

Religious Orthodoxy and Secularization in the Development Milieu

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In the Indian society, religion has played a crucial role in integrating as well as dividing people in and across different cultural groups. The modal value of Indian society revolves around the 'Hindu way of life' because of the numerical preponderance of the Hindus but as a consequence of the influence of Islam and Christianity, there were many changes observed in the religious orthodoxy which had kept the people together in a cohesive manner to constitute a solidarity group. The resultant effect was observed in terms of the disharmonious relationships not only within groups but even in between the groups following different religious adherences. In the post independent era, our commitment to democracy as a political system of governance brought in new values of individual's freedom, liberty and fraternity along with the concept of equality for all. The focus on the individual, rather than the group ideology as a part of traditional Indian social structure, brought in the concept of a secular state where people irrespective of their religious adherences were to be treated at par for availing the social, economic and political benefits as a consequence of the development of the society.

It has to be recognized that secularism as a concept is skeptical of the religious truth. In other words, it implies opposition to the religious truth or doctrine. On the other hand, religion as a social phenomenon has interactive relationship with the other social units that constitute the society. The focus of a sociological perspective is on the study of interaction of people in groups and on the influence of these groups on the human behaviour and on the other institutions of the society. In that sense, religion is organized into groups and exerts influence on the members belonging to these groups as well as on the non-members and other groups and institutions. The moot question is to what degree, in what way and how it can be measured? Examination of the human nature is based on certain assumptions. First, a human being is a biological organism, having physiological drives, needs,

potentials and limitations. Religion is a social agency that may influence or modify the biological nature, for example, different religious groups have different approaches and provide or allow different outlets for various sexual drives. There are permissive, compensatory or restrictive approaches pursued and as a result of that people develop different personalities and demonstrate different values and attitudes. Secondly, people have the ability to use symbols. In other words, people create and attach meanings to things, sounds, words and acts and the consensus on these meanings leads groups to communicate and accumulate knowledge. As such, language becomes the prime symbolic mechanism to express ordeal with abstract concepts and emotions etc. In this context, religion consists of symbols and activities that are interpreted and mediated by them. For example, God, hell, heaven, salvation, *Nirvana*, Guru and *Mana*, may be a part of a particular symbolic system. Thirdly, people become humans only in groups through the socialization of the human organism. In this sense, religion is one of the important socializing experiences and it affects every one, whether one is born into a religious family or one is under the indirect influence of the secular institutions. Fourthly, it is stated that human action is in some form and to some degree a problem solving act or mechanism. Religious behaviour is problem solving like any other social activity. Praying, attending church services, observing religious laws etc. are all religious activities towards solving a problem. People often engage in religious activities in the belief that such behaviour can solve problems. The last assumption about human nature is that all social phenomena within a given group or society are interrelated. Religion interacts with and has a dynamic reciprocal relationship with every other social phenomenon and process. (Johnstone, 1988)

In the above backdrop, it may be appropriate to trace the origin of the concept of religion. The 'English' word

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religion has a 'Latin' root but whether this Latin word is *Religare* meaning 'to bind together' (suggesting possibly the concept of a group or fellowship) or it is *Relegere* meaning 'to rehearse, to execute painstakingly, referring perhaps to the repetitious nature of *liturgy*' (sort of public worshipping through a book of common prayer, Orthodox Church). It is argued that without getting into the etymological debate on the root of the word while considering religion as a group phenomenon, we need to focus on the Latin word *Religare*, the concept that suggests group or fellowship. It may indicate the exclusion aspect of an individual but an individual as a member of the group has personal beliefs, emotions, thoughts and he or she has freedom to associate him or her self to any religious system. However, from the sociological point of view, we need to concentrate on it as a group phenomenon; for example, we have religious congregations, ceremonial gatherings, prayer meetings, family pilgrimages etc. It is further observed that a religion may operate at the secret (personal without divulging to others), private (divulging only with a few carefully chosen), denominational (sharing with a larger group) and societal (sharing with members of a society at large) levels.

Another important dimension of religion is that it is concerned with the sacred and the supernatural. It is different from the mundane activities which Durkheim calls 'profane'. For many people, the entire religious system is 'something special', the sacred. In fact, it involves a supernatural power which is not subject to the laws of the observable universe. For example, such a power may be personified by any number of gods, devils, goblins (ugly demons), or spirits or it may be a vague or a diffused power such as identified by the Polynesian term 'Mana'. As such, the sacred, the holy, the supernatural, together with people's relationships with them may constitute the subject matter of religion.

Religion involves a body of beliefs and most belief systems are characterized by values based on criteria of validity to judge them; logic that connects one substantive element to the others; perspective to identify the position of one group with the others and worldviews; substantive belief such as Vishnu as an *avatar* in Buddha; prescriptions and proscriptions for behaving and a technology that consists of means and techniques for obtaining the valued goals. Further, religion also involves a set of practices which consists of the performance of a ritual and a host of other activities, generated by its belief such as a gathering to worship, the sacrifice of an animal or a person, the ceremonial washing of the feet, the immersion in the water of the Ganges to wash sins etc., to meet the normative expectations of the society. Religion has also

been observed to involve moral prescriptions. It advocates, on the one hand, certain behaviours with the intentions of encouraging its adherents to choose the acceptable good ones in every day situations while, on the other hand, it discourages people to take up bad things such as theft, telling a lie or murder etc. in life. In short, sociologically speaking, religion may be conceived as a system of beliefs and practices by which a group of people interpret and respond to what they feel is sacred and usually supernatural as well. (Johnstone, 1988)

If we examine the religious adherence in the Indian society within the sociological perspective on religion outlined above, we can observe that though our society comprises people belonging to Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Parsi, Buddhist and Jain faith, yet the modal value pattern is that of the preponderant Hindu belief system. Most of these religious systems work around the notion of mind and spirit (soul) although the Hindus give greater credence to self-realization or soul searching. But, with the passage of time, the philosophical aspect of Hinduism based on the theory of *karma* and *dharma*, got diluted and the mythological and ritualistic aspects got dramatized to the extent of being considered as sacrosanct for the existence of people. As such, these got perpetuated and ingrained in the way of life of people. Even, the other religious groups also got influenced by the kind of beliefs and cultural practices promoted by Hinduism. Many supernatural beliefs, religious dogmas, obstructionist practices, superstitious beliefs etc. influenced the group life and religious orthodoxy dominated the scene in the pre-independent era.

The secular character of our Constitution in independent India is a departure from the traditional religious orthodoxy based on group life as it provided greater autonomy to an individual to follow his belief system without any infringement on or scare to persons of the other religious groups. The value of tolerance, inherent in our cultural system, was advocated to build up a secular character of the Indian society. However, the contradiction came to the surface when the state apparatus for the functioning of our society, promoted secularism while the individual adhered to his or her belief system so rigidly that even the minimum tolerance level in between religious groups broke down and led to communal tensions and in extreme cases to communal violence in different regions of the country.

Notwithstanding the above observations, it may be worthwhile tracing the history of the concept of secularism, a value being promoted but plagued with its misuse. It is suggested by Madan (1991) that this word was first used in 1648, at the end of the thirty years of war in Europe, as a reference in the context of Church

properties to be under the exclusive control of the Prince. Then, after the French Revolution, a statement was issued on 2nd November 1789, declaring to the French National Assembly that all the Church or clergy (ecclesiastical) goods would now be at the disposal of the nation. Further, in 1851, George Jacob Holyrake coined the term secularism as a rational movement of protest in England and since then, it was built in the ideology of progress. However, Madan considers it as a process of modernity which encompasses enlargement of human freedom and the enhancement of the range of choices open to people that concerns them including their present and future lifestyle. Peter Berger, an eminent sociologist in the present context considers secularization as a process by which the sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. The inner logic of the economic sector, no doubt, makes it the most notable area but the other sector such as political, appears to be not fully amenable to it. But, it is the latter sector that the ideology of secularism acquires the most salient aspect of it.

Further, one of the Indian sociologists, Srinivas, in his essay on secularization (*Social Change in Modern India*) opines that both Sanskritization and secularization are gaining ground in our society. Secularization is being considered as a more general process affecting all Indians while Sanskritization affects only the Hindus and the tribal groups. Again, secularization is more marked among the urban and educated groups while Sanskritization is visible among the lower Hindus and tribes. According to Srinivas, the term secularization implies that 'what was previously regarded as religious is now ceasing to be such and it also implies a process of differentiation which results in the various aspects of society (economic, political, legal and moral) becoming increasingly discrete to each other. Another element of secularization is rationalism, that is, interpretation of the universe purely in thought to regulate the individual and social life in accordance with the principle of reason and to eliminate as far as possible or relegate to the background everything irrational'. Rationalism replaces the traditional beliefs and ideas by modern knowledge. It is also observed that the Hindus were more affected by the secularization process than any other religious group in India as the concept of purity-pollution, central and ubiquitous in Hinduism, was greatly weakened as a consequence of the forces of Westernization and secularization. However, different sections among the Hindus are affected in different degrees by it; for example, new elites are possibly much more affected by it than everyone else. (Srinivas, 1966)

However, Madan's (1991) argument is that secularism

is the dream of the minority groups who want to shape the majority in its own image and want to impose its will upon the history but lack power to do so under a democratically organized polity. On the other hand, for the majority group, secularism is a phantom (mental illusion) concept, as they are not sure whether or not it is desirable to privatize religion. Even, they are not sure in regard to the ways of doing so. In the case of Protestant Christians, they may do so but if they are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, (these are the belief systems mostly practiced in South Asia); it may be difficult to privatize it. No doubt, Buddhism may well be considered as one religious tradition which by denying supernatural beings any significant role in human life has the most secularist potential. Yet it is also observed to be hierarchical within it. Apart from the element of sacredness in Buddhism, Bhikkhu (the world renouncer) is superior to Chakkravatti (the world conqueror but he cannot exist by himself).

Madan (1991) opines that secularism as an ideology has emerged from the dialectic of modern science and Protestantism and not from the repudiation or rejection of religion and the rise of nationalism. The idea of secularism, a gift of Christianity, has been built into paradigm of modernization having universal applicability as a part of the thought of the western society. It is observed that even the Enlightenment thought was not against religion as such but against the revealed religion or a transcendental justification for the religion. In our times, Mahatma Gandhi also mentioned about the inseparability of religion and politics and the superiority of the former over the latter. He had remarked, 'For me, even the tiniest activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion' and 'those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion means'. Historically speaking Gandhi's observations are valid inasmuch as across the epochs in different geographical regions of the world, religion and politics have been observed to be the two sides of the same coin.

In his illuminating paper, Assayag (2003) critically examines the crisis of secularism in the development milieu of the Indian society. Our National Flag representing tricolour is a symbol of secularism as it represents the religious plurality of the nation since saffron colour is a symbol of Hinduism, green represents the Islam while the white in the middle denotes all other religions present in the sub-continent (Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism etc.). Besides, the emblem of the wheel of the law (*dharma*) in the centre represents the idea of equanimity towards these religions. No doubt, the Indian flag denotes a singular form of secularism in which

there is no civil religion (society) and where the head of the state takes oath on the Constitution, yet religious communities and caste organizations dominate Indian life. Further, it is observed that India's religious singularity unlike that of the USA is surprising as Indian nationalism readily invokes the syncretic character of the Hindu spiritualism to base its multi-cultural, multi-religious and eventually the secular democracy. However, the basic two issues involved are related to the secularization of the *state* and the *society* and the decline of religious belief in public space and institutions as well as among the individuals as was evidenced in Europe. But in Great Britain, during the industrial revolution, there was expansion of religion and that pervaded over secularization. However, in the recent past, secularization has become problematic, mainly because of the resurgence of a multiplicity of 'counter-secularization movements' since 1970s, from Ireland to Iran and from Israel to Afghanistan via USA, which the Christian and the Jewish and Muslim fundamentals term as 'backlash' or 'revenge of God'. As such, secularism is not an end of the belief because the movement is neither uniform nor irreversible. In fact, its extent and its time span may vary with the course that history has taken in concerned societies. In the Indian context, secularism as a concept, is not the reproduction of the American, British, and French models, rather the whole thesis of secularization acquires futility when it subsumes 'multiple modernities' under a single ethnocentric narration. (Assayag, 2003)

There are two basic questions that need critical appraisal in the Indian context. First, we need to look at as to why the secularism of the state succeeded in India from 1947 to 1960s, followed by its decline from the 1970s and reappearance of the same in 1980s. After that, there was resurgence of the Hindu national movement since 1990s by the partisans of 'Hinduness' (Hindutva) and the stigmatization of the old Nehruvian secularists as 'pseudo-secularists'. Secondly, one must examine as to why secularism of the society has failed to strike roots in the Indian society? Some scholars cast doubt about the suitability of secularism to Indian sensibilities while others think that this has failed because of our insistence on the Indian revisionism and neo-traditionalism. (Nandy, 1985; Madan, 1997; Bhargava, 1998 as quoted by Assayag, 2003). Further, these scholars along with others have identified a set of factors that have led to crisis in Indian secularism. Basically, this crisis is attributed to reaction of old elites who felt threatened due to end of the political and the government monopoly of the Congress party which had promoted their prosperity. Further, there was spread of communalism incited mainly due to the confrontation of the Hindus

against the Muslim communities. Moreover, the democratization process threw up many opportunities to a growing number of communities to acquire equal rights and assert their identities, promoting communal reactions and religious conflicts.

Further, in the public sphere we have observed contradictions in 'social and ethical norms' and as a result of that, these norms lost their regulatory functions, thus enabling the advantage of behaviours for certain people to aim at immediate and personal interest even if it meant 'instrumentalizing the religions'. (Madan, 1997) It is also argued that as a backlash to globalization, there is a proud withdrawal into the 'immemorial Hindu civilization' which provides reference points, values and dignity to the onslaught of the competing external interventions. However, there is a need to view the secularization in a larger perspective based on the historical and political circumstances through which people have come to identify and mobilize in particular ways, that is the concepts of majority and majoritarianism that got created and periodically restructured through politics and the socio-economic inequalities. In short, the homogenization processes initiated due to colonization of the Indian state and society through the modernization of the highly heterogeneous groups by bringing individualism against collectivism or group centrism, retarded the process of secularization. (Assayag, 2003)

Assayag (2003) also suggests that in Europe and America, the modern state could claim to free itself from the social and political shackles of the past, but the institution of caste in India resisted military conquests, political intrusions and religious conversions either by indifference or its ability to assimilate and act as a resilient sort of social organization based on '*dharma*' including *kama*, *artha*, *sanyasa*, *karma*, *samskara* etc. In other words, the sacralized social configuration of castes acted against the modern-liberal thought of secularism. As such, the imposition of the British secular model on the Indian (non-Christian) society was bound to fail. In Europe, the individuals unequal in status were placed against each other and the state mobilized hierarchical communities which were less characterized by beliefs or ideologies than by the segmented group orientations of the Indian society to determine status and identity.

In the pre-independent era, no attempt was made by the Church to reform the beliefs of various religious groups. However, in the 19th century, under the auspices of Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha movements and later on, in the Aligarh and Deoband among the Muslims, extensive religious reforms were mooted. The fallout of these movements was witnessed in the form of growth of pressure groups and

'associations' of these communities. This suited the colonial administration to evolve a system of competitive opportunities through reservations for the oppressed and discriminated groups to list these as SCs, STs and backward castes while keeping the question of status hanging in dispute to help it follow the 'divide to rule policy'. However, in the post independent era, the secular principle advocated by Nehru on our multicultural society is reflected in our Constitution (1950) which alleges that all religions are recognized by the State and should show benevolence towards each other based on 'equidistance' towards all in an identical manner. Nehru was keen to consolidate the public sphere both in the political and economic spaces as well as to transform all the Indians into citizens irrespective of their religion or belief, caste, region or village in order to move forward the nation-state towards modernity, growth and development.

Nehru was committed to build up factories, dams, laboratories of scientific excellence, and technological institutes for the development of the Indian society rather than temples, mosques, churches or gurudwaras, so as to make India a model of growth and development within the Western model of economic and social thought based on rationality dimension of the Enlightenment thinkers, influenced by the notion of education. No doubt, the Indian Constitution was for the establishment of a uniform civil code, yet this could not become a reality due to strong resistance from both the Muslims and the Christians, while the Hindu Code bill relating to inheritance, marriage, divorce and adoption was applicable to all groups (Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, Christians, Muslims, Parsis and Jews). However, Nehru accepted the formation of Muslim Personal Law Board, founded on 'Shariat', already codified by the British regime.

It is suggested that the creation of Pakistan and its declaration as an Islamic Republic in 1956, led to the creation of the concepts of majoritarianism and Hindu nationalism as Muslims in India were being perceived suspiciously by most of the Hindus, especially those who had fled from that part of India. However, Nehru tried to maintain communitarian expression and prevented the invasion of his other co-religionists to introduce 'communalist' element in our social life. But after Nehru, the Hindu nationalists took advantage of the concept of majoritarianism and employed it as a political arithmetic to secure 'vote bank' politics in terms of secularism based on greater numbers as a part of democracy. Further, the demographic composition of the Indian population was such that people started voting along the religious representations. It is argued that the Muslims started

multiplying at a faster rate than the Hindus but the Hindu majority reaped the fruits of modernization in almost all fields (economic, political, administrative religious or academic), since the state apparatus failed to resolve the issue of marginalization of the Muslims in the social, economic and political life of the country. (Assayag, 2003)

Interestingly, in 1980s, the politicians of the Hindu nationalists have started propagating the 'minority complex of the majority', as it was felt by them that the state had a pleasing attitude and action towards the minority groups. This resulted in reducing the tolerance levels in between different religious groups (tolerance is the single most significant factor of the Hindu culture) and the idea of a composite culture of our society started faltering. In other words, the idea of 'Indian tolerance' turned out to be 'exclusivist'. It is observed that the Congress party till 1970s, with Indira Gandhi at the helm of affairs, based politics on the separation of religion from it within a democratic framework but later on, she got inclined towards 'inclusivist ideology' generated at home. The Hindu nationalism led by Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) on the other hand, became the protagonist of the Hindu culture (its history, religion, language and territory) while the Muslim and its militant groups considered that secularism was being used only as an instrument of the Hindu nationalist politics. As such, they demanded uniform laws for all the Indian citizens, independent of their denominations.

The decline of secularism and the subsequent erosion of democracy are attributed by some scholars to their alien character, but it appeared that the concepts of the majority and minority were exploited by the politicians to find a space in politics. However, it is observed that the process of desecularization was visibly experienced from 1970-2002. The theological-political symbols were increasingly employed selectively by the politicians of all hues in the parliamentary democracy and all those in power (politician, bureaucrats, businessmen and professionals) favoured religious ideology and submitted themselves to 'Gurus' and 'renouncers', to get their ambitions fulfilled. These 'Gurus' became as powerful as the syndicates. Besides, personal and collective identity with the religious affiliation and the issues related to the conversions and geo-political tensions between the low and high caste Hindus, the Hindus and the Muslims and India and Pakistan, developed complex social reconfigurations.

It is observed that since 1990, basically four social groups gave rise to the politics of Hinduism and its ideology around the hard core ideology of RSS and subsequent 'saffronization' of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). These were 'sadhus, saints, pujaris and mahants'

along with the Vishva Hindu Parishad (Saffron family); a significant proportion of upper caste Hindus (Brahmins, Rajputs and Baniyas) providing xenophobic Hindu nationalism based on the 'minority complex of the majority'; urban middle class (nearly 150 million persons) similarly promoting the infiltration of the Hindu nationalism into the civil society; the state apparatus supporting BJP and deserting Congress which traded on secularism and the dominated persons such as working class aristocracy, secured employees, small shopkeepers, inhabitants of shanty towns and even 'hooligans', the unemployed, diverse non working elements, delinquents or guys selling their muscle power to the political parties etc. Further, since 1990s, as a result of the globalization process and opening to the market forces, the demand for desecularization by a rapidly growing middle class got radicalized. In short, the idea of Hindutva gained momentum to find an expanded political space through the forces of market, the media and the middle class. This kind of development led to an alliance between the OBCs (Other Backward Castes) and the Muslims and in between 1971 and 1996, the electoral composition in the country changed in the favour of the indigent people, illiterates, dalits and OBCs, rural inhabitants and the Muslims whereas in 1971, the upper castes, privileged classes, literate and qualified persons, town dwellers dominated the electorates. They are now in the minority and mostly, they absent themselves from voting. There is now, a contestation of the dalits and Muslims with the dominant castes in the political arena. As such, they seem to be emerging as the champions of democracy rather than of economic development. In the true sense, secularism implies religious non-discrimination rather than the separation of the religion from politics. It is observed that since 1980s, the process of secularization of the state or of civil society acquired a desecularization character and assumed some sort of sacral-secularization structure, when some of the sacral dimensions started appearing in secular fields. For example, atomic bombs in 2000 were named 'Prithvi' and 'Shakti', that is 'Earth' and 'Energy'. In short, it is argued that the religious 'backlash' in the form of 'counter secularization' against the principle of secularism of the state/society, is operating now in the context of the individualized and interiorized dimensions based on the personal choice, pride and identity in a more globalized but fragmented world. (Assayag, 2003)

In his brilliant analysis, no doubt, Assayag has brought home to us the processes of desecularization in independent India due to the political follies of the politicians, alienation of the masses especially the minority communities, dalits and Muslims etc. and the ideological shifts engineered from time to time, yet it goes

to the credit of the our people that despite religious 'backlash' of varied nature punctuated in between various periods, no major political upheaval or upsurge of serious nature was witnessed. In fact, there was a smooth shift over from one political regime to another having different ideological orientations. People have encountered the terrorist activities and intrusions not only from across the borders but even within, with calmness, serenity, compassion and concern for the affected victims. One value that is ubiquitous across the Indian society, as a part of our culture, is tolerance which has its permeation and mediation in the way we believe, think and act. This needs to be preserved, promoted and ingrained into thinking of people of all religious adherences, if we have to move towards the ultimate goal of a secular society. The dichotomy of private and public sphere of social life is significant but the priorities of one over the other need to be negotiated through communicative action that is based on the trust, understanding and mutual interest of all the groups in the interactional process.

Religion as a part of the private sphere is most desirable and needs to be pursued and its aim should be to integrate a person within as well as with the others, with whom, he or she has associations, but in the public sphere, so long as it is confined to the prayer meetings, religious congregations, obedience to one's gods or goddesses etc, it is acceptable but the moment, it acquires a gigantic proportion and is plagued with the political germs, it becomes a political dynamite and assumes threatening and deadly forms for the society. The private and the public spheres of religion should have judicial trade off relationships with the polity and economy of the society.

Historically speaking, there is hardly any evidence that suggests the separation of religion and politics. In fact, these have always acted in tandem with each other. The only way to keep down or tone down the role of religion in politics is to restrict religion in the domain of the private sphere so that politicians are discouraged to create mass hysteria among the public in the name of religion. Simultaneously, mix working groups from the different religious belief systems to pursue joint economic activities can reduce communal tensions and promote secular ideals in a democratic polity to build up a vibrant civil society. No doubt, one of the aims of a democratic society is to widen the participation of the people through enlargement of the public sphere for the decision making process, yet it is desirable to restrain the religious practices to the private sphere, otherwise it may turn out to be anti-secular and democratic, generating tensions beyond containment for an integrated social living.

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Critique of the Concept of Religion

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Religion stands for belief in a super-human controlling power, especially in a personal God or gods entitled to obedience and worship. Here belief does not point to mere imagination or fanciful conjecture. It does imply (in its assertive content) that such a powerful super-human Being/God exists. He is claimed to be real and is revered as omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. This is the standard use of the concept of religion, predominantly noticed in case of all Semitic formulations. Under this theoretical set-up religion is bound to be theistic, either monotheistic or polytheistic. Anything, other than such formulations, is not designated as religion.

If one strictly adheres to this standard use of the concept of religion, then the so-called religions of the orient (especially of Indian origin) like the Jaina *dharma*, the Bauddha *dharma* and even the Hindu/Vaidica Sanatana *dharma* are not religions. Both Buddhism and Jainism have no acceptance of *Isvara*. The two *dharmas* do not have any conception of Creator-God. In case of Hinduism, the acceptance of *Isvara* is not that necessary too. A believer, a non-believer and even a dis-believer are all found to have been well accommodated within

this *dharmic* fold. It is said to be extremely heterogeneous, with no one sacred text or body of doctrine, unlike most religions. On account of all this, it seems to be reasonable not to assimilate *dharma* with religion. The distinction between them is conceptually clear and unambiguous.

Dharma stands for rule or law that binds men in society. Their relation remains intact. The socio-individual relation has been conceived in terms of being regulated by certain standard norms that keep the bond well balanced and composed. On the basis of that, *dharma* is identified as moral rule/principle which is not conceived as just limited to worldly mortal men. The principle is even extended to the speculated *devas*. It is notable that the *devas* like the *mānavas* and even the *dānavas* are depicted in the textual sources as both benevolent and malevolent too. In other words, it is worthy of note that in such *dharmic* set-up, the rule is more important and powerful than a person (whosoever he may be—a man or a demon or a divine being). *Dharma*, therefore, is not person-centric but rule-centric. As such, the reading of theologism on *dharma* seems to be an unwarranted superimposition. And, the rule or norm is not conceived to be something fixed, unalterable and arbitrary maxim.

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