

RELIGION AND POLITICS: THE INDIAN SCENARIO

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1. Introduction

India has often been described as the land of religions. Indeed, not only are all the major religions of the world found here to be existing triumphantly for thousands of years, but more importantly, all the religions continue to have significant influence on the lives of their adherents as both cult and view of life. In consequence, religion has been a major factor in socio-political identity as also in social cleavage both independently of and in association with language and caste in India.

The roots of religion lie deep in society. It is an organizing principle which gives form and shape to societies. Religion creates overarching structures because it constitutes a personal system of meaning. Therefore, individuals tend to interpret events through a religious prism. Religion is a symbolic frame, determines perception and action of social groups, perceptions that can mould objective conditions in a particular way. This is because religion is a social force in its own right; it is an integral and conditioning aspect of the total structure of society. The interrelations of the various elements in society are given shape and determined by the total structure, which reveals a logic of its own. The role of consciousness and the cultural processes which this structure generates is crucial to the understanding of political behaviour.

The place of religion in human affairs has to be studied in the totality of human activity, i.e., in the cultural context. As F.O'Dea comments:

Religious ideas and religious values are in part influenced by the social groups among whom they originate; they express the needs, the thought ways, the perspectives of the world of social strata. But once they become established as elements of a culture and are taught as the belief systems of the religion, they have a formative influence upon the values

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and motivations of men. Thus religion is both affected by and affects social conditions. It can be either cause or effect.¹

Providing the framework and concepts within which the political process unfurls religion implicitly or explicitly becomes a part of the ideological state apparatus. The role of religion in cultural symbolism and community building has important political implications.

Culturally religion has a propensity for legitimizing the status quo. Religion buttresses a hegemonic political culture. In the West, it was Christianity along with capitalism that provided the unifying base of the civil society and created a network of values, binding the moral and the material. Christianity in western Europe began with the doctrine of dual authority; the authority of the state for matters temporal and the authority of church for matters spiritual. For the rulers the influence of the church had certain advantages; it could help them legitimize their rule over subjects or stabilize their authority over conquered territories. The organization of the church was strong and its authority well extended to the localities where the arms of the state could not effectively penetrate. With the papal consecration of kings formalized the supremacy of the church over the state in point of fact, various doctrines also emerged to sustain the authority of the church on the plain of ideas.

Religion has a wider connotation, viz. it is a part of the structure that conditions the political and social process. It has a dual ambience, as a legitimator and as a questioner of the social order. It is this latter dimension, the protest element in religion that builds up an alternative culture. Religion as a socio-cultural dynamic must be defined in relation to the process of social transformation. Oppressive political structures and unjust social patterns call for the liberation theologians to transcend status quo in the religious institutions and create concrete strategies to resist oppressive measures. Religious myths, allegiances and metaphors can be re-worked to interpret the needs of the time. Only from within religions can a new legitimacy for an alternative way of life and for religious tolerance arise, which is binding in its scope. Religion, therefore, should not be treated as a static ideological concept, either rooted in or forced upon a largely passive mass of people. We need to treat religion as praxis - a means of transforming the world through consciousness, actions and values.

2. State and Religion in India

In India, as in other countries, the state is working within the cultural ambience of society. The secular state is transforming itself into a religious state which seeks to resolve the problems of legitimacy by working within the cultural framework of the majority religion. There is, for instance, the excessive use of mainly Hindu symbols at official functions, television coverage of the leadership participating in *bhajans*, *pujas* and religious festivities. Religion has become an essential component of the media. In fact religion has been boosted to the level of official ideology - a far cry from the privatisation of religion that secularism is expected to promote.

In the process religion has become a tool used cynically for narrow and selfish electoral purposes. In India, despite the religious pluralism and the amorphous cultural patterns, which result from this plurality and a semi-feudal semi-capitalist material base, the Brahmanical tradition remains strong. This legitimates a clearly elitist government.

Religious tenets, dogmas and ideology become important mediatory structures for the regime. It is an irony that the Hindu caste system, first articulated to serve the needs of the feudal mode of production, still holds validity as an ideology of the dominant class in a capitalist society, though economically the caste division acts as a brake upon the efficient use of labour and resources towards profitable accumulation.

In order to make a political claim cultural identities are often created. They may draw on cultural traits of an earlier historical phase, but assume specific forms. For the minority community, cultural identity is a response to declining economic power or a demand for political power commensurate with their economic status. For the majority community it is a response to increasing demands by other groups, or a reaction to the perception that minorities are statistically over-represented in certain areas, even if the members are numerically small in the overall social structure. The minorities become an object of the fears, paranoia, prejudices and social grievances of the majority.

3. Religion as an Ideology and as an Identity

Historically speaking, human beings have lived for centuries in multi-religious or multi-ethnic societies. It is very difficult to ensure uniformity of faith in a human society, much less so in a modern industrial one with its own

migratory inducements and shifting patterns. Faith as an identity, not as an ideology, has been one of the most powerful factors apparently responsible for much bloodshed in modern history, particularly of the third-world countries. Most of the third -world countries are multi-religious and multi-ethnic and this has often caused grave situations of violence and bloodshed.

India saw a great bloodbath in 1947 when it got divided apparently on religious lines. Tens of thousands of people were slaughtered then and dozens continue to be killed even now manifestly on account of religious differences. It is important to grasp the distinction between faith as an identity and faith as an ideology. In medieval society it was faith as an ideology with its ritualistic orientation which held sway, but in the emergent modern industrial societies of the third world it is faith as an identity which has assumed increasing significance in socio-political life. In the third- world societies faith as an identity ensures greater degree of political and socio-economic power as well as greater degree of communal solidarity which is badly needed in modern societies. Faith as an identity has come to play ever greater role in our lives.

In a democratic set up where votes and numbers count, such an assertion provides a religious community with an important leverage. Assertion of religious identity is more often for secular rather than religious purposes. The political and religious elite within the community promote this sense of religious identity more and more aggressively. Such an attitude sets off an unhealthy competition between rival communities for assertion of their respective identities leading to severe communal strains.

Assertion of communal identity acquires sharper edge in a democratic society as such a society gives greater consciousness of rights not only to profess and practise one's religion but also to have due share of political power as well as economic development. In a democratic set up communal polarization greatly helps in fighting for the perceived share of power and economic development and this fight often leads to unmanageable communal conflict.

The communal view asserts that the religious distinction is the most important and fundamental distinction or cleavage. This distinction overrides all other distinctions. On the other hand, all other social identities and distinctions are either denied or, when accepted in theory, either negated in practice or subordinated to the religious identity. But, a person who takes religion as an ideology shows equal respect for all religions. He believes in

the fatherhood of God and universal brotherhood of man. Those who take religion as an ideology are tolerant and peace-loving and they search for God with a high degree of religiosity in whatever form it is expressed. They do not want to foster hatred and hostility, injustice and inequality which cause division and disharmony in society. A person who is truly religious will work for a new society in which justice and equality, love and truth prevail and all look upon one another as brother and sister.

4. The Interplay of Religion and Politics in India

The relationship between religion and politics is indeed a complicated one. The endemic relationship between religion and politics is as old as human civilization. In ancient times neither religion nor politics was structured though there existed an undefined relationship between the two. As both these human experiences crystallized and took definite forms, their connections also became clear and organized. The state and the church developed one mechanism or the other to share political power so as to ensure order in society.

This power sharing was not without its tensions and it acquired a definite shape in modern times. England, the pioneer of modern political development, was to provide the best example of the nature, context and content of the conflict. This was reflected in the severing of ties with the papacy during the reign of Henry VIII, though the specific provocation for the revolt of the latter against the Pope of Rome was personal. But it did not mean that politics and religion were also separated. The establishment of the Anglican Church was actually an assertion of English Nationalism. It was not an indication of specific demarcation of political power sharing between the church and the state.

Religion-oriented politics in India has a long and chequered history spanning the entire 20th century. It, however, remained on the periphery making constant unsuccessful bids to enter the mainstream. Only of late have there been indications pointing to its arrival at the centre stage. This was evident in the way the Hindu nationalistic Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) succeeded not only in imparting political respectability to the concept but also exploited that concept after it acquired the desired respectability.

In India, in spite of the state's emphasis on secularism in constitutional terms, people do identify themselves and others as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs,

Christians, etc. Religion also plays an important role in determining people's group affiliations and loyalties. Religion has become a political commodity and is subjected to ruthless and unscrupulous exploitation.² Noted Sociologist Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji, wrote about a half a century ago: "Indians, by and large, are... addicts to religion, that the body and soul of Indian culture are annexed and possessed by the Divinity. Those progressives in India who dismissed religion as the opium of the people not only ignored social facts but also the historical process by which these have assumed the attached social values".³

Before an attempt is made to ascertain the nature of this interplay in India between religion and politics or between the sacred and the temporal, it is appropriate to explain the two major notions of religion - the individual and the social. The former refers to religion as some sort of a psycho-spiritual experience of an individual and the latter refers to its social dimension where religion acquires the status of a social institution or a value structure of a group in a particular social formation. Presently, our concern is not so much with religion in the first sense of the term, i.e., as individual's psycho-spiritual experience. Rather our concern here is with the second, i.e., religion as a social institution and as a value structure consisting of ideas, concepts, myths and rituals.

Historically, one finds that in India the pattern of interaction between religion and politics has varied from time to time and it has had varied social consequences. Our major thrust is to argue that in India one element which is all-pervasive throughout its history, though in varying degrees, is the use of religion for the fulfilment of political ends and aspirations. In India religion has always served politics and politics has often served religion.⁴ In other words, religion was never able to fully extricate itself from politics nor could politics ever rid itself fully of religion. One finds politicisation of religion in some manifest or latent form at all stages of Indian history.

For the sake of generality one can identify five distinct patterns of interaction between religion and politics in India: first, from Indus Valley civilization to the advent of Islam; second, from the advent of Islam to the First War of Independence (Seepoy Mutiny) of 1857; third, from 1857 to Indian Independence in 1947; fourth, from 1947 to the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992; and fifth, from 1992 onwards. While there was close interplay between religion and politics during all these phases, the nature, the

intensity and the dynamics of this interaction were different during each of these phases.

4.1. From Indus Valley Civilization to the Advent of Islam

During the first phase, the Indian sub-continent consisted of Hindu civilization. There was no other religion and there was no inter-religious rivalry. Whatever challenges came to Hinduism, like the branching off of Buddhism and Jainism, came from within. However, interaction between religion and politics was very intimate. Some historians like Jayaswal and Beni Prasad have claimed that politics in ancient India was secular in nature. But it would be wrong to infer from this that religion was not used to legitimize the political authority.⁵ The Brahmin (priest) was very powerful in the state structure and forcefully defended his privileges and status. The nexus between the priest and the ruler is subtly reflected in the former's attempt to sanctify the four *varnas* and project them as some kind of divine dispensation. The priestly class (Brahmin) and the ruling class (Kshatriyas) joined hands to dominate over the two lower classes: the Vaishyas and the Shudras. The *karma* doctrine enshrined in the Upanishads constituted the core of Brahmanical doctrine and was used by the rulers to maintain order and civility in society.

The Mauryan period witnessed the emergence of Buddhism, Vaishnavism and Shaivism but the nexus between religion and politics continued. During the reign of Asoka the propagation of Dharma became a major part of state policy. The infrastructure of the state was used to preach religious doctrines and religious doctrines were employed to consolidate political power. According to Kautilya, the power of Kshatriya rulers legitimized by the priest was invincible.⁶

4.2. From the Advent of Islam to the First War of Independence (Seepoy Mutiny) of 1857

On the eve of the advent of Islam, the country consisted of numerous small and big kingdoms, but all of them were Hindu kingdoms. Their rivalries and occasional battles were seen merely as battles between political entities without any religious overtones in them. This situation changed during the second phase. The second phase saw not only the advent of Islam but also the emergence of Sikhism and the spread of Christianity in India. Each of these affected the existing relations between religion and politics.

The defeat in the beginning of the eleventh century of Raja Jaipal of Punjab at the hands of Mahamud Ghazani was viewed as the defeat of Hindu ruler at the hands of Muslim invader. During the rule of Slave Dynasty Islam was adopted as the state religion and the state acquired a theocratic character. The policy of conquest, annexation and plunder of Hindu population and Hindu religious places continued during the Tuglak reign. A new wave of discrimination by the state against the Hindus came with the invasion of Taimur and more particularly during the Lodhi dynastic rule. At times, Islam was imposed on the local population with force. There were also attempts by the state at proselitization. Many Hindus embraced Islam, either out of fear of state power or out of greed to get jobs in the royal courts or merely to get exemption from payment of special tax. By the beginning of the 16th century, the Muslims constituted the ruling class in most part of India while the Hindus constituted the subjects. During the whole of this period politics and religion were so intimately connected that the two were virtually indistinguishable. (But communal tensions or communal riots between Hindus and Muslims were seldom reported during this period.)

The 16th century witnessed the establishment of the powerful Muslim (Mughal) empire in Delhi. It was founded by Babar who was a descendent of Taimur. Akbar wanted to set up a secular polity. Many a time positions in government began to be given irrespective of one's religion. He also revoked some taxes, which had been earlier imposed on the Hindus. He introduced Din-i-Illahi, a new religion that had its elements of Hinduism as well as Islam. But during the reign of Aurangazeb attempts were made to deprive the Hindus of their political and even civil rights. At the behest of state power many Hindu temples were destroyed and mosques were constructed in their place. The Hindus and the Sikhs jointly rose in revolt against the state policies of Aurangazeb.

During this period there emerged the political power of the Marathas in South-West India. Here also religion and politics were closely mingled and Hindu religious identity was used by the Maratha rulers to fulfil political ends. Maratha ruler Shivaji expanded the base of Maratha support among the Hindus. He successfully projected the political struggle between the Marathas and the Mughals as a religious struggle between the Hindus and the Muslims. Shivaji created an impression among his followers that he was not fighting merely for political power but also for protecting the Hindus from the

proselytizing efforts of Islamic rulers. Thus, he assumed that he was fighting for political as well as religious liberation of the Hindus.⁷

4.4. The Period from 1857 to Indian Independence in 1947

The British East India Company had to be engaged in numerous battles, big and small, against the Muslim and Hindu rulers in order to establish its foothold in India. There was no united opposition from the Indian rulers to the Company's expansionist designs. It was only during the middle of the 19th century that there was some united struggle of the Hindus and Muslims against the Company's rule. Because of this united fight the Seepoy Mutiny of 1857 left both the major religious communities - the Hindus and the Muslims - suspect in the eyes of the British Government. Therefore, it soon evolved a strategy to exploit the religious identities of the Indians to serve the political interests of the Raj. One manifest form was to rely more and more on the Sikhs for the strength and survival of the British Empire, particularly in the matter of recruitment to the army.⁸ The British government also tried to win over a section of the Muslims so that Hindu nationalists could be isolated.

In 1909 the British introduced communal electorates in a big way and in 1919 they further extended it. The policy of the British ultimately put the Hindus and the Muslims on opposite sides of the political barricade. The Muslims were given representation in legislative bodies more than proportional to their numerical strength. While the British rulers were trying to use the religious divisions of the Indian people for consolidating their political power in India, some leaders of the Indian national movement like Bal Gangadhar Tilak also found it more convenient to mobilize mass support against the British rule by using religion. They used religious slogans and symbols.

In the 20th century, religion and politics began to interact more directly than they had before. Although officially secular, India's independence movement preached nationalist loyalties in terms that echoed the Hindu notion of dharmic obligation and its espousal of devotion to "Mother India" incorporated some of the characteristics of worship of Hindu goddesses.⁹ Mahatma Gandhi attempted to forge a compromise between the religious and the secular wings of the independence movement by applying Hindu ethical values to the nationalist movement.¹⁰

5. Growth of Hindu Nationalism and Politicization of Religion

The early years of the 20th century saw the founding of several Hindu associations on the one hand and the Muslim league on the other. Hindu revivalism was the forerunner of Hindu nationalism in India. Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Rama Krishna Mission, Bharat Dharma Maha Mandal, Theosophical Society, All-India Shuddhi Sabha, Hindu Maha Sabha, and Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) sought to strengthen the structure and foundations of Hinduism. To strengthen the Hindus physically several *Akhanda Dals* were opened.¹¹ Other voluntary organizations and military training centres like the Hindustan National Guard, Bhonsle Military School at Nasik, the Hindu Rashtra Dal, the Nagpur Provincial Rifle Association, the Hindu Shakti Sangh of Bengal, and the Maharashtrian Militarization Board were also established.¹² Swami Dayananda, Ramakrishna Parama Hamsa, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Shradhananda, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Paramananda, V.D. Savarkar, Moone, Dr. K.B. Hedgewar and Syama Prasad Mukherjee, Raj Narain Bose, and others were the outspoken champions of the political and social interests of the Hindu community. The activities of these leaders and organizations were significant in infusing a spirit of strength, dynamism, social solidarity and nationalistic fervour amongst the Hindus.

The various reform movements that led to the Hindu renaissance in the first half of the 19th century laid the basis of the idea of Hindu nationalism. In 1867 under the leadership of Raj Narain Bose the first *Hindu Mela* (meet) was inaugurated to promote the national feeling, sense of patriotism and a spirit of self-help among the Hindus.¹³ The *Hindu Mela* was held altogether fourteen times from 1867 to 1880.

Swami Dayananda imported into Hinduism a new spirit of aggressive militancy against everything foreign to India.¹⁴ The Arya Samaj was a militant sect from the very beginning. The young Arya Samajists openly declared that they were waiting for the day when they would settle their account both with Muslims and Britishers. The nationalism of the extremists had a religious tinge. Bala Gangadhar Tilak's views on nationalism derived considerable inspiration from Hindu sources. Tilak said: "The common factor in Indian society is the feeling of Hindutva or devotion to Hinduism".¹⁵

The Hindu nationalism got a fresh impetus with the emergence of Hindu Mahasabha started under the initiative of V.D. Savarkar. The first Hindu Sabha was formed in Punjab as a cultural body in 1907 to be ardent and watchful to safeguard the interests of the entire Hindu community.¹⁶ Savarkar is known as the father of modern Hindu nationalism. He wanted to build a strong and militant Hindu nation. According to Savarkar: "Every person is a Hindu who regards and owns this land - the land from Indus to the seas-as his fatherland and holy land. Therefore, it included the followers of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism; but excluded the Muslims and Christians".¹⁷

Savarkar advanced the concept of **Hindutva**, the idea that virtually everyone who has ancestral roots in India is a Hindu and that collectively they constitute a Nation. He campaigned for the re-conversion into Hinduism of those who had been converted to other religions. He propagated the idea that "Hindu Nation" was an organic growth and no paper make-shift.

The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) formed in 1925 was solely based on the ideas of Hindu nationalism. It believed that the Hindu culture was the sole binding force of Indian nation. The feeling of a burning love for Mother India (*Bharat Matha*) has become the basic tenet of RSS philosophy. Dr. Kesav Baliram Hedgewar, an active participant in the national movement, founded the RSS in September 1925, at Nagpur, on the Hindu festival day of Vijayadashmi.¹⁸ Dr. Hedgewar founded the RSS in order to rouse and organize the Hindus on the basis of pride in their culture.¹⁹ He did not believe in the separation of religion from politics. The RSS began to expand rapidly under the leadership of M.S.Golwalkar. In 1948, its membership was estimated at between 4,00,000 and 5,00,000 and its sympathizers at more than five million.²⁰

The Hindu-Muslim conflict gradually enveloped the national movement. In fact, during the 1920s there were frequent clashes between the Hindus and Muslims, particularly in Bengal and Punjab. Religion was used much more to serve political interests than the use of politics to achieve religious objectives.

A major factor in the growth of communal consciousness was the slow rate at which the national consciousness developed and spread in the country.

In the 19th century was initiated the prolonged historical process of welding the Indian people into a nation.

In a general atmosphere of frustration, insecurity and anxiety it was easy for feelings of mistrust, fear and hatred to flourish. The communalists and other reactionaries are able to use the real-life insecurity, anxiety, frustration and fears to attack other religious groups who are held responsible by the communalists for their deprivation.

The communal leaders took full advantage of the anxieties of the people. In 1907, Viqar-ul-Mulk had expressed the fear of "the possibility of the Muslims being reduced to slavery, and of the tyranny of the majority and of the danger of the minority losing its identity".²¹ Syed Ahmed Khan, Muslim League leader, opposed democracy in India because the "larger community would totally override the interests of the smaller community".²² The main communal argument against democracy in India was that it would lead to majority rule, which would in effect mean the majority community's domination over the minority. Syed Ahmed Khan said in 1888: "Any system of elections would put the power of legislation into the hands of Bengalis or of Hindus of the Bengali type which would lead to Muslims falling into 'condition of utmost degradation' and the 'ring of slavery' being put on them by the Hindus".²³ He also said: "Not only are the interests of Hindus and Muslims divergent but mutually hostile and therefore they cannot live peacefully side by side, 'equal in power'. It is necessary that one of them should conquer the other and thrust it down".²⁴

The Hindu communalists tried to instil among Hindus a sense of fear, the fear of suppression and domination by Muslims. The task was not easy since the Hindus were a milder, weaker, unorganized and disunited people. In 1909 Lieutenant Colonel U.N. Mukerji wrote: "They (Muslims) are growing in number, growing in health, growing in solidarity; we are crumbling to pieces. They look forward to a united Mohammedan world - we are waiting for our extinction".²⁵ In 1937, Hindu Maha Sabha leader V.D. Savarkar said: "Muslims want to brand the forehead of Hindudom and other non-Muslim sections in Hindustan with a stamp of self-humiliation and Muslim domination and to reduce the Hindus to the position of helots in their own land".²⁶

Lal Chand described the Congress politics as "politics of self-abnegation and self-immolation" of the Hindus.²⁷ In 1925 Lala Lajpat Rai told the Hindu Conference at Bombay: "If the Hindu community does not wish to commit a political suicide, they must move every nerve to be communally efficient. In fact, there is danger of Hindus being 'eaten up and devoured' by Muslims".²⁸ In his address to the Hindu Maha Sabha in 1927, Dr. Kurtakoti Shankaracharya declared: "If the Hindus did not take up in right earnest the work of shuddhi or conversion, within ten decades you shall find no Hindu on the surface of this earth".²⁹

Mohammad Ali Jinnah and other Muslim League leaders cleverly used the weapon of religion to arouse the feelings of the Muslim community. Jinnah in his presidential address at the Muslim League session in December 1938 said: "I say the Muslim League is not going to be an ally of anyone, but would be the ally of even the devil if need be in the interests of Muslims. It is not because we are in love with imperialism; but in politics one has to play one's game as on the chessboard".³⁰ In March 1940, in a speech at the Muslim University Union, Aligarh, Jinnah said: "Mr. Gandhi's hope is to subjugate and visualize the Muslims under a Hindu Raj. It is not that they want the British government to go but only to cajole and coerce it to give them something which would enable them to dominate the Muslims under British protection".³¹ In a speech at the Muslim University Union, Aligarh, in March 1941, Jinnah said: "Pakistan is not only a practical goal but the only goal if you want to save Islam from complete annihilation in this country".³² In a statement on 13 April 1942, after the failure of the Cripps Mission, Jinnah asserted: "If the Congress demand (for a national government) had been accepted it would have been the deathknell to the Musalmans of India".³³ In 1926, the *Muslim Darpan* of Bengal warned that "without government help the 23 crores of Hindus would" completely wipe out the 7 crores of Muslims.³⁴ In his presidential address of April 1941 at Aligarh, Jinnah declared that in a united India "the Muslims will be wiped out of existence."³⁵

This motif of domination and suppression became the dominant theme in the Muslim League propaganda after 1937 during its extremist phase. Jinnah built up his political campaign to popularize the League around this theme. He used his presidential addresses and other speeches and statements

to appeal to this fear and insecurity and to separately drive home the theme that the Congress wanted not independence from British imperialism but Hindu Raj in co-operation with the British and domination over Muslims and even their extermination.

In 1938, Hindu Maha sabha leader Bhai Paramanand warned that the "unavoidable result" of the Congress policy and programme "will be the racial and national self-immolation of the Hindus".³⁶ In 1939, Golwalkar declared that, if the minority demands were accepted, "Hindu national life runs the risk of being shattered".³⁷ He condemned contemporary secular nationalism for "hugging to our bosom our most inveterate enemies and thus endangering our very existence."³⁸ The volatile communal atmosphere of 1947 brought out the full venom of Golwalkar in portraying the impending danger to Hindus and their present degraded condition in a highly provocative and inflammable language. Referring to the Congress leaders and their policies, he said:

The Hindu was asked to ignore, even submit meekly to the vandalism and atrocities of the Muslims... The Hindu was told that he was imbecile, that he had no spirit, no stamina to stand on his own legs and fight for the independence of his motherland and that all this had to be injected into him in the form of Muslim blood. Those who declared 'No swaraj without Hindu-Muslim unity' have thus perpetrated the greatest treason on our society. They have committed the most heinous sin of killing the life-spirit of a great and ancient people.³⁹

Communal riots were also often the result of the overall fear that the other side would wipe out or dominate "us". Petty questions such as cow-killing, music before a mosque, throwing of coloured water during the Holi festival, etc. became the fuel for communal tensions in India. Referring to the formation of Hindu Maha Sabha in Punjab Gopala Krishna Gokhale said: "the movement is frankly anti -Mohammadan as the Muslim League is frankly anti-Hindu, and both are anti-national."⁴⁰

Pandit Nehru demolishes all the claims of the communal organizations to be religious and cultural in nature. He said:

What are communal organizations? They are not religious although they confine themselves to religious groups and exploit the name of

religion. They are not cultural and have done nothing for culture although they talk bravely of a past culture. They are not ethical or moral groups for their teachings are singularly devoid of all ethics and morality. They are certainly not economic groupings for there is no economic link binding their members and they have no shadow of economic programme. Some of them claim not to be political even. As a matter of fact they function politically and their demands are political, but calling themselves non-political, they avoid the real issues and only succeed in obstructing the path of others.⁴¹

5.1. The Relation between Religion and Politics after 1947

The close affinity between religion and politics continued after 1947. With the introduction of universal adult suffrage under the constitution of India, the political parties found it convenient to use religion to mobilize political support during the elections.

When India became independent in 1947, Nehru proclaimed it a secular state and exhorted India to "lessen her religiosity and turn to science".⁴² But the tension between the secular and the religious nationalisms remained.⁴³ The suspicions about Hindu influence persisted among Sikhs, Muslims and members of other minority communities, but the government appeared eager to dispel these suspicions and attempted to treat all religions equally. It protected and maintained religious institutions of all faiths; it allowed colleges sponsored by Sikhs, Muslims and Christians, as well as by Hindus, to be incorporated into state universities. The personal laws pertaining to marriage, divorce and inheritance of the Muslim, Christian and other minority religious communities were also given legal sanction by the government. Pandit Nehru's government took sincere efforts to follow the principles of secularism and to maintain religious impartiality or neutrality at all levels of government.

5.2. The Formation of Jan Sangh

The Bharathiya Jan Sangh came into existence as an all-India political party under the presidency of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee on October 21, 1951.⁴⁴ The Hindu Maha Sabha could not secure any important position in the political life of free India. After leaving the Hindu Maha Sabha he founded the Jan Sangh to give impetus to the Hindu ideology and Indian

culture.⁴⁵ Jan Sangh stated its principle as one nation, one culture and one people.⁴⁶ Following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic, belonging to the Hindu Maha Sabha, the Hindu national forces in India became unpopular for a decade. For many years after independence, religion had remained distinct from politics with religious groups like the RSS relegated to the back seat.

After the general elections were announced in 1977, Jan Sangh merged in the Janata Party. The Jan Sangh group was the biggest partner of the Janata Party. Janata Party came to power at the centre under the leadership of Moraji Desai. With the merger of Jan Sangh in the Janata Party in 1977, the idea of Hindu nationalism suffered a setback. For a short period no party was there to openly support the Hindu cause. But the RSS took the initiative to spread the idea at that time. No doubt, the increasing influence of the RSS at that time in the social and political scene of the country invited opposition from the partners of Janata Party itself. Thus, the Lok Dal group and the socialists in the Janata Party questioned the RSS connection of former Jan Sangh members.

The objection taken on ideological ground was that the RSS believed in a Hindu nation and those who believed in this ideology could never have faith in the secular policies and programmes of the Janata Party.⁴⁷ Thus, within a short period after the formation of the Janata Party, disintegration of the party started. First the Lok Dal faction deserted the party in July 1979. It led to the fall of the Janata Party government at the centre and finally the Jan Sangh group deserted the Janata Party in April 1980. At a convention on April 6, 1980, in Delhi, the former Jan Sangh leaders of the Janata Party decided to form a new party which was named Bharatiya Janata Party and A.B. Vajpayee was elected as its first president. Thus, Jana Sangh was revived with a new name.

5.3. Growth of the Sikh Militancy in Punjab

In the 1980s violent movements erupted in Punjab for Sikh autonomy and political power. The Akali Dal which is an organization of the Sikhs has always taken the position that religion and politics are inseparable. It has become a part of Sikh ethos and Sikh psyche that religion is not safe unless it is defended by the political might of the state power. It has always stood for a Panthic government, i.e. the government that serves the Sikh faith. Pre-

eminence of *Khalsa* is one of its avowed goals. It uses Sikh religious congregation in the Gurudwaras to preach the message of Sikh *panth* as well as to mobilize them for political struggles. Some of the political agitations which the Akali Dal launched during the last few decades were carried out from Gurudwaras.

The Sikh militancy in the eighties was in many ways more fanatical, more religious.⁴⁸ The movement began during a clash in 1978 between a group of Sikhs and the Nirankaris, a small sect that had splintered from the Sikh tradition and followed its own gurus. The leader of the Sikhs attacking the Nirankaris was Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a young rural preacher who at an early age had joined the *Damdami Taksal*, a religious school and retreat centre founded by the great Sikh martyr Baba Deep Singh.⁴⁹ Bhindranwale eventually became its head. Bhindranwale had found the Nirankaris worship of a living guru to be presumptuous and offensive. In the escalating violence between the two groups, many lives were lost on both sides. In 1980 the Nirankari Guru was assassinated.

Soon Bhindranwale became busy with a new organization the *Dal Khalsa*, which was supported by many political leaders. Bhindranwale called on his followers to maintain their faith in a time of trial and he echoed the common fear that the Sikhs would lose their identity in a sea of secularism, or worse, in a flood of resurgent Hinduism.

Bhindranwale's power had grown enormously and he set up an alternative government of his own in the protected quarters of the Sikh's most sacred shrine, the Golden Temple, in Amritsar. The situation became uncontrollable and finally the central government had to send troops into the Golden Temple in a venture code named 'Operation Blue Star.' The events led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards and over 2000 Sikhs were massacred in Delhi and elsewhere by orchestrated angry mobs.⁵⁰

5.4. The Growth of BJP and the Hinduisation of Politics

Hindu nationalism has always been strongest in North India's "saffron belt" running from Rajasthan to Bihar and encompassing India's largest state, Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, religious based political parties such as the

vulnerable Jan Sangh laboured for thirty years to build a political base on the interests of conservative Hindus, but for most of those years it was not able to make a significant dent in the popular support enjoyed by the reigning Congress Party. Jan Sangh's latest incarnation in the Hindu political lineage, the BJP, has been enormously successful not only in the saffron belt but throughout the country.

In the mid term election of 1980 the newly formed Bharathiya Janata Party won 16 seats in the Lok Sabha. But in the 1984 general elections to the Lok Sabha, the BJP's debacle was shocking. Almost all the leaders of the party including its president A.B. Vajpayee were defeated. It got only two seats in the Lok Sabha and polled only 7.72 percent of the popular votes. After 1984 the leadership of the BJP was able to convert the political sentiments of the majority community into electoral results. During the 1989 parliamentary elections, the BJP allied with the National Front led by the Janata Dal. In that election with 86 seats and 11.5 percent votes the BJP emerged as the third largest group in the Lok Sabha.

In less than two years thereafter, in the elections of 1991, it emerged as the leading opposition party winning 120 Lok Sabha seats. In the elections of 1996 the BJP emerged as the largest party in the Parliament with 161 seats which obliged the president of India to invite it to form the government. Its share of the popular vote increased from 11.5 percent in 1989 to 20 percent in 1991 and to 21.34 percent in 1996. The Congress Party, which had a virtual monopoly of power at the centre since independence, barring the Janata Rule in 1977-80 and the United Front rule in 1989-91 and 1996-98, was relegated to the second position. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1998 the BJP attained an unprecedented victory by winning 180 seats and 26 percent of the votes. Together with its allies, it won more than 248 seats and 37.4 percent votes. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1999 the BJP won a total of 249 seats, surging ahead of its rival Indian National Congress which secured only 148 seats. The BJP and its allies together got 298 seats and polled 40.8 percent votes.

Table 1 shows the electoral performance of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Lok Sabha elections from 1952 to 1999.

Table 1

Performance of Jan Sangh (1952-1971) and of the BJP(1980-1999) in the Lok Sabha Election		
Years	Percentage of Votes	Number of Seats
1952	3.06	3
1957	5.93	4
1962	6.44	14
1967	9.41	35
1971	7.35	22
1977	----	---
1980	9.2	16
1984	7.72	2
1989	11.5	86
1991	20.0	120
1996	21.34	161
1998	26.0	180
1999	23.7	249

Note: In the 1977 general elections Jan Sangh gave up its independent entity and merged in the Janata Party.

Source: (1) *India Decides Election 1952-89*. (2) The Deepika Library Kottayam.

The phenomenal rise of the BJP and the corresponding growth of Hindu political power are variously branded as 'Hindu fundamentalism', 'Hindu revivalism', 'Hindu nationalism' and so on. While there is an element of truth in all these characterizations, none of them actually represents the comprehensive reality. Political observers like Partha S. Ghosh finds it more appropriate to call the recent trend as "political Hinduism" or "Hinduisation of politics", that is, the quest for political power through the use of Hindu symbols and mythological traditions.⁵¹ Whether this "political Hinduism" would exhaust its potential once the party is in power for a reasonable period

of time is, however, a moot point. What is even more unclear is whether the party would be able to retain power with the support of all its allies, given the fast-changing political configurations among India's innumerable castes and communities as noticed in the general elections of 1998.

Religion and Hindu communalism have been used by the BJP to mobilize its support. Religion has been systematically used as a tool for the consolidation of Hindu votes in favour of the BJP. It always proves to be a short cut to political success.⁵² The RSS supplied the dedication, energy and staff to make the new party work. Its network of several thousand *pracharaks* - full time, educated staff workers - was put at the service of the BJP, giving the party overnight an effective political apparatus. Yet, the RSS had a mixed image in the Indian public eye. Many regarded it as a Nazi-like group of nationalist fanatics. It gained respectability and a link with traditional Hinduism through its association with the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).

The VHP did not begin as a political organization and its ties to the RSS were at first unclear.⁵³ It was founded in 1964 when 150 Hindu leaders were invited to a religious retreat centre, *Sandeepany Sadhanalaya*, near Bombay, by its leader Swami Chinmayananda. The Swami, who had a large following in urban areas of India and abroad, including the USA, was in many respects a modern Hindu, but he and the other leaders who founded the movement were concerned about what they regarded as the relatively slight influence their religious groups had on the social values of Indian society.⁵⁴ They were determined to make a difference. Chinmayananda was elected the first president of the VHP and Shivram Shankar Apte was elected its general secretary. Apte was a long time leader of the RSS. The RSS gained control gradually through the involvement of its *pracharaks* in the VHP organization.

5.5. Politicization of the VHP

The politicization of the VHP occurred largely in the 1980s. It first came into national prominence by organizing protests against mass conversions of lower-caste Hindus to Islam at Meenakshipuram in South India in 1981. In 1983, a great Procession for Unity organized by the VHP brought over a million people to New Delhi in one of the largest gatherings of its type in history.

The VHP's momentum increased with the issue of Babri Mazjid at Ayodhya. For some time conservative Hindus had been incensed at the government's protection of a number of mosques built on the sites of Hindu temples during the Mughal period. In 1984 VHP called for a reassertion of Hindu control over a dozen of these. Chief among them was the Babri Mazjid. Violent encounters between Muslims and Hindus soon ensued, with the VHP calling for the mosque to be destroyed or removed and a new temple built in its place. By 1986 the VHP claimed to have over 3000 branches throughout India and over a million dedicated workers. It targeted for defeat of politicians who it felt were unfaithful to the Hindu cause and lobbied for pro-Hindu legislation.

In October 1990, L.K. Advani joined the VHP's call for faithful Hindus throughout the country to make bricks and bring them to Ayodhya to rebuild the temple at the site of the Babri Mazjid, at the place where Ram was allegedly born. The BJP leader undertook his famous *Ram Rath Yatra* from Somanath in Gujarat to Ayodhya, through various states, to highlight the necessity of the reconstruction of Ram temple in the place of the Babri Mazjid structure at Ayodhya.⁵⁵ On October 23, 1990, the Rath Yatra was stopped and Advani was arrested at Samastipur in Bihar. As a result the BJP withdrew its support to the National Front government led by V.P. Singh and that led to the fall of the government. Here, the BJP leadership was able to convert the religious sentiments of the majority community to make political gains. Religion was cleverly used by the BJP as a tool for the consolidation of Hindu votes.

Prime Minister V.P. Singh in a speech made during the crisis recalled Mahatma Gandhi's struggle for Hindu-Muslim unity at the time India became independent and said that, he, like Gandhi, was fighting for the survival of "India as a secular nation".⁵⁶ He also claimed that "he had sacrificed the highest office for the cause of the unity of the country and the oppressed".⁵⁷

On the other side, the leaders of the VHP and the BJP saw Ayodhya as the symbol of the government's inability to stand up for the Hindu majority and its tendency to pander to the interests of the religious minorities. From the BJP's point of view, this stand was tantamount to selling the soul of the country for the sake of Muslim votes. The BJP was dead against the "Muslim appeasement policy" which was initiated by Mahatma Gandhi during freedom struggle and carried forward by the Congress and other secular party

leaders. The RSS had openly criticised the Indira-Rajiv Gandhi governments for their 'preferential treatment of the Muslims'.

The BJP's Hindu fundamentalism became more evident after the implementation of the *Mandal Commission Report* by the Janata Dal Government. The implementation of the *Mandal Commission Report* which ensures 27 percent reservation of government jobs to the backward castes triggered caste wars in several parts of the country. The BJP understood that the polarization of people on caste line (upper castes versus lower castes) would benefit the Janata Dal and will adversely affect the BJP. The strength of Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP and Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar is the consolidation of backward-caste votes against the forward castes. The VHP's demand for the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya and Advani's historic *Rath Yatra* from Somanath to Ayodhya are seen by political scientists as a shrewd device to counter the 'Mandal based' polarization of backward and forward castes on "caste lines" and to mobilize the consolidation of Hindus on "communal lines". According to political scientists, backward castes and Dalit leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav, Laloo Prasad Yadav and Maya Vati use "caste" as a tool for the consolidation of lower-caste people. On the other side, RSS-VHP-BJP combine use "religion" as a tool for the consolidation of the Hindu majority community. In Bihar, for example, Laloo Prasad Yadav could check the growth of the "communal politics" by resorting to aggressive "caste politics".

On December 6, 1992, the Babri Mosque was destroyed. In a surprise move, the Hindu "Karsevaks" participating in a mock rally to lay the foundation of Ram temple, stormed the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 and razed it to the ground, thus putting the BJP in an awkward position. Vajpayee has admitted that the mosque was "pulled down deliberately by the Sangh forces".⁵⁸ The Babri Masjid demolition sparked off a series of Hindu-Muslim riots in India. The riots left a bloody stain on the mantle of Indian secularism.

So far the attempt had been to stigmatize Muslims as alien and anti-national and thus to exclude them from the nation. Now the net has been extended to include Christians also. Many people are surprised by the sudden attack on this peaceful, small community, with a low profile in politics and hence of no threat to the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. For Guru Golwalkar himself had bracketed Christians with Muslims and Communists as anti-

national. His disciples are now implementing his teachings through violent means.

The last three years have witnessed well over 300 incidents of attack on the person and property of Christians. The attacks are not incidental on communal conflicts to which Christians are a party, but are unprovoked physical attacks and arson and intimidation by the storm troopers of the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal and Sangh Parivar. Missionaries have been burnt alive, stripped naked and paraded through the streets, nuns have been gang-raped, churches have been razed to the ground and the Bible and other religious literature have been burnt.

The heightened animosity and violence against Christians coincide with the rule of the BJP at the centre. Prior to that the incidence of violence against Christians was relatively very low. It is estimated that over a period of 32 years, from 1964 to 1996, there were only 38 instances of violence against the Christians.⁵⁹ Even in 1997 not more than 15 instances were reported.⁶⁰ But after 1997 the atrocities and violence against the Christians have increased in alarming proportions. Political observers have remarked that the atrocities have shown tremendous increase after Sonia Gandhi, Italian Christian by origin, took over the presidentship of the Congress party. The political scientists feel that the attacks are orchestrated attempts to arouse the feelings of hate and hatred in the minds of the Hindus towards Christians and thereby to diffuse the influence of Sonia among the majority Hindu community. It is said that the Hindus are a majority community with a minority complex. The RSS, VHP and Sangh Parivar are spreading feelings of hate and hatred among the Hindus towards Muslims and Christians and instilling fear among the minorities to win votes. (Polarization on communal lines will always benefit the "majority religious-based" political party).

6. Issues Involved in the Interplay of Religion and Politics

6.1. The Fallacy of Hindu Nationalism

BJP's nationalism is Hindu nationalism. It is different from the nationalism of the freedom struggle, the nationalism born of anti-imperialism. The nationalism of the RSS and the BJP had very little to do with anti-colonialism. The RSS was a professedly apolitical militia dedicated to Hindu self-strengthening.

The BJP has huge difficulty in laying claim to the freedom struggle because the role of its ideological fore-bears, the Hindu Maha Sabha and the

RSS, in the struggle was minimal. There is certain awkwardness in its appropriation of Swaraj and Swadeshi because it is nationalist without a nationalist movement.

The Hindu and Muslim communalists often took up basically pro-colonial and loyalist positions and developed a relationship of mutual dependence vis-à-vis the colonial authorities. In no case did they adopt active anti-colonial political positions.⁶¹ The communalists organized no agitation or struggle against colonialism or for independence even of their own conception.⁶² For the Muslim and Hindu communalists the "main enemy" was the "other community", the threat of domination and subjugation came not from colonialism but from the other community; and, therefore, the need for political organization of the community also arose in order to compete with and confront the "other community" and not colonialism.

The Muslim communal position in this respect has been summed up by K.K. Aziz:

Most Muslims appreciated the fairness with which they had been, or were being, treated by the British. Between the Hindus and the British they chose to trust the latter, and on the whole found that this policy paid dividends. The British ruled the country and held power and patronage in their hands. The Muslims, as a minority wanted safeguards, and the British alone could grant them.⁶³

Presiding over the Hindu Maha Sabha session in 1933, Bhai Paramanand told the delegates:

We have reached a stage where the Congress with its theory of swaraj through Hindu-Muslim enmity and civil disobedience goes entirely out of the field. The future is very gloomy and dark for the Hindus. I feel an impulse in me that the Hindus would willingly co-operate with Great Britain if their status and responsible position as the premier community in India is recognized in the political institutions of new India.⁶⁴

It is also important to note that the Hindu communalism could not be treated as anti-imperialism or as Hindu nationalism. Communalism was not religion-based nationalism as it was in some European countries, in Indonesia, Iran, or some Arab countries. In these countries political struggle

was defined in religious terms but was directed against colonialism. But in India communalism defined politics in religious terms but their politics were directed against fellow Indians and not against colonialism; their fight was against the "other community". On the other hand, they usually looked to the colonial regime for support and favours and co-operated with it.⁶⁵

The proper secularist response to this is that the nationalism of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi that won us our freedom as a nation state and shaped the pluralism of the constitution has very little in common with this hectoring patriotism.

The BJP's majoritarian nationalism is not singular: it is parallel with Serb and Singhalese nationalism. Hindu chauvinism is a lot like Serbian nationalism: the memory of defeat at the hands of the Turks, legends of gallantry in defeat, the memory of long Turkish dominance and atrocity.⁶⁶

We have to study what happened in Yugoslavia. Josp Tito, father of modern Yugoslavia, managed to balance for 50 years, in a secular, federal state. The Serbs and the Singhalese as majority communities succeeded in aligning the state closely with their religions, the Orthodox Church and the Buddhist Sangha respectively.⁶⁷ It is significant that this alignment of the majority's religion and the state has done nothing to resolve the internal conflict or civil war. It has made the divisions worse; in some cases hastened partition. Indonesia has lost East Timor, Sri Lanka has practically lost Jaffna, the Rump State of Serbia has been deprived of Kosovo.

The BJP's identity is critically dependent on the presence of the Muslims as the enemy number one. Christians are part of its demonology, but its historical grievance is centred on the Muslim conquest. Its nationalism is premised on Hinduism beleaguered by Islam. It is a "sheepdog nationalism" where the BJP is the sheepdog trying to keep a Hindu flock together, protecting the strays from Muslim and Christian wolves.⁶⁸ If there were no wolves there would have been nothing for the BJP to do.

6.2. Not Concerned with the Issues of the Common Man

The BJP and other Hindu communal organizations are seldom concerned with the socio-economic issues that affect the masses who form the bulk of the community or with economic development. A country like India where 30 percent of the population lives below poverty line and

millions remain illiterate and homeless, a party which believes in true nationalism cannot waste time discussing religious issues like Hindutva and construction of temple. The BJP and other communal organizations lack any social or economic programme which would help solve the problems even of their co-religionists. During the freedom struggle the Hindu and Muslim communalists had invariably opposed any meaningful changes in the economic structure which would have adversely affected the vested interests. The Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League, for example, actively opposed land reforms as well as anti-landlord measures.⁶⁹

6.3. Support the Status Quo and Oppose Social and Religious Reforms

The communalists oppose all radical forces in the fields of social and cultural change and religious reform. The communalists were actively opposed to the contemporary upsurge among women and the lower castes. The Hindu communalists, upheld the upper-caste domination while the Muslim communalists tended to support the status quo. The religious elite among the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians openly fought for religious and social orthodoxy and conservatism. The social, economic and political vested interests deliberately encouraged communalism because of its capacity to distort popular struggles, to prevent the masses from understanding the social and economic factors responsible for their socio-economic deprivation.

The religious establishment reinforces the authoritarian and exploitative political structures by supporting them openly. Religion and politics in India interact and adjust themselves to the best interests of the dominant classes in society. Dr. Ambedkar was convinced of the need for conversion from Hinduism to another religion ever since he realized the oppressive nature of the Hindu religion towards the low-caste people. In 1929 he advised the untouchables to embrace any religion that would regard them as human beings and give them an opportunity to rise in the world and enable them to act, eat, walk and live like men.⁷⁰ After the conversion Ambedkar replied, "By discarding my ancient religion which stood for inequality and oppression today I am reborn".⁷¹ Dr. Ambedkar was using conversion to mobilize the scheduled-caste people politically.

Communalism or communalization of politics meant that philosophy which stood for the promotion of the interests of a particular religious community. In the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha the Hindu communalists had a

separate organization which was completely devoted to the promotion of Hindu interests. Muslim League existed primarily to safeguard and promote the interests of the Indian Muslims as a separate political entity while the Congress stood for democracy, secularism and a common Indian nationality. In communal politics or religion-based politics, the allegiance that should normally go to the nation is given by the communalist to his community instead. In order to have a proper balance between religion and politics the political parties and the rulers must subordinate their group or communal interests to the larger national interests.

7. Conclusion

Religion and politics continue to be decisive in the social and political life of the contemporary India despite being secular. As a value of the constitution, secularism is a highly cherished ideal championing equal respect for all religions. In practice, however, secularism is nothing but soft Hinduism, which appeared significant in the events following the demolition of the controversial Babri Masjid in December 1992. Despite the irreparable damage the December episode caused, for many people supporting the Hindu resurgence, it was a struggle to establish Hindu cultural hegemony over society and to redress the historical humiliation of the Hindus in the past. The immediate outcome of such an engineered effect is the polarization of communities and religion consolidating the divisions. At one level, such a process is a threat to India's multicultural socio-political life, at another, it breeds and sustains hatred among the communities disrupting the highly cherished ideal of communal harmony in a society which suffered heavily in the wake of the 1947 partition. So whatever be the merits of religion as an organizing tool its utilization for specific political gains may lead to disastrous consequences.

Religion as an institution coexists with the political institution. The relation between religion and politics runs deep. It influences the political and non-political processes and effects the operation of the institutional framework of the state. Religion attempts to foster community solidarity among its members divided into distinct and opposed social classes. The interplay between religion and politics has taken deep roots in India and it cannot be washed away. A proper alignment between the two without crossing the boundaries will be helpful for the advancement and welfare of the society.

Discussing the word religion as a description of India's cultural affiliations Mark Juergensmeyer found that it may be taken to mean any one of the three forms translated as **Dharma, Panth and Qaum**.⁷² In its **dharmik** form it refers to customs and codes of social obligation and spiritual behaviour. **Panth** emphasises fellowship of those who were bound by reverence to a lineage of spiritual authority. **Qaum** is used in the sense of "coherence of a large, unified community". In the 20th century in particular, there has been a considerable shift from **dharmik** and **panthik** to the **qaumik** form in conceptualisation and description of religions in India. What underlies this transition to qaumik form is the ascendancy of political consideration in matters of religion. What is needed today is the proper balance between the dharmik, panthik and qaumik forms of the religion.

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