RELIGIOUS IDENTITY & POLITICS IN
THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA

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ABSTRACT

Religion as a practice and as a political identity influences an individual in different ways. It has shaped the course of national struggle and played a significant role in framing the Indian polity. The authors in this paper intend to evaluate the role religion as a political identity played in the anti-colonial struggle. The paper traces how the masses were mobilized by exploiting the vulnerability created by their religious identity. The scheme of separate electorates brought in by the British is scrutinized along with its further strengthening of the same by the Communal Award intended to aggravate the differences between the communities and, at the same time, divide and weaken the freedom struggle. It further discusses the development of communal politics led by organizations such as the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, and, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The paper also points out the different way the Indian notion of secularism has developed as against the western notion. It concludes on the note that religious identity did play a significant role in the later part of the freedom struggle and subsequently, in the Constituent Assembly debates.

Keywords: Communalism, freedom struggle, politics of polarization, religious identity, secularism, separate electorates.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Religion has always been an indispensable and ineffaceable part of our lives. So have questions concerning how much religious freedom and in what form is tolerable for a secular democratic republic. In a country as diverse as India, the predicament of protecting religious minorities within a majoritarian religious culture becomes even more significant. Religion and politics are so intricately connected that religion influences the political as well as non-political processes both in the West and in the East and commands more significance than just being a matter of social and personal relevance even in secular polities.

Amartya Sen ponders how an idea like secularism can occupy the centre stage in the formation of modern India:[1] *Is secularism really an important issue, or is it just sanctimonious rhetoric?* He answers that secularism is indeed a very important factor of the recognition of a larger heterogeneous identity: "*But secularism is, in fact, a part of a more comprehensive idea- that of India as an integrally pluralist country, made up of different religious beliefs, distinct language groups, divergent social practices...the sectarian forces that seek to demolish Indian secularism will have to deal not merely with the presence and rights of the many Muslims in India, but also with India's regional, social, and cultural diversity. Toleration of differences is not easily divisible.*"

"The message of 1857 is secularism", said Sonia Gandhi, the UPA Chairperson with a boastful jactitation.[2] While it is possible that there was not much alienation of one religious community with the other, it may not be proper to say that lessons of secularism are to be learnt from the events occurred in the year 1857. To say the least, 1857 was primarily focused at bringing the long lost authority back into the hands of feudals, by even going to the extent of granting favours to those who helped them in doing so.[3] Although it would not have worsened the economic drain that British were already carrying on, the success of the revolt would have been a set back to the idea of democracy that developed through the freedom struggle.

No movement is completely free of the politics and ambitions of the participants within the movement, irrespective of how strong the common ground and objectives are. The same stands true with regard to the independence of the Indian sub-continent as well. There is no

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[1] Amartya Sen, "Threat to Secular India", Social Scientist, Vol. 21, No. 3/4 (Mar. - Apr., 1993), pp. 5-23, p. 6.

[2] In the year 2007, at the 150 years celebrations of the 1857 revolt. See: http://www.rediff.com/news/report/sonia/20070511.htm

[3] First War of Independence in 1857 - Its Impact on Hindu-Muslim Relation, April 1 - 15, 2007 - By Asghar Ali Engineer. Available at: http://www.csss-isla.com/arch%2070.htm.

denying the fact that various organisations, political or otherwise, conceptualized their own form and idea of 'nationalism'. Many have them succeeded in contributing or evolving the ideas that were present hitherto.

The Constitution of India is not a document that is built on mere ideals of the members of the Constituent Assembly. It also embodies, within itself, the experiences of more than seven decades of freedom struggle. It is not a document that puts nationalism at the foremost making everything else ancillary. Rather, it happens to be a culmination of the hurdles that the freedom struggle faced. The vulnerability that ruled the minds of the framers about the nation's fallout into various pieces caused them to make a strict Article 3 which allows only the Centre to create, alter, or modify the boundaries of the States. The never-ending debate on an official language led the Constituent Assembly to resorting to an *ad hoc* measure of adopting English for a period of fifteen years. Similarly, the idea of secularism did not arise in a vacuum. It was proposed and chiselled taking into account the religious ideologies, beliefs, and influences that were rampant during the freedom struggle. If religion had not played a role in the freedom struggle, the proposal of having a constitutional guarantee to practise one's own religion would only be seen as an unwarranted exaggeration by the members of the Constituent Assembly. It is in this back drop that it becomes imperative to trace the routes of religious thought in governance and analyse them in order to give them due credit for what could have been a nation breaking issue.[4]

The researchers in this paper aim to look at three such organisations viz. the Hindu Mahasabha, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and the Muslim League, in order to analyse the development of a religious thought, and, subsequently, the idea of secularism. The essential aim is to source 'secularism' in the vulnerabilities created by such organisations, or even perhaps, by the partition of the sub-continent. It will be the endeavour of the researchers to understand if secularism developed merely as a compromise between various religious thoughts and ideologies, or if it is a genuine doctrine that the framers of our Constitution intended to embed in the polity. To do the same, the researchers will look at various movements, events, ideologies, and thoughts that emerged and influenced the people and their views so much so that their product is what we have before us as India, a constitutionally proclaimed secular State.

II.   THE REVOLT OF 1857 – A CONSEQUENCE OF RELIGIOUS VULNERABILITY

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[4] With complete awareness of the fact that religion did break the nation in the year 1947. The assertion is that the absence of considerations of religious thought in governance would have made another such episode possible.

The episode of 1857 was, by no means, a sudden outbreak that erupted as a reaction to any calls that the British took. While the cartridges greased by the fat of animals which respective religions prohibited to eat did add to the fury, various political, economic, and social causes have played an equally important role. However, William Dalrymple opines that the East India Company was seen to be a Christian missionary that had come down to an alien land with the objective of preaching, propagating, and spreading Christianity.[5] The identity attached by the virtue of following a religion was seen to be in danger, rather than wearing the 'Indian Nationalistic' identity which, perhaps, did not even exist. At the same time, it is not to state that the claim of various Marxists that the revolt was an uprising of the proletariat against the capitalistic and exploitatory policies of the British is wrong.

However, the fact that religion and religious identity took the lead becomes clearer when we consider the proclamation issued in the name of Bahadur Shah Zafar when he was asked by various troops to be the face of the revolt. Zafar was told by the sepoys, on 11th of May 1857, that they 'have joined hands to protect the religion and faith'. In fact, the question posed to various people in the city of Delhi was whether they were the people of the faith that was being defended, and if they were so, they are to join in the troops and do what is needed to be done. The proclamation issued in the name of Zafar to this effect read:

"*... this is a religious war, and is being prosecuted on account of the faith, and it behoves all Hindus and Musalman residents of the imperial city, and of the villages in the country ... to continue to be true to their faith and creeds.*"[6]

Moreover, in various *farmans* issued in Urdu referred to the British as *nasrani* (Christians) rather than *angrez* (English) or *gora* (Whites). It is, hence, an obliteration to say that the revolt was not backed by any vulnerability towards the religious identity. Rather, one of the purposes was to protect such religious identity.

It is another matter altogether that if the revolt had been successful, the idea of having a democratic and republic state would have been further pushed back, as the monarchies waited eagerly to restore themselves with their full glory. At the risk of simplifying the issue, it is safe to suggest that while the ultimate aim was to gain back the power that various princely states had lost, religious identity was a useful tool to invoke the sense of vulnerability of losing one's own culture. The fact that various Christian missionaries were established cemented this fear further. Above all, the introduction of gun powder cartridges greased with

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[5] William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of Delhi, 1857* 22 (2006, Bloomsbury Publishers, Delhi).

[6] *Ibid.*

the fat of animals which religiously were not to be consumed triggered the feeling that the main aim of the British in the sub-continent is to spread Christianity and make other religions less effective.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNALISM

Religion can become an apparatus for both, benevolence and malevolence; compassion, charity, brotherly love and fanaticism, brutality, persecution; spiritualism or violence, depending on how and where it is employed and the latter follows when religion coalesces with power.[7] J S Mill in *Representative Government* famously remarked that "free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities"[8] and the torrential history of Hindu Muslim relations in India both pre and post-independence are but prophetic reminders of Mill's remarks.[9]

The scope of this paper, however, is to study the religious sentiments which ran high in the earlier half of the twentieth century which was marked by a riot torn Hindu-Muslim relation with increase in anxieties and a growing feeling of mistrust between the communities. The years beginning 1920 until the riot stricken partition years witnessed multiple incidents of communal violence.[10] The relations remained strained throughout and the antagonism soared with some of the major riots such as Kohat Riots of 1924, Calcutta Riots of 1926-1927, Lahore Riots of 1927, Sind Riots of 1930, Kanpur Riots of 1931, Ayodhya Riots of 1934, Karachi Riots of 1935, Panipat Riots of 1937 and Sind Riots of 1939 and several others. Each of these riots involved loss of life and damage to the property of either community and as Ambedkar aptly puts such barbaric mutual violence displayed an utter lack of unity between the communities.[11] The riots were but a sad manifestation of success of the propaganda, even incorrect at times, by the Muslim communalists that Hindus were exploiting Muslims and by the Hindu communalists that Muslims were threatening Hindu property or economic interests incorrect.[12]

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[7] Asghar Ali Engineer, "Understanding Communalism: Report on a Seminar", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 19, No. 18 (May 5, 1984), pp. 752-756, p. 752.

[8] Of Nationality, as connected with Representative Government in J S Mill, *Representative Government,* Available at: https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/mill/john_stuart/m645r/chapter16.html.

[9] As cited in Gareth Nellis, Michael Weaver, Steven Rosenzweig, "Do parties matter for ethnic violence? Evidence from India", Available at: http://nellis.commons.yale.edu/files/2014/05/Do-parties-matter-for-ethnic-violence-Evidence-from-India.pdf, p. 2.

[10] Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India,* Available at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/ambedkar_partition/307c.html#m01

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947* 409 (1st ed. 1989, Penguin Books, New Delhi).

Several factors can explain this feeling of suspicion and hostility between Hindus and Muslims and the spurt in communalism. The imperial policy of "divide and rule" was the first factor which politicised communal identities and created artificial divisions between the communities. Separate electorates was but one of the manifestations of this divisive policy. Communal elements could also flourish because of the political and economic crises of the system and the half-hearted opposition to the feudal systems.[13] In fact the ruling classes used the communal and the casteist divisions merely as a pretext to hide the weakness and fragility of the system which favoured their own cause.[14] The transformation in the economic, political and administrative conditions in the country under the British rule and the growing need to combat and fight against colonialism led to a rise in communal consciousness as the development of this modern society required a relook at the way common interests were looked at.[15] Communalism started as a politico-economic problem and the communal question was primarily a "middle class question"[16] and continues to be so.[17]

IV. THE ALL INDIA MUSLIM LEAGUE, THE AKHIL BHARTIYA HINDU MAHASABHA, AND, THE RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH: BIRDS OF THE SAME FEATHER?

British Imperialism led to the rise and popularity of many communal organisations in India in the early twentieth century and apart from serving the political interests of the community in question, served the British interest of keeping India colonized. Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim League, Akali Dal are all such organisations.

The Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha was founded as a Hindu nationalist political party in 1914 in Amritsar with its headquarters in Haridwar to counter the politics of Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. The seeds to organise and unite Hindus politically against the rise of Muslim nationalism were however sown in the year 1910 when an All India Hindu Conference was organised in Allahabad by leading Hindu social and political leaders. Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Lala Lajpat Rai and were among its prominent leaders who campaigned for an organisation which could represent "Hindu interests".[18] The leadership

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[13] Zoya Khaliq Hasan, "Communalism and Communal Violence in India", Social Scientist, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Feb., 1982), pp. 25-39, p. 28.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[15] Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947* 405 (1st ed. 1989, Penguin Books, New Delhi).

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 408.

[17] Asghar Ali Engineer, "Understanding Communalism: Report on a Seminar", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 19, No. 18 (May 5, 1984), pp. 752-756, p. 753.

[18] Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave- Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* 77 (1999, Princeton University Press, Princeton).

passed into the reign of V D Savarkar in 1937 whose goal was to "Hinduize all Politics and Militarize Hindudom".[19] Hindu organisations such as Arya Samaj,[20] Brahmo Samaj,[21] Prarthana Samaj[22] existed even in the nineteenth century but mostly carrying a reformist agenda. The political element crept in with the Hindu Mahasabha which glorified the Golden Age of Hindu culture and focused on revivalism along with reformism of Hindu religion. It did not call for exclusion of other religious communities but by defining India as primarily Hindu and calling for re-conversion of Muslims and Christians to Hinduism, effectually perpetrated a politics of hatred and antagonism towards the minorities especially Muslims.[23]

The ideology of the Hindu Mahasabha, especially under Savarkar's leadership, was based on *Hindutva*- a nation of Hindu race, culture, and, civilisation, in which religious and national identities were equal and this was done through the concept of *Hindu Rashtra* which emphasised that Hindus being the majority community in the country should rule India as a Hindu state.[24] As Hansen puts it, "Savarkar's cultural nationalism was communal, masculine, and aggressively anti-Muslim, but also rationalist and in favor of rapid modernization."[25] Savarkar was very critical of Congress and rejected the version of secularism which it followed: "*They call themselves Indian Nationalists! But every step they take is communal.*

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[19] Dibyesh Anand, "The Violence of Security, Lethal Representations and Hindu Nationalism in India" in Abdelwahab El-Affendi (ed.), *Genocidal Nightmares: Narratives of Insecurity and the Logic of Mass Atrocities* 107 (2014, Bloomsbury Publishing, USA).

[20] It was founded in 1875 in Punjab by Dayananda Saraswati, a Sanskrit scholar and was mainly opposed to aspects of the caste system, idolatry, and popular ritual traditions, as well as against Christian proselytization and Muslim influence in social life.

[See: Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave- Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* 71 (1999, Princeton University Press, Princeton)].

[21] It was started in 1828 at Calcutta by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Debendranath Tagore to reform Brahmanism of the time.

[22] It was founded in 1860s by M.G. Ranade in Bombay with a Hindu reformist agenda and promote theistic worship and social reform.

[23] A. A. Parvathy, *Hindutva, Ideology, and Politics* 137 (2003, Deep and Deep Publications).

V.D. Savarkar in 19th Session of Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha at Karnavati in 1937 spewed hatred against the Muslim community,

"I warn the Hindus that the Mohammedans are likely to prove dangerous to our Hindu nation and the existence of a common Indian State even if and when England goes out. Let us not be stone blind to the fact that they as a community still continue to cherish fanatical designs to establish a Moslem rule in India. Let us work for harmony, let us hope for the best, but let us be on our guard!"

[See: Hindu Rashtra Darshan, Available at: http://www.savarkar.org/content/pdfs/en/hindu-rashtra-darshan-en-v002.pdf, p. 13]

[24] Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* 1 (1994, University of California Press).

[25] Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave- Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* 79 (1999, Princeton University Press, Princeton)

They have guaranteed special protection to minorities-Moslems, Christians, Europeans, etc. Is that Indian Nationalism? A true Indian Nationalist must know nothing of Moslems and Hindus, minorities and majorities...A truly Indian National electorate must be only an 'Indian' electorate pure and simple without the least mention of the unnational and unreasonable differences of race or religion."[26] However, the definition of 'Indian' was crafted in a highly restrictive manner so as to effectively oust Muslims from its definition and labelling them as foreigners. Therefore, this brand of Hindu nationalism was also opposed to the appeasement of minorities and labelled it pseudo-secularism for in their conception a genuine democracy can be only achieved with the recognition of the primacy of Hindu majority.[27]

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ushered in an era of militant Hindu Nationalism in India. It was established on 27th September, 1925 in Nagpur by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar as a social organisation with an aim to protect and nourish the Hindu culture.[28] Later M.S. Golwalkar emerged as the most prominent ideologue of the RSS which acquired the status of a powerful and important Hindu nationalist organization in the country since the 1940s.[29] The RSS was meant to serve as the cultural dimension in the formation of a Hindu nation and creation of swayamsevaks armed with courage, self-disciplined, and organizational capabilities who would "be the kshatriyaized antithesis to Gandhi's nonviolent, "effeminate" bhakti-inspired Hindu."[30] The European fascism influenced the leaders of militant Hindu nationalism who borrowed the fascist ideology of making enemies of difference and the dictatorial model as is evident from the RSS principle of *ek chalak anuvartitva*[31].[32]

The All India Muslim League, popularly called Muslim League, was founded on 30th December, 1906 in Dhaka (*Dacca then*) by Khwaja Salimullah, Syed Ahmad Khan, Vikar-ul-

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[26] Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha, 20th Session Nagpur, 1938, Hindu Rashtra Darshan, Available at: http://www.savarkar.org/content/pdfs/en/hindu-rashtra-darshan-en-v002.pdf, p. 33.

[27] Dibyesh Anand, "Hindutva: a Schizophrenic Nationalism", Available at: http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601_dibyesh_anand.htm.

[28] http://www.rss.org/knowus//Encyc/2012/10/23/Vision-and-Mission.aspx.

[29] Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave- Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* 80 (1999, Princeton University Press, Princeton)

[30] Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave- Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* 93 (1999, Princeton University Press, Princeton)

[31] Obedience to one leader.

[32] "Hindutva's fascist heritage", 2000, Available at: http://www.sabrang.com/cc/comold/mar00/document.htm.

Mulk and Aga Khan III to safeguard the interests of the Indian Muslims.[33] The Muslim League emerged in the 20th session of All India Muhammadan Educational Conference, which was established by Syed Ahmed Khan in Aligarh in the year 1886.[34] The politics of league was to foster Muslim loyalty towards the British and in doing so, protect and advance the political rights of Muslims in India who constituted a minority, and hence under a constant threat of Hindu domination.[35] While the Bengal Partition in the year 1905 was the major force behind the Muslim claim to separate political representation and formation of the Muslim League but it was with the grant of separate electorates in the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 that institutionalised communal politics in India. The goal of self-government under the British was adopted by the Muslim League in March 1913.[36] The year was also significant in League's History since it marked the entry of Mohammad Ali Jinnah into the party. The separatist politics of the League began mainly in the 1930s with Sir Muhammad Iqbal's demand for a separate Muslim state but it was only later towards the 1940s that the League aggressively pressed for the establishment of a separate Muslim nation[37] for the Indian Muslims (which ultimately resulted in the creation of Pakistan at the time of independence in 1947).[38]

Communal politics is based on this the ideology of communalism and the communalisms of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian communalities alike belong to a single species and are

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[33] "Formation of All India Muslim League", Available at: http://csspoint.yolasite.com/resources/Formation%20of%20All%20India%20Muslim%20League.pdf.

See: Objectives of the All India Muslim League- "Resolved that this meeting, composed of Musalmans from all parts of India, assembled at Dacca, decide that a Political Association be formed, styled All-India Muslim League, for the furtherance of the following objects:

(a) To promote, among the Musalmans of India, feelings of loyalty to the British Government, and to remove any misconception that may arise as to the intention of Government with regard to any of its measures.

(b) To protect and advance the political rights and interests of the Musalmans of India, and to respectfully represent their needs and aspirations to the Government.

(c) To prevent the rise, among the Musalmans of India, of any feeling of hostility towards other communities, without prejudice to the aforementioned objects of the League."

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] Sanderson Beck, *India's Freedom Struggle 1905-1918*, Available at: http://www.san.beck.org/20-4-India1905-18.html

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] All India Muslim League, Lahore Session, 1940.

[38] Ayesha Jalal, "Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia" in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (eds.), *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998-9), Available at: https://www.tcd.ie/iiis/documents/archive/pdf/communalismayesha.pdf, p. 11.

merely varieties of the same communal ideology.[39] While communalism is often sought to be painted as a consequence of separatist politics of Muslim League or the Hindu fascist ideology of the Hindu Mahasabha and the anti-Muslim posture of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its allies, the politics of these organisations is not the sole factor in the continued communalism in the post-independence India. The communalism practised by the Hindu Mahasabha, RSS and the Muslim League before 1937 was of the liberal variety where they practised communal politics but at the same time upheld certain liberal, democratic, humanist and nationalist values.[40] It was only post 1937 that these parties veered towards extreme or fascistic communalism.[41]

V.   THE EVIL OF SEPARATE ELECTORATES: BONE OF COMMUNAL POLITICS

The system of "separate electorates" implies division of the voting population of a country or region into different electorates based on factors such as religion, caste, gender, occupation etc. and members of each separate electorate cast their vote only to elect the representative of their own electorate.

The battle between separate electorates and joint electorates as a mode of election to srepresentative positions in British India began in 1906 and continued unabated until 1947. The demand for separate electorates for Muslims was first made by a delegation of Muslim elites headed by Aga Khan to the Governor General Lord Minto in October 1906 at Simla.[42] There was a fear that Muslim interests are likely to remain unrepresented in the limited representative Government because of the socio-political backwardness of the community relative to the Hindus. The demands of separate electorate and weightage in number in representation to all elected bodies for Muslims were accepted by Lord Minto and the same were incorporated in the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909.[43] The act apart from providing separate electorate for Muslims also ensured that seats be reserved for Muslims in the Municipal and District Boards, Provincial Councils and in the Imperial Legislature and that the number of seats reserved for Muslims be more than their relative population.[44] Cases of

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[39] Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947* 402 (1st ed. 1989, Penguin Books, New Delhi).

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 403.

[42] Simla Deputation, October 1, 1906 [Eugene F. Irschick, "Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement, 1905-1910 by Syed Razi Wasti", The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 24, No. 3 (May, 1965), pp. 538-540].

[43] The Government of India Act, 1909, 9 Edw. 7 c. 4 [Received assent on 25 May 1909] (popularly known as Morley-Minto Reforms).

[44] Legislative Councils (Act of 1909): Communal Proportion between Hindus and Muslims, Available at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/ambedkar_partition/tables/411a.html.

Cyprus and Bohemia were cited by Lord Minto as a precedent for introduction of separate electorate for the Muslims,[45] but this concession was the beginning of a constant source of communal strife from 1909 to 1947.

"Separate electorates" is the single largest factor responsible for fostering communalism in the country rather than this communal character resulting from some communities being majorities and some other minorities. It resulted in division of Hindus and Muslims into antagonistic groups who can no longer approach each other for their interests thus erasing the scope of any dialogue between the two. Thus, democratic politics in India had separateness in its roots since communal separate electorates were part of the first constitutional scheme that was a step towards a representative government.[46]

The Lucknow Pact of 1916 was the next major event in the relation of Hindus and Muslims and in the politics of communal representation.[47] It was an agreement between the Indian National Congress, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and the All-India Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Two major decisions were taken in this agreement.[48] One, no legislation affecting a community can be passed if three-fourths of the members of that community in the particular Council, Imperial and Provincial, oppose it, and, two, in the Imperial Legislative Council, one-third of the Indian elected members will be Muslims elected by separate electorates in the several Provinces, in nearly the same proportion as they were represented on the provincial legislative councils by separate Muslim electorates.[49] Both these clauses were accepted by the Government and incorporated in the Government of India Act, 1919 with a slight modification that prior approval of the Governor General was required for introduction of any legislation affecting the religion or religious rites and usages of any class of British subjects in India.[50]

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[45] http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/M_0396.htm.

[46] Mukul Kesavan, "SELECTIVE REPRESENTATION - Nationalism in a time of separate electorates", The Telegraph, 31st May, 2013, Available at: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1130531/jsp/opinion/story_16949368.jsp#.VGnPk_mUdwt.

[47] The negotiations started as a follow up of the demands of extension of separate representation and other safeguards for Muslim community made by Muslims to Lord Chelmsford after 19 members of the Imperial Legislative Council presented the Viceroy a memorandum demanding a reform of the Constitution in October 1916.

[48] http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/ambedkar_partition/411.html

[49] Representation of Muslims according to the Lucknow Pact, 1916, Available at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/ambedkar_partition/tables/411c.html

[50] *Supra* n. 48.

Also see: Communal Composition of the Legislatures, 1919, Available at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/ambedkar_partition/tables/411b.html

Though Jinnah himself preferred a joint electorate, he bowed down to the demands of the community: "I am not wedded to separate electorates, although I must say that the overwhelming majority of the Mussalmans firmly and honestly believe that it is the only method by which they can be sure."[51] The communal representation was rather considered a basic minimum for the constitution of Government to be acceptable to Muslims as advocated by the Muslim League in Jinnah's Fourteen Points of 1929.[52] Further, the League also demanded that the INC withdraw its opposition to the Communal Award and refrain from describing it as a negation of nationalism.[53]

Muslim League continued to press its demand for separate electorates and in the Third Round Table Conference of 1932, separate electorates were cited as a means to stop the political advancement along Hindu nationalistic lines, and enable the Muslims to counter Hindu domination everywhere.[54] The Communal Award of 1932[55] further expanded the separate electorate formula reserved for Muslims to other minorities and was nothing but 'a sign of the determination of the British Government to warp the Indian question towards electoral politics'.[56] Prasad Jinnah Accord of 1934 was an attempt to do away with separate electorates but the Government of India Act, 1935 retained separate electorates and in fact the numbers reserved only increased.

Further, separate electorates could only secure a descriptive representation rather than a substantive one which could actually represent the interests of the constituency and the Muslim leaders saw this mode of representation as stepping stone corridors of State power.[57]

The British extension of separate electorates to Muslims was just the beginning of separatism between Hindus and Muslims and led to creation of a Muslim identity in Indian politics and aligned the communities along communal lines with political camps pitted against each other

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[51] *Constitutional Proposals of the Sapru Committee* ¶150 (1st ed. 1945, Padma Publications Ltd., Bombay), Available at: http://archive.org/stream/saprucommittee035520mbp/saprucommittee035520mbp_djvu.txt

[52] Point 5- Representation of communal groups shall continue to be by means of separate electorate as at present, provided it shall be open to any community at any time to abandon its separate electorate in favor of a joint electorate.

[53] A letter of Jawaharlal Nehru to M. A. Jinnah (6 April 1938), Available at: http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415485432/43.asp

[54] Bidyut Chakrabarty, "The Communal Award of 1932 and Its Implications in Bengal", Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1989), pp. 493-523, p. 496.

[55] Made by the British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald on 16th August, 1932

[56] John Gallagher cited in Bidyut Chakrabarty, "The Communal Award of 1932 and Its Implications in Bengal", Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1989), pp. 493-523, p. 493.

[57] David Gilmartin, "Democracy, nationalism and the public: A speculation on colonial Muslim politics", South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, Vol. 14 (1), pp. 123-140, p. 126.

having partisan tendencies.[58] Congress attempts at Hindu-Muslim unity during times of communal strife were in vain. In this battle for separate electorates, the essence of securing minority representation and ensuring they feel included and protected in a political atmosphere dominated by Hindus was lost. Congress' opposition to separate electorates was seen as anti-Muslim and in any case they acceded to this demand as early as the Lucknow Pact of 1916. Mukul Kesavan rightly captures the hostility of this system of representation but acknowledges that the system alone was not the cause of alienation of Muslims:

"In the thirty years between 1909 and 1939, an original and novel nationalism founded on the remarkable claim of representing diversity fought a losing rearguard action against a constitutional provision that ring-fenced Muslims. Separate electorates aren't a sufficient explanation of the Congress's failure to draw in Muslims - its own hubris played a strong supporting role - but they were central to an institutionalization of communal politics which made the pluralist ambition of speaking for a subcontinent hard, if not impossible."[59]

Independent India might have succeeded in banishing the communal electorates but by surreptitiously bringing in communal elements in the political process, it has failed in removing communalism altogether.

VI. NOTIONS OF SECULARISM AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

While on one hand the politics of Muslim League hovered around constructing a Muslim religious identity and using it as a leverage to gain political power, the counter politics of Hindu Religionists, both Hindu Mahasabha and RSS, rested on exploitation of Hindu nationalism and portrayal of India as a Hindu Nation. What is interesting to note, however, is that both Hindu and Muslim nationalism developed along similar lines and were offshoots of the same organisation. It should also be noted that neither Muslim League nor Hindu Mahasabha and RSS fought British rule. Instead, they both joined hands with British during the Quit India Movement launched by the Congress in 1942. Hindu Mahasabha formed a coalition ministry with the Muslim League in Bengal and Sind and functioned for a year at a time which was critical in the history of Indian Independence Struggle.[60]

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[58] Zoya Khaliq Hasan, "Communalism and Communal Violence in India", Social Scientist, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Feb., 1982), pp. 25-39, p. 26.

[59] Mukul Kesavan, "SELECTIVE REPRESENTATION - Nationalism in a time of separate electorates", The Telegraph, 31st May, 2013, Available at: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1130531/jsp/opinion/story_16949368.jsp#.VGnPk_mUdwt.

[60] V. D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan Vol. 6* 479-80 (Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, Poona, 1963).

The Hindu Religionists of Hindu Mahasabha and RSS were as firm believers in the two-nation theory as leaders of Muslim League were.[61] However, to conceive of India without Islam is impossible for Islam in India is a fact of history and an intrinsic feature of the subcontinent's future.[62] The whole of Muslim minority in the subcontinent has been tarnished with the brush of communalism solely because of the success of Muslim League in the establishment of a Muslim State with the withdrawal of the British but a similar treatment has not been meted out to the communalism of Hindu Nationalist outfits or the compromised secular nationalism.[63]

The Indian polity was being communalized at the same time when the anti-colonial national identity was being formed and the Congress led national movement was as guilty of this communalisation as the religious nationalism.[64] Religious groups in the Indian subcontinent emerged as the strongest candidates for assertion of nationhood as is evidenced from the fact of Partition in 1947 but the claim of Hindu Nationalism of Hindutva being the sole marker of Indian identity met with a vehement opposition in the wider-ranging interpretations of Indian culture and history which had little to do with 'Hindu' characteristics.[65] But the way the idea of secularism took shape in the Indian polity can be attributed to the aggressive and hostile communal politics which was intertwined with religion.

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[61] The two-nation theory was founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and the major ideology of Muslim League and its demand for Pakistan.

Even V. D. Savarkar in the 19th Hindu Mahasabha session, Ahmedabad, declared:

"As it is, there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India, several infantile politicians commit the serious mistake in supposing that India is already welded into a harmonious nation, or that it could be welded thus for the mere wish to do so. These were well meaning but unthinking friends take their dreams for realities. That is why they are impatient of communal tangles and attribute them to communal organisations. But the solid fact is that the so-called communal questions are but a legacy handed down to us by centuries of cultural, religious and national antagonism between the Hindus and Moslems...Let us bravely face unpleasant facts as they are. *India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogenous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the main: the Hindus and the Moslems, in India.*" [Emphasis added]

V. D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan Vol. 6* 296 (Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, Poona, 1963).

[62] Ayesha Jalal, "Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia" in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (eds.), *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998-9), Available at: https://www.tcd.ie/iiis/documents/archive/pdf/communalismayesha.pdf, p. 2.

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] Achin Vanaik, "Reflections on Communalism and Nationalism in India", Available at: http://newleftreview.org/static/assets/archive/pdf/NLR19203.pdf, p. 3.

[65] *Ibid.*

VII. CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DEBATES ON SECULARISM AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Religion was at the forefront of discussions in the framing of the Indian Constitution. The idea of secularism took shape in the background of the religious ideologies, beliefs, and influences that were rampant during the freedom struggle. Secularism in India if of a unique composition and is a conglomerate of different ideologies mainly adapted to suit the political and social circumstances.[66]

The unique role religion played in the freedom struggle, necessitated discussions on not blindly importing the western notion of secularism of separation of religion from the State and resulted in a constitutional guarantee to all persons to freedom of conscience and free profession, *practice* and propagation of one's own religion. The demand to marginalise religion and grant only a narrow right to religious freedom was countermanded by the various voices who demanded that religion as a way of an Indian's life be acknowledged and the Constituent Assembly voted in favour of an 'equal respect'[67] theory of secularism rather than a 'no concern'[68] one.[69]

The present conception of Indian secularism may not be perfect and has certainly not been able to stem the spread of communalism in India but what one needs to acknowledge is that the failure was not the result of the communal parties alone but because of complex socio-economic conditions of the Indian polity. Be it the Muslim League's communalism which succeeded in breaking the Indian subcontinent or the crass majoritarian and xenophobic version of secularism which the Hindu Mahasabha or RSS swears by, the 'secular' Congress and other non-Sangh parties also have a share in the failure of Indian secularism.

The Constituent Assembly was in agreement on the necessity of establishing a secular State but there were constant clashes between the 'no concern' and 'equal respect' positions on secularism during the Constituent Assembly debates. Another question which cropped up in the discussions was one on whether religious freedom should be defined as a freedom to *worship* or as a freedom to the *practise* of religion.

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[66] William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* 6 (2004, Cambridge University Press).

[67] The equal respect theory of secularism implies that the State treats all religions on an equal respect basis and maintains equidistance from each religion.

[68] The no concern theory of secularism implies a definite separation of the State from religion and its institutions such that State stays away from all religions alike.

[69] Shefali Jha, "Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 30 (Jul. 27 - Aug. 2, 2002), pp. 3175-3180, p. 3176.

The primary argument from the 'no concern' camp was that Secular state must maintain a complete distance from religion and that it must be strictly confined to the private sphere since religion is an individual's personal belief system.[70] They stressed on the need to have the identity of an Indian as a citizen first and then as a member of a community. Radhakrishnan was of the view that nationalism should be the basis of modern life not religion for "the days of religious states are over".[71] For this side of the Constituent Assembly members since India had just begun its journey as a modern nation state, "religion, an obscurantist and divisive force, had no place".[72] There were demands from this faction to have an article clearly stating that State shall be separate from religious activities. In fact, Tajamul Husain demanded that not only should the right to religion be defined as the right to practise religion *privately* but also that religious instruction not be given in any educational institution.[73] While they supported an individual's right to religious freedom, they were against its inclusion as a fundamental right.[74] Thus, the demand from this group of members was to restrict religious freedom to *worship* alone in one's private sphere.

The major argument advanced by the 'equal respect' camp was that the western notion of Secularism was ill-suited to the Indian situation and that given the important part religion plays in the lives of most Indians, a characteristic Indian secularism be evolved, which makes the State respect all religions alike.[75] K M Munshi, a right leaning politician,[76] was one of the

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[70] *Ibid.*

[71] Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. II, 20th January, 1947, Available at: http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol2p1.htm

[72] Shefali Jha, "Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 30 (Jul. 27 - Aug. 2, 2002), pp. 3175-3180, p. 3176.

[73] Tajamul Husain: "I feel, Sir, that religion is a private affair between oneself and his Creator. It has nothing to do with others. My religion is my own belief, and your religion, Sir, is your own belief. Why should you interfere with my religion, and why should I interfere with your religion? Religion is only a means for the attainment of one's salvation." [See: Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. VII, 3rd December, 1948, Available at: http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol7p19.htm];

Another Muslim member from Bengal, Naziruddin Ahmad was of a similar view and stated: "I feel very strongly that religion should have nothing to do with politics: not that religion is to be ignored; but religion is a private matter and in public life we should cease to think in terms of communities. Whether in this Assembly or in public life outside, we are neither Hindus nor Muslims. In private life we should be devout Hindus or Muslims." [Emphasis supplied] [See: Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. VIII, 25th May, 1949, Available at: http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/constituent/vol8p8.html].

[74] Jaspat Roy Kapoor (United Provinces) and K. T. Shah (Bihar) were the main opponents of inclusion of religious freedom to practise one's religion as a fundamental right. See: Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. VII, 7th December, 1948, Available at: http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/constituent/vol7p21.pdf.

[75] Shefali Jha, "Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 30 (Jul. 27 - Aug. 2, 2002), pp. 3175-3180, p. 3176.

[76] Munshi was in Indian National Congress but separated from the Nehru-dominated (socialist) Congress Party and started the *Akhand Hindustan Movement* in 1959. He along with C. Rajagopalachari, founded the Swatantra

major proponents of this camp. Lakshmi Kant Maitra and H V Kamath were some of the other proponents of this position and asserted that the Indian state should regard India's religions and spiritual concepts and ideals and neither draw a rigid line between the state and religion nor deny anybody the right not only to profess or practise but also to propagate any particular religion.[77] The members of this camp wanted to cast the freedom of religion as a right to the *practise* of religion albeit with limitations rather than cast it in a manner that religion was sidelined completely. This group considered a forcible replacement of religion as the basis of a person's identity with the abstract identity of an ideal citizen of the Indian State as an attack on the autonomy of individuals.[78]

The 'equal respect' theory was presented as the one advocating tolerance and acceptance of all religions and faiths as against the 'no concern' theory which was alleged to be rooted in intolerance. P.K. Sen was of the view that a Secular Democratic Republic does not banish religion but only the conflicts between one religion and another.[79]

Krishna Chand Sharma from United Provinces offered an insight that not religion per se but its politicisation which resulted in communal violence and rather "Religion as such is the basis of all morality, all social and ethical values and all human institutions".[80] Jayaprakash Narayan, who refused to join the Constituent Assembly,[81] had a similar insight to offer that rather than a complete separation of religion from the State, the need of the hour was to

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Party, which was right-wing in its politics, pro-business, pro-free market economy and private property rights. Later, Munshi joined the Jan Sangh, a development from the Hindu Mahasabha.

[77] Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. VII, 6th December, 1948, Available at: http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol7p20a.htm

[78] Shefali Jha, "Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 30 (Jul. 27 - Aug. 2, 2002), pp. 3175-3180, p. 3177.

[79] Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. XI, 23rd November, 1949. Speech by Dr. P. K. Sen. Such was his faith in God that he felt, "Do we not believe that today when we are on the point of ushering forth this Constitution the same Providence which is hovering over us is present here, and if there be any danger, if there be anything untoward, there is He to take up the poison, to make this poison-free".

[80] Krishna Chand Sharma had a similar opinion:

"What is wrong with religion is not the religion itself but its wrong propagation or its propagation by inefficient or undesirable persons. Religion as such is the basis of all morality, all social and ethical values and all human institutions. I do not find what is wrong with religion itself."

Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. VII, 7th December, 1948, Available at: http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/constituent/vol7p21.pdf.

[81] Jayaprakash Narayan was of the opinion that after the partition, "what remains of that body is no longer capable of drafting the Constitution of a free India" and he wrote to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly to dissolve the assembly elected on a very restricted franchise. [See: Satya Prakash Malviya, "Towards better governance", The Tribune, 9th August, 1998, Available at: http://www.tribuneindia.com/1998/98aug09/sunday/head.htm]

prohibit the use of religious institutions for political purposes or the setting up of political organisations on a religious basis.[82]

The version of secularism that finally emerged was one which accommodated personal laws of different religious communities and in fact secularism sans protection to minority religions and cultural groups was seen to be majoritarianism.[83] The majoritarian sentiments did leave an indelible impression on the Indian polity and a majoritarian emphasis clearly occupies the heart of the Indian model of secularism and "the colonial predisposition towards organizing politics along lines of community has lived on in independent India".[84] Majority of the Constituent Assembly members were in favour of grant of special rights to minorities despite strong opposition by a few members who thought it would create hurdles in the path to national unity and promote anti-nationalistic view and communalism.[85] Given the cultural diversity and the communal political atmosphere during the independence struggle as well as the soaring religiosity of many Constituent Assembly members, the accommodative secular character of India's Constitution is a remarkable achievement.

VIII. WHAT GANDHI MEANT FOR INDIA SECULARISM

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a deeply religious person and a believer in the Golden Age of Hindu culture but unlike the militant Hindu nationalists, "his cultural nationalism was populist, syncretic, and distinctly anti-Western"[86]. Gandhi wrote in his autobiography, "I can say without slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion means."[87] For Gandhi, spiritual unity, communitarian harmony, and, the pursuit of God was the way to attain *swaraj* for the nation, communities and the individual.[88] Gandhi wanted a free India whose edifice was made of

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[82] Shefali Jha, "Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 30 (Jul. 27 - Aug. 2, 2002), pp. 3175-3180, p. 3177.

[83] Sanghamitra Padhy, "Secularism and Justice – A Review of Indian Supreme Court Judgements", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 39, No. 46/47 (Nov. 20-26, 2004), pp. 5027-5032, p. 5030.

[84] Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya, "The Politics of Indian Secularism", Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1992), pp. 815-853, p. 817.

[85] Collective rights in the nature of right to establish and administer educational institutions of their own was granted to both religious and linguistic minorities under Articles 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution.

See: Shefali Jha, "Rights versus Representation: Defending Minority Interests in the Constituent Assembly", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 38, No. 16 (Apr. 19-25, 2003), pp. 1579-1583, Section III, p. 1582.

[86] Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave- Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* 79 (1999, Princeton University Press, Princeton).

[87] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, Available at: http://www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/gandhiexperiments.pdf, p. 268.

[88] Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave- Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* 45 (1999, Princeton University Press, Princeton).

religious pluralism and his version of secularism implied assertion of the basic equality of all religions with use of religiosity.[89] He envisaged a secular state in which religion and spirituality is an intricate part of public as well as political life and where religious values are valued without allowing any one religion to dominate the discourse.[90]

Gandhi's secularism had people of different religions working side by side and this brotherhood of religious communities was to be founded on their respect for and pursuit of truth.[91] Gandhi, however, was cautious of the fact that in a society ridden with complex social divisions along religious, caste, and ethnic lines, communalism based on these would be a grave threat to the creation of a secular democratic State and considered a "political association based exclusively on adherence to a particular religion was worse than undemocratic".[92] Gandhi spoke from a position which commanded authority for by speaking in the language of religion, he could accommodate both the right and the left, and making Patel, Prasad and Purushottam Das of the right camp and Nehru of the left liberal camp work side by side.[93]

Gandhi was undoubtedly a religious Hindu but he was an Indian nationalist leader opposed to the radical and aggressive Hindu nationalism and it was this that led to his assassination on January 30, 1948 by a Hindu nationalist – Nathuram Godse (previously a member of RSS) who blamed Gandhi's appeasement of Muslims for the partition of British India. The contempt militant Hindu nationalists had for Gandhi and his opposition to their views is not a hidden fact. The complicity of V.D. Savarkar and the RSS in conspiring for Gandhi's assassination could not be proved but several accounts point to their privity in the murder.[94] Ramachandra Guha's research showed that even though the RSS was not directly implicated

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[89] William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* 6 (2004, Cambridge University Press).

[90] Matthew Bain, "Gandhi and Secularism", 27th May, 2009, Available at: http://gandhifoundation.org/2009/05/27/gandhi-and-secularism/.

[91] Lloyd I. Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *Explaining Indian Democracy: A Fifty Year Perspective, 1956-2006: Volume II: The Realm of Institutions: State Formation and Institutional Change* 233 (2008, Oxford University Press, India).

[92] Sadashiv Prabhakar Aiyar, *Studies in Indian Democracy* 12 (1965, Allied Publishers, Michigan).

[93] Prakash Chandra Upadhyaya, "The Politics of Indian Secularism", Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1992), pp. 815-853, p. 826.

[94] A.G. Noorani, "Savarkar and Gandhi's Murder", Available at: http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2919/stories/20121005291911400.htm; Pyarelal has recorded in his memoirs that "members of the RSS at some places had been instructed beforehand to tune in their radio sets on the fateful Friday for the 'good news', and sweets were distributed by the members at many places" ["The BJP and Nathuram Godse", 8th February, 2003, Available at: http://www.frontline.in/books/the-bjp-and-nathuram-godse/article4328688.ece]

in Gandhi's murder, Golwalkar had knowledge of the conspiracy and in fact a meeting of the RSS workers was convened in Govardhan on December 6, 1947 to discuss how to assassinate the leading persons of the Congress so as to get a hold on the public by terrorising them.[95] The RSS faced its first ban from February 1948 to July 1949 after the assassination of Gandhi.

However, it should be noted that Gandhi's version of pluralist nationalism has been critiqued by several scholars and Peter Van der Veer accuses Gandhi of aligning himself "with a long tradition of Hindu expansion that operates through hierarchical incorporation and assimilation but has, in the end, little to do with a pluralist acceptance of the equality of different traditions" which for him can be witnessed in Gandhi's movement for cow protection.[96] In fact, there is a Hindu bias in the Constitution of India which was not solely because of the militant Hindutva but due to the ideology propagated by secular leaders such as Gandhi.[97] Notwithstanding these criticisms Gandhi is one of the ideologues behind the 'equal respect' theory of secularism and is certainly to be credited for his discourse on communal harmony and Hindu Muslim unity in the country.

IX. CONCLUSION

Every individual personality in the group or nation movement has aspirations of his / her own. Such aspirations maybe secondary to the common object such group tries to achieve. But when the realization of a common goal seems obvious, the individual aspirations take a front seat and drive a movement, sometimes leading it to catastrophe even after attaining the goals. However, for those who are not involved in steering or leading a movement, what is primary is the recognition and dignity achieved through the lenses of one's own identity. A

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[95] Ramachandra Guha, "Golwalkar- The Guru of Hate", 28th November, 2006, Available at: http://www.countercurrents.org/comm-guha281106.htm.

[96] Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism : Hindus and Muslims in India* 95 (1994, University of California Press).
Bhikhu Parekh also critiques Gandhi:

"*Neither Gandhi nor many other Congress leaders could look upon the Muslims as anything other than ex-Hindu…The Muslims were little more than converted Hindus or ex-Hindus whose religion was but an icing on their essentially Hindu cake. And as for the British rule, it imported an alien civilisation unsuited to the Indian genius and which the culturally revitalised Hindu India must reject.*"

Brass further describes Gandhi's Hindu bias: "*As Gandhi himself was, in a sense, the most successful of the Hindu revivalist politicians, but his great stress in bringing the Hindu masses into participation in the nationalist movement, by infusing Indian nationalism with the symbols of Gita, the ethics of non-violence and the promise of Ram Rajya, was also his greatest failure, for his revivalism had no appeal to Muslims.*"

[See: Pritam Singh, "Hindu Bias in India's 'Secular' Constitution: Probing Flaws in the Instruments of Governance", Third World Quarterly, Vol. 26, No. 6 (2005), pp. 909-926, end note 4]

[97] Pritam Singh, "Hindu Bias in India's 'Secular' Constitution: Probing Flaws in the Instruments of Governance", Third World Quarterly, Vol. 26, No. 6 (2005), pp. 909-926, p. 921.

Muslim of Sindh was told by the political party which claimed to represent him that unless a separate nation for Muslims is created, he and his group will not be free from any oppression by the majority. The same followed in various other parts of the sub-continent. This resulted in the misuse of vulnerabilities by various ideological and political groups.

In this paper, we have attempted to understand and formulate the roles played by various political groups which served the interests and believed in the supremacy of one specific group or identity. We have looked at the roles played by All India Muslim League, the Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The ideological contribution by M K Gandhi and the Congress have also been looked at. The culmination of all the ideologies was seen at the Constituent Assembly which set a stage for the biggest clash of what the new nation (or rather, nations) should be. While we did manage to free ourselves from the rule of the British, our vulnerabilities did have a resounding victory and made the two nation theory a reality. Sixty seven years later, we struggle to free ourselves from the chains of our vulnerability with not much success, and the idea of an Indian National Identity is hurdled by various obstacles.

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