

THE INCLUSIVE AND THE EXCLUSIVE

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Dear brothers and sisters. Hindutva is a pluralistic, yet integrative, concept. Far from being divisive, as many, particularly the ‘secularists’ in Indian public life, would have us believe, Hindutva is what integrates this country. The proof and explanation for this pluralistic, assimilative and inclusive nature of Hindutva is not to be found in theory, or in politics, but in history, especially in Indian history as seen in comparison with the Semitic history.

I have been a student of Indian politics and history for quite some time, though I have no great training in the discipline. I have been more of an observer, an anxious observer, of things that go on around us. And, whatever historical perspective I have acquired is the result of my anxieties about the present. Contemporary anxieties make me look to the past, to try and find out whether there is anything at all in the past that may be relevant to what we are undergoing today, and the challenges that we are likely to face in the future.

And in this adventure of looking back, I always find an enormous divide between us as a society, as a people with specifically Indian civilisational and historical experiences, and the anglicised among us who speak on behalf of our society. This divide is very visible to me. The divide is as vast as the divide between the eastern and the Semitic. Because those who speak for us today are cast in the western mould, and are really aliens amongst us. And yet, they are our spokesmen.

STATE AND SOCIETY IN EAST AND WEST

Two distinct ways of life

In the history of human civilisation there have been two distinct ways of life – the eastern and the Semitic. If we look at the history

of India and of its people on the one hand and at the history of Semitic societies on the other, we find a glaring difference. In India, and generally in the east, the society and individual form the centre of gravity, the fulcrum around which the polity revolves, and the state is merely a residuary concept. On the other hand, in the Semitic tradition the state wields all the power and forms the soul and the backbone of the polity.

In India, temporal power fertilised the lowest units of society, which developed into a highly decentralised social set-up. This was the very reverse of the centralised power structures that evolved in the Semitic tradition of the west. We had decentralising institutions, of castes, of localities, of sects belonging to different faiths, of groups of people gathering around a particular deity, around a particular individual. And these decentralised localities, groups and sects had an amazing continuity and integration between them. Society was a collection of multitudes of self-contained social molecules, spontaneously linked together by socio-spiritual thoughts, symbols, centres of pilgrimage, and sages. While in the west the most important, and often the only, link between different institutions of the society was the state.

State in India was a residuary institution

Of course, the state also existed in India of the past, but only as a residuary institution. It had a very limited role to perform. Even the origin of the state is said to be in the perceived necessity of an institution to perform the residuary supervisory functions, which supervision perhaps became necessary because a small number of people could not harmonise with the rest in the self-regulating, self-operating and self-powered functioning of the society. The state was to look after the spill-over functions, with the exceptions that remained undigested by social self-regulation, that escaped the self-regulating mechanisms of the society. The Mahabharata, in the Santiparva, defines the functions of the state precisely thus. The state was to ensure that the one who strays away from public ethics does not tread on others.

There was perhaps no necessity for the state at one point in our social history. At least conceptually the Indian society did not

necessarily require the state for its functioning. Evolution and functioning of the society to a point where certain individuals came to be at cross-purposes with the society, because of the erosion of dharmic or ethical values, introduced the need for a limited arbiter to deal with the outlaws, with those who did not agree to be bound by dharma. That task was entrusted to the state. This appears to be the origin of the state here.

So the society or the group, at whatever level it functioned, was the dominant reality and the state was a residuary authority. The society had an identity distinct from the state. Social relations, religious and cultural bondages, transcended beyond the bounds of the state and statecraft.

In the west society subordinated itself to the state

People in the Semitic society of the west, on the other hand, seem to have burdened themselves with the state the moment they graduated from tribalism and nomadic life to a settled existence and began to perceive themselves as a society. There is no social history or civilisation of the west that predates the western state. The western civilisational history starts with the creation of the state. Before the state, there was only tribalism and barbarism; there was no civilisation or order. Thus the Semitic society of the west never knew how to live and self-regulate as a society. It never knew how to live except through the state and its coercive institutions.

The concept of self-regulation, the concept of dharma, the personal and public norms of action and thought that we have inherited from times immemorial, did not have any chance to evolve in the west. Instead what the west evolved was the “social contract” theory of the state. And this became the basis of the nation-state that developed later.

But even before that, a mighty state, a nation-less state had already evolved in the west. It was a state that cut across all nations, all societies, all ethnicities, all faiths, and all races. This was the kind of state developed by the Romans. The statecraft of the Romans purveyed power and power alone and nothing else. Later, after the collapse of the nation-less state, tribal nationalism began to be assertive. This nation-state, with socio-religious sanctity for pursuing even unguided state power, became the model for the modern west.

Far from being an arbiter, the state became the initiator, the fulcrum of the society.

Even religion acquired stately attributes

Western society thus became largely a state construct. Even geography and history began to follow state power. In the scheme of things, the king symbolised total power, the army became crucial to the polity, and the police indispensable. The throne of the king became even more important than the Church, and his word more important than the Bible, forcing even the Church to acquire stately attributes and begin competing with the state.

That is why the first Church was founded in Rome. Because of the social recognition of state power and the importance that it had acquired, religion had to go to the seat of the state. That is how Rome, and not Bethlehem, became the centre of Christian thought. The Church developed as a state-like institution, as an alternative and a competing institution. The Church began to mimic the state, and the Archbishop competed with the King. And finally religion itself became a competitor of the state.

Naturally there were conflicts between these two powerful institutions – between the state and the Church, and between the King and the Archbishop. Both owed allegiance to the same faith, the same book, the same prophet; and yet they could not agree on who should wield ultimate power. They fought in order to decide who amongst them would be the legitimate representative of the faith. And, in their fight both invoked the same God.

The result was a society that was at war with itself: A society in which the stately religion was at war with the religious state, and the Archbishop with the King. The result also was centralism and exclusivism, not only in thought, but also in the institutional arrangements. Out of such war within itself did the western society evolve its centralist and exclusivist institutions that are now peddled as the panacea for the ills of all societies.

Unbridled state soon became exclusivist and unitary

As the west rapidly evolved a theocratic state, it ruled out all plurality in thought and fora. There could not be any doubt, there could

not be a second thought competing with the one approved and patronised by the state, and there could not even be a second institution representing the same faith. So the possibility of different saints, or different religions, or different attitudes to life evolving, much less operating, in the same society was made minimal, and even impossible. No one could disagree with the established doctrine without inviting terrible retribution. Whenever any semblance of plurality surfaced anywhere, it was subjected to immediate annihilation.

The entire social, political and religious power of the western society gravitated towards and became slowly and finally manifest in the unitary state. Plurality thus is not one of the features of western society. On the other hand it was the main casualty of the development of western civilisation. The west, in fact, spawned a power-oriented, power-driven, and power-inspired civilisation, which sought and enforced exclusive thoughts, books, and institutions, and these were then sought to be legitimised by the idea of a single-dimensional universalism.

Society then rose and fell with the state

This unity of the Semitic state and the Semitic society proved to be its strength as a conquering power. But this was also its weakness. Because, the moment the state became weak or it collapsed anywhere, the society there also followed the fate of the state.

In India, society was supported by institutions other than the state. Not just one, but hundreds and even thousands of institutions flourished within the polity, and none of them had or needed to use any coercive power. Indian civilisation, her culture, arts, music, and the corporate life of her people were not handed over to the state for control and regulation. The guardianship of the people and of the public mind was not entrusted to the state. In fact, it were the sages, and not the state, who were seen as the guardians of the public mind.

When offending forces, whether Sakas or Huns or any others, came from abroad, this society – which was not organised as a powerful state, with a powerful army, and with arms and ammunition of a kind that could meet such vast brute forces coming from outside – found its institutions of state severely damaged. But, that did not lead to the collapse of the society. The society survived

even when the institutions of the state collapsed. It not only survived, but in course of time it also assimilated the alien groups and digested them into inseparable parts of the social stream. Later invaders into India were not mere gangs of armed tribes, but were highly motivated theocratic war-mongers. The Indian states, which were mere residues of the Indian society, caved in before them, too. But the society survived even these crusaders.

In contrast, the state-oriented and state-initiated civilisations, societies and cultures of the west invariably got annihilated with the collapse of the state. Whether it were the Romans, the Greeks or the Christians, or the later followers of Islam, or the modern Marxists, none of them could survive as a viable people, society or civilisation, once the state they had constructed collapsed.

Unitary states led their societies to perpetual wars

The Semitic society organised itself as and around a state, handed over power to an army, and then one man could direct the destruction and annihilation of everything that came in the way. The powerful states, consequently, were at war with one another. They were in a perpetual state of war. And the war was not between two kings, it was between the societies. Entire societies were at war. And there was no dharma in such war.

In India, on the other hand, even war was fought by both sides according to the dharmic norms. The winner was bound by dharma not to kill the vanquished. Dharma in such situations was often practiced unilaterally, and the vanquished enemy was spared even if he were an alien who would not follow the dharmic path. It was thus that Mohammed Ghori was defeated 17 times but escaped unscathed after every defeat. But on the eighteenth attempt Ghori won; and the treatment he meted out to the defeated stands out as a stark example of the difference between the Indian and the Semitic ways.

When a Semitic king won and wiped out another, it was not just another state that was wiped out, but all social bearings and moorings of the society, all its literature, art, music, culture and language, were wiped out. Everything relating to the society was extinguished. In the west of today, there are not even the remnants of what would have been the products of western civilisation 1500

years ago. The Semitic virtue rejected all new and fresh thought. Consequently, any fresh thought could prevail only by annihilating its predecessor. At one time only one thought could hold sway. There was no scope for a second.

Indian society on the other hand assimilated and flourished

This was the situation in the west. On the other hand in the east, more specifically in India, there prevailed a society and a social mind which thrived and happily grew within a multiplicity of thoughts, which in fact welcomed every new thought, and which invited noble thoughts from all over the Universe. “*Ano bhadrah kratavo yantu visvatah*” – let noble thoughts come in from all directions of the universe – thus went the Rigvedic invocation.

We, therefore, welcomed all, whether it were the Parsis who came fleeing from the slaughter of Islamic theocratic marauders and received protection here for their race and their religion, or the Jews who –slaughtered and maimed everywhere else in the world – found a secure refuge here along with their culture, civilisation, religion and the book, or even the Shia Muslims, who fearing annihilation by their co-religionists sought shelter in Gujarat and constituted the first influx of Muslims into India. These were all refugee people, refugee religions, cultures and civilisations, which came here, took root, and established a workable, amicable relationship with their neighbourhood. They did not –even now they do not –find this society alien or foreign. They could grow as constituent parts of an assimilative society, and under an umbrella thought, which appreciated their different ways and with which they too could associate happily.

When first Christianity, and later Islam, came to India as purely religious concerns, they too found the same assimilative openness. The early Christians and Muslims arriving on the west coast of India did not find anything hostile in the social atmosphere here. On the other hand, they found a fertile social landscape where their religions could grow as near cousins of the native thought. If anything, they found a welcoming and receptive atmosphere in which the Hindus would happily offer them temple lands for building a church or a mosque.

From those days till now the native approach to these thoughts has remained unchanged. Abdus Samad told us the other day, that in the localities of Tamilnadu temple lands are offered even today for construction of mosques.¹ It was only the later theocratic incursions by the Mughals and the British which introduced theological and cultural maladjustments between the assimilative and inclusive native ways and the exclusive and annihilative instincts of Islam and even Christianity. Till this occurred, the native society assimilated the new thoughts and fresh inputs, and had no difficulty in keeping intact its social harmony within the plurality of thoughts and faiths.

Respect for diversity is inherent in the Indian ways

This openness for foreign thoughts, faiths and people did not happen because of any legislation, or because of a secular constitution, or the teachings of secular leaders and parties. We did not display this openness because of any civilising inspiration and wisdom which we happened to have received from the west, or because of the secular orientation which the west had patented and supplied with its English education, or because of the western statecraft, European mannerism and English sophistication that some of us believe to have acquired over the years.

In terms of our own contemporary values, we had a great conviction in the plurality of life, thought and systems, and we respected this plurality in practice and in our day-to-day life. That level of conviction in and respect for plurality of life and thought the west could not have even conceived of, nor can it conceive of it even today.

The fact being this, we have been made to believe the contrary. We are somehow made to believe, and we do, that we have become a somewhat civilised people and have come to learn to live together in harmony with others, only through the civilisation, the language, the statecraft and the societal influence of the west! It is a myth that today has become an inseparable component of the intellectual baggage that most of us carry.

¹[See, Abdus Samad, 'Coming Together', in this volume, p.93-118.- ed]

Indian society survived the Semitic onslaughts

When the Semitic forces and statecraft, powered by brutally exclusivist religious fanaticism, invaded us and extinguished our states and institutions, our society could still survive and preserve its multi-dimensional life largely intact. This is because society was not totally identified with the state. It was not a mere alter ego of the state. Nor was any ingredient of social life – like music, the arts, culture, or literature – dependent on the state for its survival. The society had its own means and methods of preserving and promoting them. This is how Indian society, like her cousins in the south and south-east Asia, survived the Semitic onslaught.

We are not conscious of the true import of our own roots, our own civilisation and culture, our own educational institutions, and other systems. We seem to be much more conscious of the impact of western civilisation and western institutions on us. Today we see and perceive ourselves – our institutions, our methods of working, our faith, our society, in fact, all that we are – through western idiom, language, and methodology, and through the historical records, teachings and writings of the west. We read Gita and Upanishads, and Ramayana and Thirukkural, in English. We are entrapped in the western idiom and only within that idiom we find meanings for our own concepts.

Yet we have survived, although with an extraordinary sense of guilt, although as a society yet to be fully civilised in our own eyes. This is because, as the state in India quickly became an instrument in the hands of the invaders and colonisers, we were saddled not just with an unresponsive state, but a hostile one. A state-less society in India would have fared better. But for hundreds of years, we suffered a state in India which was hostile to the nation, which was hostile and annihilative of its own subjects. For hundreds of years we had a state, which at best had nothing to do with the society, and which at worst, was annihilative of the society.

Such a paradox has never and nowhere existed in the history of the world. When we look at the history of any other country, we find that whenever an overpowering alien state came into being there, it wiped out everything that it saw as the native thought and institutions. And if the natives insisted on holding on to their thought and institutions, then the natives themselves were wiped out. But

we, and the Indian society, survived under an alien and hostile state for hundreds of years. Though indeed we have barely survived. We have largely lost any understanding of, and any sense of pride in, ourselves. We, as a people and a civilisation, have lost almost all initiative and self-confidence.

And we continued to shelter the persecuted of the world

How did the assimilative Hindu cultural convictions fare in practice, not just in theory and in the archives? This is probably best seen by comparing the Iranians of today with the Parsis of India. They belong to the same race. The Parsis, a few thousand of them who came here and who are now two hundred thousand, have lived in a congenial atmosphere. They have not been subjected to any hostility, nor to any influence, temptation, threat or coercion to convert, or to give up their cultural or even racial distinction. They have had every chance, as much as the natives had, to prosper and evolve. And they did. They have lived and prospered here for 1500 years, more or less the same way as they would have lived and prospered in their own lands, had those lands not been ravaged by Islam.

Compare an average Parsi with an average Iranian. Does the Persian society today display any native attributes of the kind that the Parsis, living in the Indian society, have managed to preserve? One can find no trace of those original native attributes in the Iranian society today. Because not only the native institutions, native faiths and native literature, but also the native mind and all vestiges of native originality, were wiped out from the Persian society by Islam. That society was converted and made into a uniform outfit in form, shape and mental condition, in which condition alone Islam would accept it.

What Islam did to the natives in Egypt, Afghanistan and Persia, or what Christianity did to the Red Indians in America, or what Christianity and Islam did to each other in Europe, or the Catholics did to Protestants, or the Sunnis did to Shias and the Kurds and the Ahmedias, or what the Shias did to the Bahais, was identical. In every case what was attempted was the annihilation of the other – annihilation of other thoughts, other thinkers and other followers. The message of the west was unequivocal uniformity and, in default, annihilation. The same message dominated the minds and

hearts of the more recent followers of marxism also. The essential thrust of the Semitic civilisational effort is to enforce uniformity, and failing that, to annihilate.

How can the west claim that it taught us how to live, and how to lead a pluralistic life? If you look at history, you find that they were the ones who could not, and never did, tolerate any kind of plurality, either in the religious or the secular domain. If it has dawned upon them today that they have to live with plurality, it must be because of the violence they have had to commit against themselves and each other. The mass-slaughter which the western society has been subjected to by the adherents of different religious thoughts and by different tyrants is unimaginable; perhaps they are now sick of this slaughter and violence. But the view we get, and are asked to subscribe to, is that they, the west, were a peaceful society, and we never knew how to live at peace with ourselves and our neighbours, they were civilised and we were brutes, they were literate and we were unlettered. It is a great paradox!

Semitic exclusivism ultimately overpowered India

The foundation of the west and the western system is laid on temporal power. For acceptance and survival in this system, even religion had to marry and stick to temporal authority, at the cost of losing its spiritual moorings. It was with this power—first the state power, which later got supplemented and substituted by commercial power, which still later got converted into technological power, all of which were sharpened by political, economic and war diplomacy of a kind unknown to the east—that the west was able to establish its dominance. This brute dominance was clothed in the garb of modernity and presented as the civilisation of the world. The aggressively organised western society, through its powerful arm of the state, was able to overcome and subordinate the expressions of the self-governing decentralised society of the east that did not care to have the protection of a centralised state.

Our society, unorganised in the physical sense, although it was much more organised in a civilisational sense, had a more evolved mind. But it did not have the muscle; it did not have the fire power. Perhaps because of the Buddhist influence, our society acquired disproportionately high Brahmatejas, Brahminical piety and authority,

which eroded the *Kshatravirya*, the temporal war-making power. So it caved in and ceded temporal authority to the more powerful state and the statecraft that came from outside. The society that caves in is, in terms of the current global rules, a defeated society. This society could not produce or generate the kind of self-confidence which is required in the modern world.

EVOLUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN AND THE ISLAMIC STREAMS

Christian state evolved from war to commerce

But continuing with the evolution of the state and society in the west, there was a time, as I said, when the concept of the nation or the society had no bearing there at all, it was the state which was the most powerful institution of the west. Afterwards, the concept of the nation-state evolved. The nation-state was so powerful, that other states, like ours, could not stand against it, and when the nation-state concept was powered by religious exclusivism, there was no equal to it at all.

But religion, when it acquired the state, became the first victim of its very acquisition. Christianity suffered from the Christian state. It had to struggle not only against Islamic States and Islamic society, but also against itself – so it had to undergo a process of moderation. First, it underwent dissent within itself. And then it experienced renaissance through arts, music and culture. Thus Christianity was able to overcome the explosive and centrifugal effect of theocratic statecraft, by slowly trying to evolve as a society not entirely identified with the state.

This happened through concerted efforts and also through natural development. First the state began to dominate over the Church on the principle of separation between the religious and temporal authorities. The result was the evolution of the secular state. Thus the king wrested the secular power from the Archbishop. Then through democratic movements following the French revolution, the people wrested power from the king. And later commerce began to invade public life as the prime thrust of the western society.

The theocratic state abdicated in favour of a secular state, the secular state gave way to democracy, and later democracy gave way

to commerce, and then power shifted from commerce to technology. And now in the west, the state and the society are largely powered by commerce and technology. The west is even prepared to give up the concept of the nation-state to promote commerce, and technology that advances commerce. Look at the consolidation that is taking place between Mexico, Canada and the United States of America around trade, and the kind of pyramidal politico-economic consolidation that is taking place in western Europe.

All this is oriented towards only one thing – commerce. Newer technologies, lower tariffs, higher standard of living and greater consumption, all are designed for the sake of greater commerce. So slowly the west has finally slipped into commerce as the main stay of its civilisation. The west has passed through many stages to arrive at this destination. There has been a measure of evolution or change in the western society. It has not been stagnant.

Islam remained unchanged

However, as far as the Islamic world is concerned, it is the story of 1,500 hundred years of unmitigated stagnation. There has never been an internal or international attempt – any successful attempt – to start the flow. It has not been possible in that society. Anyone who attempted to start even a variant of the mainstream flow – anyone who merely attempted to re-interpret the same book and the same prophet – was disposed of with such severity that it set an example and a warning to anyone who would dare to cross the line. Some, who merely said that it was not necessary for the Islamic Kingdom to be ruled by the Prophet's own descendants, were wiped out. They just could not exist. Some others said that the Prophet himself may come again – not that somebody else might come, but the Prophet himself may again be reborn. They were also wiped out. The Sunnis, the Shias, the Ahmedias, the Bahais – all of whom trusted the same prophet, revered the same book and were loyal to the same revelation – were all physically and spiritually maimed.

So, the Islamic society, since the earliest times, has proved itself incapable of producing an internal evolution. It is incapable of change, internally legitimised change, as every change is instantly regarded as an act of desertion and apostasy. Every change was and is resisted, and successfully so, by bloodshed. Even the change from

pre-Islamic religions to Islam was accompanied by enormous bloodshed, and so were the changes from Islam to Christianity and vice-versa.

In contrast, the Hindu ethos changed continuously. Though, it was always change with continuity: from ritualistic life, to agnostic Buddhism, to the Ahimsa of Mahavira, to the intellect of Sankara, to the devotion of Ramanuja, and finally to the modern movements of social reform. In India, all these changes have occurred without the shedding of a single drop of blood. Islam, on the other hand retains its changelessness, despite the spilling of so much blood all around. It is the changelessness of Islam – its equal revulsion towards dissent within and towards non-Islamic thoughts without – that has made it a problem for the whole world.

Unreformed Islam is a problem especially for India

The encounter between the inclusive and assimilative heritage of India and the exclusive Islam – which had nothing but theological dislike for the native faiths – was a tussle between two unequals. On the one side there was the inclusive, universal and spiritually powerful, but temporally unorganised, native Hindu thought. And on the other side there was ranged the temporally organised and powerful, but spiritually exclusive and isolated, Islam. Islam subordinated, for some time and in some areas, the Hindu temporal power, but it could not erode Hindu spiritual power. If anything, the Hindu spiritual power incubated the offending faith and delivered a milder form of Islam – Sufism. However, the physical encounter was, as Will Durant testifies, one of the bloodiest in human history. We survived this test by fire and sword. But the battle left behind an unassimilated Islamic society within India. The problem has existed since then, to this day.

But, anyone who thought that the traditional Muslim way of thinking, with its sanctified dislike for non-Islamic faiths, is a problem was regarded as communal till the day before yesterday. No one, neither the political leaders nor the independent intellectuals, could even talk about this issue. It was such a sensitive subject. December 6, 1992 was able to deliver at least this one message: that we can now talk about this subject.

Hindus have always been sensitive about their universal outlook. They are scared of someone calling them narrow-minded. The greatest insult a Hindu can face, it seems, is to be accused of being narrow-minded. A Hindu will do anything—including spiritual suicide—to be certified as a “liberal and broad-minded” person. Because of this weakness, Hindu society voluntarily embraced intellectual dishonesty by accepting that the exclusivist aspects of Islam, unexamined and untempered, were compatible with a multi-religious social structure. The question itself was avoided. All debate on the issue was shunned. But we need to talk about it openly, and talk not only amongst ourselves, but also with the Muslims. We must communicate it to them that they are in danger of becoming isolated in the world unless they rethink their views about themselves and about the non-Islamic faiths.

The west has begun to recognise the problem

The Hindu renaissance in India, heralded by the Ramajanmabhoomi movement, is the Indian response to a global evolution, which calls for a review of the conservative and extremist Islamic attitudes towards non-Islamic faiths and societies. The world is now concerned with the prospect of extremist Islam becoming a problem for the whole world by sanctifying religious terrorism. The west was trying to cover up all this for a long time. So long as the red flag was flying atop the Kremlin, they were trying to project communism as the greatest enemy of world peace. But that has changed now.

When communism collapsed, extremist Islam with its terrorist tendencies instantly emerged on the mind of the west as the major threat to the world. The west understands only one lesson: it understands only a threat to itself, to its survival. When the threat came from communism, the whole effort of the west was on containing communism. Communism, therefore, was intensely analysed, studied, and exposed. But now that communism is gone, where does the next threat to the west come from? Of course, commercially the west today occupies such a pivotal position that there is no question of any commercial threat. The west also faces no threat from the military prowess of others, nor from the atom bombs and diverse other weapons of mass destruction. In all this the west, as of now, has no equal. The threat therefore comes only from fanaticism

and terrorism purveyed by extremist Islam. The west is seriously concerned about this danger.

The west allied with Islamic fundamentalism to fight communism

The west originally promoted Islam and Islamic fundamentalism, against the fanaticism of communism. Because the west knew it could match communism in the market place, in technology, in commerce, and even in war, but it had no means of combating communism on the emotive plane. So they structured a green Islamic belt – from Tunisia to Indonesia – under the communist societies, to serve as a bulwark against Marxist thought. Extremist Islam was thus defended by the benevolence of the west. In the post-war global alignments that took place in the forties, the west made Islamic extremism an ally in its fight against communism.

Let me relate an instance from history to show how Islamic theocracy and politics came to be regarded as an ally by the west. You must have heard of Gilgit. Gilgit was part of Jammu and Kashmir, which itself was carved out of Punjab by the British and sold to Gulab Singh, the grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in 1846. The territory of Jammu and Kashmir was sold for the price of one crore rupees. But Gulab Singh was found to be so good by the British, that they accepted only 75 lakh rupees from him and gave him a discount of 25 lakh rupees. This is how the state of Jammu and Kashmir was created. But, when the British sold the territory, they took Gilgit on lease from Gulab Singh.

Thus the British government sold the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, but took a small part of it, the part called Gilgit, on lease. Because, from Gilgit they could spy into Tashkent. You only need a powerful telescope to look into Tashkent from Gilgit. With a telescope you can actually see the movement of men and vehicles there.

On achieving independence, the Indian government became the successor government to the British, and thus the lessee of the Gilgit territory. Later, when on October 23, 1947 Maharaja Hari Singh, the grandson of Gulab Singh, signed the accession treaty with India, the Indian government also became the owner of the whole of the Jammu and Kashmir territories. It meant that Gilgit was owned by India as the owner, and was also possessed as the lessee. Therefore, the British government ought to have handed over Gilgit to India.

But the British government instructed the English commander in Gilgit to lower the Union Jack and hoist the Pakistan flag. Because, the west had decided that India was not going to be in the western block against communism, and Pakistan was going to be. At that time SEATO, the western military alliance into which Pakistan entered later, had not even been conceived. We were still in 1947, the SEATO was a product of the 1950's. So some years ahead of even the conception of the SEATO, the newly created Pakistan was already seen to be a part of the western alliance against communism. And, India obviously had been classified as a part of the communist sphere of influence.

This event is critical in my perception. Later the western countries wooed many Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries through a multiplicity of military and diplomatic alliances. The assumption was that Islam and the Islamic society were impervious to any other thought, and certainly to a godless thought like Marxism. That is how the west made Islam a partner in its fortifications against communism. Every other ideology has been subjected to merciless analysis and criticism by the west, but excepting a handful of Marxists in France no western intellectual has felt encouraged to undertake a study of Islam during almost five decades of the cold war. No one did.

Collapse of communism has broken the alliance

But now after the collapse of communism, the entire west is directing its energies to a study of this society of Islam, which could keep itself closed for 1500 years. The west is now beginning to enquire how the Islamic society could live in the manner directed by one man, by the manner how he walked, how he ate, and how he spoke, 1500 years ago. And that manner binds it to the last man even today! How is it that the statecraft, the society, its outlook, its relationship with others, everything is decided by what he had said fifteen centuries ago?

He commanded very clearly, "Don't befriend non-Muslims, don't have any social relations with them." And till now the traditional Muslim society is averse to interacting with non-Muslims, it detests not just non-Islamic thoughts, but even the Islamic variants

that stray from the conservative traditions. It, consequently, has become a stagnant pool. This stagnation helped the west so long as communism was a force. Now the west is keen to study what kind of phenomenon it is.

The anxiety of the west stems from its security concerns. The west is not motivated by any human concern for the Islamic people who have lived under stagnation for centuries. The west is concerned because Islam and the Islamic society may now prove to be a danger to the west. The west is now terrified of what would happen if, for instance, Iran acquires an atom bomb today or a Gadaffi does so tomorrow. What would happen to the west, then? So, in self-defence, the west is now viewing extremist Islam as a major threat to world peace.

The Islamic fundamentalist threat is also forcing the United States of America and the countries of western Europe to change their policy towards India. Without anyone asking for it, the United States has dropped its policy of international arbitration on Kashmir and substituted it with the bilateral processes spelled out in the Simla agreement. Britain and other countries have followed the line set by the United States. And the Carnegie Endowment studies on policy perspectives for Indo-US relationship have begun to find a commonality of interest between India and the United States against Islamic fundamentalism.

India is, whether by choice or by compulsion, a part of the evolving worldwide strategy against Islamic fundamentalism. And it is not only the west that is ranged against Islamic fundamentalism. Even Islamic states like Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and also the Palestine Liberation Organisation itself, are scared of fundamentalist Islam. Islamic nations of the former Soviet Union too are turning fundamentalist. It is a global phenomenon. The problem is not confined or confinable to India.

India has to counter Islamic fundamentalism

We must realise that we have a problem on hand in India, the problem of a stagnant and conservative Islamic society. But, secular leaders and parties tell us that the problem on our hands is not Islamic fundamentalism, but the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha and the Bharatiya Janata Party. This view is good

only for gathering votes. The fact is that we have a fundamentalist Muslim problem, and our problem cannot be divorced from the international Islamic politics.

What is the best way of dealing with that problem? Is the problem soluble, or is it insoluble? In 1947 we could at least identify the areas where the Muslims were in a majority, and whether we liked it or not, we had to acquiesce in the partitioning of the Muslim majority areas from the country. And we thought that the problem, of a magnitude that this society had never faced earlier, had been overcome. We were all sad about the partition, but we also accepted the inevitability of partition. But even partition did not solve the problem. It kept lingering. After 1947 how has this problem developed again, and how have we dealt with it? What is the basis for solving this problem? These are the questions that we have to face today.

INDIA AND ISLAM

India alone stood firm against the Islamic invasions

To understand the problem and to undertake the task of solving it successfully, we must know the nature of Hindu society and its encounter with Islam in India. I will try to explain how, as compared to other nations that faced Islam, ours has been a different experience. As a nation, we are heckled by the secularist historians and commentators: "You are caste-oriented, you are a country with 900 languages and most of them with no script, you can't even communicate in one language, you don't have a common religious book which all may follow, you are not a nation at all. In contrast look at the unity of Islam and its brotherhood." But, this apparently unorganised and diverse society is perhaps the only society in the world that faced and survived the Islamic theocratic invasion.

We, the Hindu nation, have survived because of the very differences that seem to divide us. It is in some ways a mind boggling phenomenon: how we survived the invasion of Islam for 500 to 600 years. No other society survived. The whole of Arabia, which had a very evolved civilisation, was run over in a matter of just 20 years after Prophet Mohammed. And Persia collapsed within 50 years. Buddhist Afghans put up a brave resistance for 300 years. But, later they also collapsed. In all of these countries today there

remains nothing pre-Islamic worth the name. They have probably retained some place names here or there, or some broken down architectural monuments from their pre-Islamic past.

How did our society survive the Islamic onslaught? We have survived not only physically, but intellectually too. We have preserved our culture. The kind of music that was heard 1500 years ago is heard even today. Much of the literature too remains available, along with the original phonetic intonations. Even unwritten oral traditions and oral literature continue to exist. There are still households that continue to preserve and propagate their own versions of the Ramayana. These are oral versions, not written down. Mothers teach these versions to their sons and daughters, who tell these to the grandsons and granddaughters, and thus the varied versions of the legend keep going on. I have heard one such version of the Ramayana from my mother.

So the Indian society continued to be functional, without a protective state, and even under a hostile and annihilative state. Because, its soul did not reside in an organised state, but in an organised national consciousness, in shared feelings of what constitutes human life in this universe that happens to be such a wonderfully varied manifestation of the divine, of Brahman.

Even the converts remained rooted in the mother society

It is not that only the Hindu elements in the society survived, even the converted Muslims – those from amongst us who had to convert to Islam – remained tied to the mother society. The umbilical cords could just not be snapped. Conversions were effected largely through physical pressure and violence on individuals, or by means of corruption, or through the agency of Hindu dissenters. But even the converts did not disown their mother society. This is a peculiarity of India. Conversions of the kind which took place elsewhere, conversions which uprooted the converts from their civilisational and social moorings, could not be organised here at any large scale. Social bondage, between the mother Hindu society and the converts, continued to exist. This is the thread, the thread of continuity between the Hindu society and the Muslim converts, that should have been emphasised. We should have emphasised the common ances-

try, the common castes, languages and culture. But this commonalty is precisely what we tried to ignore and suppress.

We do not know what the civil law of the Persians was before the Islamic advent; because, at one stroke everything there became Islamic and the entire society changed. Not even one soul there could resist the new imposition, and whosoever resisted had to flee to Gujarat for survival. Islamic law substituted whatever social law the Persians had. But in India the society of Muslim converts continued to follow the Hindu social law of their area.

In fact, it is wrong to talk of a 'Muslim society' in India, because in India nowhere was there an exclusive society of Muslims, cut-off from the Hindus of their locality and region, till the pan-Islamic organisations like the Muslim League and the British made the Muslims, after over a hundred years of non-Mughal rule, feel that they were a different society. There had always been people in India who felt that their religion was different from, and even that their religion was superior to, that of the others. The Vaishnavas have a feeling that their religion is superior to that of the Saivas, and there are Saivas who feel they are superior to the Vaishnavas. We always have had such differences, and the converted Muslims would have had similar feelings of difference, which would not have in any case made them a different society or a nation. It should be remembered that Indian Muslims had little in common with the Mughals. The Mughals were foreigners, of alien stock, while at least nine out of ten Indian Muslims have Indian blood running in their veins.

Muslim converts continued to follow Hindu customary law

For the last two or three years I have been studying the condition of the so-called 'Muslim society' in India before the coming of the British. I find that already in 1772, even before the British took over the administration of any major area in India, there was a regulation passed by the British government authorising the East India Company to administer India. The East India Company was not a government, but it was virtually made the Government of India. And a charter was given to the East India Company to apply Islamic law to the Muslims and Hindu law to the Hindus. The company was also told that in cases where the Hindus and the

Muslims were engaged in some mutual litigation, the law of the defendant was to be applied.

This was the three line civil code of the Company. But when the courts began to implement this law, they found that in most of the areas Hindu customs prevailed even amongst the Muslims. The Muslims were customarily not governed by Muslim law, the Shariat. The Shariat seemed to be especially inapplicable in matters concerning property disputes and social conflict. Different courts repeatedly found this. There are cases of some Islamic communities amongst whom even the Quran was not known. The only literature that was known in the Kutchi Memon community, for instance, was a book called *Dasavatara*. And, in that book nine avatars – the nine avatars of Vishnu up to Srikrishna – were common with the Hindus. It was only in the last avatara that there was a difference. In the *Dasavatara* of the Kutchi Memons the tenth avatara was mentioned as ‘Ali’, amongst the Hindus the tenth Avatara is called ‘Kali’. This is a striking illustration of the social and cultural integration that existed and was preserved in India between Hindus and Muslims through centuries, notwithstanding the fanatical statecraft of many of the Mughal emperors.

The intense socio-cultural integration that existed between the Hindus and the Muslims in India often got reflected in the findings of the courts. Let me list some of the more striking finding recorded by the British judiciary in India in the period prior to 1937:

- i. The local Hindu Law principle of Marumakkathayam was held to prevail over the Shariat among the Moplah Muslims of Malabar.
- ii. In Punjab and the North-West Frontier Provinces too local customs prevailed over the Shariat.
- iii. In Punjab, the custom of professed Mohammedans not to allow a share to a widow in the property of her husband prevailed over the Shariat.
- iv. In Punjab the courts recognised a widely prevalent custom among the Muslim landowners of the province, according to which widows took a life estate in the whole property, as in Hindu law, instead of settling on a specific and absolute share in the inheritance according to the Shariat.
- v. In the Oudh province also the recognised custom among the

Muslims was for the widows to take a life interest in the whole property as per Hindu Law, instead of a specific and absolute share as per the Shariat.

vi. The Oudh Estates Act expressly exempted the Muslims from the application of Mohammedan Law.

vii. Where large section of people had converted from Hinduism to Islam, like the Kutchi Memons and the Khojas, they continued to be governed by the Hindu laws.

viii. The same principle, as in the case of the Memons and the Khojas, was applied to the Sunni Bohras and Molisalam Girisias in Gujarat.

ix. Halai Memons, like the Kutchi Memons, were governed by Hindu Law.

x. The Customary Law of the East and West Punjab did not recognise Mohammedan Law on Iddat.

xi. Courts in Madras refused to apply the Mohammedan Law principle of pre-emption to Muslims, on the ground that it was opposed to the principles of justice, equity and good conscience.

xii. In the East and West Punjab there was a custom of adoption prevalent among the Muslims, which was recognised to be contrary to the Mohammedan Law.

xiii. There was also a custom regarding wills among the Muslims in the East and West Punjab which was recognised to be contrary to the Mohammedan Law on the subject.

xiv. In the succession to Tarawad in Malabar, in families that followed Hindu customs in spite of being Muslims, the Shariat was not applied.

xv. In the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, local customs having the force of law prevailed over the Shariat.

xvi. In the moffusil areas of Madras customs having the force of law were allowed to prevail over the Shariat.

xvii. In the East Punjab too, customs having the force of law were expressly allowed to prevail over the Shariat.

xviii. Legislative provisions in Ajmer-Mewara and Oudh permitted local customs to prevail over the Shariat, as in the East Punjab.

xix. In Madhya Pradesh also local customs conflicting with the Shariat were allowed to prevail.

xx. Despite the enactment of the Shariat Act 1937, the Muslims of Cooch Bihar were governed only by the Hindu Law of

inheritance till as recently as July 1, 1980, as only from that date did the government of West Bengal notify the application of the Shariat Law.

xxi. The Shariat Act 1937 even now does not apply to agricultural land, and therefore Muslim agriculturists are not bound by the Shariat.

xxii. The Kambojis of Malerkotla state are predominantly agricultural and are governed by local custom and not the Shariat in matters of inheritance.

Thus, the Shariat which was said to be immutable was found to be inapplicable to the Muslims in so many instances and in such widespread areas. In matters of law and custom the Muslims of India, it seems, were mostly integrated with the larger Hindu society. It is to reverse and erase this socio-cultural integration between the Hindus and the Muslims, and to carve out an exclusive Muslim community in India, that the Muslim League led by Mr. Jinnah demanded and got enacted the All India Shariat Act of 1937. This became the foundation for a separate Muslim nation.

This is how the Muslim society, as an exclusive socio-religious entity totally cut-off from the mother Hindu society, was forced into being by political intervention. The Shariat Law did not come to be accepted, even among the Muslims of India, in spite of all the political machinations and force of Islam. It could be imposed only through the power of the British.

The British nurtured an exclusive Muslim society in India

Islam in India got political patronage of the British to secure an exclusive Muslim identity distinct from the Hindus. The crisis that afflicted the soul of the Indian nation – and continues to afflict it even after Partition – arose out of this endeavour to promote an exclusive Muslim identity that was to remain at cross purposes with the all-inclusive Hindu ethos. What we have been witnessing for the last about a hundred years is a tussle between the isolationist exclusivism of Islam and the assimilative inclusivism of the Hindu ethos.

In the normal course, after the Islamic rule had withered away, the assimilative Hindu ethos would have made Islam its own. But political compulsions generated by the British rule, and the consequent politically motivated compromises with the Muslim leadership, prevented this assimilation, and brought about an even greater separatism, which finally led to the creation of Pakistan.

After the creation of Pakistan, political separatism of the Muslims was sustained under the distorted and dishonest secularism of the Indian political elite, which in practice meant minority-ism. The assimilative Hindu spirit was rendered incapable of digesting the Islamic faith and making it a part of the wider Hindu cultural identity by the 'secular' leadership of India, which convinced the Muslim political leaders that they would be protected against any assimilation. Assimilation was projected as Hinduisation, but to the Muslims leadership even the thought of Indianisation was not acceptable.

Assimilation in the case of the Muslims of India is merely a matter of realisation and recognition of the Hindu ethos, culture and civilisation that in practice already pervade among the Indian Muslims. Assimilation does not need any fresh infusion of Hindu societal values. Indian Muslims only have to bring down their heightened pan-Islamic consciousness and their sense of identification with the international Ummah, and begin to understand and accept the historical bonds that have been sought to be erased from their social consciousness by the separatist Islamic politics of the 20th century. They only have to remember afresh that they are descendants of the same forefathers; that they belong to the same society, the same culture, the same nation and the same ancestry as the Hindus: they differ only in the matter of faith. Such realisation and understanding will bring Indian Muslims on par with the Sikhs, the Jains and the Buddhists of India. Hindu cultural canvas and Hindutva do have the universal reach to accommodate such varied faiths.

HINDUTVA

Hindutva is a civilisational concept

'Hindu' and 'Hindutva' are geo-cultural and civilisational concepts and do not connote mere political or religious dogma. While the definition of the term Hindu in its religious sense may exclude even

the Jains, the Buddhists, the Sikhs and the Aryasamajis, besides the Muslims, the Christians and the Parsis, in the cultural sense the term Hindu does, and did always, include all of these. The cultural nationality of India is Hindu, and this Hindu nationality is inclusive of all who are born in Bharatavarsha, and who have adopted Bharatavarsha as their motherland. This inclusiveness of Hindu nationality is not just a matter of one man's convictions, it is a fact borne out by history. The Muslims, the Christians and the Parsis of India have always been Hindus in the cultural sense.

In fact, there are four distinct meanings of the concept 'Hindu', and an understanding of these different meanings is of help in clarifying the issues currently facing us.

Firstly, Hindu as a religious concept means those who follow sanatana dharma as expressed in the timeless rituals and customs of their community and locality. Defined in this strict religious sense, the term Hindu would exclude even the Sikhs, the Jains, the Buddhists, the Aryasamajis, the Brahmosamajis, and the followers of the Ramakrishna Mission, who recently sought and have obtained the status of a non-Hindu minority from the Calcutta high court. The religious concept of Hindu would, of course, exclude the followers of religions and faiths that came from abroad – the Muslims, Christians and Parsis. It is this narrow religious meaning of the term Hindu that the constitution of India adopts for dividing the country into a majority and the minorities. This religious view forms the narrowest possible meaning of the term Hindu or Hindutva.

Secondly, Hindu in the political sense – which is more comprehensive than its meaning in the religious sense – would include the Jains, the Aryasamajis, the Brahmosamajis and the followers of the Ramakrishna Mission. Until recently the Buddhists and the Sikhs also came within the political meaning of the term Hindu. When an Indian politician refers to Hindus, he only excludes the Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Buddhists and Sikhs who are politically organised as non-Hindus.

Thirdly, the legal meaning of the term Hindu, according to the legal system of the country for personal and social laws, includes almost all: the Sikhs, the Buddhists, the Jains, the Brahmosamajis, the Aryasamajis, the Saivas, the Vaishnavas, and so on. The only groups that remain outside the legal meaning of the term Hindu are the Muslims, the Christians and the Parsis. Before 1937, before the All

India Shariat Act was passed to exclude Muslims from the legal definition of the term Hindu, large sections of Indian Muslims also fell within the Hindu fold in the legal sense. Thus the legal concept of Hindu approximates to the Hindu society, of which the Muslims were recognised to be a segment till 1937.

Lastly, there is the cultural meaning of the term Hindu, and in this sense the term includes all persons descended from a common parentage within the mother society, like the Muslims and the Christians, and also those who have adopted Bharatavarsha as their home, like the Parsis. Hence by birth and blood, as well as by culture, the Muslims and the Christians of Indian origin are Hindus, and the rest, including the Parsis, have become culturally Hindus by adopting this land as their home and by sharing in the Hindu ethos.

While the term Hindu may be defined in the narrow religious sense, its meaning keeps expanding as we look at the term from other perspectives, till we reach the all-inclusive concept of Hindu in the cultural sense. Even the legal definition of the term Hindu comes very near the inclusive cultural and societal meaning of this term. Therefore, to limit the outreach of the term Hindu, or Hindutva, to the narrow religious or political meanings is to pervert its content.

Supreme Court recognises the civilisational meaning

The civilisational and cultural meaning of the term 'Hindu' was considered by the Supreme Court in a case in 1977. A constitution bench of the Supreme Court, consisting of Chief Justice A. N. Ray and Justices M. H. Beg, R. S. Sarkaria, P. N. Singhal and Jaswant Singh, considered the expansive meaning of the term and ruled:

“The sole question which, however, falls for our consideration in these appeals is whether Nicholas Sundaram is a Hindu governed by Hindu law. It is a matter of common knowledge that Hinduism embraces within itself so many diverse forms of beliefs, faiths, practices and worship that it is difficult to define the term 'Hindu' with precision.

“In Encyclopaedia Britannica (15th Edition) the term 'Hinduism' has been defined as meaning the civilisation of Hindus (originally, the inhabitants of the land of the Indus river).

“As a religion, Hinduism is an utterly diverse conglomerate of doctrines, cults, and ways of life...

“In principle, Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any. The Hindu is inclined to revere the divine in every manifestation, whatever it may be, and is doctrinally tolerant, leaving others—including both Hindus and non-Hindus—to whatever creed and worship practices suit them best. A Hindu may embrace a non-Hindu religion without ceasing to be a Hindu, and since the Hindu is disposed to think synthetically and to regard other forms of worship, strange Gods, and divergent doctrines as inadequate rather than wrong or objectionable, he tends to believe that the highest divine powers complement each other for the well-being of the world and mankind.

“Few religious ideas are considered to be finally irreconcilable. The core of religion does not even depend on the existence or non-existence of God or on whether there is one God or many. Since religious truth is said to transcend all verbal definition, it is not conceived in dogmatic terms.

“Hinduism is, then, both a civilisation and a conglomerate of religions, with neither a beginning, a founder, nor a central authority, hierarchy, or organisation. Every attempt at a specific definition of Hinduism has proved unsatisfactory in one way or another, the more so because the finest Indian scholars of Hinduism, including Hindus themselves, have emphasized different aspects of the whole.

“This being the scope and nature of the religion, it is not strange that it holds within its fold men of divergent views and traditions who have very little in common except a vague faith in what may be called the fundamentals of the Hindu religion”.

It will be advantageous at this stage to refer to Mulla’s *Principles of Hindu Law*, where the legal meaning of the term Hindu is stated thus:

“The word ‘Hindu’ does not denote any particular religion or community. During the last hundred years and more

it has been a nomenclature used to refer comprehensively to various categories of people for purposes of personal law. It has been applied to dissenters and non-conformists and even to those who have entirely repudiated Brahminism. It has been applied to various religious sects and bodies which at various periods and in various circumstances developed out of, or split off from, the Hindu system but whose members have nevertheless continued to live under the Hindu Law, and the courts have generally put a liberal construction upon enactments relating to the personal laws applicable to Hindus”.

That is the width and scope of the term Hindu as recognised by the law of the land, and the supreme court of India. By leaning on the geo-cultural and civilisational roots of Hinduism, the Supreme Court held that Nicholas Sundaram was a Hindu governed by Hindu Law: he was held to be a Hindu even in the religious sense which is actually narrower as compared to the cultural reach of the term Hindu.

The Supreme Court virtually affirmed what Swami Vivekananda said of the socio-nationalism of India. He said: “The national union in India must be a gathering up of its scattered spiritual forces”; and that “the nation in India is a union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune”. Sri Aurobindo also, in his famous Uttarapara speech, equated the nationalism of India with sanatana dharma. He presented a higher Hinduism as the point of national unity. The geo-cultural-spiritual foundation of India is thus essentially Hindu.

Indian nationalism must regain its anchorage in Hindutva

The assimilative Hindu cultural and civilisational ethos is the only basis for any durable personal and social interaction between the Muslims and the rest of our countrymen. This societal assimilative realisation is the basis for Indian nationalism, and only an inclusive Hindutva can assimilate an exclusive Islam by making the Muslims conscious of their Hindu ancestry and heritage. A national effort is called for to break Islamic exclusivism and enshrine the assimilative Hindutva.

This alone constitutes true nationalism and true national integration. This is the only way to protect the plurality of thoughts and in-

stitutions in this country. To the extent secularism advances Islamic isolation and exclusivism, it damages Hindu inclusiveness and its assimilative qualities. And in this sense secularism as practiced till now conflicts with Indian nationalism. Inclusive and assimilative Hindutva is the socio-cultural nationalism of India. So long as our national leaders ignore this eternal truth, national integration will keep eluding us.¹

¹[Discussion on S. Gurumurthy's presentation largely revolved around the question of the appropriate relationship between the state and the society, and the possibilities of creating a self-regulating society, untrammelled by the state, in the present context. Since these questions have been discussed in some detail in this talk and in the introduction, the discussion is being omitted.–ed.]