Multiculturalism and Nation-Building— A South Indian Perspective*

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Abstract

Viewing the ideology of 'multiculturalism' as a reaction to the metamorphosis of 'nationalism,' this paper addresses some issues in national integration and nation-building emerging from the interface between the two in south India. While the specific issues dealt with relate to the four states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the emergent highlights are sought to be placed in the pan-Indian context.

[One] has to admit that nationalism in both its historical expressions [liberating and expansionist] is dead today. But we can still say: 'Nationalism is dead, long live Nationalism,' for a new Nationalism like a new monarch has appeared. What is it like?

- Chaudhuri (1997:59)

Scanning periodicals and journals for editing the *ICSSR Journal of Abstracts and Reviews: Sociology and Social Anthropology*, I notice that 'multiculturalism' has been gaining prominence on the academic agenda of social sciences. To be sure, the idea underlying the concept of multiculturalism is not novel; it can be traced to the now out-of-fashion concept of 'plural society' originally conceived by J.S.Furnivall in 1939 and developed by other scholars (see Furnivall 1948, and Smith 1965:66–91).[1] However, the context of changing contours of ethnic and socio-cultural groups vis-a-vis politico-geographical boundaries has given new currency to this concept and its underlying ideology.[2]

In India, for over fifty years, we have celebrated and trumpeted our ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic plurality or 'multiculturality.' 'Unity in diversity'

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has been a familiar and 'overworked cliché' (Dube 1992:29) used not only by politicians but also by intellectuals. However, it is only since the mid-1980s that the reality of multicultural existence has been formulated and advanced as an explicit ideology. The making of an 'ism' (an ideology) of multicultural existence is something more than a mere semantic shift. It essentially underscores the emergent reaction to the metamorphosis of nationalism in the country.

Nationalism in India, as it has been conventionally understood in social sciences, referred to the movement which emerged as a reaction to the British (and more generally, the European) colonialism. It was primarily articulated and spearheaded by the Indian National Congress. It is not surprising that the exit of the British in 1947 saw political power being transferred to the Congress. The nature of this type of nationalism and its centralizing tendency has been the subject of analysis and interpretation by social scientists of various ideological hues.

The concern with this type of 'political nationalism' is now passé. As if reflecting this, the political fortunes of the once mighty Congress party have also dwindled. What is important to note is that the country is now engaged in reinventing the nation, and this process is willy-nilly directed by a fuzzy and controversial brand of religion-based 'cultural nationalism' (euphemism for 'Hindu nationalism') advocated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allied quasi-political organizations. In fact, the rise of BJP since the mid-1980s has been inversely related to the fall of Congress,[3] and this change has come about through the medium of democratic elections.

As an ideology, multiculturalism is essentially a reaction to or the antithesis of the inevitably 'majoritarian,' possibly exclusivist, and potentially intolerant tendencies inherent in 'cultural nationalism.' It stands for an inclusive socio-political space for the plurality of ethnic, religious and cultural groups inhabiting the geopolitical area that is India. The juxtaposition between nationalism (be it 'political' or 'cultural') and multiculturalism constitutes the political ferment that will determine the form of India as a nation-state in the future.

To be sure, this phenomenon is not easy to grapple with and it does not permit any straitjacket analysis. The proverbial complexity of politics in India is rendered even more baffling by its interface with region, ethnicity, religion, caste and language issues. Paradoxical as it may sound, to understand India as a nation-state, one has to comprehend the regional and local scenarios. Accordingly, this paper tries to address some issues in national integration and nation-building emerging from the interface between nationalism ('political' and 'cultural') and multiculturalism in south India. While the specific issues dealt with relate to the four states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the emergent highlights are sought to be placed in the pan-Indian context.

Erosion of Federalism

'[W]e have disturbed a hornet's nest and I believe most of us are likely to be badly stung.' So bemoaned Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru when, in 1953, Andhra Pradesh was formed on the basis of linguistic homogeneity (quoted in Nag 1993:1525). Inevitably, many linguistic states were soon born. Not that Pandit Nehru's apprehension betrays (in retrospect, at least) a sense of naivety, but his view of nationalism/nation was indubitably linear, with no place for diversities, even when these were celebrated! Since his programme of modernization implied a dulling of internal differentiation, it was destined to land the Indian polity in what Brass (1990:xi) calls 'a systemic crisis.'

As it has turned out, it was not the formation of linguistic states *per se* that has thwarted Nehruvian nationalism, but the way Pandit Nehru and his successors in the hegemonic Congress, and particularly his daughter Shrimathi Indira Gandhi, rode roughshod over federalism that dented the relation between the states and the centre (see Brass 1990:36–63). The Congress, dominated by politicians from the Hindi belt, handled the states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in a condescending manner, and trampled on the legitimate power of the non-Congress governments by imposing President's (then euphemism for Congress) rule.[4] The Congress, no doubt, has paid very dearly for its political sins.

The erosion of the federal nature of the political system as envisaged in the Constitution, consequent upon the Congress regime's tendency towards increased centralization and central intervention, was characterized by a growing sense of alienation in the southern states.[5] While Tamil Nadu, led by the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (AIADMK), had earlier freed itself from the shackles of the Congress hegemony, it was Shri N.T. Rama Rao's foray into politics that articulated the regional-cum-linguistic consciousness fully and effectively. In 1983, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) led by NTR, as he was popularly known in the Telugu tinsel world, swept into power on a single-point programme of restoring the Telugu honour.

It could be argued that the sense of alienation experienced by people in the southern states had as its point of reference the central government, and that it did not have a direct bearing on their involvement in the economy and society. Nevertheless, there is no gainsaying that the project to build a centralized nation-state has gone awry, and that it is critically significant 'to rethink our federal polity and plural society in order to design a *federal India* which can successfully combine 'federalism' and 'pluralism' in the institutional framework of '*self rule with shared rule*'" (Khan 1997a:v). Khan (1997) offers some valuable suggestions on how to go about this.

Weakened Demand for Autonomy

Notwithstanding the irritants in the centre-state relations, it is important to note that in none of the southern states is the demand for autonomy expressed in an extreme form now. Even in Tamil Nadu, where the Dravidian identity was once articulated in opposition to the Aryan (Brahmanical and Sanskritic) identity and the demand for autonomy was expressed in its extreme form, the situation has eased. It is true that by its consistent stance on autonomy articulated both by DMK and AIADMK, Tamil Nadu could extract significant concessions especially on the question of language policy.

There is, however, a matter of national concern with reference to Tamil Nadu. The prolonged ethnic fratricide in Sri Lanka involving the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sinhalese has serious implications for India. It has cost her the life of one former prime minister, several soldiers and many innocent citizens, besides huge sums spent on the maintenance of vigil and security. What is worrying is that the heartland of the LTTE's operation in north-eastern Sri Lanka is geographically proximate to Tamil Nadu, and in its struggle against the Sinhalese, the LTTE has articulated its ethnicity primarily in linguistic terms with Tamil as its marker. It is no secret that the LTTE has sympathisers in Tamil Nadu, not only among Tamil fanatics, but even among the Dravidian political parties. How the central government handles the LTTE vis-a-vis Tamil Nadu and India will have far-reaching consequences for our federal polity.

While the demand for autonomy by the southern states vis-a-vis the centre is no more a serious issue, the incipient demands for autonomy by regional, linguistic or ethnic groups within a given state could be an issue to contend with. The Telangana issue in Andhra Pradesh, which had been put on the back burner, is resurfacing. In Kerala, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government has created a Muslim-majority district, namely, Mallapuram. In Karnataka, the Kodavas (Coorgis) are demanding autonomy and statehood for Kodagu (formerly Coorg, a district traditionally inhabited by them). As compared with Bihar, Assam, and the North-East, however, the situation in the southern states is certainly not alarming.

All the southern states under reference were reorganized on the basis of linguistic homogeneity—Andhra Pradesh (Telugu), Karnataka (Kannada), Kerala (Malayalam), and Tamil Nadu (Tamil). Linguistic homogeneity, however, did not preclude dialectal variations and differences among people from different states and provinces who were reorganized into linguistic states. All the southern states, though Kerala less so, have been constrained to iron out intra-state differences resulting from the linguistic reorganization and deal with conflicts resulting therefrom. The currency of such terms as 'old Mysore,' 'Bombay Karnatak,' and 'Hyderabad Karnatak,' in Karnataka, for example, is more than a linguistic point. However, the delicate art of balancing regional and group interests that state politics

in Karnataka (as elsewhere) has been, has ensured that it is no more a thorny issue.

Inter-State Disputes

What has been more serious from the point of view of federalism and national integration are the unresolved inter-state disputes and the uneasy multilingual situation in what are supposed to be linguistically homogenous states. The inter-state disputes in south India have to do with border areas and sharing of river waters by the riparian states. The conflict about language results from parochialism and the aggressive advocacy of the sons (and daughters)-of-the-soil policy.

As regards inter-state borders, Karnataka has a long-standing unresolved dispute with Kerala (on the issue of Kasaragod, now in Kerala) and Maharashtra (over Belgaum, now in Karnataka, and the villages on the existing border between the two states). The Kasaragod issue has remained dormant for quite some time, and that Kasaragod is a part of Kerala is now *fait accompli*. On the Karnataka-Maharashtra dispute, the bone of contention has been the as yet unimplemented report of the Mahajan Commission. Even as the Maharashtra Ekikaran Samithi has been active in Belgaum district of Karnataka (and has substantial voter support too) the issue is muted. It appears that for the transborder linguistic groups what matters is how the linguistically homogenous state deals with their aspirations.

Inter-state river waters dispute is another story: The sharing of waters of two major rivers, namely, Krishna and Cauvery, has been an unresolved conflict of interests among the southern states. Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are locked in a bitter politico-legal wrangle over Krishna waters. In the case of Cauvery, the question of water-sharing has been even more contentious between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and as the third riparian state Kerala too is involved in the imbroglio. Incidentally, the Cauvery river waters dispute is more than a century old, and the parties to the original agreement were the Princely State of Mysore (now part of Karnataka) and the Madras Presidency (reorganized as the state of Tamil Nadu). While the dispute settlement machineries have been evolved and the central government too is involved, the matter has gone to the Supreme Court several times. Political constraints in both the states make the respective political parties in power to maintain a stubborn stance. Perception that the balance may be tilted has resulted in violent situations and has adversely affected the civil society.

Well-meaning, peace loving citizens, including many a political leader at the centre, hope that time will dissolve the inter-state disputes. While this hope may appear to be vindicated with reference to the border disputes, it is certainly a fond one as regards the river waters disputes. While the former basically has identity and symbolic value and is an instance of 'non-realistic conflict,' the latter affects the interests of dominant agricultural communities in the riparian states, and is a 'realistic conflict.'[6] Water being a scarce resource, and the upper riparian states

trying to conserve it through constructing dams and canals, the lower riparian states are bound to be affected.

Inter-state disputes, it must be recognized, have been obviously politicized. One would be justified in thinking that no politician is genuinely interested in resolving these disputes. These disputes are like the proverbial troubled waters, available for political fishing; or, as often is the case, the waters are troubled intentionally so as to fish. The fact that concern about these disputes is aired by political leaders occasionally to be conveniently forgotten later only confirms this.

Linguistic States: Insularity and Parochialism

One consequence of the linguistic reorganization of states in south India has been the increasing insularity and the associated growth of parochialism within the states. The tendency originated in Tamil Nadu as a reaction to what was perceived by the Dravidian political leaders as the 'imposition' of the Hindi language on that state.[7] It has since spread to all the southern states. Exaggerated opinion about 'selves' and the uncritical rejection of 'others' not only reinforce this insularity but also beget antagonistic attitudes and hostile sentiments. The insider-outsider discrimination, which is well entrenched in all the southern states, is undoubtedly detrimental to spatial mobility and national integration.

Often, the sons (and daughters)-of-the-soil policy is vociferously advocated even for appointments and postings in central government institutions and establishments. The central and state governments alike are confronted with the demand for a state quota in central appointments and opposition to posting of people from outside the state in central government institutions. The posting of non-Kannadigas in the Accountant General's Office in Bangalore provoked strong protests by 'aggrieved' political and pro-Kannada leadership and strikes by the employees union. That the postings were revoked, and that those already posted were repatriated or posted elsewhere, points to the shape of things to come.

More serious is the language question, especially as it relates to education (see Jayaram 1993). With 'the three-language formula' either not being implemented (as in Tamil Nadu) or being implemented half-heartedly (as in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka), and the standard of English language education having woefully deteriorated, there has been a transformation in the composition and orientation of the elites. In all the southern states there are two distinguishable categories of elites: the English-educated and the vernacular-educated. The variations in their orientation to the question of nation and national integration will be taken up later. But what is noteworthy is that it is the vernacular elite that is calling the shots now.

As can be expected, the vernacular elite fuels linguistic chauvinism to sustain its own power position within the state. This has adverse consequences for linguistic minorities living in a state, raising questions of constitutional safeguards, just as it opens new arenas of social confrontation. With reference to Karnataka,

Nair (1996) has observed that Kannada nationalism, like all nationalism, attempts to produce a solidarity among Kannadigas irrespective of caste and class, and pits itself against other minorities. As long as it continues to privilege the identity of Kannada over other democratic aspirations, she argues, the movement will tend increasingly towards alignment with strident 'communal' or 'anti-minority' forces and may be prone to undemocratic resolutions of its identity crisis.

The perilous scenario that linguistic nationalism can turn into is illustrated by the confrontation among the adherents of the Catholic church in Bangalore. Tamilians, who are by birth citizens of Karnataka, constitute a significant minority of Bangalore's population, and they form a dominant majority in a few pockets of the erstwhile cantonment area. In areas where Tamilians are a numerically dominant community the Catholic church services have been conducted in Tamil. For over a decade now, there has been a demand from the Kannada nationalists (both Christian and non-Christian Kannadigas) that Kannada should be given primacy in church services even in the Tamil majority areas. The protagonists of Kannada have even disrupted church services, resulting in violence inside places of worship. The Kannada nationalists have also criticised the Vatican for successively posting non-Kannadigas as the Archbishops of the Karnataka Diocese.

That the confrontation between Kannadiga and Tamilian Catholics has other non-religious dimensions (like control over immovable assets and employment) is beside the point. What is important, religion by itself does not seem to bind its adherents to the faith, and the internal cleavages come in handy for political mobilization. Incidentally, when the church service was in Latin, a language which none but the clergy understood, there was no controversy! Also, the Kannada zealots are silent about the *mantras* and *slokas* recited in Sanskrit in the Hindu temples and the prayers said in Arabic in the Muslim mosques! The facile argument is that Tamil is not a sacral language.

Electoral Understanding and Coalition Politics

Electoral understanding and coalition politics are two important political developments in the southern states which have implications for national integration. Coalition politics, accommodating various group interests as articulated by political parties, is not new to south India. Kerala was the first state to successfully experiment with coalition government and has consolidated it for three decades now: Political power in Kerala switches between the CPM-led Left Democratic Front and the Congress-led United Democratic Front.

In other southern states, one party rule has been the norm: The stranglehold of Congress was first broken in Tamil Nadu by DMK under the leadership of Thiru C.N.Anna Durai. After the split in DMK and the formation of AIADMK, DMK or AIADMK has held political power with an electoral understanding with Congress. When AIADMK was with Congress, DMK was with the National Front (NF).

When AIADMK brought down the BJP-led government at the centre in 1999, after initially supporting it through a poll alliance, and joined hands with Congress, DMK entered the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Since 1983 when Shri N.T. Rama Rao broke the dominance of Congress, TDP has been in the commanding position in Andhra Pradesh. TDP gave outside support to the BJP-led government in 1998–99, and in the 1999 general elections it had electoral understanding with the BJP-led NDA and it now supports that government from outside. The speaker in the last and the current Lok Sabha, Shri G.M.C. Balayogi, is a TDP member.

The stranglehold of Congress has been the longest in Karnataka, one of the states which has been generally faithful to that party. The Congress dominance was, no doubt, broken by the (now splintered) Janata Party, but since then the political situation has seen a see-saw change, with Congress romping home to power with a thumping majority in the 1999 Assembly elections.

Coalition politics in south India, as elsewhere, makes for ideologically strange bedfellows. In Kerala, for example, votaries of 'secularism' like the Congress and CPM on the one hand, and the 'communal' Muslim League on the other, have been politically hobnobbing. Similarly, Congress has been allying with the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu, after being their sworn enemy. What is more curious, DMK (now) and AIADMK (earlier), both known for their vehement anti-Brahman and anti-Hindi stance, being politically chummy with BJP, a party which was only yesterday dubbed by them as a Brahman party of the Hindi 'cow belt.'

Coalitions, no doubt, are inherently unstable, as they are essentially convenient working arrangements under given circumstances. Notwithstanding the talk about 'a common minimum programme' or 'national agenda,' there is often no ideological similitude among the coalition partners. Nevertheless, the Kerala experiment has confirmed that coalition politics is latently functional in providing stability in a politically splintered environment. After all, factionalism being a salient trait of all political parties in India, even under a single party rule, stability depends on how best the leadership balances the various factions representing different caste, community and regional interests.

Considering the growth and consolidation of regional political parties, the latent function of electoral understanding between ideologically disparate national and regional parties, protean and ephemeral as it may be, is even more significant for national integration. Such an understanding will keep the dominant and majoritarian national parties in check from pursuing their controversial agenda. It will ensure balancing of interests and aspirations of states, and offer stability both at the centre and in the states. We are all too familiar with the deleterious consequences of centralization and authoritarian tendencies manifested by the successive Congress regimes.

Social Conflict and National Integration

Since conflict is a pervasive, persistent social reality, a minimum realism about it is a prerequisite for any society to survive (see Jayaram and Saberwal 1996:1–3). In all the south Indian states social conflict has centred around primordial identities and interests, of which religion, caste and language[8] have been important. Given the central position that these identities and interests hold in polity, their interaction with democratic politics and their eventual politicization have been inevitable. Politicians can ignore these at their own peril, and social scientists at the risk of being irrelevant.

It must be noted, however, that the interface between primordial identities and interests on the one hand and politics on the other has been dynamic in all the states in south India. Religion, caste and language were important factors in their political life in the decades preceding independence.[9] The leaders of the nationalist movement had sought, though not always successfully, to relegate them to the background. The dawn of independence and the reorganization of states brought them to the fore, and the adoption of the republican form of democracy converted them into significant pivots around which group interests could be articulated and major confrontations could jell.

Since independence, caste configurations have changed in the southern states. Political mobilization against Brahman domination (the non-Brahman movement), combined with aggressive advocacy of protective discrimination for the 'backward castes' (in addition to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes), has certainly dislodged Brahmans from the pedestal of political power and curtailed their role in the bureaucracy. Brahmans in south India, unlike their counterparts in the north, are a numerical minority caste group, and thanks to land reforms, whatever landed property they commanded was lost. Education and professions are still their forte, though even here their dominance is challenged. Spatial mobility, including emigration, and private enterprise and managerial positions are their new strengths.

It is interesting that in all the south Indian states, the dominant non-Brahman caste groups, who successfully fought the Brahman hegemony during the colonial period and after, are fighting each other now. In fact, the political competition is now between these dominant non-Brahman caste groups: Kammas and Reddys in Andhra Pradesh, Lingayats and Vokkaligas in Karnataka, Ezhavas and Nairs in Kerala, and Thevars and Nadars in Tamil Nadu.[10] Scheduled Castes and other backward caste groups, as also minority religious communities, are significant as they can tilt the political balance. Hence, the dominant castes woo these castes and communities. The politics of backward classes, with increasing number of caste groups and communities seeking the backward tag and those in power negotiating it, are to be understood in this context.

Moreover, in all the southern states, the Scheduled Castes are better organized and more conscious of their rights now than they were three decades

ago. Their increasing assertiveness, and its resistance by the dominant agricultural castes, has often resulted in violent clashes between the two. Given their subordinate economic position in the agrarian social structure and the meagre political support that is available to them, most often the Scheduled Castes are at the receiving end. Incidentally, lack of unity among various organizations representing them and their internal squabbles—as, for instance, between the Malas and Madigas in Andhra Pradesh—put them in a disadvantageous position against the dominant caste groups who can better organize themselves to protect their interests.

Compared with caste, religion has not been a very contentious issue in south India. It is true that violence associated with the aftermath of partition swept parts of the southern states: People of the yester generation recall with awe the events in the erstwhile Nizam region in Andhra Pradesh, the then Malabar region of Kerala, and some urban centres of Princely Mysore. But neither in its sweep nor in its intensity is religious violence in south India comparable to that in the north. In fact, south Indians, laypersons and intellectuals alike, find it difficult to comprehend the trauma of Partition and the associated communal violence, and its etching on the psyche of their north Indian brethren.

Thus, though religion has become a contentious issue in south India today, reflecting the general politicization of religion across the country, its socio-psychological appeal to the people and its impact on their political imagination are slow in the making. That they are nevertheless in the making is certain. Because of its past history, the old quarters of Hyderabad and parts of the erstwhile Nizam region have been theatres of repeated communal violence. The establishment of bases by extremist Islamic groups in parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala since the early 1990s and their terrorist activities have been a matter of concern for both these states.

By and large, the communal conflagration in south Indian states involves the numerically dominant Hindu and the minority Muslim communities. In parts of Kerala, communal confrontation has often involved Christians, who have been pitted against both Hindus and Muslims for different reasons. It must also be noted that all these religious communities are internally divided on more axes (sect, caste, and language) than one, and these intra-religious subcommunities have often been at loggerheads.

Reflecting on the implications of social conflict in south India for national integration, it must be observed that like other states in India, conflicts have not been focussed on a single axis. Hence, animosities and hostile sentiments have not been allowed to aggravate and crystallize to a point where the relation between groups breaks down totally. As the old-fashioned functional theory has it, the multiplicity of the axes on which conflicts take place make for dissipation of political energy and contribute to dynamic realignment of groups and interests.

Religious/Cultural Nationalism

The turn of events in national politics since the mid-1980s and the general politicization of religion have not been without their effect on south India. The electoral gains of BJP in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, and its establishing a base in Tamil Nadu in the recent past are noteworthy. In Kerala, where the religious minorities constitute more than 40 per cent of the population, BJP has drawn a blank despite the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) being active there. Even so, the gradual increase in BJP's share of votes shows that it has begun denting even the formidable Communist fortress. In other words, cultural nationalism will be a force to reckon with in the south too.

The rise of BJP as the single largest political party has profound significance for the southern states, notwithstanding its as yet fledgling base there. The success of BJP lies in articulating the nationalist imagination in religious and cultural terms, confirming the strong affinity between 'nationalist imagining' and 'religious imagining' emphasized by Anderson (1983:19). To the extent that BJP seeks to articulate the aspirations of the Hindus, nebulous and heterogenous as their religion may be,[11] and consolidate their religious/cultural identity, the trend towards 'majoritarianism' is discernible. Some may interpret the eagerness of some regional parties to ally with BJP as a realistic appraisal on their part.

Interestingly, and significantly too, in a note submitted to the Congress President Shrimathi Sonia Gandhi, veteran Congress leader Shri V.N. Gadgil has stressed the need for redefining the Congress ideology in view of the changed perception about Hindutva and secularism among the people (PTI news item in *The Navhind Times*, Panaji, 24 November 1999, p.1). 'The political reality,' he observes, 'is that Hindutva does appeal to a large number of Hindus.' Underlining the fact that in the last Lok Sabha elections BJP had won the majority of the seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, he wants the Congress leadership to recognize that BJP is 'no longer a Brahman and Baniya party.'

The trend towards Hindu majoritarianism in a country where the Hindus constitute the overwhelming majority (82 per cent) of the population is only to be expected. It is, however, viewed, and justifiably so, with suspicion and apprehension by the minorities. The growing psychology of fear among them is to be understood in this context. It should not be surprising, if in south India too, communalism—defined as the 'antagonistic mobilization of one religious community against another' (Ludden 1996:1)—becomes a perennial problem during the transitory stage of majoritarian consolidation. Contestations over sacred places and desecration of places of worship and sacred symbols have been on the rise. Thus, striking a working balance between majoritarianism and multiculturalism assumes significance.

Following Juergensmeyer (1994: xiii and 2), it needs to be clarified that 'religious nationalists are not just fanatics' and cultural nationalism is not a historical aberration.[12] 'For the most part, these political activists are seriously attempting to

reformulate nation-state.' As Ludden (1996:2) observes, 'Since the late 1970s, nationalist movements based on the assertion that one majority ethnic or religious group defines a nation have emerged with new force and creativity . . . to revalorize old emotions and symbolic resources.' The dialectics of inosculating globalization and insular ethnic/religious nationalism across the world is indeed enigmatic.

Around the world, and in India too, socialism has turned out to be a god that failed. For a generation of scholars like me socialism was not only a source of intellectual stimulation but also a goal and direction which our polity was expected to take. Its failure (so much so that it is now anachronistic as it were to take its name) has not been easy to grapple with for intellectuals in India, especially those leaning left of the centre. Similar has been the fate of the modernity project. As Fox (1996) has argued, modernity not only failed to dislodge premodern identities but generated conditions for their hyperenchantment as a reactionary opposition.

Those unable to grasp the turn of our socio-political history, including the social scientists who have been heavily influenced by the liberal or radical ideologies from the West, have bemoaned the attacks on 'secularism,' an important component of the modernity project. Calling names ('saffron brigade,' 'khaki knickers,' etc.) or using pejorative expressions ('Hindutva') in debunking the ideology of 'cultural nationalism' is no substitute for understanding its emergence and consolidation.[13] While politicians antithetical to BJP, and even sections of the media, indulging in this is understandable, social scientists following suit has only succeeded in distorting our understanding of the sweep and significance of the phenomenon. Considering the electoral success of BJP, it would be insulting the imagination of voters too, which those who swear by democracy will be at fault doing.

Madan (1992:395) has forcefully argued that in the prevailing circumstances in South Asia in general, secularism 'as a shared credo of life is impossible, as a basis for state action impracticable, and as a blueprint for the foreseeable future impotent.'[14] It is, he holds, 'the dream of a minority which wants to shape the majority in its own image, which wants to post its will upon history but lacks the power to do so under a democratically organized polity . . . From the point of view of the majority, "secularism" is a vacuous word, a phantom concept, for such people do not know whether it is desirable to privatize religion and if it is, how this may be done . . . For the secularist minority to stigmatise the majority as primordially oriented and to preach secularism to the latter as the law of human existence is [both] moral arrogance and political folly —because it fails to recognize the immense importance of religion in the lives of the people of South Asia.'

Epilogue: Nation-Building—Which Way?

By surviving as a single political entity for more than five decades, we as a country have belied the prophets of pessimism.[15] More important, but for the brief dark interregnum of the Emergency era in the mid-1970s, our track record as a

functioning democracy, with the largest electorate in the world, is enviable. Democratic politics, no doubt, has a tendency to politicize all aspects of life, and we have above discussed the politicization of religion, caste, and language. Yes, the wages of democracy have to be borne![16]

The evolution of India as a democracy has a bearing on the process of nation-building. Nation-building is a challenging and incomplete exercise, and it is particularly so when the definitions of 'nation' and 'nationalism' themselves are undergoing change. As used in the post-World War II years, the concept of nationalism had not only a secular political ideology and a religiously neutral national identity, but a form of political organization, namely, the nation-state in which 'individuals are linked to a centralized, all-embracing democratic political system that is unaffected by any other affiliations, be they ethnic, cultural, or religious' (Juergensmeyer 1994:14).

Since the 1980s, however, emphasis is also being laid on the affective dimension of nationalism. Thus, for example, sociologist Anthony Giddens describes nationalism 'as conveying not only the ideas and 'beliefs' about political order but also the 'psychological' and 'symbolic' element in political and economic relationships' (cited in Juergensmeyer 1994:15). It is this affective dimension revolving around psychological and symbolic elements of the majority community that has come to the fore in contemporary India, a celebrated land of diversities.

Thus, nation-building in India has now to address the question of reconciling effectively majoritarianism and multiculturalism. Universally, nation-building has been a task undertaken by the elite. With the composition of the elite having undergone a change since independence, the task appears to be ever more daunting. The indigenous elite created by the much maligned Macaulay doctrine, united as it was by English education and liberal values, provided the basis for nation-building in the aftermath of independence. This elite, though still being reproduced by the inherited colonial institutions, has become considerably enfeebled, and the ideology (socialism, modernity and secularism) for which it stood is on the wane.

The vernacular elite, with its local or regional base, with little or no proficiency in the English language (or being even hostile to it) is at odds with the English-speaking elite. Most constituents of the vernacular elite do not have any mass appeal beyond their constituency, district or state. Often their support base is their own caste or community. Obviously, thanks to democratic politics and the numbers game, primordial groupings become ready-made bases for articulation of interests. It also seems to work well, considering the appeals made in terms of group interests and defined in terms of 'we/us' and 'they/them.' This is so well accepted in state-level politics that the secular credentials of all politicians are suspect.

The patronage politics of balancing different interest groups by the vernacular political elites will determine the political dynamics at the state level, and

the relationship (electoral understanding and coalition politics) of these elites with the majoritarian political elite will determine the political dynamics at the national level. In the transitory period, when the political equations are experimented and consolidated, and the contradiction between majoritarianism and multiculturalism remains unresolved, the question of what constitutes 'national' will be contentious and the task of nation-building will be unenviable.

Notes

1. The ideological underpinnings of Furnival's thesis, elaborated by Smith and critiqued by many others in the context of the Caribbean (for instance), are seldom discussed in India. Only the issue of socio-political space gets highlighted, and the trend towards majoritarianism is decried.
2. Significantly, *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (edited by Bullock and Stallybrass) published in 1977, carried no entry on 'multiculturalism,' but the *New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (edited by Bullock and Trombley), published in 1999, has a prominent entry on this item by Andrew J. Miller (see Bullock and Trombley 1999:550).
3. In the Lok Sabha elections held in 1984, BJP won only two seats. Increasing its tally steadily over the successive elections, it has now emerged as the single largest political party in the country. That BJP has been able to garner 'votes that have been let loose from the shredded net of Congress' (Ludden 1996:18) is explained, at least partly, by its ability to sell the ideology of 'cultural nationalism.' This is a political phenomenon which can hardly be brushed aside.
4. Between 1952 and 1964 Nehru himself imposed President's Rule 'at least five times, either to dislodge non-Congress Chief Ministers (PEPSU 1953; Kerala 1959) or to offset the collapse of merger moves between the Congress and non-Congress groups (Andhra Pradesh 1954; Kerala 1956; Orissa 1961)' (Das 1997:291).
5. It is true, as Sathyamurthy (1997:28) points out, that 'the ambivalence of the Constitution on the question of sharing power between the different tiers of government has resulted in an ongoing feud between the Centre and the States on vital questions of policy.' This does not, however, gainsay that the one-party (Congress) domination has been mainly responsible for distorting the functioning of federalism in India and breeding 'corrosive tensions' in centre-state relations and causing 'centrifugal tendencies' (Das 1997:291–2).
6. The distinction between realistic and non-realistic conflicts was drawn by Coser (1956: 48–55): Realistic conflict is 'a means toward a specific end.' It arises from 'frustration of specific demands within the relationship and from estimates of gains of the participants.' Non-realistic conflict, on the other hand, is an end *in itself*. For a brief analysis and interpretation of this distinction, see Jayaram and Saberwal (1996: 13–15).
7. Pandian (1996), however, has sought to free the language question in Tamil Nadu from the stigma of being dubbed 'anti-national' in the nationalist narrative, and make available

alternative ways of imagining politics based on the 'national-popular will.' He views the anti-Hindi agitation launched by the Self-Respect Movement in 1937 as a movement where 'national-popular will' found its articulation in mobilising a spectrum of 'subalternities' in support of Tamil.

8. Social conflict resulting from the language issue is discussed in the section on 'Linguistic States: Insularity and Parochialism.'
9. Often the British are blamed, and justifiably so, for sowing the seeds of division and disharmony among communities or for sharpening them where they existed. 'Divide and rule,' history books tell us, was their proven strategy. However, beating the dead horse of colonialism does not help us in grappling with the contemporary divisions and disharmonies.
10. Caste conflict in Tamil Nadu is perhaps the most metamorphic: With Brahmans having been dislodged from the political scene, the contestants in caste conflict are varied. In the northern districts, Vanniyars (a backward caste) are pitted against the Dalits. In the southern districts, Thevars, who earlier had Nadars as their adversaries, are now challenged by Pallars (a left-hand Scheduled Caste group). While in all the southern states there has been a perceptible development of caste consciousness and an increased mobilization on caste lines, they appear to be more so in Tamil Nadu.
11. Ludden (1996:7) has argued that 'the ideas that define Hinduism as a religion . . . deeply discourage the formation of a collective Hindu religious identity among believers and practitioners. Hindu identity is multiple, by definition . . . ' Nevertheless, it should be recognized that Hindu identity can be and has been selectively articulated at various levels, depending upon the context and the other identities in question.
12. Juergensmeyer (1994) views Hindu nationalism as a response in kind to Islamic nationalism.
13. In his note to Shrimathi Gandhi, referred to earlier in this section, Shri Gadgil rightly observes that 'We cannot judge RSS or BJP of today by what they were 50 years back. If we call them communal and fascist, it hardly makes any impact on the majority of voters, who belong to the age group of 18 to 35. To them, fascism or communalism does not convey anything sinister.' More important, he also draws attention to the fact that the constitution of the Indian National Congress 'does not mention a word about secularism.'
14. According to Madan (1992:395), 'It is impossible as a credo of life because the great majority of the people of South Asia are in their own eyes active adherents of some religious faith. It is impracticable as a basis for state action either because Buddhism and Islam have been declared state or state-protected religions or because the stance of religious neutrality or equidistance is difficult to maintain since religious minorities do not share the majority's view of what this entails for the state. And it is impotent as a blueprint for the future because, by its very nature, it is incapable of countering religious fundamentalism and fanaticism.'
15. One may recall here that Harrison's (1960:3) analysis of 'the most dangerous decades'

of post-independence India begins with Suniti Kumar Chatterji's ominous warning that she 'stands the risk of being split into a number of totalitarian small nationalities.'

16. In an insightful write-up in *The Sunday Times of India* (Mumbai, 21 November 1999, p.16), Ashish Nandy makes a critical observation: 'As long as the [India's urban middle] class was small and the logic of democracy was not clearly visible to it, it oozed brotherly love for the poor and the downtrodden. Now that the game of numbers is catching up within it and the invisible is becoming unbecomingly visible, there is widespread panic.' When the poor and the downtrodden 'confront an increasingly descaralised world and desperately seek some evidence of the survival of values that once gave meaning to personal and community life,' the middle class dubs them 'primitive and ill equipped for our public life.' Social scientists seem to share the urban middle class' 'fear of the people.'

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