footsteps of his grandfather, Nehru, in his early days in order to paralyze that ethnic violence. With the arrival of elections, he changed his policy and sided with the Hindu community of the country specifically for votes. Besides, the Congress had already lost its popularity. Moreover, he did not want to weaken it further by supporting the Sikh minority at the cost of Hindu majority. His election campaign revolved around the assassination of his mother in order to win the sympathies of the masses. But like his mother, he also lost his life in the election campaign of 1991 at the hands of a Tamil suicide bomber whose community felt betrayed by his policy shift towards Tamils. However, Sikh militancy declined with each passing year and its leaders were targeted and killed invariably.²²

ii) Kashmir and Communalism

Kashmir has remained a disputed area since Independence. It received and is receiving the brunt of communalism since then. Before Independence of India, Kashmir was an independent princely administered state and never directly ruled by the British Empire under the Interpretation Act 1889. In the process of the partition of India, it has to decide its future. Like the whole of India, it also has the feature of plurality i.e. the home of multi-religions. In such a diverse society, the Muslims used to enjoy the status of majority. But her rulers decided the other way round and acceded in favor of India. This resulted in war between India and Pakistan and made the region a bone of contention on permanent basis between the two newly born states. The major portion of the land came under the control of India while one third of it had the sway of Pakistan. The division of the region remained disputed since then as both the states (India and Pakistan) level claims against its ownership. However, after 1971 war, both the states agreed to the de-facto division of the land i.e. that each should keep the land which is in its control.²³

The issue was reborn in 1980s it was the era in which India was not only facing communal violence among the Muslims but also among Sikh community. The liberation movement of 1980s generated mixed opinions among the masses. This time, the majority of the community was against joining of either state rather they sought to be independent. A fraction of people supported the stance of both the states. Pakistan fully supported this uprising and left no stone unturned to make it vibrant. As a result, it had to bear all the blames of India which blended Pakistan as the training camp for Kashmiri freedom fighters and gave this state sponsored terrorism the name of "Cross Border Terrorism". However, Pakistan regarded the support being provided to Kashmiri freedom fighters as assistance to freedom struggle. This whole turmoil provided great opportunity to religious parties to emerge. The tool, these parties used to attract people towards themselves, was of the region as well as religion.²⁴

In 1987, the situation worsened extremely and resulted in the imposition of emergency in the region. However, the central government immediately came to terms with Farooq Abdullah and his government was reinstated. These inconsistencies of the central government gave birth to questions in the minds of the people about the democratic setup of India. The rigging of 1987 elections worked as a catalyst to increase this disbelief. This was responded especially by the youth of middle class in the shape of ethnic mobilization. The magnitude of this uprising was so magnanimous that it was regarded by some of the authors as a "Youth Quake" in Kashmir.

The ethnic violence that started in 1989 exists even today with the worst death tolls in the region. The official death tolls observed by the government of India in Kashmir to date are thirty five thousand whereas the figures given by the government of Pakistan are double to that of India. This issue not only struck India but also has far-reaching impacts over the whole region making it volatile. The L.O.C, the de-facto border between India and Pakistan, is watched by either side with heavy military deployments. It is considered to be the major reason of

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Amarjit Singh, *The Reorganization of States in India: A Case Study of Punjab*. 1995, p.138.

²² Charles Hauss, *Comparative Politics, Domestic Responses to Global Challenges*, Canada: Thomson Wadsworth Canada, 2008, p.361.

²³ Erja Marjut Hanninan, *The Contest of Indian Secularism*, University of Helsinki, 2002, pp. 111-113.

²⁴ Charles Hauss, *Comparative Politics, Domestic Responses to Global Challenges*, Canada: Thomson Wadsworth Canada, 2008, p.361.

hostility between the two nations as none of them wants to surrender their stated position.²⁵ However, both the states maligned each other with derogatory labels. This blame game brought nothing except humiliation worldwide. The amateur attitude of both the states provides room to militancy and strength to its roots in the region in the name of jihad.²⁶

Politics of Hindutva

Hindutva, a political philosophy of fundamentalists of the Hindu community, is quite often believed as the state of mind of Hinduism. However, this belief is utterly faulty as both are entirely different from one another. Hinduism is a religion that comprehensively covers and addresses the social, religious as well as political affairs of its followers. However, Hindutva is a political philosophy initiated and followed by a particular fragment of the Hindu community. It was established during the era of colonialism when the upper caste of the Hindus i.e. Brahmins made the people conscious of that they had been aborigines of the land. Moreover, they made their notion presentable and acceptable before the masses under the slogan i.e. to develop India into Hindu Rashtra (Hindu State).²⁷

V.D Savakar was the founding father of the philosophy of Hindutva. He was deeply inspired by the works of B.G Tilak who, for the first time, exclaimed that Hindus should be united to revive their lost status in the region. The tool he adopted to achieve this goal was to hold the various festivals of Hinduism. He had realized that only one thing i.e. religion could unite this dispersed society. This laid down the foundation of Hindutva philosophy. The word, Hindutva, literally means "Hinduness". It was the name of a book let authored by V.D Savakar during the days of his exile in the British. The fundamental objective of the book was to amalgamate the disorganized and unaware community of Hindus especially the youth under the philosophy of the Hindu nationalism so that they might be an important factor in the regional politics.

Despite its majority in the region, the Hindu community failed to unify in one whole like the other religious communities of the world. It was so on account of its division into a number of castes. The leaders of the philosophy brought them together and indoctrinated in them the idea of nationalism and importance of the state in their lives. These fundamentalist leaders titled India in the name of Bahart Mata (Mother India). The other instrument they used to unify their community was to develop the concept of hate among them not only against the oppressors i.e. the British but also against all other religious communities of the region.²⁸

Hindutva that was actually originated against the British still made its own presence felt on regular intervals even after independence due to its strong roots among the masses. This was how it had put serious challenges to Indian secularism. Hindutva has its own organizational structure like any other organization. They virtually struggled for forty years in becoming the ruling majority of the state. BJP became the majority party in 1996 elections in the Lok Sabha. Besides, 1990s was also believed to be the era of religion overrode politics worldwide. BJP utilized this global change in its own favor. It mobilized the Hindu community of the country under the policy of unity through hate. This policy was applied to the Muslims' community of the State.²⁹

Five hundred years old site of the Babri Mosque, controversial since its formation, was targeted under the policy given in the foregoing paragraph. The BJP leaders injected the policy in the minds of religiously charged Hindus and declared the site to be the birth place of their God Ram. A large number of rallies marched towards the site of the Babri Mosque under the assumption that it was their religious duty to conquer the birth place of their God. Those rallies were led by the BJP leader L.K Advani. On 6th, December 1992, the Mosque was attacked by the Hindu fanatics and was damaged. This whole sad incident took place under the cover of central government and showed cold shoulder in the whole episode. As a result, the worst Hindu-Muslims communal violence started in the country. It is considered to be the worst incident in any secular state of the world.³⁰ Besides, it proved to be a successful launching pad for the BJP as people lost their faith in the role of secularist political forces which not only had been criticized locally but also faced international criticism. Resultantly, the rightist political forces under the philosophy of Hindutva captured the majority in 1996 elections. It made life hard for the secular forces to revive as they also mandated for the next term till 2004.³¹

To revitalize the fear among the minorities, Hindutva replicated its violent image exactly after a decade in 1992 incident. Gujarat, which is considered to be the laboratory for Hindu Jihad, was the place for Hindutva demonstration. The Gujarat Riots of 2002 started when Hindus, after returning from the celebrations held in

²⁵ Balraj Puri, *Kashmir towards Insurgency*. New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd, 1995, pp. 46-48.

²⁶ Ibid. 361-364.

²⁷ *What is the Nature of Hindutva Politics?* (<http://www.pluralistindia.com/book/illustrated-primier/chapter-10.pdf>), accessed on 20, June, 2010.

²⁸ P.M Kamath, *Secular Democracy in India: The Domestic and Regional Challenges*, in *Current Domestic Policy Challenges and Prospects in South Asia*, Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, 2005, p. 48

²⁹ Hindutva and the Politicization of Religious Identity in India, Issue 13, Feb 2009 (<http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>) accessed on 9, Dec 2011.

³⁰ Mani Shankar Aiyar, *India's Destiny: Secularism or Hindutva*, in *Current Domestic Policy Challenges and Prospects in South Asia*, Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, 2005, p.1

³¹ Ibid. 1-2

connection with the Babri mosque demolition, were burnt alive in the train. The Muslims were blamed for the incident. Thus, Muslims once again had to bear the violence of the Hindu fanatics. The incident was regarded as matchless in the history of violence in India as the state machinery was in the hands of BJP. Narendra Singh Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat, gave free hand to those fanatics and assisted in their violent actions. This resulted in the worst anti-minority activity in which more than fourteen hundred Muslims were brutally killed. It was also named as the first holocaust of 21st century. However, Hindu named it the start of Hindu Jihad exclusively adopted to wash out the fear of Muslims from the hearts of their community. The policy of Hindutva was not only against the Muslim community of the country but also targeted almost all the minorities of the country. Sikhs had experienced it in 1980s and Christians in 1990s. The reason behind this anti-minority policy of Hindutva is held that minorities are the only hurdle in the way to achieve its dream i.e. to develop India into Hindu State (Hindu Rashtra). However, the secularists and critiques of India Secularism consider Hindutva to be the hurdle in the way of Indian secularism.³²

Politics of Religious Parties and Organizations

The most dangerous threat to Indian secularism is regarded to be the presence and active participation of the rightwing political parties in its mainstream politics in the shape of BJP, Akali Dal, J.I (Hind), and J.K.L.F. This does not end here as there is also a long list of religious organizations that make their presence felt by actively participating in the mainstream politics of the country. While briefly highlighting their role in Indian polity, one can easily conclude how it created threats in the path of secularism.³³

On the basis of its origin and proficiency, R.S.S is dealt first in the list of discussion. It was founded by Dr K.B Hedegwar, who was inspired from B.G Tilak, as a Hindu scouting organization. He took it as a vehicle to fulfill his mission of life i.e. to train deeply downtrodden and confused youth of Hindu community and convert them into a united, active, and aggressive individuals. He adopted this aggressive approach because Hindus, throughout their history, had been ruled by the outsiders who were less in number as compared to them. He gathered youngsters of his community in the prime of their age and they were trained physically and emotionally motivated by the religious songs. Besides, uniformity in their uniform was maintained in order to implant unity among them.³⁴

These trained youngsters then used to perform their skills publically in various festivals of their community. Consequently, within no time, the organizations took its roots in the whole country, as each member had to pull at least five members with himself. Moreover, among the Hindus, affiliation with the organization was regarded as the matter of pride for the family. This organization also worked as a tool of socialization among the members. Founded as a scouting organization, one could hardly believe that it would become a mother institution for all religious organizations of the country.³⁵

After independence, RSS transformed into a vibrant organization having its membership spread all over the India. The assassination of M.K Gandhi paralyzed the activities of the organization (RSS) on the ground that the assassin, Nathuram Godse, belonged to it. However, the period was lasted not more than a year and a half. During that period, it continued its social work among Hindu community and supported those Hindus who suffered from the riots inflicted after Independence. By gaining the sympathies of the masses, its status was restored quickly. However, after independence, they have to remodel their role in the secular India as her secular status was the main bottle neck in the way of its growth. They coined the philosophy of Hindutva to legitimize their presence amongst the masses. Under this philosophy, their basic aim was to convert India into Hindu Rashtra (Hindu State). Although, they did not participate directly in the politics but it acted as an incubator for the leadership of the right wing. Among them, L.K Advani and A.B Vajpayee are the prominent personalities.³⁶ Beside, RSS, VHP also came to the limelight as a result of meeting held at Mumbai (formerly Bombay), in 1964 under the leadership of RSS. Despite the fact that it is the brainchild of RSS, it enjoys the status of an autonomous organization in theory but in practice it completely operates under the umbrella of RSS. The duties assigned to VHP were to promote the teachings of Hinduism and unify the community by observing the holy festivals. The recent addition to the list of Hindu religious organizations is that of BJP which was founded in 1984. Moreover, it is considered as the rebirth of Jansangh, the political wing of Hindutva, which adopted a new label in the name of BJP. The year 1996 is a memorable year for those organizations as BJP emerged as the majority party in the secular politics of India and re-elected in 1999 for the second term and enjoyed power till 2004.³⁷

³²P.M Kamath, *Secular Democracy in India: The Domestic and Regional Challenges*, in *Current Domestic Policy Challenges and Prospects in South Asia*, Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, 2005, p. 90.

³³Irfan, Engineer. *Hindutva and Indian Democracy*, in *Current Domestic Policy Challenges and Prospects in South Asia*, Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, 2005, pp. 44-47.

³⁴Ibid, 35-36.

³⁵J.A. Curran Jr, *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A Study of RSS*, New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1951, pp. 44-46.

³⁶Nancy Auer Falk, *Living Hinduism*, Canada: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006, pp. 282-283.

³⁷Charles Hauss, *Comparative Politics, Domestic Responses to Global Challenges*, Canada: Thomson Wadsworth Canada, 2008, p. 351.

Here the question arises why their presence is considered as a challenge to Indian secularism. In a way of explanation, there is nothing wrong in the presence of these political groups as secularism ensures social, political and religious freedom. However, the problem emerges when religion is politicized. This politicization of religion is contravene to secularism altogether. Their presence, therefore, in Indian polity is threat to secularism as they promote their own agenda i.e. religious obscurantism against the minorities. This approach makes them controversial because secularism never legitimizes the promotion of one's religion at the cost of others' religion. These anti-minorities activities paved the way for the emergence of militancy. The Sikhs militancy in the Punjab and the Muslims separatist movement in Kashmir are some of the worst examples.³⁸

Regional Challenges to Indian Secularism

India, geographically as well as population wise, is the largest country of South Asia. It shares its borders with almost all the countries of the region. But the uniqueness of its geography lies in the fact that none of its neighbors shares borders with each other. India is the land of multi religions. On account of its diversity in religions, it, maintains friendly relations with all these countries. Moreover, it is advantageous to develop a religious harmony in the country. These religious spillovers create the bond of interdependence among these nations. As the people of this part of the world have strong affiliation with their religions, it is considered the only tool to rule and command their social as well as political life.

This religious homogeneity of India makes the relations so fragile that any mishap in India possesses implications for its neighbors and vice versa because religion plays a magnetic role among its followers irrespective of the boundaries of their states. However, secularism points to a religion free society. It nurtures well in such a society. This scenario poses threat to Indian secularism as it possesses the largest share of the religious community of its neighbor. Besides, all its neighbors have their respective state religions. The secularism not only needs national environment but also regional atmosphere to grow up. Non-secular regional atmosphere, therefore, inflicts a serious challenge to the Indian secularism.³⁹

Another serious regional threat to the Indian secularism is of increased extremism in the region. Extremism has ancient link with the region as was found in the era of cold war when both the titans i.e. the USA and the USSR were engaged with one another on various grounds. Heavy losses were levied at South Asia during the USA and the USSR proxy war in Afghanistan in 1979. The USA regarded it an opportunity to take revenge of what it had lost in Vietnam at the hands of the USSR. The region was indoctrinated against the communist philosophy of the USSR. Moreover, it was taught to be assumed the philosophy as a system that preaches the message of a godless society. The Muslims from all over the world were gathered against communism in Afghanistan to safeguard their religion from the oppressor. This strategy of the USA was met with success and resulted in the disintegration of USSR.⁴⁰

The problems for India emerged after the end of cold war when Pakistan was the frontline state of the war and was considered as the most allied of all the allies. The USA, after achieving its goal, left the region without determining the future role of those holy warriors. Moreover, Pakistan did not deal appropriately with the remains of the war. Thus, Jihadi's were left on their own as they had no other skills except for what they had been trained. However, Kashmir, a disputed area between India and Pakistan, was a hot bed for such warriors. Resultantly, it received the bulk of them. Pakistan also provided them with safe passage to perform their activities in that region. Their activities resulted in the anti-minorities operations of Indian Army which caused disturbance in the region.⁴¹

This state of affairs not only posed threats to the Indian secularism but also increased hostility between the two largest states of the region. This hostility is, therefore, the major regional threat to Indian secularism. Moreover, Bangladesh is also moving towards confessional politics as J.I shares a strong coalition partnership with the government. The communal violence in Sri Lanka in the past was also linked with Indian interference. India suffered from losses when Rajiv Gandhi was blown up by a Tamil Lady Suicide Bomber during his election campaign in 1991. His policy shift towards Sri Lanka is determined to be the main reason of his killing as it was resented among the Tamil community of the land.⁴²

Opportunities of Indian Secularism

Like all other secular states, India is not an exception and has to cover a lot of distance to minimize the gap between theory and practice in her secular status. India- the most populous state- has a pluralist society which possesses the potential of being secular could not be overlooked. The secularism has provided India with an opportunity to develop her into a stable democracy and enjoy the status of a functional democracy. Besides, she

³⁸P.M Kamath, *Secular Democracy in India: The Domestic and Regional Challenges*, in *Current Domestic Policy Challenges and Prospects in South Asia*, Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, 2005, p. 35.

³⁹Ibid. 38

⁴⁰Ibid, p.39

⁴¹Charles Hauss, *Comparative Politics, Domestic Responses to Global Challenges*, Canada: Thomson Wadsworth Canada, 2008, p.361.

⁴²Ibid. 360-362

has also achieved remarkable milestones in economic field and maintained stable economic growth rate for years. Moreover, it is also the largest market for international investors and have a large community of over thirteen crore community of the middle class. Except the occurrence of some tragic incidents, India has utilized her diversity as a strengthening factor among her communities. The credit for all those achievements goes to her strong belief in secularism.

Democracy in India

The secularism has made it possible for India to remain a functional democracy since independence. There is no alternative to democracy there. She stands in sharp contrast to the regional states most of which have suffered from continuous military intervention and remained under the grip of dictatorship. On the other hand, Indian polity has no such tradition. Military generals could have differences with the political leadership but they could never resort to any adventurism. They have been confined to barracks through constitutional limitations. It is, therefore, safe like the USA or U.K to experience any military intervention.⁴³

Despite the fact that India has remained one party dominant polity, this feature was evaporated after the emergence of BJP. The only set back that democracy had ever received was when Indra Gandhi imposed emergency in the Punjab from 1975-77. Moreover, in the past, ethnic violence, off and on, struck India. The Sikh militancy in the Punjab, the issues of tribal people both in eastern and western parts, Assamese and Gorkhas of Western Bengal, and last but not the least, the separatist movement of Kashmir had been the worst examples of ethnic violence. All those sorry episodes were tackled and being tackled sagaciously by the democratic leadership of the country. The country had to bear the issue of communalism but it did not affect any demand for alternative to democracy and people had shown full faith in it.⁴⁴

Here the question arises how India has successfully launched their democratic setup in the presence of such challenging circumstances. Democracy needs two variables in order to flourish i.e. legitimacy and the effectiveness of the government. The Indian democracy fulfills both the variables. One can, therefore, conclude that its future is safe and promising. The Indian secularism adapted itself to the liberalist policy of the government. There is polarization in the society but the legitimacy of the government overcomes it efficiently and ensures safe future for the democracy in the country. Economic stability, although, has not addressed the major issues of the Janta so far but even then the people have faith in it as it is at least on the right track.⁴⁵

Democracy in India still has to cover a lot of distance to reach to its ideal form. It is an evolutionary phenomenon. It, therefore, needs time to develop. Despite being in infancy, it is regarded as the world's largest democracy in this age of globalization. However, people should take care while comparing it with the Western democracies such as the USA and U.K because these countries took centuries to have their ideal democratic setup. In short, India is a newly born state with multi-featured society which poses a multitude of challenges to its democratic setup but even then it has successfully maintained its position.⁴⁶

Economic Stability

Prior to 1980s, Indian economy used to be nationalized one. The basic purpose of a state economy is to reduce poverty and increase the growth rate of the country. This nationalized policy was regarded as the policy to pamper the majority (Hindus) and mostly the upper castes. This discrimination was felt by Rajiv Gandhi who had the experience of developed societies during his stay abroad. He, along with his new team, took a complete U-turn in the economic policy of the country and changed the policy of his predecessors being followed. Deeply influenced by the policy of liberalization, he made India an open market through the process of privatization that proved to be the turning point in the present economic status of the country. Although it did not achieve its desired results in the beginning, yet it got the popularity of the masses.⁴⁷

The policy of liberalization ensured the masses a secure future. It opened its account when the Punjab government supported the Green Revolution that changed the fate of the people. Technological development of India is also unmatched especially in the field of information technology i.e. software technology. Moreover, it has also achieved the place amongst the world seven nuclear states and has an advanced defence system. Although, economically, India did not achieve its milestones yet there are some positive signs of its improvements as it has occupied a large chunk of the middle class that is on increase with each passing year. The stable growth rate (6-7 %) of the country, since last two decades, has satisfied the Janta (people) as it has been put on the right track. On micro level, it has launched programs like IRDP which introduced the rural people to the modern technological trainings in the field of agriculture.⁴⁸

⁴³Robert. W Stern. *Democracy and Dictatorship In South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 76.

⁴⁴Ibid. 76-77

⁴⁵Charles Hauss, *Comparative Politics, Domestic Responses to Global Challenges*. Canada: Thomson Wadsworth Canada, 2008, p. 361.

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷Ibid. 361-362

⁴⁸*The Indian Economy Review 2010*, (<http://www.iipmthinktank.com>) accessed on 24, January 2011.

In the modern world, on account of its liberal economy, India has attracted a huge bulk of foreign investors who find their capital secured here. The credit for all this economic stability and boom goes to the visionary leadership of Rajiv Gandhi and his new team who gave a completely new outlook to the Indian economy. He threw away the close economic system and adopted the open economic setup in line with the principles and demands of the globalized and modern world. As a result, India is ranked amongst the world growing and stable economies as it has maintained its growth rate of 7% for more than a decade.⁴⁹

There are two men behind this economic boom of Indian economy i.e. Manmohan Singh and P. Chidambaram. It was on account of his contributions that the INC offered premiership to Manmohan Singh when it assumed power in the Lok Sabha. The liberalization of Indian economy performed wonders in the shape of foreign investment of \$4 billion in the 1990s it provided solid foundation to the economy of the state. The most benefitted industry from this entire economic boom was of the industry of Information Technology. It set milestones in the software sector of IT industry. As a result, it is ranked as one of the best in the IT industry of the world. The city of Bangalore is converted into the world largest IT city that generated jobs for two hundred thousand IT professionals.⁵⁰

International Prestige

As it is the home to one third of the world population, the 21st century is regarded as the century of Asia. The major actors, that would outshine the century, would have been noneother than India and China. The population of both the countries, if calculated together, is more than 2.5 billion. This makes them the center of gravity for the foreign investors. With the end of cold war, world moved towards globalization. Keeping in view the demand of the world, the leaders of India planned their strategy as to how they would make their presence felt at domestic as well as global level. As India moved one step ahead of her aim -to become a regional power, now she is thinking to take a leading role at the global level.⁵¹ It was Rajiv Gandhi who, along with his new team comprising of experienced politicians and technocrats like P.M Chidambaram and Manmohan Singh, adopted a completely new approach to the economic philosophy of his predecessors and made India an open economy. Prior to that, India used to be a closed economy with nationalized industries that failed to address the main issues of economy. India, after adopting an open economy and with the adoption of privatization, received a multitude of foreign investors who wanted to capture her market of huge consumers. As a result, India maintained her growth rate for more than a decade. The global importance of India was felt for two reasons. One was its strong democratic setup which earned her the title of the world largest democracy and the second one was its economic stability.⁵²

India's aim, to be an active international actor, has its roots since Independence. The first Prime Minister, Nehru prophesied that India, geographically and population wise being a large country with diverse nature and ancient history, had the full potential to become a prominent international actor. Immediately after Independence, the leaders of the country adopted both realists and idealists approach presenting India before the world as a soft power. It was evident during the era of cold war when the world was split into two blocks i.e. communism and capitalism. India, rather than joining any block, chose to be impartial in this clash of ideas. However, it became a leading figure in the NAM which exhibited her desire to be the world leader of the future and she did not want to spoil her relations with any of the world powerful states. It was the 1998 nuclear tests of India that attracted international attention towards her. Moreover, the sound foreign relations, strong political and democratic culture, and peaceful internal law and order situation earned her the label of being a responsible nuclear power.⁵³ Moreover, on economic front, the country still has to cover a lot of distance to be included in the ranks of developed countries as, at international level, India still is kept in the league of under-developed countries. However, its current track of economy is heading toward right direction while looking at its strong legal structure, democratic culture, booming information technology sector, banking system, highly skilled manpower, and peaceful atmosphere for foreign investors. This all would make her to be a world icon in future. But India has to deal with few regional powers (China and Japan) that have the capacity to become strong contenders to challenge its status in the region.⁵⁴

⁴⁹Charles Hauss, *Comparative Politics, Domestic Responses to Global Challenges*. Canada: Thomson Wadsworth Canada, 2008, p.362.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹Ummu Salma Bava, *India Role in Emerging World Order*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006, p.1.

⁵²*The Indian Economy Review 2010*, Quarterly Issue, Volume: (3), Issue 31, March 2010,(www.iipmthinktank.com), accessed on 24, January 2011.

⁵³Jacques E. C. Hymans, India between Transition: India between "Soft State" and "Soft Power" 2010 (<http://casi.ssc.upenn.edu/ii/hymans>), accessed on 24, January 2011.

⁵⁴Ummu Salma Bava, *India Role in Emerging World Order*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 2-3.

CONCLUSION

Secularism -a fundamental principle of Indian constitution- has to face various threats on regular intervals. Secularism is the philosophy that separates religion and politics and makes the religion as one's personal matter. The application of this theory of secularism has to go through thorny path in order to reach its final destination. The problems created in its path are related to the people attachment with their respective religions as they command their social, political and economic aspects of life. To separate religion from the politics is a daunting task India has to deal with after adopting a secular status. The continued anti-secular activities i.e. communalism, extremism of the majority, separatist movements, insecurity among minority and the presence of religious political parties and organizations, have posed internal as well as external challenges to Indian secularism.

Besides these serious challenges, secularism has provided India with a lot of opportunities. It has paved the way for the progress of the state in this globalized world. It has provided an opportunity to India to remain a functional democracy throughout her history and never allowed any undemocratic adventurism and has earned her the title of the world largest democracy. As it is said that economic prosperity leads towards democracy and vice versa, this proved to be correct in the case of India. Because of her stable democracy, her economy flourished to such an extent that for more than a decade she maintained her growth rate. It is on account of this secular nature that she has turned her diversity into unity. All these contributed towards her current international prestige among the major actors of international politics.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aiyar, Mani Shankar, *India's Destiny: Secularism or Hindutva?* In *Current Domestic Policy Challenges and Prospects in South Asia* Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, 2005
- Ali. (Engineer) Asghar, *Muslims and India*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2006.
- Allen Gillispie Micheal, *The Theological Origin of Modernity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Bava, Ummu, Salma, *India Role in Emerging World Order*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2005.
- Curran. J. A, *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A Study of RSS*, New York: Institute of Pacific Relations 1951.
- Falk, Nancy Auer, *Living Hinduism*. Canada: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006.
- Hauss, Charles. *Comparative Politics, Domestic Responses to Global Challenges*. Canada: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008.
- Hindutva and the Politicization of Religious Identity in India, Issue 13, Feb 2009 (<http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>)
- Irfan, Engineer. *Hindutva and Indian Democracy*, Current Domestic Policy Challenges and Prospects in South Asia Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, 2005.
- Jakelić Slavica, *Secularism: A Bibliographic Essay*. ([www.iasc-culture.org/HHR/Archives/Fall2010/Jakelic lo.pdf](http://www.iasc-culture.org/HHR/Archives/Fall2010/Jakelic%20lo.pdf))
- Kamath P.M, *Secular Democracy in India: The Domestic and Regional Challenges*. In *Current Domestic Policy Challenges and Prospects in South Asia* Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, 2005.
- Marjut, Hanninan Erja. *The Contest of Indian Secularism*. Helenski: University of Helenski, 2002
- Puri, Balraj. *Kashmir towards Insurgency*. New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd, 1995.
- Rajeev Bharqava, *Political Secularism*, (www.queensu.ca/edg/Bhargava_Political_Secularism.pdf)
- Singh Amarjit, *The Reorganization of States in India: A Case Study of Punjab*, 1995.
- Stern, W. Robert. *Democracy and dictatorship In South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- *The Indian Economy Review 2010*, (<http://www.iipmthinktank.com>)
- *What is the Nature of Hindutva Politics?* (<http://www.pluralistindia.com/book/illustrated-primer/chapter-10.pdf>)
- Winifred F Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.