

# HINDUISM, HINDUTVA AND HINDU SOCIETY

## A DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP

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The late Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was a great scholar, social political worker and a builder of institutions, and was immensely concerned with the progress of India in general and Hindu society in particular. For men of thought and action then, it was customary to think that if the problem of Hindu society were properly attended to, the progress of India would be automatically assured. It was but natural that Malaviyaji was concerned with the fissures in Hindu society and particularly the practice of untouchability. At the same time, he was really convinced about the richness and glory of Hindu tradition. That is why, he founded the Benares Hindu University with the view to attain excellence in all fields of knowledge — science, technology, medicine, philosophy, humanities and social sciences. As a student of social science, I felt that it would be a mark of respect and honour to Shri Malaviyaji to dwell on the field mentioned above.

### *Introduction*

The present theme, like any field in social science endeavour, has twin dimensions, the theoretical and the practical — not to say polemical, since the very discussion of Hindutva has serious polemical overtones. Not only that, but even theoretical formulation about Hindutva are in no small way coloured by such considerations. Therefore, what may appear to be a purely academic and theoretical exercise is not free from all kinds of value judgements, biases. While one has to accept the importance of comparative approach, it is necessary for us to guard against certain formulations which are culture and history specific. Thus, as we shall discuss later on, the writings in the Western press were testimony to what I have hinted at.

It would not be out of place to make a mention of certain observations which are pregnant with implications for practical reality and problem-solving as well as analysis (comparative) which offers or rather asserts a law of society, progress and development. Such an effort smacks of Auguste Comte's law of stages of development as well as Rostov's formulation about stages of economic growth, because several prerequisites have been mentioned for such development, in the absence of which a society cannot progress. Coming to observations by men of public affairs and business or religion, etc., I would like to mention a few observations. Very recently, during his visit to India Pope John Paul II reiterated the need for undertaking conversion activity in South Asia. Conversion of non-Christians to Christianity has been a sore point. Yet, the importance of such evangelical activity has been reasserted by the Pope, creating a lot of dissatisfaction

and resentment in the minds of religious people. Prof. Bhiku Parekh has mentioned time and again his surprise at the fact of the feelings of insecurity on the part of Hindu communities in India, which enjoy a definite majority. Such mental attitude can help explain certain postures on the part of leaders, not to say a common man. The Indian Constitution — socialist, secular as it is claimed to be — also sends signals, which are looked upon as disturbing. Mr. V. N. Gadgil, the Congress leader has given vent to popular expression regarding the distortions implicit in the concept of the secular. Not only that but the pursuit of secularism and its implementation in practice, particularly in the political arena, have given rise to serious misgivings in the minds of the Hindu population according to Mr. Gadgil. Very far ahead from home, that is India, certain statements regarding the necessity of converting the Hindus to christianity so that they could see the light of wisdom and progress, by Baptist Church in America has caused quite a furore in the minds of Indians/Hindus. Any discussions of Hinduism as Hindutva has to be done in the context of the partition of the country along the lines of a religious divide. The themes of Hinduism and Hindutva and particularly the vicissitude underlying these themes have been a matter of serious discussion for the last many years. While my presentation is confined to the post independence situation, it will not be out of place to take a brief peep in the history of Hinduism in India.

### *A Brief Historical Review*

Certain facts about the composition and development of Hindu society have emerged, which are beyond dispute. In the first place, the racial multiplicity of India on the eve of its emergence and development into Hindu society has to be emphasized. The very size of the country and the parcelling of Indian population into various units (disparate) dictated by geography, has to be appreciated, resulting in the lack of a political unity. At the same time, it should be mentioned that the concept of the Chakravarty, that is the Emperor ruling over the entire empire has been mentioned in Sanskrit literature. Rather than emphasising a purely religious unity, stress has been placed on cultural unity in spite of diversity — racial, geographical, etc. The Aryan, Dravidian contacts and the blow-hot, blow-cold emerging out of it, has also to be understood in respect of the emergence and composition of Hindu society. This is not to ignore the people of Indus Valley Civilisation which impacted both the Aryan and Dravidian. In fact, the people of Indus Valley civilisation represented a highly developed urban society while the Aryans (earlier) represented a rural society based on the pursuit of agricultural activity. Broadly speaking, the Hindu society can be understood in terms of (1) the Vedic Age, (2) the epics — Mahabharat and Ramayan etc., (3) the Puranas.

While it is extremely significant to mention the structural feature of Hindu society, namely the caste system, it has to be emphasized that Jainism and Buddhism had made serious attempts to question certain aspects of the caste system: Buddhism in particular, has questioned the authority of the Brahmins — the Purohits — acting as intermediaries between man and God. In short, it can be mentioned that what is talked of Hindu society, was a phenomenon which was continuously interrupted and interpreted in a different fashion from time to time. It was a definite protest against brahmanical exclusiveness. It was complained in all

seriousness that arrogation of superiority by Brahmin's dharma which resorted to the use of Sanskrit, denied to the vast majority of the people, was a matter of grave injustice. The use of a certain kind of language, that is Sanskrit, denied to the majority of the people, resulted in a dialectical process, reflected in a) development, b) emphasis on the utilisation of Prakrit language, that is the language of the common man. All over India, one finds a reflection of this tussle. So, what is regarded as a linguistic hiatus has deep socio-cultural and structural undertillings. While Buddhism emphasized the importance of congregation and also resorting to activity of conversion, unlike Hinduism, the emphasis on the rigorous austerity in Buddhism gave rise to a lower version of Hinduism which could be practised by everyone. Moreover, Hinduism was very assimilated.

Greek kingdoms are established in Punjab and the Iranian origin of Bimbisara of Sunga dynasty is well-known. The flood gates were opened to various tribes from Central Asia such as the Shakas, Parthians and the Kushans as well as the Huns who had definitely a Muslim element in them. While Brahmanism effected a revival, Hinduism had to incorporate the Bhagwat Dharma, which was open to everyone, irrespective of caste and strata. This marks the beginning of the dual character of Hinduism. What emerged as the Bhakti cult and movement in later times has to be traced back to this period. Down South, the Andhras were Mauryans, and were ruled by the Greek king who became Hinduised. The tribes from Central Asia who conquered parts of India had appointed their representatives as Chhatrapals, which marks the beginning of a new polity. The Kushans came from North-Western China. The foreign influence on administration was emphasising the semi-divine authority of the King. The revival of Hinduism during the Gupta period gave a lift to Sanskrit literature which was effected without the persecution. Similarly, it was not marked by any narrow sectarian spirit. The eruption of the Huns from Central Asia introduced the element of savagery and desecration of Buddhist stupas, not to say treachery. In fact, their entry has been marked as a turning point in the history of Northern and Western India, both politically and socially. Those who are known as Rajputs originally belong to the Hun group who were interested only in political power. As a result of the cruel practices, the caste system became more rigid. While the trait was Hinduised, the importance of bhakti became a cultural, structural feature. Bhakti movement spread in different parts of the country, thus providing entry to the majority of the people who had been excluded from the knowledge of Sanskrit, and as such prevented from pursuing the path of salvation. On the other hand, the hiatus between the great tradition and the little tradition had serious repercussions all throughout.

The ethnic diversity and the recurring contact with different races and tribes heading from outside India, gave rather a peculiar twist to what is generally construed as Hindu religion — ranging from animism to agnosticism and atheism. The simultaneous presence and availability of different models certainly facilitated the dialectical process. Defection, dissent and total rejection thus provide a variety of models — ideological and practical — for Hinduism. It should be futile to look for a single version of Hinduism since Hinduism does not owe allegiance to a given book but bends and twists itself according to the demands of history and geography for making it both pliant and vulnerable to lack of solidarity. This

difficulty was further compounded by conversion to Islam or Christianity. Hinduism thus presents a picture of an amorphous entity.

*British rule and the status and functioning of Hinduism*

It would be useful to refer to Dharampal's important work, *Despoliation and Defaming of India : the early nineteenth century British crusade* (Bharat Peetham, Other India Press, Goa, 1999). In many ways, this work points out the groundwork which has been done by various British thinkers, liberals and who enjoy a place in our memory as upholders of human freedom and dignity. Wilberforce rightly famous as the champion to fight for human freedom by opposing slavery, has different things to state in the context of Hindu society in particular. Dharampal has quoted chapter and verse from the speeches of Mr. William Wilberforce, James Mill and T.B.Macaulay. While he has been used to refer to these authors in a rather favourable light, their observation would require us to look at their speeches and writings in a different manner altogether. Perhaps, the British were confronted with different ethnic groups and a variety of thinking and a value system to which they were strangers. At the same time, it has to be pointed out that, "In India a large number perished by British brutality and deliberate creation of famines, violation of persons' bodies and dignity; in Palnad in Andhra, half of the population was said to have perished every ten years, during several decades after the subjugation of the area by Britain" (Dharampal, p. 13). Dharampal also mentions the number of women who were burnt to death since they were charged with the heinous crime of witchcraft in Britain and Europe while the status of women in India has invited a special criticism, not to say wrath from these writers. Jawaharlal Nehru in his correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi stated, "You misjudge greatly, I think, the civilization of the West and attach too great an importance to its many failings. You have stated somewhere that India has nothing to learn from the West and that she has reached the pinnacle of wisdom in the past. I certainly disagree with this viewpoint" (ibid.p.38). Speaking before the British Parliament on June 23rd, 1830, Mr.Wilberforce characterised as the lowest depths of moral and social wretchedness and degradation of Indians and particularly the Hindus. Therefore, he advocated active interference by the British Government in the various social institutions. Attributing the progress of Britain to the influence of Christianity, Wilberforce advocates that the spread of Christianity in India will alone help to overcome the pernicious impact of Hindu institutions like family, caste, religion, etc.. James Mill characterised Indian/Hindu society as half-savage, and Macaulay criticised the various inefficient institutions and arrangements ranging from agriculture, medicine, literature. No wonder that he thought it fit to suggest that any attempt to educate the body of the people is impossible and therefore, "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (ibid. p.202).

Archaic and irrational component of Hindu civilisation, in particular necessitated conversion activity. In a sense, one is amused ? by the similarities and persistence of this framework, mental and moral ? which is reflected in the efforts



made by Baptist (protestant) Church in America as of today paradoxically with reference to Hindus and Muslims. Whatever one might say of the fundamental importance of secularism in modern times and society, even now it is a conviction of some that Christianity alone would facilitate the uplifting of the ignorance of civilised, if not savage group of humanity.

### *Hinduism and Hindu society during the British rule*

While the British ruler initially wanted to steer clear of traditional arrangement and mechanisms, sure enough to various pieces of legislation, joint family, caste, education, etc. were sought to be amended. It has been observed, not to say criticised, that the British rulers ensured the hegemony — cultural and moral?— of high caste Hindus, there is no doubt that the British rulers always suspected the high caste Hindus as a potential danger to their rule. It is true that the bureaucracy of the higher echelons were manned by high caste Hindus because of their exposure to modern, Western education. Yet the advent of new technology such as the printing press, media created certainly a ferment in Hindu society regarding its inequitable nature. A mere perusal of the non high caste press would bear testimony to this. On the other hand, Orientalism helped assuage the feelings of stalwarts like Tilak and Gandhi since the orientalist scholars praise the glory of the past civilisation, to which such stalwarts wanted to jump upon to create a sense of self-respect amongst the people. Surprisingly though, even Marxists subscribed to orientalist interpretation by accepting Marxist formulations regarding the Asian mode of production. Writing in *New York Times*, Marx advocated the break-down of Indian rural economy which would drive the peasants to urban areas in search of employment in industry so that they would constitute the proletariat which can be imbued with revolutionary ideology. This is not to suggest that Marx did not criticise the British imperialism in India but he wanted to make use of it — best of the bad bargain— to facilitate revolution in India in times to come. It must be mentioned that the British rule in India with its system of modern education both exposed and prepared some of the discerning minds to critically examine the Hindu social system in its entirety. The inner questioning of the unjust social system set the pace for protest, dissent and mobilisation. At the same time, the British rulers tried to protect the interest of minorities, particularly the Muslims, a fact which has been criticised by no less a person than Dr. Ambedkar. In the name of fair play, the British rulers sowed the seeds of partition which became a reality in times to come. The entire gamut of Hindu-Muslim relationship during the period of British rule is replete with the fanning of communal discord and hatred. Hinduism displayed the characteristic of what is mentioned time and again, pejoratively, as a million dollar problem of Hindu society and national integration in particular. As mentioned earlier, the eternal criticism of the overarching institutions of caste gave rise to various protest movements like the Arya Samaj, the non-brahmin movements, the movement of the untouchables, etc. disputing this central structural feature of Hinduism. In a sense, the British rule paved the way for the adoption of our constitution which would discard caste as the major principle of social organisation and try to provide entitlements in respect of access to various resources like education, economic well-being, culture, etc. The hiatus between the so-called Great Tradition and Little Tradition came to be under attack and various

steps were suggested to undo the same. In order to do so, special provisions were inserted in the Constitution to help the backward sections make up for their want of availability of access to vital resources. Hindu society during the British rule certainly displayed a dialectical relationship between the forces of modernism and a traditional structure, which had been exposed to new ideas and values and as such wanted to effect a change in their prospects.

### *Independence and After — Hindu Society and Hindutva*

The framing of the Indian Constitution set the ball rolling of initiating a host of changes, particularly through legislation in respect of our social, economic and political arrangement. It should be mentioned that the introduction of adult franchise paved the way for participation of every single citizen irrespective of caste, religion, education, income, etc. in the political process, thereby overcoming the earlier restriction and deprivation. Hopefully, this measure was expected to facilitate effective participation by the common man and yet unwittingly though, it paved the way for all manners of manipulation. India became free though had to face the stupendous problem of partition of the country along the lines of religion, resulting in a holocaust which is said to be unparalleled in history since it was a man-made disaster — a deep wound in a sense. The Indian Constitution emphasized the cardinal importance of secularism to prevent if not overcome future possibilities of such divisions of the country. All is not well and the various threats from different ethnic groups confronting the country in respect of at least a political autonomy if not cessation are looming large which certainly have provided a grave cause for concern. As if this situation was not enough, there is a continuous infiltration and intervention from other countries in the affairs of this nation state. To realistically discuss Hindu, Hindutva and Hindu society, it is very necessary to take note of these circumstances (threatening) which provide certain parameters over which we have no control causing grave anxiety. In order to address oneself and the group if not the whole nation, such grave concerns recourse is made to various types of mechanisms and recourses to counter the various dangers. A battery of modalities to face the problem mentioned above, we suggested which is not only at least prima face heterogeneous but even incongruent is to be seen in operation. On the one hand, a purely academic and theoretical exercise is undertaken to evaluate the various modalities and on the other hand, appreciation of the complexity of variables and parameters also need to be taken into account. Therefore, it boils down to a pragmatic defining and understanding of the intricacies of the problem instead of providing a text-book solution.

The eternal problem or dilemma of Presentism and Historicism comes to one's mind. In a sense, the effort to wish away the peculiarities of time and space has to be emphasized with all its attendant difficulties. Similarly the concept of progression (linear) of various societies has also to be borne in mind with all its trappings. Therefore, it would be useful to start by examining both the concept and brief of modernisation which has been enshrined in our Constitution since we want to progress towards establishment of a modern society — which is both secular and socialist.

The emphasis on modernisation and the progress towards modernisation is

expected to provide an antidote to fundamentalism — in this case, Hindu fundamentalism, that is Hindutva. Hindu Mahasabha was established in 1915 as a reaction to the establishment of Muslim League in India. It was later on that V. D. Savarkar wrote a book on *Hindutva* in 1934. Ever since, he was at pains to put forward a correspondence between religion, nation and culture, so much so that he advocated the acceptance of this position by everyone irrespective of ethnicity and religion. As a matter of fact, religion, culture and nationality are expected to be co-terminus, particularly after the partition of the country. While the partition of the country was an extremely unpleasant experience, Dr. Ambedkar had also come to the conclusion about the inevitability of the partition of the country basically along the lines of religious divide. The declaration of India as a secular state and the pursuit of this policy of secularisation in a certain manner evoked, not to say provoked, Hindu response. The fear of the majority community expressed by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the concern, not to say anxiety, for minority (religion), which meant for all practical purposes the safeguarding of the interest of a particular minority, that is Muslims further created anxiety and tension in the mind of the leaders of Hindu organisations. It should be mentioned that during the pre-independence, considerable activity (scholarly) was undertaken in respect of the codification of the Dharmashastra, preparing a critical edition of the Mahabharat, inquiring into the roots of the Indian philosophy, jurisprudence, etc. Such activity could be regarded as a part of oriental scholarship. Dr. Radhakrishnan in his Spalding lectures at Oxford chose to dwell on the theme of Hinduism and categorically stated that Hinduism was a way of life rather than religion. In short, the Hindu ethos and the world view came to be advocated in all seriousness. Laxmanshastri Joshi in his famous work said that critique of Hindu religion pointed out the heterogenous character (ethnic) of Hindu society and the corresponding variety of religious beliefs ranging from animism, naturism to loftiest intellectual heights. All the same, it was obvious that there were great difficulties inherent in speaking about Hindu religion as a composite whole for reasons which we have already referred to. The situation was further complicated by the persistence of the caste system and particularly the practice of untouchability. Conversion to Christianity or Islam has by and large been confined to the deprived and the dispriveleged sections. While Savarkar spoke of reconversion, Ambedkar in a very characteristic fashion pointed his finger to the root of the cause of conversion and stated categorically that unless the root cause is removed, palliatives (gimmicks) of reconversion activities would be of no avail. On the other hand, what we see in India is a clash of civilisations — one believing in conversion and the other not believing in conversion. The latter claims to be so syncretic and accomodative as to take care of the bewildering variety of ethnicity and religious practices. At the same time, the feeling of insecurity experienced by Hindu leaders has to be taken note of.

### *Hindutva and Fundamentalism*

Sevaral books have been written on Hindutva but its linking with fundamentalism has acquired special significance. A special project was completed on "Fundamentalisms comprehended", sponsored by The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby and published by

The University of Chicago Press. Several scholars were invited to participate in this project and to write on various types of fundamentalism starting with Protestant fundamentalism in America as a prototype. A few general observations are necessary, such as the suspicion of religious liberalism and the fear of diluting pure religion. Fundamentalist ideas do not exist in the cultural stratosphere; they are generated and supported in concrete social institutions. Fundamentalism must establish its own distinctive social form so as not to mix up with any other type of social movement. Sometimes, they assume an activist form, seeking to re-date the institutional and cultural world beyond its own sub-cultural border. Interaction with culture and ideology between discourse and action has also to be emphasized. Any such movement must provide a critique of the culture in which they live and set forth a vision of change. The importance of social dynamics and rhetorical strategies has also to be stressed. It is but natural that myths have been created and visions of past and future have also to be put forward. There is thus a continuous dialectic between the past and the future. On the other hand, any attempt to introduce new myths is wrought with suspicion. For example, secularism, modernisation, globalisation, etc. In order to do so, social supports have to be especially sought. Particularly in present times, social support has been translated into political support. However, in doing so, one has to encounter several difficulties such as, steering clear of orthodoxy in order to elicit support for a common programme by eschewing sensitive areas, for example, construction of Ram Temple, abrogation of Section 370 of the Indian constitution and the insistence on a common civil code, etc. The transformation from the social to political level poses its own dialectics, similarly facing hostility on the part and parcel of any fundamentalist movement. While effecting compromises, a charade of certain beliefs has to be maintained. The contest for power and influence certainly form an important form of any fundamentalist movement. As such, opposition and confrontation become a part of the game.

### *Theoretical Aspects*

Knowing fully well the uniqueness of a certain configuration, some effort is all the same necessary to hazard a few common propositions. By and large, it has to be accepted that both nationalism and modernity play a significant part in the understanding of any fundamentalist movement. Of course, the illustration of Islam as an effort to transcend the boundaries of nationality in order to propagate and practice Islam as well as continuing distrust of modernity has also to be mentioned. Otherwise, "We have to look again at the nature of modernity itself which, for certain fairly specific reasons, has been poorly grasped in the social sciences hitherto. Rather than entering a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before." Anthony Giddens: *The Consequences of Modernity*, quoted by Harjot Oberoi on p. 96 of the publication already referred to. Oberoi ascribes the concept of fundamentalism as a regression of the four requisites of modernity as defined by Hegel. Hegel proposed four features that characterised modernity -1) Individualism; 2) each person is entitled to his own subjective freedom and the right to criticism : nothing needs be taken for granted; 3) autonomy of action: an individual is responsible for his own action; 4) philosophy



of reflection : the subject can know himself without having to rely on explanation grounded in religion (p. 102). However, these requisites are not generally acceptable in toto to any religious tradition. The very understanding and interpretation of such concepts poses an ethno-methodological problem. It is well-known that every religion wants to act as a gate-keeper of its culture. In order to do so, it has to possess both ideological and political properties and programmes occupying political space is equally important. There is a selectivity in accepting certain features of modernisation such as science and technology, industrial and agricultural development of the country, attaining economic prosperity so as to withstand any kind of international domination and therefore, emphasis on adoption of new knowledge and techniques. A continuous effort has to be made to withstand pressures from anti-fundamentalist groups such as intellectuals not sufficiently anchored into tradition (national, cultural), Government's efforts to change the traditions radically. The problem is compounded by a gift called the caste system in India so that mobilisation of all the Hindus gets prevented. Religious politics also encourages a continuous attack on the tenets of Hindu traditions in this case, which is reflected in the operation of the mechanism of the vote bank. And still "unsecularisation" of the world is one of the dominant social facts of life in the late twentieth century. (George Wiegel as quoted by Mark Juergensmeyer in his article on *Anti-fundamentalism*, p. 364). Similarly, he quotes Samuel Huntington. "The growth of civilisation consciousness, a return to the roots phenomenon among non-western civilisations". Notwithstanding the specificity of the historical context and the array of different variables such as the political, socio-cultural, economic and of course, the sway of international domination, not to mention continuous interference by foreign powers in the affairs of the country by promoting terrorist activities and by pursuing efforts to destabilise the country, certain common features have been worked out to facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon of fundamentalism. Four different approaches have been mentioned by Gabriel Almond such as seduction, probabilistic or statistical explanation, functional explanation, a set of circumstances, genetic explanation. Society, culture and economy are treated as variables holding religion at constant. The concepts are also practiced — a simple and less complex world, indigenisation and selective innovation. Similarly appropriation of new concepts and mechanisms, reactivity particularly with reference to threats posed by secularism and modernisation, resorting to new interpretation and ethno-national consideration, etc. (p. 401,402,403,407). From the foregoing, it is pretty obvious that any single explanation would be of no avail in understanding the specific of a situation. Moreover, as already mentioned, the necessity of refraining from categorising certain traditions (religious) as permanently and beyond repair fundamentalist is necessary. Moreover, there has been hardly any tradition (religious) which has not exhibited or continued to exhibit some fundamentalist conviction. The case of the Southern Baptist Church in America comes to one's mind immediately. Arrogation of moral superiority, in addition to the benefits of enlightenment ? has been responsible for persisting in evangelical activity. Even as of now, one therefore wonders whether the pejorative attitude towards the phenomenon of fundamentalism is justified. Concepts and theoretical formulations thus have to be treated as provisional. On the one hand, it has been accepted that empirical reality rather than theoretical, if not ideological

formulations, have to be taken into account and yet, only the fundamentalist aspect is overemphasized to the neglect of existing reality.

### *Hindu society and empirical entity*

Quite in keeping with the holier than thou attitude of some social scientists, particularly if they are Western in origin or even situated in Western environment for their work and living, what according to them is new Hinduism, is nothing but a ploy to cover the fundamentalist doctrine. As we have briefly surveyed Hinduism as such had undergone a considerable metamorphosis, what with internal descent and protest as well as invasions from abroad particularly Islam and Christianity? The contact with an altogether different civilisation which regards it a moral duty to convert people to their own religion, Hinduism and also Hindu society had to introspect and search for its shortcomings so as to withstand the pressures from without. Every such attempt has been naturally tuned to repair the basic structural flaws, namely lack of access to knowledge and information and the resulting participation in all manners of activity ranging from the religious to the secular.

The various movements such as the Arya Samaj have emphasized the necessity of welding Hindu society. No wonder, that the scourge of caste came in for a severe criticism and discarding. Further still, Ambedkar's movement placed its finger on the fact that though the untouchables who really were an integral part of Hindu society were dismembered by permanently slapping untouchability on them. At the same time, these untouchables were compelled to participate in the village economy as bonded labour — serfs. It should be mentioned that declaration of India as a secular socialist state in 1977, needs a proper scrutiny. Both from the legal and the substantive point of view, the doctrine of secularism is restricted to the relationship of the majority community — Hindus, and to minorities, that is Muslims and Christians in particular. It should be stressed that this is a fallout of Nehru's perceptions, predilections and prejudices, a fact which has been pointed out by Sultan Shahin in his recent article, *Expanding the Empire with Conversion*. While a concept of secularism is specially designed and is applicable to the majority community, that is the Hindus, the minority communities do not have to accept that — rather reject it out of hand. The recent reiteration by the Pope about the importance and necessity of conversion of peoples of Asia to Christianity has sent signals about the never say die attitude and persistent efforts of Christianity to convert the world with faith and Gospel. Not only the educated Hindus in America but also the Muslims have been targeted for conversion to Christianity. The specter of conversion looms large, creating a sense of insecurity and tension. It is indeed a matter of common knowledge as to how millions of dollars are poured into the backward areas of India to ensure conversion to Christianity.

What we ought to be really concerned with is the operation of various institutions and arrangements which by and large make up the social fabric. Starting with rural society, the institution of economic interdependence between different castes and groups continues to be the main feature of life in villages. At the same time, migration from villages outside to towns and urban industrial areas, has made its impact on rural economy and society. Introduction of cash payment

has naturally altered relationships from bondage to contract. Similarly, the political enactments regarding political representation as well as tenancy legislation has also impacted rural society. For this, what is more important is the accessibility to various kinds of resources such as education, income (cash), health services and exposure to media. It is being claimed that the information technology revolution will link up the villages with the rest of the world and enhance efficiency as well as rise in income. Even as it is, some experiments which have succeeded in reducing the traditional inequalities and inequities, have helped in transforming the social structure. To put it in some terms, if the abject dependence of people is reduced, if not eliminated, the traditional structure of authority undergoes a significant change. Politicisation has also in no small way affected rural living in the sense that the vulnerable sections in particular can derive a hope from outside. Various instances come to one's mind, ranging from women's participation, both in economic and political activity can help change the status of women.

Spread of education and social consciousness has brought about a turmoil in Hindu society. Various enactments have also given a fillip to people's aspirations. If we look at the expansion of our economy, particularly through the rising importance of the service sector, one can well imagine the considerable openings it offers to sections which have been denied opportunities. If we look at hotel industry for example, in addition to the food products which it serves to the consumers, it creates considerable amount of employment, both within and without. The concept of multiplier effect comes to one's mind because the spawning hotel industry requires skilled services such as engineering and construction, food supply, entertainment, florists, travel agents, catering colleges, management institutions and what not. Similarly, the fact of women's employment outside the home has created a demand for providing items of consumption by those who make it their business to provide such things. It would not be wrong to say that a new type of economic interdependence has been established in urban areas which cut across caste and religion. The case of travel and transport too well known to make a mention, which has provided considerable opportunities for intermingling of various groups of people. Likewise, the displacements of traditional ethnic groups from their locale is also a case in point. Increasing access to the various types of resources certainly has helped reduce the traditional gulf between various groups. Dress, eating habits, entertainment, preferences and so on have also brought about a new kind of equilibrium between different groups.

There is one feature which is certainly disturbing, namely, the persistent effort to disrupt any kind of harmony between different groups. One immediately thinks of the bogey of fundamentalism created by ideologues and thus creating a scare among the minorities. A cleavage between the interests of the majorities and the minorities is continuously harped upon. This effort naturally creates ill-will amongst different communities. Apart from conversion programme of Christianity, financial and other help from abroad is also a great destabiliser. Then again spanning the caste animosities is one more way of destabilising Hindu society by pinpointing attention only on caste differentials instead of trying to cement the caste differentials. On the other hand, the considerable proliferation of religious activity, such as the various pujas, have helped cement local communities wherein there is a participation cutting across caste, ethnicity and religion. The political

mandate which is given by the people to the so-called fundamentalist parties in different parts of the country also bears testimony to the rising awareness among people about the captioning, if not branding of certain organisations as permanently reactionary and so on. Ideological top track has been seen through and people want to really find out for themselves as to what would be in their interest. Giving labels and casting aspersions has become suspect. Therefore, people are questioning some of the pet assertions like secularism, rationality and so on.

Hindu society in its functioning has almost always displayed the characteristic of reactivity. As such, it has reacted to the rising new situation and challenges from time to time. Without talking of a revolutionary transformation, various institutional arrangements like family, kinship, marriage, caste, ethnicity and religion and so on have been questioned from time to time and effort is made to meet the challenges provided by new circumstances. Therefore, what is characterised and castigated as Hindutva hardly occupies any serious place in the interaction of people in day to day life. Basically, being left alone to pursue their beliefs and articles of faith is all that the common man is concerned about. You may call it tolerance, or even indifference.

I could not do better than quote what Popper has said : "In the social sciences, learning and creativity limit the confidence with which we can establish social patterns and regularities. These relations are at best probabilistic, and they tend to erode over time as a result of human learning", (Gabriel A. Almond, Emmanuel Sivan R.Scott Appleby : *Fundamentalism : Genus and Species*, p. 400 in *Fundamentalists Comprehended*). I am fully aware that several difficulties can be raised about this formulation. However, the very pliable and resilient character of Hinduism in meeting different challenges, makes it less amenable to a theoretically ideal type of fundamentalism. Besides, intellectual ferment from time to time, also provides a critique of easy acceptance of any type of dogmatic position. The practical reality, diverse as it is, ranging from remote villages to metropolis and centre of international influence through technology, modern education, secular occupations, new patterns of social interaction, etc. would not permit a text-book behaviour on the part of the people, no matter what has been taken (condemned) by others both from within and without. The prejudice that a traditional society is incapable of separating intellectual and philosophical ideas from political compulsions and actual day to day relationship and interaction is certainly not warranted. I would also like to remind about the persistence of fundamentalism in all the religions of the world such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc. Really speaking, the inter-linkage between the three is well taken from a dialectical point of view, in the sense that all the three are not only amenable to change, but constantly need a revision from time to time. That is why, the facile assumption that a given social structure is accepted by all, needs serious questioning. Basically, the so-called fundamentalism is a response to insecurity and fear of losing one's identity. It is a boundary maintaining mechanism, which has a very important component of pragmatism which is not being neglected. Particularly, a religion which does not believe in conversion has to face the contingencies more often than not. Methodologically speaking, the dilemma between the specific and the universal come to one's mind.