

Professor Satish Dhawan attracted our attention to a very perceptive article written by one of our ablest administrators P. N. Haksar. We reproduce below a note by Dhawan as an introduction.

—Editor

In the turmoil—social, political and economic—that India is passing through, nothing stands out as the strife spawned by friction between communities, castes and religion often fomented and manipulated by politicians and their henchmen. There seems to be a growing distrust of reason, a forgetting of the roots of Indian tolerance and adherence to morality. While some members of the Indian intelligentsia have on a few occasions taken courage to speak out against the whipped up frenzy and its disastrous consequences, the Indian Science Community has generally not discussed or taken a public stand in its usual gathering places such as Conferences, Symposia, Congresses, etc. Although many see this phenomenon as a menace not only to the strengthening of the roots of science in India but to virtually all civilized development, few do much about it. Haksar's editorial note [reproduced below] in *Man & Development* is worth reading by all our colleagues. It is a sober and reasoned analysis in the light of history by a respected intellectual who has been active for many decades in the endeavour to help create a modern India which is rational and humane, where the power bestowed by knowledge and status is tempered by wisdom and sensitiveness—he has been in the thick of the fight and yet above it. It is a good, sobering message for all Indian intellectuals.

— Satish Dhawan

Fundamentalism and secularism

P. N. Haksar

In the charmed world of Alice in Wonderland, words can be made to mean anything. Regrettably, outside that Wonderland, words have to be used with utmost care. The context in which a word arises must be understood if we are to avoid unnecessary sorrow and suffering. Ever since human beings began expressing themselves through words and then language, a measure of sacredness has been attached to a 'word'. According to our own tradition, in the beginning there was 'Word' and that word was *Om*. Great care was taken in articulating the vibrant resonance of *Om*. Similar sanctity attaches to a Muezzin's call: "Allah-O-Akbar". In the Christian system of faith and belief, the second person in the Trinity is 'Word'. When a person makes a statement or promise to do something "upon my word", sanctity attaches to that statement.

We have said enough to make the simple point that 'words' have to be used with utmost care. In order to do so, we must understand the context in which each word arose and the shades of meaning which it acquires through the passage of time. All this might sound somewhat pedantic, but the Information Revolution, which is shaking

the world, makes it necessary to point out the dangers involved in our failure to be meticulous, even fussy, about the use of words. In these notes, we are particularly concerned about two words, namely, 'Fundamentalism' and 'Secularism'.

Many dignitaries visiting our shores in recent months, more especially from the United States and the United Kingdom, have warned us about the rise of 'Islamic Fundamentalism'. It is perhaps, their hope that India's social and political climate might be receptive to their warnings. That hope is not without some basis. That is why it is necessary to examine critically the genesis of the word 'fundamentalism'. How did this word arise in the English language? The *Oxford Reference Dictionary* explains it thus:

Strict maintenance of traditional orthodox religious beliefs; a religious movement which developed among various Protestant bodies in the USA after the First World War, based on strict adherence to certain tenets (e.g. the literal inerrancy of Scripture) held to be fundamental to the Christian faith.

The *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* elaborates the origins of fundamentalism as follows:

Fundamentalism is the name of an aggressive conservative movement in the Protestant churches of the United States which flourished

during the decade after the World War. It manifested itself chiefly in the Baptist, Disciple and Presbyterian churches but received considerable support from other ecclesiastical groups. It was characterized not only by its conservatism with regard to traditional popular Christian beliefs but also by its aggressive efforts to impose its creed upon the churches and upon the public and denominational schools of the country. Its conservative supernaturalism was expressed in the "five points of fundamentalism" which included the doctrines of the inerrancy of the Bible, the Virgin Birth of Jesus, the supernatural atonement, the physical resurrection of Jesus and the authenticity of the Gospel miracles. The first of these points was interpreted by fundamentalism to apply particularly to the Biblical account of the creation of man in opposition to the theory of evolution, which became the central question of the fundamentalist controversy.

The movement was directed against liberal elements within the churches and against purely scientific or secular interests in American civilization.

Fundamentalism and political conservatism

It may be noted that fundamentalism as it arose in USA allied itself to political conservatism against liberal elements within the churches and against purely scientific or secular interests. Unnormous pressure was exerted on teachers and schools of a large number of States to

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purge the textbooks of all references to Evolution and substitute it with Creation. It may be of interest to note that

In the social sources from which it drew its strength fundamentalism was closely related to the conflict between rural and urban cultures in America... the fundamentalist attitude reflected the distrust of reason and the emphasis upon emotion, the doubt of human ability to solve ultimate problems and the reliance on divine agency which are characteristic not only of much traditional Christianity but also of those groups which have received the least profit from a rationalized culture and of pioneer or isolated rural societies which remain most conscious of dependence for their livelihood on those processes of nature which are least subject to human control. The rationalism and self-reliance of the opposing groups, on the other hand, had been fostered not only by science and education, but also by industrialized culture with its rational and artificial methods of production and its immediate urban environment, all largely subject to human control. (*Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, p. 527.)

One can perhaps, formulate a generalization about causes generating fundamentalism expressed in religious terms. Whenever human beings in larger or smaller aggregates in any society perceive that their physical and spiritual well-being and their future cannot be achieved through reason in politics, and thus become assailed by a sense of fear and uncertainty, they would tend to fall back upon fundamentalism as the only emotionally stabilizing factor. Insofar as there is a growing potentiality of the rise of fundamentalism in countries where people profess Islam, it is directly related to massive frustration of hopes and aspirations of the peoples concerned for both bread and liberty. Historically speaking, these frustrations are the direct result of policies pursued by the West, including the United States, in the entire arena which embraces Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and the entire Arab world. Naturally, these frustrations might also grip those areas of the former Soviet Union in which people have Islamic faith.

Military force no answer

One cannot meet the challenge posed by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism by the application of military force. It can only be met if the faith of these people

in the possibility of improving their sense of human dignity, their identity and promise of a better life is seen to be understood and translated into diplomacy practised by the western powers. The other scenario is too horrendous to contemplate. Surely, those who warn India against the rise of Islamic fundamentalism are not contemplating the revival of the crusades or of religious wars. One should learn from history that neither the crusades nor the religious wars fought in Europe between the 15th and 17th centuries yielded decisive results in the victory of one religion over the other or victory of Protestantism over Catholicism. It is indeed ironic that fundamentalism should have resurrected itself in the United States amongst the Protestant sects.

In our own country, religious fundamentalism gains adherence only in the measure that reason retreats in politics, money and muscle power suffocates democracy, cultural and ideological pluralism is sought to be snuffed out by fundamentalism expressed in religious terms, whether in the name of Hinduism or Islam.

Our country has, for several centuries, interacted both with the Arab world and Persia. We have interacted with Islam. And if India had remained undivided, we would have, in the Republic of United India, more than 300 million citizens of the Republic professing Islamic faith. We respectfully ask how *Hindutva* would have coped with *Akhanda Bharat* containing 30 crores of Muslims? That is why we began by expressing serious anxiety about improper use of words.

It would be erroneous to assume that the mind-set which is labelled by the word 'fundamentalism' is invariably connected with religion. Any rigid dogma can degenerate into a fundamentalist mind-set crushing liberty and democracy. Fundamentalism can equally express itself in racist terms. The apartheid system in South Africa, in this view of the matter, must be regarded as an expression of the fundamentalist mind-set of white racists there. Hitler's Nazism was also fundamentalist, as it combined racist dogmas with retreat from reason and rationality. In pre-war Japan, Japanese fundamentalism was based on enforcing the Bushido Code; dissidents were persecuted for the crime of advocating 'dangerous thoughts'. The

Stalinist persecution equally belongs to the fundamentalist species.

Challenge to replace fear

Our own social, political, economic, cultural and moral order is gripped with crisis. The centuries-old tradition, reinforced by a variety of oral traditions, helps our people in maintaining some sort of faith in their future. But this must not be over-estimated. Fear and uncertainty is seeping through millions upon millions of people. Our political leadership faces a great challenge to replace fear with hope and this can only be done by combining together the moral, spiritual, rational and scientific universe with which the names of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru are associated.

At this stage one must consider the meaning of the word 'Secularism'. Both fundamentalism and secularism are interacting attitudes of mind in human societies bounded by specificities of their own respective cultures and civilizations. They are not independent variables. In the English language, the word 'secular' means "concerned with the affairs of this world, not spiritual or sacred" and 'secularism' means "the belief that morality or education should not be based on religion".

Both the words *secular* and *secularism* arose as a result of the operation of a universal process which has been in operation in all societies from the dawn of human consciousness. In this connection we would like to draw the attention of our readers to the same column in the September 1991 issue of *Man & Development*, entitled, "Men, Events and Processes". By this process, the human mind is able to discern what constitutes the affairs of this world, as distinct from spiritual or sacred. Naturally, the outward expression of the operation of this process of secularization of the human mind takes a variety of shapes and forms depending upon the cultural specificities of each society. The human-kind began this process of secularization from the very moment they began asking questions like How and Why instead of Who.

In the history of our own civilization, we began drawing a distinction between matters relating to *Jh-lok* as distinct from *Parlok*. There is a similar distinc-

tion between matters relating to *Deen* and *Duniya*. The process of secularization is fed by the search for knowledge which grows into science-based knowledge. By this process, human beings endeavour, on the basis of knowledge, to grapple with the problems of political, economic, social and cultural structuring of societies. In Europe, the secularization process produced in time Renaissance, Enlightenment and Juristic humanitarian universalism. We can easily discern similar processes at work in the story of our own civilization.

State for totality of national interest

It is important to remember that the process of secularization was powerfully helped by the elaboration of natural laws instead of laws derived from sanctity of religion. When, in the midst of this process, there emerged the Modern Nation State, the question arose, and certainly arises in our country with a particular sense of legitimacy, about the nature and character of our State: Is State an instrument for enforcing divine laws? Alternatively, is State an instrument for the enlargement and protection of the totality of national interest transcending religious or denominational divisions? It is from these considerations

that there arose the need for the State confining itself to the affairs of this world, and thus being secular rather than being an instrument of any particular faith or dogma.

It may be noted that the process of secularization is accelerated in the measure that a State, citizens and society are governed by laws enacted through the democratic processes. There then emerges a "law-governing State" and "law-abiding citizens". In our country, we have laws and procedures relating to crime; we have laws relating to evidence; we have laws governing transfer of property and about taxation. All these are secular laws concerning the affairs of our world in India. In this view of the matter, it is normal and natural to have uniform laws governing all the citizens of the Republic of India.

If the words secular, secularism and secularization are to be understood as part and parcel of a universal process of secularization of the human mind, then we have inflicted enormous damage on the nation-building process in India, by a totally unacceptable and false translation of the word secular and secularism by equating them to the doctrine of religious tolerance expressed in the words like *Dharmanirpekshita* and *Sarva Dharma Sambhava*. These translations

have produced great schizophrenia in our politics which, in time, has produced the situation with which we are now actually confronted in Punjab and Kashmir. And not merely in Punjab and Kashmir, but elsewhere too, when our politicians of all political parties make their electoral calculations in terms of 'Hindu', 'Muslim', 'Sikh', 'Christian', etc.

There is one more question which needs to be answered: What is the relationship between religion, howsoever defined, and processes of secularization? Is this relationship inherently antagonistic? The answer is no. The process of secularization merely leads to finding the domain of each, both at the level of individual and society and State. That is why the word 'Secular' as we have stated means "concerned with the affairs of this world, not spiritual or sacred". It is to be hoped that if the Republic of India is not to degenerate into a state of anarchy, the time has come to grips with the real meaning of such words as 'secularism' and 'fundamentalism'.

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Context: Tehri Dam

OPINION

Must we have high dams in the geodynamically active Himalayan domain?

K. S. Valdiya

The occurrence of the moderate earthquake of M 6.6 on 20 October 1991 resulting from slipping along active faults in a region cut by many active faults and thrusts, and which has been consistently giving warning signals in the form of small earthquakes of magnitude 3 or less, has once again brought to the fore the question of building high dams in geodynamically sensitive regions. The Uttarkashi earthquake not only killed over 1000 people but also wrecked more than 28,222 buildings, severely damaged another 20,658 houses and also violently shook a large part of north-central India. The Tehri Dam in the Garhwal region of central sector of the Himalaya is taken as an example of the risks involved in building high dams.

A majority of 200-odd hydel projects that have been built or are being constructed or planned happen to be located not far

from the seismically and tectonically active zones of faults and boundary thrusts tearing the Himalayan terrain

into blocks and segments (Figure 1, Table I).

The 260.5-m high dam, across the