

**Paper under Sub-theme: Religious Diversity**

**The Rising Hindu Fundamentalism (Hindutva) and the Future of India's Diversity and Democracy in a Globalised Era**

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## **Rising Hindu Fundamentalism (Hindutva) and the Future of India's Diversity and Democracy.**

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*“The Hindu Social System is undemocratic not by accident. It is designed to be undemocratic. It's a division of society into the Varnas and castes and out-castes, are not theories but are decrees.” Dr B R Ambedkar ( W & S Vol. 4, P.284)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The growth of multiculturalism is largely attributable to 20 th Century but international recognition could be seen through UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of year 2001. This Universal declaration recognizes, for the first time, cultural diversity as a “common heritage of humanity” and considers safeguarding of the same to be a concrete and ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity (Pandey Sanjay, 2007). The concept of Multiculturalism is based on positive equality wherein state endeavors to treat people equal and make them equal. Multiculturalism necessarily includes recognition of a number of political, social and economic, cultural and religious rights of the citizens living in the given country. The Preamble of the Indian Constitution proclaims to guarantee every citizen liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. The groups of Articles 25 to 30 guarantee protection of religious, cultural and educational rights to both majority and minority communities.

However, the secular and multicultural spirit of the Indian Constitution was hard to digest for the majority Savarna Hindus. The battle between cow and constitution started right from the first day of drafting of the Constitution and Dr B. R Ambedkar had to compromise on many of his ideas in restructuring of Indian society, due to steep opposition from the upper caste legislatures directly or indirectly affiliated to the Sangha Parivar. Recently, there are fresh attempts to disregards the constitution and a Dharm Sansad Led by VHP has virtually called for the scrapping of the Constitution saying that it is against the interest of the majority Hindus. Dr Ambedkar and his idea of Indian Nationalism, “We are first Indian and we are last Indian,” suffered a strong setback. The Politics of Hindutva and their so called Cultural Nationalism

posed a serious challenge to the unity and integrity of India and also to the very secular fabric and unifying doctrine of the Indian Constitution which strives to establish a new society based on liberty, fraternity and equality without harming its diversity.

Most societies today are internally diverse. This is not a mere accident; nor is it simply the consequence of the process of globalization. It is the reflection of a far more basic dimension of our social and political life. Towards the end of the twentieth century it was estimated that there are “5,000 to 8,000 ethno-cultural groups in the world” and just about “200 states.... Arithmetic (thus) dictates that most states (at the moment over 90%) are inevitably going to be shared by more than one ethnic group, and often by dozens.”<sup>1</sup> So, even if the number of nation states was to increase the likelihood of most states remaining multi ethnic and multi-cultural would still remain. It is this condition of our political existence that compels different societies to learn to live with differences and to find ways by which culturally diverse populations can live together as members of the same political community. More and more societies today are confronted with challenges from within. In the past it was wars between nation-states that were the cause of destruction and displacement of populations. Today it is ethnic conflicts that have their roots within the nation-state that are yielding the same result. It is estimated that of the 101 armed conflicts that occurred between 1986 and 1996, only 6 were inter-state; the remaining 95 conflicts had their roots within existing states.<sup>2</sup> In order to draw the attention of the world community towards this grim reality UNESCO in the year 2001 in its universal declaration on cultural diversity declared cultural diversity as a “common heritage of humanity” and considers safeguarding of the same to be a concrete and ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity<sup>3</sup>. The most important conviction of this Universal declaration is the growing belief that intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of peace and to reject out right the theory of the inevitable clash of cultures and civilizations. (Pandey, 2007)

India is the second most populous country (population now over a billion) after China, and socially and culturally the most diverse in the world. Formed over many thousands of years as a country of immigrants who brought their own cultures and traditions, India’s diversity is proverbial. Although predominantly inhabited by “Hindus” (over 82 per cent) who are regionally

rooted, plural in beliefs and practices, and divided by castes and languages, India's population also includes a large proportion of Muslims (about 12 per cent), Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Jains.<sup>4</sup> linguistically too, India is very diverse. It is the home of some hundred languages and dialects and, so far, eighteen languages have been "officially" recognized and placed under the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. There are, however, sizeable sections of the population, most notably in the North-East, who are a majority in their locality but whose first language is not yet "officially" recognized. Most of the states have some dominant ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious groups (Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, North-East), although within each of them there are religious and linguistic minorities.<sup>5</sup>

In fact most of the states of India are formed by major reorganization of territories in the 1950s and 1960s on the basis of ethno-linguistic or ethno-religious groups identities. Given that some kind of ethno-linguistic factor is the prime criterion in according statehood, scholars have tended to see the reorganization as part of a multicultural state-building process in India.<sup>6</sup> To build a strong and united community of citizens, nation-states often try to construct a shared cultural/national identity on the basis of a language policy, calendar of public holidays, school curriculum, and cultural narratives of the nation and so on. As and when these constructions of national identity reflect the cultural orientation of the majority they tend to disadvantage minorities in material and symbolic terms sometimes turning into a source of simmering discontent and spilling over in the form of ethnic conflict. Theories of multiculturalism make us sensitive to these sites of disadvantage and discrimination that exist in nation-states even after the basic rights of citizenship have been granted.<sup>7</sup> The country with so much of diversity and plurality needs something extraordinary to bind them together and the concept of multiculturalism is one of the effective ways which can help us in holding the nation together.

## **DIVERSITY: A DEBATE**

Starting in the 1960s, a number of Western democracies embarked on new experiments in accommodating indigenous peoples, national minorities and immigrant groups. Although these "experiments in multiculturalism" have always been the subject of intense public debate, there was surprisingly little academic attention to them in the 1970s and 1980s. It was only in the

1990s that multiculturalism became a major area of academic inquiry, picked up initially by political theorists.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, for much of the 1990s, the academic literature on multiculturalism was heavily normative, and dominated by political philosophers who developed idealized theories of a distinctly liberal–democratic and egalitarian form of multicultural citizenship. These theorists were interested in the question of whether multiculturalism was consistent in principle with their ideal theories of justice—for example, whether multiculturalists claims could be defended from within Rawls’s theory of liberal justice—and attempted to show how familiar liberal–democratic principles of individual freedom and distributive justice could be invoked to give a principled defense of certain multiculturalist claims.<sup>9</sup> liberal multi- culturalism is a viable approach, worthy of being considered by policymakers, but it raises a puzzle. For the general tenor of most discussions of multiculturalism, both in academia and policy circles, is of a “failure” or “crisis” of multiculturalism. To take just one example, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recently issued a report which states, without hesitation or qualification, that multiculturalism has failed in Europe, and indeed that it has proven to be as harmful as the assimilationist approach.<sup>10</sup> This is a remarkable statement: here we have a formal intergovernmental body, speaking on behalf of its 47 member states, stating that there is, in effect, a European consensus that multiculturalism is no longer a viable approach. This is just one of many examples one could give of the now widespread assumption, found among both intergovernmental organizations and academic commentators that we have moved into a “post multicultural” age. What we need is look across the full range of cases and, as we’ve seen, the bulk of the evidence—not just from Canada, but also Australia and Sweden, and cross-national studies—suggests that multiculturalism remains a viable approach worthy of serious consideration<sup>11</sup>

Only since the late 1990s have Indian scholars joined the global debate on multiculturalism The recent Indian debate on multiculturalism has taken two distinct forms. First, multiculturalism as a state policy has been operative in the growing federalization of its political system, a process that politically accommodates ethnic identities. In this form, multiculturalism is conjoined with federalism. Second, multiculturalism itself, its definition, meaning and implications, has been the subject of discussion among scholars centering around the issues of rights (individual versus group), culture, community and communalism, secularism, religion and so on. Both forms of debate are current today in India.<sup>12</sup> In the Indian context, Bhargava has identified three problems with multiculturalism in so far as identity is concerned. First,

overemphasis on identity may be exclusive in the sense of excluding people or “others” from an essential identity. Second, encouragement of cultural particularity deepens divisions and undermines the “common foundation for a viable society”. Third, it may result in curbing individual freedom by advocating “aggressive community power over individual freedom”, and thus corroding the values of liberal democracy. Bhargava ultimately sees the solution of the problem of identity in India in “democratic multiculturalism” which combines cultural and political communitarianism. On the one hand, it recognizes the importance of cultural identity, and on the other hand is committed to bringing the issue into the political domain. The conflicts that result from the differences of identity are to be resolved through dialogue, discussion and negotiation. Democratic multiculturalism entails the role of an effective democratic state, which “intervenes in religious and cultural practices to get rid of oppressive practices” so that the possible subordination of the individual to the authority of the collectivity is curbed, if not abolished. The Indian experience of “secularism” since independence, he believes, is replete with examples of when an effective state intervention has been able to maintain secularism. But this requires two preconditions. In the absence of an effective state, peaceful coexistence is not reproduced automatically. Second, there is a need for essential democratic politics. A minimally democratic state may not be good enough but what it may manage to prevent may be much worse (Bhargava et al.1999, 48–9).<sup>13</sup>

The debate on multiculturalism has also considered the relation between multiculturalism and the Indian nation-state. Many scholars have tended to use the concept as a point of departure for re-examining and reassessing the relations between minorities and the Indian state. Multiculturalism that seeks to “manage cultural diversity” within the nation-state is termed “liberal” by Sangari. Post-modernist multiculturalism, she argues, positions itself outside or across national boundaries. For her, critical multiculturalism raises questions about the structures of power as well as the very need to add multiculturalism to the democratic project. But none of the above models of multi-culturalism applies to the Indian case because none “can come to grips with the diversity of the Indian subcontinent, which does not quite conform to a multi-ethnic state” (Sangari 1999, 24). In contrast, Chandhoke takes an extreme position on this subject in that she believes that the rise of multiculturalism has meant the end of the “grand vision” of the culturally homogeneous nation-state, of national integration (Chandhoke 1999, 35). While it is true that multiculturalism has posed a challenge to the uncritical and arrogant ideas of

homogenization and national integration around the world, it is doubtful whether the problem can be seen in such absolutely binary terms. In many countries, multiculturalism has been taken as a corrective to the excesses of the one-sided nation-building process that has tended to privilege the majority and to marginalize the minorities. Chandhoke, none the less, acknowledges that the Indian nation-state project has been heavily influenced by a “Brahmanical and uncomfortable oppressive” content. Referring to the rise of the Dalit (backward caste) movements in India since the 1970s, she argues that despite decades of so called economic development and progress, the social status of the Dalits has not changed for the better. The elite vision of “national culture”, she concludes, has increasingly marginalized minority groups (Chandhoke 1999, 36).<sup>14</sup>

So far the Indian debate around multiculturalism has remained sociological and normative. It has raised questions about the place of minorities in the nation-state, and the vexed issue of community identities. In so doing, it has highlighted the structural limitations of the nation-state project in India and its implicit “ethnic bias” – what Singh calls the “ethnic” content of democracy (Singh 2000). But the debate has generally failed to address the key question identified at the beginning: what is the secret of India’s unity and integrity, its diversity and complexity notwithstanding? Even though the exact nature of India’s “national” identity may be suspect, the boundaries of the political community blurred – and often empirically untenable – but what is beyond dispute is that India has been relatively successful in resisting disintegration. 8 and this could happen because of the well balanced nature and framework of the Indian Constitution.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL MULTICULTURALISM IN INDIA**

Multiculturalism is the official policy that countries adopt to legally protect racial, ethnic and cultural diversity. Western countries like the UK, France, Canada, USA and Australia have been the primary proponents of the practice of multiculturalism as official government policy. There is, however, a distinction between diversity and multiculturalism, although they are generally used synonymously. While diversity means the existence of pluralism, multiculturalism is the official policy that countries undertake to legally protect that diversity. For instance, the constitutional declaration that India is a secular country is the practice of multiculturalism. Countries attain multicultural status in two ways: they either become ‘mosaic’ cultures, as in case of UK or a ‘melting pot’ of cultures as in case of USA.<sup>15</sup>

Although multiculturalism is a value-laden term yet the Constitution of India could be interpreted to read pluralism, participation, religious-linguistic integration and protection, secularism, and various freedoms forming foundation for constitutional multiculturalism in India. constitutional values have nurtured multiculturalism in such a way that not only multicultural rights have been balanced but also no compromises have been allowed for keeping common identity intact. Culture of equality is an essential feature of our Constitution. The Constitution of India perhaps provides a model of multiculturalism, which is so balanced that it disallows separatist tendencies but allows proliferation of diversity. The Constitutional multiculturalism is based on integration and not on segregation <sup>16</sup>

India, after its Independence in 1947 adopted the policy of multiculturalism In 1976, that the word 'secular' was introduced into the Preamble of the Constitution by the 42nd Amendment. It was thus that India came to be characterized as a 'Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic'. Article 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, caste, sex, or place of birth Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment irrespective of one's religious identity; and Article 17 abolished the practice of untouchability. Articles 25 to 30 deal specifically with the freedom of religion. All the freedoms and rights conferred by Articles 25-30 were made "subject to public order, morality and health.

#### **The Goals of the Indian Constitution:**

- 1) Achievement of national unity and stability
- 2) Promotion of democratic political behavior based on parliamentary procedures
- 3) Protection of minority interests and social justice
- 4) Expression of general principles and humanitarian sentiments

With this constitution India attempted to achieve administrative and political unity and an economic and social revolution in the country with the largest population in the world having wide variety of diversities.

#### **Characteristic features of the Indian Constitution:**

- 1) It is the longest constitution in the world. .
- 2) It makes India a sovereign democratic republic and also a secular state
- 3) It is federal in character
- 4) It divides powers between Union and the States though, the Union has more powers



- 5) It provides for single citizenship for the whole of India
- 6) It gives the right to vote for all citizens of 18 years and above
- 7) It provides for parliamentary form of government both at the Union and State levels
- 8) It guarantees all citizens certain fundamental rights (combination of individual rights and group rights.)
- 9) It provides the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) to guide the state in law making for social and economic welfare (non-enforceable social and economic rights. In recent years, the judiciary has applied the principle of harmonious construction, which implies reading fundamental rights and DPSP together.
- 10) It lists fundamental duties expected of citizens of India. <sup>17</sup>

From the above discussion it appears that India has embraced diversity, or cultural pluralism in both policy and practice. The Indian Constitution which is the source of many state policies can be said to be a basic multicultural document, in the sense of providing for political and institutional measures for the recognition and accommodation of the country's diversity. Cultural diversity is viewed as one of India's most important attributes, socially and economically. Through multiculturalism, India recognizes the potential of all citizens, encouraging them to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs. <sup>18</sup>

## **CONSTITUTIONAL SECULARISM**

Jawaharlal Nehru in a conversation with the French intellectual Andre Ualraux had said that, the toughest part of his job as Prime Minister was to build a secular state in a religious society.<sup>19</sup> The word 'Secular' has not been defined or explained under the constitution either in 1950 or in 1976 when it was made part of the preamble .Secularism as a modern political and constitutional principle involves two basic propositions. The first is that people belonging to different faiths and sects are equal before the law, the constitution and the government policy. The second requirement is that there can be no mixing up of religion and politics. It follows that there can be no discrimination against any one on the basis of religion or faith nor is there room for the hegemony of one religion or majoritarian religious sentiments and aspirations. It is in this double sense – no discrimination against any one on grounds of faith and separation of religion from politics – that our constitution safeguards secularism. India is a multi-religious society and

the survival of such a society is possible only if all religions are given equal treatment without any favors or discrimination.<sup>20</sup> Article 25 to 30 of the constitution gives us the right to freedom of religion so also the cultural and educational rights. But Indian secularism extends far beyond the confines of the bundle of rights contained in the aforesaid provisions. Secularism is a goal as well as a process. As an ideology and a bundle of working norms, it is conditioned by the past legacies and the prevailing realities. Secularism in our country is an ally of nationalism and national integration. Secularism in the Indian Constitution asserts that:

1. The state by itself shall not espouse or establish or practice any religion.
2. Public revenues will not be used to promote any religion.
3. The state shall have the power to regulate any economic, financial or other secular activity associated with religious practice – Article 25 (2)
4. The state shall have the power through the law to provide for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.
5. Article 17 constitutionally outlaws the practice of untouchability.
6. Every individual person will have under Article 25 an equal right to freedom of conscience and religion.
7. These rights are however subject to the power of the state through law to impose restrictions on the ground of public order, morality and health.
8. These rights are furthermore subject to other fundamental rights in Part III.
9. The courts, especially the Supreme Court shall have the final say on adjudging state action as valid or otherwise under the above principles.<sup>21</sup>

## **HINDUTVA AND CONSTITUTION**

### **Why Right Wing Hindus are not at Ease with the Constitution**

Secularism is the basic structure of our constitution. Some scholars believe that Hindutva is an antithesis of Secularism. But the counters of Hindutva go much beyond that. This is reflected in a note (found with National Archives of India, Sardar Patel correspondence- A note

on RSS) which states that, “The RSS practices secret and violent methods which promotes ‘fascism’. No regards is paid to truthful means and constitutional methods.”<sup>22</sup> Leading historian Romila Thapar commenting on the multiculturalism under serious threat from religious nationalism, for which she called Hindutva or syndicated Hinduism, points out that, it not only an attack on non-Hindu belief and practice but also on the multicultural traditions of Hinduism itself.(Jahanbegloo, 2007:11 cited by Lancy Lobo)<sup>23</sup> The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh was never at ease with the principles and Values of the Indian Constitution and hence several attempts have been made by the saffron brigade to disrespect the constitution. The review of the Constitution was right on the agenda of the BJP government till the year 2004, and had also appointed a commission to that effect. For their misfortune, they lost the succeeding general election and that halted the whole debate on Constitutional Review. One of the former Sir Sangha Chalak Mr. K Sudarshan had gone to the extent of demanding the scrapping of the Indian Constitution. There are repeated attempts from the Sangha Pariwar and its outfit’s organization to underestimate the spirit and sanctity of the Constitution of India. The question arises why the Pariwar is not happy with the present form of the constitution? The simple answer for this is that the constitution has taken away all the privileges of the upper castes people, more particularly the special privileges of the Brahmins, which they enjoyed for ages together given by the religion (Hinduism) and brought them at par with the other low caste people at least in a legal terms, since equality is the guiding principle of the Indian Constitution. The Pariwar do not believe in democratic principles and democratic values since it is difficult for them to rule this nation on the basis of democratic setup. Their fascists approach is an indication that they are for dictatorship, the legacy they took from Mussolini and Hitler, the former dictators of Italy and Germany respectively. Pariwar has no hesitation in accepting them as their icons and applying their methodologies in solving the problems of our country. They functions and flourished on the basis of arson and violence. The militarization of children, youths and civil people throughout the country by the RSS shows that they are preparing to wage a war against their own people. The mass killing in Gujarat in the year 2002 after the Godara incident can lead us to the convictions that how dangerous the Pariwar and its tactics are for the future of this country and all this is being done on the name of Patriotism and nationalism.

## **Hindu Rashtra: Myth and Reality**

The phenomenon of Hindu nationalism has, by and large been interpreted in India as the resurgence of Brahmanism. Brahmanism is not strictly limited to Brahmins alone, but an attempt by the middle and upper castes to safeguard their privileges, perks, status, wealth and power which was theirs in traditional caste hierarchy....it was the secular and democratic constitution of India that challenged these traditional hierarchies through institutional changes.(Lobo, 2002) One of the important reasons why the RSS and company dislike the constitution is it disallows to form a religious state and that too a Brahmanical state. On the contrary our constitution pays equal respect to all the religions and gives religious freedom to profess and practice any religion of your choice. This religious neutrality on the parts of the state is 'Secularism' according to some scholars. In fact, when we look at the process of the making of Indian Constitution we find that word "secular" was not incorporated in the preamble. The omission was deliberate. One of the members Mr. K.T. Shah made two attempts to introduce the word "secularism" but it was opposed by Dr. Ambedkar. Constitution makers might perhaps have felt that it was not necessary to use the word "secular" or "Secularism" particularly as it might give the impression of establishing a state structure inconsistent with the cultural ethos of Indian people. <sup>24</sup> Dr Ambedkar once said that, "History of India is the history of cultural struggle". In the ancient India Buddha fought the battle of poor and excluded people against the Brahmanism and established a "Dhamma Raj" (State of Justice). Dr. Ambedkar in fact wanted to continue the legacy of Buddha and hence he might have opposed the idea of Secularism. In his later life Dr Ambedkar himself took an oath in 1956 to dedicate rest of his life in converting and transforming caste ridden Hindu India into a caste less Buddhist India. Unfortunately, he passed away within few months after publicly declaring his whole hearted commitment towards Buddhism. Jawahar Lal Nehru, in his book, "Discovery of India," wherein he emphasized that Buddhism and Jainism were certainly not Hinduism or even the Vedic Dharma. Yet they arose in India and were integral parts of Indian life, culture and philosophy. A Buddhist or Jain, in India, is a hundred per cent product of Indian thought and culture, yet neither is a Hindu by faith. It is, therefore, entirely misleading to refer to Indian culture as Hindu culture.

Against this backdrop we need to look at the RSS agenda of Hindu Rashtra. RSS wants homogenization of Indian Nation state under the banner of Hinduisation without disturbing the

steep caste based hierarchical structure. They do not have a single programme directed against the destruction of caste based social structure. In fact, they are perhaps proud of the existing unequal social system. Hinduism benefits the Brahmins most and then Kshtrityas and hence they want it to preserve, protect, propagates and carve out a nation of their own dream, a nation in which they will remain masters above others, forever and the others as their servants. The Indian Constitution has made their task difficult by sowing the seeds of justice for all and equality for all. The movement against untouchability was never on the agenda of the RSS. In December 1992 the Dharam Sansad of the VHP passed a resolution stating that the Indian Constitution is non-Hindu and should be replaced by a 'Hindu Constitution'. According to the Sangh Parivar, the Manusmriti has provided justice to all - the laws therein are more important than Constitution of India. Ambedkar states that Hindus are neither a nation nor are they a society. The reality of the social life of Hinduism is the caste system, because of which there is a lack of dialogue and opportunities in cultural life, and there is no feeling of togetherness. Due to social, economic and educational contradictions, Hindus cannot become a nation.

### **India: Nation or Federation of Castes**

India is not a Nation in its true sociological sense. It is not even a society. It is a mass of people living in closed, isolated groups and subgroups to be more specific people living in caste and sub castes and every caste is a nation by its own way. Naming them all as Hindus is most absurd in a contemporary India. This becomes more cleared from Census of India report of 2001 which counted 98 per cent of tribes in India as Hindus! Question of caste is a basic question and no one can create a nation without addressing the question of caste. You can mislead few people on the name of religion and can wage a war against minorities on the name of Cultural Nationalism (Cultural Intolerance!) But the fact remains that when you want to arrange a marriage of your son or daughter you inevitably look for your own caste and we conveniently forgets our nationalism!

All These castes today looks integrated because of the Indian Constitution. Article 44 of the constitution is an important stone in that regard. It requires the state to 'endeavor to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code through out India. It is, however, included in the chapter of Directive Principles of State Policy, which has no legal enforceability. The spine of controversy revolving around UCC has been secularism and the freedom of religion enumerated in the

Constitution of India. Article 44 is based on the concept that there is no necessary connection between religion and personal law in a civilized society. Marriage, succession and like matters are of secular nature and, therefore, law can regulate them. The UCC will not and shall not result in interference of one's religious beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of that, so far, we have witness enough caste wars and there are many more likely to come in future. Hinduism and its Philosophy and recently incarnated Hindutva is supportive of Varna Dharmas and caste system and hence in order to destroy the caste system Gautama Buddha, Dr Ambedkar and Mahatama Jyotiba Phule advocated for destroying the Dharmashastra and religion based on such Dharmashastras. This was their last resort against caste . Protection of such Dharmashastras is on high agenda of the upper caste for the simple reason that end of these Dharmashastras means the end of the privileges and monopoly of the uppers castes and hence making of Hindurashtra is a upper caste agenda to continue and sustain the supremacy of the upper caste over the low caste people.

### **CHALLENGES AHEAD**

India has a diverse and highly complex ethnic composition. The country is having more than 1600 linguistic groups and six major religions. The major religion - Hindu religion is further divided by a hierarchical caste system. In addition about 10 percent of the population has been characterized as tribal. In spite of the existence of such a vast spread of cultural diversity and heterogeneity, Indian society still remains as peaceful and not became a melting pot like other multi cultural societies in the world. (Ibid)It is a matter of great concern that secularism is struggling for survival in our own country. The anti thesis of secularism is communalism, which is gaining momentum in our society at an alarming pace. The mixing of religion with politics and the dangerous growth of communal parties pose a major threat of the secular framework of our country. India is a secular state and yet communalism continues to shape its policies. Frequent occurrences of violence in the name of religion give fatal blows to the very existence of secularism. There have been reports that some state governments were partisan and were instrumental in aggravating communal violence. Such shocking incidents would undoubtedly affect the secular credentials of our country. The divorce of politics from religion is the need of the hour and unless this task is expeditiously accomplished, secularism is bound to have its last

breath in our country. The constitution of India does not clearly and explicitly defines secularism and hence there is hardly any remedy if the state acts in a unsecular way.

In the end we need to take up the challenge of hindutva at all level from street to parliament. In Meera Nanda's word, "The battle against Hindutva has to be fought in the realm of ideas, as well as in the realm of politics and economy. We have no choice but to engage with the *content* of Hindutva ideology in order to refute and discredit its core ideas. Indeed, we will have to go a step further and challenge the irrational and supernatural aspects of *Hinduism itself* which provide a permanent home for all kinds of demagogues and charlatans' <sup>26</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The most important conviction of this Universal declaration is the growing belief that intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of peace and to reject out right the theory of the inevitable clash of cultures and civilizations. The Indian concept of secularism is full of contradictions and therefore, is unable to provide clear, un-ambiguous guidelines either to the individual or to the state. As a consequence, the religious values continue to dominate the day-to-day affairs and in the process generate tension because of plurality of religious views. In such circumstances, it is imperative that serious attention is paid to revive secularism and opt for the some other religion born on the Indian soil. Religion based on equality and brotherhood can be the fitting reply to the politics of Hindutva and its "Cultural Nationalism" that will not only curb communalism but also paye the way for building a strong nation which existed during the Buddhist era of Indian history.

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