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**COMMUNALISM, REGIONALISM  
& SECULARISM AND  
IMPACT ON SOCIETY**



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Call : 09582948810, 09953007628, 0120-2440265

# COMMUNALISM, REGIONALISM & SECULARISM AND IMPACT ON SOCIETY

**CHRONICLE**  
**IAS ACADEMY**  
A CIVIL SERVICES CHRONICLE INITIATIVE

## COMMUNALISM AND ITS IMPACT

Communalism, is a particular kind of politicization of religious identity. It is an ideology that seeks to promote conflict between religious communities. In the context of a multi religious country, the phrase "religious nationalism" can come to acquire a similar meaning. In such a country, any attempt to see a religious community as a nation would mean sowing the seeds of antagonism against some other religion/s. Inevitably, the formation of religious and communal identities in this way is conducive to inter-communal competition and conflict, as each group seeks to identify itself in contradistinction to seemingly menacing "others." Powerful elements within such groups carefully patrol their borders and regard overlapping communal or religious identities as threatening to weaken or sabotage the community, and hence is to be opposed.

India is a land of multiple faiths and religions leading often to violence and hatred among the people. Those who fan this religious violence do not consider religion as a moral order but use it as a means and weapon to pursue their political ambitions. Communalism essentially leads to violence as it is based on mutual religious hatred. This phenomenon leads to distinction between a communal organization and a religious organization.

Communalism has divided our society for long. It causes belief in orthodox tenets and principles, intolerance, hatred of other religions and religious groups, distortion of historical facts. Most communal riots prior to 1947 were rooted in the 'divide and rule' policy of the British colonial rule. But after the partition of the country, sections of the Indian elite from both the communities are also to be blamed for the problem.

Communal violence in independent India has been caused by many factors. Some general factors are : First the class divisions of our society and the backwardness of our economy has resulted in

uneven development of the economy. It is the upper classes of the less-developed communities that have enjoyed the fruits of limited growth and hence it is they who have also enjoyed political power. Over a period of time some sections among this elite developed a sense of rivalry vis-à-vis their counterparts in other communities. In order to draw support from the masses of their own community, these leaders have often encouraged communal feelings to strengthen their political support. Thus, the traditional beliefs of the society are perpetuated to the advantage of the elites. When they, many among common people, feel insecure because of some adverse circumstances, they often tend to rely on religion, which make them vulnerable to political manipulation to inflame communal passions, some times leading to violence. Communalism is tearing apart the rich and closely-knit fabric of Indian cultural pluralism.

Our national movement was the biggest and the most widespread anti-imperialist movement in world history, because it was a movement of all patriotic elements drawn from the diverse regions linguistic groups, religious communities, castes and tribes, rural and urban segments. Intercommunal and Inter-caste tensions and violence have been recurrent with increasing numbers of communal riots and caste carnage.

Communal violence also increases because communal parties carry on religious propaganda in an offensive manner, thereby creating ill-will among the members of the various communities. The political parties in India which adopt a communal attitude should be blamed for encouraging communal feelings which often cause communal violence. Apart from these general factors, some specific local causes also account for communal violence in India.

Communal riots occur in towns which have a history of communal riots. Aligarh and Hyderabad, among other cities, suffer from this trend. Presence of a large proportion of religious minorities increases political rivalry between the upper strata of both these communities who often appeal to their communal identity to gain support. Whatever may

be the cause of communal violence, whenever it occurs, it immediately attracts attention of the nation.

Our society class identities still remain submerged under caste and communal identities. With economic problems becoming important, the ruling elite of our country manages to convert economic problems like poverty unemployment, price rise, etc. into caste and communal ones. People should be careful not to be influenced by such tactics. Economic problems of the people, like-poverty and unemployment must be resolved in the country before the problem of communal violence can be totally eliminated.

Revivalism of religious fundamentalism has pitted followers of different religions against each other. In Kashmir, it is Islam against Hindu hegemony; in Gujarat it is Hindutva forces against Muslims and in Punjab it is Sikhs against Hindus. These tensions are not conflicts of divergent cultures; each one of them is potentially and actually apolitical movement aiming at realizing not a mere cultural or religious objective .The objective is open or camouflaged, political communalism is perversion of religion from a moral order to an arrangement of contemporary political convenience.

In our country, eight major religious communities co-exist, namely the Hindus(82%), Muslims (12.12%), Christians (2.6%), Sikhs (2%), Buddhists (0.7%), Jains (0.4%), Parsis (0.3%) and Jews(0.1%). Quite often communalism is wrongly used as a synonym for religion or simply for a sense of belonging to a community. A communalist is basically interested in using and exploiting religion and that too for political, electoral and economic gains.

Communalism is exploitation of religion, sometimes open and sometimes subtle. Historically, communalism and casteism had their inception in the Moghul and British periods. Hindu-Muslim relations under the Mughal rulers depended largely on the sovereign's will and disposition.

After 1857 , the Muslims suffered a great deal at the hands of the British, for the community as a whole was not trusted .The establishment of Muslim League in 1906 was another milestone in Hindu-Muslim relations. The Muslim League and Congress organizations started drifting apart from each other. Muslim fanaticism started asserting itself against liberal and accommodative views. The British played their part deftly and saw to it that

the two communities never reached a real understanding on vital issues.

The establishment of Pakistan as the new home for the Muslims in 1947 should have solved the problem of relations between the communities but to the eternal regret of everybody, who had firm and unshakable belief in amity and friendship between the two communities, the problems continue to plague the life and endeavour of hundreds of millions of people on both sides of the great divide to live in peace. There have been wars between India and Pakistan in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999. The 1971 war resulting in the dismemberment of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh.

Scores of Muslim organizations have come into existence, some drawing their inspiration from across the border and others openly and brazenly directed by Pakistan. During the British period communalism and its major manifestation, communal riots were imputed to Two Nations theory and in the context, it was presumed that the partition would solve the problem forever. But in retrospect ,our comprehension of Hindu-Muslim reality seems erroneous.8000 communal riots occurred since India's Independence.

Communal conflicts not only create bitterness and a sense of insecurity but have far-reaching economic and political consequences as well. They retard economic development. Politically they weaken the forces of democracy and damage the nation's image outside the country. Socially, they loosen the bonds of unity among members of different communities and corrode the very basis of national solidarity. It is, therefore necessary to ponder over the question of communal riots that take place and devise measures to prevent their recurrence. Communal riots still take place on flimsy grounds

Though many Hindus and Muslims in India are today infected by the virus of communalism, the fact is that before 1857 there was no communal feeling at all in most Indians. There were, no doubt, some differences between Hindus and Muslims, but there was no animosity. Hindus used to join Muslims in celebrating Eid, Muslims used to join Hindus in celebrating Holi and Diwali, and they lived together like brothers and sisters.

How is it that around 150 years later, suspicion, if not animosity, has developed between the two major religious communities in our subcontinent? Today, Muslims in India find it difficult to get a

house on rent from Hindus. When a bomb blast takes place in India the police, incapable of catching the real culprits (because they have no training in scientific investigation), 'solve' the crime by arresting half-a-dozen Muslims. Most of them are ultimately found innocent in a court of law, but after spending many years in jail. This has resulted in tremendous alienation among Muslims in India. In Pakistan, things are even worse for the minorities who often live in a state of terror, scared of extremists and religious bigots.

### ***Watershed***

1857 is the watershed year in the history of communal relations in India. Before 1857, there was no communal problem, no communal riot. It is true there were differences between Hindus and Muslims, but then there are differences even between two sons or daughters of the same father. Hindus and Muslims lived peacefully, and invariably helped each other in times of difficulty.

No doubt, Muslims who invaded India broke a lot of temples. But their descendants, who became local Muslim rulers, almost all fostered communal harmony. This they did in their own interest, because the vast majority of their subjects were Hindus. They knew that if they broke Hindu temples, there would be turbulence and riots, which no ruler wants. Hence almost all the Muslim rulers in India promoted communal harmony — the Mughals, the Nawabs of Awadh, Murshidabad or Arcot, Tipu Sultan or the Nizam of Hyderabad.

In 1857, the First Indian War of Independence broke out, in which Hindus and Muslims jointly fought against the British. After suppressing the revolt, the British decided that the only way to control India was to divide and rule. Thus, the Secretary of State for India, Sir Charles Wood, in a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Elgin, in 1862 wrote, "We have maintained our power in India by playing off one community against the other and we must continue to do so. Do all you can, therefore, to prevent all having a common feeling."

### ***Divide and Rule***

In a letter dated January 14, 1887, Secretary of State Viscount Cross wrote to Governor General Dufferin: "This division of religious feeling is greatly to our advantage and I look forward for some good as a result of your Committee of Inquiry on Indian Education and on teaching material."

George Hamilton, Secretary of State for India wrote to Curzon, the Governor General: "I think the real danger to our rule in India ... is the gradual adoption and extension of Western ideas ... and if we could break educated Indians into two sections [Hindus and Muslims] ... we should, by such a division, strengthen our position against the subtle and continuous attack which the spread of education must make upon our system of government. We should so plan education textbooks that the differences between the two communities are further enhanced." Thus, after 1857, a deliberate policy was started of generating hatred between Hindus and Muslims. This was done in a number of ways.

Religious leaders bribed to speak against the other community: The English Collector would secretly call the Panditji, and give him money to speak against Muslims, and similarly he would secretly call the Maulvi and pay him money to speak against Hindus.

History books distorted to generate communal hatred: As already mentioned, it is true that the initial Muslim invaders broke a lot of Hindu temples. However, their descendants (like Akbar, who was the descendant of the invader Babur) who were local Muslims rulers, far from breaking temples, regularly gave grants to Hindu temples, organised Ram Lila and participated in Holi and Diwali (like the Nawabs of Awadh, Murshidabad and Arcot). This second part of our history, namely, that the descendants of the Muslim invaders, almost all, promoted communal harmony, has been totally suppressed from our history books. Our children are only taught that Mahmud of Ghazni broke the Somnath Temple, but they are not taught that the Mughal emperors, Tipu Sultan, etc., used to give grants to Hindu temples and celebrate Hindu festivals.

All communal riots began after 1857; there was none before that year. Agent provocateurs deliberately instigated religious hatred in a variety of ways e.g., by playing music before a mosque at prayer time, or breaking Hindu idols.

This poison was systematically injected by the British rulers into our body politic year after year, decade after decade, until it resulted in the Partition of 1947. We still have nefarious elements that promote and thrive on religious hatred.

Whenever a bomb blast takes place, many television news channels start saying that an email

or SMS has been received claiming that the Indian Mujahideen, the Jaish-e-Muhammad, or the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islamia has owned responsibility. Now an email or an SMS message can be sent by any mischievous person, but by showing this on TV and the next day in print a subtle impression is created in Hindu minds that all Muslims are terrorists who throw bombs (when the truth is that 99 per cent of all communities are peace loving and good).

During the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, a section of the media (particularly the Hindi print media) became kar sevaks.

### ***Panic in Bangalore***

Recently, SMS messages were sent to northeast Indians living in Bangalore and other cities stating that they had killed Muslims in Assam and so they had better get out of Bangalore otherwise they would be massacred. This created panic. When the Muslims of Bangalore came to know of this mischief, they organised a feast for the northeast Indians and told them that someone had played mischief, and that Muslims are not against the people from the northeast.

It is time Indians saw through this nefarious game of certain vested interests. India is a country of great diversity, and so the only path to unity and prosperity is equal respect for all communities and sections of society. When India became independent in 1947, religious passions were inflamed. There must have been tremendous pressure on Pandit Nehru and his colleagues to declare India a Hindu state, since Pakistan had declared itself an Islamic state. It was the greatness of our leaders that they kept a cool head and said India would not be a Hindu state but would be a secular state. That is why, relatively speaking, India is much better off in every way as compared to our neighbour.

Secularism does not mean that one cannot practise one's religion. Secularism means that religion is a private affair unconnected with the state, which will have no religion. In my opinion, secularism is the only policy which can hold our country together and take it to the path of prosperity.

The Indian state and the ruling elite committed to the capitalist modernization have failed in propagating the ideology of secularism and in shaking off the shackles of religion, caste and community loyalties which are binding on all

classes in India. The modern India state has to grapple with the challenges posed by communal forces. Therefore, we must oppose communalism not only in minority but also in the majority if we do not want to weaken the growth of real democratic and secular spirit.

## **REGIONALISM AND ITS IMPACT**

The term 'regionalism' has two connotations. In the negative sense, it implies excessive attachment to one's region in preference to the country or the state. In the positive sense it is a political attribute associated with people's love for their region, culture, language, etc. with a view to maintain their independent identity. A positive regionalism is a welcome thing in so far as maintaining as it encourages the people to develop a sense of brotherhood and commonness on the basis of common language, religion or historical background. The negative sense regionalism is a great threat to the unity and integrity of the country. In the Indian context generally the term regionalism has been used in the negative sense. The feeling of regionalism may arise either due to the continuous neglect of a particular area or region by the ruling authorities or it may spring up as a result of increasing political awareness of backward people that have been discriminated against. Quite often some political leaders encourage the feeling of regionalism to maintain their hold over a particular area or group of people.

### ***Historical perspective:***

On 15th of December 1953, when Potti Sriramulu succumbed to death not able to sustain 52 days of marathon fast that was undertaken to demand a separate state for Telugu speaking people, little did he realize that his death would become a launch pad for the dawn of Political Regionalism in India – that would in course of time alter the landscape of India.

But the brand of regionalism that evolved after Potti Sriramulu's death was legitimate, genuine and logical. It reflected the aspirations of people at that time. It stood for fulfilling the longstanding want of people to have their own linguistic state. Thus, Andhra Pradesh became the first linguistic state of India. Today, Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh is renamed as Potti Sriramulu.

After the death of Sriramulu, reluctant Nehruji was forced to agree to various cries from other parts of the country with similar

demands. In 1954, a States Reorganization Committee was formed with Fazal Ali as its head, which recommended the formation of 16 new states and 3 Union Territories based on the language people spoke in those respective regions. This heralded a new phase in the Indian politics.

The later movements for separate states and territories gave birth to a slew of regional parties which eventually became prominent at the national level becoming crucial in the formation of governments – heralding a ‘coalition culture’ in Indian politics.

### ***Regionalism: Meaning***

Regionalism is a feeling or an ideology among a section of people residing in a particular geographical space characterized by unique language, culture etc., that they are the sons of the soil and every opportunity in their land must be given to them first but not to the outsiders. It is a sort of Parochialism. In most of the cases it is raised for expedient political gains but not necessarily.

### ***Growth and Development***

Regionalism in India can be traced back to Dravida Movement started in Tamil Nadu. The movement initially focused on empowering Dalits, non-Brahmins, and poor people. Later it turned against imposition of Hindi as sole official language on non-Hindi speaking areas. Finally, the movement for some time focused on seceding from India to carve out their own Dravidistan or Dravida Nadu. The movement slowly declined and today they have become prominent regional parties after many splits and factionalism.

Throughout India regionalism persisted. In Maharashtra Shiv Sena against Kannadigas in the name of Marathi pride and recently MNS activists against Biharis; in Punjab against non-Punjabis that gave rise to Khalistan Movement and earlier Akali Movement; in Andhra, Telangana Movement with an aim of separate state; in Assam ULFA militants against migrant Biharis and Bengalis; in North-East against other Indians.

It can be traced that regionalism slowly turned from non violent means to violent means to achieve their goals. From Potti Sriramulu’s non violent means of fasting to Maharashtra Nav Nirman Sena (MNS) and ULFA’s violent means, regionalism has come a long way.

Regionalism in contemporary India is readily

used for political gains by petty politicians and secessionist organizations. Economic reasons are exploited for political dividends.

When violence is used against people in the name of regionalism it is a criminal act and is punishable. Article 19 of the Constitution of India provides a citizen of India to move freely throughout the territory of India, to live and settle in any part, and to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business. When ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) militants or MNS (Maharashtra Navnirman Sena) activists used violence against poor migrant workers, they clearly violated the law of the land and also the Constitution which is above all, even above the Parliament.

### ***Do we need to fear Regionalism?***

No. Regionalism in India is only a short cut to meet the political ambitions by emotionally exploiting the sentiments of the people. The fear of Balkanization is void of any logic. India is bound by a common culture that has flourished on this land many thousand years ago. I may be Kannadiga or Tamil but I am an Indian first. My identity outside India is that of an Indian. The states which fought for complete independence are now part of Indian Union and they have renounced violence to some extent ; they include Mizoram, Nagaland, Kashmir, Bodoland, Tamli Nadu..

Today regional parties define how the governments are formed and conducted both at the Centre and the state level. Indeed it is a good development as some political entities such as RJD, BSP, LJP, DMK, AIADMK, BJD have to some extent represented those people who were neglected in the political process for a long time. As long as they thrive for regional development without discriminating against outsiders, regionalism is good for India.

Every Indian is son of this soil. A Bihari becomes Mumbaikar when a bomb explodes in Mumbai and a Mumbaikar becomes Bihari when Kosi wrecks havoc in the plains of Bihar. We are united by an idea called India and that unity is imperative if we want to realize the dream of becoming a superpower.

### ***Different Forms of Regionalism***

Regionalism in India has assumed various forms like:

- (a) **Demand for State Autonomy:** Regionalism has often led to the demand by states for greater autonomy from the centre. Increasing interference by the Centre in the affairs of the states has led to regional feelings. Demand for autonomy has also been raised by regions within some states of the Indian federation.
- (b) **Secession from the Union:** This is a dangerous form of regionalism. It emerges when states demand separation from the Centre and try to establish an independent identity of their own. Disputes between states over the sharing of river water, primacy given by the states to the language of majority and to people of their own states in job opportunities have also given rise to feelings of regionalism. Migration of people from backward state to a developed state for employment opportunities have often resulted in a hostile attitude against the migrants for example, problems going on in Karnataka and A.P .

### ***Development of Regionalism in India:***

Regionalism is not a new phenomenon in the Indian political system. In the pre-independence days it was promoted by the British imperialists and they deliberately encouraged the people of various regions to think in terms of their region rather than the nation as a whole, with a view to maintain their hold over India during the national movement. After Independence the leaders tried to foster a feeling among the people that they belonged to one single nation. The framers of the Constitution sought to achieve this by introducing single citizenship for all. With the same objective a unified judiciary , all Indian services, and a strong Central government was provided. But in view of the vastness of the country and cultures regionalism soon made its appearance in India.

The first manifestation of regionalism was the demand for reorganisation of states on linguistic basis, but the most effective play of regionalism was the victory of the DMK against Congress in Tamil Nadu in 1960s. Initially the central leadership felt that regionalism was a peripheral political factor confined to Tamil Nadu and hence did not pose any threat to national unity. However, that assessment was ill-founded. Soon in Punjab the Akali movement gained momentum, while in Jammu and Kashmir Sheikh Abdullah revived the National Conference. During these initial years all the Indian political parties continued to adjust with

these regional forces on the plea that they would ultimately succeed in making inroads into the bases of the regional parties and absorb them in their organisations.

The Indian National Congress which enjoyed monopoly of power between 1947–1967 and followed a policy of blowing hot and cold towards the regional forces, also contributed to the growth of regionalism in India. It accommodated the regional forces when it was convenient and raised a hue and cry against them when it was pitted against them. The local Congress leaders also encouraged the growth of regionalism and strengthened their hold on local party organisation, with a view to increase their bargaining power with the central leaders. In fact a close link developed between central and regional leadership. This close link between the central and regional leadership greatly encouraged the growth of regionalism.

### ***Causes for Growth of Regionalism:-***

In India a number of factors have constituted to the growth of regionalism.

1. Regionalism made its appearance as a reaction against the efforts of the national government to impose a particular ideology, language or cultural pattern on all people and groups. Thus the States of South have resisted imposition of Hindi as official language because they feared this would lead to dominance of the North. Similarly, in Assam anti-foreigner movement was launched by the Assamese to preserve their own culture.
2. Continuous neglect of an area or region by the ruling parties and concentration of administrative and political power has given rise to demand for decentralization of authority and bifurcate of unilingual states. On occasions sons of soil theory has been put forth to promote the interests of neglected groups or areas of the state.
3. The desire of the various units of the Indian federal system to maintain their sub cultural regions and greater degree of self-government has promoted regionalism and given rise to demand for greater autonomy. The desire of regional elites to capture power has also led to rise of regionalism. It is well known that political parties like DMK, AIADMK, Akali Dal, Telugu Desam Asom Gana Parishad etc., have encouraged regionalism to capture power.

4. The interaction between the forces of modernisation and mass participation have also largely contributed to the growth of regionalism in India. As the country is still away from realising the goal of a nation state, the various groups have failed to identify their group interests with national interests, hence the feeling of regionalism has persisted.
5. The growing awareness among the people of backward areas that they are being discriminated against has also promoted a feeling of regionalism. The local political leaders have fully exploited this factor and tried to feed the people with the idea that the Central Government was deliberately trying to maintain regional imbalances by neglecting social and economic development of certain areas

### ***Role of The Regional Parties:-***

Though the regional parties operate within very limited areas and pursue only limited objective, they have played significant role both in the State as well as national politics. The regional political parties formed governments in several states and tried to give concrete shape to their policies and programmes. Some of the important regional parties which formed governments in various states include DMK and AIADMK in Tamil Nadu; National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir, Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, Asom Gana Parishad in Assam; Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party in Goa; Mizo National Front in Mizoram; Sikkim Sangram Parishad in Sikkim; All Party Hill Leaders Conference in Meghalaya and Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) in Haryana. Some of the regional parties were also partners in the coalition governments formed in several States after the fourth general elections of 1967. At the Centre also, of late the Regional Parties have been able to play critical role in helping formation of Congress government. DMK, a regional party, supported Mrs. Indira Gandhi's government after split in the party in 1969 and enabled her to carry on government despite loss of majority in the Parliament. Telugu Desam was the pillar of strength for the United Front and later the National Democratic Alliance. The representatives of the regional parties focus the attention of the Parliament on issues in their region and try to influence the policies of the Government to promote their own interests. But probably the greatest service rendered by the regional political parties is that they have focused the attention of the people in remote areas on

various political and economic issues and contributed to their political awakening. Above all, the regional parties have been able to impress on the national political parties that they cannot put up with their attitude of indifference towards regional problems and have compelled them to take keen interest in the resolution of their problems. In short it can be said that the regional political parties have not only profoundly influenced the regional politics but also left tremendous impact on the national politics.

### ***Measures for Correcting Regional Imbalances:***

Regionalism has been an important aspect of Indian politics. Sometimes, it has posed threat to the unity of the country. Hence it is necessary to take steps to reduce such tendencies. Some such measures can be:

- ❖ To promote even development of the hitherto neglected areas so that they feel a part of the national mainstream.
- ❖ The central government must not interfere in the affairs of the State unless it is unavoidable for national interest.
- ❖ Problems of people must be solved in a peaceful and constitutional manner. Politicians must not be allowed to misuse the issue of regional demands.
- ❖ Except for issues of national importance, the states should be given freedom to run their own affairs.
- ❖ Changes are necessary in the Central-State relations in favour of the states, and for introducing a system of national education that would help people to overcome regional feelings and develop an attachment towards the nation.

### ***Conclusion***

The resurgence of regionalism in various parts of the country has emerged as such a serious problem that it literally threatens to divide the country. The creation of new states like Jharkhand, Uttaranchal (Uttarakhand) and Chhattisgarh in recent times is in fact the expression of territorial regionalism. Again, the demand for Bodoland, Vidarbha, Telangana, Gorkhaland, etc. cannot be traced in the earnest desire of the people to have their regional identity, which results from regional imbalances. In fact, it is the natural desire of the people in a region or territory to make rapid social and economic development so that they may live

happily. But in course of time when some part of the region makes rapid development, and other remains neglected, then the feelings of anger and frustration creep into the mind of the people which find expression in demand for a separate homeland. Thus, this development imbalance in which some part of the state receives special attention and other areas are neglected and allowed to rot causing immense suffering and hardship to the common man appeared in the form of Gorkha movement, Bodo movement, Telangana movement, etc. There is certainly no denying that social Utopias of leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were mainly responsible for the lopsided development of the country and the creation of the society in which a few rolled in wealth, the majority of the people yearned for food. This marks the inefficiency and incapability on the part of the authority concerned-the Parliament, the Executive- to respond to the people's expectations and efficiently handling the growing unrest and deepening conflict.

Besides, the local leadership is to be held equally responsible, which fails to reconcile with the aspirations of the people. The mixed economy of India, consisting of large state sector and corporate sector, miserably failed to generate job opportunities for majority of people who are forced to live a life of poverty, illiteracy and starvation. Large portions of the population are under housed and live a life without benefits of rudimentary health care. In this situation in which the teeming millions languish under the crushing burden of poverty, only about twenty per cent of the populations enjoy the benefits of development. This ever-widening gap between the two groups of India constitutes the root cause of inter-ethnic, inter-communal and inter-regional conflicts-various manifestation of regionalism. Regional parties play a prominent role in the spread of regionalism and in creating regional consciousness. Since these parties have their political existence in regional support, they arouse it to gain its benefits to serve their end. It is a well-known strategy of the regional leadership to launch their agenda against the Centre, i.e. the opposition party for discriminating against the state with political motives.

Besides, the regional press, which is primarily language-oriented, immensely contributes in the emergence of regionalism. It is a powerful vehicle for the expression of regionalism and regional sentiments. The views expressed in them are, often quite contrary to those in the English media, i.e. national media. In an age of coalition governments,

where regional forces in the country are strengthening, vernacular press has become more vocal and articulated. Naturally, it has strengthening effect on regional sentiments.

Thus, the need of the hour is to develop a realistic perception of regionalism at the conceptual level focusing on righteousness and judicious outlook on the part of the political parties. If this objective is achieved, then the realisation of the idea of different communities, speaking diverse languages and each linked with particular cultural expression, "thinking globally, acting globally and seeing human unity in diversity in practical terms" too would become a distinct possibility.

### SECULARISM AND ITS IMPACT

"India will be a land of many faiths, equally honoured and respected, but of one national outlook."

-Jawaharlal Nehru, 24 January 1948

Secularism in India means equal treatment of all religions by the state. Unlike the Western concept of secularism which envisions a separation of religion and state, the concept of secularism in India envisions acceptance of religious laws as binding on the state, and equal participation of state in different religions. Mahatma Gandhi has on his own part benefited the evolvement of the concept of secularism by clarifying the relationship between state and religion. Gandhi actually rejected the ideology of secularism without any qualifications, but interestingly and consistently advocated for a secular state completely detached from the religious concerns of the people. At the same time, Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the inseparability of religion and politics and the superiority of the former over the latter.

He has written that 'those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means. 'For Gandhi, religion was the source of absolute value and hence constitutive of social life and that is why politics were the arena of public interest. The inseparability of religion and politics in the Indian context was for Gandhi a fundamentally distinct issue from the separation of the state from the church in Christendom. When he did advocate that religion and state should be separate, he clarified that this was to limit the role of the state to secular welfare and to allow it no admittance into the religious life of

the people. Gandhi died because he had striven unceasingly to promote Hindu-Muslim unity. There were competing nationalist discourses in India in the beginning of the twentieth century but Gandhi had tried to combine these under the aim of "swaraj" (self-rule).

Jawaharlal Nehru was the main architect in the relation between the state and religion in India. While Gandhi put his faith in the reformed, ethnically refined individual, in creating a better if not the ideal society, Nehru considered the shaping of suitable institutions as the best means of achieving the same goal. Of all the modern institutions, it was the state which he believed would be the principal engine of social change. The ideal state according to Nehru was first and foremost democratic, but also socialist because of its bad economic situation and secularist because of the cultural and religious diversity. An example from Nehru's writings and speeches brings out very clearly his conviction that religion is a hindrance to the change and progress which are inherent in human society and that the belief in supernatural agency which ordains everything has led to certain irresponsibility, and emotion and sentimentality have taken the place of reasoned thought. He was influenced by the experience of European nations and Marxist thinking and believed that industrialization would erode the influence of religion. Therefore, he did not worry too much about religion or its political expression, namely communalism, because he passionately believed that these phenomena would vanish at the touch of reality. In a letter from 1931 he insisted that, 'the real thing to my mind is the economic factor. If we lay stress on this and divert public attention to it we shall find automatically that religious differences recede into the background and a common bond unites different groups. The economic bond is stronger than the national one.

Indian National Congress developed a strategy of containment by which he meant that there should be a distance between the state and the religious passions of society. But to make a difference to the Western secularism this was interpreted so that all religions are entitled to flourish in India equally. The state of India has the demands and will lean on its mantra that India will stay united: 'unity in diversity'. In spite of this equality, secularism has faced opposition from both outside and inside of India's territory. The threat from outside has come from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and the threat from inside

from the different religiously motivated ethnic groups, such as Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, and from some of India's territories, such as my example, Kashmir. These groups and areas threaten secularism and federalism by their secessionist or separatist aspirations. The aspirations are partly religious, partly disguised in a religious form, but they also affect the political, economic, social and cultural situation in the areas. Communalism is the political dimension of nationalism. Communalism is not based on the feeling of a distinct nation but of a smaller unity, community. In this thesis communalism refers to the desire to protect this distinct community from others. Religion often lies behind communalist action and in the case of India the communalists use religious feelings of the people as the means of mobilisation. A common character that all the communalisms, share is the fear of the threatening 'Other'. For Hindus it is the Muslims, for Sikhs the Hindus and for Kashmiris the Sikhs and the Hindus. All of them see Indian secularism as a threatening force that needs to be fought against.

The contest of Indian secularism means that Hindu, Sikh and Kashmiri nationalisms try to brake the secular central power of India by separating from the Indian Union. The separation has political, economic and social but also religious dimensions. This, then, has led to the crisis of Indian secularism. Indian central powers have not been able to solve the conflicts by negotiation but have needed to rely on violence and armed forces. They have also succumbed to use religion for their political purposes.

The main religions that are discussed in the thesis are Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam. Shortly, Hinduism is a religion which actually consist of many different religions. It bases on several different deities and on the idea of rebirth. A Hindu tries through good deeds in the present life to get a better life in the next one. Sikhism, on the other hand, has only one God, but gurus are worshipped as well. However, Sikhism derives from Hinduism and therefore the Sikh and Hindu identities can sometimes be overlapping. Islam is a religion, which is based on the concept of one God and the law system of Sharia.

With the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution of India enacted in 1976, the Preamble to the Constitution asserted that India is a secular nation. However, neither India's Constitution nor its laws define the relationship between religion and state.

The laws implicitly require the state and its institutions to recognize and accept all religions, enforce religious laws instead of parliamentary laws, and respect pluralism. India does not have an official state religion. The people of India have freedom of religion, and the state treats all individuals as equal citizens regardless of their religion. In matters of law in modern India, however, the applicable code of law is unequal, and India's personal laws - on matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, alimony - varies with an individual's religion. Muslim Indians have Sharia-based Muslim Personal Law, while Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and other non-Muslim Indians live under common law. The attempt to respect unequal, religious law has created a number of issues in India such as acceptability of child marriage, polygamy, unequal inheritance rights, extrajudicial unilateral divorce rights favourable to some males, and conflicting interpretations of religious books.

Secularism as practiced in India, with its marked differences with Western practice of secularism, is a controversial topic in India. Supporters of the Indian concept of secularism claim it respects Muslim men's religious rights and recognizes that they are culturally different from Indians of other religions. Supporters of this form of secularism claim that any attempt to introduce a uniform civil code, that is equal laws for every citizen irrespective of his or her religion, would impose majoritarian Hindu sensibilities and ideals, something that is unacceptable to Muslim Indians. Opponents argue that India's acceptance of Sharia and religious laws violates the principle of equal human rights, discriminates against Muslim women, allows unelected religious personalities to interpret religious laws, and creates plurality of unequal citizenship; they suggest India should move towards separating religion and state. Secularism is a divisive, politically charged topic in India.

The 7th schedule of Indian Constitution places religious institutions, charities and trusts into so-called Concurrent List, which means that both the central government of India, and various state governments in India can make their own laws about religious institutions, charities and trusts. If there is a conflict between central government enacted law and state government law, then the central government law prevails. This principle of overlap, rather than separation of religion and state in India was further recognized in a series of constitutional amendments starting with Article 290

in 1956, to the addition of word 'secular' to the Preamble of Indian Constitution in 1975.

The overlap of religion and state, through Concurrent List structure, has given various religions in India, state support to religious schools and personal laws. This state intervention while resonant with the dictates of each religion, are unequal and conflicting. For example, a 1951 Religious and Charitable Endowment Indian law allows state governments to forcibly take over, own and operate Hindu temples, and collect revenue from offerings and redistribute that revenue to any non-temple purposes, including maintenance of religious institutions opposed to the temple; Indian law also allows Islamic religious schools to receive partial financial support from state and central government of India, to offer religious indoctrination, if the school agrees that the student has an option to opt out from religious indoctrination if he or she so asks, and that the school will not discriminate any student based on religion, race or other grounds. Educational institutions wholly owned and operated by government may not impart religious indoctrination, but religious sects and endowments may open their own school, impart religious indoctrination and have a right to partial state financial assistance.

India is a country where religion is very central to the life of people. India's age-old philosophy as expounded in Hindu Upanishad scriptures is sarva dharma samabhava, which means equal respect for all religions. The reason behind this approach is the fact that India has never been a mono-religious country. Even before the Aryan invasion India was not a mono-religious country.

Secularism in India was more a political than philosophical phenomenon. The Indian National Congress adopted secularism, not as this worldly philosophy but more as a political arrangement between different religious communities. As a power-sharing arrangement could not be satisfactorily worked out between the Hindu and Muslim elites, the country was divided into two independent states of India and Pakistan, most of the Muslim majority areas of the North-West going to Pakistan. After independence and partition a large body of Muslims were left in India and hence leaders like Gandhi and Nehru preferred to keep India secular in the sense that the Indian state would have no religion though the people of India would be free both in the individual and corporate

sense to follow any religion of their birth or adoption. Thus India remained politically secular but otherwise its people continued to be deeply religious. In India right from the British period, the main contradiction was not between the religious and the secular but between secular and communal. In the western world the main struggle was between the Church and the State and the Church and Civil Society, but in India neither Hinduism nor Islam had any church-like structure and hence there never was any such struggle between secular and religious power structures.

In a multi-religious society, if politics is not based on issues but on identities, it can prove highly divisive. Politicians are tempted to appeal to primordial identities rather than to solve problems. The former case proves much easier. The medieval society in India was thus more religiously tolerant as it was non-competitive. The modern Indian society, on the other hand, has proved to be more divisive as it is based on competition. This competition becomes more acute if development is uneven and unjust. Thus in the case of India one can say by and large it is secular in as much as it is religiously plural and tolerant but there are politically divisive forces quite active and create communal pressure and widen the gap between religious community thus bringing Indian secularism under threat.

There are two main reasons for the contest of Indian secularism. They are interwoven and to some extent also parallel. However, historically, the contest of Indian secularism has first happened through the different Indian nationalism which refused to merge into the idea of an Indian nation-state. The ruling power considered that the integrity of India was threatened by the secessionist movements, and to maintain the idea of integrity, some of the leading politicians of the Congress party have relentlessly pursued the project of homogenising diversities. But everything turned out the other way around: because of the attempted homogenisation, a growing number of separatists and secessionist movements have gained political power in the country. Therefore, homogenisation has partly led India into political decay and caused the decline of secularism, especially because of the use of oppressing politics, which then has consequently induced the rise of secessionist movements. This has then been strengthened by the other nationalisms that have benefited the rise of each other. Kashmiri nationalism has given impetus to Hindu nationalism and vice versa, but

Sikh nationalism has also grown because of the rising Hindu nationalism.

Secondly, the contest and the decay of secularism has been the result of the politics of the originally secular Congress Party, which has surrendered its secular role several times by using communalist tensions to further their political aims. It has also surrendered its democratic role by consciously attempting to weaken and even to destroy institutions, in the often a mistaken belief that this will strengthen their hands. This centralisation and alienation policy led then to the weakening of the Congress Party's effectiveness in controlling communalism. It lost its legitimacy as the state power and it has drifted into a crisis of hegemony because of the politics of centralisation. The Congress Party resorted to populism in the 1980s as the result of the growing communalist movements. This made it possible for the communalist parties to start a wide-based mobilisation. The Congress used the national unity and secularism as manipulative symbols for electoral mobilisation. Thus, it has been easy for Hindus to rely on Hindu religious symbols in their mobilisation. However, this does not mean that it was the fault of the Congress that Hindus have learned on their own to use cultural and religious background to advance their political aims. Because of the contest done by the nationalist movements and the unsuccessful politics of the Congress Party to contain these movements and to preserve the secular character of its politics the Indian political system has failed to hold on to the principles of secularism and democracy, which has then consequently deepened the crisis of secularism. The crisis has also brought up old cleavages and disputes and therefore it has grown even deeper. The crisis of Indian secularism is like a vicious circle.

In sum, what was pursued by the founding fathers of Indian secularism was a separation of two realms in the public: one was the political realm, wherein the interest of national unity, non-preference, and the rationalities and imperatives of the state compelled political actors to speak and act in certain ways, while at the same time praising the cultural diversity of India; the other was the cultural realm, wherein any community could celebrate itself and its own myths and exclude others. This cultural diversity was the foundation of the larger nation. However, the political realm was not supposed to be "contaminated" by unilateral celebration of one community or the open representation of particularist interests of a community.