

BOOK REVIEW

Levels of Prejudice

Rabindra Ray

Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India

by T.N. Madan

Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997; 323 pp + glossary, references and index

This book is a topical and welcome contribution to Indian sociology. It aims to contribute to the understanding of what it believes are general, universal sociological categories of secularism and fundamentalism and thus seems to have no overt argument — a rhetorical posture belied by the polemical title. (Without this argument the contribution that the book makes to the understanding of secularism and fundamentalism in India cannot be addressed.) The argument itself moves at two levels: an overt level at which it is an exploration of the notions of secularism and fundamentalism in a highly schematic, selective and prejudiced fashion, and a covert organic level at which the prejudices are set into their Indian context. The two levels, however, interpenetrate each other and contribute greatly to the interest an Indian reader is likely to take in the book in trying to decipher the author's viewpoint.

Crisis of Secularism

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The overt argument begins with the misgivings that have begun to be voiced in the West concerning the validity of the notion of secularism. The author sketches the European pedigree of the term. He identifies it with the open-minded and critical outlook of Enlightenment, but without going into questions of the atheist, materialist content of the term: questions that are highly important in what the author calls the crisis of secularism. To begin with, there is the sociological rather than the social dimension of this crisis: the pure notional form of a

clear separation of religion from other spheres of life, especially politics, is nowhere to be found — not even in Europe and America. Everywhere, we see only differences of degree in the mixture of religious considerations in various spheres in public life. The author regards this as his theoretical opportunity and of supreme interest to Indian sociology: the study of India can illuminate the workings of such categories in a way as to be valid for the whole world.

But this overt argument and the notional crisis are tied to a deeper and less explicitly pronounced social crisis of the workings of secularism in India. This is a theme that the author has already explored in the past and the conclusions of which he has drawn upon to elaborate the perspective of the present book. He believes that the secularism of the Indian constitution has two components. One is the Europeanized secularism of the intellectuals—socialist in inspiration in the case of Nehru — that wishes to clearly separate religion from public life and that has tried to impose itself on the masses. The author seems opposed to such imposition, but also argues for the independent validity of this point of view in a democracy, indeed its superiority as the more rational, open-minded view. However, this secularism—the 'secularism in crisis' that finds itself unable to cope with the closed-mindedness of the communalism and fundamentalism of the masses—is not the active agency of the relations between different religious groups. Religious groups in India maintain relations with each other not according to principles of a Europeanized secularism, but in accordance with world-views where religion has a preeminent place in public life. The coexistence in peace of religious communities, which also perhaps is a variety of secularism, is thus the outcome of an exclusivist tolerance or an accommodative non-interference. These latter secularisms are currently in crisis because of the rise of fundamentalism.

Invariant Principles

Whereas the author's conceptions of secularism and its crisis are organically historical and sociological, his programme for an understanding of fundamentalisms is schematic and formal. His historical account is selective, and from it he wishes to deduce invariant principles for the identification and the characterization of fundamentalism. Thus, to my mind, the author can erroneously characterize the phenomenon of Hindutva as a fundamentalism.

The book, however, has more to offer than this argument. It undertakes a presentation of certain thinkers in the Sikh, Islamic and Hindu traditions as its mode of exposition and covers a great deal of ground in the consideration of doctrinal matters. The selection of thinkers and doctrines seems to have been guided with an eye to illuminating contemporary Indian circumstances. The author points out the terror of the enviroing Hindu circumstance and its contamination in the cases of the Sikh and earlier Muslim fundamentalism, touching only briefly on the anti-westernism of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism. No causative nexus is even mentioned or indicated to attribute motives to a Hindutva. Equally, atheism and materialism are left entirely undiscussed, without which it may not be possible to address the phenomenon of the crisis of secularism and fundamentalism.

An engaging and exciting book. But a word of caution. Ram Mohun Roy's 'Attiyo Sabha' has been mis-cited as 'Brahmo Sabha' and the references include two *Brahmanas* and the *Mahabharata* without bibliographical information, even though the author says he has used English translations of Sanskrit texts.

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LECTURE

Partition Stories

Narendra Mohan, a visiting professor at the IAS in April-May 1998, presented a series of three lectures on *Partition: The Indian Short Story*. The first lecture, *Partition: History and Memory*, dealt with the role and significance of memory, as reflected in literature, for bridging the gaps in history. Recalling the days he spent in Lahore, Narendra Mohan shared with the audience his vivid memories of the traumatic experiences which he and the members of his family had to undergo at the time of partition. He emphasized that literature can serve as a vehicle for interpreting the events of history afresh. He referred in particular to 'Pattar Anara De' (A. Hamid), 'Parmesher Singh' (Ahmed Nidim Kashami), 'Malbe ka Malik' (Mohan Rakesh) and 'Sikka Badal Gaya' (Krishna Sobti).

In his second lecture, *Partition: A Literary Text*, he pointed out that the socio-cultural as well as political problems of the day are part of the literary texts concerning partition. He dealt with a wide range of short stories such as: 'Maan Beta' (Hyat-Ullah Ansari), 'Patjhar Ki Aawaj' (Qurrat-ul-ain Hyder), 'Ek Shehari Pakistan Ka' (Ram Lal), 'Kis Ka Itihaas' (Rajee Seth), 'Aadab' (Samaresh Basu), 'Lajwanti' (Rajendra Singh Bedi), 'Uttar Nahin Milaya' (Niranjan Tasneem), 'Amritsar Aa Gaya Hai' (Bhisham Sahni) and others. These stories mostly concern people marginalized by the society.

The third lecture, *Partition: Blotted Sunshine*, highlighted the fallout of the historic divide that created vacuity in the lives of people across the borders. Analysing at length the short stories of renowned Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto, he came to the conclusion that these are, in a way, long drawnout cries in the wilderness of partition. Manto's short stories, particularly 'Khol Do', 'Thanda Gosht' and 'Nangi Aawazen', laid stress not only on the episodes but also depicted the deep-rooted psyche of the affected persons. He also referred to Krishna Sobti's 'Mere Maan Kahan', Kamleshwar's 'Kitne Pakistan', Munir Ahmed Sheikh's 'Apni Shaklen', Manoj Basu's 'Seemanta' and Joginder Paul's 'Fakhtayen'.

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of Cola extract only on his maternal side. Thus, it became essential to weave tales of chaos and confusion, followed by peace and harmony heralded by this new line of kings. Ghose makes here an impressive contribution to south Indian history and it would probably be necessary for the reader to flit between chapters 4 and 9 to get a feel of the simultaneous processes of mythmaking and growing political authority and legitimation.

A fascinating feature of the book is that Ghose makes many startling connections through the elaboration of what appears to be tangential information. Thus the motif of the anklet in the dance of Tyagaraja is traced to the Cankam texts as symbolising victory and is studied within the context of its use in cultic dances (p. 98). The fusing of the Vedic and Agamic traditions and privileging the latter over the former in subtle ways forms another interesting part of the study (pp. 135-141, 187). A motif that recurs often is the constant presence of the goddess in the Tyagaraja myths (pp. 27-8, 38, 67, 85, 148). Ghose argues against the historical validity of tales of Sankara taming the fierce goddess, and sees in such myths an expression of the impact of the Advaitic doctrine on the Saiva schools (p. 162). The discussion on the *mariyatai* scheme in temple ritual calls for comment as well. The term *mariyatai* literally means respect and is used to connote the ritual status accorded to various functionaries in temple ritual. As Ghose suggests, it was basically a means to diffuse points of social tension through the incorporation of various caste specialists into this scheme, as well as their integration in the religious sense into the Agamic fold (pp. 225-28).

The book makes an important contribution to the study of the history of religion in general as it

attempts to bridge the gap between theory and field research. Hence, Ghose defines 'cult', derived from the Latin '*cultus*', as the constant interweaving of various myths, symbols, rites, festivals and dances which produce a body of ideas and practices resulting in the formation of a group (though not a fixed one) espousing a specific form of the divine (pp. 3-4). In the Hindu tradition, cults are seen as evolving around three factors—the sacred place, the sacred waters and the icon. The Tyagaraja cult is placed by Ghose within the range of regional cults and she broadly uses Victor Turner's paradigmatic approach to study the various tensions arising within cults—'egalitarianism vs. non-egalitarianism', 'exclusiveness vs. inclusiveness', etc (p. 6). But she emphasises on the need to make it relevant to the Hindu-Tamil context by taking into account that very essential component of the social fabric, caste (p. 6). She studies myths as cultural integrators which provide certain practices with a philosophical base and neutralise rival beliefs and practices by emulation and/or persecution (p. 187). Thus, in her analysis of the Tyagaraja image as the focal symbol of the cult performing certain symbolic functions, she qualifies that the symbol is not fixed but keeps acquiring new meanings which appear to be added on 'by collective fiat to old symbol-vehicles', what Turner calls 'processual symbols' (p. 99).

Religious Legitimation

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While there is much that the book offers, it fails in one fundamental respect—to prove the centrality of the Tyagaraja cult as *the* tool of legitimation for the Colas, particularly from the time of Kulottunka I. As Ghose herself points out, Nataraja or Atavallan was also constantly invoked by the Colas as their presiding deity (pp. 24-25), while the massive edifices at Gangaikondacolapuram and Tanjavur demonstrate the importance given by the rulers to the establishment of a state cult in these temple centres. R. Champakalakshmi (1989a) has shown how in keeping with the *bhakti* tradition hymns were composed in praise of these two newly created royal temples, which were then included in the *Tirumurai* or Saiva canon. The legend of Hiranyavarman in the *Cidambara Mahatmya*, according to Kulke (1993), also parallels the life and times of Kulottunka I, and, as in the Mucukuntan myth, attributes the restoration of peace and order in the period of flux to this legendary figure. Moreover, the importance given to other deities, such as the various goddesses, through grants and the construction of structural shrines from the twelfth century reflects the dynamics of this process of cultural integration. In fact, the Cola period stands apart precisely because of its integration and accommodation of many diverse strands of belief, what Kulke terms the 'horizontal process of legitimation', concomitant with the vertical legitimation of enfolding several strands of belief within the Vedic and Agamic fold.

In methodological terms, the excessive drawing upon the works of Stein's school is disappointing in that Ghose, if not by intention then by compulsion, puts paid to the basic argument of the 'segmentary state' thesis through her constant emphasis on the political processes under-

lying the ideological trajectories of the Cola state, but does not really address the looming historiographical implications. If, as Stein and his followers argue, the *nadu* was really a self-sustaining unit, the abundant epigraphical evidence that points towards the flow of revenue and resources from such units to the Cola state, channelled via the temple's institutional apparatus, would remain inexplicable. Also, as Ghose herself is at pains to stress, the ritual aspects of sovereignty are in no way divorced from the political and temporal structures of power. In fact, chapters 6 to 9 essentially deal with the very crucial intertwining of religious ideology/symbols and political legitimation and power. Despite these problems, Ghose's contribution is noteworthy and will enrich the body of knowledge available on south India.

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LECTURE

Social History at Margins

Ramchandra Guha gave three talks at the IAS, Shimla, in May 1998. In his first lecture, 'Can An Englishman Become Indian: The Case of Verrier Elwin', he began with the provocation that in Indian historiography biographies were never given much importance. Inquiring into Indian social and intellectual history, he argued that the Indian tradition lacked the concept of individuality.

Guha presented an 'intellectual'

biography of Verrier Elwin. He pointed out that due to their philosophical limitations, colonial, nationalist and subaltern historiographers convert various forms of social life into a category, and are unable to see the multiplicity of historical realities of Indian life. As a result, some important British scholars who were successful in establishing intimate relations with the Indian society are left out of their purview, Verrier being one of them.

In his second lecture on 'The Cultural Politics of Sport in British India' Guha talked about the relationship between cricket, colonia-

lism and Indian society. Highlighting the biography of Balwant Baloo, who was born in a dalit family and became a great cricketer, Guha described the political context which surrounded Baloo on the cricket fields of Bombay. Guha stated that even in the case of biographical histories our attention is always drawn towards successful and conspicuous personalities: the bias is implicit in the very act of the selection of subject for biographical study.

The third lecture based on the Indian environment movements stressed on the need for a metho-

dology to establish 'untouched' biographies. Guha talked of many British environmentalists who interacted with the Indian environment in an innovative way.

Ramchandra Guha's lectures encouraged sharp debate. Scholars present in the discussion questioned Guha's remarks on the lack of biographical instinct in the Indian tradition and his views on the Marxists' ignorance of the value of biographies/biographers. They were doubtful about Verrier Elwin's commitment to tribal life, and to the Indian situation in general.

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Recognizing the Complex

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Trautmann concludes by briefly examining the dialogic nature of the Indian relationship to orientalism. He touches on the range of responses to the shifting constructs of Aryan, from enthusiasm, to hostility, to the complexities of the Aryan-Dravidian divide. Finally, he draws attention to the enduring legacy of the orientalist—the fact that they created a space for exploring early Indian history, and identified language families, including Indo-European.

As Trautmann recognises, the Aryans have an undeniable contemporary presence. It is true that philology and ethnology have diverged, with the latter placing an increasing emphasis on 'scientific' physical criteria, especially complexion (or even the nasal index) as indicators of race. At the same time, philology and archaeology remain closely and rather untidily entangled in contemporary explorations of the Aryan question. The history of this relationship, and its contextualisation could have provided interesting points of comparison with that between philology and ethnology. As is well-known, localising the Aryan homeland, and tracing out routes of migration into India, and the problems of correlating linguistic and archaeological evidence are (often literally) burning issues. The analytical framework Trautmann develops could very well have been extended to contextualising the production of archaeological knowledge.

Trautmann consistently and explicitly refuses to simplify what are in fact complex relationships. What is also refreshing is his empathy and gentle humour. Commenting on H.H. Wilson's edition of James Mill's *History of British India* (1858), where Wilson, a Sanskritist, attempted to revise Mill's anti-orientalist perspective by inserting copious footnotes, Trautmann writes, '[i]t is rather as if the prey were trying to embrace the boa constrictor, and with about as much effect' (p 118).

Given the current polarised intellectual environment, one wonders whether the fate of Trautmann's rich, painstaking study may not be somewhat similar.

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CONFERENCE

Science and Tradition Explorations In the Indian Context

A seminar on 'Science and Tradition: Explorations in the Indian Context' was held at IIT, Kanpur from December 22 to 24, 1997. It was jointly sponsored by IUC in association with IAS, Shimla, ICPR and IIT, Kanpur, and was dedicated to Prof. PRK Rao of IIT, Kanpur. An electrical engineer by profession, he was the institutional locus of responsible dissent and critical initiatives.

The papers under discussion pursued the theme of modern science and Indian tradition at various levels: philosophy and history of ancient Indian and western science, sociology of knowledge, history and politics of science movements, science education, etc. The seminar tried to explore meaningful linkages between modern science and ancient Indian traditions, and probed the tenuous relationship between science and the resources and processes of the life-world.

In his inaugural lecture, Andre Beteille argued that it is not meaningful to conceptualize a single Indian tradition, and that one could benefit from the more recent Indian tradition than a two thousand year old one. This was debated later during discussion sessions and in Patnaik's paper where he attempted to show the surprising formal similarities between contemporary generative and Paninian linguistics.

A.P. Shukla, in a reflective analysis of the science movement in Kanpur, sought a science which inhabits tension between the quest for the infinite and the empowerment of people. A. K. Biswas delineated various paradigms for writing the history of Indian science and made a plea for a National Society of History of Science Movements to coordinate the efforts of historians, archaeologists and scientists.

Taking a critical look at two influential contemporary philosophers of classical Indian philosophy, J. N. Mohanty and B. K. Matilal, Mohini Mullick argued that such representations, if left unchallenged, could not only lead to gross distortions of *darshanas*, but endanger the very survival of these traditions. A. K. Raina argued that it is the metaphysical concerns which give significance to scientific theories; the

phenomenal cognitive edifice created by the Indian traditions could be understood only against their metaphysical base.

Prajit Basu explored the relationship between the history and philosophy of science and science education. He argued that there are problems in the claim that either history or philosophy of science is an aid to science education, especially when history of science is understood as intellectual history, and science education implies proficiency in acquiring concepts of modern science within a paradigm. Establishing a dramatology of philosophical exchanges, Sanil V. argued that the dialogue between positivists and its critics were made possible by the mutual misrecognition of their relationship with their own founding event, popularly known as (modern) science.

Exploring the concept of knowledge (as a justified true belief) in the western tradition, Nirmalangshu Mukherji suggested that the concept be viewed socially, rather than cognitively. He suggested that author-less traditions, such as some aspects of the Indian tradition, do not need this concept. Kalyan Basu posed what he called a 'trascendental' question concerning science: what is the minimum structure needed on an apperceptive substrate so that informationally non-trivial projections of the phenomenal domain to a grammatology of terms (projections from world to words) can admit of truth-evaluation?

For Sundar Sarukkai, science works under a soligarchy: while scientific knowledge is based on solidarity, this solidarity in turn is shaped and validated in the presence of an oligarchy. U. Kalpagam's history of statistics in India showed how the deployment of the science of chance was governed by the necessities of the establishment.

In the concluding session, Prof. Rao provided an illuminating critique of the main themes of the seminar.

B. N. PATNAIK, A. K. Raina, Sanil V.

LECTURE

Alternative Paths of Development

In a series of three lectures, Y.B. Damle, a visiting professor at the Institute in October 1998, dwelt on the inadequacies of the state implemented development plans and the more fruitful activities undertaken by voluntary non-governmental organizations.

In his first lecture he focused on the concept of development itself: the need for nation-specific theories of development, for harnessing knowledge for social good rather than for asserting authority, for minimizing the gap between the common man and the expert, and the problems of unhealthy monopoly of state and bureaucracy in development and the resultant non-participation of people.

As alternatives Damle suggested 'Science Movement' and 'Ethico-Religious Movement' for development. In his second lecture entitled 'Science Movement for social Action' he pointed out the need to redefine science to broaden its scope to make it available and useful to common man. Damle provided detailed information on the functioning of various voluntary organizations which represent a progression from abstract to concrete. Examples included the Kerala Sahitya Parishad, Homi Bhabha Science Education Centre, Bombay, Maharashtra Association for the cultivation of Science, Pune, Pani Panchayat initiated by an engineer Vials Salunke, and Bharatiya Agro-Industrial Foundation founded by Mahatma Gandhi's disciple Manibhai Desai.

The third lecture entitled 'Ethico-Religious Movement' delineated at length 'Swadhyaya', a unique movement evolved and founded by Shri Panduranga Shastri Athavale. It seeks to combine knowledge, devotion and activity, and obliterates the usual distinctions between the rich and the poor, the intelligent and the not so intelligent, and so on. Swadhyaya, of which Damle himself is a part, has shown that man can rise above self-interest and can selflessly work for human upliftment. Listing its varied projects all over the world such as socio-economic projects, natural resource utilization, medico-cultural clinics, social reformation, non-formal educational activities, publications, etc., he gave an idea of the range of activities of Swadhyaya based on the philosophy of devotional activism.

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