CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

In India, especially after 1980, a strong Hindu extremist movement with anti-Muslim spirit and a fear of weakened Hindu race/nationality, has been on the rise enjoying the backing of a large number of Hindus inside and outside India. Obviously, most of the references on both secularism and communalism in India have its analytical base in this emerging condition. However, as it was outlined in the previous chapter, none of these formulations has successfully resolved those problems as most of them have operated within a negative framework of self defence. First of all, all of them were having severe fears to develop a critique of these ideas, ‘... for that might be looked at as a betrayal of the cause of nation-building and thus play into the hands of the reactionaries’¹. This has however invoked a serious paradox in their analysis, where the practical situations never became represented in its intellectual portrayals. In a way this is substantiative of what

Karen S. Cook says, ‘the ideas that have staying power in the world of words not only shape but sometimes alter our conceptions of reality’².

This is in fact the case of both the concepts of secularism and communalism in India. Both of them have a high level of discursive structures, but at the same time they are devoid of a specific meaning. Ironically, they have come to represent a number of socio-political situations which are otherwise intellectually intractable.

The formulations on secularism conveniently deals with categories ranging from the minority to the majority and even to the community as a whole. At times, it is nothing but a policy to protect the interests of minority communities in a pluralist society. And at some other times, it necessarily represent the spirit of tolerance of the majority. Finally at a still higher level, it even inherits a superior cultural image representing the widespread category of communities in India.

Strangely enough, these are also the grounds on which many serious criticisms of secularism or the most predominant cases of

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communalism are identified. The original situation of communalism in India revolved around the concept of minority communities, claiming their separate identity. The claims of minority religious communities for reservation of seats in the legislative bodies and their demands for the right to maintain their own distinctive cultural systems above the laws of the land etc., could be cited as referral points. Under the specific discursive structure, these claims easily got accommodated into the secular framework even after years of secular development. More significantly this has also brought into the picture a sense of majority identity. Hence, just as ‘minoritism’ was accepted as inherent in secularism, ‘majoritism’ was made a natural category by the contenders. Interestingly, even though, these are the two sides of a debate, both are speaking the same language.

Surprisingly, even after fifty years of independent secular development, these categories are only being reinforced into the political vocabulary. Therefore the critics consider the prevailing mode of secularism as pseudo-secularism, and even argue that any ‘true secularism has to be based on the principles of majority community and culture. Harbans Muhkiya’s observations in this
context are extremely relevant. He contends that although these two categories and the political parties practising them are presented to us as alternatives, in effect they share with each other the basic category of social analysis and political operation, namely the community. Hence far from being alternatives, the two strategies arising from the same basic category, comprise a continuum. In the historical context of Freedom Movement, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League were seen pursuing opposite policies. But according to Muhkiya, conceptually they were operating with the same analytical category of community (identity) so that they shared much with each other. He points out that, ‘most political parties follow the Hindu-Muslim ‘Bhai- Bhai’ strategy and also encourage most retrograde communal demands to be voiced from their platform’.

In this tradition not only the communalist even the secularist writers express themselves in the languages of ‘community’ ‘majority’ or ‘minority’. Strangely enough some of these conceptions have even become a cover for communal actions. In

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3 Harbans Mukhia, ‘Communalism and Indian Polity’, Bidyut Chakraborty (ed), Secularism and Indian Polity. New Delhi, Segment Books Distributors, 1990, p-83-84.

4 Ibid.
the process it has also become so much difficult to make a distinction between the existential category of community and the constructions based on that reality. This is the most serious ambiguity with regard to secular communal categories in India now. The above analysis clearly reveals that, there do not exist an empirical polarity between these two categories and the secular and the communal have the same analytical contexts and any separation between these two will have only a discursive relevance.

'Secularism' in India is almost permanently vitiated by an excessive reliance on the category of the religious community. This is true with regard to even the most progressive of the socio-political programmes. Everywhere the prevalent community identities are quite unquestionably integrated into the legitimate framework of secularism and development. Quite naturally, the most orthodox of the community interests and the most undemocratic aspects of these identities, etc., also found an easy access into the modern structures of democracy. Paradoxically it was the so-called practitioners of secularism who have given these elements the required legitimacy too. Freeing our society from the
clutches of communalism, therefore, requires an unconditional rejection of this framework of community identities under the developmental programmes. However this is not an easy task which can be initiated in a radical manner in any society. The most important problem here, is that by adopting the prevalent forms of community framework for state-sponsored schemes, the state also became instrumental in legitimatising a large number of communalist elements. In other words the 'secular' and the 'communal' are functioning in a complimentary manner and any kind of a substantive change may happen only if certain new frameworks of socio-political actions are introduced. This may be made possible only by a redefinition of the concept and the practice of secularism by constructing a structure of counter-identities cutting across the prevalent modes of religion based identities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This process, however, has to go through a number of stages starting from the very original context of these concepts
and its introduction into the Indian society and political vocabulary. A number of attempts are already made in this direction by writers like Partha Chatterjee, Ayesha Jalal and Sugatha Bose, Sudipta Kaviraj, Dipankar Gupta. In their analyses of the nature and functioning of the contemporary Indian Society and politics all these writers have very significantly identified a number of subjective influences from the state apparatus on the process of increasing communalisation in Kerala. The objective of this study is to contextualise some of their arguments, in the process deconstructing a large number of prevalent ambiguities with objective data from the state of Kerala which may help us to throw some light on the communalisation of our society. The next section on the conceptual and methodological framework of this study will clarify this further.

COMMUNALISATION BY THE SECULAR: AN EMERGING UNDERSTANDING

In this study, an attempt is made to deal with the epistemological dimensions of these two concepts. It is the
fundamental argument of this thesis that more than just being a discursive category ‘secularism’ has also resulted in an indirect process of communalisation in Indian society. Communalisation in India, especially in recent times, has got its base in the so-called secular political practices themselves. The rhetorical politics of secularism, practised under the bogeys of minoritism or community, have intensified the separateness of religious identities in Indian society. The instance of Muslim Personal Bill, the Babri Masjid affair, etc. are substantiative of this dimension only. Ironically the most visible cases of communalism in India, now has only the objective of realising certain secular objectives like better socio-economic and political share in governance. Essentially as Sudipta Kaviraj puts it, ‘communal politics in modern India is more clearly a strategy to get more, secure advantages within the arrangements of modern electoral politics’.

All this requires to develop a new understanding of these two concepts. First of all it requires one to understand that the religion of the communalists is very often a thin affair, and many

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of their most articulate moves appear incompatible with traditional conceptions of religious identity. Similarly, the rational or egalitarian basis of secularism too are only discursive and is, therefore, not unconnected with the other general social conditions prevalent in the respective countries. It is, therefore, argued here that to make ‘secularism’ a true social category, one needs to demystify its discursive meanings.

As already observed, in a specific socio-political context, the concept of secularism was adopted in India with so many ideological implications. Unfortunately these very ideological structures later became the most fundamental sources of ambiguity in its processes of contextualisation or application in India. Therefore, it resulted in a somewhat opposite social functioning. The only solution is to free this concept from these ideological burdens. This present analysis seeks to undertake this task through a detailed analysis of these two concepts and processes in the context of the political formations in the state of Kerala which is in very many ways a miniature of Indian society and politics.
The facts that Kerala has got all the predominant political parties and socio-religious groups present in the country as a whole also justifies this selection. More than all these reasons, the most significant basis for this selection is the fact that Kerala’s politics is too well known for its ideological and structural paradoxes. Also it is very often held that Kerala is the most secularised state in India. Ironically Kerala is also referred to as a communal canker in some other analysis. One very recent study maintains that Kerala is secularised in a communal manner⁶. All this very clearly manifests some of the theoretical ambiguities which were identified earlier. Hence the attempt here is to bring out a new interpretation of this situation in order thereby to explain the nature of socio-political structures in Kerala with special reference to these two categories - an attempt at redefining the conceptual categories of ‘communalism’ and ‘secularism’ in Kerala with an altogether new framework.

The fundamental argument of this analysis is that, under the dynamics of a complex political process in Kerala, both secularism and communalism are existing only as discursive ideologies. At an

⁶ Reference is to the work of George Mathew, The communal road to a secular Kerala Delhi, Concept Publishing House, 1989.
empirical level it is the so-called secular categories who are more responsible for communalisation in Kerala. Also it is argued that under the influence of the dominant colonial structure of knowledge, these discourses in Kerala have inherited some of those colonial imageries like an ‘inherent difference’ or what is called a ‘colonial difference tradition’ into this framework. Hence the so-called secular organs in Kerala politics have strategically constructed for themselves an image of a ‘secular self’ and also in the process constructed a ‘communal other’. The prevailing projections on communal categories, on the contrary, are only manipulative constructions.

In this framework, the political history of modern Kerala from the time of its constitution in 1956 till 1991 elections form the subject matter for analysis.

This would involve an analysis of the issues like how political life as such is constructed in Kerala and how it is ideologically constructed into the secular and communal categories.
OBJECTIVES

(1) To find out the nature and extent of communalisation of Kerala society and politics.

(2) To trace out the factors behind the increasing communalisation of Kerala society.

(3) To find out whether there is any inter-relationship between the ‘secular’ politics and the processes of communalisation.

(4) To find out why the social structure of Kerala experiences the problem of communalisation while the political formations appear to be progressive in nature.

HYPOTHESES

The study is based on the following hypotheses.

(1) Kerala has been getting more and more communalised because of the policies and programmes of the so-called progressive and dominant political parties.

(2) The political parties branded often as communalist appear to be overt reaction to the problem rather than its causes.
Communalisation occurs in Kerala in a subtle manner because it is taking place under the cover of programmes introduced by the so-called progressive parties. The confusion regarding the concept of secularism and the compromises made in the implementation of the principle have assisted the process of communalisation in Kerala.

VARIABLES

The study makes use of the following variables.

1- Secularity of political policies.
2- Communalisation.
3- Nature of secularism.

METHOD OF STUDY

The study is historical in nature. The period selected for analysis is from 1957 to 1991. The historical analysis was made on the basis of newspaper reports, reviews in journals and interviews with political leaders. Interviews were conducted with the help of
an interview schedule, a copy of which is attached at the end of the thesis. The political history of Kerala was studied with the help of election data based on the reports of election commission, election guides and a review of vast amount of literature available on Kerala’s political history.

CONCEPTS

A number of terms and concepts are used in this study. The most important of those concepts are ‘secularisation’ and ‘communalisation’. As it was explained both these concepts are analysed primarily from a political framework. Secularisation in India is fundamentally part of a political agenda and communalism is only a threat to that agenda. In the post-independent India both these processes have developed a very close affinity with the political structures and as such we need to look at both of them within this framework. The traditional framework, of secularism and communalisation have a more cultural and historical orientation which now appears to be overshadowed by the former. Hence in this study secularisation is not analysed as a cultural
process and communalism not as a historical construction. Secularisation is understood here as the social process that denote the change in the approach of the state from its traditional, religious and metaphysical moorings to a rational ordering of social, economic and political institutions. Similarly the term 'communalisation' is also operationally understood as a process in which religion or religions/community identities are used for purposes other than religions. Even though this may include the economic social, cultural and political dimensions, the political aspect is considered here as the most significant case of communalisation. In fact these frameworks are developed largely on the basis of the arguments of Partha Chatterjee, Ayesha Jalal, Sugata Bose, Dipankar Gupta etc. All of them have quite categorically argued that secularisation was above all a political agenda of the independent Indian state and the policies of the post-independent secular state has been the most important determining factor of communalisation of India in recent times. It is the same framework which is used for analysis here.

A number of other concepts are also used in this analysis. A few such important concepts are the following.
The discourse analysis may be considered to be in the most general sense, the consideration of speech, conversation and texts in terms of their internal dynamics and the ‘external’ principles structuring what utterance may or may not be made or combined with others in any particular social context. As a method discourse analysis came into existence following the emergence of post-structuralism in the western academia. This method was made popular through the writings of the French philosopher Michael Foucault. According to him Discourse forms both an object and manifestation of desire. It is linked to power and domination. Foucault’s thesis is that in every society discourses are controlled, selected organised and distributed in specific ways.

\[\text{DISCOURSE}\]

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MODERNISM

The term modernism here refers to the social thought in an era in which came into being after the industrial and ‘cultural revolutions in the West. It was a time when, with the emerging notions of technological and scientific development, social scientists like their counterparts in natural sciences, began to express a strong sense of objectivity and scientism. In this frame work scientific abstractions gained popularity over the subjective and naturalist dimensions of social thought. As a result a number of conceptual categories have come into existence in the social sciences, which still remain as mere abstractions and consequently a source of numerous paradoxes.

CHAPTERISATION

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is the introductory section and it seeks to introduce the research problem from a conceptual and terminological perspective.
The second chapter is a review of literature in which an attempt is made to summarise and evaluate the various analyses of the two concepts of communalism and secularism. The first part of this chapter looks at the problem from a national point of view and the second part deals with the studies specifically on Kerala.

The third chapter is on the methods, techniques and concepts used in this study. The fourth chapter presents the data and its interpretation. It begins with a historical representation of the pre-British Kerala and it also comprises the political evolution of Kerala all through the 20th century.

The fifth chapter is the concluding one in which a summary of the major arguments of the thesis are given. This also comprises a validation of the different hypotheses, conceptual and theoretical frame work, given in the beginning of the research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has several limitations also. First of all, the topic of this study is largely an unaddressed one in the context of Kerala and as a result there exist few literature on the subject. The
references available here are mostly popular journalistic writings which may not be very much dependable, especially on issues involving such controversial elements.

Though some amount of primary data is raised by way of direct interviews with the leaders of different political parties of Kerala, with the help of an interview schedule it was also a very difficult task as no leaders are likely to disclose their true nature as that may effect their political fortunes.

However in spite of these limitations it is hoped that the study will definitely throw more light upon the issue which has up to now not been brought into any serious and objective analysis from the above mentioned point of view.