CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: LEGACIES OF SECULARISM AND PRACTICES OF COMMUNALISM AN EMERGING PHASE
Kerala is generally known for its long and distinguished history of progressive and people-oriented movements, which have undoubtedly ushered in important social and economic changes. In the midst of such transformations, very little attention is paid to the various negative and often dangerous trends that have set in the state’s social and political ethos. The gradual and intensive communalisation of Kerala politics is one such factor often overlooked by socio-political analysts. Whenever some attempts were made to study this problem, they turned out to be quite futile, as most of such analyses got trapped in a number of rhetorical formations. Hence Kerala is secular in one language and communal in another. Also several studies on the structure and history of Kerala society project the state being a land of paradoxes. The works of P.M. Mammen, E.J.Thomas, George Mathew, P.K.Micheal Tharakan and G.Gopakumar, et al, as noted above, very well represent this dimension.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to deconstruct the prevailing constructions of discourse on Kerala politics. In the light of the findings from the previous chapter, it is argued here
that a proper explanation for the rising communalism in Kerala can be developed only if the prevailing definitions of "the secular" and "the communal" is subjected to a revaluation. As the above analysis reveals even when the so-called secular groups were in total control of the state, communalism has been taking roots here. In other words, while secularisation continues to be the manifest claim communalisation is the only end result. This is the basic ambiguity that is in need of an interpretation. What is needed is a re-examination of these concepts in the light of our analysis so that we may be able to explain the reasons for the prevailing paradoxes.

THE SECULAR AND THE COMMUNAL IN KERALA; THE EXISTING IMAGES

'The secular' and 'the communal' are very well differentiated in Kerala politics. The image of being 'secular' is claimed by both the dominant political groups in Kerala, the Communists and the Congress. The 'Communal' on the other hand is always attributed to certain small political parties like the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress which are predominantly
supported by the minority communities. However, of late, there is also a new entrant in this category, the B.J.P or Hindu Munnani combine. More significantly it is these three political groups, who are also held responsible for the problem of communalisation of Kerala in almost all analyses. Obviously, these represent the broader images of Kerala’s politics. How far this division is empirically valid, however, has never been the subject of any academic evaluation. It is in this context that the present study assumes significance.

One basic question that must be answered is: ‘how can such minor political actors be held responsible for the intensification of communalism in a state which has always been under the control of two ‘all-time secularists’, the Congress and the Communists’. The Communists and the Congress, having shared the political mantle between themselves over all these years are however largely absolved of all responsibilities for the development of communal sentiments in the state. This is indeed an ambiguous formulation. It is more so because, ‘Secularism’ or even ‘Secularisation’ for that matter, is conceived to be one of the main political and administrative agenda of the state itself. It is the
state and government which must propagate the spirit of 'Secularism' in India. When the mighty political machinery of the state propagates secularity, how can these minor political actors override the state power and communalise the Kerala society?. It must be admitted that the project of secularisers has also failed. In fact none of the analyses of the communalisation of Kerala society, gives due consideration to this aspect. Most of the interpretations of communalisation in Kerala are based on the practices of these minor political entities, which in fact constitute only the overt manifestations or symptoms of the problem. The root of the crisis, no doubt, lies elsewhere.

As noted above, one of the most important sources of communalisation in Kerala is considered to be the spread of RSS and its influential political wing the BJP. It is true that the RSS and some other communalistic organs of the majority community have made serious inroads into Kerala politics. But our contention is that this development itself is a response to the large-scale communalisation which has been taking place in Kerala over the last three or four decades. The fact is that though the RSS and the Hindu majority communalism have been existing in Kerala, for
quite long, it is showing signs of sudden resurgence in the recent past. Therefore any analysis of the phenomenon of communalism in Kerala should necessarily take into account its long period of historical development also.

Indeed, as the previous Chapter has demonstrated, such an analysis clearly reveals that the process of communalisation originates from the practices of the 'secular' state itself rather than those of the minor political organs. More specifically as it was put up in the hypotheses of this study, it is the different socio-economic, religious or political programmes of these dominant political parties that has actually brought about an intensification of communalism in Kerala. The case of the infamous Tellicheri Riots of 1972, the rise and growth of RSS through protests against the sanctioning of Malappuram district by the Communist Government of 1967, the preferential treatment given to wakf boards, the sanctioning of a pension scheme for the Muslim priests, the Vilakkal episode of 1983 etc. are significant events that led to the revival of what is called a Hindu militancy in the state. It is true that this phenomenon of 'Hindu militancy' is not restricted to the state of Kerala alone. Similar developments are
experienced in many other regions of India as well. But what makes such developments more serious in Kerala is the fact that it is the most ideologically inclined and politically conscious state in India. In fact the study also approve of all the other hypotheses. As it has been proved in the last chapter it is the political conditions that is spreading communalism in Kerala. It is more significantly a by-product of the manipulative practices of the secular state itself and more than the so-called communal groups the secularists themselves are behind this transformation of Kerala into a communal sensitive state. As a result communalism becomes a subtle development and in fact it is this subtlety that continues to sustain this movement. Therefore in the light of this study it can be proposed that the most basic solution to the problem of intensification of communalisation in Kerala is to bring out this 'secular' roots of the problem by identifying the factors that continue to keep the process in a subtle manner.
COMMUNALISATION IN KERALA: CONTEXT AND CAUSES
THE MAJOR FINDINGS

As the preceding analysis reveals it can be argued that the process of communalisation has become so much intensive because it has been a subtle development in Kerala, whereas secularisation was the first manifest claim. Naturally any analysis of this situation should also address the subtlety of this problem, so that the process shall not go unnoticed hereafter. On the basis of the foregoing analysis a number of factors contributing to the process of communalisation are identified and a brief summary of these findings is given here. The communitarian history of Kerala’s socio-political formations, the colonial legacies associated with its political transformation, the abstractness of the concept of secularism, the nature of power politics etc. are held here as the most important factors or causes for this development.

COMMUNITARIANISM AND COMMUNALISM

The situation in Kerala at the beginning of the period under study was such that, with its deep-rooted socio-political structures which were highly segmented and organised, any sort of political
initiatives necessarily invoked a multitude of communitarian responses. With its varied socio-political landscape the politics in Kerala began to take shape in such a way that any of the two major political incumbents could rise to power by invoking communitarian aspirations alone. Hence, over a period of time, the ‘secular’ parties developed a process with a new type of political culture based on communitarian aspirations.

Thus the secular-communal polarities in Kerala gradually lost their distinctness and there began to take shape a series of ambiguous coalitions or alliances in which the so-called communalists too were given slow but gradual recognition. The Muslim League and the Kerala Congress, the two dominant, overt and communal parties in Kerala, representing the Muslims and the Christians respectively, thus became the Goliaths on whose shoulders these coalitions creaked along. Once these communal groups became constituents of a coalition, both the leading political groups, the Communists and the Congress, cultivated a special reflex for the gratification of demands of the communal lobbies. And both the Muslims and the Christians thus managed to secure a large number of benefits from the government. At the
same time none of these governments did show a similar eagerness with regard to the vast unorganised and segmented mass of the Hindus in the state. The ‘secularists’ stood with the organised minorities even on issues having some direct communal bearings.

The case of ‘Thali Temple issue’ in 1968 was one such situation when the government had to turn down the demands of a section of the Hindu community to appease the Muslim minority, which was a constituent of the then Communist government.

The infamous Nilakkal episode of 1983 is another case in point. All these factors hurt in different degrees, the political sentiments of the Majority Hindu Community.

The rise of RSS in Kerala as a powerful political wing has been significantly facilitated by these endless pampering of the minority communal lobbies in Kerala politics by the dominant groups of the Communists and the Congress. It was more often through their campaigns against these ‘appeasement’s’ that the RSS membership was substantially increased. All these manoeuvrings gave the RSS and other overt communal categories an opportunity to protest quite loudly. As Krishna Menon puts it "the RSS agitation in 1968, against the Muslim League demand
for Malappuram district, which was to become a Muslim majority district, although a futile agitation, has become part of its folklore\(^2\). Protests against the so-called preferential treatment, of the Wakf boards by the government, state’s involvement in Hindu Temple Management, State pensions to the Muslim priests, and other similar issues are raised by the RSS at regular intervals.\(^3\) Obviously all these did really help them to claim for themselves the status of being the champions of the Hindu cause.

The problem here is that while Communalism has permeated deep into all the socio-political systems of modern Kerala, the analysis often go by the explication of its manifest expressions only. The so-called communal structure of the B.J.P.-Hindu Munnani combinations is nothing but an offshoot of a still more underlying communal base in the political structure of Kerala. The roots of this problem lie at a much deeper level, and the groups like the RSS or B.J.P.-Hindu Munnani are only the manifest symptoms of this problem.

---


The preceding analysis has significantly revealed the sources of this irony. Behind all instances of secularising attempts, Kerala witnesses communal implications. The so-called secularists are always accused of communal pampering and appeasements. In other words the policy of secularism itself has become a source of multitude of conflicts in Kerala. In fact the secular ideologues are even accused of dividing our society. Obviously, the burden of communitarian history and socio-political developments are unlikely to disappear from Kerala in the near future. The facts that, each different community or caste is well organised and that their separate identity structures remaining unaffected by secularisation schemes, etc, always function to perpetuate this history. Naturally there has come into being a very close affinity between communitarian developments and communal mobilisation. Therefore, it is argued that, it is because of this affinity that communalism has become a subtle process in Kerala.

SECULARISATION: AN EXERCISE IN ABSTRACTION

The previous Chapter has clearly presented how the so-called secularist parties in Kerala politics, the Communists and the
Congress, engage themselves in communal manoeuvrings. The study has also revealed that the overt communalists largely derived their political relevance out of those instances. The increased strength of the RSS during the late 1960's and the emergence of the B.J.P.-Hindu Munnani combine in the mid 1980's, have been traced to these practices of the then secular governments of the Communists and the Congress.

In short, what has emerged from this analysis is that both the secularists as well as the communalists are involved in a somewhat similar process. Both these groups function dialectically than being adversarial. The fundamental problem here is that in the ultimate analysis it is the appeal of the latter group (of communalists) that, often succeed.

This is so because, while 'secularism' derives its legitimacy not from History, or the past, but from its promise, not from origins but from its desirable effects, 'communalism' does exactly the opposite by launching a cultural, ideological, social and political onslaught primarily from their positions in civil society. In other words while secularism is first and last a political option alone, communalism is everything else. Or when the formation
and expansion of the religious (communal) identities often take place in the civil society from below the secular emphasis is largely concerned about the state and politics. More significantly when the so-called promises and the desired/projected effects of secularism go unfulfilled the communal becomes a viable and receptive one.

As the above study reveals, in Kerala the so called secularists never really functioned towards the ultimate objectives or effects of secularism. They could never fulfil their promises of secularisation. The civil society in Kerala was otherwise highly organised around the principle of communal divide and that was very easily perpetuated, whereas, the secular schemes got derailed very often. In fact, most of those attempts even resulted in a sort of re-ordering of the communal or community identities pitted against one another.

The communal mobilisation, in the wake of the various reformative attempts made by the 1957 Communist ministry, very clearly stand out in this tradition. The previous Chapter has brought out the nature of this process of internal mobilisation and external re-ordering of communities and castes of Kerala during
different political formations. Apparently, this has also resulted in a dialectical interaction of the secular and the communal in Kerala. Naturally what comes out is nothing but the abstractness of the concept of secularism and in a way it is this abstractness that has actually made the communalists a natural category.

In India ‘secularism’ as a concept has been subjected to numerous abstractions, transformations in its interpretation. Naturally, the process of secularisation have also developed similar orientations. Unfortunately, the same concept has been used to represent mutually contradicting situations. In the end it even becomes a cover for communalisation converting the otherwise visible phenomenon into a subtle process. The abstractness of the principle of secularism has made this process all the more easy to effect.

SECULAR ‘EXCEPTIONS’ AND COMMUNAL ‘NATURALS’ IN KERALA POLITICS: NATIONALIST AND COLONIAL LEGACIES

The preceding analysis also demonstrate that there are some political parties in Kerala which are ‘exceptionally’ secularists and some others who are ‘naturally’ communal. The dominant
political groups, the Communists and the Congress, belong to the former group whereas the majority of the minor political parties like the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress represent the latter. This is in spite of the fact that none of these parties are ever mutually exclusive. In other words there existed a very close interaction between all these parties.

This is the fundamental contradiction in Kerala society. The contributions of the dominant political actors towards the process of an intensification of communalism in the state is an aspect all too often overlooked. In fact the only single factor that had always contributed to this situation is the political dominance of these parties. The fact that both the Communists and the Congress always make a comeback to power during every alternate elections also amounted to absolving them of all responsibilities of their misdoings in the previous term. In this way, to use the words of Ashish Nandy, "the hypocritical and self serving secularists" very easily put up the burden of communalisation on the minor political parties. On the contrary, they never tried to put their political agenda of secularisation into action and practice. In fact

---

it is their claims to a secular stature that really prevented this ideology from reaching the bottom levels of the civil society. In the end, along with the deepening malaise of communalisation of the civil society, the diagnosis and the prevention, itself turned out to be a source of contradiction. This has also resulted in discrediting and delegitimising the message of secularism.

Undoubtedly, all these are partly a product of the nature of the state apparatus that the colonialists have constituted in India. In fact, as it was held earlier in the introductory part of this thesis, the colonialists have very often perpetuated their political dominance through the projection of a ‘natural’ superiority of their culture and politics. They claimed that the Indian society is inherently communal, whereas the West is secular oriented, and therefore their own regime in India should be conceived as an exception to the communal influences as they are naturally secular.

It was also claimed earlier that the colonialists themselves have initiated a number of communal manoeuvring in India. Even then the imperialists could perpetuate their ‘secular’ images as those images were constructed more on the basis of their political dominance.
In a similar way the so called secularists in Kerala have also constituted their images on the basis of their dominant involvements in the National Movement and on the basis of their ideological discourses. Even then their day-to-day political practices were always to the contrary. Obviously, being in power, these groups could very well enhance their claims of superiority. The nature of state apparatus itself is such that, the "state" is conceived as the most rational agent of political structure. Hence the state retained its inherited images even when the civil society was becoming more and more communalised. This is also a reason why communalism still remains as a subtle fact in our society.

THE ORIGIN OF COMMUNALISTS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER

The preceding portions reveal that Kerala has of late become a communal canker. Even though it is not an altogether new development, the period since 1980 have given it a very serious dimension. The analysis of the political history of Kerala, from the pre-British period, in the fourth chapter of this study, has shown that, from then on, Kerala had various small and large
groups based on caste and community actively involved in politics. Many of these groups began as social-reform movements, but they have gone on to play a political role.

The Muslim League has been active in Kerala since the pre-independence period. A break away faction of the Congress called the Kerala Congress came into being in 1964, as 'the Champion of Christian cause in Kerala'.

However, it is only since the '80's that the Hindu political groups have made a serious attempt to participate in the political process. Both the *Hindu Munnani* and the *Bharatiya Janata Party* in spite of their limited presence have added a new dimension to politics in Kerala. The various references made to the process of intensification of communalisation in Kerala, in the recent periods, is only indicative of this emerging dimension. In other words the most recent discourse on communalism in Kerala revolves around the politics of the *B.J.P./ Hindu Munnani* combine. Otherwise, one may not find any other factor of communalisation, which was not prevalent a decade ago. Obviously the *B.J.P./ Hindu Munnani* combine represent the latest brand of communalists in Kerala.
A pertinent question here is why they are called communalisers even though they have not yet formed part of any of the organs of the state machinery. Also they have not had the real power and opportunity to be 'the secularist' like others. Obviously this is the discursive nature of politics in Kerala. Just as the dominant groups made their claim to secular status because of their strategic role as the political incumbents of the state, the B.J.P./Hindu Munnani combine has been termed as communal due to their relative lack of power. On the other hand they treat themselves 'communal' because they are in search of power, which alone can help them convert themselves into the status of secularists.

The case of the Kerala Congress and the Muslim League parties could be taken up to substantiate this argument. Till recently both these groups were more often considered totally untouchable by the secularists. However, as both the rightist Congress party and the leftist Communist party have time and again opted for alliances with these groups their mode of
communalism is almost a ‘taken for granted phenomena’ now.

What is relevant here is the fact that, what actually changed the political image of these two community oriented political groups was their closeness to the power structure. Being part of the different coalitions in power, they have more or less relieved themselves of their image as communalists. This was, however, in no way a result of any visible change in their political ideologies nor because of a change in the nature of their composition. Both the Muslim league and the Kerala Congress continue to represent the Muslim and the Christian interests respectively. Since they have formed part of the different structures of power at different times, they are no more the untouchable Communalists. Interestingly what it means is nothing but a situation that ‘Communal” in power is not communalism, but on the contrary it is the ‘communal’ out of power or without power that is really communalistic. Surprisingly ‘power’ or ‘political dominance’ becomes yet another base of making communalism a subtle

---

4 During my interview with the leaders of both the Congress party and the Communist party, almost all of them subscribed similar views on this. They have even termed the minority communalism as defensive communalism whereas the majority communalism as the real offensive one. Chadayan Govindan (CPI(M)), K.Karanakaran (Indian National Congress), M.V.Raghavan (CMP) etc., were of this opinion.
process. In fact it is this access to power or closeness to the power structure that helped the communalists to put up a secular image. Obviously, this is also the reason why it is communalism that haunts the society of Kerala than anything else because Kerala is the land of public politics. It is the most politically conscious state. Quite naturally communalism can only be more and more dangerous when it has its roots in politics as the nexus between the two could make it an all-pervasive problem. This is no doubt a potentially serious situation.

The most serious manifestation of this crisis of governance is the growing number of communal conflicts in modern Kerala, particularly in the last two decades. In a paper dealing with the Vizhinjam communal riots in 1995, political scientist K.M. Seethi observes that “the frequent outbreak of communal riots in Kerala, especially in its coastal regions has cast its shadow on the age-old acknowledgement of Kerala as a secular terra firma in the cultural matrix of the country." In his view such an approbation

---

does not seem to be any longer sustainable in the emerging scenario. The 1990’s had already seen a spate of communal tensions and conflicts and some of them assumed violent proportions causing considerable political embarrassment. Seethi also claims that there are many more potentially tense (communalist) areas existing in Kerala, where even a small spark could cause a major communal conflagration.

Communalism thus haunts the society of Kerala more than anything else today. One fundamental reason behind this development is the erosion of secular values in Kerala’s politics. More significantly the study shows that the so-called secularists in Kerala are secularists not because they function towards that promise or the desired effect, but because they are in positions of political dominance. They are secularists because, they use secularism for self-serving purposes. In fact, it is their position of strategic dominance in the politics that has given them this image as secularists. As far as the Communists were concerned, it was their image of being the progressivist ideologues that really helped them to corner this secular stature. In the case of the Congress party, their role as the leaders of Indian National
Movement, being the unquestionable rulers and presumably the protectors of the unity and integrity of India, has helped them to ‘inherit’ a secular legacy. It was these legacies of the past or the historical conditions that is acting behind the construction of various secular discourses attached to both these parties. On the contrary, as far as the Indian civil society was concerned secularism is future-oriented. It was a promise made for certain desirable effects. It was part of a political agenda set before the independent Indian state. It was a process, which was to be initiated and implemented in our country.

Obviously it is here that, the state politics and the society start showing disjunctions. Secularism was never allowed to be really a living part of the popular emotions, and on the contrary, it was hijacked by these political elites for their political gains. In the end whatever secular credential these elites inherited, was also eroded and that explains the general crisis of the state politics too.

Having understood the nature and dimension of the functioning of secular/communal categories in Kerala, now what remains is to see why the communalists alone succeed? Is it
because India is basically a communal society, and there are no secularists here as it was often held out by the colonialists? Or is it a problem associated with the nature of our understanding and the implementation of the concept of secularism? As per this study the latter is considered to be the important factor which has resulted in the spread of communalism in the recent periods and the following section seeks to answer these issues.

THE SUCCESS OF COMMUNALISM - THE NEED FOR NEW THEORIES

The principle of secularism and the practices of the secular state, are put in the dock in Kerala now. In fact the same is more or less the case with the whole of India too. A significant segment of intellectuals, within and outside India, have emerged as critics of secularism as practised in India. No doubt, this recent rise of politics of communalism is first and foremost influenced by the nature and characteristics of the modern state itself. Sooner than expected, the failure of the Indian state to rise above its legacies, resulted in a crisis of the regime. Some of these legacies have nothing but a communal character. The legacy of the National
Movement, the sauce-religious reform movements, and much more significantly the legacy of the partition itself have demonstrated the inherent weaknesses of the democratic structures of Independent India. The communal overtones in all these instances are quite widely spread images in Independent Indian state.

The adoption of ‘secularism’ by independent India was seen only as a political response to its manifold problems. It was never taken up as the final solution to these problems. Jawaharlal Nehru himself had stated that the use of the expression ‘secular’ was not a happy one and that it was being used for want of a better word. In fact attempts to introduce the word ‘secular’ in the Constitution failed twice in the Constituent Assembly and it was only in 1976, (42nd Amendment Act) that the word ‘secular’ was inserted into the Preamble of the Indian Constitution to describe India as a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular Democratic Republic.

Indeed this has only added to the problems instead of bringing about any fundamentally valid solution. Significantly enough, no such separation of the spheres of the state and the religions has ever taken place in India. Or, in other words, from ancient times to the present, India’s political history has witnessed
the employment of all conceivable patterns of relationship between religion and politics. Religious symbols, the use of religious places, religion-oriented political parties and pressure groups have all been part of this history and all these factors together have always called to question the idea of secularism and its relevance for the country.

What, therefore, emerges is the reality of a discernible interrelationship between the institutions of religion and politics. These being the facts, what then was the role of secularism in India? It is here that the state comes in the picture. It was asked to perform a number of functions so as to help unsettle the numerous socially inhibiting traditions in Indian history.

However, the above analysis has only proved that the modern state has only back-tracked from these roles. They have only perpetuated the earlier pre-existing social divisions perhaps, inadvertently. In other words secularism as an ideology was never made part of their functional existence. What is even more significant here is that communalism was given a further boosting under the auspices of the state apparatus. Here the question of re-evaluating the secular/communal categories become a necessity.
It is here that, Partha Chatterjee’s analysis of “Nationalism” in India becomes relevant. In his work, Chatterjee, lists out a number of powerful cultural products of the nationalist imaginations in Asia and Africa that are premised not on the understandings of their identity but on the ‘difference’ with Europe and the America. Chatterjee therefore, criticises the use of these cultural products in India without understanding the inherent colonial subjectivities in all of them.

He took up the case of ‘Nationalism’ as an example to prove his argument. According to Chatterjee, the consideration of nationalism as just a political movement, is a by-product of this framework. Objecting to this understanding, Chatterjee maintains that much before 1885, when the National Movement found its political expression in the form of the emergence of Indian National Congress, nationalism was quite well developed in India. In his view, these developments, at first took place through a division of the world of social institutions and practices into two domains - the ‘material’ and the ‘spiritual’ or the ‘outer’ and the ‘inner’ layers. Also it is his belief that, while this ‘outer’ layer is

---

of the economic, technological and the political arena, the ‘inner’ or the spiritual layer is constituted by the essential cultural marks of identity. However, when nationalism came to be conceived as a political dimension, it resulted in the subjugation and oppression of all other indigenous elements of the very same society in the name of this political project. Hence the various cultural identities and aspirations of the indigenous categories of caste, religion, class and gender began to be appropriated or suppressed under the state-centred ideas of nationhood or nationalism. Quite naturally this resulted in what can be called, a hijacking of the ‘idea of nation’ by a group of political elites to become the sole repository of legitimate nationalism.

The problem here is the representation of the concept of nationalism as a political construction alone. This is, no doubt, a by-product of the continuing legacies of colonial ideology. As far as the colonialists were concerned, the articulation of “Nationalism” as a political construction was very much in tune with their own interest as politics was one area where the Westerners always had an edge over the Eastern societies. Their

political structures were very well organised and articulated and as such they could easily claim for themselves a sort of superiority in the area of nationalism. As a result, the nationalist aspirations in the colonial India did always revolve around the political, or in other words the ‘outer’ layers of our social structure. ‘Nationalism,’ therefore, became the characteristic feature of the state apparatus instead of reflecting the emotions and identities of the indigenous categories. As a consequence nationalism became an exceptional feature or an inherited legacy of a minority in our society; very often that of the strategically located political elites.

In the end Chatterjee also makes a plea for moving beyond this framework and in its place he proposes that ‘nationalism’ should be considered as a much more indigenous character, still more deep rooted in a society. For Chatterjee, it is the elements of ‘inner’ or the spiritual dimensions of a culture that should really constitute the basis of nationalism. The formation of that would, however, require a total inversion of the existing framework of nation-building, that is, it should start from the bottom levels of our social structure for e.g., the community structure.
Of course there are numerous problems with Chatterjee's proposition also. The most serious one is that his own arguments in favour of a 'community' structure is not amply supported by an understanding of the term community beyond the pre-modern period. In fact, there also exist some very influential theories suggesting that the 'modern community' is in itself a product of colonialism, specifically of colonial modernity.⁸

M. Muralidharan in his article has very clearly advanced this idea with regard to the process of Hindu Community formation in Kerala.

However, in spite of all handicaps, Chatterjee's analysis can be used as a fundamental framework for this study on secularism and communalism. The so-called 'exceptional secularists' in Kerala can be very easily understood as quite similar to the so-called 'nationalists' in Chatterjee's analysis. Like the nationalists, these secularists are representatives of the outer or the material structure of Kerala society who inherit the legacy of the dominant state apparatus. More often it is their role as the preservers of the state authority which bestows on them this secular status.

Presumably it can even be argued that the so-called communalists in Kerala politics, the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress or even the B.J.P-Hindu Munnani combine, given a chance to take control of the political apparatus in the state, too would start forming themselves as part of the same secular self. What often happens is that, in the absence of such a possibility these minor political groups assume for themselves, the ‘natural’ attributes of being communalists. In fact to these minor parties, this was an opportunity to come closer to the inner or the spiritual layers of the society. The irony here is that, the more the success of the representatives of the state apparatus to claim an exceptional secular image, the more was also the success and need for the representatives of minor parties to claim and establish their closeness with the ‘inner’ or the ‘spiritual’ layers of the civil society.

In other words the more the state become secularised in the political sphere the more was the losses of the civil society in the cultural sphere. The civil social institutions were never really taken into consideration in an apolitical dimension. Only naturally even the most positive elements of this inner layer, like for example, the
‘religious life’ came to be dragged into the service of bad politics.\(^9\) The infamous *Nilakkal* episode is a standing example. The different accounts of this problem even records that the stand of the Christian Bishop was not really endorsed by the Christian community at large even though the government had backed the Bishop’s claim initially.\(^10\)

It is this situation of distancing the state machinery from the civil society which is identified as the basic contradiction of Kerala society. As Pranab Bardhan puts it, the problem is the “weakening of the medium than of the message itself”\(^11\). The often quoted statement of Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru that in India the state is secular when the society is religious whereas in England it is the society which is secular, even though the government has got an official religion, very clearly represent this divide.

Significantly enough, the state politics in Kerala has gone into the hands of a section of elitist groups who are largely loosing their hold over the society now. In fact, their main weakness was

---


that instead of moulding their inherited state apparatus to better reflect the emotions that had fired the socio-political developments of Kerala, they only allowed the state to appropriate and oppress this socio-cultural identities in the civil society. As a result, instead of resorting to an alternative configuration of relationship between the religion and the state, the dominant political groups always tried to claim the status of the only repositories of legitimate ‘secularism’. In this process it was a necessary condition for them to attribute or project an opposite image on some other groups in Kerala’s politics. The irony here is that such kind of a binary projection can have only a discursive value.

CRISIS OF THE STATE AND THE LOSS OF THE SECULAR SELF

Ayesha Jalal’s and Sumantra Bose’s formulations on the state and politics in India, too can be referred to here to substantiate the ongoing analysis.

Ayesha Jalal in her article entitled “Exploding Communalism; The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia”, takes up the issue of representing Islam, its past, present and the
future with the charge of communalisation. In her view, not only the self-professedly secular Indian state and the Congress regimes at its helm, but also their challengers claim the appellation of nationalists. They even attribute the original sin of being the communalists for the most part on the subcontinent's Muslims.\textsuperscript{12} Notwithstanding the compromises of secular nationalism with Hindu communalism, the burden of this negative term in the history of late colonial India has fallen on the Muslim minority. The establishment of a Muslim state (Pakistan) at the moment of British withdrawal added immeasurably to the weight of this burden. Muslim minority communalism has also occupied a critical location in academic texts organised around the binary opposition between secular nationalism and religious communalism.\textsuperscript{13}

Sumantra Bose, substantiate this still further and argues that to explain the rise of Hindu\textit{va} in the most modern period in Indian politics, we must critically dissect and challenge these widely unquestioned dichotomies such as the presumed antinomy, whether in theory or practice between categories such as

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p-78.  
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}
‘secularism’ and communalism¹⁴. In fact, Sumantra’s view is that “the relationship between secularism and communalism in post-colonial India has been more complex and dialectical rather than simply being adversarial. On the other hand treating communalism, as the antithesis of Indian nationalism, frequently results in the post-colonial ‘secular’ state being absolved of most if not all culpability in the rise of ‘communalism’ and specifically of Hindutva”¹⁵. Sumantra, all through his analysis emphasises the crucial role of the Indian state and of the Congress regimes in facilitating the seemingly meteoric rise of ‘Hindu nationalism’.

SECULAR STATE AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY - A NEW FRAMEWORK

Politics in Kerala as a secular enterprise has always been influenced by religious undercurrents. Similarly, the religion as a social power has always derived much of its strength from its ability partially to redress material/secular needs. It is this specific

¹⁵ Ibid., p-106.
order which has actually given shape to the social structure of Kerala.

A number of early strides made in education, health and other welfare structures of the socio-political fabric of Kerala, had also brought about a high level of political consciousness and a kind of public politics. This was nowhere altogether disjuncted from its social fabric and on the contrary each of these reform movements only re-established the same or a similar framework of social structure. The civil society was never subjected to a fundamental transformation. Quite naturally, even in the days of secular governance the secularisation of the civil society had never taken place. In fact such concerns did not even form part of the so-called secularising schemes of the state. This is also the reason why, even today, the protagonists of secularism never show any interest in addressing this issue in the context of the civil society. This has, however, become a very urgent need now. Only by looking at the nature of our civil society is it possible for us to find out the possibilities or difficulties of secularisation here. Because, what the state does within the framework of secularism can be at the same time a future oriented policy decision or also a decision
rooted in the history. In other words it may be a new initiative of the state or even a matter of compulsory option. Or else what is it that requires even the most progressive of the political groups like the Communists to play the communal card one time or the other?

In short, the basic problem here is the disjunction between the secular state and the civil society. However, this is part of the still more deeper malaise that has inflicted the Indian polity as a whole. Partha Chatterjee captured the situation quite well when he said that it is the homogenising and normalising project of the modern state that has appropriated the identities and aspirations of the subordinate natural categories of these societies. Quite naturally all those identities of caste, religion, region, class and gender come out in the open challenging the very same projects of the state. Obviously what is needed is, as in the words of Partha Chatterjee, a movement beyond this state-centred structure. Also as Achin Vanaik puts it “A long term program of decommunalising India must give the highest priority to the building of secular counter-institutions in civil society and in promoting a more secular popular culture”.16 First of all it implies

the progressive erosion of power differentials between individuals and between groups. Be this power, social, economic or political in form and be the groups, classes, castes or other communities.

In the context of Kerala, what can be proposed is that power needs to be decentered. With its teeming socio-political fabric, no single ideology, or any homogenous social category can command the wilful acceptance of all those divisions. On the other hand the nature and character of Kerala politics have always been discursive in orientation. As a result almost all the dominant political groups constructed for themselves a rhetorical stature. The political elite's of Kerala, the Communists and the Congress, therefore became the exceptional secularists without having to take part in the process of secularisation at all. Their own political legacies also acted to construct this discursive stature of being the only secularists. Their continuing political dominance in the state substantiate this position too.

The minor political parties did not inherit any of these legacies. On the contrary, the groups like the Muslim League had a number of burdening images too. Having contested with the 'secular' Indian National Congress party at the national level, and
often held responsible for the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan as a religious country, the Muslim League in India is never accepted as a nationalist or secularist party. Their own closeness to the ‘inner’ layers of the social structure have also been a significant factor here. Howsoever communalistic the Muslim League actually is, a part of this construction often grafted on them are only part of the same discursive pattern of political formations in India. In fact, there are some minor changes in this image now. The fact that, the Indian National Congress party and the Communists themselves have stopped considering the Muslim League as an untouchable group is in itself a transformation. Ironically, such a change in the approach, as it has already demonstrated in the fourth Chapter has still more deep rooted meanings. What is worth recapturing here is the fact that it was their closeness to the power structure and politics that really gained them the dividends.

A very similar parallel is visible in the national politics of India also. One very often repeated political jargon which is widely proclaimed in the national politics at present is that the
BJP-Hindu Munnani combine is not an untouchable party. One single factor that can be identified here behind this proclamation is that the BJP-Hindu Munnani combine has reached the corridors of power in India. Hence it need not be so ambiguous as it was in the case of the Congress party, to claim that the BJP-Hindu Munnani combine is the next ‘secular’ force in the making of India.

Obviously then what is needed is a rewriting of the theories of secularism and communalism. Though it was not the objective of this analysis to formulate a new theory of secularism or communalism, one very fundamental claim that is advanced here is that an understanding of these categories in the line of this analysis is a must, before any attempt for redefinition is made. In fact that is also considered to be the sociological significance of this study.

In the end, on the basis of this study, it is proposed that, the concept of ‘secularism’ should be detached from all its inherited legacies. The adjective ‘secular’ should not be placed on any political groups in India on the basis of their past performances at one time or the other. None of the political parties in India is in

\[17\] This reference is made to highlight the political situation that has emerged in India in the 1990’s. In fact the prepolll scenarios in the 1998 very clearly suggest that the BJP /Hindu Munnani may come out as the largest political front in the elections.
fact secular in the true sense of this term. Similarly the so-called communalist are not the only communal groups here. There are also other subtle agents of this problem. In the context of Kerala, the Congress and the Communists parties are the most important agents of communalisation. The so-called communalists in Kerala like the Muslim League, the Kerala Congress and of late even the RSS-BJP wings etc., are only the overt manifestations of this deep rooted malice that has inflicted the socio-political fabric of the state.