

Unit 21

Religion and Politics

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Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- define the concept of religion and politics;
- describe some of the major approaches to the study of religion;
- explain the interrelationship between religion and politics in India historically; and
- outline the major aspects of religion and politics in contemporary India.

21.1 Introduction

In this paper the term religion is being used in the Weberian. It is emphasised that 'sacred' notions have always made their presence felt in the domain of the secular. Thus seen, religion is viewed as a form of orientation to the secular world in the sense that it is a source of knowledge, values and norms of a society. Religion thus viewed is an ideology, a system of thought, located in the domain of the sacred. Though pertaining to the 'other world' and often associated with the 'internal' and the 'spiritual domain' of the individual and the collectivity, it has to do with the individuals and collectivities existing in 'this world', in that it offers a way to negotiate life.

The definition of politics is not as complex as that of religion. It is generally accepted that politics is a set of activities deeply entrenched in 'this world,' the secular world. These activities are those which are geared towards the attainment, acquisition, maintenance and consolidation of power. Political activities also include those which use symbols and metaphors of the sacred domain to determine and gain ends that are not religious. These are directed towards creating distinct spaces for communities implicit in which is a definite striving to attain power. In this unit you will learn about the relation between religion and politics in societies. We begin by explaining the meaning of religion and politics before trying to understand their relationship.

21.2 Understanding Religion and Politics

Religion and politics are inseparable; they have always been intertwined in a complex way. According to Romila Thapar.

"...The relationship between religion and politics had complex dimensions in the past and cannot be explained away by a simple monocausal explanation that reduces everything to a minimalist religious motivation. Religion is a

private matter so long as it remains within the thoughts of a person. When these thoughts are expressed publicly and inspire public action such as building monuments for worship and organizing fellow believers into carrying out political and social functions, then religion ceases to be an exclusively personal matter. It is no longer a matter of faith since its formulation as an organization of believers has a bearing on the functioning of the society. Its religious identity incorporates these functions that are expressed through its institutions such as monasteries, *mathas*, temples, mosques, Khangahs churches, synagogues, *gurudwaras*. Their role has to be assessed not merely in terms of the religion with which they are associated, but also in the context of their functions as institutions of society..." (Thapar, 2004: 229-30).

How do we understand religion? Religion is understood in different ways by different people. Philosophers, theologians and sociologists have different perspectives to understand religion. However, sociologists have understood religion as primarily a social phenomenon. Every society has religious beliefs, rites and organization. Religion very often influences our understanding of everyday life. In many societies religion affects the way we relate to each other. Our religious beliefs often guide our social interaction. Religion can be a unifying factor in some societies. However, in some societies it can be a matter of conflict.

"Religion broadly refers to:

- a) experiences of human beings as a collectivity in all parts of the world.
- b) Relationships between human beings, probably in all walks of life, and
- c) To all facts of everyday human life, for example, education, politics, economy etc."

(Kennedy, M 1992 : pp. 9 in IGNOU, BDP elective Course, ESO-05 : Society and Religion, Block-1)

Therefore, it is very clear that religion is a social phenomena. It is related with politics, as mentioned earlier in an inextricable manner. Since, it is a social phenomena and part of the culture of society which we inherit, often we grow up being socialized into the religious beliefs, values and practices of our parents. It is another thing that after maturity we may reject this religion and take up another or simply not be part of any religion.

Religion as a phenomenon is very difficult to define, but central to the notion of religion is the idea of the 'sacred' as opposed to the 'secular' and the 'profane'. It is a "... particular class of phenomenon, a kind of knowledge, a varied form of activities in space and time and a typology of roles and persons..." (Madan, T.N. 1991:2).

We explore the relationship between religion and politics in four sections. The first section provides an overview of the various sociological and anthropological approaches to religion, and locates the perception of religion in this framework; the second section deals with the relationship between religion and politics in India historically; the third section describes the manifestations of this relationship in contemporary India in the form of communalism, rise of secularism and fundamentalism, religious nationalism, and the fourth section forms the conclusion.

21.3 Approaches to the study of religion

Study of religion as an important element of social life has been the focus of attention of several sociologists and social anthropologists. Here below is an overview of some of the major approaches to religion.

i) The Functional Approach

The basic assumptions of this approach is that parts of a society are linked to each other through its values and norms and that each part of the society fulfils a positive function for the maintenance of the total society. Religion furnishes the consensual and integrative framework for society. For Durkheim the 'sacred' was the most fundamental religious idea or phenomenon. According to him...

"A religion is an unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called church all those who adhere to them" (1965:62)

Important, from our perspective is (a) the aspect of 'things set apart' and (b) the idea of a moral community, which is an eminently collective thing (ibid: 63). What is 'set apart' is not just supernatural beings, but also persons with supernatural or magical powers, places (temples, mosques, churches), certain performances and events (such as births, deaths, marriages, eclipses etc). The term 'set apart' means that which is other than routine or ordinary.

The notion of the 'sacred' becomes sharper when contrasted with the 'profane' or the 'secular'. Durkheim emphasises that this is the very core of religious phenomena.

He says, ..."All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of things, real and ideal, of which men think into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words 'profane' and sacred (ibid: 52).

Durkheim was not interested in seeking the historical origins of religion but was concerned with the sociological causes for the existence of religion, which he found in the human need for social life. To him religion was a collective phenomenon, which arose from social interaction. He studied the Australian aborigines, agreeing with the prevailing scholarly opinion that aboriginal totemism was the simplest, 'the elementary' form of the religious life. He was of the opinion that if one succeeded in discovering the origin of totemic beliefs, it was possible to discover at the same time "...the causes leading to the rise of the religious sentiment in humanity..." (ibid: 195).

Presenting a detailed discussion of totemic gatherings among these aborigines, he located the roots of religious beliefs and practices in social interaction.

Durkheim concluded that 'the collective and anonymous force of the clan, the God of the clan, the totemic principle can therefore be nothing other than the clan itself (ibid: 236). Generalizing from the Australian case - the elementary form of the religious life - Durkheim came to consider society as the source and sustainer of religious sentiments and structures and, therefore, God, its members, creating among them 'the sensation of a perpetual dependence' (ibid: 237). Thus Durkheim's interpretation of religion derives religion from the very nature of social life.

Reflection and Action 21.01

You have just read about Durkheim's concept of religion and society. Talk to five members of your family/community about how they describe the essential elements of their religion and how it is practiced in everyday life.

Write a report of one page on "Perspective on Religion and Society in My Community." Compare your note with those of other students at your Study Center.

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown focused on the role of religion in the maintenance of social solidarity in his sociological analysis of ritual. He was influenced by W. Robertson Smith in his emphasis upon rituals rather than beliefs in the study of religion. He followed Durkheim closely, but narrowly. He along with others, such as Malinowski, of the British school of sociological functionalism was concerned with the question of how religion anywhere and at any time contributes to the maintenance of social solidarity According to him...

"An orderly social life amongst human beings depends upon the presence in the minds of the members of society of certain sentiments, which control the behaviour of the individual in relation to others. Rites can therefore be shown to have specific social functions, when...they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on which the constitution of society depends..."(1952:157).

E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1965) disagrees with Radcliffe Brown. His monograph on the Azande (1937) shows a shift in the explanation of supernatural phenomena from function to meaning. Witchcraft among the Azande was explained by him as a mode of causality for human misfortune. In his later work, 'Nuer Religion' (1956), the same shift from straightforward functionalism to the problem of meaning can be noticed, though he did not go into an explicit phenomenological analysis. He was close to Durkheim when he interpreted the Nuer religious thought and ritual in terms of social order. In the study of religious beliefs and practices in Gujarat (1973) David Pocock is concerned with the problem of subjective meaning and offers an alternative to narrowly functionalist approach.

Venugopal (1998) thinks religion can be functional at pragmatic level as well. Human beings face stressful situations in everyday life, such as, those of sickness, misfortune, death etc, which disrupt the normal tenor of a household. In such situations religion, ritual, magic provide a kind of solace which wealth and privilege can not give (1998: 91).

Merton (1968) and Parsons (1975) have referred to the functional roles of religion. Merton shows a definite relationship between Puritanic ethic and the rise of science in the seventeenth century England. Hard work and commitment to the improvement of this world, etc., which came from Puritan faith were effective in developing scientific temper. In other words, rationality of religion influenced the lives of scientists. Robert Boyle, John Ray, Newton and many others were not only noted scientists but were also devoted to new ethics. They contributed to the improvement of the material world through their scientific researches as a tribute to the glory of God (Venugopal, 1998: 91).

Talcott Parsons demonstrated that the normative order of society in the West rested on the religious premises of Christianity; it inspired voluntaristic kind of action, wherein individuals are committed to the welfare of others in society (ibid).

Functionalism focuses on the consensual rather than a dialectical pattern of growth. It looks at the role of religion mainly in terms of the present and does not address the problem of subjective meaning and the historical and cultural aspects of religion.

ii) Weber and the phenomenological approach

Ever since the publication of Evans-Pritchard's 'Nuer Religion' sociological and social anthropological studies of religion have increasingly moved in the direction of phenomenology, 'a trend anticipated in the work of Max Weber,' (Madan, 1991:6).

Box 21.1 : Phenomenology

If you recall back to what you had learnt about 'phenomenology' in your core course MSO-002 Research Methodologies And Methods, Book-1, page 81, you will know what phenomenology means. However, to again refresh your memory, we explain this concept and theoretical approach to understand social reality again.

Phenomenology as a term gained wide acceptance first in philosophy as a result of its use by Hegel in his work *Phenomenology of Mind* 1897. But the main source of the phenomenological tradition in modern times is to be found in the writings of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). "the dominant concerns of Husserl's phenomenology are expressed in the root of the word itself, derived from the conjunction of the noun form of 'phainama', to appear, and logos to reason. The origin of human reason is to be discovered in the structure of appearance in the basic ordering of human experience". (Mitchell, Dumcan C.(ed.) 81-141) Thus, phenomenology concerns itself with the source of knowledge and how human beings derive knowledge.

Weber's sociology of religion provides an alternative perspective to Durkheim's which emphasises the 'exteriority,' and 'coerciveness of 'social facts,' which are also collective representations. The essence of Weber's sociology of religion lies in his emphasis on an 'interpretive understanding' of social reality, leading to causal explanation. From this perspective an understanding of 'religious behaviour... can only be achieved from the viewpoint of the subjective experiences, ideas and purposes of the individuals concerned - in short, from the viewpoint of the religious behaviour's 'meaning' (1964:1).

Weber studied preliterate as well as the so-called world religions (viz., Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam) in order to examine, among other things, the relations between religious beliefs and practices on the one hand, and the secular domain of politics, economics, sexuality, etc on the other. He is unlike Durkheim who paid particular attention to the relation between it and the religious milieu and did not look at economy. In "Protestant Ethic and the sprit of capitalism", weber argued for a causal relationship between the Protestant ethics and the rise of rational capitalism in Western Europe.

Weber said that, "only in the modern Western world that rational capitalistic enterprises with fixed capital, free labour, the rational specialization and combination of functions, bound together in a market economy are to be found... and that economic grounds alone do not provide a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon" (Weber 1947: 279)

He looked at the Calvinist ethics of Protestantism and asserted that the crucial elements of this ethic were the ideas of predestination and 'calling,' i.e., the notion that one's fate and one's work are both predetermined by God. This idea of predestination generated anxiety amongst the Calvinists. In order to cope with this anxiety, he Calvinist put his faith in the hope that 'God helps those who help themselves. Thus he himself creates his own salvation, or...the conviction of it' (1930:115).

This led to worldly asceticism, i.e., exercise of restraint on immediate gratification, which had the unintended consequence of accumulation of capital and expanded investment, which nurtured capitalism. It was thus that the Christian ascetics 'strode in the market place of life' (ibid: 154).

Thus in Europe capitalism was an aspect of the process of rationalization, which was facilitated by the theological debates within Christianity. Weber went beyond Europe to examine the economic ethics associated with the other world religions. A basic conclusion he drew after examining the religions in India was that 'Indian religiosity is the cradle of those religious ethics which

have abrogated the world, theoretically, practically and to the greatest extent' (1958:323). However, other social scientists, like Milton Singer (1972) and others who studied religion in India found that this opinion did not hold true at the field level. Singer's study proved that Hindu businessmen had the capacity to compartmentalise their religious life from their business life. Jainism and Buddhism both have elements, which are closer to the ethics of profit and enterprise.

Weber distinguished between 'mysticism' or the attitude of abandoning worldly involvement, and 'rationally active asceticism,' which is this worldly and seeks to master the world. The central concerns of Weber's sociology of religion, therefore, included the related questions of the future of religion and the nature of human existence in modern society. To him the religious fate of mankind is constructed consciously by human beings 'themselves through the world images they fashion and the social institutions they construct. Weber had an enormous influence on contemporary works in the field.

Peter Berger looks upon religion as that special human activity through which comprehensive, meaningful, sacred cosmos is constructed. (Berger 1973). Clifford Geertz, a cultural anthropologist views religion as a cultural system - as a system of symbols implicit in which is a world view and a related code of conduct. Both these social scientists stress the importance of interpretive understanding. For Berger, religion is a way to find 'meaning' in life, to bestow legitimacy on social life and to help it to remove chaos. For Geertz, religion makes human life meaningful in the midst of moral perplexities and social conflicts.

iii) Structuralist Approach

A major contemporary theoretical development in the study of religion derives from the structuralist movement in anthropology initiated by Claude Levi - Strauss.

Levi-Strauss subsumes the study of the 'sacred' under forms of thought, modes of classification, mythologies etc. He disagrees with the identification of 'totemism' with religious forms. To him totems are rather modes of classification. (See Levi-Strauss 1963 & 1966). He asserts that the sacred objects owe their significance neither to the narrow considerations of utility, nor to their social nor moral character, but to their availability as concrete manifestations or embodiments of abstract ideas. The primitives do not '*think*' differently from the *civilized* but they *symbolize* differently. Religious systems, comprising myths and rites, are symbolic systems of signs, of communication, which establish through analogical reasoning continuities between nature and culture and between cosmic order and social life.

Louis Dumont has been one of the most distinguished exponents of the structuralist approach in Indianist studies. His 'Homo Hierarchicus' (1967) identifies religious values - notions of pure and impure - as the very foundation of the caste system.

In the works of both Levi-Strauss and Dumont, social phenomena or cultural facts, appear above 'the threshold of consciousness' as manifest expressions of fundamental 'latent' structures. The task of structural analysis is to explicate this relationship and to show that societies differ not in terms of fundamental constituent elements but in the way these elements are interrelated in various patterns.

Veena Das (1977), and JPS Uberoi (1996) are some of the other social scientists, who have made a structural analysis of religion in India. They present interpretation of ritual in terms of certain fundamental categories of thought

(such as time, space, purity, power and auspiciousness) and in relation to the structure of social relations.

Common to these approaches is the fact that in all of them religion is regarded as an important element of social life. The system of beliefs, rituals and practices in themselves are not significant; they are significant only in the way these are manifested and actualized in interactions between individuals and groups in a society. It is sociologically significant as a basis for social interactions in the process of which, through the use of symbols, metaphors, language and rhetoric strategies it demarcates boundaries, creates distinct often-conflicting identities.

Thus perceived religion has always been an important basis of identity and marker of boundaries. The substantive content cosmological, theological and metaphysical of religion *per-se* is not significant, it assumes significance when it is used by individuals and collectivities to gain political ends.

This paper, approaches religion not in terms of the substantive content of any particular religion or with its ritual aspect. It rather approaches it in terms of its relationship with the secular world. What is viewed as significant is the dynamic aspect of the relationship between the two realms. In other words the focus is on practical modes of being rather than on the abstract realms of value. In the words of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who breaks up the omnibus category of religion into *faith* and tradition - that is matters 'internal' and 'external' - *a religious tradition' is a part of this world, it is a product of human activity; it is diverse, it is fluid, it grows, it changes, it accumulates..'* (in Madan 1998). Religion is viewed in its aspect of a religious tradition, where it is presented as an ideology operating in particular historical setting, by interested groups such as political parties or by charismatic individuals to achieve vested interests.

Box 21.2: A Millenarian Movement : Birsa Munda (1874-1901)

One of the best known millenarian movements in tribal India was the Birsa Munda movement (1874-1901) in Chotanagpur, Bihar. The movement among the Munda tribals led by their leader Birsa was typical of the resistance and revitalisation movements in the latter half of the 19th Century. It represents the struggle and aspirations of his people and sowed the first stirrings of nationalism among them. It is characterised by a combination of a religious and political movement and by an urge to recreate the old world which had disappeared under the impact of colonial rule in India. (Singh, K.S. 1983. Birsa Munda and his movement 1874-1901, A Study of a millenarian movement in Chotanagpur. Oxford University Press: Calcutta)

Seen thus, religion in this sense is an important social force, which operates in society and contributes to its constitution.

Reflection and Action 21.2

Do you know of a socio-religious movement which has made a difference to the life of the people who follow it in a socio-cultural sense, for eg. Bhakti Movement in the past, Birsa Munda movement of the tribals in Chotanagpur, Bihar etc.

Write a report of one page about the social, political and cultural background of this religious movement and its present state. Discuss the report with your Academic Counsellor and peers at your Study Center.

21.4 Religion and Politics in India: Historical Overview.

When we examine the history of India from the ancient times to the contemporary, we find that in India the patterns of interaction between religion and politics has varied from time to time and it has had varied social

consequences. (Sharma, T.R. 1988 : 41). Sharma argues that in India one element which is all pervasive throughout its history, though in varying degrees, is the use of religion for the fulfillment of political ends and aspirations. In India religion always served politics and politics has often served religion. Religion was never able to fully extricate itself from politics nor could politics ever rid itself fully of religion. Thus, one finds politicisation of religion in some manifest or latent form at all stages of our history. He says that in India historically we find this interaction between religion and politics in four phases. First phase extended from Indus valley civilisation to the advent of Islam, the second from the advent of Islam to the Indian muting of 1857, the third from 1857 to Indian Independence in 1947, and the fourth from 1947 onwards. While there was close interplay between religion and politics during all these phases, the nature, the intensity and the dynamics of this interaction was different during each of these phases.

The sacred and the secular perspectives have been inextricably interwoven in pre-colonial India. Indian society has witnessed continuous changes affecting the political systems, occupational structures, culture and religion. Religions in India have been the prime source of tension, innovation and even modernization (see Venugopal, 1998). The use of religious idioms has been important in initiating change in India, particularly in political movements and reform movements.

The beginning of the nineteenth century has been marked by a number of social reform movements. This section looks at some of these political and social reform movements.

Though the British rule brought about far-reaching changes in administration, transport, communication and economy, it also disrupted traditional social ties and fragmented culture. It was at this point of time that Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal, Dayanand Saraswati in the North, Jyotirao Phule in Maharashtra introduced reforms in education and socio-religious pursuits and also provided a perspective on national life. They drew upon Indian tradition as well as Western knowledge. They were inspired by the rationalist and the liberal doctrines, according to which the basic unit of society was an individual perceived as citizen and as a human being. They used the Western methods of organization in sponsoring schools and colleges for men and women. Their aim was to raise the national consciousness in terms of culture. These reform movements led to a mass awakening which paved the way for the political awakening in the twentieth century. The struggle for independence was in the initial stages a product of educated middle-classes in Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu to mention a few states. In addition to liberal education, a religious upsurge stimulated the youth to participate in the freedom struggle. (Venugopal, 1998).

In Maharashtra, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, revived on a large scale, the Ganapati puja which then served as venue for political meetings. In Bengal, Ras Behari Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal and their associates used religious symbols centred around the Durga Puja to develop a political consciousness. Apart from this, socio-religious plays in these and other provinces of India conveyed political messages to the public. During the national Independence Movement, Gandhiji used the Hindu notion of 'Ram Raya' to unify, integrate and mobilise a majority of the Indian population.

In post 1947 India the relationship between religion and politics are manifested in the growth of communalism, development of secularism and rise of fundamentalism, which is the focus in the next section.

21.5 Religion and Politics in Contemporary India

Today the debate in India is primarily focussed on communalism, secularism and fundamentalism/ religious nationalism: Religion and Politics in contemporary India can be *** as undergoing a different phase of *** where interests other than "regions" guide actions of indurd.

Communalism it must be asserted at the outset is not in the main about religion.

"...It can be defined..." as an ideology which envisages the religious community as a political group committed to the protection and promotion of its social and economic interests and cultural values. It is thus a substitute for nationalism. The territory occupied (or sought to be occupied) by the group is seen as 'holy land' or 'land of the pure' which is what the words '*Pakistan* and '*Khalistan*' mean. As pointed out by Louis Dumont, the religious element that enters into the composition of communalism seems to be but the shadow of religions, i.e. religion taken not as the essence and guide of life in all spheres, but only as a sign of the distinction of one human, at least virtually political group against others (Madan, 1991) In the context of India, the important question to be addressed is viz: - has the persistence of communalism in India and the persistence of communal riots, any thing to do with the substantive 'religious' contents of the conflicting religions? This section attempts to answer this question by examining the communal riots between Hindus and Muslims.

Historical analysis of Hindu-Muslim communal conflict, its causes and conditions has been highly contentious in character. According to one group of historians, (such as, Gyanendra Pandey (2000). Sandrio Freitag (1989), Ayesha Jalal (1985 etc.) Hindu-Muslim consciousness and conflict are largely modern constructions in which the British colonial rulers played a major role, either through deliberate 'divide and rule' policies or through ways in which they categorised, classified and typified the various people of India for example they categorised some tribes as criminal tribes. These constructions views of Hindu and/or Muslim communal consciousness or communalism as forms of ideology connect to class, group and elite political interests. Thus to them the growth of communal consciousness is an instrument of struggle, either against the British or between Hindus and Muslims for political advantage or supremacy. In the course of the struggle communal violence was often the result of conflicts framed within a communal discourse. They hold that communalism is a cover that hides a multiplicity of mainly political and economic causes.

The other group of historians (C.A. Bayly (1985), Gaborieau (1985) argue that there is more continuity between the past and the present, extending backward at least to the early 18th century and in some arguments to the earlier period of Moghul rule. To them inter-religious conflict and riots that resemble contemporary Hindu-Muslim conflict were present in pre-modern times. They lay greater stress on their religious significance and on the existence of strong communal identities that preceded them (Brass, 2003).

However, in modern India we still find the traces of 'divide and rule' policy of the colonial rulers of the past. The imprint that has led to a great divide' between the two largest communities of Hindus and Muslims in India keeps waxing and waning according to the political climate of the nation as well as its different religions. Brass says "Whatever the similarities, continuities and persisting idioms may be found before the 19th century, it would seem idle to over emphasise them. The consolidation of the heterogeneous Hindu and Muslim groupings in the subcontinent and the politicization of the differences between them are overwhelmingly a modern phenomenon, deeply connected

with the striving for control over the modern state apparatus, involving a claim to rightful inheritance on the part of Hindus and to self determination on the part of Muslim leaders. In the course of the struggles for power that developed during British rule, intensified in the late 19th century and culminated in the division of India in 1947, a discourse of Hindu-Muslim difference was created that has struck deep roots in both communities and acquired a partly self sustaining momentum that at the same time continues to be fed by political competition." (Brass, 2003).

Asserting that communal conflict has little to do with religion itself, but with its, use by the politicians for their vested interests, Ali Asghar Engineer, one of the most prolific writers on Hindu-Muslim riots in India, blames neither the Hindus nor Muslims as communities for the flaming of communal riots. To him it is the politicians on the one hand and the forms of economic competition between Hindus and Muslims on the other that are responsible for the eruption of communal riots. To him minor disputes are exploited by petty-minded politicians, who have no qualms in sacrificing human lives that follow upon their exploitation of such disputes for their political advantage. At times political movement themselves are the cause of violence, as in the '*Ramshila puja*' processions of militant Hindus carrying bricks to Ayodhya in the movement, to bring down the Babri Mosque there and replace it with a temple to the god Ram. These processions resulted in the eruption of riots all over the country. Thus, to Engineer, the primary cause of communal riots in India is the pursuit of political advantage at any cost. Its clear that despite all the condemnation of riots from all concerned members of the conflicting communities to the elite intellectuals to the state - the riots continue.

Brass uses Mertonian kind of functional analysis to explain this persistence. To him riots serve the interests of particular individual groups, organization and even society as a whole in concrete useful ways that are beneficial to them. Further using one of the more common uses of the term 'function' viz, that of 'use' or 'utility,' he speaks of the functional utility of the persistence of Hindu-Muslim riots in India for a wide variety of interests, groups, institutions and organizations including ultimately the state. Under these circumstances, it is not possible to produce a broad enough consensus in society to eliminate violent riots from Indian public life (ibid).

Thus, contrary to the prevailing notion that riots are spontaneous rather than planned, that they breakout either unexpectedly as a consequence of a build up of tensions that may or may not explode under fortuitous circumstances, they, to Brass, are....

"meticulously planned and coordinated from beginning to end. Rather they are dramatic productions, street theatre performances that are meant to appear spontaneous, but involve many people in a variety of roles and actions that include inciting the interest of the audience, the dramatization and enlargement of incidents into a fit subject for a performance and finally, the production of the event... [they] are dramatic productions, creations of specific persons, groups and parties, operating through institutionalized riot networks within a discursive framework of Hindu-Muslim communal opposition and antagonism, that in turn produces specific forms of political practice that make riots integral to the political process..." (ibid).

21.6 Secularism

The Partition in India with its communal holocaust and forced migration and its Independence gave rise to an intense debate about what the character of the new nation-state should be: Secular, i.e., multi-community with equal rights for all?, Socialist? or Hindu? (Pandey: 2001).

Pakistan emerged, as an overwhelming Muslim country, observing which sections of the Hindu nationalist press in India began to assert that India should be cleared of Muslims (ibid).

This was the rise of Hindu nationalism, alongside of which also arose, much more emphatically, another more inclusive nationalism, which emphasised the composite character of Indian society and refused to give the same sort of primacy to the Hindu element in India's history and self-consciousness. This was later termed as 'secular nationalism', which Nehru called as the 'real' or Indian 'Nationalism'. This was the nationalism of the Indian Constitution (ibid).

The Indian Constitution reflects a national consensus about the vision of a secular Indian polity which emerged during the national struggle. It is important to point out that secularism in the sense of the separation of the church and the state (as it means in the West) is not relevant in India. Here it implies an impartiality of the state in its dealings with citizens professing different faiths (*Sarva Dharma Sambhav*).

The emergence of a secular society in the West has been a consequence of the growth of modern industrial mode of production and advancement of scientific knowledge. While the growth of scientific knowledge leads to a decline of cognitive function of the religious and the scientific world, the rise of modern industrial societies have been accompanied with a process of differentiation whereby various parts of the society and their functions becoming increasingly specialized based on knowledge.

The notion of the secular in India is thus different from that of the West. The deviations from archetypal secularism were based on the plea made by Dr. Ambedkar that the influence of religion (Hindu), such as, caste system in this country were so vast that they covered every aspect of life, from birth to death. He said unless the state had the power, it would be impossible for our legislatures to enact any social measures, Gandhi also believed that the secular law in certain cases could be used to tackle social evils.

India's secularism bears the impact of non-dualist worldview of the Indian people as well as the impact of India's plural society and India's experience. Hence, it has been rightly described as a "canopy concept" - all-inclusive concept based on universal tolerance - in which the state has been assigned the role of a reformer of a society in which religion determines the social structure and social behaviour.

There is a growing skepticism among intellectuals about the use of secularism in India, whether secularism is good for India, particularly in the wake of social and political upheavals witnessed in the past few years.

"...The social and political turmoil in the country does not make the case for secularism weaker, it makes it stronger..." (Beteille, 2000).

The need for secularism is not because it will eliminate religious passion from human affairs, but that it may to some extent neutralize and soften its expression in public life. "...However ardently one may desire the separation of religion and politics, it is impossible in a democracy to prevent political leaders from exploiting religious sentiments or religious leaders from seeking political alliances..." (ibid).

India is both culturally and demographically different from Western countries such as Britain and France. India's religious minorities may comprise only a small proportion of the total population, but in absolute numbers they are very large. There is no question here of the differences of religious identity getting obliterated through either peaceful assimilation or forceful conversion in either the long or the short run. Thus secularism ensures that no religious

doctrine or community exercises unwarranted dominion over the other, and not only to nourish institutions that are by their nature indifferent to religious demands.

Secularism either in the sense of equal respect for all religions, or in the sense of indifference to religion in selected spheres of social life, is a philosophy of moderation, that makes it particularly compatible with democratic politics. It is undermined when political parties heighten or exploit religious differences for the mobilization of political support. (See Beteille, 2000).

21.7 Fundamentalism

Drawing upon the experience of American fundamentalists and that of Iranian revolution in 1979, Madan describes fundamentalism; as (i) affirmation of inspiration, final authority, inerrancy, and transparency of scripture as the source of belief, knowledge, morals, and manners; (ii) recognition of the reactive character of fundamentalism: it is not an original impulse as, for example, orthodoxy is, but a reaction to a perceived threat or crisis; (iii) intolerance of dissent, implying monopoly over truth...; (iv) cultural critique, that is, the idea that all is not well with social or community life as lived at a particular time; (v) appeal to tradition, but in a selective manner that establishes a meaningful relationship between the past and the present, redefining or even inventing tradition in the process; (vi) capture of political power and remodeling of the state for the achievement of the stated objectives; and (vii) charismatic leadership. (Madan, 1998: 27-28).

However, fundamentalism has been often equated with orthodoxy, revivalism, cultural nationalism, traditionalism and communalism, the latter two being particularly mixed up with fundamentalism, it would be pertinent to briefly distinguish between the three. Traditionalism as compared to fundamentalism is quietest and it is content with pursuing religion in the sacred sphere without it spilling over into other domains particularly, the political. The element of activism is common to communalism and fundamentalism, whereas the communalists have a particular 'other', for the fundamentalists it is rather a case of 'us' versus "the rest," because the 'rest' is a "general other." Moreover, fundamentalism reaches deep into its philosophical and religious roots to define its community of believers. It looks inwards and is self-producing. (Gupta 1996: 206).

It is common knowledge that long range tolerance and catholicity are an abiding general characteristic of the psyche of the people in India. In spite of the fact that it is multi-religious, multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi cultural nation, fundamentalism is alien to Indian people as a whole. By and large the Nationalist Movement at the grass roots or people's level was all-inclusive, also the Constitution of India reflects the values of National Movement.

Nevertheless, some of the seven features of fundamentalism enumerated above by Madan can be located or identified in Indian polity. There have always existed pockets or "enclaves" of fundamentalist forces among the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians in India in the past and in the contemporary times. As a matter of fact, Indian people have suffered from spasmodic onslaughts of one or the other variant of fundamentalism, specially communalism, religious nationalism and terrorism.

There are several reasons for this. But during the past five or six decades this phenomena is intimately related to the process of 'democratization' of Indian polity, leading, inter alia, to injection of doses of political 'power' and all that it means.

Further, Islamic fundamentalism has its roots in the concept of Pan-Islamism which expresses itself in the movement like *tabliqi* (conversion or proselytesation) and which in turn, fosters Hindu fundamentalism (say *shuddhi* movement).

There are also international ramifications of Pan-Islamism. For example, some Islamic states have been supporting Islamic fundamentalist forces in India. This phenomena was very prominent feature of political scene in the eighties (Meenakshi Puram conversion).

We would like to specially refer to a few instance of role of religion in contemporary Indian politics. First, a person not at all known for his, religiosity, M.A. Jinnah, the father of Pakistan argued that one did not have to be religious to appreciate the cultural differences between Islam and Hinduism. The cultural distinctiveness of Indian Islam, he stressed, constituted the rationale for a separate nation-state of Pakistan. To him Islam and Hinduism are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are different and distinct social orders, belonging to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions....(ibid).

Now take, the rise of Sikh militancy in the eighties. "Sikh fundamentalism is a 'reactive' phenomenon. It is a defense mechanism, where aggressiveness "...is a cover for fear of the threatening other - namely, nonconformist Sikhs, secularists of all communities, and communal Hindus, and as certain process, notably heresy, modernization, cultural disintegration, and political domination..." (Madan, 1998). These are fears and anxieties which the fundamentalists would want every Sikh to have.

There is not enough space to go into the historical and political dynamics of the growth of this perceived threat to cultural identity. But briefly stated, this fear and anxiety not only found its culmination in the demand for a separate Sikh state "Khalistan," but also in the rise of fundamentalism among a cross section of Sikhs, Muslim and in the Hindu. This is also manifest in the ..."demand of some religious communities notably Sikhs, for the recognition of their 'right' to repudiate the separation of religion and politics in the conduct of their own community life..." (Madan, 1998).

21.8 Conclusion

Secular nationalism is India's acknowledged ideology, it has its roots in National movement. It implies that all religions are treated as equal in the sense that none will dominate the functioning of the state. But the term 'secular' does not mean separation of state from religion, but implies neutrality of state to all religions. Secularism, in India means religious equidistance, but not non-involvement. Here religion is not the determinant of Indians citizenship, it is their birthright.

Secular nationalism and religious nationalism have been two of the most important organizing devices for mass politics in India, which have generated passions in politics - sometime very violent. It has taken primarily two forms viz., Muslim and Hindu nationalism. Muslim nationalism emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. It led to the birth of Pakistan in 1947. Hindu nationalism could be viewed as the mirror image of Muslim nationalism. According to the Hindu nationalists, Hinduism is not only the religion of India's majority community but also what gives India its distinctive national identity; other religions must assimilate to the Hindu center. (Varshney, 2002). Hindu nationalists insist on having cultural and political primacy in shaping India's destiny and build Hindu unity politically.

In short, the Indian polity is sub-continental and complex. It has been characterised by pluralism. Since 1947 India has accepted the political culture

of democracy. In this ethos, the dynamics of the relationship between religion and politics has raised many problem regarding secularism, rise of communalism, religious nationalism and fundamentalism. Above all it has even raised the sensitive question of the nature of national identity of India -what is India? And who is an Indian?

21.9 Further Reading

Durkheim, Emile, 1965 (1915). *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Translated by J.W, Swain, Fdree Press, New York.

Madan, T.N. (ed) (1991). *Religion in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.