

## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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The history of human society has been one of constant variety in which no form has become established. All is still experiment change, breakdown and renewed experiment. Typical nation states of today, such as those of western countries were unknown two centuries ago. History is the evolution of development and association. The cells that make up the leaves of a tree are associated by common organization in a single organic structure that is one kind of association. The different trees that make up the green garden are also associated to one another. That is another kind of association. The individual tree is not a matter of more or less, but the green garden is. The different groups of individuals are not much powerful, but the integrated communities are.

Every community in the degree to which it is coherent represents an idea that defines it. The idea alone can give the community the singleness and integrity. Different communities are bearer of different ideas. Sometimes the conflict of different ideas gives way to conflict of communities. 1

The diversity of India is tremendous, it is obvious. It concerns itself with physical appearances as well as with certain mental habits and traits. They differ in face, figure, clothes, fooding, language, caste, religion and many more spheres. These differences show diversity, but can not change the mental background which the people had developed. The people of India have their distinctive features, all of them have still more the distinguishing mark of India. It is fascinating to see how they have retained their peculiar characteristics for hundred of years and yet have been throughout these ages distinctively Indian, with the same national heritage and the same set of moral and

mental qualities.<sup>2</sup> Foreign influences poured in and often influenced that culture and were absorbed. Disruptive tendencies gave rise immediately to an attempt to find synthesis. Some kind of dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization. The unity was not conceived as something imposed from outside, a standardization of externals or even belief. It was something deeper and, within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practiced and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged.

The religious diversity of India is also very fascinating. There are many religions of Indian origin like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. The believers of religions of non-Indian origin came here and settled down, became distinctively Indian in the course of a few generation such as Christian, Jews, Parsees, Muslims. Some of them adopted Indian religions and some Indians also converted these religions. But they never ceased to be Indian on account of a change of their faith. They were looked upon in other countries as Indians and foreigners, even though there might have been a community of faith between them.<sup>4</sup>

Before 1858 India was never a united political entity, in that year the British rule started as over a country and nation. India achieved freedom after a long struggle. The political struggle against Raj posed a number of problems. For Mahatma Gandhi, the aim of attaining the Swaraj was to be realized only when there was an organized, well equipped and disciplined non-violent force of citizens. The problem was to mobilize all communities under one banner and one slogan. Thus this idea was to seek help and support of all the communities of India and put forward their basic

demand - Swaraj'. The dream came true and Swaraj was achieved. There was a mood of elation, an atmosphere of euphoria in India on August 15, 1947. Then we had been in unified nationality for almost a century under one head of the state. Despite the partition of the country and the consequent riots, the years after 1947 were years of high hopes and aspirations, bright optimism and a certain faith in the country's future as a united and integrated nation.

There was the great danger that the atmosphere and the mentality generated by the partition and the riots might continue and strengthen the communal trend in Indian politics. But Indian nationalism was able to withstand the test. Despite fierce pressure of communal sentiments, the people did not give up their secular mooring, under very difficult circumstances, framed a fully secular constitution and laid the foundations of secular state and society. The Indian leadership also dealt firmly with communal violence and, on the whole succeeded in protecting the religious minorities. Another great achievement was territorial and political integration of hundreds of small and large princely states with the Indian Union".

Then our constitution was enacted incorporating the fundamental rights. Our Constitutional law is secular and religion is no bar to the holding of any public office whatsoever in the state. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru exhorted India to lessen religiosity and learn to science and the government attempted to treat all communities equally".

Some foreign and Indian observers predicted breakup of India, but instead of that the Indian nation was consolidated and the process of nation-in-making was further pushed forward, so that the common national identity, the identity of being Indian, came to be accepted by all the inhabitants of the subcontinent and the fact of Indian unity became irreversible. Of course, not all the problems of integration were solved, with further social and economic development, spread of education, deepening of democracy and

politicization of the people, new sources of tension. conflict and disruptive tendencies have arisen.

The decade of sixties was a decade of realities and struggle, but in seventies congress party experienced setback. For the first time since partition communalism ravaged the nation in the eighties as never before. Kashmir and Punjab initiated a war cry that threatened to destabilized the border states of India due to their peculiar location, discontent of the people and foreign support to militancy while religion was one of the factors. Government action in Punjab, assassination of a leader and the riots after that, once again explained the gravity of the conflict.

The socio-political agenda for the decade leading upto the next millennium was set by two personalities in the beginning of the decade, both of whom have created two very different but closely-entwined issues- social justice and aggressive nationalism. The personality- dominated politics had come to end, issues were to take Centre stage.

Assessed from another perspective the nineties could also be described as the decade of anti-thesis. Both emerging ideologies symbolize rejection of the Nehruvian thesis. Paradoxically along with the ascendancy of caste and community based political ideologies, the dismantling of state control over the economy is also happening concurrently. This is a paradox because the concept of economic liberalization and globalization is a post modern ideology and, to that extent, runs contrary to the rise of pre-g modern political concepts represented by caste and communal identities"

The meaning of secularism is not the same for every person. Gandhiji's secularism was deeply rooted in religion while Nehru rejected religion as a positive force. The debate surfaced in the nineties, is in a perverted form. Nehru's successors pursued his definition of secularism but in practice they compromised on many issues. The crisis of secularism was increasing due to the failure to define it.

It is a fact of present time that every political party is making a conscious attempt to

reach out to minorities because their assimilation in nation-building is necessary for national integration and it marks a significant step forward in the direction of synthesis. Similarly, the minorities appear to have stopped to think any party as untouchable. The concept of the secular nation-state has been reinforced with the triumph over religion-driven terrorism and secession in Punjab.

But there are some hard facts which we have to accept. We have enough religion to hate one another, but not enough to love one another. Communal hatred, linguistic fanaticism and regional loyalties are growing at the expense of unity and the integrity of the country. Sometimes only creed and belief is sufficient ground to kill fellow citizens.

The greatest achievement of Indian democracy is that it has survived fractured for 50 years. About one billion people live together as one political entity under conditions of freedom. Never before in history and nowhere else in the world today, has one sixth human race existed as a single free nation in an atmosphere of fundamental rights. The achievement is all the more creditable, since no other democracy has had such diversity in unity, such a mosaic of humanity. All the twelve religions of the world flourish in India.

Each one of us is free to pursue his religion. But the group or institution of one religion must not be allowed to do what groups or institution of other religion are denied. Fairness as well as firmness must inform the policies of government in all matters small as well as big. Treating minorities or the majority as a group has several specific drawbacks. By reinforcing group identities it polarises society. The politicians begin to buy votes by pondering to those who today control the groups. It affects the nature of political life, the nation itself"

National integration is born in the hearts of the citizens when it dies there, no army, no government, no constitution can save it. Inter-faith harmony and consciousness of essential unity of all religions is the very heart of our national integration

The soul of India aspires to integration and assimilation. Down the ages, Indian culture,

whatever diverse it may be, a tremendous force of power and beauty has been made richer and deeper as a result of absorbing what is best in the outside and integrating those various influences to enrich our own identity.

The Only solution of the conflicts is goodwill, integrity and knowledge in all communities to come together and understand one another, when the Vedas, Quran and Bible are harmonized. Each one of us has to understand deeply his own religion first. Only then the mind would become free from the petty interests. Then the next step should be to understand the vast treasure of other religions and the men would learn that religions are but the valid expressions of the religion which is oneness, so that each may chose the path that suits him best.

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