Chapter I

Secularism and the Discursive Privileging of Religious Identity

Introduction:

In political studies, Religion as a meta-narrative is often understood as a homogeneous and collective group identity with certain essential socio-religious and cultural features and normative. In the modern world, the State has emerged as a prime institution in constructing the group identities based on existing differences in their cultural and traditional practices. The modern liberal state and its institutions facilitate and legitimize this understanding by constructing legal constitutional groups through census, official ethnographies, special commissions and by classified lists of people based on differences in their socio-economic and cultural-regional aspects. This also helps the state to re-structure and protect the cultural uniqueness of the community from any kind of domination and suppression by the hands of the majority community. In India, this mechanism is understood as one of the essential values of secularism. The state in India sensitively comprehended the distinct plurality of socio-cultural and religious entitlements and in response, under the constitutional provisions, provided multiple protective policies and other safeguards to some social and religious communities to overcome their present socio-economic backwardness and marginalization. Rajeev Bhargava describes it as one of the unique and path breaking features of Indian secularism.¹

These classifications, in most of the times, are derived from conventional and informal identities based on professional and cultural attitudes of members of the respective

¹Rajeev Bhargava is consistent in reiterating his position that the Indian secularism is distinctive from the western models. He has based his explanations by pointing the unique cultural background and social context of India which has necessitated adaptation of alternative variant of secularism in India. See, Rajeev Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism" in Srinivasan T. N., (Ed) The Future of Secularism, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, pp.39-40 and, Rajeev Bhargava, The Promise of India's Secular Democracy, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010
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communities. Nation-states adopted such broad and homogenous classifications as it simplifies the moral objective of the state to reach to the disadvantaged section of the society. In India, following the footsteps of the colonial British rule, the law makers have not only provided universally applicable category of citizenship for all but also categorized the citizens of India as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and in the recent past as Other Backward Castes (OBC) in order to recognize the disadvantaged sections in order to fulfill the objective of Social Justice.²

Different from the morally sensitive objective of the state, the modern democratic process is also instrumental in forging new group identities based on alternative recognition of people. In the modern political system especially in the electoral process the comfortable usage of ethnic, regional, communal, caste and racial identities have systematically de-legitimized the notion of the liberal abstract citizen and other related nomenclatures. The political parties, social groups, mass movements and their supplementary organizations construct a hyper collective identity in order to mobilize a particular set of people and to achieve their political goals. They utilize religious myths, cultural symbols, regional spaces, linguistic distinctions and caste-communal categories for the making of a modern political identity. The immaterial cultural differences among the people are manipulated and converted into permanent differences. This strict categorization is also useful in branding the groups as majority-minority, upper castes-untouchables, nationalist-anti-national, religious-secular, etc. for subjective political purposes. The democratic identities usually downplay the internal contradictions of the community and their material concerns to forge an abstract collective unity of the people.

The constitutional nomenclatures and the political democratization of the popular ethnic identities, both locate identities as fixed, homogenous and unified categories. Both the debates operate in similar ethical models to achieve the goal of communitarian welfare and justice in the plural society. The constitutional fixations are different from the communitarians because of its moralistic objective of bringing an inclusive social order and to provide an equal space to the socially and economically deprived communities in

modern public spheres. The political fixations and usage of ethnic identities in the democratic polity do claim for its ethical objectives but mostly looked upon their subjective communitarian ideals as essentially superior over the claims of other groups. These identities have garnered immense space in the debates and discourses on secularism and social justice. Especially in the debates on secularism, collective religious identities have a discursive privilege over other themes modeled to bring an inclusive society. On the one hand, the secular constitutional state, in order to fulfill its commitment to the values of equal rights and protection to the culture of minority religions, promotes special legal rights and provides additional safeguards to the minority communities. On the other hand, the socio-religious groups, as supplement to its formal recognition provided by the state further claim greater protections and safeguards for their collective identity under their subjective understanding of justice. The democratic polity is instrumental in providing both the groups a legitimate space to articulate their interests in public spaces. Hence, there is a stress in between the objective of the state and the democratic mobilizations of the people based on the particular values. In the recent past, the sporadic assertions by different small communities have deconstructed the notion of citizenship on the one hand and on the other hand also problematized the secular communitarian ethics of the modern democratic milieu.

Ashish Nandy and Partha Chatterjee argue that the right wing political outfits use the state’s secular ideology and its modern-rational anti-religiosity to build an argument in support of their communal politics. In their view, the communalization of politics is the product of secular rhetoric of the state and thus both the narratives are interdependent on each other. These analyses further operate under the binary of ‘secular versus communal’ with a qualitative criticism of both the approaches. However, both neglect the supportive role played by the elites of religious minorities in legitimizing the ‘secular versus communal’ debates. The debate over special rights and safeguards for the religious minorities has constructed the idea of majority and minority with an aim to structure the socio-cultural differences comprehensively, however, under the democratic milieu it consequently matured into strict political and ideological differences. On the
other hand the social justice policies created another debate within each respective community and bring out the internal contradictions of the collective identity in the front.

The doctrine of Secularism possesses a moral objective by which the state channelizes the authority of the religious domain into non-statist arenas and treats its citizens on equal parameters, embedded with common rights and duties. In India, the marginalization of minority religions under the domination of Hindu majority, especially of the Muslims, is the main concern within the debate of secularism. In order to avoid the marginality of religious minorities and to protect their unique religious and cultural attire from the repressive Hindu majority, the state acts as the protector of minority rights and provided them with special safeguards. In this context this chapter tends to argue that such normative theorizing, based on the articulation of the elites, is not integrated with the empirical realities of the society and are constructed in order to legitimize the overarching ideals of secularism. The general nature of such normative argument is based on the assumption that the practice of secularism needs strict communitarian structures and collective cultural denominations which consequently neglects the issue of difference within the community. Under this discourse there is no space for alternative articulation based on empirical dissection of a community as the marginality of the collective group against another group becomes the sole criterion for discussion. The secular-communal debate has undervalued the importance of many groups and identities which are internally related to this debate under such hypothetical evaluation.

There are two broad compartments in every religious society. In the first compartment, there are people who are the beneficiaries of the religious order and therefore uphold and justify the political instrumentality of the religion and its secularization as universal identity. In the second half, there are deprived and depraved people (socially segregated castes, economically poor, women, Backward Castes, migrant groups, homosexuals, etc.) who find religion as only a solace in order to justify their day to day material problems and not as a final solution. The later group objects to the construction of religious identity proposed by the conservative elites of the respective religious and
social groups and demands differentiation in nomenclature in order to highlight their social and economic backwardness in the public spaces. The abstract notions of communal identity based on cultural and religious characteristics are now examined by the groups who are denied fair opportunities in various spheres. Within the religious order these groups operate as a critical agency and this assertion emerges particularly from the lower strata of the society. They also counter the simplification offered by the state that all identities possess common secular values and therefore, will be treated with universal equality. They demand respectful differentiation to the notion of citizenship by acknowledging the difference between people. Within every religious order, some groups and individuals are possessed with socio-religious and cultural privileges and some faces perpetual oppression and marginality.

In this chapter, there will be an attempt to critically examine the above mentioned normative generalizations made by secularism doctrine and its contestation with the insurrections of particularistic demands. I shall argue, that, under the garb of metaphysical abstract cultural values many political identities are constructed (in general the secular political identities and in particular the communal group identities). These in a subtle way practice and recommend the domination of social elites in the political spaces, justify social and economic inequalities and undermine the moral objectives of justice as fairness. This chapter will be studying the contentious social relationship between the individual groups adhering to a common political identity like Citizen, Hindus and Muslims.

This chapter would like to highlight that all socio-religious construction (democratic or constitutional) of identities by the upper caste elites in India are oppressive towards the minority groups (often constructed). The values of equality, liberty and fraternity are absent perpetually within the group itself and therefore, any projection of a unified communal and secular identity escapes from the internal social realities of the community and dilutes the concept of justice in public. Any identification of the group which is impotent in addressing the perpetual injustice of the society is a deficient project. This normative theorizing of the identities is not integrated with the empirical realities of one's society. Here, I am attempting to question the external binary
identifications of religious groups as ‘we’ and ‘other’ by the communalists and ‘secular’ and ‘communal’ by the nationalists. I would like to explore this question by employing the particularistic internal caste question pertinent in every religious and social construction.

The modern ideas of social justice and secularism were redefined and constructed during the British era. This chapter deals with the history of national independence struggle, as the roots of contemporary contestations are buried in the past. There are three parts in this chapter. In the first section, I shall deliberate upon the construction of universal nationalist political and religious identities by the upper caste elites. This chapter will help us to demonstrate the political objectives of the elites in making such attempt. The second section deals with the making of Dalit perspective as a response to the exclusionist models of the social elites. I am postulating that secularism and communalism both are projects of homogenization by the social elites which craftily negates and obscure the pertinent social realities. I shall make an effort to show how the Dalits politicize the argument of difference to deconstruct the rhetorical argument of common universal identities. The final part focuses on how secularism and social justice are interrelated morals. These are restructured by the social elites who have placed them in two separate compartments.

Nationalist Historiography: Utopia of Universal Identities

The process of democratization of Indian polity during the British rule was dominated by the upper caste elites. The early Congress activism remained limited to handful of the intellectuals, avoided mass political actions against the British and remained deliberative with the state in making passive demands. The leadership of the Congress at the very initial phase sidelined itself from the movements of social reform and concentrated their efforts mainly in representing the nationalist concerns to the British rulers. This is what Dadabhai Naoroji had to say in the presidential address at the second session of Indian National Congress in 1886;

It has been asserted that this Congress ought to take up questions of social reform (cheers and cries of ‘Yes, Yes’) and our failure to do this has been urged as a reproach against us. Certainly no member of this National Congress is more alive to the necessity of social reform than I am; but, Gentlemen, for everything there
are proper times, proper circumstances, proper parties and proper places (cheers); we are met together as a political body to represent to our rulers our political aspirations, not to discuss social reforms, and if you blame us for ignoring these, you should equally blame House of Commons for not discussing the abstruser problems of mathematics or metaphysics. 3

This approach definitely changed dramatically as soon as Gandhi took the leadership of the Congress; however the general principles of the party remained distinctively committed to abstract liberal nationalism. 4 The leadership, especially Jawaharlal Nehru, had shown deep interest in the modern western political philosophy and borrowed its ideals from the classical left-liberal tradition. The notions of patriotic citizen, secular nationalism and anti-imperialism had a strong presence in their campaign till India got its political independence. 5 The modernist liberal agenda of Congress in the political spectrum was further laden with an abstract hyper value to the ideas of individual liberty and freedom. With such an approach, the Congress Party succeeded in its liberal agenda on one front. In a society which is traditionally pluralistic, multi-ethnic, multicultural and divided into numerous caste and regional identities, Congress had successfully branded nationalism as an overarching bond of the people to achieve political independence. Such momentum was developed exactly identical to the dominant themes of liberal nationalism preoccupied with the Western thought. Rousseau had called upon the enlightened legislators to generate patriotic feelings among the general masses in order to establish true meaning of general will, he said,

The legislator feel himself capable, so to speak, of changing human nature, of transforming each individual, who is by himself a complete and transforming each individual, who is complete and solitary whole, into part of a greater whole from which he in a manner receives his life and being; of altering man's constitution. 6


4 Gandhi was of course not content with such welcoming of western modernity and raised critical issues in his earlier writings, especially in Hind Swaraj. His political philosophy was based on the expansive human values of peace, non-violence and communal harmony. Beyond the majority-minority syndrome Gandhi wanted to promote a pluralist nation-state committed to the values of mutual respect between religious communities (sarva dharma samabhav). He intercepted those values in the activism of the Congress, however the general abstract nature of both the values, Nehruvian liberalism and Gandhian Humanism tried to provide the notion of collective universal, to which most of the other fragments had shown their own inconvenience in accepting.


6 Quoted from Rousseau, by Nicholas Dent, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 142
The Congress had shown ingenuity in adopting such general value as it suited comprehensively in building its leadership over the fragmented subjects. In the Habermasian sense, it was antithetical to the values of deliberative democracy in which the pertinent issues of caste, religion, gender, class and region were suppressed or relegated to private individual spheres, superseded by the rational political imaginary of national independence of the elites. However, such domination of the western political ideas on the Indian psyche was soon met with indigenous opposition as Muslim League and Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) were other two political outfits which demonstrated their opposition to the articulation of secular nationalism of the Congress. Partha Chatterjee looks into this issue as a revolt of indigenous elites against the western ethos and in support of their conservative patriarchal values and communitarian practices. He argues that the elite leadership wished to separate religion from modern politics in order to make it a private affair to avoid any domination from the external authorities. Bipan Chandra also argues that the rise of extreme communal politics was a reaction to the inclusive secular liberal model of the Congress whereas the politics of communalism was based on the ideology of hatred, fear psychosis and irrationality against the Muslim minority.\(^7\)

The creation of ethnic nationalism against the secular one has its own characteristics. The basic premise of composite secular nationalist culture on which the Congress imagined a collective struggle against imperialism was seen as crafty motives of the western educated upper caste elites to perpetuate their own hegemony in the political system. The whole idea of secularism under its forward looking, scientific temperament had devalued the ascendancy of religion in the public and relegated it into the private affairs of the society. Under this ideological antagonism the League and Sangh projected their own alternative forms of justice based on the notion of unified religious communities. Both the outfits treated Hindus and Muslims as two permanently conflicting camps and propagated issues which could arouse mass emotions related to religious traditions and practices. Religious identities, symbols, cultural practices, myths and ideological orientations were restructured by the political elites of both the groups to

establish concrete notions of difference. The democratic institutions which emerged during this period also consolidated this difference in a formal way. The self proclaimed Hindu and Muslim leadership, in accordance with the demand of modern politics, were in contest with each other to garner maximum benefits from the new political milieu.

The rise of communal politics has its democratic credentials. In a society like India, it is impossible to relegate religion from the public spheres. The Muslim League and the RSS both had legitimate motives for their subjective political actions and any attempt to devalue their political participation will hamper the definition of deliberative democracy. Their participation is in accordance with the principles of liberal constitutionalism and therefore, it should be respected. However, the main opposition to the communal ideologies is against its immoral, irrational and illiberal political practices. Communalism instrumentalizes democratic institutions to devalue liberal notions of pluralism, republicanism and citizenry based on egalitarianism. Their social imaginary is based on violent machismo, religious homogeneity, cultural nationalism and non-tolerance towards rights of the minority subjects. Their prescribed model of political activism was not only hegemonic in the cultural spheres but also insensitive and intolerant to other models of social and cultural representations. They borrowed their ideological support from pre-political and pre-modern historical context and tried to justify the socio-cultural stereotypes even in the modern liberal secular spaces. Thus, their democratic participation hampers the political principles which are imperative for establishing liberal democratic order.

The Congress Party faces further limitations because of its negligence to the social arena in which numerous local level assertions were already erupted against caste discrimination. During the same period, mainly early 1930s, when the political articulation of ethnic nationalism started occupying its public space as a mass movement, in Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Punjab and Bengal, impressive non-Brahmanic/anti-caste movements also started emerging against the domination of Hindu

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social elites. Congress because of its public commitment to the liberal ethos was unable to resolve the burning problems posed by the caste and region specific groups. Moreover a vast section of the Congress was traditionalist and conservative in their profile and on many occasions had communicated their orthodox position without any hesitation. The Hindu Mahasabha for a long period of time had remained an influential lobby within the Congress party. The Mahasabha leadership had consciously utilized a sentimental and paternalistic approach while dealing with the question of Depressed Classes (Untouchables) in order to avoid their departure from the Hindu order. Lala Lajpat Rai in his presidential address to the Mahasabha said:

For the Hindus at this stage to neglect the Depressed Classes will be simply suicidal and I will beg of them to take a broader view of the question than they may be inclined to do on the ground of their religious scruples. One glory of the Hinduism consists in its adaptability to the circumstances of the times, and but for this the Hindus would have been nowhere by this time...we can at least join together in providing education and economic facilities for the uplift of the Depressed Classes. In this respect all credit is due to those Hindu philanthropists who with great sacrifice and labour are working in this cause.

Further, the Congress was not motivated enough to prioritize the religious question over the struggle against British imperialism. Under such impasse, many Congress sympathizers within the organization and outside it, hastily sidelined themselves from the liberal motives and openly collided with the religious fundamentalist groups in order to provide a strong political articulation based on religion which emerged subsequently.9 Many members of the Congress publicly defended the religious superiority of the Hindus and the social division based on caste. Under the dual constraints, the Congress has hardly placed the issues of socially deprived sections in their national agenda. Such position was otherwise difficult to pronounce from the Congress platform because of its adapted liberal constraints.10 At this juncture it seems that the Congress leadership had developed an informal sympathy towards the Hindu Mahasabha which was craftily used by the Hindutva leadership to propagate its conservative agenda and paved easy access to Hindu communalism in the public arena. The separate communal and secular political

9 Christophe Jaffrelot, Hindu Nationalism: A Reader, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2007, p. 14
10 Hindu Mahasabha functioned as a pressure group within the Congress aiming to influence the liberal party leadership. Two prominent leaders of the Congress, Madan Mohan Malviya and Lala Lajpat Rai were also worked as the president of Mahasabha in 1923 and 1925 respectively.
nomenclatures were the products of upper caste imaginations which were used to further relegate the local pluralist assertions based on caste and other intra-religious identities. Further, even the articulation of liberalism of the Congress was unrealistic and utopian in the Indian context. The campaign of Congress suffered from its own limitations as it turned away from the issues of discriminations and exploitations of the people on social and cultural fronts. The socio-cultural practices of the plural Indian society were rabidly conservative, orthodox and exploitative which the Congress at the initial phase of their struggle cleverly sought to overlook due to its conservative version of nationalism. Due to this, the Congress was criticized as a party of Hindu upper caste elites by Periyar, Ambedkar and Mohammad Ali Jinnah and argued that the Congress Party was more serious in protection of social privileges and political interests of the upper caste Hindu elites. The legitimate categories like caste and community and their respective issues were treated as unreasonable or in Marxist terminology “false consciousness” and even unethical under the passionate version of homogenized good of the nation. Even Jawaharlal Nehru, the spokesperson of progressive nationalism, had also treated the issues of depressed class as a “side-issue” or “something insignificant” while commenting on the Poona Pact.\footnote{Aditya Nigam, \textit{The Insurrection of the Little Selves}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, p. 227} I shall argue that this collective homogeneous will, constructed by the Congress was hegemonic to all the democratic assertions emerging during the contemporary period. The \textit{divisive} arguments of the social groups and communities were excluded or belittled in the nationalist discourses in order to establish the legitimacy of the one brand of secular leadership that is of the upper caste Hindu elites who imposed themselves as the new political authorities of the independent India.

In India, the conflict between communalism and secularism was the creation of upper caste elites of Hindu and Muslim communities, which firmly emerged as mainstream political discourse during the last two decades of British rule in India. Secularism, on the one hand, proposed uncritical agreement with the modern upper caste leadership in shaping the politics of new nation state which subsequently led them as the new rulers in the post-independent India. On the other hand, knowing the unparallel influence of religious identity among the masses, the idea of ethnic Nationalism became a powerful
tool which the elites utilized to construct the ideals of theocratic nation-state. The grand Hindutva ideology of universal brotherhood against the oppressor Muslims was one of the most imaginative political constructions of the Hindu elites to divert the masses from the real pertinent issues of social justice and liberal egalitarianism. On the other hand, among the Muslims, the elite leadership was staunchly against any stratification among the Muslims on the caste basis and circulated appeals to mention Islam as sole identity during the making of 1941 census. Due to the absence of any strong social movements against the Muslim elites, it became relatively easier for the Ashraf leaders of the League to articulate a strong sense of nationalism based on religious and regional fraternity among the Muslim masses. Both the political formats, secularism and communalism, proposed abstract inclusive ideals and consciously underplay the issues related to the socio-economic aspirations of the lower strata of the society as petty and irrelevant.

As modernity provided newer space to the underprivileged sections of the society to articulate their concerns and interest in a democratic manner, it also facilitated the dominant sections of the society to protect their interests by restructuring their ideology with new forms of symbols, vocabulary and notion of justice. The concepts of secular and ethnic nationalism were distinct from the ideas propagated by the under privileged sections, especially by the anti-caste movements. The doctrines of secular and ethnic nationalism lack any supplementary overlapping with the objectives that the sections of underprivileged groups have articulated during this period. I would like to argue that this difference highlights the socio-economic positions of the articulators which make this difference such starkly visible.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Indian Nationalist Movements:

As mentioned earlier, the nationalist leadership of the Congress was determined to forge a hyper collective identity of people in fight against the British colonialism. In the case of Hindu and Muslim leadership, they also constructed the “other” on religious terms and tried to bi-furcate the social and political systems on overt communal lines. Poverty,

hunger, unemployment and issues of social discrimination were comfortably ignored in the propaganda of the communal politics. Even in the political programs of nationalist parties little attention was paid to the issues related to the socially and economically deprived sections of the population. The left wing supporters within the Congress and the emerging but mostly underground socialist and communist outfits tried to evoke the issues of economic exploitation by the imperialist state and the feudal structures; however it had never made impressive inroads among the masses for a long time. Further they also promoted their ideological offence with a different form of blind subjectivity towards the social issues and persistently harped over the utopian claim of armed revolution against the imperialist state.

The leadership of all the nationalist political organizations demonstrates certain common characteristics which put them on one platform. The identical commonalities among the dominant elites provide logic for their silence and indifference towards the issues of the deprived sections. The popular differences based on cultural and religious symbolism which the communal organizations had proclaimed as the basis for political differences had been systematically utilized to camouflage the opinion of the deprived sections and evenly served the interest of the upper caste elites.

Firstly, the main leadership of all the nationalist parties was upper caste elites. Within the Congress, Tilak, Gokhale, Gandhi, Nehru, Prasad, Tandon, Malviya, Azad, Pant, Radhakrishnan, etc., in Hindu Mahasabha or in RSS, Golwalkar, Savarkar, Munje, Upadhyay, Swami Shraddhanand etc (all Brahmins) and in Muslim League, Syed Ahmed Khan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Aga Khan, Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, etc. The Hindu leadership, including that of the Congress was vastly dominated by the Brahmins and within the Muslim League it was dominated by the Ashrafs. Most of them were highly educated and English speaking intellectuals, trained under western scholarships. Their class status was alike and most of them were from the landed upper class urban category. Until the rise of Gandhi as a mass leader, the Congress party had operated exclusively as a club of educated nationalist having nominal mass support in their

political endeavors.\textsuperscript{14} The comfortable caste-class positioning of the nationalist leadership located that for them the British imperialism is the immediate hurdle in occupying the authority of the state as rulers. Their struggle of political independence was crafted to reassert or regain their lost authority under the British realm.

Secondly, on the terrain of political ideology, the nationalist parties borrowed its political programs, organizational structures and moral standards from the historical experiences of the Western nation-states. The Congress was influenced by the Parliamentary democracy of United Kingdom and by its liberal traditions. The RSS was influenced by the Fascism and Nazism, the militant nationalist movements of the West especially of Germany and Italy. The Muslim League also had shown similarities with the Iranian and Egyptian religious nationalism; however it supplemented the Western style of secular nationalism. Mark Juergensmeyer elaborates that these types of nationalism, especially in South Asia, subscribe at least nominally to the dominant religion of their country but remained hesitant in proclaiming their country as a theocratic state.\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, the ideological base of these nationalisms was burdened by the modernist experiences of the West. Partha Chatterjee also argued that, the nationalist on the one hand, built a movement in opposition to colonialism which was supportive to their political and economic interests (material domain) and on the other hand to preserve their socio-cultural hegemony over the respective communities they constructed a “modern” private sphere of religious identity outside the domination of western influence.\textsuperscript{16} The nationalist thus maneuvered their actions to build a false consciousness based on their elitist version of moral good and political ethics and in this process hardly subscribed to the socio-economic realities of their own society.

Thirdly, in relation to the second point, building of a homogenous national culture was a principle force behind the project of all nationalism. All three kinds of nationalism

\textsuperscript{14} Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Subaltern History as Political Thought” in V. R. Mehta and Thomas Panthan (Eds) Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Exploration, PHISPC (Vol. X Part 7), Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006

\textsuperscript{15} Mark Juergensmeyer, Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, p.78

\textsuperscript{16} Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 3-13
therefore consciously built their project which in Anthony D. Smith's terminology is “primarily abstraction and elite construct” within the given context of irresolvable socio-political conflicts for supremacy.\(^{17}\) This conflict was internal as well as external. Internally, all the elites, irrespective of their political ideology, looked upon the social and economic questions of their respective subjects as secondary and prioritize the common, universal religious/secular identities. It was an elitist interpretation of national life and therefore in their analysis of common good, non-material elements like culture, language, political rights, religion found the most prominent space. Such totalitarian motives ignored the crucial realities of society and tried to eliminate cultural differences to establish homogeneity. In the Indian context, the perpetuated socio-economic differences and functional inequalities because of these differences were underplayed by the nationalist leadership by situating political independence from colonialism as the final synthesis of all the contemporary problems.

Fourthly, the Nationalist political parties have shown great apathy in accommodating the differences of religious communities in their respective models of organic unity. Even for the secular Congress party, accommodation of the Muslim as Nationalist Indian was a great problem. Gyan Prakash elaborates this dilemma:

> The Nationalists persistent representation of Muslims was unduly religious. This image was confirmed by the stereotypical depiction of the Muslim male as bearded and wearing a Turkish fez (women clad in _burqua_), even though Muslim experience of secular modernity was varied and produced a range of ideologies, personalities, and sartorial styles. Unable or unwilling to accommodate the figure of the secular Muslim who could be a Nationalist and a Muslim at a same time, the Congress leadership fell back on the image of the Muslim as traditional and retrograde.\(^{18}\)

Under the leadership of Nehru, the Congress was deeply committed to the enlightenment project of secularization and modernization. The Congress has adopted this heightened policy towards the other poised communities like the Dalits, but consciously prioritizes an abstract secular identity over the particularistic assertions. As

\(^{17}\) Anthony D. Smith “The Origins of Nations” _Ethnic and Racial Studies_, Volume 12, Number 3, July 1989, Routledge, p. 341

the result of this zeal, the politics of identity and their movements were branded as separatist, collaborators of the British, communalist, castiest, parochial and even anti-national. The progressive nature of the anti-caste movements was seen limited only to the arena of special social reforms and any demand for special political rights was considered as reactionary and anti-national. A. R. Desai in his popular work elaborated it as follows.

The movements of the lower castes of the Hindu society suffering from social, religious and legal disabilities, as a result of undemocratic caste system, had two aspects; one progressive and the other reactionary and anti-national. When a lower caste organized even on a caste basis and fought for democratic freedom, its struggle helped the general struggle for the unity of the Indian people on a democratic basis......But when a lower caste organize itself for securing a specific weight in the constitution of the country, when it demanded separate electorates, it acted in reactionary and anti-national manner. Separate electorate would only perpetuate communalism. It would make permanent the communal division of society.19

Under the nationalist fervor and secular rhetoric, the Congress argued that the rationalist project of nation building and development will modernize and secularize the ruminants of the degraded past and their antagonism will be buried in the future. The ambitious ‘assimilationist’ rhetoric was insensitive towards the plural assertions based on caste and communitarian issues. The RSS, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League, were another brand of totalitarian political movements which supplemented such hegemonic pronouncements. Their programs and policies hardly provided any space to religious and cultural differences as they propagate superiority of subjective religious traditions over other religions. They were intolerant to the liberal notions of individual rights and equality and prioritize communitarian ethico-cultural norms and laws for ordering of society.

Fifthly, the philosophical and ideological values of the assertive local or particularistic movements where hardly admired with tolerance and gratitude. The movements were always relegated to the margins as it speaks only to overcome a narrowly situated oppression and does not have universalistic appeals. These movements were treated as the juvenile noise of the immature and backward junta which failed to understand the

moral objective behind the ideals of nationalism. The perspectives of these movements were stereotyped as the ideological constructs of lesser merit, and prejudiced in the nationalist discourse as another counter voice of a passionate but irrational being and therefore need only paternalistic guidance. Gandhi is one of the most vociferous voices of this logic, especially when it comes to the question of Dalits. The political demands made by the Dalit leadership are contested under the assumption that the issue of Untouchability is a matter internal to Hinduism and that the Congress represents concerns and interests of the Dalits in a true spirit. Gandhi emphatically argued against Ambedkar over the proposed political reforms and dismissed him as the leader of the deprived classes. Gandhi was such a passionate follower of his beliefs that he dismissed all other alternatives provided by the Dalits for their emancipation:

\[\text{I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam and Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two different divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of the political rights of untouchables (Ambedkar) do not know their India, do not know how Indian society is today constructed, and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life.}\]

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Such paternalistic classification of particularistic perspective as lesser and nationalist perspectives as universal, is reiterating the notion of superiority and impurity within the public discourse. The Dalits because of their dehumanized past are devalued, their capacity of thinking as individual is questioned and cunningly portrayed as the voice of the community, and therefore of less merit. Such were hegemonic stereotypes which promoted casteist myths and beliefs. The presumed inferiority and incapability of the Dalits was one of the prominent features of the nationalist discourses.

Finally, the communalists and the secularists have a common understanding on the issues of social justice. The consistent demands of minority status for the depressed classes, internal religious reforms, political reservation, cultural and religious autonomy were met with open resistance from the upper caste lobbies of all the nationalist political outfits. The popular aspirations of the deprived sections were branded as submission to the calculative agency of the British maneuvering to disturb the growing rage against the

Within the Muslim league the problems of socio-economic discrimination and exploitation of the non-upper caste Muslims never became the issues of deliberation on the nationalist platform, as there was almost absence of organized social movements for internal social reforms within the Muslim community. Against the aspirations of the deprived sections, they promoted a general theory of justice, considering the individual/citizen or hegemonic communitarian category as the prime subject of state’s action. The political environment created by the upper caste political elites was hegemonic, reactionary and illiberal towards the issues of the deprived sections for a large period. The issue of social and economic justice even under the leadership of Gandhi was treated with immaterial logic of anti-modern philanthropy. All the discursive nuances on Indian nationalism were constructed and dominated by the upper caste elites during the British Colonial Period. The secular Nationalism of the Congress, the communal cultural Nationalism of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and the religious Islamic nationhood of the Muslim League, consciously used immaterial symbolic logic of the nineteenth century modern west to justify its ideological confrontation. These political confrontations led the elites to redefine the meaning of their communitarian identity as separate and independent. In this process they redrew the cultural map, re-identify and construct new communitarian symbols, rituals and customs to mark their community differences. A new language of confrontation and assertion was publicly pronounced by the elites of the community.

As discussed above, there was a strong similarity between the social and economic backgrounds of the leadership of respective political outfits, between their programs and ideological orientations and finally their approach towards the issue of social justice. In a cumulative way these variant brands romanticized their ideals as universally applicable without taking any cognizance of the people who were at the margins of these discourses. However, with greater democratization of the polity and due to the sporadic presence of strong assertions of anti-caste and other social movements of pluralist aspirations, it became indispensable for the Congress and other nationalist political outfits to address the concerns of the deprived sections, especially related to the Hindus.

Ambedkar and Periyar played a distinct role as leaders of two important lower caste segments and built a consolidated political ideology against the hegemony of social elites. Such democratization of the social milieu never materialized among the Muslim community in a concrete way and remained controlled extensively under the rhetoric of Islamic unity. The social and political consciousness of the Muslim society was dominated with the guiding logic of separatism which was seen as the final solution for all their problems. The Ashraf leadership had successfully built a widespread consensus among the Muslims for a separate nation-state and consequently achieved it in August 1947.

The Value of Communal Identity

Gandhi deployed religion and its spiritual teachings in order to counter the unethical baggage of modern materialism of the west. For him, religion was more than ritualistic persuasions or seer casteism and he preferred philanthropic reforms within the religion against the annihilation of the religious system as whole. His understanding of the Hindu identity is moralistically abstract and he accepted the presence of other religious denomination on equal spiritual terms. Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan, who represents the liberal leadership of the Muslims during the initial phase of nationalist struggle, also had to do little with the religious reforms within the Muslims and concentrated specifically for educational and political advancement of the Muslim elites and worked on secular plane without disturbing the religious ethics.\textsuperscript{22} Savarkar, the first proponent of Hindutva doctrine, located Hindu identity under violent patriarchal lenses and proposed the formation of hegemonic Hindu nation. Golwalkar, the founder of RSS, was one step ahead and proposed the idea of Hindu imperialism, in which non-Hindus (especially Muslims and Christians) will have secondary status, devoid of any rights. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who took over the Muslim League Politics from 1935 onwards, located Muslims as a separate independent entity from the Hindus and proposed formation of Pakistan as Islamic nation state. The usage of communal religious identity has multiple motives and aspects in the political system which provides us a terrain of ideological

\textsuperscript{22} Moin Shakir, "Religion and Politics: Role of Islam in Modern India" \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, Vol. 14, No. 7/8, Feb. 1979, p. 470
contestation in between them. These identities had developed a discourse within them and contested against each other for public acceptability. In these contestations, between the elites of different religions and political parties majority of the masses were relegated outside the discourses.

The popular communal identity was not only patriarchal and conservative in its outlook but also rabidly casteist, hegemonic and anti-modern. Gandhi and RSS, disregarded and opposed the demand of separate political rights to the Untouchables under the pretext that they are not a distinct community like Muslims and Christians rather they are essential part of the Hindu social order. Ambedkar comprehended the conspiracy of the elites and never accepted the hegemonic construction of Hindu identity and consciously imagined the untouchables as separate entity like other religious minorities firmly protected by the state. In Tamilnadu, during the same period, Periyar Ramaswamy, opposed the exploitation and marginalization of the non-Brahmin indigenous Dravidian peoples under the Indo-Aryan Hindu cultural domination and demanded separate space for them as Dravidastan. The Muslim identity was consciously repressive against any other political assertion meant to break the Muslim unity and the idea of Pakistan. The formation of separate Islamic state was intelligently framed as religious duty of each Muslim and opposed any unified alliance with the Congress under the fear that any such arrangement will leave the Muslims under the domination of the Hindus.

The religious nomenclatures with its universal denominations adopted a difference blind approach when it comes to analyze the internal dynamics of the religious system. The elites understood that the socio-economic problems are non-political issues that might be treated under the rhetorical appeal of adopting the popular imagination of common social bonds and universal religion. Such appeal was fallacious one as common religious or secular bonds within the communities do not approve any final resolution to the socio-economic inequalities and marginalization of certain groups internal to each community. Congress, RSS and the Muslim League nurtured a common identity of their respective subjects and cunningly sidelined the pertinent issues of social and economic

23 B. R. Ambedkar, “What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables” BAWS, Vol. 9, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Nagpur, 1990, p. 182

24 I shall elaborate on these aspects subsequently in the next chapter.
justice. Even the sponsored passive social reforms were limited in dislodging the authoritative domination of the patriarchal and casteist order. The subordinated and marginalized groups of all the religions find it very difficult to raise their voices in the heightened discourses of secular/communal nationalism.

The Valorization of Secular Citizenship

The British anthropological History had given a prominent space to caste questions in their studies and measured it one of the elementary characteristic to analyze Indian society. On the other side, the nationalist elites located caste as the deadlock in constructing the nationalist unity and therefore public acknowledgement of caste differences is seen as the symbol of nation’s backwardness:

Given the hegemony of European discourse and the centrality of British colonial power, writings on caste seemed implicated in colonial struggles from the beginning of the colonial rule. This produced a defensive cast of mind, a concern about unity that had as much to do with genuine about the essential shortcomings of caste. If, as Partha Chatterjee has suggested the women’s question” thus disappeared from nationalist discussion, the same was true of the “caste question.”

The liberal project elsewhere had popularized the value of citizenship through the doctrine of equality as difference blindness. The liberals had a giant hope with the idea of citizenship that it had the capacity to reconcile the diverse differences of the society in democratic manner and provided the nation-state uniformly identified masses with common nationalist belongings. The Congress leadership was influenced under such heightened value of nationalist citizenship and located the particularistic assertions of minorities and social groups as antithetic to their nationalist goals.

A large section within the Constituent Assembly discouraged the idea of perpetual separate minority rights, especially the political rights, and such safeguards were reluctantly added as temporary measures, necessary until the minorities come with real adjustment with the new modern secular state. Especially after the partition, minority rights were factually comprehended as a threat to the national unity, secularism and against the idea of common citizenship. Even the democratic participation of the

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individual was demanded on secular front, discouraging the usage of social identity in the public spaces. Govind Vallabh Pant argued in defense of such concern:

For the success of democracy one must train himself in the art of self-discipline. In democracies one should care less for himself and more for others. There cannot be any divided loyalty. All loyalties must exclusively be centered around the state. If in a democracy, you create rival loyalties, or you create a system in which any individual or group, instead of suppressing his extravagance, cares nought for larger or other interests, then democracy is doomed.26

The nationalist secular leadership valorized the national identity against the diverse socio-cultural and regional identities. They took these particularistic assertions as a challenge to their model of national integration and secular citizenship. The proposed normative had a moral outlook, but because it lacked democratic participation of the diverse sections while formulating this ideal, periodically, most of the groups in India had raised their concerns against the idea of citizenship. The minority communities, especially the Untouchables, against such violent hegemonic expression vigorously demanded special political rights and protection from the state.

The heightened value of citizenship is passive at least on four brief accounts. First, the idea does not dethrone the upper caste/class rule over the subordinated groups but eventually provide authority to them to define the idea of citizenship. Second, the social milieu is structured and controlled by the age old system of caste and religious customs, where the concept of citizenship has no value as it remained solely as a celebrated norm within the structures of state institutions having almost no impact in changing the conflicting sites of caste binaries. Third, it disregards the embedded sensitivities of the individual that she/he relates to its social status and communitarian ethics. Fourth, citizenship is passive because, as a concept in India it does not propose or form strong anti-caste ideology in order to radicalize the social milieu. The citizenship discourse does not radicalize the entrenched sensitivities of the diverse groups based on closed social identities, further, under the new democratic churnings, the social identities are utilized by exclusive groups; especially the socially deprived sections to gain political incentives from the state. The concept of secular citizenship has constraints in bringing

democratic transformation within the society as it half heartedly involves with the internal trajectories of the society and consequently legitimizes the differences.

Social Injustice and the Dalit Perspective: Emancipation through Politics of Difference

In the post-independence democratic polity, the secular liberal articulation of unified citizenry diminished under the assertions of multiple voices related to the aspirations of different groups. Against the abstract liberal model of the Congress, the contemporary social and cultural movements argued that in order to protect the individual liberty and freedom, a liberal democratic state should be agnostic in the matters of religion and its conventional morality. The contemporary social movements borrowed their ideological impetus from the history of British India as this was the time when parallel to the national independence struggle, numerous castes and communities waged their independent struggles against the internal dominations of upper caste landed elite oppressors.

The movements of the subalterns met with heavy resistance from the nationalist upper caste elite leadership. The Dalits and the Muslims were the two prominent communities on the national front that showed opposition to the dominant rhetoric of the Congress Party and built their struggle to counter its social and political hegemony respectively. As argued earlier, the political opposition of Muslim’s had the same goal as that of the Congress. As Nigam also argues, that they were struggling against the Hindu elites and built an alternative discourse over nationalism; however it ideologically supplements the Congress brand of elite politics in achieving their nationalist goals and therefore, I shall conjecture that it does not fall in the category of the subalterns. The socio-political assertion of Dalits on the other hand was in real sense meant to be defined as ‘the insurrection of little selves’ as it postulated the history of the people who were socially segregated, culturally degraded, economically exploited and politically excluded for the longest period of time in the History of India.

27 Aditya Nigam, The Insurrection of the Little Selves, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, p. 25
28 There is a paradox with such statement. In the fifth chapter, I have tried to develop an analysis describing the common elements between the Muslims and the Dalits during the nationalist movement. I would like to argue that the Muslim political movement reflects such complexity in two distinct ways, first as an independent movement based on ethnic polarization, the Muslim Movement, especially of the Muslim League and the cumulative demand for partition was an elitist construction. However in relationship with the Congress and the Hindu Communal forces, the Muslims have show considerable democratic concerns which can make an unimagined alliance between other asserting groups like the Dalits and thus can be justified as subaltern claims. In this chapter I have argued taking the first view and in the fifth chapter I have utilized the second perspective.
Chapter I

The political leadership of the nationalist movement, especially of the Congress, mitigated the demands of minorities without really addressing their concrete concerns and apprehensions. When the Untouchables demanded separate minority status and political rights, the Congress raised the bogey of religious unity and comprehensive social reforms against the social evils. In this debate, that took place between Gandhi and Ambedkar during the Poona Pact, the Congress readily provided a shallow policy framework against the aspirations of the untouchables. The later accepted this pact under an emotional pressure conspired by Gandhi. Ambedkar had comprehended such insensitivity of the Congress politics when it comes to the issue of social justice. The grand articulation of the Congress in favor of national independence and dumping the crucial aspect of social reforms for it was critically examined by Ambedkar. He said,

The decline of social reform was quite natural. The odium of social reform was too great. The appeal of political power too alluring. The result was that social reform found fewer and fewer adherents. In course of time the platform of the Social Reform Conference was deserted and men flocked to the Indian National Congress. The Politicians triumphed over the social reformers. I am sure that nobody will now allow that their triumph was a matter for pride. It is certainly matter of sorrow.29

Therefore, Ambedkar took recourse in building an independent political argument in favor of the untouchable castes, in order to achieve special safeguards and rights for these groups.

The contemporary social movements of the Dalits and other related anti-caste struggles in most of social science studies are shown as the products of western modernity and British colonialism. Modernity provides space for the argument of social justice, individual liberty and egalitarian public space for all and on the other hand, the British colonial state supplements it with the uniformity in civil laws in order to provide an “enlightened nationhood” to the society divided by distinct religious communities.30 This argument endorses Nicholas Dirks’ study on Indian caste system that “caste” became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all “systemizing” India’s diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization, under the colonial


30 Gauri Vishwanathan, Outside the Fold, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p.75
rule. These observations were substantiated with volumes of ethnographic surveys and historiographies to prove that colonialism was bound to perform its moral obligation as reformer of the traditional societies of the East, so that it may lead towards a modern world. This moral ridden argument is staunchly oriental and eurocentric in nature as it dismisses the possibilities of some other internal reasons for the development of caste movements in India. I shall argue that the 'modernity' of Dalit perspective was structured because of its lived experience within the unjustified social milieu and its historic struggle against its given degraded condition. The colonial system worked as a catalyst and empowered their struggle with new rationalist meaning. The history of India was based on social and cultural antagonism between two broad groups of people, the upper caste and the lower castes. The studies done by the Orientalists on India's social history was predisposed towards the upper castes as it hardly reflected upon the struggles of the lower castes which these groups had waged in the past against their social oppressors. The establishment of an egalitarian social order was the main motive behind the movements against caste discrimination. In the narratives of mainstream history dominated by western methodologies requires space and scrutiny has not been provided to this terrain of social conflicts. They caricature the social history without really understanding the political economy of the social relationship. The social reality of India is different from the superficial and romantic saga of India's spirituality as narrated by some of the western writers. The contemporary modern political representations of religious and cultural identities are the product of India's social history which during the British colonial rule explored liberal ideas and objectives of political functioning. However the ethos of modernity- liberty, equality and social justice always remains an integral part of the social movements even before the arrival of the British in India.

**Historiography of Caste Society: Social Reality**

About the idea of caste and its institutional structure in India the sociologists and other social scientists have multiple contestations and explanations. However, on certain

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31 Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Minds*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p. 5
32 I have elaborated on this aspect in detail in the second chapter.
essential elements of the caste system, there is a broad consensus amongst them. Some of the similarities which we can draw from the works of the social scientists are as follows: 1) **Compartmentalization**: Society was divided into four *varnas* (castes), based on status of birth which guarantee hierarchical superiority of some over others. 2) **Hierarchy**: The priestly castes were the most powerful sections of the society 3) **Exclusivity**: Endogamy was the essential rule. 4) **Untouchability**: Outside the four *Varnas*, a fifth group was invented as *a-varna* or the untouchable 5) **Fixity**: The caste nomenclatures are permanent and hereditary, and 6) **Religiosity**: To legitimize the above mentioned structures the religious Sanskrit scriptures were resorted upon.

These observations can be substantiated by referring to volumes of primary and secondary resources available in the archives of India. The Sanskrit religious texts of the Hindus elaborate extensively about the interrelationship of different caste groups as social structures during the ancient Aryan society. One of the most ancient classical religious texts, the *Rig Veda* in its 10th *Manda/ (Purushukta)* explains the origin of the four *Varnas* and the social, economic and political duties subscribe to each unit. *Manusmriti* is one of the most important texts of the ancient Hindu scriptures which also referred as the law book of the Hindus. It systematized and structured the whole social order into multiple hierarchical layers, describing the origin, objectives, responsibilities and social duties of every individual caste of the society. Even a critical reading of classical epics of the Hindus, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, is useful in validating the above mentioned claims about caste distinctions and their respective duties.

In the medieval period, the writings of Bhakti Saints further portray the operational societal discrimination and divisions based on caste divisions. Most of these saints born in the lower strata of the society (especially from the Untouchable castes), and in their pursuit of visualizing a better society became some sort of reformist bards. In their *bhajans*, *bharuds* and *abhangas* (devotional songs) their main appeal was against the discriminative position which they bear in relationship with the almighty god and therefore criticized the social elites for their despised place in the society. This sect is
regarded as the precursor of the protestant reformation in India, as the idea of universal equality for all and social justice was expounded in that particular period.  

The modern period used new methodologies and perspectives to study the complexities of caste system in India. The occidental social anthropologists and historians were fascinated by the cultural and social diversity of India and extensively elaborated *the distinct traditions of the east* in their works. In his writings on India, Karl Marx described the contemporary socio-religious culture of early British rule in India in the following words:

> We must not forget that this undignified, stagnant, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan (India). We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman (Hanuman), the monkey, and Sabbala (Kapila), the cow.  

The British, the Germans and the French historians and anthropologists put lot of efforts in understanding the social and religious dynamics of the Hindu society. In 1817 James Mill wrote a descriptive article on *Caste* in *Encyclopedia of Britannica*, highlighting the nature of caste system as division of labor and the importance of priestly caste. Abbe Dubois in one of the first ethnographic studies, as early as 1825, related the institution of caste to the ideology of power created by the Brahmins. Max Muller, a German anthropologist, further defined the caste system as division of labor based on the distinct hierarchies among races. These observations were eventually substantiated by the first Census of India (1901) under the census Commissioner Herbert Risley. He described the social stratification of Hindu society on the salient features of caste, occupational

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33 Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, Manohar Prakashan, New Delhi, 1996, p. 8  
34 Karl Marx, *The British Rule in India*, People’s Publishing House, New Delhi, 1962, p. 15  
36 Ibid. p. 23-24  
37 Ibid. p. 29
differences, customs and strict endogamy.\textsuperscript{38} In their analysis they accepted that the control of the priestly caste is responsible for the degenerated and morally depraved Indian society.

Nicholas Dirks in his work argued that the Orientals had their motives and objectives to describe India’s social reality in a peculiar sense. They constructed the social realities and formulated a new kind of civil society to supplement the colonial authority and thus the modern caste system was the product of British colonialism in India. Endorsing this here, I would like to add that, these constructions are based upon certain unique social characters different from that of the class based western society. The Orientalists utilized scientific methodological standards and evidences from historic texts to study the social institutions in India. However, the results were not very different from the examples of social stratification earlier demonstrated in other available classical textual resources of medieval and ancient India. I would like to highlight that these studies turn out to be superficial when we contextualize its political economy. I will argue that these studies have a passive, degraded and undignified representation of the lower castes as a permanent inactive social group. It had consciously negated the history of the lower castes’ struggle for emancipation and postulated the whole social dynamics through the agency of their upper caste collaborators, especially Brahmins. The Brahmins were defined as spiritual and religious guides, rulers, high born and infallible. The account presented by the western scholars was a soulless caricature of the social order as it hardly dwells into the reasons and causes responsible for such chaotic and exploitative social order. They were mainly concerned about the instrumentality of their studies for the administrative usage of the British state and therefore, had not aired any concern about the narratives of history located in the traditions of the lower caste groups.

The system of caste in India is an organic political institution. In many aspects it resembles the political society of twelfth century medieval Europe. The supreme powers of the Brahmins can only be compared to the authority of the catholic priestly class as both were the essential components of the ruling elites. Their duty was not restricted only to the spiritual domain but they were the influential participants in the discourses of

\textsuperscript{38} Nicholas B. Dirks, \textit{Castes of Mind}, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p. 50
the temporal order. The *Kshatriyas* was the real temporal rulers having a moral obligation (*dharma*) to protect the divinely ordained socio-economic structures. The rest were the enslaved subjects (serfs, peasants, merchants, slaves, women, etc.) having almost negligible authority in the domain of temporal and spiritual order. The customs, rituals, festivals, myths, history, cultural symbols, etc of each community was differentiated and placed on the basis of its position in the hierarchical caste system. Of course, such generalization was not appropriately followed everywhere in stricter sense, however, within the social relationship, the ‘essence’ of such aspect can be seen overtly in most of the cases.

The historical subordination and exploitation of the lower strata (especially the Untouchables) had created an isolated identity of ‘other’ different from the comprehensive Hindu ‘self’. In the history of India, the recorded insurrections against these dominations were not seen as the conflict against Brahmanism but as some alternative cults or socio-cultural sects within the great Hindu tradition. In the history text books, the phenomenon of caste is understood as a system of corporate life. One of the first modern historical texts by R. C. Majumdar largely concerned about the upper *varnas* and briefly described the groups among the lower *varna* as simply as ‘Other Social Corporations’.\(^3^9\) Such view belittled the assertive moral voices of the movements which had poised to bring radical convergence in the philosophy of social relationships. The political history written by upper caste nationalist elites usually narrated the perspectives of the social and political elites and avoided judging the historical developments by the perspective of concrete political sociology or political economy. This was in connivance with the positivist objective of the nationalist discourses which mostly approached the social realities under a broader spectrum of common belongings and spiritual domains.

As mentioned above, the insurrections against the dominant brahmanic social system were also responsible for producing an alternative conceptualization about political ideas similar to the political ideals developed in the modern west. Especially the ideas of social justice, freedom and equality are the intrinsic values of these insurrections.

\(^3^9\) Aloka Parasher-Sen (Ed), *Subordinate and Marginal Groups in Early India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, P. 30
The Idea of Social Justice

The communitarian ideals of the Hindu society stood in opposition to the modern conceptions of justice, liberty and equality. The caste system occupied its legitimacy not because of its ethical and humane nature but because as an institution it implemented a particular perception of platonic rational justice in the society based on divisions and hierarchical statuses of the communities. Therefore, the concept of justice was not universally related but dependent upon the subjectivity of the receiver; Equality was metaphysically propounded in front of the God, but in social practices individual relationships were based upon unequal distribution of social and economic assets. The society lacks communitarian ethics and therefore absence of social equality is seen as normal phenomenon. Further, because of the strong compartmentalization of the social groups and control of the social elites, freedom/liberty from the conventional cultural practices and social customs was not a possible endeavor. The orientalists compared the structures of the Indian society with the western society and found that the essential modern ethical principles prerequisite for the functioning of a good society is absent in India. Therefore, it became the responsibility of the British Empire to introduce the modern features of social and political institutions, known as liberalism, for the betterment of Indian society.

As mentioned above, the idea of justice and equality is rooted in the contest against Brahmanism which was consciously neglected by the elite upper caste nationalist historians. The big and little insurrections against the dominant social orthodoxy of Brahmanism created an alternative model of social relationship, culture and political system. During the sixth century BC, Buddhism and Jainism were the two important religious orders which countered the Vedic Brahmanic religiosity and philosophical teachings to establish an alternative social order based on liberty, equality and fraternity. These religions revamped the social structure as new communities like the merchant castes and women were granted prominent spaces in the discourses of social and religious life. Social equality between the human beings within the religious order was one of the prominent teachings of the Buddha. It also influenced the political system in the most substantive way. Among the three prominent Mauryan rulers of Magadha
(321-185 BC), King Chandragupta and Bindusara were Jain devotees and established their imperial kingdom over half of the land of Indian peninsula. The Third ruler, Ashoka, was the most powerful with grand ambitious imperial designs. He was dramatically converted to Buddhism after the destructive imperial campaign against Kalinga and later on remained an active and committed campaigner of Buddhism in South Asia. The political realm of King Ashoka was based upon secular credentials and moral concerns like non-violence and social harmony.

The relationship between the Mauryan dynasty and the Brahmins was infested with multiple contestations. In the Brahmanic literature, the clan of Mauryan rulers was always notified as shudhra or heretics\(^{40}\) and Magadha as the land of mlecha (barbarians) where Vedic sacrifices and brahmanic rituals were not performed.\(^{41}\) Ashoka was seen as the destroyer of the Vedic ritualism and propagator of Buddhism. However on many accounts, this was a radical era which had a non-Vedic spirit and paved ways for materialistic concerns related to the common people. The control of the Brahmin orthodoxy was sidelined and the conditions of the shudhra and untouchables castes were improved. Ambedkar depicted this period as Buddhist India and referred the Brahmanic era as a period of defeat and darkness against which the Mauryans built an outstanding social and political realm:

> There is only one period in Indian history which is a period of freedom, greatness and glory. That is the period of Maurya Empire. At all other times the country suffered from defeat and darkness. But the Maurya period was a period when chaturvamya was completely annihilated, when the shudras, who constituted the mass of the people, came into their own and became the rulers of the country.\(^{42}\)

Brahmanism as a socio-political ideology had reemerged by terminating the value based socio-political milieu of its earlier era. Consequently, it came up with a more stringent and oppressive social system in the defense of Vedic traditions which lasted for more than thousand years without having any radical change in its attire. However, during the medieval age, the Bhakti Movement had shown some potentialities to counter the

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hegemonic control of Brahmanism on the social and religious domain. The buried ideals, equality and fraternity, resurfaced in the public domain in the devotion laden spiritual songs of the Bhakti saints.

In the second half of the Nineteenth Century, Jyotirao Phule, a radical social revolutionary in Maharashtra, forged a radical social movement by forming a formidable alliance of the socially deprived sections to counter the social elites of the contemporary society. He was amongst the first few who mobilized the deprived masses to accept western modernity and vehemently denounced the authority of Vedic-Sanskrit texts as supreme or infallible. In 1873, he wrote Slavery, in which he initiated his program for the emancipation for the Shudra by declaring:

I denounce all the main books of the bhats (Brahmins) which decree as their slaves as well as any other books which claim so, and embrace that book (which may have been written by a person belonging to any other country or religion) which propound that all human beings have a right to enjoy human rights in equal measures.43

The basic idea behind the above mentioned illustrations is to demonstrate the explicit reality of Hindu social system and its relationship with the modern political concepts. The explicit antagonism between the social elites and the oppressed classes is based on the different ideals which they had inherited. The idea of justice propounded by the social elites defeats the modern fundamental principles of justice whereas the appeals and perspectives of the oppressed people and their movements supplement and endorse the modern motives of justice as a social philosophy. Therefore, the idea of social justice is rooted in the age old struggle for social equality and liberty from oppression.

It is true that, during this period they failed in constructing a grand theory of justice or of an ideal world, however these little and great insurrections against the established social and religious orthodoxy of Brahmanic traditions were identically modern in its spirit and action. Modern in the spirit because it adopted anti-establishment posturing and denounced the legitimacy of the orthodox and conservative practices followed in the contemporary period. In its dealing with the social relationship, these movements

promoted social cohesiveness over exclusive rights of the different caste groups. It carries the value of enlightenment in its teaching and tries to establish humane concerns as the essential principles to judge the ethical value of all social activities. It was in the British India that this alternative conceptualization was provided with a legitimate space in the socio-political discourses. The British rule in India had not invented communities or constructed them, but the opening of new knowledge system and rational public spaces during this realm had provided an opportunity to the different groups and sections to articulate their democratic demands against their respective oppressive systems. This battle for recognition of difference on equal respect and rights had remained prominent within the nationalist discourses for all the major minority communities. Along with the Muslims, the Dalits and other groups of lower castes were in the forefront in articulating their differences against the Hindu social elites and their domination in the socio-political system. These particularistic assertions supplement overwhelmingly to the principles of liberal democracy and contributed in making the public reason more inclusive in real senses.

**Dalits and the Politics of Difference**

The rise of particular perspectives has created a new Universe, having its own methodology, human concerns, secular values and ideals about the future world, different from the dominant perspectives of the modern universal approaches dominated by the traditionalists. In India, the Dalit assertion had the same potentials which have challenged the mainstream dominant socio-political ideologies represented by the Liberal secular Nationalism and Conservative hegemonic Hindutva. The Dalit Perspective constructs a different ‘universe’ based on contextual morality, secular socio-religious values and commitment to the democratic order. There is a philosophical precision to this perspective as it counters the outsourced categories to construct an independent and organic model. Firstly it avoids the traditionally imposed social categories like untouchables, *Asprushta* or *Harijan* as they operate under the aegis of Hindu *Varnashrama Dharma*. Secondly, it rejects the Marxist economic determinism and its given nomenclatures (proletariat, peasants, subaltern) because of its historic negligence to the questions of social and cultural discriminations. Thirdly, the Dalit
perspective denounces the liberal’s self obsessed individual category as abstract citizen and established Caste as the basic value to judge the superstructure. It derives its inspiration from the materialist epistemology of the social struggles of the marginalized people who are denied all human rights in various spheres of their life.\textsuperscript{44}

The theoretical criticism of modern meta-narratives by the Dalit perspective is not meant only to de-legitimize their moral initiatives but to provide an alternative model based on ‘socio-cultural historicity’ experienced by the socially deprived sections in the past. Therefore, it is a partly a post-modern consciousness and deeply rooted into the ideals of alternative modernity. In India ‘the caste system’ is the main area of investigation for the Dalit Perspective as it provides the base structure to examine the external ideas that periodically has been constructed without their consent and projected as universal or neutral.

This perspective is based on a conscious interpretation of history and contemporary social reality with an objective to establish liberty, equality and fraternity in society. In the political arena this alternative conceptualization was instrumental in challenging the rhetorical idea of popular nationalism of the Congress during the Nationalist Movement. In the post independence period, the hegemonic secular citizenship was restructured and the Dalits were granted special rights as differentiated citizens. Along with objecting the abstract secular notions of modern citizenship in the contemporary politics, the Dalit perspectives have also shown vibrant resurgence as a political force defeating the rhetoric of Hindu Unity and Cultural Nationalism proposed by the Hindu social elites.

All the three ideas, Nationalism, Secularism and Hindutva have been crucial in constructing the ideal of universalism. These broad frameworks categorically deny group differences and try to assimilate every one on one single platform as equal. The Dalit movements criticized such integrationist goals and argue that under the veil of metaphysical abstract notions, the social elites are cheating them along with the other socially deprived social groups. The Dalits assertion rejects the political goals of the social elites and crafts an autonomous political alternative based on distinct

\textsuperscript{44} Gopal Guru, “Understanding the Category ‘Dalit’” in \textit{Atrophy in Dalit Politics} Gopal Guru (Ed), Dalit Intellectual Collective, Vikas Ahyayan Kendra, Mumbai, 2005, p. 67
historiography, cultural notions and political morals. Their specific social experience provides a moral perspective in order to judge the legitimacy of different institutions of the democratic world. The Dalit perspective upholds the voices of the oppressed sections against the historically privileged communities and their political notions. Therefore their criticisms against the institutions of the state in most of the debates in the public life are named as separatist and narrow. However, this alternative articulation has provided space to the demands of the deprived sections in the mainstream political system dominated by the upper castes.

Christophe Jaffrelot argued that, the early post-independence democratic period in India was exclusively dominated by the upper caste elites (the upper caste intelligentsia, the business community and landowners) with a clientelistic arrangement with the Congress Party. The social organizations and leaderships of the lower castes were co-opted or discredited in favor of building social unity. The assertion of independent leadership of the lower strata, especially in the southern states of India has emerged in the late 1970s and was poised to break the hegemonic appropriation of democracy by the social elites and demanded radical transformation of the political authority. Twenty years later the same phenomenon was witnessed in the northern India where assertive Dalit mobilization dismantled the political prospects of the Congress party. Democracy has become more vibrant and socially rooted as the political mobilizations of these groups are now more independent, aggressive and participative. Importantly, this assertive difference is political in nature as it claims emancipation from the oppressive social relationships to become the integral part of the society with equal respect and dignity. Jaffrelot terms this transformation as India’s silent revolution as it adopted liberal democratic methods to change the political spectrums.

Iris Marion Young argues that the universal standard norms or policies usually reflect the cultural and behavioral stereotypes of the dominant groups and thus, percolate disadvantages to other groups. She further argued that the politics of the disadvantaged group against such domination is emancipatory as it constructs an independent group by

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rejecting the ideals of inclusion.\textsuperscript{46} It makes the social culture more homogenous and breaks the myths of unified socio-political cultural contexts propagated by the dominant groups. The Dalits in India are emerging as a strong socio-political group which has the potential to deconstruct the myths of secular citizenship and cultural nationalism with their politics of difference. Further to what Gopal Guru has referred as ‘experiential epistemology’ provides new standards of analysis which are concretely embedded with the realities of social spheres. By using such exclusive realities, the Dalits in the contemporary situations have placed the idea of social justice as central question in the deliberation of nation building. In the discourses of social sciences, the Dalit perspective is yet to achieve the needed space for their concerns and the ideas constructed by the dominant groups always have discursive privileges.

\textbf{Contextualizing Secularism}

Every modern identity in India has its roots in the colonial history and its modern political objectives take shape referring to the considerations which are buried in the past. Social justice and secularism are the two ethical ideas which captured the imagination of nationalist elites during the struggle for independence. To establish a just social and religious order both the political principles have played a significant role in transforming the ideals and objectives of the national independence struggle. The socio-cultural sensitive ideas of proportional representation, special safeguards to minority religions, cultural and religious autonomy and protection to linguistic minorities interchangeably played important role in both the discourses. The social reformist/revolutionary movements have consciously countered the hegemonic construction of communal identity and also the value neutral identity of citizenship and provided an alternative model for structuring the socio-political system. Within this complex discourse a unique brand of interventionist secularism emerged in the modern constitution. This integral link between these two values nurtured a distinct model of secular nationalism and inclusive democracy. Rajeev Bhargava’s interpretation of secularism as “contextual secularism” is close to this analysis.

\textsuperscript{46} Iris Marion Young, \textit{Justice and the Politics of Difference}, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1990, pp. 163-168
In the language of sociology, the social justice can be termed as statist project for a comprehensive secularization of the society. Dipankar Gupta argues that the process of secularization is different from the ideology of secularism as the later constructs religious communities on strict sense of collective identity, whereas secularization is a process in which communities are advanced to adopt modern institutional morals. In this respect, the ideology of secularism can be utilized to check and balance the hegemony of any religion over the state affairs and in protecting the cultural sensibilities of the minority religions. The process of secularization of religious communities through effective implementation of social justice mechanism is also equally important as it helps in the greater democratization of the society by breaking the conservative local authorities and power relationships. Identically, such process is visible exclusively with the Hindu society as the contemporary state adopted both the mechanisms of secularism and social justice to make the religious order more liberal and modern in its outlook.

Secularism and its Critics

The critics of secularism often define the doctrine of secularism as antithetical to the distinct and unique socio-cultural structures of Indian society and seek to build an alternative conception of secularism based on varied conceptual models like neutrality of state in religious matters, priority to citizenship rights and abstract Gandhian morality. The objection placed in this section to these debates is not based on seer analytical persuasion, but I would like to argue that these critics have developed antagonism against secularism by cunningly determine it as a value devoid of principles of social justice. This constructs the image of secularism as a one dimensional liberal institutional mechanism meant only to keep at bay communal tensions and to promote tolerance.

Donald E. Smith, the main promoter of the concept of ideal secular state, argues that establishment of secular state is possible only by separating the state from interfering in the order of religion, thus strict separation of state and religion is a priori condition for a secular state.

Religious reform per se is not a valid function of the secular state; it is not the business of the secular state to concern itself with religious matters. Furthermore, any such interference is likely to violate religious liberty, lead to the state promotion of religion, or both. Religious reform should never be the motive behind state legislation.  

Smith renders a passive affirmation when asked whether India is a secular state or not as he has observed that because the Indian state find serious difficulties in implementing the Uniform Civil Code, the definition of India's secularism remains under suspicions. Even Partha Chatterjee somehow seems convinced with this observation and argues that because the Indian state recommends such kind of reformist and interventionist logic it can never be really secular. He argues that more than the keeping belief in the progressive march of the interventionist state what is needed is the initiation of internal reforms within the religious communities which will lead them towards a better democratic polity. Universal reason of the liberal tradition like citizenship is prioritized over the politics of difference like demands of special group or cultural rights in such criticisms. These debates are also referred in public spaces to denounce or degrade any other assertion for social justice as narrow, separatist casteist, parochial, or hurdle in the way to achieve the celebrated goal of national integration and citizenship.

Ashish Nandy and T. N. Madan argue that this heightened protective state neglects the alternative model of Indian tradition that lies in the spiritual and tolerant domain of religious practices especially of the Hindu civilization. Their alternative is based on Gandhian ethos of anti-modernism and proposes that the tolerant religious traditions of the east have the capacity to transform the overarching value of rationality and science entrenched in the current definition of secularism. In their argument for a state which should be culture sensitive, and should limit the process of secularization as it devalues the role of religion in society. In these criticisms, there is no discussion on the persistently degraded socio-cultural practices like caste discrimination and subjugation

49 Ibid. p. 291
of women within the same cultural milieu. They visualized socio-cultural groups as homogeneously tied with tolerant and spiritual ideals of social living without empirically analyzed the social behavior and relationships of the people living in same culture. It is difficult to understand, how a religion which in its religious sermons legitimized social hierarchy, discrimination, subordination of women and ritual pollution has been idealized as tolerant religion.

The right wing opposition to secularism builds its argument on the basis that the Indian state is pseudo-secular as it is proactive in shielding the perpetual perpetrators of terrorism (Muslims) by granting the religious minorities special rights and policy packages on the expenses of the majority Hindus. They utilize the above mentioned criticisms to dilute secularism’s socially sensitive character and reformist temperament. By constructing a hyper image of Muslim community and its related threat of terrorism, they valorize the Hindu identity as a unified force against the Muslims point to the fact that due to pseudo-secular policies of the state the Hindus have suffered tremendously in the post-independent India.

Moreover, secularism has not only been myopically visualized by its critics but even the intellectuals who have defended secularism have taken a partial view. While discussing such issue, many social scientists oversimplify the constructions of identities and restrict religious groups into communal compartments. Visualizing the Hindu or the Muslim as one homogeneous and monolithic communal identity and overlooking the diverse social stratifications and differences within both the communities can be identified as a usual practice in contemporary discourse of social science. Partha Chatterjee argues that the state mechanisms are responsible agents for defining the notions of ‘minority and majority’ constitutionally and legally under the argument that it is protecting the cultural rights of the minorities. This is true but that does not mean that the religious communities should be regarded as unified structure without examining their relative intricacies within the structures and interrelated functions of those structures. However,

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within the discourse of social sciences, religious and social issues are discussed under the privileged discourse of secularism (religious identities as homogenous units) and the other important political identities (Caste, class, region and gender) were restricted from entering into the mainstream debates.

Such theorization about the secular identities is inherently flawed and thus, has impoverished the agenda of liberal egalitarianism in India. The objectives of social justice are realistic as it attempts to provide material benefits through institutional support to the deprived sections of the respective religious communities. The idea of social justice has emerged to radicalize the social relationships which due to conservative religious practices are based on unequal treatment of their fellow beings, lack of social equality, political or economic dependency and patriarchy. Thus, as an exclusive policy framework, social justice proves to be imperative and a greater value than secularism as it articulates the moral principles derived from the legacy of humanism and individual good. The political elites and the intellectual class have not seen this relationship between secularism and social justice in order to avoid the logical and ethical superiority of social justice over secularism. Here, Historic context of constitution making is consciously employed by the theoreticians to draw a distinction between secularism and social justice. Thus, it establishes separate caste and communal compartments laden with specific institutional mechanisms to rectify their relative problems. Religious communalism is visualized in the discursive vogue as a threat to the democratic polity as it consciously constructs the religious identities on a xenophobic model and argues for a rigid and monolithic construction of the majority and the minority.

As the participants in the debates of secularism most of the times belong to the upper caste/class strata of the respective communities, their negligence to this value of social justice within the discourse, demonstrate their caste and class interests. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India, is the best example of this phenomenon. He was a passionate modernist and committed secularist and as a result of such zeal he had not only neglected the demands and issues of the Dalits but termed their demands as “insignificant”. Nigam argues that Nehru’s secular rhetoric
supplements the arguments of the moderate Hindu Nationalists like Madan Mohan Malviya which he utilized to counter the reactionary forces like the Muslims and the Dalits. After independence, he proposed a moral argument of Secularism. This helps the nationalist lobby in two ways, firstly the Muslims, due to partition, find it difficult to oppose the Hindu authorities and under such circumstances their demands for political rights were scuttled craftily. On the other hand, the Dalits were granted some solace of social justice due to the presence of their leader Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly. The social justice initiatives of the state were partly revolutionary in its content and unfair to the demands of social justice by the non-Hindu religious communities especially the Muslims and the Christians.

The ideal objective posed on state’s secularism in India is to rationalize the relationship between two or more different religions based on three main principles (1) Building relationship of tolerance between the religions (Sarvadharma Samabhav), (2) protection to the religious and cultural rights of the minorities and (3) non-recognition of state as theocratic one (Dharma Nirpekshta). These three overarching modern principles have also constructed a picture of a dependent minority on the state (especially Muslims) because of which, as Gyan Prakash argues, provided impetus to the communal politics which consistently argues for a greater secularization of Indian Muslims as citizens.

Secularism respects the cultural and linguistic aspirations of the groups and under such popular rhetoric put a blind eye to the social and economic distinctions and deprivations of the same groups. On the other hand, the communalists use these secular constructions of minority identifications to forge a new meaning to their political objectives. This hyper idealization of secularism and its institutional practice is based upon the new invented morals of the nationalist elites. It is fashioned without taking the much needed aspect of secularization into concern and dependent heavily on the strict frameworks of religious rights. The social arrangements, cultural conventions and practices, including the issues of gender relationships in every concerned religious community are in

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desperate need of change, which is possible only with the application of social justice mechanism.

The ideal of secularism relatively provides space for the social justice policies in order to bring radical transformation within the society. In India, secularism in the context of Hindu religion endorsed such complementary relationship between these ideals. However, this complementary duality between secularism and social justice is changed under the calculative attack by the caste/class elites of the Hindu and Muslim community under the garb of communalism in the contemporary period.

Communalism versus Secularism

The Nationalism debates produced a canonical interpretation of the social reality. Religious identity played the pivotal role in constructing the discourse on Nationalism during the same period. The modern construction of politically charged communitarian identities is the product of unresolved confrontations of political ideologies during the British Colonial rule. In the post-independent India, the modern Constitution under the most influential logic of enlightenment era provided some solace and was able to contain the politically charged communal tendencies in the first two decades after Independence. However, in the post Nehruvian era, India has diminished its character as a secular state. The modernist values of citizen and secular nationalism face a critical and offensive attack by the communitarian socio-religious identities and try to restructure the political debate on nationalism for one more time. The promoters of religious Hindu nationalism were uncomfortable under such charged environment of modern culture in which religious identity plays a residuary role. They lodge an impressive attack against the normal adoptability of secularism by the people by recalling the notions of cultural superiority of the Hindus, the Muslim appeasement by the Congress, scrapping of the Article 370 and the most celebrated theme among them all, construction of the grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

The modern constitutional state has to deal with the renewed categories of assertive religious fundamentalism. Communalism resurfaces in the political spaces with a motivational force by articulating the same traditional nomenclatures with a new moral appeal. In order to democratize these categories and related issues, emotionally charged
narratives of history based on hatred against Muslims are systematically utilized to raise communal passion among the Hindu sections. Under such zealous campaign, the upper caste political elites not only neglect the socially sensitive ethics enshrined in the constitution for the deprived sections but also build a staunch public opinion in favor of a particularistic brand of communal politics, popularly known as *Hindutva*. Communal politics lacks progressive roadmap or national agenda for the betterment of socially deprived sections and related issues of economic marginalization like poverty, unemployment and displacement.

Communalism, on the other hand, provides legitimacy to the need of secular state in India. The secular state accepts the logic that the democratic process can be craftily utilized by the right wing forces to achieve its political goals. Under the pressure of the right wing political environment, the constitutional arrangement can be diverted into a regressive direction which will further lead to the establishment of totalitarian theocratic state. To avoid such situation secularism is posed against the imagined grand narrative of the communal forces as the sole rescue mechanism. However the secular doctrine has consistently failed in diminishing the domination of the communal sentiments from the population and also remained restricted in popularizing secularism as the doctrine to build link between contesting socio-religious groups.

**Social Justice versus Secularism:**

In the contemporary period there is a conflict between Secularism and Social Justice also. While the idea of Secularism, especially in the post independence period is invoked to valorize, construct and modernize religious communities towards achieving the greater goal of the “Indian Citizen”, the idea of Social Justice has challenged this homogenization by prioritizing difference and division within the community and stressed on equal rights and community based special safeguards. In the post-independence period the nationalist elites started denouncing equal position to the value of social justice and defined it as a private mechanism to reform the Hindu religious order. The secular identities like the Hindu, the Muslim, citizen and nationalism are appropriated and fashioned vigorously in the public domain to undermine the socially sensitive nomenclatures like Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribes. The aggressive
emphasis on communal categorization of community and a criminal negligence of disadvantaged and underprivileged categories within the community is an important feature of the first two decades of post-independence politics in India.

Over emphasis on community-centric constructions provide heightened status to religious sensibilities and its ideology and thus weakens the issues and objectives of social justice. The communitarian secular state by emphasizing heavily on external protections (education, language, familial and religious laws), neglects perpetual social, cultural and economic disadvantages faced by the members within respective communities, thus it sustains elitist interpretation of the 'public reason' and manipulates the discourse on social justice for idealist 'non-public reason'. The idea of 'external protection' is consistent with the liberal principle of secularism, although it has the possibility of becoming illegitimate if it is inconsistent with the 'internal differences' i.e. the values of social justice.

In this respect, the modern religious identities under the discourse of secularism are applied and fashioned in the public reason to construct a controlled political milieu in which superficial and immaterial objectives of communalism and minority rights can take a central stage. Such emotive and culture specific ideas have great potentials to divert and obscure the pertinent issue of social justice from public conscience. A heightened logic of Nationalism, national unity, integrity and citizenship is forced on the minority communities and other social groups by the Hindu Nationalist elites. The agenda of social justice takes a back stage under such conscious attack. Shabnam Tejani argues that during the last phase of the British rule, an overarching context of nationalism was built up which was later used against the religious minorities and consequently they were denied special rights for social justice like reservation and political representation.55

In the Indian context, the relationship of the state and the religion has produced a unique kind of secular state which is sensitive towards the ethos of social justice. Reform within the religious order, especially within the Hindu community remains the priority in the

agenda of nation building. This particular aspect is extensively criticized by the political scientist. Secularism is analyzed not as an ethical doctrine to construct and reform the traditional conservative societies but as an ideological assault which defeats the western ideals of secularism and consecutively perpetuates communalism. For them a perfect secular state is a state which regulates the state institutions in protecting the political and cultural rights of the citizen. In order to achieve this secular ethic the state should not promote social or religious reforms.

Conclusion

Social Justice and secularism need to be related and be made complementary norms especially in a liberal political domain, which celebrates differences and provides space to all kinds of identities. In the literature of social sciences, these two important values of modern nation state are usually understood by separating them from each other. Those who try to draw a link between these two values have worked under the academic limitations of simplified definitions, ideological overtones and they do not understand the distinctive character of India's political and social environment. I would like to argue here that social scientists, by continuously exploring these two elements separately from each other diverted the discourse from the principle issue of justice. Social justice and secularism should be seen as the modern political constructions linked commonly to the age old canon of politics known as Justice. Both the concepts are derived in order to fight every kind of oppression in the religious, social, cultural and political arena to create an inclusive democratic polity. I have sought to demonstrate here that the contemporary political discourses have given extra leverages to the concepts of communalism, special group rights, distribution and autonomy under a liberal modernist institutional framework. While working on such segmented division they constructed or imagined a political uniformity of religious identity and neglected the internal dynamics of each group. Further, such concrete distinction fails to make a common theoretical alliance between the two or more oppressed groups of every religion based on certain common parameters like, marginalization, social discrimination and economic disadvantage. Thus, 'justice to the oppressed' becomes an unattainable task, as some other constitutional directive appears more important than the principle of justice.