ABSTRACT

When an innocent citizen in the country is anxious to be left to himself to work quietly and achieve his ambitions, it is the state to a large extent that has to provide him the atmosphere in which to do so. He does not want to eternally live in a world of uncertainties, in a world of commotion, chaos and riots. It is those who do not believe in leaving others in peace but are anxious to make their life miserable, that bring about confusion and disorder. Communalism, casteism, religious hatred and bigotry, disrespect for the constitution, for the long established political institutions, norms and practices, and above, all for our own countrymen, because they practice a different religion, are responsible for many of the suffering of our people and the lack of real progress in the country.

The present work in the form of thesis is the result of a continuous and constant attempt of searching all significant literature available on secularism and relevant to the contents of the thesis. Although selective in nature, an attempt has been made to cover all aspects of the topic.

India is officially a secular democratic country and secularism as the guiding principle for running the affairs of the state and fostering ties between people of different castes and creeds for the overall task of national building. Indian secularism however raises the problems of concept, interpretation and perhaps practice. It is therefore necessary to examine Indian secularism within a historical framework of the development of secularism as an idea. The rise of secularism in India as we understand is wholly a product of her contact with the west; first with Muslim turks and later on with the East India company.

Ordinarily secularism means separation of politics and religion and no patronage of any religion by the state. But it has been given different
shapes in different countries. For example Indian secularism is different from Western secularism. In Western countries there is complete separation of state and religion. But in India, though there is no state religion or state does not patronize any particular religion, the state treats all religions on equal basis and on many occasions on many grounds, can interfere in the religious matters. Though every political party professes and declares its faith in secularism yet every party takes religion into consideration while fielding candidates in elections and appealing for votes.

In the present day most of the states are secular states. There was a time in the middle ages when the political authority was under the Church or Religions. Authority and laws were mostly based upon religions principles. A state which patronizes a particular religion and makes its laws according to that religion is called a theocratic state. In the later part of the 15th century, the Kings began making efforts to get them liberated from the clutches of the religious authorities and establish supremacy of political authority.

Scriptural religions and perhaps all traditional religions have had to face the challenges and dangers of secularism. Most Indian leaders pleaded for a secular state but disagreed on its meaning. For some it meant Sarva Dharma Sama bhave or equal for all religions.

In the first chapter of the thesis efforts have been made to debunk many of the pet ideas that some of us have cultivated in recent decades. We have encouraged and fostered an obnoxious system of values. We have propagated communal hatred as a public policy. We have almost made some religions appear despicable in order to win votes of our co-religionists. We have cultivated a dislike for some fellow-citizens only because they profess a different religion.
There is a genuine, honest effort made in this chapter to define “Secularism” from the Western and Indian point of view, to show what it embraces and what it does not, so as to make it obvious to an average Indian that this concept is highly creative, and also a sine quanon for a multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-cultural society like India’s; whereas communalism is destructive, divisive and disintegrating. There is no attempt here to take sides or to camouflage the shortcomings or failures of anyone including the ruling party, whether it is the communal groups and hotheads that brought down the countries old Babri Masjid at Ayodhya or the central or state governments that were largely responsible for the death of thousands of innocent men, women and children, for the destruction of property worth crores of rupees, for holding the entire country to ransom for several days after the dastardly crime at Ayodhya, or the bomb blasts in Bombay (Mumbai). In this chapter efforts have been made to expose the actions and behaviour of everyone concerned. So all true patriots should take serious note of it, if this “madness” of communalism is to be brought to an end and the country is to march forward as a civilized nation.

Chapter second provides a brief historical account along with the socio-economic and political dynamics of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Any attempt to study the political process requires a clear understanding about the context in which it emerges and operates. It is therefore imperative to discuss and analyze the major socio-economic and political characteristics of the state under study. Since the state of Jammu and Kashmir has certain distinctive features of history, geography, climate, culture, language, ethnicity etc. a description of all these factors becomes all the more important.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir whose foundation was laid by Gulab Singh, a feudatory of Sikhs for a cash payment of 75 Lakhs of rupees. Right from the Dogra rule, the Muslim subjects, who formed bulk of the
population, bore the heaviest brunt of the Dogra autocracy which was highly exploitative. The masses were economically backward because of Jagirdari system, exploitative revenue system and above all a corrupt administration. Disputes over religious places became a common thing in this period in which the rulers mostly sided the minority community in the state. With the transfer of power and partition of the sub-continent, new problems cropped up. As all the Princely States were supposed either to join the dominion of India or dominion of Pakistan. The state of Jammu and Kashmir like Hyderabad & Junagadh neither joined India nor Pakistan. The state of Jammu and Kashmir being the Muslim populated area and keeping in view the strategic importance of the state for Pakistan, Pakistan sent armed infiltrators to get the control of the state. The Maharaja feeling helpless to deal with the situation made frantic requests to Indian to help him. Jawahar Lal Nehru taking advantage of the situation forced him to sign the Instrument of Accession. Even the Viceroy Lord Mountbatten while signing the Instrument of Accession introduced a provision that the wishes of the people should be ascertained after normalcy is restored in the valley. Meanwhile India lodged a complaint in the U.N. which also favoured a plebiscite in the state. Initially, India agreed to hold the plebiscite, but nothing concrete emerged and the tension between the two countries escalated resulted into three wars and Kashmir became a permanent irritant between India and Pakistan. The various efforts to resolve the issue like the Tashkent Agreement, Shimla Agreement failed to make dent in the bi-lateral relations. The accession was followed by Delhi Agreement between Sheikh Abdullah and Jawaharlal Nehru whereby autonomy was guaranteed to the state by providing that the parliament shall not frame laws for the state without the consent of the State Assembly except in the areas of defence, external affairs and communication. The agreement also recognized the state flag, common citizenship and spelt out the mode of appointment of the head of the state. It also formalized the Union-State financial agreements.
Ironically both the instrument of accession and Delhi agreement were fragrantly violated and laws were passed by the union infringing the autonomy of the state.

The Kashmir imbroglio has not only defied solution so far, but has also be deviled Indo-Pak relations, resulting in as many as three declared wars apart from frequent skirmishes, clashes and border disputes. Each dispute has further complicated the situation internally as well as externally. In fact, Pakistan’s effort was designed in such a manner that it not only exploited the local situation but also vitiated it further with a view to making it more conducive and compatible. The fabric of amity and oneness between different faiths and philosophies faced a sharp decline in the state in the changed conditions.

The third chapter presents a picture of the practice of secularism in Jammu and Kashmir and gives a brief account of the ongoing violence from 1988 onwards. The issues such as communal violences, the different types of regional agitations, religious disputes, nature of militant upsurge, the consequences of violence, the politics of human right violations, the Amaranth Land Row etc. form the major part of this chapter. In the post independence period, the state gradually fell prey to communal consciousness which unfolded in the form of fundamentalist organizations, desecration of shrines, discrimination on community basis, communal tensions, subversion and occasional bomb blasts etc. By February 1986, it witnessed senseless “violence triggered by conflicts arising from exploitation of religion.” These riots were preceded by several incidents of communal and subversive violence. Within a few years of independence, the public life of the state started to be heavily influenced by considerations of parochial loyalties, ethno-regional tensions, competitive communalism, rampant corruption, mis-rule, alienation from national mainstream, excessive centralization, electoral malpractices etc. The peculiar party
system mostly sharpened emotive considerations by channelising issues along religio communal as well as regional lines resulting in further widening of the gulf between diverse regions and people in the state. The people of Jammu and Kashmir tend to be swayed by issues such as complete merger of the state with the Indian Union, of Ladakh being made a union territory or centrally administered and of Kashmir by holding plebiscite distrust begotten more distrust, putting one region against another in no issues or slight provocations.

Lopsided politics and politics of convenience and manipulation on the part of New Delhi towards Kashmir and repeated rigging of elections coupled with unprincipled compromises created a dismal mosaic of national and secular life in the state. For example right from the time of accession in 1947, successive Governments in New Delhi have been guilty of undemocratic policies. Sheikh Abdullah was thrown into jail, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad was unceremoniously dismissed and jailed, and Syed Mir Qasim was forced to step down and make way for the undemocratic return of the Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah under the 1975 Accord with Mrs. Gandhi. As a result, frustration and a sense of alienation among the people was writ large on the people in the valley. Gradually and unconsciously the seeds of militancy were sown which remained, by and large dormant till the elections of 1987, which were reported to have been rigged on a massive scale shattering the hopes and aspirations of the people and affecting the credibility of the government. The youth who had actively participated in these elections from Muslim United Front lost all hopes of access to political offices through peaceful and democratic methods. Realizing the futility of the state sponsored elections, they decided to wage an armed struggle against the authority which in their opinion has no legitimacy to rule over them. With this objective, many of them crossed the border for moral and material support. Pakistan, taking advantage of the situation, provided them
with arms and ammunitions. Later due to this militancy, thousands of people were killed and thousands are languishing in jails under various emergency legislations such as TADA, Disturbed Areas Act, Special Powers Act and Public Safety Act.

So is this chapter all these issues have been discussed and delineated in the back ground in which they originated and received impetus.

The fourth chapter deals with the electoral politics and the role of different political parties and brings out how the electoral practices in this sensitive border state soured the whole democratic process. It examines as to how the most peaceful Kashmiris have taken recourse to bullets instead of ballot to bring about political change. An attempt has also been made to present a brief account in regard to the mismanagement, malpractices and corruption which have become the order of the day in recent times.

Democracy is one of the most widely advocated forms of government. But the growth of modern democracy can not take place without certain conditions. Among these conditions, a healthy, democratic and stable party system occupies a unique place. The party system not only democratizes politics but it also makes responsible government responsive. Kashmir represents a political sub-system which has its own peculiar position and style. Since its inception in 1947, this political sub-system with its parliamentary institutions within a democratic set-up, had very little interaction between the system and the people.

The National Conference, while representing a total political life before 1947, in essence promised a political life for Kashmiris only in the sense of majoritarianism. In the post 1947 period, the majoritarianism was being replaced by the slogans of socialism, secularism and democracy.
All these slogans had nothing to do with the common man in Kashmir either during the National Conference rule or the Congress rule.

The dichotomy which Kashmir sociology presents is the political alienation of Kashmiris. Kashmiri believes politics to be norm less, elections to be a fraud and the character of political loyalty a matter of expediency. Kashmiris gave to the leadership of political groups a high degree of freedom in determining matters of strategy. Because of this tactics many political activists in the post independence turned rebellions or were driven to the gallows. Though these rebels in the valley were not in a position to bring a revolution leading to de-accession, yet non-participation in political issues was aggravated. First an outstanding front rank leader Mohi-ud-din Karra fell out of National Conference and started Political Conference. Later G. M. Saddiq started Democratic National Conference. Later militant organizations Alfateh, JKLF, HM, etc. came into existence. Some other political parties which came into existence were Muslim league, Awami Action Committee, Muslim Conference, Jamaate-Islami, Peoples Conference, Awami League, Peoples Democratic Party etc. The CPI and CPI (M) also re-organized their parties.

In the conclusion it becomes imperative to examine the entire range of political development in the state right from the days of the independence. The present study is a modest attempt in this direction. The policy of discrimination, pursued over decades and lack of timely action to redress the grievances of the people, has landed the state in the present mess. Suppression of rights and exploitation of people over years, adhocism, political clichés and empty promises have done irreparable damage to the state. What is therefore required is a sober approach, free from political overtones to the problem. The problems and grievances of the people have to be identified, the lapses on the part of the government in addressing to these problems ought to be examined in the right perspective. Mobilization
of public opinion in favour of government’s policies, through persuasion rather than coercion will go a long way in building up confidence among people.

The Hurriyat Conference which is prepared for talks despite opposition and threats from the hardliners should be encouraged and the process should not be bogged down in futile arguments over passports. There is nothing wrong if the hardliners and pro-Pakistani leaders like Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Abdul Gani Bhat are also associated with the peace talks. The focus should be on restoring back normalcy in the state even if it involves the association of the hardliners. It is only then that the pristine glory can be restored back in the once peace loving valley. Without promoting democracy and secularism in Kashmir, democracy and secularism can not be safeguarded across the country. This realization needs to be dawn in full measure among democratic forces, human rights activist and members of civil society in general striving to translate Mahatma Gandhi’s fervent hope and desire (expressed on December 29, 1947)-“Kashmir should become a beacon light to this benighted sub-Continent”-into a reality in the days ahead.