



Imagining a 'Secular' India: Roots, Offshoots and Future Trajectories of the Secularism Debate in India

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1. Two 'Moments' of Rupture – National Blemishes and the Lapse of Secularism

1.1. Ayodhya in 1992

"Ram lala hum jayenge, mandir wahi banayenge."¹(We shall march to the Ram Janmabhoomi [the birth place of Lord Ram in Ayodhya] and build a temple there.)

In 1992, Ayodhya, a city in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, clenched in communal horror as Hindu fundamentalists, proclaiming to be disciples of Ram – one of Hinduism's most prominent deities, marched in large numbers towards it, chanting the above slogan, with the aim to build a temple (mandir) and simultaneously destroy a mosque (masjid). This was India's very own critical rupture – one that would push it into a nation-wide uproar of religious controversy and riots not just in the coming months but for many years to follow, severely wounding the carefully fabricated ideal of Indian secularism (Morey and Tickell 2005: ix).

What could be so tumultuous, one may ask, about constructing a temple in a city which was not very famous for its commerce, economic standing and political significance, "a place with no resonances of colonial humiliation or trace of futuristic monuments, but a stage where a quite different historical drama would be re-enacted"? (Khilnani 1997: 152) The controversy behind Ayodhya lay not just in the city's local past but in what role it had mythologically come to occupy for India's Hindus and Muslims alike. Since the 16th century, there stood in Ayodhya a mosque, the Babri Masjid, which had been built by the emperor Babur, founder of the Mogul dynasty in India. Debates have it that this was done on the remnants of a destroyed Hindu mandir. The bone of



contention was thus not that, now, centuries later, a mandir would be built again in Ayodhya where it historically stood, but that it would be erected at the very same spot where the masjid was, where Ram was born. The trigger, to a religious conflict that eventually came to shatter India's secular image, was thus not that the mandir would be built but that it would be constructed on the debris of a destroyed Babri Masjid (Van der Veer 1994).

In order to instrumentalise the construction, bricks were collected (with the name of the God inscribed on them) from not just all over India but also from Hindu Diaspora located in the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa, the Caribbean and Canada (Khilnani 1997: 150).² The demolition did indeed materialise as, on 6th of December, 1992, thousands marched to the masjid led by the Hindu right wing combine of India's very prominent political party, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)³ and an international Hindu organisation, the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad).⁴ The masjid was "reduced to a pile of rubble" (Morey and Tickell 2005: ix) with the usage of shovels and axes. Communal riots followed the event in Ayodhya and eventually in many other parts of India. The closing chapter in the existence of the masjid had opened a new one in Indian politics.

1.2. The Godhra Carnage, 2002

On the 27th of February, 2002, 10 years post the Ayodhya incident, a train coach of the Sabarmati Express, carrying Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya, was set to fire, allegedly by a Muslim 'mob', in Godhra (Gujarat) killing 59 pilgrims, mostly women and children.⁵ The incident led once again to a communal uproar all over the state of Gujarat as violence in immeasurable proportions overtook the state.

Some of the most severe riots in the state broke out in the cities of Ahmedabad, Vadodra and Porbandar, percolating to numerous villages along the central and north-eastern belt in the state. Hindu agitators attacked Muslims in the state in retaliation to the train burning leading to a death of approximately 2000 people,⁶ whereas thousands were displaced. The demons that the Ayodhya incident had produced were invoked yet again and it seemed that India had been brutally awakened another time from the slumber of communal peace.⁷



2. Colonial Trysts, Nationalism, 'Religion' and the Secular

Both the above described chains of events formulate the point of departure for this chapter. Whereas the events of 1992 are seen as the trigger that started the communal wave with a ferocious vigour, those of 2002 are seen as a continuity to the same. It is in this context, that the attack on the secular identity of India came to be challenged both nationally and internationally, triggering a response of attempts to reconstruct the image of Indian secularism by its political elite. It is post these two events that the themes of communalism and secularism came to be even more rigorously debated and "kept alive" in contemporary India (Tejani 2008: 3).

For any comprehensive narrative of whether the paradigm is a more recent invention that has brutally come to 'infect' Indian politics and the national agenda, or if it indeed has a long trajectory in the sub-continental history, one cannot avoid diving into the realms of the colonial legacy and post-colonial developments of the Indian Nation state. Here the term 'post' is not used simply as an available replacement for 'after' but intends to focus on the continuum, the red-string, that has trickled down from the colonial encounter and acquires visibility in the developments that occurred in India as a sovereign state. This permeation has determined, to a great extent, the roadways treaded by India's politics. Thus, no discussion on Indian modernity or Indian secularism can be complete when devoid of the colonial encounter and its impact on post-colonial India.

Partha Chatterjee (1993: 94) states that "[t]he materials of Hindu nationalist rhetoric current in post-colonial India were fashioned from the very birth of nationalist historiography." The aim here is thus to delve into seeking an understanding of the rise of the Hindu Right Wing, and its claims for a Hindu Nation, by not just focusing on the events of the 1980s and the following decades, but by providing a larger historical environment that also encompasses the colonial era and the Indian national movement for independence. It is through this lens that the historical context to the career that the terms secularism and communalism have in contemporary India, will be grasped. However, before delving into the 'Indian' understandings, another aspect demands consideration. Here the lens ought to be shifted from the colonial subject staging the struggle for political independence to the colonising power itself – the Empire. An important question to be posed is was the British



imperial policy secular? Nandini Chatterjee (2011: 8) states that “the imperial term of choice was ‘neutrality’ towards all religions, a term whose sheer insipidity and indication of vacuum may have prevented historians from paying close attention to British imperial religious policy.” This principle of neutrality was established via Queen Victoria’s Proclamation of 1858 (Mondal 2005: 6).

With regard to the Proclamation and the weight it gave to the idea of neutrality, John Zavos (2000: 36), points out that “[t]he reason for the prominence of religion can be explained through British pre-occupations in the wake of the 1857 Rebellion, and through the underlying assumption that religion, degenerate though it may be, was the motor force of Indian civilisation and social relations.” However, to claim that this neutrality and equidistance, in some sense implied a ‘secular’ approach would be a statement that would be thoroughly misplaced both from the perspective of the liberal framework within which secularism as a formula had developed in the West as also in terms of how it was materialised and staged in colonial India.

Peter Robb (2002: 300) aptly points out that:

After all [...] secular values were quite weakly advanced both by the colonial state and in independent India. In practice the state offered religious neutrality and mutual toleration. The British, for all the heated rhetoric of some missionaries, soldiers and officials, mostly took great care to avoid attacking religious sentiment. Often they gave succour to religion, respecting Brahman dietary arrangements, or giving semi-clandestine support to mosques and temples, or promoting the political identities and interests of castes and religions.

While on the one hand this “succour to religion” prevented innocent neutrality, the infamous ‘Divide and Rule’ policy points to its more active annulment via enactment of religious differences during the colonial era. Though not the sole reason behind the Hindu-Muslim cleavages in colonial India, the policy, did exacerbate the pre-existing rifts. In 1909, the introduction of the Minto-Morley Reforms (also called the India Councils Act) which was the first landmark effort to introduce more powers for Indian participation in governance of the country through legislative affairs, also announced the simultaneous provision of sepa-



rate electorates for Muslims. These eventually were developed upon in future reformist acts (Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 and finally the Communal Awards of 1932 which provided separate electorates for Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Dalits or lower castes).

The above mentioned narrative is just a starting point to the reflections on the loaded trajectory of the 'ideal' of secularism in post-colonial India. Another important addition comes from the lens of the Indian national movement for independence as well. The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, could be viewed essentially as a product of a leadership that was largely inspired by British liberalism and for quite some time maintained a view (against the nationalist revolutionaries) of imposing trust in the Empire and seeking constitutional reforms from within its framework (Kulke and Rothermund 1998: 260). Even though, rifts existed between the Congress Extremists and the Moderates, the eventual route that would be treaded by the Congress would be more or less united in its perspectives on what the 'future' state would look like.⁸ As will be highlighted later, this imagination was largely guided by Nehru's conception of secularism, primarily post 1940. Ayesha Jalal (1995: 39), in her account of the different trajectories of the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League (the second most important political party formulated in 1906) and later those of 'democratic' India and 'authoritarian' Pakistan, clarifies that "[a]s the most likely inheritor of the British colonial mantle, Congress's secularism derived from pragmatic as much as moral and ethical considerations. Congress's claim to be the only representative organisation in a society divided along community and caste lines demanded the conspicuous projection of a secular ideology."

The imperative question then to be asked is what about the understandings of secularism within the framework of the Indian National Congress during the phase of 1885 (its inception) to 1947 (India's independence)? Was there a consistency in the claim to secularism that may be traced in the Congress's own evolution as a political party? On the one side, the understanding that a sensitive approach had to be adopted considering the religious diversity of the country in staging a mass-mobilised struggle for independence for no singular religious identity's association with the movement could help it give a truly national character, prompted a thrust towards the ideal of secularism. On the other side however, there was also a different understanding that seemed to be brewing. Morey and Tickell (2005: xvi) state that:



[...] The Congress Party that led India to independence has strong practical as well as ideological reasons for endorsing inter-communal tolerance rather than a strongly secularist line. In order to increase national solidarity and reinforce a sense of a common anti-colonial grievance, the Congress – itself a very diverse body – had maintained a strategy of absorbing the different religious communities into the Indian polity rather than demanding a uniform, secular adherence to the concept of the nation. What one finds thus is a Janus-faced paradoxical translation of a secular ideology into a lop-sided secular politics.

In one of the typical paradoxes of Indian society the very factors necessitating the politics of secular nationalism laid the basis for particularistic religious communalism. Despite the official creed of secularism, a succession of Congress leaders both before and after Gandhi had grasped the expediency of resorting to popular Hindu religious symbols. (Jalal 1995: 25)

What adds another twist to the story of the term in the sub-continent is the enormous gap that appeared between the politics of rhetoric and reality. The dream of a secular ideology of the Indian National Congress could never find basis in being translated into 'secular politics.' From late 19th century onwards, many voices within the Congress leadership employed Hindu religious symbolism as a strategy for mass-mobilisation (Jalal 1995: 26). The necessity for cultural confidence vis-à-vis the colonial power, provoked the utilisation of the readily available tool kit of Hindu religious customs, practices, prayers, symbols and rituals by its majority Hindu leadership to generate solidarity and mobilise the Indian population. It is here that the role of media in the generation of aesthetic formations (Meyer et. al 2002)⁹ came to play an enormous role in Indian national movement. The leaders, in fact, capitalised upon their available cultural resources to translate the movement into a numerical strength. For example practices like Ganapati Pooja (worship of Hindu deity Ganesh) or Ganesh Chaturthi were popularised by leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1893) to replace the Muslim festival of Moharram in Maharashtra (Morey and Tickell 2005: 14).

The following is another example of the many available from the speeches of a very famous nationalist visionary Bipin Chandra Pal (1906: 10-11), who wrote on the anniversary of the Partition of Bengal:



"In thy waters, Holy Mother, are mixed the two streams of Aryan and Semitic culture [...] both the Hindus and the Mahomedans have a common inheritance in art and civilisation [...] resonant with the minstrelsy of two great world-cultures." Though on a cursory glance, this may indeed appeal as a classic example of a construction of a Hindu-Muslim composite syncretic identity, appealing to the combined forces in the national movement, it is interesting to note the 'unspoken' elements. Here the Aryan culture is equated as the 'original' Indian one (essentially Hindu) whereas Islam is equated with a Semitic culture, indicating that it was indeed an 'Other', that bore an affiliation to the Middle East rather than 'belonging' to the Indian sub-continent. Due to paucity of space, this section will not engage with this subject in depth.

However, such hints as visible in the material analysed for this work indicate how many leaders belonging to the Congress, in attempts to unite and mobilise a vast Hindu majority which was divided along caste lines, employed the medium of festivals as also their writing to revoke a sense of community. However, this paradoxically led to the further estrangement of the Muslims. The very name given to India, *Bharatvarsha*, in fact echoes strongly of the borders that were ideologically being drawn in a colonial India with respect to questions of roots and belonging (Jalal 1995: 26). Constant references made to the term were not a naive engagement of the nationalist leaders, but rather a statement, associating the country with its first Hindu king, *Bharat*, after which it was named and from whose story, the epics unfold. Jalal (1995: 26) states that "[a] definition of the Indian nation fashioned on ideas of territoriality found in ancient Hindu texts and popular mythology was not seen to compromise Congress' secularism."

Thus the 'official creed' of secularism was paralleled with a medium that employed excessive Hindu symbolism. This fed to the growing insecurity among the Muslim sect of the movement's leadership that an independent India would find no adequate place for its Muslims. The simultaneous emergence of the All India Muslim League, that would later advance the claim for a separate nation for the Muslims, helped feed into the construction of a dichotomous narrativisation of the movement itself, whereby all associated with the Muslim League implied a politics of communalism whereas that associated with the Congress was secular nationalism. This narrative has no doubt been challenged by numerous academics like Jalal (1995: 26) who rightfully point out that these 'labels' weren't absolute – there were many more pro-Muslim political



leaders who abstained from the activities of the League because they saw it as an elite club that did not adequately represent the different sects of Islam in British India, while many self-proclaimed 'secularists' within the Congress resorted to a politics of religious distinction and symbolism. What is important historically from the perspective of the Indian nation state's self-imagination as a secular democracy, is that later these official ideological narratives would be enmeshed in 'national' rhetoric so that the Muslim League's agenda of establishing a Muslim state would translate into Pakistani national rhetoric and the Congress's secular claim would translate into secular nationalism in the Indian context (Chatterjee 2011).

3. The Nehruvian Consensus and Gandhi's Imaginations of a Secular India

After independence in 1947, the newly founded sovereign state proclaimed itself to be a 'secular' democracy. The underlying principle was that the state would not associate itself "with any particular faith but would give freedom to all religious functions", as Nehru proclaimed already in 1945. The Nehruvian conception of secularism did not imply an utter rejection of the transcendental values of religions. The approach reflected the dictum *Sarva Dharma Sambhav* (literally meaning: all religions are true and equal). From this phraseology emerges the much debated Indian dictum that:

The idea does not mean [...] that society should be irreligious; on the contrary, there is acceptance that all religions are meaningful and that they should have a valid place in the life of the nation. However, religion is not a component in defining nationality or citizenship. The state should be neutral as between the country's many religions and tolerant of all (Tambiah 2005: 422).

However, how the dictum has lent the contours between the state and the religious sphere even fuzzier shall be discussed in a later section of the paper. The President of the Union of India, re-echoed this consensus when he stated the following:

When India is said to be a secular state, it does not mean we re-



ject the reality of an unseen spirit or the relevance of religion to life or that we exalt – irreligion. It does not mean that secularism itself becomes a positive religion or that the State assumes divine prerogatives. Though faith in the Supreme is the basic principle of the Indian tradition, the Indian state will not identify itself with or be controlled by any particular religion. We hold that no one religion should be accorded special privileges in national life or international relations [...]. No person should suffer any form of disability or discrimination because of his religion but all alike should be free to share to the fullest degree in the common life. This is the basic principle involved in the separation of Church and State. (Radhakrishnan 1955: 202)

Given the consideration to the plurality question in India, secularism was viewed as the surviving dictum that would unify all existing communities under one umbrella, at least ideologically. With numerous existing religions, languages, lifestyles, the ideal was deemed as helpful in the actualisation and discursive construction of an 'Indian nationness.' Another reason for the same was the horrors of the Partition of British India in 1947 into India and Pakistan. It was lucid that the communal violence, emanating in the Hindu Muslim riots, which accompanied the partition, could be avoided only if the existing minorities would be duly protected and not suppressed by a Hindu state. Gandhi's Ramrajya, or the Kingdom of God on Earth (Gandhi 1929: 305),¹⁰ enthused with a deep sense of personal 'religious' understandings and Nehru's conceptions of a secular India, stemming out of his personal agnostic reflections but an acquired understanding of the place of the transcendental in the individual's life in India, both could be viewed as attempts to 'fixate' the notion of the national-self above one coordinated by communitarian or religious belongings.

The project was one of producing and even materialising the notion of citizenship and placing it above that of individual faiths. Moreover, the claim was reinforced with a sovereign Islamic Republic of Pakistan being projected as the other. Contemporary Indian political rhetoric celebrates India's diversity whereas secularism as a paradigm offers the terminological common ground, an approachable feasible formula, used thoroughly as a term, though its contents may imply different ideas for different actors, providing the space for that diversity to be celebrated. In fact, it is often projected that there is no other ideologi-



cal common ground which could unite India. To cite one out of numerous examples, the Indian Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao (1992), stated in response to the events of Ayodha that:

In a country of the size and diversity like ours, it is only the concern and care for the sensibilities of each other which can ensure a smooth functioning of the institutions we have created. This is the only way to maintain peace and harmony amongst the people of India [...]. The delicate fabric of our nation woven around democracy and secularism is the only anchor-sheet for our country's existence.

What is remarkable for an understanding of the contemporary debate on the paradigm of secularism in India is that, even during the Nehruvian period, the co-ordinates of the term were defined vis-à-vis its prominent other, 'Communalism'. This term has a very indigenously connotation in India, described as "conflict, often accompanied with violence, between religious communities, primarily the Hindus and the Muslims, for political and/or economic gains" (Vohra 1997: 2). Thus enormous thrust was laid upon defining what secularism entailed for the Indians by defining what it ought not to be. Vohra (1997: 90), states that:

The term communal has a unique meaning in India, and communalism is a uniquely Indian development. Broadly speaking, communal groups are defined by their religion and not by their ethnicity, language, or region. An Indian newspaper, reporting a "communal riot" gives the religion of the parties involved and the location of the riot, but provides no details of the caste, language, or ethnic identity of the participants (unless that has a special significance).

However, the term got institutionalised already in the twenties. As early as 1928 Nehru stated that "the real problem before [us] is how to exorcise communalism" (Akbar 1988: 217). During the following decades in a still colonial British India, the Congress agenda was permeated with 'nationalism' as the anti-thesis of the Raj-induced communalism but the term secularism itself remained primarily absent in the vocabulary. Post-independence and partition, the term



was used indeed as a replacement for nationalism but its contours were not thoroughly defined minus the rhetoric of the leadership, now in government, promoting ideals of tolerance, syncretism and pluralism as unifying ideals (Vohra 1997: 2). Shabnum Tejani (2008) contests that secularism in India was not just a replacement, an ideology or an off-shoot of nationalism, "it was nationalism itself", always defined in respect to communalism "or the quest for Muslims to secure political recognition of their religious difference. When that frustrated quest led to a demand for partitioning of the nation, self-vindicated Indian Nationalism, always another name for Hindu majoritarianism, rebranded itself secularism, hence the emergence of that term in Indian political vocabulary in the 1940s" (Chatterjee 2011: 4-5). The primary discontent with the notion lay in the emphatic usurpation of the Congress in a post-colonial India of the idea itself – there was a thrust on the ideal, however, its contours lay ambiguous, fuzzy and not concretely defined.

The refusal of the Congress party, of Nehru in particular, to let secular policy emerge through negotiation between different communitarian voices provides a clue into the integral flaw in Nehruvian secularism, that is its Archimedean character [...]. The usurpation by the Congress of the arena in which different communities could express their own voices, and its presumption that it alone represents all these communities quashed any chances of an emergent secularism with greater moral legitimacy and stability. (Bhargava 2006: 26)

The Constitution of the Union of India, which materialised its status as a republic, bore the brunt of these ambivalences. What became apparent is that the Indian notion of secularism would shift its location on a wide spectrum of claims – that religion was a defining factor of the Indian way of life, that Indian secularism did not imply irreligiousness, that religion had nonetheless to be relegated to the 'private' realm and expelled from the realm of politics, that the state would grant equal freedom to one and all to practice, preach and profess their own belief systems but that this would not intermingle with the domains of the state, and paradoxically enough, that the state would have to intervene in the religious domain to protect minorities.

Article 25 of the Constitution of India recognised the religious free-



dom of all citizens of India. However, it nonetheless allowed the state to intervene in the same with the authority to regulate or restrict any economic, financial, political or other secular activity associated with religious practices and allowing for legislative intervention for the sake of social welfare and justice “or the throwing open of the Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus” (Bhargava 2006 23). There was a silence maintained also on “how to separate the secular from the religious matters” (Ibid.). This has obviously led to numerous controversies whereby it is propagated by the Hindu right that the state intervenes primarily in the affairs of the Hindu majority whereas leaves the discriminatory practices of the minorities such as Muslims outside its purview (Ibid.). This aspect shall be further elaborated in the sections that follow on the recent debate and the actors involved with their distinct claims on secularism.

4. Post-Nehruvian era: The Visceral Side of the Construct – Attacks and Ruptures

The term ‘secular’ also has a distinct constitutional history to the Indian democracy. Added to the Preamble of the Indian Constitution only in 1976 as per the 42nd Amendment, it was hailed as a distinct move to specify categorically that the only desirable form or version of democracy that India wished for was a ‘secular’ one. Paradoxically enough, this was introduced at a time when the country was in a state of internal Emergency, an initiative of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. During this phase all civil liberties stood curtailed and the era is often viewed as a blemish in the trajectory of Indian democracy.

Another controversial twist to the debate and its Indian story occurred in 1985 in a court case filed by a Muslim woman named Shah Bano. Shah Bano, who was divorced by her husband, sued for the acquisition of maintenance which he refused to provide for. The Chief Justice of the Bench ruled, in accordance with the criminal procedures of the Indian Penal Code, that Muslims were also subject to maintenance provisions. As per the ruling he was thus required to pay the decided maintenance. This ruling led to religious tumult among various sections of the Muslim orthodoxy that viewed the Court’s ruling as a direct attack on the personal affairs of a community. A court of law



could not decide on norms that were pre-established as per private laws. The Muslim Personal Law Board made an appeal to the Parliament on behalf of Shah Bano's husband. The then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in the aftermath of having suffered remarkable Congress defeat in the by-elections in states like Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, flexed the Parliament for the passing of a statute that reverted the ruling of the Court. This led to immense criticisms within the Hindu majority leadership that alleged the government of positing a pseudo-secularist stance. More critically, the case raised two profound issues that would continue bringing Indian secularism under a looming question mark.

First, if a necessity was felt for the introduction of a Uniform Civil Code which would be applicable to all the citizens of India and take precedence over the personal laws of different religious communities in the country. It is important to state here that the various religious communities in India have their own versions of laws often called private laws or religious codes that dictate the terms and behaviour of those born in these communities in matters especially relating to inheritance (property laws in general) and matrimony (Chatterjee: 2008). A Uniform Civil Code would eventually imply challenging such personal laws. Second, if there was to be a recognition, as such, of personal laws having a legitimate basis, what could be done if these personal laws became conflictual and contradictory to each other as also to Fundamental Rights as guaranteed under the Constitution? (Tambiah 2005: 427-428). Unfortunately, much of the debate has not withdrawn from the terrains of these two provocations.

5. The Rise of the Hindu Right Wing

The rise of the Hindu Right Wing in India is not a recent occurrence that saw an emphatic thrust in its support in the eighties (this is traced below). Its roots and genesis can be traced to certain crucial developments in the writings of some prominent personalities as early as the twenties. One important writer in this direction is Vinayak D. Savarkar whose work *Hindutva – Who is a Hindu* (1923), continues being an important text for the Hindu Right Wing. Morey and Tickell (2005: xiv) point out that:

For Savarkar the only Indian community to fulfil the prescriptions



of 'Hindutva' or 'condition of Hinduness' was one that could claim 'Aryan racial descent, and could define India as both a 'fatherland' (pitrabhu) and a 'holyland' (punyabhu). Other communities such as Christians, Parsis and Muslims could not be admitted to Hindutva unless they reclaimed this meshed national-communal identity. Thus, [...] Savarkar's Hindus were called upon to see themselves as the chosen cultural custodians of Indian identity.

In its present avatar, the Hindu Right Wing comprises largely of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh),¹¹ which, to borrow Arundhati Roy's phrase, is the "cultural guild" of the Hindu Right Wing, founded in 1925. Its second important constituent body is the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad), founded by the RSS in 1964. The VHP has the Bajrang Dal as its militant youth faction. Finally the political party the BJP is the political faction of the wing. Together these bodies comprise a part of what is called the Sangh Parivar (parivar means family), the umbrella family organisation of all the Hindu nationalist organisations.

The years 1989 and 1990 co-incised with numerous crucial parallel events which witnessed the rise of Hindutva. First, the formulation of a coalition government in India for a second time in Indian politics. (The first was formulated post the elections of 1977 when the Congress lost a majority support due to the prior state of emergency declared by [Congress] Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This would be the first time that no drastic events such as the emergency had occurred and yet the Congress would be voted out of power.) The Congress failed to secure a clear majority and a new coalition, led by V.P. Singh as Prime Minister stayed in power with the support of the Communist parties and the BJP. Second, in 1989, the VHP started the collection of the bricks and their worship from all over India and abroad and staged numerous processions agitating even more rigorously for the demolition of the mosque and the construction of the Ram Mandir (Van der Veer 1994). Villages in the state of Bihar faced numerous riots at the time with those like Bhagalpur being completely wiped off of their Muslim population.

Third, what became very apparent by now, was the collaboration between the VHP, the RSS and the BJP (the political party that now supported the coalition government from outside). Prominent BJP leaders carried VHP and RSS portfolios, among them being L.K. Advani (one of the main agitators for the mandir construction) and Atal



Behari Vajpayee (who would later become the Prime Minister of India in 1998 up to 2004 and in under whose central government the second described incident above in Gujarat also occurred). Fourth, the developments in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, acted as a re-invigorating trigger for the popularity of the Hindu right. Almost 90 per cent of the state's Pandits (Kashmiri Hindus) were ousted from the territory during these years. The community faced ethnic cleansing post the beginning of the Kashmir insurgency (conflict between the Indian army and the militant organisations that have laid claims on a sovereign Islamic Kashmir). Estimates of 250,000-350,000 Kashmiri Pandits live as internally displaced persons, post the exodus, in other parts of India with their current population in the state being reduced to around 3000 (IDMC 2008: 3). This occurrence timed well with the BJP's anti-Muslim agenda as the exodus was seen and dramatised as an attack on the Hindu majority by militant organisations that had roots in Pakistan. In India, this anti-Pakistan stand also meant an anti-Muslim stand, with Pakistan being co-related to a Muslim identity narrative.

In 1990, the BJP/RSS/VHP camp announced a final procession called Ram Rath Yatra from the state of Gujarat up to Ayodhya that would eventually culminate in the construction of the mandir (temple) in September, set to reach Ayodhya by the 30th of October. Leading the procession was the BJP member L.K. Advani who was seen in an open Toyota car that was decorated like Lord Ram's mythological chariot, somehow impersonating the deity himself. Advani was arrested in the state of Bihar before making it to Ayodhya. The state governments of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were dominated by leaders of political parties that were supporting the central government but not the BJP. Advani's arrest caused the eventual withdrawal of support to the coalition government by the BJP. As the followers continued with the march without Advani, they were stopped by an open fire from the police. This was once again painted into an agenda by the BJP with the protestors who had participated in the march being epitomised as martyrs.

What followed is a thorough electoral campaign in the state for the upcoming elections in which religious symbolism became a norm. The ashes of the dead marchers were taken in special "ritual pots", to borrow Van der Veer's term (1994: 6), *asthi kalash*, major ritual sacrifices or *yajnas* were performed in which numerous BJP and VHP



leaders participated. Audio and video cassettes of such exercises were rotated. As will be highlighted in the section below, whereby a discussion of the sensitising lens for the project is undertaken briefly, such actualised manifestations of the religious imaginations in the form of videos etc. contributed severely to the figuration of certain aesthetic formations (Meyer 2002). They not only helped in postulating the imagination of the Hindu or the Hindu nation, Hindu Rashtra as it was called, but also contributed to the spaces for the realisation of such imaginaries. Besides, numerous actors who had played the role of religious deities in mythological films and TV series also entered the political arena at this time. As aptly stated by Van der Veer (1994: 7): "Playing a saint or a god in a movie qualifies a person for saintliness or godliness on the political stage. [...] there is clearly a penchant among the public for the struggle between good and evil [...]. The new discovery is the dramatisation of religious tales." T.V. serials like *Ramayana* (aired from 1987-1988), that staged the life of the deity Ram, popularised Ayodhya as the birth place of the God and also became a medium for the material manifestation of a religious national imagination.

6. Tremors Post-Ayodhya, 1992

The Bombay violence post the Ayodhya incident shocked the world: Post-colonial India had long been held up as a political success story. The world's largest democracy, whose citizens enjoyed freedom of speech and religious tolerance, was seen to have escaped the military dictatorship and sectarian strife that had been the fate of so many ex-colonial states. The violence of 1992 appeared to many in the western media as the resurgence of internecine rivalries, evidence that Indians had failed in the task of overwriting their sectarian affiliations with national identity. (Tejani 2008: 3)

6.1. Some Critics of Indian Secularism

As a point of departure, it would be useful to mention the work of J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994), which is oft viewed as a canonical foundation to the realm of secularisation (secular-



ism being associated more with the history of its ideas and secularisation to transformations in society). Casanova sketches three theses to the theory of secularisation which enable its understanding as the differentiation of the secular spheres from religious norms and institutions, the general decline of religious beliefs and practices and finally the marginalisation of religion to a privatised sphere. The advent of modernity led to a decline of religion, a rise of nation states, that which remained within the public sphere was privatised and finally an institutional separation was instrumentalised (Casanova 1994). Though helpful in an understanding of the paradigm, this theoretisation does not offer adequate means for an understanding of the complex in India neither in the way it was intended nor in how it is practiced. As the above sections have tried to elucidate, the term religion cannot have a stabilised, contoured understanding in India as these definitions are constantly negotiated in an environment where 'religion' is not simply an established normative concept but also a 'performed' practice which is dynamic in changing its media of communication.

This is also in line with the anthropologist Talal Asad (2003: 181-201), who critiques the idea of institutional differentiation on grounds that religion has an enormous influence still in many countries on the sphere of politics as also economy and pedagogy. Religion, thus, an external invention for him, is not an isolable category. One of the seminal works on secularism in India, is Donald Smith's *India as a Secular State* (1963). Smith places his topology within the parameters of three sets of relationships among religion, state and the individual. These three aren't mutually exclusive categories. First, the relation between the religion and the individual which requires the exclusion of the state. Second, that between the state and the individual from which religion is excluded. Here the proposition is that the state acknowledges the equality of citizens and views them independently of their religious affiliations. And finally that between the state and religion, which implies a rejection of state religions. Smith opines that the "consolidation of the secular state in India was never smooth" (Bhargava 2005: 18).

In his critique of Indian secularism Smith has suggested that the problem with the Indian 'version' lies in the fact that the State has assumed a role of the reforming body for the majoritarian Hindu religion, intervening in many of the personal laws. However, it has simultaneously, in the claim for upholding its image, been relatively non-interventional in those of minorities like Muslims under the garb of protection of



minorities. His complaint thus is that protection of minorities as well as reforms or intervention in personal laws ought not to acquire 'neurotic' dimensions whereby minorities are given complete freedom sometimes (even though the Fundamental Rights guaranteed in the Constitution come in conflict with them) whereas there is an obsession with reform in the majority religion. They should rather be undertaken within the framework of the idea of 'equal citizenship.' This viewpoint is critiqued by Marc Galanter who states that Smith's work shifts 'unwittingly' from a descriptive to a normative view of religion. His argument is grounded in the assumption that a secular state has to acquire a normative conception of religion and ought to, in that context, judge, reform and evaluate religion. That being the premises, it is impossible to foresee that the state will not interfere and that it can observe strict neutrality (Galanter 1965: 133-159).

Rajeev Bhargava (2005), who is also known for his seminal work on Secularism in India, is in line with Galanter's critique here and in fact builds further on the arguments. Bhargava (2006: 20-53) explains that unlike its external counterparts, secularism, in its distinct variant in India, does not find its basis on the strict separation between religion and the state. The boundary created is not absolute in its nature and does not imply a complete dichotomy of the two spheres. His variant views Indian secularism as one that maintains a 'principled distance' between religion and the state. Indian secularism, "[...] by balancing the claims of individuals and religious communities, never intended a bludgeoning privatisation of religion. It also embodies a model of contextual moral reasoning. All these features combine to form contextual secularism." (Bhargava 2006: 28) Inherent then, are the departures that the ideal makes from mainstream western secularism as it is called.

Whereas, articles in the Constitution do exist that follow this mainstream idea such as the principle of non-establishment: "No religious instruction to be provided in any educational institutions wholly maintained out of state funds" (Article 28 (1)), guarantee of religious liberty (Articles 25, 27 and 28 - each individual is entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion; freedom of conscience here referring to people without religious affiliations), no obligation to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any religion, non-requirement to participate in religious instructions in any educational institution (Article 28(3)), non-discrimination of citizens by the state on grounds of their religion or



caste or language etc. However, simultaneously there exist articles such as those recognising the rights of religious minorities (Article 30(1)) specifically and thus, unlike all the articles that are applicable to all citizens as individuals, such articles are eventually in recognition of community based rights. Also the state provides aid to educational institutions that are run by certain religious communities (Article 30(2)) and religious instruction is permitted in institutions that are only partly funded by the state. Articles 25(2) and 17 in fact incorporate an intervention of the state in religious affairs. Article (25(2)) provides for the state to be able to make laws providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of the Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus. And Article 17 is a direct attack on the caste system in Hinduism asking for its abolishment.

Even though this does render the picture fuzzier, what ought to be remembered is that there are personal laws or religious codes (especially instrumental in the case of marriage and inheritance of property) that govern the lives of people depending on their religion by birth. Many religious practices have been unjust and brutal and imply a deprivation of fundamental freedoms to the citizens. The state is inevitably pushed to intervene in such affairs thereby technically departing from the 'strict wall of separation' between religion and state principles. More so, in the case of the majority religion Hinduism where any central governing body like a Church is absent poses complications on the question of self-reform through a central body thus requiring the state to intervene. Thus, the notion of principled distance implies an institutional separation of the state from any religious body while simultaneously requiring the state to engage with religion at the level of law and policy (Bhargava 2006: 20-53).

As Bhargava (2006: 29) states: "Unlike western secularism that appears to impose a choice between active hostility and benign indifference, Indian secularism brings to bear on religion an attitude of critical respect." These lines do sound loaded as does Bhargava's claim that in fact the Indian example can be posited as a Trans-cultural Ideal rather than being abashed for its failure to deliver in India. What is extremely convincing in Bhargava's approach is that here one encounters an attempt to indicate that there can be no 'guiding master approach' or set, defined frameworks which have been seen to function in the West and produced a working template. Secularism in the West too, though oft



homogenised, stands contested, lacking in definite coordinates and a clear grasp of what it entails. "Each country in the West has worked out a particular political compromise rather than implementing a solution uniquely required by the configuration of values embodied in secularism" (Bhargava 2005: 3). It is thus, no wonder that secularism with the separation thesis implies different notions in the United States, France, Germany and Britain.

However, the above adulations of the concept, which do acknowledge the hidden shortcomings but nonetheless view it as an inspirable ideal, are not the only ones playing each other out in the dynamic field of the intellectual world, liberal circles or English language media in India. Some of the harshest criticisms of the paradigm from the intellectual field in India emanated in the voices of T.N. Madan (2005) and Ashish Nandy (2005). Nandy (2005: 321) states that secularism "as a generally shared credo of life is impossible, as a basis for state action impracticable, and as a blueprint for the foreseeable future impotent." Both the critical remarks on Indian secularism contest that Secularism as an ideology has no indigenous roots in India. They view it as a super-imposed project, just as modernity itself. India and Indians can never delineate the spheres from each other and thus attempts at doing so would only result in 'erosion' what they term as Indian cultures.

Models of modernisation prescribe the transfer of secularism to non-western societies without regard for the character of their religious traditions or for the gifts these might have to offer [...]. In traditional societies they can only mean conversion and the loss of one's culture and the loss of one's soul. (Madan 2005: 308)

What is implied is a difference between religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology. The former has its foundations in the ways of life that people have come to establish, religion being its essential guiding dictum. It is in this light, that one is pushed in the direction of asking questions regarding the understanding of religion and what it entails where. Interestingly, enough, the Hindi term for religion is dharma which when literally understood, implies duty. Secularism in the both the abovementioned viewpoints is seen as an externally imposed machinery that pays lip-service to external constructs but at its heart is found to be baseless. As a response to the crisis, then they suggest, that both Hinduism and Islam in India, in fact all religions in India,



entail values of tolerance that ought to be retrieved for any workable solution to confront communal horrors. However, Sumit Sarkar (1994:102) has argued that in their quest for solutions, a lot is derived from what may in a general context be categorised as Hindu civilisation and thus the criticism that this perspective shares a discursive space with the Hindu Right.

7. Situating the Actors: The Hindu Right's Semantic Reversals and the Secularism Paradigm

As mentioned above, many controversies have arisen post the second half of the eighties as to what the terms secularism and secularisation have implied in India. There has been a growing discrepancy vis-à-vis the interventionist role of the state. The Hindu Right which is one of the key elements of this debate has alleged parties like the Congress, which have primarily dominated the political scene in India, of taking complete responsibility for the reformation of Hinduism per se while simultaneously pandering minority religions like Islam by non-intervention in those domains that require reform. There is thus an allegation which is dramatically staged in all discourses belonging to the rhetoric of the BJP/VHP/RSS combine that the apparently secular Congress has provided reservations for Muslims in civil and educational institutions and been lenient to discriminatory Muslim personal laws, thereby elucidating its prejudices. A state which is 'genuinely' secular ought to view all citizens through a similar lens and thus a Uniform Civil Code is desirable. It is on the same stand that the Congress is labelled as being 'pseudo-secular'. However, on a more realistic level, when encountered with the anti-Muslim agenda that these parties propagate and the emanating wave of communal violence that has haunted India for the last 63 years or more, one comes to question the darker contexts of such 'universalising' claims. Secularism, then appears to have become an ideological tool, a "stick with which to beat the Muslim minority" (Chatterjee 2011: 5).

Partha Chatterjee (2005: 345) aptly points out from the ideological moorings of the Hindu right in India that it has brilliantly adapted itself to the semantics of secularism, meticulously describing the Congress agenda as pseudo-secular. In doing so, it has in fact accepted the appeal of the framework as such. And here in perhaps lies the power of the discourse. In a politics guided by numbers, the initial thrust of 'making'



or 'constructing' a controversy in Ayodhya, did give its due results as could be seen in the following years. However, over the past few decades as the conflict and its repercussions have flared up enormously, there has been a slight 'cooling off' by the BJP. This is not to state that the VHP or the RSS have declined in staging the dramatics of Hindutva. What is remarkable indeed is that there are no longer any attempts in favour of Hindu theocratic institutions, scriptural injunctions, participation of religious institutions in legislative procedures or, for that matter, even the introduction of curtailments of scientific or literary endeavours, as could be viewed a few decades ago in the agenda of the Hindu Mahasabha with its emphasis on the founding of the Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation). There is an intelligent shift thus, whereby now the movement does not pit against the ideal of secularism as such. As Chatterjee aptly sums up:

This is indeed a Hindu Right that locates itself quite firmly within the domain of the modernising state, and using all of the ideological resources of that state to lead the charge against people who do not conform to its version of the 'national culture'. From this position, the Hindu Right can not only deflect accusations of being anti-secular, but can even use the arguments for interventionist secularisation to promote intolerance and violence against minorities. (Chatterjee 2005: 345)

Does that imply that in fact, the agenda itself has undergone a secularisation process? Quite the contrary – if one scrapes beneath the surface, one is confronted with regular announced bans on films like Deepa Mehta's *Fire and Earth*, the former dealing with the story of a Hindu lesbian couple in colonial India while the latter being a strong criticism of the Hindu widows and the abominable treatment meted out towards them in an essentially patriarchal, chauvinistic and suppressing environment whereby 'religion' has been utilised as a tool to keep power relations floating. The two films created immense controversy in India (the director is a Canadian Indian) with theatres being burnt and attacked when they aired the films and multiple life threatening situations for the caste and crew of the films. Occasions like Valentine's Day are publicly condemned even in metropolises like Mumbai by the Shiv Sena and there have been numerous reports of attacks on young couples seen together on such days. The offered justification comes from a defence of what has been homogenised as 'Indian values and culture'. Thousands of Muslims have been forced to be internally displaced in the advent of the communal violence



of 1992 and again in 2002 and innumerable mosques have been destroyed all over India. The Christian minority has also not been forgiven with incidents like the burning of the priest Graham Staines (Chatterjee 2011) and his sons and the recurrent forced conversions still being a reality.

This is to point out that the guiding dictum of the Indian National Congress pre and post the colonial era, Gandhi's Ramrajya and imaginations of a secular and tolerant India, and Nehru's liberal secular consensus of a syncretic India, have all become a resource for the Hindu brigade and in a formidable 'semantic reversal' are used as a framework for attacking the same by one of India's most fundamentalist forces. Indeed the movement has been intelligent enough to learn the language of the medium and utilise it for attacking its ideological opponents. It is in this convoluted context that the term 'communal' has come to be associated with the Muslim in India whereas the term 'pseudo-secular' has been stored for the 'Hindu who defends the rights of the Muslim'. Partha Chatterjee (2005: 347) thus provokes a formidable question in asking: "Is the defence of secularism an appropriate ground for meeting the challenge of the Hindu Right? Or should it be fought where the attack is being made, that is – should the response be a defence of the duty of the democratic state to ensure policies of religious toleration?"

8. Opening the Pandora's Box – Who Cares for Secularism in India?

The above presented story thus immediately thrusts one to ask the obvious question – so who really cares for secularism in India? Why does it matter that India be a secular democracy? Has secularism been relegated to being a mere word, emptied of all meaning, which is used by the political leadership of the country – the Congress for making appeals to a more diverse vote bank and the BJP for strengthening its Hindu support while simultaneously defeating the Congress at its own linguistic game? Here too innumerable complications abound the field. It is here that the minoritarian perspective acquires agency. Nandini Chatterjee (2011: 5) in a historical study of the Christian minority in India recounts her encounter with the power of the discourse, as could be felt, in experiences with members of the Christian community.



During the traumatic episodes (the murder of Graham Staines) and all through the period of my extended research work in India, I was deeply impressed by the deep commitment of Christian leaders across the board to a political concept they called 'secularism,' which they often explicitly related to the specific Indian constitutional provisions establishing freedom of religion. Secularism therefore has a positive connotation not only for the majoritarian Hindus, [...] but it is also a constitutional, political and social ideal for minority groups, especially Christians, including people who are active members and office-holders of the churches they belong to.

Secularism thus also becomes an agenda that needs to be 'rescued' so that the minorities in India can co-habit that 'national space' that seems to be the pivotal peak to be achieved for both the BJP (as when under the coalition government) and the Congress. Thus, what is attempted here is to highlight that this is not just an ideal that could be relegated to the political ideologies of two political parties in India, but also a visceral desirable paradigm for India's multifarious minorities. Gayatri Spivak (2004), in tracing the trajectory of the Subaltern in her work, states, in this context, that Secularism thus looms in the Indian realities as "an impoverished abstraction that needs to be preserved". It is in fact a paradigm in contemporary India that constitutes the metonymisation (rather synecdoche) for the Indian subject. This implies an arrangement so that the part (the Indian citizen) may be able to be representative of, and relate to, the whole or sum (the state) in order to be able to claim, in order to be able to hold the state accountable for itself. Thus this is not just a floating ideology but one that silently creeps through the 'common' citizen and the everyday, imploring one to ponder upon whether there is more to the narrative than 'spoken' discourses, whereby a quiet understanding exists to its nature and promises.

It also acquires an actualised or visceral dimension for the people in India, when one delves into the stories and incidents that an everyday encounter confronts the individual. In a documentary based on a 15th century Sufi mystic, Kabir (his work is oft quoted by the Prime Ministers in their speeches), whose philosophy set to establish a sect that would overcome the orthodoxy of Islam and Hinduism, Shabnum Virmani (2003), engages in the question of how a thinker with a Muslim upbringing could seek Ram. What is interesting here, is that in her encounters in Ayodhya, one is revealed to the fact that



videos, cassettes and postcards of the demolition of the Babri Masjid are sold on every street of the city. There is a severe daily demand for the same by many who visit the shrines in the city (Virmani 2003). There is thus a new media that lends materialisation to the figuration of such aesthetic formations. To provide another example – The RSS runs approximately 20,000 secondary and primary schools in India today, known by the name of Vidya Bharati (vidya meaning education and bharati coming from India's other known name, after its first king, Bharat). The text books and curriculum in such schools is loaded with jargon and abominations against the Muslim community. One of the questions asked in an exam organised by the school (mathematics) went as follows: "If it takes four sevaks to demolish one mosque how many does it take to demolish twenty? (Delhi Historians Group: 2001)."¹² Meanwhile academicians like Romila Thapar who have been engaging in the content of textbooks and have made provocative remarks upon (with evidences) Vedic Aryans eating beef, have faced tumultuous consequences for their boldness (Morey and Tickell 2005: xxiii). The idea thus has remained static – there is a necessity to fixate the national self and that national self is viewed in many discourses as the Hindu self. Thus, any propositions that challenge established patterns and norms that are used as a defining moment for that 'Hindu identity' are stubbed before they raise doubtful analogies.

9. Conclusions

The above examples are but a few examples to illustrate that the debate in India has not been relegated just and only to political camps, it also has a 'real' dimension in that voting behaviours are guided by it, in that a school pupil in India is made 'aware of' the term through text books, and in that it is indeed contested increasingly by an ever expanding, enormous 'middle class' leaving the realms of the intellectual and academic world. There is a constitutional vocabulary and career that the term has experienced in an independent India. However, post the tremors of the Ayodhya conflict and the Gujarat riots, the theme of secularism has entered more intuitive discussions. In summation, a few remarks that stand out from the trajectory of the term in a post-colonial India include the following: That secularism in India is not viewed primarily in a strict sense of 'the wall of separation' between the state and



religion. It does not imply irreligiousness but nonetheless, seeks a distinction of the political sphere from induction of religious themes. The state in fact intervenes in religious issues which normally lie under the purview of 'personal laws', at least for the Hindu majority, as a reforming body. Controversies have arisen in the past and continue to arise on the question of intervention. The Hindu Right employs the paradigm to illustrate the prejudices held by the state (usually with Congress governments in power) in terms of relative non-intervention in Muslim personal laws. Post the Ayodhya conflict the debate stands as not just being relegated to the academic and liberal intellectual world but has come to be debated outside these realms. In most discourses, it has historically been viewed *vis-à-vis* its prominent other 'Communalism'. The term itself has a relatively recent career in India and is replaced in contemporary rhetoric with new phraseology in Indian languages (particularly Hindi), where numerous resources for the same are paradoxically borrowed from religious texts and scriptures.

Endnotes

- 1 Slogan chanted by the karsevaks, Hindu volunteers who marched to the city of Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, in order to demolish the Babri Masjid (mosque).
- 2 This is also one of the controversies surrounding the event – as to whether the bricks called the ramshilas (or Ram's bricks) that were collected for the shilanyanas (translated as foundation ceremony) were actually collected from different parts of the world as a contribution from the prominent Hindu Diaspora or whether this is part of the narrative construed by the Bharatiya Janata Party as a prominent instrumentaliser of the event and collaborator of the Hindu Right Wing.
- 3 People's Party of India.
- 4 World Hindu Council.
- 5 Many, it was later investigated, were not VHP members or karsevaks, who were visiting Ayodhya as agitators for the construction of the Ram temple at the Ramjanmabhoomi in Ayodhya, but rather pilgrims who had been lured to join the VHP with the promise of getting to perform rituals in Ayodhya and meager



sums of 100 Rupees.

- 6 This is an approximate figure because the statistics of the number of deaths and missing individuals vary enormously in sources. Official statistics of the Government were maintained at 900 because many of the victims were registered as missing rather than dead.
- 7 The intention here is not to engage in details in the history of the two conflicts. Thus, an emphasis is not placed here in locating the various actors – the Hindu Right Wing and its contributing elements like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Central Government's role, the State Government's alleged involvement in the riots. The author intends to introduce these two moments only briefly to provide the context to the readers against which the paper is set.
- 8 Here I imply the imaginations of a sovereign India that were projected in the last phase of the movement starting 1940 by the Congress leadership.
- 9 This sensitising framework is borrowed from Meyer et. al (2002) to grasp an understanding of the formulation or actualisation of the 'Idea of India' through the medium of speeches by its political elite. The proposition is to employ Anderson's Imagined Communities as a point of departure but then to develop upon it to unleash the 'sensational forms' that render such 'imagined' entities like nations real and touchable for both those within and without. Formation is used instead of communities to highlight the dynamism of the nation abstaining from viewing it as a stagnant bordered group with non-negotiable defined contours.
- 10 Gandhi describes Ramrajya in *Young India*, the journal he initiated in 1919, as follows: "By Ramrajya I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean Ramrajya Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of truth and righteousness. Whether Rama of my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, the ancient ideal of Ramrajya is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure. Even the dog is described by the poet to have received justice under Ramrajya." (*Young India*, 19.09.1929, p. 305).



- 11 National Patriotic or Volunteer organisation
- 12 Sevak here is a reference to the members of the Sangh Parivar, who contributed to the demolition of the mosque in 1992 (Delhi Historians Group 2001: 7).

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