

POLITY, RELIGION AND SECULARISM IN INDIA: A STUDY OF INTERRELATIONSHIPS

Abstract

In most parts of the world, the political processes have arisen out of social matrix. Tribes, clans, castes, classes have existed around a social organization. Economy, polity, religion, family and kinship networks have operated under a social framework. When Aristotle said that man is a political animal he had in mind the social element. In ancient Greece the political and the social were interdependent. F.D. Coulanges in his study of ancient cities noted that in Greek city states, the political activities of free citizens (who excluded women and slaves) were associated with social and religious duties and obligations. The people who gathered at the public forum participated in city cults which honoured their ancestors and deities and subsequently engaged themselves in political discussion. The Roman cities also had similar cuts which were led by the senators in the presence of citizens. The modern states have treated political work as a formal process which is independent of other factors. At present, the direct participation of people in politics has become a thing of the past.

The domestic element has almost vanished due to the rise of representative democracy. J. Habermas has stated that in the post – 17th century Europe the public sphere has disappeared, because the direct participation of people in the city councils has mostly disappeared. Harold Laski, the British thinker, has observed in a cryptic way the today public opinion is neither public nor opinion. In other words, politicians have taken over the functions of public who previously expressed their opinion freely.

The Indian society has not only been multi-ethnic but also multi-religious. Indian religions are pantheistic in which the nature is seen as a manifestation of divinity. By contrast of the monotheistic religions of West Asia the divinity was withdrawn from nature and made transcendental. In the Pre-Christian era (at the time of the rise of Jainism and Buddhism) there were numerous small-scale republics in the North. We find references to them in the Buddhist Jatak tales (composed both Pali and Sanskrit). These small tales had a strong demotic character:

1 Cell phone number: (+91) 80-3240 8782

they elected their rulers mostly on merit; there was widespread participation of people in the political affairs. In 3rd century B.C. Alexander reached the borders of India; this even gave rise to a socio-political ferment. Although Alexander abruptly returned to Macedonia, Chanakya (also known as Kautilya) used the threat of Greek invasion to mobilize the people towards building a central state. He inspired Chandragupta (a warrior) to establish the Mauryan state in eastern India. Thereafter, many such states came up in different parts of India. In spite of their aggressive or despotic tendencies, these large states brought about social stability. By decree they protected the many ethnic groups which were getting absorbed into the caste system. Although the caste system was hierarchic, yet it was based on reciprocal ties. Besides, they laid the foundations for socio-economic development.

In the southern peninsula the village councils known as panchayats became highly effective in the rural areas. These panchayats controlled land, fostered community participation in the village affairs and punished the wrong-doers. The southern kings never disturbed their autonomy. In the north also the village panchayat flourished till the 10th century. In the wake of British rule (17th century) these village councils declined. Radhakamal Mukerjee, the Indian sociologist, described them as "democracies of the East". Although many Indians are not educated, they have exercised intelligence in choosing their representative for assembly and parliament. This is largely due to the legacy of the panchayats.

The Indian political systems have been traditionally guided by two types of juridical texts. I. The dharmashastras (composed by Manu and others). II. The niti-shastras (such as Kautilya's Arthashastra, Shukra's Nitisara and Bhisma's address to the princes in Mahabharata which is known as Shantiparva). The texts of the first type laid down rules for conducting sacred duties, codes of conduct, punishment for transgression. The texts of the second type deal with more mundane matters related to agriculture, irrigation, imports and exports and military organization. It is here that Indian secularism originated. In other words, the rulers protected both sacred and secular pursuits of their subjects. The Indian rulers (Hindu, Budhists and Jaina) followed the same texts in administering justice, conducting warfare against the invaders and maintaining internal peace.

Further, the two ancient systems of Indian philosophy – Vaisheshika and Samkhya were highly ratiocinative. They laid the foundations for developments in Indian science. Alburini, the Persian scholar, described in detail India's developments in science, mathematics and astronomy in the 10th century AD. This clearly shows that Indian religions have not opposed science which is a secular activity. The Indian constitution (1951) has not seen any contradiction between religion and secularism. Both types of activities are legitimate in India. All people of India have freedom of worship; only condition is that one religious group should not interfere in the religious life of another group. However, in the recent years the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim militant groups have arisen and disturbed the social

harmony. These tensions and problems will be more fully analyzed in the larger version of this paper.

Keywords: multi-ethnic, multi-religious, pilgrimage, inclusiveness, pan-chayats, secularism.

Introduction

The Indian subcontinent was a welter of many political experiments. In the millennium preceding the Christian era, the northern India was dotted with many small states called the *ganarajyas* (republics). These were the autonomous states, with an elective monarchy, a designated territory, a royal court and the soldiers entrusted with a security of the domain. These republics were reminiscent of the ancient city states of Greece. In the Buddhist text *Dighanikaya* there are references to such states. Similarly, in the Buddhist *Jataka* tales there are references to them. Buddha and Mahavira, the great religious reformers, were born into the royal clans of such republics. In these texts there are indications that the incompetent or wicked ruler was thrown out by his angry subjects and he was replaced by a new ruler. In the 3rd century B.C., the Greek warrior Alexander started from his Macedonian kingdom and carried out a successful military operation against the Persian rule. He reached Punjab (the border of India) and soon after returned to his kingdom, but he passed away during this journey. His brief stay near India led to a socio-political ferment, which stirred up India's nationalistic aspirations. In north India a Brahmin pundit named Chanakya (also known as Kautilya) mobilized the masses of people, by alerting them about the threat of foreign invasion. He inspired a warrior (Chandragupta) who rallied people around him, raised an army and overthrew the corrupt rulers of Maghadha (Bihar) and set up the Mauryan kingdom. He closely followed Chanakya's advice in launching an Empire, which in course of time controlled a vast territory in north India. The Greek ambassador in the Mauryan court, Megasthenes, put on record his detailed observations of Chandragupta's rule. In this large state irrigation, agriculture, mining, trade and commerce were actively promoted and controlled by centralized administration.

The small republics mentioned above were nearly obliterated the march of large states. This was inevitable because a centralized rule was needed to defend India's vast territory. The Indian society had always existed on the basis of the *varnashrama dharma* which was a four-tiered social system. As such there was no Hobbesian state in India. The king or the ruler was the one who protected this social system and enforced sacred and social regulations among the members of society. There was no divine right theory in Indian kinship. This is because the king was not the source of law. His authority to rule was based on the juridical texts known as (a) *Dharmashastra* - composed by Manu and others, and (b) *ni-*

tishastras². These texts are written in Sanskrit and they have guided the rulers of ancient India: Hindu Buddhist and Jaina. The texts of the first type dealt with sacred aspects of life, enforced ritual obligations on the people and also prescribed expiation to those who violated the rules. Even if the king was not Hindu he did not interfere in the ritualistic life of his subjects. In particular, the dharmashastras³ enjoyed upon the ruler to uphold the varna order by wielding the sword if needed.

The king's punishment of those who transgressed the rules was usually preceded by expiation. Besides, the karma theory widely accepted in India held that the wrong doers would incur demerits in the next round of births. The folk tales of India mention that the ruler often moved among the common people incognito in order to know the true state of his policies. Chanakya insisted that the ruler should be a model of good conduct to his subjects. He should be available to the common people and exert himself for the welfare of the state. His famous work Arthshastra⁴ belong to the second type of text known as nitishastra. There are three other well-known individuals, namely Shukra, Bhishma and Vidura, who contributed to the nitishastra. These texts are not directly concerned with sacred aspects. They do emphasize that moral behaviour must be maintained. The old traditions need to be followed. However, they are also concerned with secular governance. The people must pay taxes to the state and contribute to economic production.

Ashoka who became the ruler of Mauryan empire was personally a Buddhist but extended his protection to Brahmins and Jainas. In his royal edicts engraved on stone he declared that he had undertaken welfare measures for the common people. In his realm roads were laid, trees were planted, water sources were created, rest houses were constructed for travelers, and hospitals for human beings, animals and birds were set up. He extended his patronage even to the tribals who lived in the forests. More than this he was available to the common people most part of the day and night. Of course, as a Buddhist he forbade the killing of animals for food. He set a personal example by greatly reducing consumption of meat in his palace. This measure made him unpopular among some people. He sent peace missions to Greece, Iran and Sri Lanka. H.G. Wells,

2 There were also instruction systems in Sanskrit known as vidyas (which were composed between first and fifth century A.D.). These were used for the training of young members of the ruling class in various arts and sciences. Both sacred and secular subjects were included in them; Vedas astronomy archery were among the subjects studied by the pupils. See G.S. Ghurye: "Vedas" in his work Anthro-po-Sociological Papers, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1963, pp: 303-351.

3 Ananda Coomaraswamy (noted commentator on Indian culture) writes "The emergence of a definitely Brahmanical rather than a Bhuddhist scheme of life is to be attributed to the fact that the practical energies of Bhuddhists were largely absorbed within the limits of monasticism. The Buddhists in the main regard Nirvana . . . as the sole object of life. But the Brahmins never forgot that this life is in the field alike of Pursuit and Return. Their scheme of life is set forth at great length in the Sutra literature, the Dhama Shastras and the Epics (in general 4th -1st centuries B.C.). See his works: The Dance of Shiva, Manshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1975 (Indian Reprint), p.42.

4 See A.K. Sen: *Hindu Political Thought*, Gyan Publishers, New Delhi, (Indian Reprint) 1986, pp. 135-179.

writer and historian, has said that there was no greater monarch than Ashoka in history. The Buddhists called him Chakravartin (wielder of the moral wheel) and thus placed him on a high pedestal.

An interesting aspect of Indian rulership is that although the king wields the sword in order to punish the offenders, yet he has no personal motive, hatred or anger. As the Nordic Indologist unto Tahtien was shown the king emerges as a non-violent person⁵. In other words he remains mentally non-violent even while discharging his military duties. The Latin phrase *sine ira et studio* (without anger and passion) aptly describes a state of mind. In fact the Hindu sacred texts such as epics, the purans and Bhagavad Gita uphold the kings' duty in maintaining social order by the use of force or military action. This trend was reversed with the rise of Buddhism which made the ruling classes give up arms and turn inward. At the turn of the 10th century A.D. India's borders became more vulnerable to foreign invasions. In sum, the Indian ethos did not uphold a policy of non-violence but expected the rulers to be free from personal hatred towards the wrong doers.

In the southern peninsula during the first two millennia after Christ, there was an extensive growth and spread of village councils known as panchayats. These councils of common people governed small areas of rural India. They controlled land, water sources, forests etc. The Panchayats collected fines from the rule breakers and also prescribed expiation. They settled caste disputes in open assembly. The southern rulers such as Chola, Pallava, Pandya, Chera, etc., did not interfere in the panchayats. But the criminal disputes were beyond the scope of panchayats and the king's court had to intervene in such cases. There was a wide participation of the villagers men, women and children – in the meetings organized by the panchayats. Sir Henry Maine, the British jurist, called them the Village Republics. India attained freedom in 1947 and became a republic in 1950. all these years democracy as a social system had worked well in India; the elections are fair and free. The masses of India are not educated. In spite of this, the people have exercised a good judgment in electing their representatives to the assembly and the parliament. They have been occasionally misled by corrupt politicians; yet sooner or later they have shown a capacity to elect the right person. These political skills have been inherited due to the legacy of the panchayats which flourished in the north upto the 10th century A.D. and in the south upto 17th century A.D. At present panchayat system has been under the shadow of the big political parties. A revival of this system will be a very valuable aid to strengthen democracy at the basic level of Indian society.

The modern Indian secularism has taken off from the past and as such retains the elements from previous times. Most of the rulers (foreign or Indian) adopted a policy of tolerance towards different faiths. The Greeks, Kushans, Muslims and British who ruled at different times in the form of small kingdoms or

5 See. Unto Tahtinen: *Non-Violent Theories of Punishment*, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1983.

as a big empire usually gave grants and endowments to temples, mosques and churches. During British times, Lord Curzon established archaeological survey of India in the early part of the 20th century for the protection and preservation of national monuments. This was a major step which led to the discovery and protection of Hindu, Buddhist, Jaina, Sikh, Muslim and Christian monuments. There were two noted archaeologists, namely Sir John Marshal and Sir Mortimer Wheeler who left deep a imprint on the others who continued their work. Also the British government established a muzarai (religious endowment department) in the government, to give grants for the upkeep of temples etc. All these policies and practices have continued up to the present in free India. Today, major Hindu temples are managed by government offices. Likewise, the religious places are generally under the control of government especially in different states of the Indian union. When the major festivals of different communities are held large numbers of people participate in them. The state police and para military forces have controlled the crowds. One example is Kumbha Mela which is held in north once in 12 years. Millions of people participate in this event. Unless the state employs its security agencies, these events cannot remain free from mishaps. Therefore it is quite clear that the Indian state which is secular in the sense that it is not based upon any particular religion, is nevertheless actively engaged in protecting the people's religious interests. The central assumption is that even if the state does not believe in religion, most of the common citizens believe in it. hence, the state extends its supports to the religious events. Another important policy is that the religious establishments controlled by the government are open to all people irrespective of their religious affiliation. If discrimination is reported then the grants given to the temples etc. is suspended. Besides, there are various religious boards which regulate the activities of their respective places of worships.

In India there are numerous schools and colleges run by Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Islamic groups. Mainly they teach secular course and subjects. There are also medical, engineering and management colleges run by the various trusts. In so far they help in the spread of education, they are recognized by the government and receive grants. The examinations are conducted by the various government agencies. Thus there is an interdependence between private and public wings of the society. in sum, secularism in India is more practical than ideological. In some western countries religion is treated as a personal or private matter. This is not the case in India even if the Indian constitution has separated religion from secular activity.

In the Indian schools and colleges people of different faiths get education. For instance, the Banaras Hindu University is opened to non-Hindus also. Likewise, Catholic schools and colleges admit many non-catholics. There si no religious instruction in these institutions which implies indoctrination. The religious trust retain control over the selection of the staff members subject to the common qualification laid down by the educational boards of the government.

It must be mentioned here that the government at the state and central level has embarked upon extensive spread of education. This effort is supplemented by private enterprise mentioned above. In the early part of 20th century Banaras Hindu University was brought into existence by the efforts of Annie Besant (an Irish person) who worked with the Indian nationalists. The Christian missionaries spread education in south-central and south-eastern tribal areas on a large scale during the last few decades. Still there are large sections of people who are not educated. The public literacy campaigns have not been successful, because there is a belief among some sections of people that formal education does not make much difference to them.

Religion in Indian Society

The major Indian religion such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism belong to the pantheistic system; similarly, the minor religions also share the same belief. This is also found in Japan, China and other countries of the Far East. In these religions there are multiple ties between man and nature. In fact, the nature's diversities such as water, earth, hills, valleys, sea coasts are believed to be permeated by divinity. The Hindu reach far away Mount Kailash which is located between India and China to offer their prayers to it. Likewise, the Japanese reach top of Mount Fuji for prayer and worship. Even the flora and fauna are part of the sacred order. The lotus flower is regarded as sacred in many parts of Asia. The Hindu God Vishnu rides garuda (eagle) as his vehicle; Shiva rides a bull and the Goddess Durga rides a lion. The Indian society is not polytheistic because its divinities are not discrete entities but arise from the same transcendental source. For example, the numerous gods and goddesses of popular Hinduism are all derived from the three primal deities Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti. The Muslims and Christians who came to India were unable to understand that there was oneness in the manifold idols or icons which were worshipped in Indian homes and temples. The early Muslim invaders destroyed the temples thinking that idolatry was thriving in them. The idols are only personifications of some symbols or ideas which are intangible in nature. These symbols are like the archetypes described by C.G. Jung in his study of the collective unconscious.

Inclusiveness has always been the hallmark of pantheism. In India many religions have lived side by side, in spite of occasional communal strife. In Japan Shintoism has lived side by side with Buddhism; in China Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist beliefs and practices are commonly shared by the people. In the monotheist religions of West Asia divinity was withdrawn from the nature and made transcendental. Under this system what one believes in or adhares to is subjected to control by the religious doctrine. A Hindu may worship a personal deity of his choice – even Jesus Christ! It does not disqualify him provided he gets along with others in performing rituals, or at least in participating in religious functions. In a

pantheistic setting no one ever disputes the existence of god in academic terms. Therefore, a person who does not believe in god is not called an atheist but an agnostic. As a rule Buddhists and Jains are agnostic: they do not subscribe to the creation of the world by devine decree. The agnostic attitude is this: "I do not know why or how this has happened". An agnostic nevertheless firmly believes in an underlying spirituality.

There are important aspects of religions in India: (a) places worship; (b) monastic institutions; and (c) sects and cults. (a) Places of Worship: The number of holy places (temples, church, mosque) found in is India is legion. Patronage by private donors, public donations and voluntary labour by local community have provided the mans to build them. They are the centres where people gather to offer prayers and participate in collective events. They have lend grandeur to India in lasting way. The lingaraj tample of Orissa, the Khajuraho temples of Orissa the Kailas temple of Ellora in Maharashtra and the Brihadeeswara temple of Tamil Nadu are just a few examples. The Buddhist stupa at Sanchi (M.P.), the Jaina temple of Mount Abu (Rajasthan), the Golden temple of Sikhs in Amritsar (Punjab), the Bahai Temple in New Delhi, the Swamy Narayan Temple of Ahmedabad are some of the holy places of the Indian sects old and new. Likewise the cathedrals of old Goa (now part of India), the Islamic Monuments in Agra, Delhi and Bijapur (Karnataka) are also impressive monuments. The impact of these places of worship on people is two fold: (1) Religious and (2) Cultural. Already reference has been made to the religious aspect. The second type of experience is available to the visitor who may be a non-believer but admires the vast and varied cultural dimensions of India. Associated with the places of worship is the pilgrimage in which people mover across the country in order to visit the sacred centres.

Pilgrimage is an universal type of movement among people of many countries who seek religious or spiritual solace. They traverse vast distances on land or sea to reach a holy place. Prior to modern transport pilgrims endured much physical exertion to fulfill their desire. There were also many difficulties faced by them in getting food, shelter and water. Still for centuries the pilgrims carried out their vow to visit the holy places. Jerusalem, Santiago and Banares are a few of the places which have attracted pilgrims from all over the world. Victor Turner (the British social anthropologist) have done outstanding work in his comparative study of pilgrimage⁶. In India people from south move to far reaches to north to worship a mountain or take bath in a holy river. Likewise, the people of north visit the sea coast of western India or south India for a religious purpose. The improvement in transport and communication in India have lent help to the pilgrims. Even today the pilgrims have to stay in crowded shelters and endure many personal discomforts. In the northern religion landslides and floods occur in the Himalayan range during monsoon months. The cold season in the north

6 See Victor Turner: *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Aldine, Chicago, 1969.

is also very severe. These difficulties have not stopped pilgrims from their march. The pilgrims include both individuals and groups who share food and shelter during the journey and make no complaints about the drawbacks.

One outstanding outcome of pilgrimage in India and elsewhere is the pervasive sense of equality among the participants. When thousands of men, women and children take bath in holy rivers or in hot water springs near the temples there is no concern about their ethnic or caste background. The usual identity which come from the village or caste background is obliterated during the journey. The deeply structured inequality of the society is countered by the anti-structure of the assemblage of people at a holy place. The pilgrimage is a valuable guide to the understanding of Indian society. It serves as a much needed corrective to the assumption that India is dominated by hierarchic notions which limit the interactions among the people and promote barriers. In fact in Hindu temples the caste distinctions are not dominant. The priest who conducts rituals for the people is not necessarily a Brahmin. In some of the important temples of India there are Brahmins as well as non-Brahmins. Normally, the castes are separated from each other and are marked by aspicuousness. For example, a non-Brahmin who is ritually impure but is trained in temple liturgy acquires an auspicious status. Hence, the temples also come under the category of anti-structures. In the scholarly writings on Indian society undue emphasis is placed on caste inequality. A totalistic understanding is more helpful for reaching a balanced depiction of India. The holy men and women of India have come from diverse castes but due to their inner attainment they are placed far above the ordinary men and women, no one thinks of their caste status; those who are in search of solace come to them on their own.

Among the non-Hindus durgahs of Muslims and gurudwaras of Sikhs have served to make India a more equal society. They have given shelter to people irrespective of their religious background. They are found in many parts of India and they are visited by people from diverse backgrounds. In a country where poverty, natural calamities and warfare have made people destitute or homeless such havens have given hope and provided concrete help. The temples, durgahs and gurudwaras at the basic level are organizations of people's welfare. Unlike the political policies of welfare which are subject to fluctuations, these welfare centres have consistently catered to the needs of people. It is mainly by the public donations which are voluntary that these are managed. Besides, no publicity campaign is launched by a holy place to secure advantages from people. The visitors who come to these centres seek the blessings to heal their sickness or find a solution to their personal problems. The continuation of traditional mode of welfare in modern times is a noticeable fact. Thus, tradition and modernity have impinged on each other.

(b) Monastic Institutions: Bhuddism and Jainism in some respects differed from the main doctrine of Hinduism. Both of them aimed at a non-ritualis-

tic kind of religion. The Buddhist and Jaina approach was to promote an ascetic orientation by instilling monastic discipline⁷ among their followers. Later, in the 8th century A.D. Shankara (the Hindu reformer) started 10 orders of ascetics. The monks and nuns in Buddhists and Jaina monasteries engaged themselves in prayer, meditation and learning. Similarly the Hindu monastic orders reoriented the life of the people by eliminating some rituals and practices. Max Weber, in his study of religions, referred to the otherworldly attitude of India. He was mainly looking at the ascetic attitude of the monastic. He overlooked the fact that there was diversity in India. The ascetic were no doubt very important but there were many other sections of society who did not share this attitude. Centuries ago in India made progress in astronomy, mathematics, metallurgy, ship-building, etc. The Indian traders were engaged in trade even outside India including Greece and Roma. The Buddhist monasteries which were thriving on the Silk Route, which connected India to Central Asia on the one hadn and Far East on the other hand, served as shelters for the traders and also provided warehousing facilities for their goods; they even provided banking facilities. The Hindu monastic orders extended educational opportunities to the people at large. In the last few decades the Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Swamy Narayan Trust and the Lingayat Educational Society have done extensive educational work in India, while keeping firmly their commitment to monastic values and norms.

An important aspect of monasticism is that there is scope for any aspirant to attain a high spiritual status through the ascetic path. For example, the four noted exponents of India's spirituality, namely, Vivekanda, Yogandanda, Sri Aurobidno and Mahesh Yogi belonged to a non-Brahminical background. There is a wrong impression in some quarters that the Brahmins escaped from the caste restrictions and became dominant in the monasteries. In fact the ascetic or monastic path is open to every one. There is no doubt that the ascetics have valourised the Indian society⁸. Swamy Vivekananda inspired generations of Indians by his teachings which called upon the people to rebuild the Indian Society. Sri Aurobindo made a painstaking study of the Rig Veda and cleared the mental cobwebs created by the Western indo-logiest. He showed that the Vedas were a rich source of symbols and ideas which can help in the reconstruction of India. Incidentally, both of them were traditionalists and did not derive from modern reforms. According the them the sanatana dharma yielded more and more insights for reconstruction of the present and the future if there is sufficient introspection. The monastic orders have also published extensively on Indian

7 P.A. Sorokin referred to the stoic discipline practiced in the European monastic orders. He wrote "The majority of the medieval thinkers stressed the same idea in various ways partly in the form of various philosophies and psychological theories, but principally in the form of the applied arts of the re-education human being successfully practiced in the monasteries and similar institutions. See *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi, 1978, Indian reprint, p. 602.

8 a) See G.S. Ghurye: *Indian Sadhus*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1964.

b) C.N.Venugopal: "G.S. Ghurye's Sociology of Religion" in A.R.Momin ed. *The Legacy of G.S. Ghurye*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1966., pp. 47-60.

culture and religion in English and other languages. The objective of social service through education and inculcation of discipline among the youth has been achieved by these missions.

A brief reference may be made here to the Christian monasteries. In medieval Europe a number of monastic orders founded by Jesuits, Benedictines, the followers of St. Francis started ameliorative work. These orders were opposed to the worldly concerns of the Roman Church during the Dark Age of Europe, these monastic centres were enclaves of learning and spirituality. They encouraged the cultivation of sciences and arts within the cloisters. The educational missions derived from them are found in India also. There are many convents, schools and colleges named after St. Charles, St. Xavier, Lady of the Rosary, etc. While the Catholics have gained a firm foothold in the domain of education, the Protestants are actively engaged in the spread of medical welfare through hospitals. India's composite societies is built up many cultural strands but there is an underlying unity which seems to be timeless.

(C) Castes, Sects and Cults: Castes and their Networks: In the post-Vedic times for several centuries have occupied a dominant position in India. There are about 3000 castes, small or big. The all India pattern recognizes four varna orders: the learned people, the warriors, traders and agriculturists and the service class. But varna (which means colour) is different from jati (caste). The varna refers to a national category based on the individuals attributes; by contrast jati refers to a concrete category into which one is born. There have been several kings or soldiers who came up from non-warrior background but attained success due to self-effort. For example, Chandra Gupta was born into a non-ruling family; yet he became the emperor through his valour. Likewise a person born in the lower category can rise to the rank of the learned. Valmiki who composed Ramayana and Vyas who composed Mahabharata came up from a lower level. The castes⁹ are hereditary social unit. At the time of birth a person acquires a social position high or low. It is called "status by ascription" in sociology. However, many castes arose from the guild background. The guilds were engaged in the production of weapons, textiles, arts and crafts. The productive process in the country was supported by the guilds. Their rulers assured protection to the castes and guilds by confirming their traditional rights and privileges. This policy measure helped in the continuation of social order.

Castes shared from positive as well as negative traits. They conferred a social identity on their members. Marriage, property inheritance and peaceful pursuit of occupations were made possible under the aegis of caste framework. The main difference between the higher and lower castes is this: the former are usually affiliated to the monastic orders from whom they seek guidance; the lat-

9 Berreman writes: "A Caste hierarchy is to large extent an interactional hierarchy . . . Every relevant other is a superior, a peer or an inferior depending on caste. Only within the caste is status equality found . . ." See G.D. Berreman "Caste Systems" in Peter Worsley (ed.) *Modern Sociology*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, U.K. p. 511.

ter have strong caste councils which strictly regulate the conduct of their members. The negative aspects of castes are the exclusive attitude of their members. There are also ritual restrictions which limit the psychological barriers in daily life due to modernization some of these restrictions are modified but within the closed circle of caste they continue in one way or the other. But virtually all spheres of life professions, services, political affiliations are influenced by castes in some way or other. When the candidates contest the elections for the assembly or the parliament, caste and community consideration have a role to play. However, there are exception to this rule. It must be recognized that the reality of caste has somewhat halted India's secular progress.

Castes in India cut across the religions barriers. In some form or the other caste consideration are present among the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Christians. Among the non-Hindu groups castes are not recognized in terms of doctrine or spiritual authority. But they exist as ground reality: Marriages are not devoid of caste ties. The converts from upper castes prefer their own level in choosing the marriage partners. Louis Dumont, the French sociologist, has made references to the pervasive caste consciousness in India. In the recent years, the lower castes have acquired some special status in the form of quotas in admission to colleges, jobs, etc. The sects which exist in India are in Principle different from castes but they too have some caste preferences. But in modern times the castes are interacting in public places (markets, etc) as never before. The old social isolation does not exist any longer. In buses and train people move together, take food in hotels without reference to the caste background. This is a step in modernization.

Sects and Cults: The last millennium saw the rise of devotional movements called Bhaktism¹⁰. In every major region of India, the Bhakti movement emphasized the common man's nearness to god through the emotions of love, affection and goodwill. Guru Nanak in Punjab, Tulsidas and Kabir in the Hindi region of north India, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal, Basaveswara in Karnataka, Shankardeva in Assam, Mira Bai in Rajasthan and Narsi Mehta in Gujarat are some of the examples. These people were poets and saints who composed in the regional languages which were commonly understood by the people. The modernization of Indian languages was made possible by such literary efforts. Even to this day they are popular because people can understand the message. These poets came from the diverse backgrounds. Tukaram who composed Marathi literature of high order came from a lower caste. The Bhakti movement liberated people from the hegemony of Sanskrit. In Fact this contributed to the secularization of Indian society by opening up the common channels of communication.

Another important outcome of the Bhakti movement was that the social interactions among the people were no longer restricted to the caste background. The satsang organized under the aegis of Bhaktism were assemblages of

10 a) See C.N.Venugopal: *Ideology and Society in India*, Criterion, New Delhi, 1988. b) C.N. Venugopal: *Religion and Society in India*, Gyan Publishers, New Delhi, 1988.

people in which men, women and children prayed together, ate the food served to them and also stayed in common shelters. For centuries the satsangs have occupied an important place in north India. The satsangs are similar to pilgrimage: just as the bath in the holy river purifies a person, the participant in a Bhakti gathering is purified; the guru male or female is the holy water. Similarly, the Sufies of north India rallied people around them irrespective of their caste or community background. Both Bhakti and Sufi social gatherings ushered in widespread syncretistic culture in India. The Hindu and Muslim groups shared many values by participating in devotional activities.

The sects lay down some criteria for admitting members to their fold. The members have to abide by the discipline of the sect. they have to wear clothes and share the food according to the common practices. The sect membership confers on them a social identity which is distinct from caste identity. In the sect the Guru is succeeded by a designated discipline who is acceptable to the members. By contrast, in a cult the people rally around a person credited with mystical or magical powers. After this person is no longer there the cult usually ceases to exist. However, the followers of cult believe that the spirit of the leader exists in transcendental sence. For example Shiridi Saibaba who exists in the last part of 19th century in Maharashtra has become the cult figure of an extraordinary stature. Even now numerous people converge in the shrine dedicated to him and offer prayers to him. The cult is growing stronger by the day; the modern transport had aided the fast movement of people from different parts of India towards Shiridi. Similar cults are existing in India which attract a wide variety of people. Common to cults is the magic or miracle which is attributed personality of the cult leader.

Secularism has become the main trend in modern world. In Western Europe after the industrial revolution, many countries separated state from Church in the public domain. The state adopted secular policies independent of the Church. Thereafter religious affairs became part of private domain. One reason for this was that the Church resisted some developments in science; besides the people were experiencing a lack of mental freedom because they had to abide by the doctrine of the Church. In Western Europe secularism reached the zenith in France after the French revolution; along with the march in science and technology mass political parties arose in Europe which nearly obliterated the earlier political pluralism based on local communities. Noted intellectuals¹¹ like Durkheim, Bonald, Hegel and Edmund Burke resisted the inroads made by the big political set up. The previous political system was based upon primary human relations in which people knew each other. The social solidarity based on reciprocity and collective feelings was eroded by an impersonal political culture.

In India there has never been a separation between the secular and

11 See Robert Nisbet: *The Sociological Tradition*, University of California (U.S.A.) 1966, pp. 47-106.

the religious domain in historical as well as present times. The noted rulers of the past such as Ashoka, Kanishka, the Imperial Guptas and Harsha who controlled most parts of north India had followed a policy of tolerance toward religions. They made grants and donations to Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina temples and monasteries. During the Islamic rule (11th to 17th centuries A.D.) there were some mixed trends. Some of the early sultans used forces to convert sections of people to Islam. Aurangzeb the later Moughal ruler imposed upon non-Muslims a religious tax known as Jizya. But Akbar was a liberal ruler who brought together Hindus and Muslims through his amity and goodwill. The British rulers of the early period of colonialism were not opposed to India's religious traditions. Warren Hastings the governor general sent his offerings to the temple of Kali in Kolkata worshipped by Hindus. He also gave grants to Max Muller to edit and translate the Rig Veda from Sanskrit into English. The sultans and kings who ruled in India generally tolerated religious diversities because it ensured for them the loyalty of their subjects.

Under the constitution of India there are provisions for both secular and religious pursuits; individuals and groups are free to follow their chosen way of life without, of course, curtaining each other's right. B.R. Ambedkar who contributed much to the making of the Indian constitution became a Buddhist and launched a social movement for the improvement of the underprivileged groups in India. He used a religious idiom in guiding his followers on the path of progress. He generally encouraged education for the masses. M.K. Gandhi who led the people of India to political freedom was a religious person. He drew his ideas from Gita, Bible and Koran. In the 1950s of 20th century Vinoba Bhave, a follower of Gandhi, launched the Sarvodaya Movement to redeem the plight of the landless peasants and other deprived sections. He too used ideas drawn from religious texts to awaken the people and draw them out of their backwardness. Both Gandhi and Bhave gave attention to the improvement of rural life through constructive programmes. Thus secular progress is not halted by the religious orientation; even if the leaders of the society are non-believers, most common people subscribe to one faith or the other.

The communal strife which occurred in India before and after Independence was the result of the British policy of divide and rule. In the first decade of the 20th century Lord Curzon the viceroy of India divided Bengal into Western and Eastern Provinces by the communal criteria. This created a discord between Hindu and Muslims. In North India Communal electorates were created in which the Hindus and Muslims voted separately in the provincial elections. This later led to the creation of India and Pakistan as separate states in the region. In the post-Independence period the communal riots took place in many towns and cities in which both Hindus and Muslims were killed. At present communal strife has receded to the background but the national unity is disrupted due to militancy and terrorism. One positive trend is that the religious bodies which have been

part of the Indian tradition have not become communal in outlook. By contrast both among Hindu and Muslim militant groups have given rise to a communal ideology in other words, there is communalization of some sections of political parties but the religious groups are not similarly affected¹².

There are two challenges to secularism in present day India. One is that there is a long standing dynastic tradition in Indian society. during the British rule which lasted for nearly two and half centuries (18th century to the middle of 20th century) under the treaty relations six hundred princely states were created all over India/ the traditional ruling families who became the heads of these states were given special powers and privileges. In turn most of these rulers remained loyal to the British Empire. They lived in large palaces and led a lavish life style which was supported by their inherited wealth and a large share of the taxes collected from their subjects. In contrast most people in these states lived in poverty, controlled by their caste regulations. However a few large states like Hyderabad, Baroda, Indore, Bhopal, Jaipur and Mysore became quite progressive in terms of education, industrial development, etc. The succession to these states was inherited right subject to the viceroy's approval. Between 1947 and 1950 most of these states were merged in the Indian union but the former rulers retained some privileges till the year 1971.

In many spheres of Indian society such as politics, business, professions such as law and medicine, defense services, etc. usually the offspring continue in the path of their elders. In the professions and the defense services selection is through competition and those who are not up to the mark cannot get into them. But in politics and business merit alone is not sufficient to succeed to top position. Here nepotism and favouritism came into the selection process. The rules may be modified to accommodate smooth succession. The persons endowed with merit suffer a setback because of extraneous influences. In the development of Indian secularism this method is unsuitable. In the field of business there is an emergence of crony capitalism in some areas of investment. This means that business partnerships are made or broken not according to the market criteria but according to family, kinship and caste considerations. This has adversely affected the further development of Indian industry. It is worth mentioning that during the long colonial rule there was no comprador capitalism. The Indian business houses such as Tatas, Birlas built up capital through their hard work and public support. They did not derive capital from the British banks. The Indian banking industry which has contributed to the emergence of industries has remained strong till the present. In contrast in U.S.A. many small or big banks have gone into liquidation. Since the 1980s India has become self sufficient in grains due to important strides made in the techniques of production. The emergence of a large middle class has altered India's position in the world. In spite of

12 See C.N. Venugopal "The Sociology of Religion in India" in Yogendra Singh (ed.) *Social Sciences: Communication, Anthropology and Sociologys.*, New Delhi, 2010, p.485.

poverty and backwardness which are evident in the country's hinterland it has reached the status of a high order.

A brief reference may be made to the prevalence of corruption in public life. American sociologist Sutherland's description of white collar crime is found in India also. This type of crime is not visible to the public but it leads to diversion of public funds, misuse of official position for selfish ends and formation of secrete networks. The respectable looking politician, administrator or businessman has often indulged in corruption. In particular the funds are diverted into the hands of kith and kin for safe custody. In the recent years some very big cases of corruption have been exposed through the mass media, there is also a lot of protest against corruption by the members of the public. In the coming years this will be a big challenge for Indian society. among the common people there is an appreciation of the British rule where most of the foreign and Indian officers and subordinates were dedicated to their work and maintained clean records of service. When there is a fast development of the country there is a higher incidence of corruption due to the lack of effective supervision. There is a negative trait among many Indians who treat corruption with indifference. Further the lack of corrective action has come in the way of eliminating corruption.

References

- Al-Biruni: (edited Q.Ahmad) *India*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1983.
- Chopra, Deepak: *The Third Jesus*, Rider Publications, U.K. 2008.
- Ananyananda, Swamy (Pbulisher) *The Teachings of Swamy Vivekananda*, Mayavati, Himalayas, India, 1971.
- Aurobindo, Sri: *India's Rebirth*, Institute for Evolutionary Research, Mysore, India, 2000.
- Hettiarachchi Shanthikumar, Tamil Tiger 'Martyrdom' in Sri Lanka: Faith in Suicide for Nationhood?, *Politics and Religion Journal*, Vol.1, No.2, 2007
- Hussain, Abid: *India's National Culture*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1973.
- Jevtic, Mirosljub, Political science and religion, *Politics and Religion Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2007.
- Jevtic Mirosljub, Religion and Relations between Genders, *Politics and Religion Journal*, Vol. 2, No.1, 2008.
- Joshi, Kireet: *The Veda and the Indian Culture*, Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan, Delhi, 1994.
- Sharma, A.K. (ed.) *Essays in Honour of Professor C.N. Venugopal*, D.K. Printers, New Delhi, 2011.
- Sharma, Vishwanath: *Chanakya Niti*, Manoj Publications, Delhi, 2004.

Ц.Н. Венугопал

ДРЖАВНО УРЕЂЕЊЕ, РЕЛИГИЈА И СЕКУЛАРИЗАМ У ИНДИЈИ: СТУДИЈА МЕЂУОДНОСА

Резиме

У највећем делу света, политички процеси су настали из друштвене матрице. Племена, кланови, касте и класе су постојале у друштвеној организацији. Економија, државно уређење, религија, породица и родбинске везе су се развијале у оквиру друштвеног обрасца. Када је Аристотел рекао да је човек политичка животиња имао је на уму друштвени елемент. У античкој Грчкој друштвено и политичко су били међузависни. Ф.Д. Коулагнес у својој студији о античким градовима је забележио да у Грчким градовима – државама, политичка активност слободних грађана (која је искључивала жене и робове) била повезана са друштвеним и верским дужностима и обавезама. Људи који би се окупили на јавном тргу су учествовали у градском култу који је славио њихове претке и божанства а потом се укључивали у политичке дискусије. Римски градови су такође имали сличне култове који су били вођени од стране сенатора у присуству грађана. Модерне државе су третирале политички рад као формалан процес који је независан од осталих фактора. Данас, директна партиципација људи у политици је постала прошлост.

Домаћи елемент је скоро нестао због успона репрезентативне демократије. Ј. Хабермас је приметио да је у Европи у пост – 17том веку јавна сфера нестала зато што је скоро нестала директна партиципација грађана у градским саветима. Харолд Ласки, британски мислилац, је приметио да садашње јавно мишљење није нити јавно нити мишљење. Другим речима, политичари су преузели функцију јавности која је претходно слободно изразила своје мишљење.

Индијско друштво није било само мултиетничко, већ и мултиверско. Индијске религије су пантеистичке у којима се природа види као манифестација божанства. Супротно од монотеистичких религија Западне Азије, божанство је извучено из природе и учињено трансцедентним. У прехришћанској ери (у време ђаинизма и будизма) био је велики број малих република на северу. Ми налазимо податке о њима у будистичким Јатак причама (писане и на Пали језику и на санскриту). Ове кратке приче имају јак народни карактер: оне су бирале своје владаре углавном по заслугама, постојала је високо раширена партиципација народа у политичким пословима. У трећем веку пре нове ере Александар је стигао до граница Индије,

ово је учинило само да се појача друштвено – политичко превирање. Иако се Александар изненада вратио у Македонију, Чанакија (познат и као Каутиља) је искористио страх од грчке инвазије да мобилише народ за стварање централизоване државе. Он је инспирисао Чандрагупту (ратника) да направи Мауријску државу у источној Индији. Након тога, многе сличне државе су настале на различитим местима у Индији. Упркос њиховим агресивним или деспотским тенденцијама, ове велике државе су допринеле друштвеној стабилности. Оне су декретима штитиле многе етничке групе које су биле апсорбоване у кастински систем. Иако је кастински систем хијархизован, он је заснован на реципрочним везама. Поред тога, оне су поставиле основе друштвено – економског развоја.

На јужном делу полуострва сеоски савети познати као панчајати су постали веома ефективни у руралним срединама. Они су контролисали земљу, поспешивали партиципацију у пословима села и кажњавали оне који су гршили. Јужни краљеви никада нису ометали њихову аутономију. На северу су сеоски панчајати такође постојали све до десетог века. На почетку британске владавине (17ти век) ови сеоски савети су били укинута. Радхака-мал Мукерје, индијски социолог, их је описао као 'демократије истока'. Иако многи Индијци нису образовани, они су користили интелигенцију бирајући своје представнике за скупштину и парламент. То је углавном због наследства панчајата.

Индијски политички систем је традиционално уређиван са два типа правних текстова. 1. дхармашатре (уређиване од стране Мануа и осталих) и 2. нитишатре (као што су Артхашатра, Шукра Нитишара и Бхипма која се обраћа Махабхарати која је позната као Шантипарва). Текстови првог типа постављају правила о успостављању верских дужности, спровођење правила, казне за прекршај. Текстови другог типа се више односе на свакодневне ствари повезане са агрикултуром, наводњавањем, увозом и извозом и војном организацијом. Одавде потиче индијски секуларизам. Другим речима, правила штите како верске тако и секуларне тежње субјекта. Индијске вође (Хиндуси, будисти и Ђаини) су пратиле исте текстове у спровођењу правде, водећи ратове против освајача и чувајући унутрашњи мир.

Даље, два античка система индијске философије – Ваишешика и Самкија су били често коришћени. Они су поставили основе за даљи развој индијске науке. Албурини, персијски научник, је описао детаљно индијски развој науке, математике и астрономије у 10том веку. Ово јасно показује да индијске религије нису противне науци која је секуларна активност. Устав Индије (1951) није видео никакву контрадикцију између религије и секуларизма. Оба типа активности су легитимне у Индији. Сви грађани Индије имају слободу обожавања, једини услов је да се једна религија не меша у религијски живот друге групе. Међутим, у скороје време Хинду, Сикистичке и Муслиманске милитантне групе су поквариле и ометале друштвену

хармонију. Ове тензије и проблеми ће бити анализирани у обимнијој верзији овог рада.

Кључне речи: мултиетничко, мултиверско, ходочашће, укљученост, панчајати, секуларизам

Примљен: 3.6.2012.

Прихваћен: 15.12.2012.