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Secularism and Religion in Multi-faith Societies

The Case of India

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1
Introduction

In the post-Cold War era it is increasingly evident that collective violence occurs not only between nation-states engaged in power struggles: it is more and more between ethnic or religious groups, both within and across nation-states (Christie, Wagner, & Winter, 2001). What we see is that despite growing calls for secularist politics, religion continues to play a central role in these conflicts today as religious traditions and communities of faith have unexpectedly re-gained particular political importance around the world (Berger, 1999). Our research shows that religion is often a central issue in political identity formation, but this is generally not recognized in social debates in the West, which sometimes underestimates the force of religious belief and the connections between religious beliefs and political views. Research on lay beliefs about the Hindu–Muslim conflict in India (Ghosh, Kumar, & Tripathi, 1992; Hutnik, 2004; Kakar, 1996, 2000; Khan & Sen, 2009; Mishra, Akoijam, & Misra, 2009; Nandy, 1990; Nandy, Trivedi, Mayaram, & Yagnik, 1995; Sen & Wagner, 2009; Shankar & Gerstein, 2007; Tripathi, 2005) provides illuminating examples of how to approach intercultural relations with reference to ethnic conflict, religious politics, and secularism. However possible resolutions to such conflict or the potential for positive intercultural collaborations in contexts of conflict have seldom been examined. While conducting our research on religious conflict in India (2003–2009) this lacuna became rather apparent.

Hence we believe that there is an urgent need to examine the political psychology of secularism. We argue for a revised understanding of secularism that examines common sense and beliefs about the relationship between religion, politics, and conflict and also focuses on the possibilities for conflict reduction contained within such debates. We shall show that there is a need to develop a common understanding and shared trajectory and identify the points of anchoring which by assimilation on either side help blur the lines of demarcation between conflicting religious groups. Finally our aim is to highlight the subtle but complex ways in which religion operates as a meaningful system of knowledge, identity, and politics within a dynamic form of secularism. Let us start by situating the work on secularism and our research in a historical and cultural context.

R. Sen et al., *Secularism and Religion in Multi-faith Societies: The Case of India*, SpringerBriefs in Political Science, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-01922-2_1,

1.1 What Is Secularism?

The history of the concept of secularization has been complex and has involved a number of different, nuanced views. In the mid-nineteenth-century England, George Holyoake coined the term "secularism" to name an orientation to life designed to attract both theists and atheists under its banner. Holyoake believed that human enlightenment will be accompanied by a rational form of religious knowledge and experience, and will not be fractured, by earlier divisions (Cady & Hurd, 2010). His 1854 "Principles of Secularism" aspired to give voice to such an alternate vision. Secularism, as Holyoake fashioned it, was not the antithesis of religion or one side of a religion–secularism dichotomy. Its capaciousness was one of its defining virtues. Secularism, he wrote, is the "unity of principle which prevails amid whatever diversity of opinion that may subsist in a Secular Society" (Holyoake, 1871, p. 17).

This definition echoes the views of Gandhi who believed that God is ethics and morality; He is even the atheism of the atheist:

> To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. (Young India, 5-3-1925 as quoted in http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_truth_truthisgod.htm).

In Gandhi's vision flexibility was inherent, and as the quote below shows he was even willing to change his views. He had stressed that God is truth, but after an encounter with atheists he changed his definition and Truth was perceived as God. No one was excluded or was an untouchable. This inclusive approach is in sync with Holyoake's assertion of the capaciousness of true religion.

> But, in their passion for discovering truth, the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God—from their own point of view, rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that, rather than say that God is Truth, I should say that Truth is God. (Speech at the meeting in Lausanne, 8-12-1931 as quoted in http://www.gandhimanibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_truth_truthisgod.htm).

In this way Gandhi deduced a simple but critical logic: people live by a set of beliefs whether they are rooted in atheism, secularism, or spiritualism, and these need to be accommodated in a secular polity. Gandhi believed in the fundamental truth and equality of all religions; as he repeatedly told his followers one must accept that an individual's own religion is the truest for each irrespective of where it stands on others' scales of philosophical or social comparison. This stands in sharp contrast to many aspects of western secularist thinking which views religion as irrational and as therefore inherently problematic. Many social scientists saw in religious conviction an eclipse of reason and in religious motivation a constraint on enlightened social behavior (Candland, 2000).

The Indian context highlights the constraints of such assumptions. It was generally believed in the Enlightenment that religion would gradually cease to influence people as societies become more modern and more rational or scientific in their thinking and beliefs. Our research demonstrates that such a simple dichotomy does not hold in India where the move is in the opposite direction. As India modernizes religion becomes more not less significant, and we see a redefinition of secularism,

which does not pose religion and secularism as a binary but as dialectically interconnected. This gives rise to an emerging category: religious–secular. It is worth noting that even in Enlightenment thought when many views on religion's decline prevailed there have been only a few prophets of religion's decline—Karl Marx being the most notable among them who have dared to predict that the world of the future would be a world without religion (Marx, Introduction, The Hedgehog Review, 2006). This is not what we found in India, and we can also see how these dialectic of religious–secular operates elsewhere and at a more global level.

1.2 Cultural Encounters and Secularism

The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was witness to some of the worst excesses of religious conflict. Provoked by the disastrous consequences of the Hindu–Muslim conflict, at this time, the Indian Government took on the role of reforming religion. Secularism became a political slogan to curb the growth of Hindu nationalism. Modernizers believed that traditional religious strictures from the entire spectrum of all religions were the major impediment to the building of a modern India, arguing that at points of religious conflict or propagation, social cohesion weakened, intolerance became the predominant norm, and intergroup conflict was rife. Hence a more Westernized concept of secularism was imported (Chopra, 1994) which separated state politics from religion. As we noted above, this binary approach to secularism, religion, and politics was not popular as influential leaders like Gandhi rejected the separation of religion from state as they saw, that in India, religion is extremely powerful in the social, cultural, and political order.

1.3 Historical Backdrop

After India became independent in 1947 and started framing its own constitution, secularism became a dominant but highly debated principle in India. On the basis of the debates, in the constituent assembly, secular principles were enshrined in the Indian Constitution. In relation to the debate regarding framing the provisions about secularism the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, stated:

> Another word is thrown up a good deal, this secular State business. May I beg with all humility those gentlemen who use this word often to consult some dictionary before they use it? It is brought in at every conceivable step and at every conceivable stage. I just do not understand it. It has a great deal of importance, no doubt. But, it is brought in all contexts, as if by saying that we are a secular State we have done something amazingly generous, given something out of our pocket to the rest of the world, something which we ought not to have done, so on and so forth. We have only done something which every country does except a very few misguided and backward countries in the world. Let us not refer to that word in the sense that we have done something very mighty. (Constituent Assembly Debates, Friday, 12-8-1949, 400-01, as quoted in http://dharmalaw.blogspot.in/2009/09/conception-of-secularism-in-constituent.html).

The social responses to this were complex. Various proposals for incorporating the word "secularism" as part of the preamble were rejected by the Constituent Assembly (Constituent Assembly Debates, 17-10-1949). However in 1950, the new Constitution changed India into a secular and a democratic state. But the word secular was inserted into the preamble by the 42nd Amendment in 1976 (The Constitution, Forty Second Amendment Act, 1976, Government of India). In some ways India was becoming more secularized as well as more "modern." But these processes of both secularization and industrialization progressed slowly. At this stage although the constitution was secular, the state apparatus—bureaucracy, judiciary, army, and police—was infiltrated by Hindu communal elements (INSAF, 1997); the government, though predominantly secular, had many leaders who were influenced by Hindu communal ideology and were in important positions. This resulted in a mixed social and political transition: secularism thrived, but religious antagonism, which was hastily buried, did not die but remained dormant. Multiculture developed as some intergroup differences fell away, but the fault lines to preexisting conflicts remained visible. In the late 1970s and early 1980s religious conflicts surfaced and were exploited by Hindu ideologues. They openly declared their agenda of a Hindu *Rashtra* (Nation; Jhingran, 1995) and used this as an opportunity to launch an ideological, social, and political onslaught on secularism (e.g., Basu, Datta, Sarkar, Sarkar, & Sen, 1993; Bhargava, 2002; Brass 2003; Lal, 2003; McGuire, Reeves, & Brasted, 1996; Punyani, 2003; Varshney, 2003; Zakaria, 2002). These calls for a secular politics stoked the process of "othering," which is a crucial part of identity formation (Howarth, 2002). India began to be divided, once again, on religious lines. The "other," the minority Muslim community, had been clearly demarcated.

The mechanics of electoral politics catalyzed the Hindu ideologues to operate at multiple levels. They tried to delegitimize the concept of secularism on the grounds that it is a concept originating in the "Christian West." Further by emphasizing that "*Hindutva*" (the ideology of Hinduism) was being threatened they alienated Hindus from Muslims. This attempt was a part of a political strategy to confuse people, and based on a psychology of "divide and rule", created "psychologically primary" (Allport, 1954) in-group feelings among Hindus. Its success culminated in violent intergroup conflict (Sen & Wagner, 2005, 2009).

1.4 Street Sense Contains the "Saffron Wave"

In the 1970s "*Hindutva*" came into being and peaked in the new century. The government from 1999 to 2004 was of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with a definite Hindu ideological bias. The saffron wave (the color saffron is associated with the hawkish Hindu political parties) had become tidal, and not withstanding the carnage in Godhara where for the first time state power was used against minorities—the Muslims (Sen & Wagner, 2005)—it was believed that the BJP and its allies would reign supreme in the next parliamentary elections. But much to the surprise of many in "high politics" and "political pundits" this did not happen. The

common people, the electorate, had not only contained the degree of communal carnage but also given a resounding "no" to Hindu nationalism and its aspirations, and the BJP was ousted from power. The common person had suffered at the hands of "shining India" (middle class, upwardly mobile India much focussed on, in BJP-led election campaign) and Hinduism, and hence removed them from power. The wisdom of the street protected democracy in India, with all its contradictions, controversies, and debates.

A thorough exploration into this street wisdom among the marginalized became the main objective of the present research. Initially the fieldwork was to be conducted only among the marginalized—Hindu, Muslim; males, females residing in the slums. Our objective was to study representations of secularism among the marginalized. However during fieldwork we realized that middle-class respondents would reveal important dimensions to the everyday accounts from the street, and they were included.

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Chapter 2
Method: Locating the Offbeat

In this chapter based on our theoretical understanding explained earlier the objectives, research concepts, design, coverage, data collection, and other field-related issues are presented. Finally the perceptions and field observations of the interviewers are reported and analyzed.

2.1 Competing Representations of Secularism

Political concepts such as secularism are meta-narratives, which go beyond any supposedly literal meanings in everyday life and are mediators of societal thinking. Different and historically constructed conceptualizations of modernity and secularism are determinants of controversial arguments and intergroup relations in terms of political positioning. Usually the official definition of secularism provided by the state, such as in France, is not sufficient to conclude political debates. Secularism is generally defined at least at two levels: its genesis and social construction within different cultures and formal governmental and legal practices. These are all connected to different social sciences and intellectual disciplines, but the first one refers mainly to psychosocial dimensions.

Representations are not simply an aggregation of cognitive states, but they are the interconnections of thoughts, practices, and emotions and they are central in the construction of identity (Duveen, 2001). They emerge in explanations, interpretations, and political conversations not as value-free definitions but as discursive tools rooted in shared and contested values, meanings, and memories, layered into the stories of the groups and embedded in their arguments (Jovchelovitch, 2007; Moscovici, 1988). There are social representations of any socially significant object and hence competing and multilayered aspects are present in almost all representations, as we see with secularism.

Dobbelaere (1981, 1999) has pointed out the multidimensionality of secularism by proposing three dimensions from macro to micro level. The first dimension

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refers to the transformation of societal system as the disintegration of institutions from religion in terms of their structure and functions. He calls this dimension laicism. The second dimension is about secularization of religious institutions—their reorganization within modern life and involvement with contemporary issues. The last one refers to individualization of religion. While this threefold distinction is useful, a thorough social representation approach needs to transcend these divisions and examine the interconnections between societal, institutional, and everyday levels (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013). We examine these interconnections below.

2.2 Objectives

In this research we explored a number of questions:

1. In a secular state should the government be nonreligious?
2. Has religion become a central issue in identity formation?
3. How is secularism socially represented? Is it the opposite to religion? Are religion and secularism compatible? Is secularism synonymous with *Sarvadharma Sambhav* (peaceful coexistence of all religions)?
4. What are the ways in which secularism may blur the lines between groups and challenge the political psychology of "othering"? Is this possible? If so, how?
5. Who are the role models? What do they signify?
6. In discussions on secularism, what are the reasons for intergroup religious conflict?
7. Does a commitment to religious tolerance, communicative space, and moral maturation lead to conflict resolution?

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Assistants to the authors interviewed a total of 120 respondents in the age group 25–35 years. The design was 2×2×2, that is, Hindu (H) versus Muslim (M), male (m) versus female (f), and lower class (lc) versus middle class (mc). These categories are referred to in the following text according to the letters in brackets. There were 15 respondents in each of the eight cells. The interviews were conducted in Hindi/Hindustani (a mix of Hindi and Urdu) in middle class areas and slums in Mumbai and lasted between 45 and 60 min. In order to establish a network of interviewees, help was taken from contact persons, i.e., people familiar with the milieu, social class, and religion (De Araujo Günther, 1998).

We assumed that just like the offbeat makes music captivating, the verbal raw material in qualitative research is discourse in action and everyday life. Through this tune, researchers need to feel and extract the "beat," which, when done properly, may be called the underlying representation (Wagner, 2011). This research is a

journey undertaken to discover such "offbeats" and make connections to possibilities for conflict resolution. Given this methodological viewpoint, in search of the offbeat, the interviewers probed different symbols and representations associated with secularism and conflict resolution. We used the unstructured interview technique as suggested by Fontana and Frey (2005) to elicit discourses about people's life realities and perceptions. The data were collected between mid-2010 and mid-2011.

Then the interview data were translated, transcribed, and analyzed on the first level to delineate the meta themes related to secularism. They were then subjected to a finer second-level analysis to subcategorize the meta themes which were then interpreted to understand the subordinate associations related to secularism and conflict resolution.

2.4 Interviewers' Observations: Minorities Hopeful, Majority Despondent

2.4.1 Majority: Blame Game

The interviewers reported that when they asked questions about communal tensions in the country different groups of participants gave different answers. The uneducated Hindus involved in low jobs such as the man who crushed sugarcane for juice, the *paanwala* (betel maker), and the security guard were dismissive. They said that there is no need to ask such questions about communalism, as this was not a big problem for them. They were very reluctant, even hostile, to answer. They repeatedly queried why we were asking all these questions. Seemingly disheartened two of the working class Hindus commented:

> This is a perennial problem, which will always remain within Indian society in general. Hindu and Muslim communities will never be able to free themselves from the feeling of communalism. They will go on fighting with each other for all time to come.
>
> Politicians create the problems and they will never let the issue die because the communal tensions serve their interests. In India in every communal riot the people who have been involved have never been punished. No politician gets punished for inciting communal riots in India. The Babri Masjid dispute is going on for hundreds of years and there is no solution until now.

They basically accepted that these problems would never get solved. They were very pessimistic about the response of the Indian political system towards the communal problems in India.

In the analysis it became apparent that the reason why Hindus from the lower socioeconomic strata were dismissive about communal problems was that they were from the working class for whom bread and butter is more important than the communal issue. Secondly, since they are from the majority community they have no problems about identity, which exists among minorities. Further, the Hindus had no grievances regarding discrimination of police in communal riots or mistreatment at their hands. Hence, for them, this was not a problem. Even during the answering of

the questions regarding communalism their disinterest was almost tangible in their facial expressions and body language. They were just not interested in even explaining the reasons for communalism and gave no great consequence to their reply. They were repeatedly saying that Hindu–Muslim conflict would never end in India.

2.4.2 Minority: Persecuted but Hopeful

In contrast, the Muslims who were from the lower socioeconomic strata held strong views regarding communalism and were in particular unhappy about obstacles to economic and educational aspirations. Central to this anxiety was employment in government sectors and job opportunities. Some of them said that basically the Hindus, meaning communal parties or persons, deliberately want to keep Muslims deprived, limiting their access to the economic and educational resources of the country, and are thoroughly biased against Muslims. The belief was

> Generally common Hindus are good and they do not want trouble of any sort but it is the communal parties in India who instigate them to create a communal atmosphere.

Most of them emphasized:

1. Negotiations should be there between secular people and orthodox elements among Hindus and Muslims.
2. The communal problems can be solved by dialogue between these two communities.
3. There are some hard nuts—ideologues among the Hindu community—who will never change.
4. Despite the difficulties in changing the attitude of orthodox Hindus it will be better to talk to them, and one should always make an effort towards creating a peaceful atmosphere—this should be the objective of each community in India.

These differing perceptions and attitudes highlight the importance of psychological needs such as trust and reciprocity. Despite Muslims' experiences of discrimination they showed a maturity that reflects in their urgent desire for constructive dialogue and an appeal for intercultural understanding. Unfortunately, from what we have seen above, majority group members do not have the time or the inclination to take such discussions seriously. They simply want economic development without examining the ways in which intergroup conflicts may be an obstacle for any growth. This needs to be questioned.

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Chapter 3
Results and Interpretation

In this chapter we present the results and their interpretations. In the following, M = Muslims, H = Hindus, lc = lower class, mc = middle class, f = female, m = male, and the numbers represent the respondent code.

3.1 Western Modernity, Secularism, and "Othering"

Cultural diversity and religious pluralism are subjects of endless debate in India. In fact when India adopted a secular Constitution some observers predicted the disintegration of the secular model itself. Secularism assumed new meanings and content difficult to capture in the Occidental experience which in varying degrees has subscribed to the following view: in a secular state, the government has to be placed on a nonreligious footing. Western modernity, through its secular doctrine, dislodged religion's mandate (Bhatia, 2012), and this relationship between modernity and religion remains unsettled and somewhat contradictory in the West. Secularism as defined in western societies is normative, while any form of religious politics is often considered as irrational, illogical, and premodern. Thus a primary "other" (Allport, 1954) was created. "The modern discourse on religion and religions was from the very beginning," as Masuzawa (2005) observes, "a discourse of secularization," a "discourse of othering" based on western Christian imaginaries. Christianity had forgotten its own birth—the socially accepted belief in the Virgin Mary and her immaculate conception—while labeling the "other" religious beliefs as irrational and illogical.

3.1.1 The "Other" Side of the Story: Religion, Identity, and Centrality

The critiques of this western interpretation of secularism are increasingly evident. Marcel Gauchet (1998) elucidates the particular role that Christianity played in the

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process of secularity and connected the secular with the religious. In "A Secular Age," Charles Taylor (2007) critiques the narrative of secularism that dismisses the changes that have occurred in the religious and spiritual realm and argues against what he calls "subtraction theories" that define secularity as simply the elimination of religion. Likewise we hope to underscore the shared resonances and inclusion of religion within a fluid secularism.

It is perhaps time to reflect on the subject of secularism since in the twenty-first century religious traditions and communities of faith have gained a new hitherto unexpected political and social importance (Berger, 1999) and religion is becoming an important factor around which identity is constructed (Giddens, 1991), as we see in our data.

3.1.2 Religion and Identity: Commonsense Lay Beliefs and Secularism

Across all social categories of gender, religion, and social class the vast majority asserted that the importance of religion was on the rise: "today every person is giving importance to his religion. The religious communities are asking for their separate states (H f lc 12)"; "earlier, people were not that much conscious about their identity—that you are Hindu, I am Muslim. They never thought about it. There was not so much discussion about religion" (M f lc 14); "nowadays, religion is playing a very active role compared to earlier times" (M f lc 2).

However, some of the Hindu respondents stressed that religion should not be given this importance. They doubted the centrality of religion—"I am not a religious person and feel that religion should have no role in society, polity or any other aspect of life. But I do feel that it is a personal belief and each one has the liberty to believe and practice their faith" (H f mc 15); "in India from my point of view there is no dispute on the question of religious identities. It is all a farce. All religious communities in India are living safe and secure so where is the question of religious disputes or the question of religious identities? It is all manufactured. Earlier there were problems in India on the question of religious identities but nowadays there are no problems along these lines. I also do not accept the fact that there is fundamentalism in India. This is also media manufactured" (H m mc 3).

In contrast to the Hindu respondents, the Muslim men, in particular, from the middle class were far more involved with the issue and words like *junoon* (passion) and distress came up in the discourse; the explanation of the psychological journey shows that this was an important issue for them. For them it was highly affectively charged as seen in the following excerpt:

> (…) one reason could be psychological too; it may be because of human distress we become closer with religion. Hindus want to portray that we are not Muslims and Muslims want to say that we are Muslims but not terrorists. Rather, we also feel comfortable and some time proud of our identity. Identity is part of your personality even if you don't want to admit. I am proud to be Muslim, Indian and Mumbaikar but that identity is again restricted but Muslim is a global identity (M m mc 10).

> People fight on the question of religious identity because of *junoon* (passion). If religious *junoon* is removed then the people will not fight on religious issues. On the question of religious identity unless and until a serious effort is not made for spreading the message of friendship among people it is very difficult to achieve the target of ending the disputes arising out of religion (M m mc 12).

However the Hindu middle class responses were more abstract—the middle class respondents blamed globalization and media. Being part of the majority the religious identity issue is not so acute for them. Hindu women from the slums were driven by economic factors and felt that the task of the government was development of the nation and they were elected for this purpose and not for formulating religious policies. This could have several interpretations. The poor and especially the women have faced all the negative effects of communal riots and violence which were catalyzed by religious issues. Hence they fear any mention of controversial religious issues. Secondly the problem of running the home is difficult; hence they rather have the government concentrating on development issues: "the government has better things to deal with like terrorism, riots, etc. The government does nothing for us. There is no use voting. There is a price hike so what is the poor supposed to eat. The government should make policies for our betterment rather than dividing the people on religion" (H f lc 8); "government is not made for religion or politics. They are the ones who are supposed to make policies for the welfare of the people. Their job is to only think for the betterment of the people. But the politicians after voting don't even turn up to solve our problems" (H f lc 7).

This emotional versus analytical frame of reference is a common pattern. Objectivity is easier when the status is not that of the persecuted. This is interesting in the context of majority–minority positioning. For the threatened minority community, there is a greater focus on religion as an identity marker, whereas for the majority it is a secondary issue, and the Hindu women have emphasized that the government should be involved in development and leave such issues aside. This brings to the forefront the issue of majority–minority and the dynamics of the interpretation of this religious overtone especially amidst the minority community. Incommensurability leads members of the lower status group—mostly minorities—to identify more strongly with their in-group and attempt other strategies to reestablish a positive social identity. They are forced to find ways to re-present their identities not only to wider society but also to themselves in order to protect their sense of worth and belonging.

A content analysis of the data showed the following themes related with the reasons for religion gaining grounds in contemporary society.

It was believed by some that education has made people become selfish, creating dirty mind politics and propaganda in the name of religion (M f lc 14); "generally people after getting education become cunning and selfish. Family values also change because of this. Earlier there were joint families. But presently, there is only individuality, which breeds selfish interest. People lost their inherent cultures and value system. It is because of this paradigm shift, that such changes have taken place" (M f lc 12); "yes, it is only recently that religious extremism is igniting so much response. This was not there earlier. Reason is that earlier people were very

sober and honest. They were not educated. They valued humanity and were conscious of God" (M f lc 10).

Secondly, the feeling was that this change had taken place after the 1992 riots over the controversial Babri Masjid–Ram Janambhoomi issue (Sen & Wagner, 2005); "the amalgamation of religion and communal politics erupted after 1992 Bombay riots. Police arrested innocent Muslim guys" (M f lc 13); "it started only after demolition of Babri Masjid. It did not happen before this. It is very contentious now" (M f lc 15); "earlier, people were not that much conscious about their identity that you are Hindu, I am Muslim. They never thought about it. There was not so much discussion about religion. They were very human and had not got polarized. But it is only recently that this is happening. People are dividing themselves in the name of religion. They have now started considering their religion as superior and others inferior" (M f lc 14). The space for suspicion had increased:

> People have become increasingly fundamentalist. Everybody has now started asking what is your religion? The space of suspicion has increased. I am a driver. We all sit and talk and if a new person joins us then we first ask their name so that we can know what is their religion (H m lc 11).

Further, the respondents believed that this escalation in religious consciousness was politically motivated and that insecurities were created for political benefits:

> In the last 15–20 years since my college days I have observed that it cannot be called religious consciousness but rather insecurity. What is happening and what we are witnessing now is religious insecurity and politicization of religion by political parties. Political parties lead this and masses are involved in this due to their insecurity. Hence, it can be said that because of these years of insecurity they have actually become religious conscious and there is nothing wrong in that (M f mc 4).

> I think it must be politics that creates the insecurities. People normally help each other and never want to kill one another. Then how come they become so violent during such situations? I think rather they are politically motivated to do such things (M m lc 12).

> I have been to Saudi Arabia, and seen that there are some parts of mosques which are being demolished for new facilities but there is no politicization of the issue (M f lc 7).

Irresponsible media coverage, which was partisan, added to the creation of insecurities:

> Our revered media people and government initiate this fear by just telecasting terrorist activities which have a linear and surprisingly simple link to Islamic nations or communities. Nothing is explained as to why this is happening (H f mc 13).

> This (insecurity) was instigated gradually. If we observe closely we find that recently media and TV serials are giving much publicity to religious festivals. People are becoming more aware of their religion and due to this boundaries are being created (H f mc 1).

The respondents also felt that there was more overt display of religious bias: "even in my own family, I find that inter-generationally, these things have changed. There was more mixing of cultures earlier. Nowadays, even traders have their own clans and they deal with only their people. Like if you go to Zaveri bazaar, all the Gujarati shops are in one place, Muslim shops in another. I don't know if customers go to one or the other based on religion, but there might be an element of that."

(H f mc 15); "in our personal lives, I don't think that has changed. But in the outwardly expression, I do think, there is more awareness about differences in religions. There is more talk of 'us' and 'them.' Like when I was a child, we went to a catholic school, we said catholic prayers and I think our parents were okay with that. Nowadays, people would object to this" (H f mc 8). As observed by a Hindu female respondent, the expression of negative bias towards Muslims had become more overt:

> Maybe nowadays they just express it more. Like after Godhara it has become okay to say bad things about Muslims more openly. And because the Hindus have so successfully crushed the Muslims in the State, there is a sense that we are the victors, so we can do what we want. Plus, when that kind of power is exerted, people start wanting to identify with the power. So yes, the same people who were previously bad-mouthing Muslims inside their houses are now doing it outside as well (H f mc 7).

However, on some issues there was difference in perception between the Hindus and the Muslim respondents, and the attribution for increase in religious awareness differed. The level of involvement with religion was also class dependent. Overall the Hindu respondents were less involved with this issue and felt that it should not be given importance. However both communities as represented by our respondents felt that this was a psychological journey, which had high overtones of passion, and identity often accompanied with distress.

But what is clear is that religion is a basic sociological and political ingredient in life in India today and plays a pivotal role in identity construction, as one of the participants recognized:

> Religion today is as important a part of my identity as my eyes or my hair. People in my locality today have discussions and sometimes even arguments pertaining to religion, which never existed even 10 years ago (H m lc 10).

Our research shows that religion is a core component of identity construction. In all of our material none of the respondents, Hindu or Muslim, were completely critical of religion (*dharam, mazhab*) or culture and traditions (*reeti-riwaaz, sanskriti, parampara*) per se. All respondents bar two depicted religion as an ordinary aspect of everyday life and emphasized the need for peaceful coexistence of all religions, as we see here:

> In India, people are very attached to their religion which nobody can take away from them. Hence, it is better to have peaceful co-existence of all religions (H f mc 1).

3.1.3 Secularism, Centrality, and Everyday Politics

In India, secularism does not have an emotional impact, is still a "fuzzy" concept, and is not part of the lexicon in lower socioeconomic strata. The concept of secularism was multi-faceted, and many respondents in the slum were not aware of it: "no, I am not aware of secularism I am not that much educated" (M m lc 11); "no, I don't know any thing about secularism" (M f lc 12). Prompts and probes were required to

understand their concept of secularism. This was done not in order to influence the trajectory of their thoughts but to be able to help them articulate their views. Unheard voices are never heeded, and much is lost because the lexicon of the reified universe rarely fine-tunes into the views nested in common sense and among those who live on the margins.

Secularism was represented as "unity in diversity," "representation of all groups," "religious but not biased," "religious but respect all religions and do not interfere," you can be whatever but still be secular," etc. It was an emancipated representation where the categories were similar in content—peaceful coexistence, but the expression as mentioned above was different. The data show the processes whereby the unfamiliar becomes familiar by utilizing the existing "field of representations" as superordinate meanings to (re)situate and therefore understand an object, activity, or event (Wagoner, 2008). Thus by situating secularism in the field of religion with which they were familiar the abstract concept was concretized and brought down to earth.

There were seven meta-themes related with secularism. In the following the main themes related with secularism are presented with salient respondent extracts. Secularism was decoded in the following ways:

1. Unity in diversity: "secularism, to me means that a government would be distant from religion, but not violate people's fundamental rights in that effort. Which means that it would have to recognize people's diversity in terms of religion and take that into account" (H m lc 7); "nowadays people are going for inter caste marriages. Hindus and Muslims are marrying between themselves. Though it is not common but it shows that people are not totally orthodox (…) and celebrate diversity" (H m lc 5).
2. Tolerance and pluralism: "religion should be a matter of personal choice and in a modern secular State, the government has to be on a non religious footing. Secular state means pluralism, religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence of multiple religions. Hence, the government should not practice or promote any particular religion but in case there is a threat to an individual or collective's religious practice, the government should protect them" (H m mc 6); "secular people are not concerned about religious differences but they focus on the common things that affect all of us in our daily lives. They focus on making the world a better place for the vulnerable" (M m mc 11); "from my point of view the meaning of secularism is that every citizen has a right to choose the religion or ideology of his choice. Secularism is the cornerstone of democracy" (M m mc 4); "being secular means—treating religion as a personal matter and keeping it separate from ones' other existences; seeing to it that it doesn't come in the way of the person's social and political interactions" (H f mc 15).
3. Respect all religions and do not interfere: "a religious society, which is non-interfering, non-imposing and believes in sharing. One must understand and recognize what others believe instead of denouncing one another" (M f lc 14), "secularism does not mean non-religious but if you are religious then you should respect religious sentiment of others. In the real way, secularism is meant to be inherent within one self, respecting and listening to others when they are talking

about their religion" (M f mc 2); "secularism is essential for our country. This concept is present in Islam also. Even in the Quran this concept is present. The Quran mentions that every religion should be respected. But the problem is that this spirit has not been translated into practice the way it should have been" (M m lc 4); "every religion is equal; no one is superior or inferior to one other" (M f lc 9); "you can follow a religion and be *dharma nirpeksh*, or have no relation with religion or treat every religion equally and be secular. You can be whatever but still be secular if you respect others" (H m lc 8).

4. Equal representation: "secularism to me is equality and equality not just in terms of religion but in each and every sphere" (H f mc 1); "secularism signifies 'equal' representation of all social groups and their interactions. It is not indifference to religion but it actually means being sensitive to all religions, to the aspirations of all religious groups and to see to it that they exist together without any threat or dominance from each other" (M m mc 3).
5. Take care of emotions and sentiments: "never ever ridicule or make fun of someone's elders and respected people … of any religion. Respect all religions and do not hurt anyone's sentiments and break their heart. The gods and goddesses they worship do not say bad things about them. For instance Hindus worship a stone if you say anything about it, which is negative then they will start saying horrid things about your entire religion … community. Never hurt anybody's feelings. Take care of their emotions and sentiments … this is secularism" (M m mc 11); "(…) if I don't like something about some religion I will not even dare say it because I know in India religion is a very sensitive topic and my words can offend someone" (H f lc 7).
6. No religion: "I think secularism has many meanings. I consider a person to be secular if they don't believe that religion is important" (M m mc11); "I like a secularism, which has no relation with religion" (M m mc 4).
7. Not aware of this concept: "no, I am not aware of what secularism is. One of my friends was Hindu but we used to live peacefully with each other. Religion is not any conflict for us" (M f lc 10); "no, I am not aware of secularism. However, I know it is only politicians who create conflicts amongst people in the name of religion for their political ends. People are peaceful in terms of religion" (M f lc 4).

The basic thrust of the arguments cutting across gender and religion is:

> We are yet to reach a stage where we accept and respect all religions at the same level. What we commonly see is mere existence of all religions. I doubt this can be considered as peaceful coexistence (H f mc 15).

> In no country in the world there is true secularism. When it comes to religion then America also becomes Catholic (H m mc 7).

3.1.4 Shared Conceptual Space: Religious and Secular

This leads us to the issue of religion and secularism and their complex interrelationship which requires a nuanced understanding. In this regard, rather unhelpfully

some social debates in the West still hold on to the assumption that religion and secularism are an antithesis of one another. This sustains an oppositional construction of the categories of religion and the secular. They are viewed as insulated and isolated. "By functioning as a static snapshot and not a moving picture, the dominant map sustains the presumption that religion and the secular are readily distinguished in modern democratic societies" (Gšle, 2010). Given this belief in a universalized dichotomy the commonly heard outcry is that modernity is under siege by irrational religious forces and at the other extreme that religious values are victim to a hostile secularism, which rides rough shod over all faiths and beliefs. Clearly, this simplified vision restricts any analysis, which cannot be robust enough to solve the complex conflicts and contradictions at the religious–secular boundary. Consequently such analyses are hindered by these polarizing discourses.

We challenge the Inglehart World Value Survey (WVS, 2009) results on the dimension of traditional versus secular–rational. Our research shows that in both India and globally the trend is towards a hyphenated religious–secular emerging social category, which is not uncommon or indeed irrational. Religious/traditional values should not be depicted as irrational, and as a corollary secular values are not always rational. The French ban on the veil is a pointer to this irrationality depicted through its holding of strict secular principles regarding dress codes (Wagner, Sen, Permandelli, & Howarth, 2012). Maybe this insight could, for instance, better explain historical events such as the Arab Spring instead of taking into account binary division between the religious (which we assume is part of being traditional) and secular–rational. The existence of the religious–secular category could well emerge in the new wave of WVS for which data has been collected in 2010–2012 in 50 countries but as yet the results are not available. This does not, in any way, undermine the importance of large-scale quantitative surveys such as WVS. However the complex dynamics and "whys" of social change are often better explained by qualitative research.

In contrast to the WVS results some of our respondents demonstrated the ways in which rationality, secularism, and religion can and do sit side by side in everyday discourses:

> Religious people in fact can be more secular because the core of every religion is peace. They are all trying to reach the same God, but in different ways. Some people don't believe in God either, but even they are aspiring towards something that is bigger than you and me—to me, that is like worship. So if all of us are worshipping or striving towards some greater good, then that is a point of commonality. The more deeply religious a person is, the better they will be able to understand this concept. So I think that religion actually makes you more secular. In our day to day life we don't meet truly religious people, just because someone prays five times a day and keeps a beard—that does not make him religious (M m mc 11).

> Someone who follows his or her faith with respect for other religions and communities can be both religious and secular. I don't think being religious means that you are bound to one faith. So you may just have faith, not necessarily following everything to the "t." There's that type of religious person as well, right (H f mc 10).

Religious but secular is an emerging category and was endorsed by most respondents. The basic argument was that the best form of secularism was practiced by

those who were religious and secular, since the core of every religion is peace. It's a nebulous concept but widely accepted. The essence of religious–secular was succinctly summarized:

> I believe that the view, following a religion makes a person non-secular, is only in a dictionary (H m mc 14).

Most of the respondents did not perceive religion and secularism as antithetical. For them it was an easy blend and a sensible path. In support of their point of view they gave various reasons: "when an attack takes place the rioters do not ask the religion of any person they just attack and in such situations Hindus have come to the relief camps set up in our Muslim stronghold. The people who run these camps are very religious people, Muslim fundamentalists but they look after and treat the Hindu victims in the same way as they treat the Muslims. This is secularism. Hence extremely religious people can be secular and there is no denying that" (M m lc 15); "yes, obviously religious people can be secular. There is nothing contradictory in the two. In fact most people are religious and secular. People can also be non-religious and non-secular. They may insist that everyone around them should not be religious. People can also be religious and non-secular, like the terrorists" (H f mc 8); "secularism is not complete compartmentalization between religion and secularism, both can be inter-related as well" (H f mc 1); or "that is true secularism which is religious but secular. It is necessary to be religious because depending on the intensity and correct following of the religion it will be decided who will go to heaven (…) that one gets to know only after one dies!! It is like a man who does not drink himself but does not hate a person who drinks. He hates alcohol but will not still hate the person (…) this is an example" (M m lc 15).

However some respondents believed that it was impossible to be secular and religious at the same time. Their reasons were as follows: "it is very difficult that a priest or a Brahmin will be a secular person. No religious guru of any community can be absolutely secular" (H m mc 6); "but I have doubts about a person who is the leader of an organized religion being secular. Because when it is a question of organized religion then it represents an amalgamation of various interest groups. For them religion is a political ideology. These persons can never be secular. A person who says that I go to a mosque, temple and Church etc cannot be secular from my point of view. They are simply hypocrites" (M m mc 4). Similarly a few believed that such an amalgamation, religious–secular, can only be possible at a superficial level:

> On a superficial level, I would say "yes." See, if all religions are really equal and everyone is worshipping the same God, then why are there such strict demarcations between religions? People will say they don't think other religions are inferior, but they get very uncomfortable when someone marries outside their religion. Then again, I am treating religion as a monolithic entity when I say that. There are so many strains of religions that are really not dogmatic at all. One has to recognize that there has been a sort of rigidity that has also set in with religions. Hinduism, for instance, used to be a philosophy rather than an actual ritualistic religion. So then how have we reached a point where we have so many rituals, we have a book, we have stringent dos and don'ts? So in that context, I would say that ritualistic and dogmatic religion specifically is antagonistic to secularism (H f mc 9).

Interestingly, it was also stressed that there was a need to go beyond tolerance and towards acceptance. This is highlighted in the following excerpts, which stress a crucial distinction—accept and not just tolerate that is secularism. The logic in their arguments however differs and gives a multiple perspective on this crucial but controversial issue.

Question: "Who is a secular person?"

Interviewee 1: "One who lives and lets live. But not like tolerance. This whole tolerance concept is dangerous. It inherently means that you don't accept, but put up with something. I think what secularism means is to accept rather than tolerate So while you certainly should not violently prevent or interfere in peoples' religion, as a secular person, you should also not laugh at or ridicule someone for their beliefs. By that, I don't mean that you should not be critical. I am very critical of rituals etc." (H f mc 9).

Interviewee 2: "But that kind of secularism makes me a little suspicious. Yes, that's because religious people inherently believe that they are superior, or rather their religion is superior. So while some people do say they are secular, inside their hearts all they're doing is tolerating …this term religious tolerance … that says it all. I don't think you should have to tolerate people around you. And if you inherently believe that you are superior, you will have to 'tolerate'—and at some point, your tolerance might wear out. So best is to not be religious at all. Some people say that secularism is 'tolerance of other religions.' I think that is definitely not secularism" (H m mc 12).

Interviewee 3: "What secularism means, I think, is that we don't actively hate or stereotype each other. See, I can 'respect' your religion by allowing you to go to the mosque, celebrate Eid, not using violence against you. But that is just tolerance. In order to be secular, I have to actively like you. Like some people believe that all Muslims are terrorists. They may not really use violence or force against another Muslim, but there is a sense that these are 'bad' people. According to me that is also non-secular" (H f mc 2).

This is a distinction, which could be well used while framing social policies.

However some respondents were of a different view and believed that religious–secular could never go beyond tolerance, and some emphatically stated that this was not possible: "because a person who follows a particular religion may only praise his religion" (H f lc 5); "a person who believes in a religion cannot be secular" (H m mc 4); "identifying with religion in itself makes one non-secular." (H m mc 11). But these were few.

In India these two categories, as our data shows, are often not viewed as mutually exclusive but seen as transactional units. The basic argument was the following: the most constructive form of secularism is practiced by those who are simultaneously religious and secular, since the core of every religion is peace. It is a nebulous and emerging norm but widely accepted. Similarly Traversa's (2012) accounts of Italian

Muslim and Catholic women show that religion gave these women a new sense of purpose in their lives. They were seeking not as much a "return to religion" but to offer novel interpretations of it. Religion was freedom. Another example of a religion with a difference is found in the work of Debra Kaufman (1991). She describes the case of "newly Orthodox Jewish women." Although these women grew up in secular Jewish homes in the United States, in their teens or early twenties, they felt that secular values as enshrined in the United States were an inadequate foundation for living. Despite the limitations that Orthodox Judaism places on women, they embraced it because according to them it offered them the structure of a definite place in the world and the roots of a long, durable tradition. It did not make them non-secular. Such culturally diverse reactions show that religious–secular is a strong emerging social category, which requires recognition and analysis. To set this aside may not be judicious.

3.1.5 Past Weighs on the Present: Long Past, Short History

This attraction and acceptance of peaceful coexistence, in India, could be a result of several factors. In a traditional society such as India the idea of modernization is quite different from new societies like France since India accepts multiculture and pluralism and does not see modernization as homogenization, which requires a mandate against religion in order to situate secularism. This is a civilizational benefit. Bhargava (2010) observes that in ancient India there was a great multiplicity of world views, and this gave rise to a conceptual space within which traditions of religious freedom were nested without acrimony or push to dominate, annihilate, and establish supremacy. In fact, describing this civilizational benefit, Max Weber (cited in Smith, 1963, 61–62) observed, "religious and philosophical thinkers in India were able to enjoy nearly absolute freedom for long periods. Freedom of thought in ancient India has no parallel in the West before the recent age."

Secondly modern India was born out of a partition, which saw religious tensions between the Hindus and Muslims at its peak. In pre-partition India, Mahatma Gandhi described this social tension as "the problem of problems" (1930, cited in Singh, 1988). However, after partition there was an attempt to forget the painful past, and as a corollary, a collective amnesia shrouded this traumatic period in India's history (e.g., Lal, 2003; Pandey, 1991, 2001; Gooptu, 2002). Silence, denial, and modification of memory were the defense mechanisms used to stabilize India and steer it towards a new era. Brooding on this event, the "*tandava*" (dance of mass destruction), and following the British policy of divide and rule would have further fragmented India, which it could least afford (Khan & Sen, 2009); hence secularism was imported from the West by Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first Prime Minister. Given this trauma when it comes to crucial societal level decisions Indians are wary about orthodoxy of religious tenets, although communal violence continues to flare up but has been contained because the wounds of the partition have as yet not healed and civil society at such times forms a strong solidarity which has

often protected India from Hindu revivalism and maintained it on the intertwined track of religion and secularity.

Finally secularism is very new to India. It was incorporated in the Preamble by the 42nd Amendment in 1976, and India does not have an official state religion. Hence the proximal distance between secularism and affect is large. At present, India does not have an emotionally loaded semiotic legacy. It remains a flexible term, which can be easily molded to keep in tune with modernity. Hence although Indians are religious they remain secular, and this partnership causes no creative tensions but is viewed as a pragmatic arrangement for continuity of everyday life, which to stretch a point is a marriage of convenience where affective sentiments such as "passion" and "love" are on the back burner and streamlined functionality of the social unit addressed as family is the focus. Similar is the story of religion, secularity, and society in contemporary India. Religion is perceived as a dynamic that includes both religious and secularist impulses and aims, and they are accommodated with ease and equanimity.

This is a significant perception and needs serious consideration in modern societies. This in turn signifies the need for going beyond "tolerance" as stated earlier. Except for two respondents everyone has stood by religion and underscored the need for peaceful coexistence of all religions: "people of all religion should live peacefully and that will be good. We live in multi religious India and it is important that we follow the secular path since that means living peacefully with each other" (M f lc 10); "I would definitely discard a state where there is no role of religion, which seems to be dictatorship. Peaceful co-existence of all religion is utopia. There are people who are more identity conscious but they don't follow religion actually. Therefore, I would go with religious and secular" (M f mc 4).

This shows how social representations of both religion and secularism are deeply rooted in their particular historical context. To take a very different context for example, Turkey, we see that representations of secularism are entirely different since secularism in Turkey has a very different history and trajectory. Secularism is a controversial topic and plays an important role in the political culture of Turkey. The findings of the research done in Turkey show that many social representations are rooted in different dimensions of the concept of secularism (Paker, 2005). The term used in lieu of secularism was laicity since secularity has a different connotation in Turkish culture. Laicity is influential and is defined as prerequisite for an Enlightened society; secularization is regarded as atheism; and there is a negative bias against religion because religion opposes rationality. This is a core or a figurative idea that creates two different social representations depending on the respondents' cognitive and affective attributions and attachments to religion or belief. "Pro-laicist" and "con-laicist" social representations are polemic and mutually exclusive (Paker, 2005).

Discourses containing different representations are perceived as indicators of certain positions struggling for power to determine political ethos of everyday life and reorganization of the public sphere. In this context people perceive others who do not hold similar views regarding laicity as a member of an "imaginary" out-group. These imaginary relations on political power, actions, stake, and accountability

provide people with a sense of "we" and "other" as the organizing distinctions of any ideological discourse (van Dijk, 1998; Thompson, 1990). The findings of a second study show that pro/con laicity positioning plays a dominant role in Turkish politics and becomes the basis for determining political in- and out-groups (Paker & Cesur, 2011). This is entirely different in India where secularism is a nebulous concept, and as discussed below there is a rejection of essentialism and stereotyping.

3.2 Anti-essentialism, Polemics, and Social Flux

In the Indian context there was a strong objection to the society being cast into the triad, fundamentalists, secularists, and traditionalists, by some respondents since they believed that these categories were fluid and people were a shade of grey and could take different positions depending upon the situation. Hence dichotomizing and essentializing them was not perceived as a right approach for the following reasons:

3.2.1 People Can't Be Categorized … The Categories Are Fluid

Some respondents had strong objection to categorization since they believed that these categories were fluid and people could not be easily pigeonholed. They could take different positions depending upon the situation and fitting them into rigid categories and essentializing them were not helpful: "no, I don't think so that there are only these three kinds of people in society. There is greater diversity and this is better also for unity" (M f lc 15); "there are also people who love their religion so much that they are willing to be martyred for their religion. On the other hand, there are people, who do not bother about their religion. We cannot call them either fundamentalist or ritualistic. They are different from them. What I mean is that one cannot easily label people" (M f lc 8); "there are people who are fundamentalist deep down but secular on the surface. Like there are people in the States (USA) who communicate with all sorts of people, socialize with all types but when it comes to marrying their daughter, it has to be someone from the same community. These identities are not static (…)" (H f mc 10); or "time brings about greatest change in human personality. It is not necessary that one who is fundamentalist today will continue to remain like that. There is strong possibility of change in his personality in future. Nothing is stagnant" (M f lc 5).

3.2.2 People Experiment

Others believed that this compartmentalization was wrong because people experiment and change over time: "people can't be classified into such water-tight

compartments. The categories can overlap. I think all of them can be secular. Among fundamentalists, I think there are those who are extremely religious, but peaceful people—those can be secular. Its not even constant, this categorization—people move from one category to another. I think people experiment, feel like certain things are right for them, go through difficult times and change—that's how we evolve. Maybe difficult life circumstances like poverty, losing someone dear to you, a sense of feeling wronged—that's probably what pushes these terrorists to do the things they do. They may not even be religious and suddenly they turn into psycho fundamentalists" (H f mc 8).

3.2.3 Understand the Ideology Before Classifying

Others emphasized that before classifying the ideology should be comprehended: "we should first understand from where this ideology emerged in the last two to three decades in global politics. The only common factors giving rise to this are poverty and exploitation of human rights in every sense. There is a conflict of powerful and powerless and this is a breeding ground for few people, who have hardly anything to do with spirituality but are interested only in their political and economic interests. This is a major role that the world community has to do. It is to counter this myth and show that it is purely political interest, which drives terrorism and terrorism has nothing to do with religion. Only when we have a just social and economic process which ensures human rights, economic welfare, and stable politics only then the problem can be resolved" (M m mc 7).

3.2.4 Secularists Can Also Be Fundamentalists in Their Antireligious Beliefs

A few felt that secularists could also be fundamentalists and terribly stringent in their beliefs: "fundamentalist are very *kattar* (orthodox). But secularists are also fundamentalist in some sense. They are totally anti religious. Not all secularists are anti religious but there are currents among secularists who feel that any kind of affiliation with religion of any sort is against secularism, which is wrong. Secularists say that the root of communalism in the society is religion which from my point of view is completely wrong" (M f mc 10).

It was clearly a polemical issue and reflects the flux in contemporary Indian society where old categories and presumptions are being questioned but no clear conclusions have as yet been arrived at. It is a transitory situation and therefore needs careful analysis. We saw that categories appeared more "in movement" and as product of particular but changing social relations (Gillespie, Howarth, & Cornish, 2012). Our respondents, as the data shows, were of the view, "people

can't be categorized … the categories are fluid. Our society has varied kind of people. Even fundamentalists are not same; there are some extreme people but there are also those who listen to others. Like wise, ritualistic are also varied. They can also be fundamentalist. There are cross sections of people in the society. We cannot demarcate people" (M f lc 13); "we cannot identify fundamentalist, ritualistic and secular either through any symbols or what is their habit etc. It is not necessary that they will have preference for particular type of clothes, for e.g., we cannot say that only a fundamentalist will wear *burkha* secularist will wear jeans and *kurta* (loose shirt) etc. There is nothing like that. What I mean is that one cannot easily label people" (M f lc 8); "different people define these things differently. Secular people I think can really be religious. At the same time, fundamentalists can also be less religious than a secular person. These identities are not static … I think it could happen, some sort of transformation" (H f mc 10); and "in general, Indian people are moderate. They are neither fundamentalist, traditionalist or secularist" (M f mc 2).

Some respondents, as mentioned above, said that this categorization was wrong: "people experiment … events change people, people can't be classified into such water-tight compartments. The categories can overlap. I think all of them can be secular. Among fundamentalists, I think there are those who are extremely religious, but peaceful people—those can be secular. Its not even constant, this categorization—people move from one category to another" (H f mc 8); "this is human tendency. One can be a hard core traditionalist but later on can be transformed into a modern personality" (M f mc 4).

The data show that when we essentialize social categories, we obscure the intersectionality of all social groups and lose a perspectival approach that recognizes that these are located, socially constructed, and ideologically maintained. In our complex lived social relations, we often move between or span several positions (Howarth, Wagner, Kessi, & Sen, 2012; Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson, & Sammut, 2013; Wagner, Sen, Permandelli, & Howarth, 2012).

3.2.5 The Dichotomies: Fundamentalists, Traditionalists, and Secularists

The data throws some dichotomies which place the fundamentalists, traditionalists, and secularists in a grey terrain—they have elements which are positive and negative, and the degree of involvement with religion and culture appears to be a significant basis for this classification, fundamentalists-religion; traditionalists-culture, and secularists-antireligious. But following culture was not frowned upon. Given below are the salient descriptors associated with each of the three categories. They are polemic (Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3).

Table 3.1 Fundamentalists

Negatives	Positives
Rigid, obsessive, and orthodox	*Saviors of religion, scholars, wise—misunderstood*
"I can't say much about the attributes of fundamentalist. I can guess that those who are very religious are fundamentalist because they over identify with their religion and can even kill others for the sake of their religion." (M f lc 15)	"Fundamentalist (*kattar*) does not mean *kaat do* (cut into pieces). It all depends on how wise a person is." (M m lc 15)
"Fundamentalist are those who follow status quo. They are very stubborn and they don't listen to others. They also propagate *jihad* and other revolutionary ideas to challenge the present system and try to bring rigidity in liberal approach of Muslims." (M f lc 13)	"I think fundamentalism is a word that is misused and misinterpreted. People think that a fundamentalist is someone who is violent or authoritarian—but I would call those people 'fanatics' rather than fundamentalists." (M m mc 11)
"They only think about their religion and their people and galvanize people against other religions." (H f lc 12)	"They know the religion thoroughly and are proud to say that they are fundamentalists." (M m lc 11)
"Actually they are the ones who pull a petty matter like elastic and influence and brain wash people." (H f mc 5)	"If any body is fundamentalist then it is not bad because everybody should be a fundamentalist in the sense that he believes in his or her religion strictly. It is easy to enter into a dialogue with a fundamentalist because he is religious and therefore easily understands the values of peaceful coexistence, more than a secular person." (M m mc 2)
"I feel the people because of whom we have communal riots are fundamentalists. People because of whom terrorists are born, are fundamentalists. They need to change their thinking with the changing times." (M f mc 5)	

Table 3.2 Traditionalists

Negatives	Positives
Rigid, blind faith, stuck in time	*Centrality of culture, link with the past*
"We are Gujarati we follow our dharma. We don't eat anything in the Muslim house, *chamars* or *dalits* (untouchables, lower castes). This is what we have learnt from our religion. If we start doing this our gods wont forgive us. We can not step outside the boundaries of our religion. No one can. If I go against my religion my god will send me to hell." (H f lc 9)	"They follow their culture. Nothing wrong in that." (M f lc 7)
"Mostly people are ritualistic. They follow several norms and customs on various occasions. For example, ritualistic people won't allow a widow to enter into marriage ceremony." (M f lc 15)	"We common people come under this category." (M f lc 4)
"We must leave the person who does not follow tradition. If I don't follow my religion or my traditions my husband will leave me. It is very important for us to follow our traditions or else we'll go to hell and god will not help us." (M f lc 8)	"It is very important to follow our traditions. God has made customs and traditions, which have to be followed or we can't live a peaceful life after death." (H f lc 10)
Some believed,	"A traditionalist does everything according to customs and traditions." (H f lc 5)
"There is no difference between ritualistic and *kaffirs* i.e., one who does not follow religion. They can follow any one blindly merely imitating others. They have no conviction." (M f lc 3)	"They are not extreme like fundamentalists. They celebrate the fact that they are Indians and their customs and traditions." (M f mc 8)
And, that traditionalists were,	"Traditional people follow their customs and don't let them fizz off." (M f mc 5)
"People who adamantly follow their traditions and don't have respect for others traditions or customs." (H f lc 11)	"Traditional is one who follows his/her ancestral practices." (H m mc 14)
"Religion has been imposed on them. They do not believe in it but follow the traditions. They are half believers (*aadhe aastik*)." (H m lc 11)	"Tradition has more to do with culture than religion I think." (M m mc 7)
	"Traditionalists are just people who follow a certain doctrine to the 't.' They needn't force others to do it, but they certainly consider it a very important part of their identity." (H m mc 12)

Table 3.3 Secularists

Negatives	Positives
Anti-religion, rigid, wishy-washy, opportunists	*Harbingers of peace and winds of change*
"Secularists can also be fundamentalists in their anti religious beliefs. Not all secularists are anti religious but some feel that any kind of affiliation with religion is against secularism, which is wrong. Secularists say that the root of commjournalism in the society is religion, which from my point of view is completely wrong." (M f mc 10)	"Peaceful … I like them. They are those people who limit their religion to the limits of their house. They follow their religion but do not believe in imposing it on others." (H ms 11)
"These *dharma nirpeksh* (secular) people with modern thoughts have ruined the cultures and nor do they abide by any religion." (H f lc 10)	"Secularist won't insult and won't do any thing to harm the religious sentiments of others." (M f lc 3)
"They are those who have nothing to do with anyone. They do not live according to religious principles. For example they lead their lives like animals …eat, drink and sleep … if you want to drink alcohol then drink, if you want to tell lies then tell them. Whatever your heart desires you do that. What is this life … this is useless. They will never take a stand … sort of spineless, wishy washy." (M m lc 15)	"They are the people who have a modern thinking. They are more open minded." (M f mc 8)
	"In today's world we must all be secular or religion will kill us all." (H f mc 13)
	"They bring change. They are important for the society as they change the wrong practices like child marriage, female infanticide, dowry, etc." (H f mc 6)
	"We need secular people to bring about change and to bring in more unity." (H f mc 2)
	"Secularists can be those who are religious and have equal space for others." (H f mc 1)

This brings to the forefront the problem of positioning, for instance, the secularists. In our earlier research (Sen & Wagner, 2005, 2009a, 2009b) Hindus described secularists as clones of the anglicized native who, having imbibed western values, was elitist, out of touch with the real India, and always ashamed to assert his or her own religious demands. They stood accused in the dock for using "double standards" when taking a stand on religious issues, and the general feeling amongst the respondents was that most English-speaking Hindus are not open to shedding their anti-Hindu rhetoric. In affective terms the respondents resented this group and called them "glamorous" and arrogant, and the present data also shows that there is a negative value loading, "wishy-washy," "opportunists," "no commitment and anti-religion." However, overall, they are seen as peaceful. This is, perhaps, a reflection of the time. Our earlier research was conducted at the peak of Hindu nationalism (2003), and the coined term "pseudo secularism" had been used by Hindu ideologues to create another primary "other," the "pseudo secularist" (Sen, 2012). However in 2011 when the data was

collected although the negative perception lingered it was diluted and overshadowed by secularists being perceived by a significant number as peaceful and those who bring change. The data thus demonstrate that the social representations maintained in the present time of a society are not static but dynamic entities that change in accordance with the changing demands of the present (László, Ferenczhalmy, & Szalai, 2010, p. 1). Simultaneously there is a need felt that the secularists while decolonizing and battling with the intimate enemy in this case the notion of secularism as held in the West need to restructure their perception regarding the concept of secularism itself (Sen, 2012) and take religion in their stride.

3.3 Symbolic Weight

Through the ages symbols have been used to express ideological and philosophical preoccupations in the form of myths, stories, religious tales, rituals, and legends. Symbols and ancient or modern myths are often interlinked in a mutually reinforcing bidirectional relationship which invests them with emotive pulls. Such symbols have strong evocative power due to the iconic form and affective charge associated with them, which—through discourse—helps in unifying people. There is little doubt that for political agitation such symbols become the prime source domain for funneling collective emotions. In fact wherever politicians struggle for control and political parties compete for access to the parliament and positions in administration the struggle is primarily about control of the symbolic field of the society. For instance, dress codes are a powerful symbol and are strong markers. Presently the veil has become one of the most contested and symbolic motifs in western imagery of the East and of Islam, but not much has been done to decode it and veiling is often depicted as almost a-historic, and static, a symbol of archaic, gender-oppressive practices within Muslim societies (Hoodfar, 1991; Kahf, 1999; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Yegenoglu, 1998). The assumption is that these gendered practices and traditions of Islamic societies represent a civilization deficit (Razack, 2004), which needs to be modernized and corrected.

The recent French and Belgian laws banning the wearing of the hijab are warnings, which show that political leaders often view historically established communities and cultures as homogeneous units rather than treating them as multi-faceted, dynamic, and fluid constructs (Scott, 2007). This resurgence of French passion for laicity could be a response to the perceived threat of a growing Muslim immigrant population to French national identity and the republican model of public space. The politics of secularism has led to the interiorization of religion, which is embedded within a nationalist political discourse. The headscarf controversy shatters the myth of neutrality and inclusiveness of French secularity (Jansen, 2010; Sen & Wagner (forthcoming)). At the peak of this conflict the question was the following:

"Do we want the river of Islam to enter the riverbed of secularism?" (Agence France Presse, 2004). This western obsession for creating a "secular habitus" for women of color/cover translates into a complete change of lifestyle for the women, but this cultural imposition continues since these "liberated" women can be then brought in the forefront as signifiers and markers of an advanced and civilized western culture.

It is hard to see how such reifying laws will encourage the peaceful coexistence of different groups in today's increasingly multicultural and multi-faith worlds. The French laic principle, which rests on their traditional Jacobinic vision of the separation between the church and the state (Killian, 2003), requires a revised interpretation to fit the social contexts of today rather than the time when it was written. Constitutions, religious texts, and religious dress need to be situated and understood within their contemporary, and diverse, sociopolitical contexts (Wagner, Sen, Permandelli, & Howarth, 2012). Our data supports this contention.

3.3.1 Dress Code

The banning of the veil in France was posited as an issue of cultural freedom versus constitutional might. Interestingly government legislation on religious expression was generally seen as against the spirit of secularism. As one participant said: "religion is our liberty and government must not legislate on this" (H ms 9). For instance, the general feeling among our respondents was that the controversial ban imposed by France was highly unsecular and a violation of human rights since the wearing of the veil is a matter of individual choice, which has no bearing on constitutional issues. Others said, "No government should make laws regarding issues which affect personal life and decision of individual citizens. It is very unfair"(M f lc 4). They believed "this (discrimination) happens only where the community is in minority and does not have enough support" (M f mc 12) since "there is no problem when nuns have dress code in Christianity but one has a problem when Muslim women wear burkha. Then it is considered an imposition" (M f lc 3). The suppressed anger was "European countries claim to be the champion of human and democratic rights in the world. But they are also trying to put a ban on *burkha*, which is completely wrong given their professed values. Why don't they apply the same principles while banning the *burkha*. Even from multicultural points of view it is completely wrong" (M f mc 12). As a consequence many respondents felt "Europe and America are enemies of Islam. Therefore, such laws which forbid women from wearing *niqab* need to be changed and we must fight against it legally" (M f lc 2). The bottom line was as follows: "if those who are wearing the *burkha* do not consider it as an imposition then why does the government think this is so?"(M f lc 3).

This hostility among the interviewees was compounded by the perception that Muslims are deceived in the name of democracy: "at the international level the concept of democracy and values is a farce and it is time and again brought into focus to bolster the interest of USA. In the name of democracy Muslims are deceived. In the name of democracy the European countries are trying to ban *burkha*, is this not fraud with Muslims?" (M m lc 4). They raised issues such as if the secular West imposes such bans then why should it not be considered theocratic. This was passionately expressed:

> Secular means that every person belonging to any religion should be free to do what they want. All religions should be free. Whatever they want they can do. Saudi Arabia is justified because it is a proclaimed Islamic state and does not call itself secular. But France says its secular then why this ban? It makes no sense (M m lc 15).

The following discourses encapsulate the basic logic of their argument against the ban and demonstrate the difference between cultural imposition versus cultural interpretation.

Question: "If you consider that in France it is not just the *burkha* that is banned but, also, other expressions of one's religious identity, then would it be okay?"
Interviewee: "Well, not always. In some situations, that might be okay."
Question: "What kind of situations?"
Interviewee: "Like Ambedkar, for instance, in the 1930s challenged the ban on temple entry for Dalits. He interfered with Hindu religious edicts, and that was justified. The ban on temple entry consciously disallowed an entire group of people access to a certain site. So it was affecting many people who had no control over the ban."
Question: "In what way does that differ from the *burkha* ban?"
Interviewee: "In case of the *burkha* ban, women are not harming anyone else by wearing the *burkha*. So there is no need for others to interfere. I think that is the difference—that no one is harmed by anyone wearing the *burkha*" (H f mc 9).

Some believed that the government should interfere only when there is a consensual public demand. The views revolved around the issue of state interference versus personal freedom:

> State can intervene to establish the practice of equality but even then it is not right. It is only when women themselves accept that *burkha* is imposed on them and on the basis of their constant demands France should take some step otherwise it is unjust. Hence, it is on public demand that state can intervene in the religious affairs of people. Furthermore, if there is any conflict between two religions then government can intervene to resolve their differences and for the betterment of society. Government cannot intervene in personal matters of religion (H f mc 1).

In keeping with the above logic of "public good" and "public demand" some respondents professed that government interference was fine in order to keep public

order: "State has got right to interfere in the religious affairs of the people if it threatens public order. There are many religious processions where riots are created, then state has right to interfere" (M m mc 4); "the government should interfere in religious matters otherwise we Indians are so superstitious that we can come up with anything. And we blame everything on God. For example, Ganga, which has the dirtiest water with all the dead bodies floating, is called pure water in our country. It is better if government has control and interferes in religious matters otherwise all the so called religious people are going to make situations worse" (H m mc 10).

According to a few government interference was fine, but they felt that this was a complex issue: "yes the government has got a right to interfere in religious matters when it involves public good or when it is going to threaten the peaceful atmosphere among different religious communities. If government does not interfere then it will be very difficult to stop religious conflicts" (M m mc 1); "the government and politicians must interfere there should be pressure and interference by the government otherwise people will come out with meaningless *fatwas*" (H f lc 3); "only if the government and politicians interfere in such matters our country will be safe and secure" (H f lc 4); "yes, public gives votes and therefore it becomes their duty to interfere in all the issues of the people and sort them out. The government should be able to judge on all the issues" (H m lc 6).

A content analysis of the data resulted in three main themes with regard to the interviewees' views on banning of the veil. They are the following: "foolish … problematic," "don't like the ban … it curtails freedom," and finally "Allah says so… it is culture and there should be no interference." The interviewees' responses are presented in the following section.

Foolish … problematic

> No, there is nothing wrong in wearing *burkha*. It does not harm anyone and is very important in Islam. There is nothing like force. The West has assumed this. We wear it out of our own choice. I am highly surprised over this. It is very unfair and France cannot call itself secular (M f lc 4).

> Now if the government also starts talking about religion and starts giving importance to religion then we are very far away from the word secular (H m lc 8).

> Every one loves their religion. An overwhelming majority follows their own customs and traditions … I feel that *burkha* should not be banned (H m lc 9).

> One has to mainly analyze what would be the consequences of such a decision; whether this ban would generate negative reactions or would it be good for the society? Such acts definitely have a strong tendency to create negative repercussion. Of course, religion and its politicization will have grave consequences, which we have already experienced in the history of communal violence. We should uphold our constitutional principles but let me stress that religious principles can never harm our polity (M f mc 4).

> France should not ban *burkha* if they are really a democratic and liberal country. They should not have objections about people maintaining their life style. They are supposed to uphold freedom of religion and expression. Everyone has the right to decide what they want to wear or not, therefore, wearing *burkha* falls under human rights and the present ban is tantamount to its violation (M f mc 3).

Well, knowing the French, the ban doesn't surprise me. They're a very closed country, they won't speak anything other than their own language, don't accommodate to strangers easily—stuff like that. So expecting them to accommodate to something so alien like the *burkha* is out of the question. I'm not condoning it, I wouldn't like if India had a *burkha* ban (H f mc 8).

No religion is better than the other. Hence government cannot be based on any one set of religious principles even though majority of the people from that country or region may believe in that religion (H f mc 14).

Don't like the ban … it curtails freedom

Yes, I have seen this on news that France is banning *burkha*. But this is not right. It is up to the people to decide whether they want to wear *burkha* or cover their head or veil their face. This law is coercive in nature. Government has no role in this and it should not happen (M f lc 11).

This is absolutely wrong that the French government is going to ban the *burkha*. It depends upon the woman whether she wants to wear the *burkha* or not. How can a government fine a person or send her to jail if she wears the *burkha*. It is highly ironic that a woman does not have the right to decide what she can wear (M f lc 14).

What is wrong if one is willing to cover up their identity? It is one's individual liberty. Even I have chosen to veil myself completely when going out. It is my religious right and my choice. There is nothing wrong in it (M f lc 9).

I do not wear the *burkha* and do not know whether religion has made it obligatory for women to observe *burkha*. But I am totally opposed to the government putting a ban on *niqab* in France and any other country. It is very wrong (M f lc 8).

No, they are appointed to handle political matters. *Burkha* nowhere comes under political matter (H f mc 6).

Tomorrow politicians will come to our houses and decide what we should eat. They are appointed only to take care of the welfare of the people (H m lc 14).

Religion is very personal and therefore any interference in it is unethical. One thing is certain that nobody is going to accept such changes (M m lc 13).

The bottom line is that one should not hurt religious sentiments of others. Hence, a secular government should not make rules regarding religious laws and should not interfere with religious freedom of its citizens (M m mc 10).

Allah says so … it is culture and there should be no interference

Islamic law is absolutely perfect. Every thing is appropriate and valid in Islam. There is nothing wrong in Islamic ordinance regarding *burkha*. People look with respect to the one wrapped in *burkha* compared to one in western outfits (M f lc 12).

Purdah i.e., veil is a must in Islam. It covers the entire body. It also reduces moral corruption in society and *burkha* is also very comfortable—you draw one loose cloak over your clothes. Such kind of enforcement of laws is against Muslims (M f lc 10).

Burkha is there in Islam. The government's policy is wrong. Like wise, *Namaaz* is also integral to Islam and if government starts interfering in these matters then how will be able to fulfill our religious duty. It is very wrong if government starts dictating and negating our religious duties. I am against this (M f lc 7).

If Muslims are there then definitely *burkha* will also be there. It is the propaganda of the government that women are forced to wear *burkha*. There is nothing like that. Any government

> cannot pass such laws without consulting and taking prior recommendations of its citizens. *Burkha* has an important place in Islam. Veil is compulsory for women in Islam (M f lc 5).
>
> To ban the veil is incorrect. Veil is a *Sunnat* (deeds of Prophet Muhammad) in Islam. No government has got the right to ban the veil. Every Muslim should protest against the ban on veil (M m lc 7).
>
> Islam, does not recommend, any wrong thing for human beings. The meaning of woman is veil. The provision of veil in Islam is from Allah and it is good for women because it protects them. Veil is some thing, which has been practiced by even non-Muslim women in the country. They adopted this practice from Islam to protect their dignity. This is a good thing and everybody should practice it. No government has got the right to ban the veil in any part of the world (M m lc 8).
>
> It is wrong to put a ban on the veil because we are Muslims. The Quran has been revealed to our Prophet where it is mentioned that, convey the message to mother and sister that they should cover their faces; they should never look upwards and should never talk in high pitch voices (M m mc 5).

Although these are the dominant themes there were other sub categories such as those given below.

The following meta-themes emerged:

1. Why call them secular, they are theocratic.
2. In the name of democracy Muslims are deceived.
3. Concentrate on development … leave religion alone.

Some respondents however believed that veiling should be banned, the issue was far too complicated, and there were no simple answers. A few Hindu respondents, mostly men belonging to the middle class, felt that the ban is right and *burkha* is wrong … government should interfere: "there should be a ban on *burkha*. This emphasis on veiling has been done by Mullahs and the *burkha* should not be there" (H m mc 7); "in our society there are no boundaries between men and women, this does not mean that it has made our women characterless. But Muslims are very rigid in this regard. Even in the marriage hall there are separate places for males and females. Besides this fact there are so many bad females and criminals who use *burkhas* for hiding their faces from the police and public. So I think that the custom of wearing a burkha is not good or it should not be there" (H m mc 2); "from my point of view the custom of wearing veil is wrong in Muslim communities. It should not be there. It creates boundaries among different religious communities" (H m mc 2). One Hindu woman also belonging to the middle class endorsed the above view: "I think French legislation is right. One should not wear *burkha*, why should one hide one's face and suppress one's identity. I don't see comfort in *burkha*, therefore, it is okay to ban the *burkha*" (H f mc 14). And a Muslim male belonging to the middle class said: "but I do not agree with the custom of *burkha*. It is against Islam. Muslim women normally misuse it. My wife wanted to wear the *burkha* but I told her not to wear it. I am totally against the wearing of *burkha* by Muslim women. There are other reasons also why I am against wearing of *burkha*. Nowadays the *burkha* is, generally used by criminals, prostitutes and all those people who do wrong things in society" (M m mc 1).

Another subgroup comprising Hindu female middle-class respondents professed that this was a terribly complicated issue: "well it is tough to say whether government should take a stand in matters related to religion, because our country has witnessed most of the politicians using 'religion' as their manifesto to win support from common man" (H f mc 7); "in some situations, where someone is being harmed, I think the government must interfere. But its difficult to draw that line—what is 'harm,' who is the government 'protecting.' All of these are difficult questions, but I don't think the government should wash its hands off anything religious, saying that they can't interfere. In fact, it is important for the government to interfere otherwise people would just do what they want especially in a majority-minority situation, where one group can easily overpower the other just by virtue of numbers" (H f mc 12); "religion may be personal, but there is a need for some allowance for outward display of it as well. I understand that it can end up being discriminatory because people would be wearing their identity on their sleeves, but people should be allowed to do it if they want to. I also don't think very loud displays of one's religion are a good thing, necessarily. They are sort of an expression of power. Apart from the fact that it is a waste of money, it reinforces the sense of identity. And they're so non-inclusive—so it also makes people who don't subscribe to that religion feel excluded or alienated. So yea, I think there's a balance there. And the government should probably control that, but the standards should be the same for all religions" (H f mc 10). And finally,

> I'm not completely sure where I stand on the *burkha* ban. On the one hand, I know it is wrong because people, specifically women, should be allowed to wear what they want—that is a fundamental right of every woman. But I also feel like so many women do not make this "choice" because there really is no alternative. Of course, I do know that people choose to wear the *burkha* sometimes—I know women like that—but they've done it at a much older age. For most women who wear the *burkha*, they just do it because they've been taught to do it since they were children. Does that make it a real choice? I don't think so. In some ways, I think it is right for the government to have taken such a step, but I also realize that it makes Muslims feel more discriminated against, which is not good. I think it's way too complex to take a simple yes/no stand (H f mc7).

The data suggest that this imposition is understandably resented by many since the *habitus* of the secular is not transmitted naturally and implicitly but on the contrary is a cultural imposition in the name of modernity which focuses on enculturation and forceful assimilation. Jansen (2010) suggests that the changes in dress codes are particularly charged with political symbolism. She highlights this by taking the examples of Kemal Ataturk and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, two figures that symbolize Turkish and Indian independence, and both addressed as the "Father of the Nation." Both are icons of secularism but communicated their message in different ways. Gandhi, a barrister, who was familiar with the western dress code abandoned it and instead started wearing simple traditional clothing—a *dhoti* (cotton fabric tied at the waist) and a shawl. Consequently Winston Churchill addressed Gandhi as *fakir* (beggar). Ataturk opted for western-style clothes and rejected any

spiritual activity in public, serving as a role model to be followed by Turkish secular politicians who abstained from the use of any religious idiom and practice, including fasting during the month of Ramadan (Casanova, 1994). Gandhi ate simple vegetarian food and practiced fasting as a means of self-purification. Through their dress code and public behavior Ataturk became a symbol of "religious disobedience" and expressed the desire to assimilate with the civilized (read westernized) world, while Gandhi became emblematic of "civil disobedience" and *Swadeshi* (from the homeland) but western ideas were not rejected, and this combine represents the bi-personality of modern India which can be epitomized by its acceptance of the religious–secular combine. This is not a social schizophrenia but rather evidence of a cognitively polyphasic society, which has a short history; India became a nation-state in 1947, but a long past embedded in its ancient civilization. As is evident, such historical events rolled in different kinds of secularism in the two nation-states, India and Turkey.

The politics of symbols are linked to domination and repression as much as emancipation and equality. More often than not, they were used in the service of ego and ethnocentric goals and are a fundamental characteristic of populism. The strength of such symbols often comes from the symbolic weight of images derived from the past being projected into the present (Jodelet, 1992). Politics often takes recourse to giving new meanings to culturally rooted symbols, which are then circulated in present-day public discourse. For instance, the religious symbolism of the saffron color was given new or at least added meanings by Hindu ideologues. Following is the debate on saffron symbolism in contemporary India.

3.3.2 Colors Are Also Charged in a Conflict

Most of our respondents became emotional when it came to discussing symbols and colors and believed that colors, although a nature's creation, had become politically overloaded. The following extracts are examples of the respondents' perceptions regarding the significance of colors. The expressions of this divided and emotionally charged terrain are given below (Table 3.4).

The significance of the saffron color (*bhagwa*) has its origin in the Vedic ages when it was associated with fire (*Agni*). While Sikhs regard it as a militant color,

Table 3.4 Colors … they are charged

Creates divides and distinctions	Saffron + green = unity	What can a color do? Talk about welfare instead
Create an other	Cannot be changed	Colors are sacred
Saffron forbidden amongst Muslims … another, other?	Not anybody's property	Should not be politicized

Buddhist monks and Hindu saints wear robes of this color as a mark of renunciation of material life. However, our respondents' reactions were affectively charged: "we do not like the saffron color. This color is forbidden in our religion since the very beginning. The Prophet had said so. It is like fire … we do not wear clothes of this color. This association cannot be changed. The color saffron can never be accepted by us" (M m lc 15); "I don't believe in flags, etc basically anything that divides the people. It is not only the borders but also such things that divide us. If you see green flags, it's a Muslim area, or saffron, then its Hindu" (M f mc 9); "we dislike saffron. Shiv Sena (Hindu ideologues), which is symbolized by saffron color, created havoc in our community in the 1992 riots. Sentiments related with colors can't be changed. If green color is meant for Pakistan and Islam then no one can change it" (M f lc 2).

On the basis of these reactions it is clear that its former meaning in Hindu culture as a symbol for renunciation has been transformed. Instead of being a symbol of piety, saffron has become symbolic of Hindu revivalism since the Hindu ideologues have appropriated this color. Thus a new symbol has been created——the color has taken on a different connotation and been effectively instrumentalized. However this was a heavily loaded polemical representation. A number of respondents believed that this was wrong but cannot be changed: "the BJP and Shiv Sena (Hindu ideologues) have appropriated the saffron color. This is wrong because people from different communities see it as reflecting fundamentalist tendencies. That this is a Hindu color. The same logic applies with the color green. These cannot be changed now. Too much time has passed since they were appropriated" (H m lc 11).

Others felt that colors are sacred and should not be used for politics: "(…) the color saffron has an association with God. Its the color of God so it should be at his altar. Green is also bestowed on God and hence should not be used" (H f lc 14); "saffron color was for Gods. To use it in politics is disrespecting it. People use all colors. Why should anyone appropriate a color? Green is the color of nature also. It is bad because they are using a holy color in politics"(H m lc 14); "saffron is associated with Hindu gods so it wrong to associate it with some political party especially when the parties are involved in all the wrong activities" (H f lc 13); "this is wrong. Sages and saints were given respect and this has degraded them by using the saffron color as a symbol of *Hindutv*a. They think we people are idiots and we will melt over their so called religious display (*dharmic pradarshans*)" (H m lc 10).

Then they were those who were totally shocked by the fact that colors have become the property of politics and begun to play a divisive role:

> This question reminds me of one Urdu couplet, *Insaano ke dimaag ka fitoor hai, ke khud to bate huwe hai aur rango ko bhi nahin choda*, which means: this is the evil of the human mind; not only are they divided but have also not left the colors untouched (M f mc 3).

Many believed that colors were God-given and beyond discussions: "green is my favorite color and I am a Hindu, does it mean I am a traitor to India? People should be a little bit more broad minded" (H f mc 13) or "colors have been given by god and there is nothing wrong or right about them, they should not be debated" (M f mc 15).

This change in symbolic interpretation is not driven by an internal dialogue but is fueled by collective controversy. The de-codification did not take place in a

cultural, semantic, or political void but in an environment that was heavily loaded with discourse. When this occurs, there are noticeable changes in the symbolic sphere and history is witness to innumerable events where symbols are reframed and interrelated to endow them with an emotional force.

But, as mentioned earlier, symbols need not be negatively exploited. For instance, Hindu ideologues exploited mythology—Ram (Hindu God, worshipped in millions of households)—for divisive politics (Sen & Wagner, 2005), whereas Gandhi used mythology—Sita (consort of Ram)—to promote secularism and the struggle for India's freedom. Sita, generally portrayed as a lifeless stereotype of subservient (and, therefore, ideal) womanhood, was re-presented by Gandhi as a symbol of self-sufficient, independent India. She only wore "Khadi" (homespun cloth). The symbol of Sita was re-presented to convey an anti-imperialist message and to inspire women to join in the struggle for freedom. In one masterstroke, the medium carried the message to millions. It was more effective than many other esoteric symbols (Sen & Wagner, 2009a, 2009b).

The concept and the intention are more startling if viewed in its historical context. When Gandhi came into the forefront the average life-span of Indians was short, maternal mortality rate was high, child marriage was prevalent, and only 2 % of women were literate (Sen, 2003). The "*purdah*" (segregation of men and women) was the norm and commonly practiced. Yet he brought hundreds of women on to the streets in his civil disobedience movement without a single word of social censure. Gandhi had astutely realized the power of myth, which is a concoction of truth and falsity both, and used it to catalyze people to join the struggle for independent India. Time and again, Gandhi used culture, mythology, and religion—the pulse of the people—to create social solidarity, which cuts across all ranks.

3.4 The Difference But Not the Divide

The interesting difference, which appears to emerge between the two religious groups, is that while both emphasize religion, a greater emphasis on diktats (e.g., *Sunnah*, text of the Quran) was evident amidst the Muslim group residing mainly in the slums. A dominant response to the ban on *burkha*, as discussed earlier in the section on dress codes, was as follows: Allah says so … it is culture and there should be no interference—"Islamic Law is absolutely prefect. Every thing is appropriate and valid in Islam. There is nothing wrong in Islamic ordinance regarding *burkh*a (M f lc 12)"; "*purdah* i.e., veil is a must in Islam … It is religious compulsion which one ought to follow" (M f s10); "to ban the veil is incorrect. Veil is a *Sunnat* (deeds of Prophet Muhammad) in Islam" (M m lc 7); "Islam does not recommend any wrong thing for human beings" (M m lc 8), etc.

This insistence on "strict" religion amidst the Muslim respondents reflects the greater need for focusing on the tenets when the community is a minority group. However, in contrast to the Muslims, some of the Hindu respondents stressed that

religion should not be given too much importance and it is not a pressing issue. This is interesting in the context of majority–minority positioning. For the threatened minority community, there is a greater focus on religion as an identity marker, whereas for the majority it is a secondary issue, and as seen in the case of the ban of the veil the Hindu women from the slums in particular have emphasized that the government should be involved in development and side step such "religious-political" issues—"the government should make policies for our betterment rather than dividing the people on religion" (H f lc 8); "the government is not made to deal with religious issues … Their job is to work towards the welfare of the people and they must leave all this to the people" (H f lc 11). This point was also reiterated by the interviewers (see methods) that the Hindu segment were less involved in this subject overall whereas the Muslims were more passionate and forthcoming. For them it was an issue, which was related to their everyday life in majority Hindu India. A similar trend was observed in our earlier research (Wagner, Sen, Permandelli, & Howarth, 2012) where the reasons for wearing the veil were far more pertinent and evoked a wide-ranging response from Muslim women in India, but this issue was not perceived to be important to a similar extent in Indonesia where the women belonged to the majority culture.

The Muslim men from the middle classes were emotionally involved with the issue, and words and phrases such as passion (*junoon*), atrocities (*zulm*), fear, distress (*khauf*), surrounded by enemies (*dushmano se ghira hai*), and we must fight against it legally (*Humein qanooni ladayi ladni chahiye*) came up in the discourse; for them it was an emotionally loaded psychological journey towards maintaining a positive identity. In such an ambience if the underlying judgmental text, as often perceived in the West, is that if religion is a "collective neurosis" that leads to "impoverishment of intelligence" (Freud, 1927/1989) then it can become the basis of misunderstandings. The French and Belgian interference in dress code reflects this superior so-called missionary zeal, which is enforced in the public domain to uplift the minority Muslim community, and it does create a backlash and hardening of fundamentalist attitudes. This should not be a surprise.

Among the Hindus the emphasis was more on culture and tradition: "today my children respect every religion but that does not mean they do not follow traditions or are unaware about their religion" (H f lc 7); "I will teach my child our traditions. Just like my parents did. Will teach about our religion also" (H f lc 15), etc. This may be a result of the different nature of the two religious groups—Islam being monotheistic and Religion of the Book in contrast to Hinduism, a polytheistic philosophy of life which has no preordained book of religion. The reactive and defensive tendency was evident amidst the Muslim respondents, and while engaging with them it appeared that to talk against Islam was almost forbidden. This is one point which we believe comes in the way of sustaining secularism. When a communicative space is sealed off, ghettoization and persecution become dominant. However, as observed, the Muslim group was eager to communicate its views on secularism and talked at length when interviewed. In contrast for the Hindus, in particular from the slums, secularism was not a pressing issue and they were more casual about it. In majority Hindu India this is not felt to be central to welfare.

Overall, the general consensus amidst the respondents was cynical, and the feeling was that religion had lost its "true" meaning and had become a ploy for political expediency: "it is politics that has vitiated the atmosphere in the country. The biggest terrorist in the country is politics (…)" (M m lc 9); "there is a political reason behind the rising religious consciousness. The seeds of the conflict are actually sown by political leaders. They are playing dirty politics with this … but playing wrong politics with a dirty mind and disgusting intention in the name of religion is not right and is condemnable" (M f mc 3). But all of them have stood by religion. Most of our respondents subscribed to religion with varying degrees of involvement. They did want a religious blueprint to transact with everyday life and spirituality. If that is the case, maybe it's time to recognize that secularism does not mean remaining religiously illiterate, indifferent, or distanced.

3.4.1 Sarvadharma Sambhav (Peaceful Coexistence of all Religions)

As opposed to the common western concept of secularism, Gandhi suggested *Sarvadharma Sambhav* to prevent conflicts caused by religious bigotry. Gandhi was not concerned with the American idea of the separation of church and state because he felt that in India religion is so powerful in the social order that the western concept of secularism did not make much sense in the geo-cultural context. The following data reveal that this is a concept, which is endorsed by many. However amidst the Muslim respondents there was greater preference for the concept of peaceful existence and reticence towards the term *Sarvadharma Sambhav*. This was not overtly stated, but discomfort and reluctance were observed when the Muslim respondents would articulate this Sanskrit term. When the interviewees were asked about secularism three themes emerged: endorsement of the concept: "definitely, I would prefer to opt for that secularism which respects every religion and wants peace in society. If a person is religious and also gives due respect to religion of others then there would be harmony and brotherhood in the society. Be like Gandhi and follow *Sarvadharma* ways" (H m lc 9); hijacking of secularism through political motivation (Sen & Wagner, 2005): "Babri Masjid and Godhara were political … we are generally peaceful. I would prefer to have peaceful co-existence of religion. India is good example for this. We have been following this except Babri Masjid and Gujarat case we are peaceful towards all religion. Peace is a must for, self, society, nation and environment" (M m mc 11); "there is nothing bad in religion. What happened in the case of Babri Masjid was merely a political issue. There is nothing wrong in becoming religious conscious in the right way" (M f mc 1); "I would prefer peaceful co-existence of all religions. The reason is that religious fanaticism or over obsession with one religion divides people. What happened such as Babri Masjid demolition and subsequent riots was an exceptional case, otherwise our country is a good example of religious tolerance" (M m mc 10); and a few believed

that secularism and *Sarvadharma Sambhav* were not synonymous and addressed different issues: "no, secularism is not synonymous with *Sarvadharma Sambhav*. It implies that all religions are equal hence they should peacefully coexist. Maybe at a theoretical level this is fine but if in governing a State this logic is applied it will contradict the basic premise of this ideology. This logic doesn't take into account the fact that all religions are not the same, particularly the reactionary and intolerant elements of any religion. To say that the good and not so good should peacefully coexist and should be treated at par with each other, is not prudent. In fact the government in a secular state should be proactive enough to control the dominant or hegemonistic religions" (H f mc 15).

Even when it comes to the concept of *Sarvadharma Sambhav*, though acceptance is there amidst both groups, the logic and explanatory process is different—the Hindus accept the concept per se since its origin is from there own culture: "the biggest *dharma* is that which allows people to follow their own wishes/desires and does not interfere. Within limits allows everyone the freedom to do what they want. Let all religions exist … this will lead to peace in the country" (H m lc 11); "there should be *Sarvadharma Sambhav*" (H m mc 5). But the Muslim respondents prefer the term "peaceful coexistence" instead of *Sarvadharma Sambhav*: "peaceful co-existence of all religion is utopia because there are diverse faiths and there are many who don't believe in faith. … According to me, plurality would lead to more tolerance and growth and then definitely there will be peaceful co-existence" (M f mc 4) and "I would prefer to have peaceful co-existence of all religions. Where there is equality of all religions, there is truth and peace" (M f mc 3).

Understandably, amidst the minority group there is an unspoken fear that absolute subscription to an outside, alien concept, such as *Sarvadharma Sambhav*, may lead to loss of religious identity, and Gandhi who is the creator of this concept has become a controversial character. Hence peaceful coexistence is willfully accepted, but there is hesitation towards *Sarvadharma Sambhav*. The concept is endorsed, but the terminology suspect. This indicates that there is a need to investigate the social actor's own representation of their minority position. This is essential if social policy has to base itself on cultural interpretation rather than on cultural imposition. For instance when secularism was branded as *Sarvadharma Sambhav,* which is a Gandhian and not a Hindu concept, it was rejected by some amidst the Muslim community. It was perceived as a cultural imposition because the subjects of "welfare," the Muslim community, associated it with its language, which is Sanskrit; hence they resist this intrusion in the public domain. However in a caste-ridden and gendered society in India, a ban on Sati (burning of the woman in her husband's funeral pyre) or Ambedkar's defiance as embodied in the entering of the "sacred" temple by the profane Dalits/untouchables is cultural interpretation. In this case the subjects of liberation were keen to break their shackles and accepted the suggested social change. This distinction requires careful consideration; otherwise the validity of reform itself gets challenged. The minorities have to be respected if peaceful coexistence is the aim.

3.5 Communicative Spaces, Moral Maturation, and the "Other"

In modern-day societies, especially in the West, there is a tendency to underestimate the existential force of religious belief—how such beliefs can, at least for some believers, provide the only sufficient basis for their political views (Habermas, 1990, 2005). Given the global atmosphere of intolerance, it is perhaps worthwhile to examine what Gandhi and Habermas post his theological turn (Harrington, 2007) thought and wrote on the subject of role of religion in public sphere.

Habermas (2005) suggests that a "reflective form" of communicative action is essential. By default this requires a communicative space that is free from diktats and leaves scope for one's own interpretations. This is nicely exemplified by Gandhi, who though a staunch Hindu believed that he need not accept that every word in the Vedas is divinely inspired. On the contrary Gandhi insisted that he would decline to be bound by any genealogy of reason however learned or sacred it may be if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense, and he was open to the idea of accepting doctrines from other religious texts such as the Quran or the Bible. Gandhi subscribed to the Vedic view of unity in multiplicity and, following the spirit of thousands of years of old Indian scripture enshrined in the Rig Veda, emphasized—"Let noble thoughts come to us from every side" (*Aa No Bhadrah Kratavo Santu Vishvatah*) which when applied in the context of secularism pointed to the dictum that a secular polity accepts even the intolerants (Radhakrishnan, 1939). This is what Habermas called moral maturation: the ability to integrate interpersonal perspectives. Habermas argued that the "encrypted semantic potentialities" of religion can "yield up their content of truth for profane thinking." The proviso being that religion's cognitive contents are liberated from their original dogmatic encapsulation in the melting pot of argumentative speech (Harrington, 2007, 47). The endpoint of this process may result in mutual perspective taking required by the "other." This anthropological line of argument focuses on identity formation, drawing on the social psychology of George H. Mead who argued that the individual's development of a stable sense of self was only possible in relation with others through processes of interaction, socialization, and dialogue that are dependent on taking the perspective of the other in a process of mutual recognition. Similarly, Habermas suggested that communicative spaces be developed and a society led by moral maturation should become the norm where the issue of "morality" is dealt with entirely differently. It is a departure and an alternative representation of morality—understanding and respecting the other, which is in direct contrast to everyday life where those who are on the high horse of "morality" often associate it with being judgmental and passing verdict.

The concept of moral maturation had a strong resonance amidst the respondents who apart from a few felt that this was mandatory for peace processes: "I think it is always better to visualize our mistakes from another person's perspective only then we will able to see our mistakes and can rectify them. I think it is important that one should resolve differences through dialogue even if it leads to chaos but that is better

than stopping due to great fear of disagreement" (M f lc 8) or "we must learn to change the way we look at people who are different from us. Learn to put ourselves in their position … The problem is that people want to have all sorts of freedom, without giving the same to others. Before I stare uncontrollably at someone wearing a *hijab* or sporting a long beard, I need to ask myself how I would feel if someone did that to me. Until we change the way we see people, there will always be resentment and therefore conflict" (M m mc 11).

Our respondents were in support of mutual understanding and creation of communicative spaces, which could lead to change in perspective. The respondents unanimously endorsed mutual understanding: "it is not right that we should always think of our selves. The other person can also be right. This is the root problem of each and every conflict. We should over come this to unite people. This problem lies with fundamentalists also. They always think of themselves as right and others wrong" (M f lc 12); "in the name of religion, people are divided into various sects, therefore, one should settle differences between them. It takes both to solve the situation. Therefore, they should enter into a dialogue to find a feasible solution" (M f lc 1); "words once spoken can't be taken back so one must try to understand each other's point of view and then talk" (M f mc 13); "I think it is mandatory to learn the situation from another person's point of view. It will definitely end the conflict" (M f mc 3); "no one can individually resolve their mutual differences" (M f mc 1); "I think people need to constantly do 'empathy exercises.' They need to learn what it means to be the other person. Imagine you are someone who lost their everything in a riot. It can be done as games, but eventually people will learn to do it themselves. You have to bring it to people's attention first" (H f mc 9); "sometimes one has to kill one's emotions and feelings for the sake of the other. In order to retain a relationship one has to sacrifice. Hence this will help in solving the problem" (H m lc 9); "it's worth a try, something like 'live and let live'" (H m lc 10); "any problem can be solved after having a dialogue about the contentious issues. There is no problem in the world which cannot be solved by talking and listening to the other person's point of view" (H m mc 7); or "complete solution may not happen. However this approach should be adopted to resolve any conflict or misunderstandings. But this may also vary depending upon the nature of conflict. Mediation, negotiation and reconciliation etc. can also be used to resolve differences but there should not be any compromise with our principles" (M f mc 4).

The respondents believed that a process such as moral maturation will help evolve people, and they will understand that collective punishment for the acts of a few should be anathema (Clémence, Devos, & Doise, 2001). They believed, "we must not forget that a person is a human being first and religion comes later. We have people caring for dogs, nature, etc. I am not saying its wrong but people don't have respect for each other. Just because a few people turn out to be terrorists does not mean the entire community is at fault. Don't we have Hindu goons? We need to stop behaving like a mob" (M f mc 11), and some stated this simply, "hating a community because of a few terrorists is morally wrong" (H m mc 10), whereas others believed, "it is we people who create these differences. Now if one person does wrong we blame the entire community or country for it. We are at fault. We need to stop discriminating on basis of religion or caste" (H m lc 8).

Our data show that great emphasis was being placed on interaction and "reflective form" of communicative action. The desire was that the "other" be accommodated and there should be a easy opening of communicative spaces and that boundaries be transcended. It was felt that although this was difficult and no single process could solve the situation there was definite hope that a multi-faith, collective, networked society was a possibility in a morally mature culture.

However in some cases, the discourse and the transition are ambivalent: on the one hand, the subjects declare their discontent, sadness, and disappointment about the fate of the country: "for all these 15 or 20 years there has been fight among different communities on religious issues. Every religious group wants that their religious flag should be flying high. When this is the desire of the religious groups in India I do not see any possibility of the resolution of religious issues among different religious communities particularly among the most orthodox groups of both the communities" (M m mc 6); "there is no possibility of a village or locality in which Muslims can live together peacefully with others. This is a dream, which will never be realized in India. Just do not start pestering me with this question. There is no possibility for this even in distant future" (H m lc 4).

Nonetheless they always refer to the need to exit from this unfavorable situation: "this can be achieved if three elements can be avoided like self interest, religion and community. If the interest of the nation is in view then the people from all these groups can be collected at one platform and a dialogue among them is possible and a solution for communal or any religious matter can be found" (M m mc 4). To resolve the conflict dialogue was considered essential: "one should have a dialogue. No point in setting aside the issue. If you keep on trying there will be a break through and you might succeed. You might fail once but later on you might be successful and reach a consensus" (H m lc 11).

3.6 Customs, Communication, and the Marginalized

3.6.1 Communicating Secularism

The main theme, which the respondents felt that they would like to communicate, was follow our religion but at the same time respect every religion and every individual:

> The signature of secularism is equality and human rights according to me. We should, sensitize children about being equal citizens of one country irrespective of their religion. Be like the mother who treats all her children equally (M f mc 4).

The main communication strategy directed towards the young was to expose them to religion but not impose it on them. However religious initiation and understanding were underscored by most of the respondents—"I like a secular person or one who respects all religions. I, in particular, do not like a person who does not believe in any religion. That sort of person is not good for the society" (M m mc 2).

The various themes through which the respondents felt that secularism could be communicated are the following:

1. Expose but do not impose:

   "I will never ask my child to follow the religion I practice. It is not a rule. I will leave this decision to him. Whatever he finds right he can do. If he does not wish to follow a religion he is free to do that also" (H m mc 2).
   "I will not pressurize my children to follow my religion but I will certainly teach them their cultural values" (H m lc 13).

2. God did not create religion … we did:

   "I always tell my children don't follow any *jaati, dharma* (caste, religion). All these words are created by human beings and not God" (H f lc 5).
   "I have always told my children that no God created religion to make this world violent. The differences have been created by human beings today" (H f mc 12).

   "I will ask my kids to follow our tradition. I will teach them about our gods and goddesses but I will also tell them to respect every religion and individual" (H f lc 14).

3. Multicultural and diverse India:

   "India is the only country with so many religions and we must respect all religions" (H f lc 11).
   "I will tell that in our country the President has been a Muslim, a Prime Minister who is Sikh. Our country is secular. Sonia Gandhi is the leader of the Opposition and she is Italian and Christian" (H m lc 12).

4. Religion indoors, respect all outdoors:

   "Follow religion inside the house but when outside respect all and live together peacefully. I is important to be secular to stay united but we can't stop following our religion" (H f lc 12).

5. We poor need to be united:

   "If we stay united and fight against the government we can do something about poverty. Otherwise what can the poor do?" (H f lc 8)
   "The poor can only think about how to find their two square meals. By fighting what will we get … just wounds" (H f lc 13).

3.6.2 Role Models: Maulana Azad, Gandhi, and Ambedkar

The respondents mentioned three people in significant numbers. They were, as expected, Gandhi—the usual; but two others, who were accepted as role models were Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Ambedkar. A significant proportion of Muslims endorsed Maulana Azad, and he appears to be their progressive, secular icon. Ambedkar, the champion of the Dalits (downtrodden) and the person who wrote the Constitution, was another favorite. Gandhi, though mentioned by many, appears to have lost his favored position. Maybe while communicating about secular issues the trinity of Maulana Azad (icon of Muslims), Ambedkar (icon of Dalits/marginalized), and Gandhi (national/international icon) can be used.

Fig. 3.1 Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Source: http://mygoldenbengal.wordpress.com/2013/01/14/maulana-abul-kalam-azad-his-passion-for-freedom-and-communal-harmony/

3.6.3 Abul Kalam Azad

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's real name was Abul Kalam Ghulam Muhiyuddin. He was popularly known as Maulana Azad. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was one of the foremost leaders of the Indian freedom struggle. He was also a renowned scholar and poet. Maulana Azad was well versed in many languages, viz., Arabic, English, Urdu, Hindi, Persian, and Bengali. Maulana Azad was a brilliant debater, as indicated by his name, Abul Kalam, which literally means "lord of dialogue." He adopted the pen name "Azad" as a mark of his mental emancipation from a narrow view of religion and life. For his invaluable contribution to the nation, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was posthumously awarded India's highest civilian honor, Bharat Ratna, in 1992. He started a weekly journal Al Hilal to increase the revolutionary recruits amongst the Muslims; elected as Congress President in 1923 and in 1940; and became independent India's first education minister (Fig. 3.1).

In contemporary society, in particular amongst the minorities, Abul Kalam Azad is an emerging role model: "I would opt for Maulana Azad. I think he was secular and practical compared to others" (M m mc 10); "I would like to lead my life like Maulana Azad. The reason is that Maulana was more secular than Gandhi or Nehru. Both of them had some flaws. Maulana Azad was a great visionary therefore I would choose him out of these figures" (H f mc 1); "he interpreted Quran according to a modern approach. He was religious and an ideal political figure. We strongly need to have women and men like him who would take Muslim community in the right direction" (M f mc 4); "he brought about change through his writings. He played an important role in the freedom struggle. I think it is very significant to revolutionize society and make people aware through writings. Education is of utmost important" (M f lc 7); and the final accolade, "Maulana Azad put an immense effort to liberate our country from imperialist forces" (M f mc 2).

Fig. 3.2 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Source: http://www.mkgandhi-sarvodaya.org/autobio/autobio.htm

3.6.4 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi, popularly known as "Father of the Nation," was one of the charismatic Indian leaders who fought for the freedom of the country. In 1891, Gandhi went to London to study law, but after being admitted to the British bar he returned to India and began a law practice in Mumbai. After a span of 2 years, he worked in an Indian company in South Africa as a legal advisor. There he was ill treated and abused because of belonging to an inferior race and color discrimination. He then decided to participate in the freedom struggle to secure rights for the Indian people. For this cause, Gandhi stayed in South Africa for almost 25 years.

Influenced by the Bhagvad Gita and Hindu beliefs, the Jain religion, and the Christian teachings of Leo Tolstoy, Gandhi moved on the path of *satya* and *ahimsa*. Satya meaning "truth" and "ahimsa" meaning "nonviolence" were the two weapons that Gandhi used to fight the enemy. In 1914, many of Gandhi's demands were accepted by the Government of the Union of South Africa. After his struggle in South Africa he returned to India and started the Non-Cooperation Movement. Gandhi, after returning to India, inspired people to boycott British goods and promoted *satyagraha* (insistence on truth; truth force), nonviolence, noncooperation, and *swaraj* (self-rule) to achieve independence. Finally, in August 1947, the British were forced to leave India. In January 1948, Mahatma Gandhi, a symbol of free India, was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu (Fig. 3.2).

Although a controversial figure in contemporary times Gandhi still continues to be a role model for many: "Gandhi was the only leader who took people of different faiths together. Whenever he used to decide about anything concerning the country then it used to be for people from all religions. Today our country needs a leader like him" (M m lc 3); "Gandhi is a good example. He was a devout Hindu and at the same time secular. At one instance, he prepared non-vegetarian food for his Muslim friend on the occasion of Eid though he was strictly vegetarian which shows how a devout religious person can be a good secular person too" (H f mc 1); or "I would like to live my life like Gandhi. I have a huge respect and admiration for him. He sets

a good example of simplicity, non-violence and *satyagraha* (insistence on truth; truth force). I mainly follow non-violence and avoid indulging in conflict. Religion talks about being a good human and following good principles" (M f mc 12).

3.6.5 Bhim Rao Ambedkar

Dr. Ambedkar hails from the community of Mahars who are condemned as untouchables. On this account Dr. Ambedkar had to face a number of problems. He was looked down upon and ill treated. Hence he wanted to agitate against untouchability. He went to England to study law. Along with law, he studied economics and political science. He acquired the degree of Barrister-at-Law and also an M.Sc. degree simultaneously. In 1918, he took up a job as a professor in a college and in 1920 he participated in the first meet of the Depressed Classes held at Nagpur. In 1923, he started practice at the High Court in Mumbai. He took up the cause of the Depressed Classes before the Simon Commission, which visited India in 1928. He attended the First Round Table Conference held at London and argued that the Depressed Classes should have voting rights and the right to elect their own leaders. Dr. Ambedkar could not reconcile to the domination of upper castes and said that all men are equal in all matters. He was the first Law Minister of India after Independence in 1947. He was also the chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution, and in fact he is one of the main architects of the Constitution. As a brilliant law minister and an intelligent person, he could include in the Constitution the required safeguards for the Depressed Classes. The caste system in Hinduism forced Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to embrace Buddhism along with 5 million other Depressed Class people (Fig. 3.3).

There was a high regard for Dr. Ambedkar: "from my point of view there are only two leaders in the world one is Ambedkar and the other is Karl Marx" (H m mc 8); "even rational people like Ambedkar may have renounced Hinduism, but he did turn to Buddhism. I would like to be like him" (H f lc 6); or "I want my life to be like Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar because he did a lot for our welfare. He fought for our rights" (H m lc 11).

The data throws up a host of emergent categories, some of which may lead to the creation of icons, which could be used to create social solidarity. For instance while addressing the issue of secularism and allied vexatious questions, stress can be placed on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, in particular for Muslims, "he is a co religionist (*hum mazhaabi*). He was a very capable person and he was a scholar (*aalim*) and very secular (…). He said that there is a very large number of Muslims and we should be involved in the political power play (*jamooriyat*)" (M m lc 15), and B. R. Ambedkar for the marginalized group, "Ambedkar, for instance, in the 1930s challenged the ban on temple entry for Dalits. He interfered with Hindu religious edicts, and that was justified" (H f mc 9). These can be tagged with Gandhi—"I like Gandhi because he is the one person whose principles can bind the nation together" (M m mc 7); "I like Gandhi because he brought an end to discrimination and poverty in the society"

Fig. 3.3 Bhim Rao Ambedkar. Source: http://drambedkarbooks.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/b48.gif

(H m mc 1); and "I will choose Gandhi because he won freedom for the country through non violence. This single man had so many followers and was successful in freeing India from the clutches of the British" (M f mc 6).

Historical accounts and public space to date have not recognized the contributions of Maulana Azad, and Ambedkar too has been given short shrift. This needs to be rectified, and this change in policy may make communication initiatives more customized and hence effective rather than diffused by the continued focus on an overused Nehru–Gandhi icon. Over centuries, such generated symbols can be, and have been, used for both constructive and divisive purposes since they tend to have strong evocative power due to their iconic form and affective charge. This evocative power can be creatively used to address the minorities and the marginalized.

3.7 Core of the Conflict

The following were considered to be significant factors, which caused conflict. There is resistance towards *dharmic* (religious) exploitation, and as expected the greatest space as the cause of conflict was occupied by politicians, who use religion for vested interests. Right wing ideology, feelings of religious superiority, misinterpretation of religion, and Islam were also considered important factors in the creation of conflict, and these were viewed as a result of political manipulation. The extracts, which follow, explain the reasons for religious conflicts:

One of the main causes for the conflict was seen as the nexus between politics and power: "political leaders are making us much more religious conscious. The seeds of the conflict are actually sown by political leaders. They are playing dirty politics with this. There is nothing wrong in politics. Politics can be used for making strategies to gain something or avoid conflict but playing wrong politics with dirty

mind and disgusting intention in the name of religion is not right and is condemnable" (M f mc 3); "people are so busy that they are least bothered about such things. But politicians fill the minds with bitterness" (M f mc 6); "politicians ignite a spark and then the fire spreads" (H m lc 14); "the people fight and it is the politicians who benefit from this. I live my life and earn my living. I believe in living and letting live. I feel terrorism has no religion. We have Hindu criminals as well" (H f lc 7); "the politicians dig a pit for the people and people fall into it. They are the ones who create all the problems" (H f lc 12); "it is politics that has vitiated the atmosphere in the country. The biggest terrorist in the country is politics" (M m lc 9); "the fight between Hindus and Muslim can be stopped if politics is kept out. All these problems are created because of politicians. The fights on religious issues, which are happening from 1990 onwards, are because of parliamentary politics and political interest" (M m mc 5); "it is the politicians who create religious disputes among people otherwise common people want to live together. There is no identity problem among the masses" (H m mc 9).

"Vote bank politics" was viewed as another major source for a divided and conflicting society: "for 15 or 20 years if there has been fight between Muslims and Hindus I think it was happening because of politicians and because of vote-bank politics. Different political parties have been using religion for serving their political interest" (M m mc 8); "in the matters of religion the government or political party interferes because of getting votes. And it is the vote bank politics that lead the government to interfere in matters of religion" (H m mc 6).

Exploitation of the illiterate by politicians was another cause: "it is the illiterate people in the party or country who create communal riots in the country. Illiterate people generally jump into this and then they create trouble for the common masses. It is the work of the devil. Satan is most happy when people fight among themselves" (M m lc 10); "it is the politicians who are responsible for the communal riots and the fights on the question of religious identities. Illiteracy helps and adds the spark. It creates mob feelings" (H m mc 1).

It was also felt that presently politics had become the source of amassing wealth: "politics is responsible for this. It is now a source of money and that is why violence is taking place in society. Earlier, politics was not a field through which people earned money. However, during the present times, one can find millions of rupees in the bank balances of politicians and big corporates. This is why religion is being misused for personal benefits. It is the easy route to money" (M f lc 5); "politics is used for earning money, which creates communal riots in the country. To earn more and more money the communal riots are created" (M m lc 10); "nowadays there is too much politics in the name of Hindus and Muslims. The leaders of different political parties have high monetary stakes in communal riots. To divert the people from real issues leaders of all political parties want them to be involved in petty communal fights" (M m lc 3); "it is electoral politics that determines the question of religious identities in India. The politicians have made it a very lucrative business. Without the use and misuse of religion they just cannot do anything in Indian politics. It has become bread and butter for them, so in this context it is wrong to blame fundamentalists for creating religious disputes in India. The main culprits are

politicians and their compulsions" (M m mc 2); "The politicians would never like to end this controversial issue because without that, their brand of politics will not survive and their coffers will be empty" (M m lc 1).

Many Muslim respondents felt that it was the hawkish right wing ideology which catalyzed the divide: "these right wing people will never come at the same table for establishing secular values in the country because religious politics is the oxygen of their party without which they cannot survive" (M m mc 4); "for BJP, Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal (right wing hawkish parties), politics is a matter of love, bread and butter. Politics is a business for them. They will never change. They will never stop creating riots in India" (M m lc 4).

A few felt that a false sense of religious superiority created extremist politics: "fundamentalists only follow their religion and try convincing others to follow their religion. They feel their religion is the best and they will never respect other religions. They are the one's who were responsible for the violence in the country" (M f mc 13) and "if people keep giving importance to their religion and criticizing others then it is all the more easy for politician to make us fight" (H f mc 12).

The "us"–"other" conflict and rise of xenophobia was considered by some respondents as the crux of the problem: "our religion says that every religion is equal. Everyone should be united. We want unity but Muslims are the ones who fight" (H f lc 9); "it is easy to influence people on religion. People always have a liking for their religion. Due to the terrorist attacks the views towards Islamic religion have changed. And it has become a very sensitive topic. And it has become a very emotional topic as many of their people were killed. So when such attacks happen people form their views about a religion, which remains in their hearts and minds" (H f mc 6).

Some respondents viewed the prevailing situation in a more politically analytical way and stressed that extremists are not born. There is no genetic code called extremist: "extremists are not produced they are created. Extremists are created because of poverty. When sisters and daughters of a person are raped then extremists are produced. When this thing is removed then terrorists and extremists will not be produced and people will be tolerant towards other people's religion" (H m lc 2).

One of the reasons for the rise in xenophobia was perceived as the so-called Muslim growth rate, i.e., high fertility, which led to the feeling that Muslims will be everywhere: "the reason for the communal riots in India is to stop the progress of Muslims and to keep them deprived and enslaved. Hindus think that Muslims have got many Muslim countries in the world and we have got just one country and if in India also their population growth is faster than Hindus then Muslims will be able to capture the resources of the country. So Hindus create communal riots in India" (M m lc 6).

Some Muslim respondents also felt that this was to intimidate Muslims and establish Hindu supremacy: "the communal riots are most of the times created by the Hindus by throwing colors upon Masjid, raising indecent slogans during the religious processions whenever they pass near a mosque or Muslim localities. Just to intimidate the Muslims the communal riots in the country are created. Islam is a religion of peace; it doesn't want fights and quarrels" (M m lc 6) and unstereotypically holding the Muslims responsible there was an emotional outburst

from a Muslim respondent: "for the persistence of religious conflicts Muslims are also to be blamed. Their reputation in the society has become those of criminals and terrorists. They have become characterless people. Earlier there used to be a time when people used to swear that Muslims are honest and upright. But nowadays people have started seeing Muslims as frauds, liars and dishonest. Muslims' attitude and illiteracy is more to blame for the bad image and adverse publicity in the country. Earlier the Muslims had a good image but nowadays their image has got a beating because of terrorist activities in the country" (M m mc 2).

There was also a well-held belief that envy, lack of trust, and objectivity heightened the divide. Expressing this hostility some Muslim respondents said, "at least with Hindus there is a sense of fear that Muslims are going to kill everyone. There is a strong feeling that Muslims have a global network that Hindus don't and in reality, they (Muslims) are the more powerful ones. So we have to keep them in check. On the Muslim side, there is a sense of complete victimization. Anything that happens, they start making excuses. Like saying that every terrorist attack is an RSS conspiracy or Zionist conspiracy to malign Muslims. There's no room for objectivity at all" (M m mc 11) and "religion is a very vast and complex topic in our country. Now, people should have enough sense to know, that this (political divide) is being created by politicians. But no, people behave like fools, and go on killing each other. People need to be more understanding and trust each other" (M f mc 7).

Further some respondents believed that media, in particular vernacular press, was an additional aggravator: "for creating communal riots in the country the vernacular press is responsible. Media creates false propaganda against Muslims. There should be a forum of Muslim advocates all over the country to counter this propaganda of vernacular press by filing a case against spreading of lies, which create animosities between two communities. This will serve as a great counter measure to stop communal riots in the country. The coverage of Muslim issues on TV is minimal" (M m lc 8).

The darkness and violence of the underworld was another causative factor: "whenever there is a dispute between Hindus and Muslim usually it occurs because of goons of both the communities otherwise without their participation and active involvement it is not possible for communal riot to break out" (H m mc 1); "it is the anti social elements that create communal discord" (H m mc 10).

Finally the universally accepted villians, the fundamentalists, were seen as harbingers of death and destruction and creators of precarious fault lines: "the fanatics are the ones who give rise to conflict. They make the others fight. Otherwise, people would mind their own business and go about their ways. During riots, there are always some trouble makers and fanatics, who lead everyone astray" (M m mc 11).

This dynamite mix was believed to augment conflict and blow up the differences which were otherwise dormant.

These political psychological strategies to create divisions can be successful, as we see in the data above and in the two Hindu accounts, which depict the discursive construction of boundaries (van Dijk, 1998):

> Our religion says that every religion is equal. Everyone should be united. We want unity but Muslims are the ones who fight (H f lc 9).

> See we are against the Muslims because all terrorists are Muslims. Even in the terror attack, which happened on 26/11, all the terrorists were Muslims. Muslims are insensitive, ruthless and cruel people. And we Indians therefore don't like them and are always suspicious about them (H f lc 4).

Such xenophobic reactions, although limited or subterranean, as expected create fear amidst the Muslim community who acknowledge that terrorism is wrong and are scared of the repercussions:

> (…) because of the heinous terrorist activities by those coming from a Muslim background, Islamophobia is bound to happen, but it needs to be corrected or else even the innocent Muslims will be looked up with suspicion (M f mc 12).

Consequently, as elaborated in the following discussions, the respondents place great faith in the capabilities of a networked community, which is high on trust and has norms of mutual reciprocity, i.e., social capital.

3.8 Common Ground: Points of Anchoring

Regarding the resolution of this religious conflict, the responses cluster around three main anchoring points. The first deals with the need to be understood and focuses on processes, which encourage enculturation. In order to achieve this it is recommended that there should be more communication and intermixing, sharing of festivals, entertainment, sports, dialogue on humanity, and thereby consciousness raising. The second clusters around change in mind-set/perceptions where Muslims and Islam are portrayed in a balanced way and exploitation of religion for political purposes is stopped. The third main thrust is the involvement of the common, regular person, a focus on children who symbolize the future and the ultimate fait accompli, which calls for a shared goal and a shared dream.

Each of the three anchoring points is substantiated by respondent extracts in the following sections.

3.8.1 Enculturation (Fig. 3.4)

Establishing effective communication channels was seen to mitigate the effects of divisive politics: "address 'hot spots' to remove misunderstandings" (M f lc 13); "I came to know that people develop bias and myths in the absence of communication which, acts as hindrances. We must try to over come this to attain harmony in our society" (M f mc 2); "there are also other things that could be done—like making an active effort to emphasize similarities among religions rather than the differences between them, initiate dialogue" (H f mc 8) and an innovative observation:

> Tablighi Jamaat, they stressed that Muslims should not drink or eat in non-Muslims house. It is a sin. However, I don't believe in this. There is flexibility in Islamic law. I read Quran

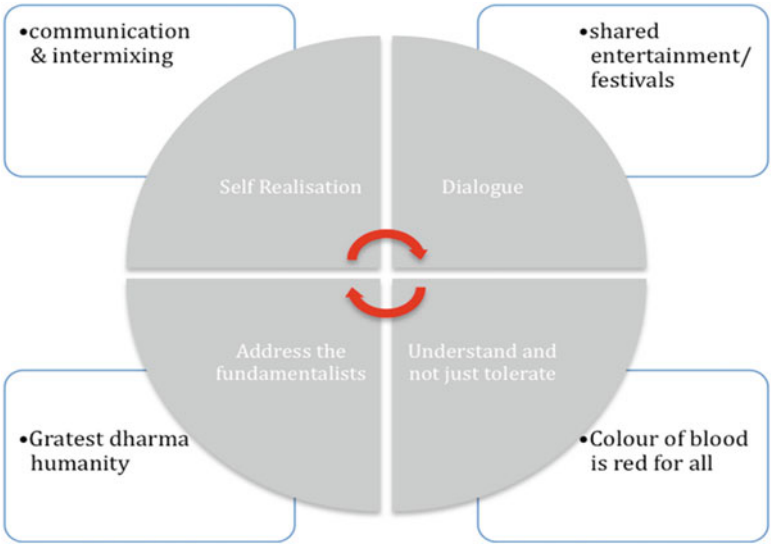

Fig. 3.4 Cluster 1: Enculturation—understand and not just tolerate … you too can change

in a *mandir* (temple). There is nothing wrong in this. Why should there be an objection over *mandir*? Ritualism is nothing, we need to communicate this (M f lc 12).

Shared entertainment/festivals were also construed to help bonding: "entertainment is for everyone not confined to one particular community and therefore secular in nature" (H f mc 9); "I never tell them don't go to a Muslim house or don't go to a mosque or church. My kids also celebrate Christmas and are also invited for Eid. It is people who have divided themselves. From every religious place you get God's blessings. Then if its Allah's blessings or Jesus's blessings … how does that matter?" (H m lc 14); "we are secular people. We peacefully live with others (people of different faiths). We give due respect to their religion, for example, in our locality, we respect tradition of Hindus especially during their festival, we celebrate with them and also during our festival, we share with them" (M f lc 13); "we are Hindus but my sisters follow *roza* (fasting in Islam). My kids go to a Christian school and also celebrate Christmas. If religion is given so much importance it will only divide the people of the country. At the end of it we are all human beings with two eyes, one nose, and belong to the same world" (H f lc 6); "even I went to Siddhivinayak temple along with my Hindu friend but I didn't worship according to their method" (M f lc 2); and highlighting sensitivity, "we can take small steps to unite them for e.g., on any occasions of happiness or distress" (M m lc 13).

Philosophically a few respondents, underscoring the universalities of humankind, said, "the color of everyones' blood is red, no one can distinguish between Hindu's blood color and Muslims' blood color. Even color of every Masjid is not green (M f lc 13); "everyone is foremost a human being and the color of their blood

is red. My friends are Marathi, Christians, Muslims, etc. so where does the question of religious identities come here?" (M m mc 7).

Others believed that humanity is the greatest *dharma*: "when humanity reigns then where is the question of religious identity and fundamentalism?" (M m mc 1); "a human being should be given importance. Humanity should be given importance and not religion" (H f mc 13); "humanity is a religion. I will never teach my kids that he is a Muslim or he is a Hindu. I will always tell my kids that everyone is a human being" (H f lc 14); "people can be brought on a single platform on the question of development. When fundamentalists realize that it is because of them that the country is suffering then they will stop fighting. Humanity is important and is above religion" (H m mc 11).

Finally, further treading the philosophical-spiritual route some stressed self-realization as the healing balm: "I think only through self-realization they can reduce their differences. If one regrets over one's wrong action then problems can be resolved other wise if they continue to feel pride over their wrong action then there won't be any solution for it" (M m lc 11); and finally summing up the issue a response was as follows:

> There is a lot of misery in this world, and we have the skills and potential to address it, if only we would give each other space to do what we like in our personal lives and keep the focus on solving problems. Everyone needs to do this (M m mc 11).

3.8.2 Change in Mind-Set (Table 3.5)

It was asserted that there was a need to question and move beyond essentializing: "it needs a change in mind-set, and that begins to form when we are kids. So schools need to address it. I'm not sure how. But I know that what we have right now is inadequate. We learn that all religions are equal and that we must live in peace and harmony, but it is so cosmetic. Very much like moral-science. Like with sex education, all we used to learn about was biology. Now we're talking about relationships, love, etc. That shift needs to take place in talking about religious differences as well. All of this is linked with what I was saying about questioning one's beliefs. Children need to be pushed into thinking why everyone in their family is from the same religion—is something wrong with the others?" (M m mc 11); "their mindset has to be changed which is not very easy. They have to learn to love the people of different

Table 3.5 Cluster 2: Change in mind-set—different ways of seeing

Beyond essentializing	Hindustani Muslim	Islam is about peace
Dargah, a place for unity	Good sibling—Hindu; bad sibling—Muslim	Correct religion
Religion indoors	Need to question rites and rituals	Do not hound the Muslims; give them space

thinking" (H f lc 7); "change in thinking and increases in level of understanding can bring them together" (M f mc 5).

The new representation, Hindustani Muslim, should be promoted and it should be underscored that Muslims are not traitors: "Hindustani Muslims also want secularism. Muslims do not like the dispute regarding mosques in India" (M m lc 8); "Muslims have always played a positive role in the national integration of the country. Muslims have ruled in India for 700 years but they never changed the name of the country. No Muslim has been found to be a traitor of Indian nation" (M m lc 8); "Muslims have never been traitors in India. They have always been loyal to the country. Muslims were with Shivaji. The commander in chief of Shivaji's military was Muslim" (M m lc 9).

The good–bad dichotomy should end: "if Hindus want to be a big brother then they should behave like a big brother. Otherwise for how long will Muslims suffer the brunt of injustice and oppression in India? Hindu business men use Muslims for crime and then TV and media paint them as bad elements of society but the same media never highlights the good things about Muslims" (M m lc 8); "who were responsible for killing Gandhi? Who is a terrorist in India, Muslims or Hindus? I need an answer about this question. Why injustice is being done to Muslims? The bodyguards of Bal Thackeray and Udhav Thackeray are Muslim. Who killed Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, it is Sikh and Tamil respectively? Muslims have never killed any leaders in India" (M m lc 9); "yes but people have to change their stereotyped mentality. A Muslim is always considered to be a *kattar* (fundamentalist) or a terrorist. And actually that is what we are always taught by our family in our childhood. These things create rifts in the society. My family was always against Muslims. But I ended up marrying one. They don't feel the same now" (H f mc 11).

It should be reiterated that Islam is about peace and not about terrorism: "Islam always preaches the value of brotherhood between Muslims and Hindus. Islam is a religion of brotherhood. Islam always preaches about humanism" (M m lc 8); "factionalism was only made in this world. Islam never preached hostility. There is no place for hatred in Islam" (M f lc 3).

Dargahs can be seen as symbols of a syncretic culture, a place for unity: "Sufi's *dargah* is a place which can promote unity among Hindus and Muslims. There are a lot of Hindus who come to *dargah* and pray. Therefore *dargah* can serve the purpose of uniting people in the country" (M m lc 7); "RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, Hindu hawks) people do not come to *dargah* otherwise most of the Hindus from different castes usually visit the *dargah*" (M m lc 14).

Correct religion should be emphasized: "people can change if good values of religion are advertised in society. When the original teachings of every religion are brought in society then they can change the perception of fundamentalists in the society. Otherwise it is very difficult to establish peace in society and hence the problems of identity will remain" (H m mc 3); "we have to make people understand that the fight on the basis of religion is not good and that is not true religion and because of wrong religion our neighbors take the benefit of our fight and militancy is promoted in India" (H m mc 6).

People should give space and not hound: "we need to learn to give each other space. As people, we need to be not so concerned about forcing our views on others. People in this country are concerned about progress—they are concerned about growth. We have to make them understand that progress and growth is linked with allowing everyone, no matter what their beliefs are, to work together, towards common goals" (H m mc 12).

Need to question rites and rituals: "the bottom line for me is that people should learn to question their beliefs. Any society that emerges out of rituals, I think will be my ideal world. I am a non-religious person. I don't follow any religion or rituals or anything. And I think I got here by questioning. I'm not saying that everyone will turn out to be an atheist. But at least they will be more rational in their beliefs. My sense is that half these rituals etc. will vanish once people begin to question" (H m mc 11).

Religion in the home: "by that I mean, no loud festivals, no *murtis* (idols) all over the place, no firecrackers on Diwali. It may sound harsh, but really, the minute you allow it to come onto the streets it is in someone's face. And that someone deserves to not have it in their face. So I would start teaching kids to keep everything religious at home" (H m mc 12).

Finally a few led by leftist ideology stressed, "the basic fight is class war not religious war" and to end this, "there is a need to create right political perspectives in society by saying that rich class exploits all the people irrespective of their religion. So there is a need for mass struggle" (M m mc 4); and "religious disputes can be removed through communism and socialism" (H m mc 8).

3.8.3 Involvement of Civil Society (Fig. 3.5)

Going beyond Contact Theory, the respondents felt that creation of interdependence had a positive effect: "when interdependencies are built at individual levels, then it helps to resolve conflict. Resolution can't come about with a one off event of getting people of all communities to meet. It won't work. It has to be sustained and it has to be linked to other incentives. Like these co-operatives of women, they may not discriminate because their incentive is economic. And eventually when they work in that environment they come to value and respect each other irrespective of religion. In contrast, calling women from different communities and trying to build ties between them, it may become pointless because people don't see any value or incentive in coming to those events" (H f mc 10).

According to the respondents a shared goal helped people to unite: "except in the face of an external aggressor, there is nothing that will bring this country together. I don't mean war. I mean something that threatens us as a society. I don't know—maybe the apocalypse. I can't think of anything. But it has to be something big. But by then, there really won't be anything that we can do because we're all going to perish" (H m mc 12); "something really grave, e.g., the 26 July flooding or the 26

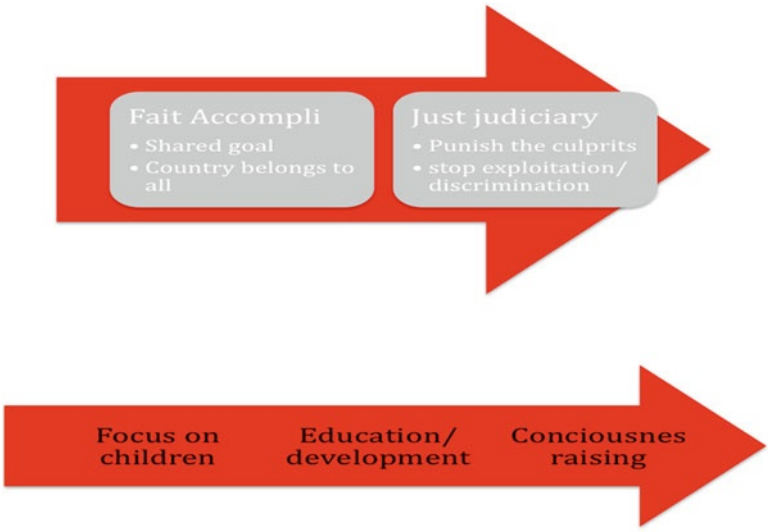

Fig. 3.5 Cluster 3: Involvement of civil society—consciousness raising and fait accompli

November attack. That is when all Indians unite and religion is forgotten" (H m lc 10); "26/11 terrorist attack was on the country and not on a particular religion. Everybody got united. When a third person attacks people forget about their religion and caste. If the *kattar* (fundamentalist) is about to die and if a person from some other religion is coming to save him he will not say, 'NO.' He will forget about religion and his life will be more important for him" (H f mc 6); "there has to be some common idea or commonality of interest which can bring them together and that would resolve their conflict" (M f mc 3).

Further, it was underscored that the philosophy of fait accompli, … we have to live together, would be beneficial: "we have to live together—but I don't think people want to. They don't realize that we don't have a choice but to live together. Maybe we need to drive that point home—that this is just how it is. We have to live together, and if we don't, we'll just kill each other. I don't think its' impossible, just very, very hard" (M m mc 11); and inculcation of the spirit that the "country belongs to all" will yield dividends: "explain to them that it's not right to fight because we belong to the same country" (H f lc 8); "if people start thinking that we all have to live in India and there is no way we can drive anybody from the country then they will begin to ask, why should we fight. If these sentiments get prevalent then there will be no religious conflicts. Beside this the people should also realize that it is against the interest of the nation to indulge in fighting on the question of some trivial religious issues, which are made by the politicians" (H m mc 1). It was stressed that love for the country is the only vital issue, which can bring them together (H m lc 11); and some Muslim respondents felt that

Muslims in India have suffered equally during the freedom struggle and made many sacrifices. The country belongs to every one (M m lc 6). Another suggestion was that if we want progress in the country then we have to raise the slogan—Hindustan is ours and not that with pride say we are Hindus (*Hindustan hamara hai not garv se kaho hum Hindu hain*) (M m lc 9). It was felt that unity can be achieved if three elements are avoided, self-interest, religion and community. If the interest of the nation is in view then people from all these groups can be collected on one platform and a dialogue among them is possible (M m mc 5) and that there is one thing in the country, which can bring all people together and that is, patriotism (H m mc10).

A strong emphasis was placed on the involvement of civil society: "I feel that civil society can play a role in this matter. There are sharp differences, between various NGO's, who are working in the areas of communalism. On the other hand communal forces in the country are united like a solid rock. Because the hardcore secularists are anti religious they are not able to penetrate into society, as the communal forces are able to" (M f mc 10); "non-religious people should control government. Being neutral, they will be more conducive for our multi religious and multi culture society. They won't come under the influence of one particular religion and won't be discriminatory towards others. Therefore, it is viable to have non-religious persons in government" (M f mc 7); "we should collect people from different groups but they should be people who keep their word and have principles and besides this they must have national interest above their petty sectional interests" (M m mc 5).

A just judiciary which punished the culprits was perceived as the backbone of a democratic society: "till date how many people who have been involved in communal riots have been punished? Democracy is only in name. But this can be stopped only when law enforcement agencies and judiciary are strict. The communal riots can be prevented only when leaders are punished" (M m lc 4). The view of some of the Muslim respondents was as follows: "the Hindu–Muslim problems in India are related with the exploitation of the Muslim community. This problem can be solved if judiciary is strict. But the problem is judiciary is unable to implement the rules strictly" (M m lc 4).

Besides the judiciary the onus of change also rested on a responsible media: "media should also behave responsibly. Media (electronic) is particularly after TRP ratings. They should bring into focus different communal issues then only communal situation will improve in the country. By doing this one can think of creating a real secular environment in the country" (M m lc 4).

Further it was stressed that stepping out of the confines of a narrow insular world view would help mitigate the differences for which exposure to multi-beliefs was necessary: "see, in our country, most people are brought up with religion playing an important role in their lives. They don't question, they often get disciplined into following certain rituals etc. That is why the notion of 'choice' when it comes to religion is so questionable. I am not saying that people don't really choose to follow

certain religions or certain customs, but that happens only when they have the freedom to choose. If something is inculcated in you from birth, I don't think that is a choice. So to me, the role of the government would be to ensure that children question their beliefs—I am not sure how this can be done, maybe through schools etc, just like how we teach religion, we should be taught about atheism and other strains of beliefs" (H f mc 7).

Great faith was placed on the younger generation and it was believed, "children are, our hope, and future," "this (conflict) can be removed only when every body makes a deliberate attempt to make their child real secular and responsible. Even in the postmodernist world we have not become secular because in our home we are totally religious and the environment is not secular. There is a need to put human values in the child" (H m mc 8). The feeling was "the new generation is more open-minded. It is throwing the orthodox views from the society. It is bringing about change in the thinking pattern of people" (H f mc 2) and the belief was "it is the children of the people who fight in the name of religion who can change their parents. The children should be put in mixed religious groups so that they do not have stereotypical attitudes towards the people from other religious groups" (H m mc 5). Some respondents observed, "we'll have to tap children if we want to do something. I'm not sure how, but I feel if children started having more Muslim friends, it might make them think twice before making an irrational statement. But even that is difficult, because you can only tap them in school. When they go back home, they will be in the company of their parents again, who will start indoctrinating them. I don't know how useful it will be" (M m mc 11) and summing up the issue it was believed by some, "today's generation does not discriminate but it is also the elders who shape their kids thinking in such a way that the kid after growing up loves his own religion and has bitter feelings towards the others. A child knows nothing about religion. It is how his parents mould his thoughts. And to add to the bitterness we have our dear politicians" (H m lc 13).

Finally it was pointed out that the trinity of education, development, and consciousness-raising was required and mandatory for initiating peace processes: "inequality is in society because of illiteracy. People will understand secularism only if they are educated. I want to be a teacher. I feel education is very, very important. And I want to teach as many kids I can. I will teach the poor for free because I can understand how difficult it is for them to receive education and education today is so costly" (H m lc 15). Some felt, "with the spread of education and consciousness in Indian society the question of religious identities has become dormant. It is no more as sharp as it used to be. Now the different communities in India want progress and do not want to indulge in fighting with each other. For them acquiring material progress is more important than getting involved in fighting on some trivial issues which have no relevance in practical life except fro some emotional satisfactions" (H m mc 2) and highlighting the importance of education it was said, "education only can bring about change. We become broad minded through education. This can also reduce differences amongst people and that is what is needed, badly" (M f lc 5).

3.9 Secularism and Social Capital

Indian secularism was based on the idea that the state would maintain a principled distance from religion but would address itself to matters rising out of religious concerns when the need arises. However, the cardinal rule would be that the considerations for both keeping away and interfering would always be nonsectarian. The problem with the Indian state's practice of secularism has been that it has become increasingly sectarian. The constitutional provisions suggest very clearly the framework of a secular state; however, the politics, nature, and functioning of the Indian state seem to drift away from this framework such as in Gujarat where state power was used against minorities (Sen & Wagner, 2005). This definitely is a major challenge to the secular framework of the Indian state. In order to fight this challenge, the struggle for secularism has to become part of the struggle of the ordinary people of India for their right to a life that is dignified and politically, economically, and culturally free.

Secularism is, we believe, closely intertwined with the concept of social capital, which came into prominence with the work of Bourdieu (1983), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993, 2000). They claimed that there is increasing evidence which shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper and that a society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. According to Putnam (2000), social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. The need to reflect on this definition of social capital is further accentuated by the observation that for the regulation of intergroup conflicts and conciliation (e.g., Fisher, 1990) most processes are directed towards establishing conditions that create open dialogue which attempt to foster reciprocal trust (Markova, Linell, & Gillespie, 2008). It is in this context that secularism becomes an integral part of social capital. If secularism exists then social capital thrives since boundaries of the "other" do not become demarcated and norms of mutual respect and tolerance are respected. Conversely, through religious categorizations and self-definitions, group boundaries are strengthened and "nonbelievers" are excluded from personal and social networks. Objects, events, and histories get re-presented to rationalize and overcome suspicion and distrust, and this often leads to a discourse that exaggerates and essentializes the "other" as well as one's own group (Hallam & Street, 2000; Howarth, 2009; Wagner, Holtz, & Kashima, 2009). Rather contentiously, one could argue therefore that assaults on secularism are assaults on social capital, social cohesion, and even modern democracy.

Overall our earlier research reveals that even in a secular and democratic setup when social capital becomes scarce, conflict and tension take the front seat in the formation of social representations, especially in the context of majorities and minorities (Moscovici & Markova, 1998), and symbols begin to get a different signification which can be employed for bringing about social change (Sen, 2005; Sen & Wagner, 2005, 2009a, 2009b).

3.9.1 Leaders, Networks, and Multiculture

In our present research most respondents, except for a few, endorsed trust, reciprocity, and a democratic setup which was networked in lieu of one with leader/leaders. It is interesting to note that leaders became synonymous with politicians who symbolize corruption. That a leader can be positive appears to be an empty category, and this space lies vacant, which is indicative of a troubled global society. However, amidst this chaos many are hopeful and in search of trust and reciprocity which emanates from the common people's collective. Some of their sentiments related to this are as follows: "real supportive people are needed and not influential politicians" (M f lc 5); "a place where people trust each other instead of influential politicians because the latter are not trust worthy. We don't see any prospect in them" (M f lc 15); "I think people are more important than leaders. Trust is very important. If leaders are very influential but people don't trust each other then what is the use of it?" (M f lc 10); "no, it is not necessary to have influential leaders to prosper. Faith and active co-operation amongst the people is needed" (M f lc 12). The following extracts further substantiate this conclusion.

The respondents had great faith in a leaderless society, which was democratic and high on trust and reciprocity: "politicians don't do anything for the poor people. It makes no difference to them if a poor are dying or living. They are only busy filling their pockets. The world should be clean. No politics. There should be no politicians. Religion has to be given importance but we must not fight because of religion but stay united and respect everyone" (H f lc 11). Emphasizing the importance of common people, they said, "it is not just good rulers which make society great, the role of the masses is very important in nation building. Politicians have a short span of life and therefore where people are not helpful that society won't reach that height as compared to the other village which is based on trust (M f mc 4); "I think that village will make progress where everyone helps each other because growth and development are not the property of the politicians. It can only happen if all hands are working together" (M f mc 3) and reiteration of the firm belief,

> It's from and because of politics that there are fights and divisions. That village in which everyone helps each other will also have greater economic prosperity. In unity there is power/indestructibility (*Ekta mein Akhandata*) (H m lc 11).

Some respondents believed that it was imperative to have a leader because without them society would be directionless: "any group of ten people needs a leader then India is a vast country it definitely needs leaders but not the ones we have in our system" (M m mc 9); "to run a huge country we need leaders. We need politicians. We need rules and regulations in the country. Everything will go haywire without politicians but they should not be corrupt officials" (H f mc 4); "the village with a leader will be better. If there is more than one they will fight with each other and there will be factions. There will be groupism and followers of each who will create an atmosphere of sycophancy. A village with one leader will be happier. A herd of animals also has a leader" (M m lc 15).

The representation of an ideal society, barring a few exceptions, was also consensual. The representation of an ideal world was a multi-faith society, which based itself on trust and reciprocity and was high on social capital, i.e., networked: "according to me, an ideal society should have unity and sharing between people; they eat and drink together. It is not necessary to have a homogenous society. People should be diverse and each should follow their religion independently. One should not have a problem with other's faith and then there will be complete peace and harmony" (M f lc 15).

3.9.2 Homogenous Societies Versus Multi-faith

Contemporary liberal democracies contain multiple cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. Within these societies, different communities provide divergent models for understanding secularism and religious, humane, and moral obligations. In multi-faith and divided societies often the assumption is that visions and dreams would be different. Conversely, our data related to the issue of homogenous versus multi-faith societies shows a remarkably clear and shared vision of an ideal society. It is truly hegemonic and underscores the uniformity of moral reasoning. However, religious and cultural differences challenge assumptions about common modes of moral deliberation. These need to be critiqued and call for a nuanced analysis in order to effectively resolve conflicts and social policy disputes.

The representation of an ideal society, barring a few exceptions, was unanimous. It was described as a multi-faith society, which based itself on trust and reciprocity and was high on social capital, i.e., networked: "no, I think diverse societies are better. They teach us many things. If I had a world full of engineers, I might have fabulously functioning devices, but everything else would be a mess. People with different skills, different attributes make the world more interesting. All religions and all points of view, traditional, fundamentalist, all of these have their good points. Moreover, I don't think we have a choice but to learn to tolerate differences. Because even if we lived in a society where everyone was traditional, we would come up with differences between ourselves. If you look for differences, there will be many. And if we start fighting every time we have to deal with someone different, that won't work" (M m mc 11). Some believed, "living separately enhances the chance of obscurantism and orthodoxy. Living together promotes the birth of new ideas. When people from different religious communities live together it promotes understanding among them and removes confusion and stereotypes about each other" (H m mc 10); "cosmopolitan society is always good. There should not be a society where only one religious group lives" (H m mc 7). Others felt, "I don't think homogenous societies can exist—if you have isolated homogenous societies, chances are

the person who is powerful is exerting some kind of control over everyone. And if there are differences—which there have to be—they will not be allowed to express it. So I think a diverse society with mutual trust and respect is less likely to face conflict. But building and maintaining that trust and respect—that is the challenge" (M f mc 10).

However a few respondents preferred a homogenous society: "I admire a society where people of one religion stay for example, Saudi Arabia. Then there is less strain. They will happily live together" (M f lc 1); "I think it is desirable to have people following the same religion in a society, for instance, Saudi Arabia. These societies have less tensions compared to diverse societies like ours where there is always tension and chaos in the society for minor reasons" (M f lc 8).

Although a few professed a desire for a homogenous theocratic society, most emphasized the centrality of religion although the preferred degree of religiosity differed: "religion would be very important. Hindus and Muslims would follow their religious method independently. And there would not be any interference of government" (M m mc 13); "people would be very religious. Though they won't share the same perspective, their life style would be altogether different but they won't contradict each other. There would be complete peace and love amongst the people" (M f lc 6); "it is not possible that fights don't happen. Our country is the most beautiful place in the world because different people reside here. Religion is to be given the top most priority in the society" (H f lc 4).

A few respondents strongly opposed the centrality of religion: "the world has to be without fights, non violence and blood shed. And religion should not be given any importance for a better world" (H f lc 5); "I see a world in my dreams where there is only happiness everywhere and people are giving no importance to religion" (H m mc 5); "there should not be any role of religion. Usually, we say that all religions are equal but we don't move beyond that. I think we should visualize a society without religion. It is very important to treat everyone on the principles of justice, equality and human dignity irrespective of their religion. God only created Adam and Eve and made no religion. So let there be no religion in society then there won't be any differences between people at least on the basis of religion" (H f mc 1).

It is evident that people aspire to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric, much along the lines social psychological research has shown, albeit on a more complicated level (e.g., Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1988). This still appears a distinct possibility. These linkages both disambiguate the world for a group and enable straightforward communication among its members: we can see this as a form of social capital and a form of conflict resolution. Throughout history it is small powerful groups that have changed the course of history and who have with their ingenuous ways altered the age-old practice, which has generally been witness to the victory of monetary capital over social capital. This still appears a distinct possibility. In there lies hope for the respondents. A dream, but possible.

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Chapter 4
Conclusions

4.1 Secularism and Religion's Mandate

In the realm of social psychology the much used representations of the "other" raise questions regarding social identity theory, which suggests that our evaluation of outgroups is largely based on bipolar concepts: Orient–Occident, religious–secular, us–them, etc. (Tajfel, 1974). However the re-presentation of the "other" is a far more complex process (Liu and Sibley, 2006) since attitudes and beliefs depend not only on intrapersonal cognitive and emotional structures but also on interpersonal, societal, and political structures (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013; Hopkins, 2011; Howarth, 2006). They help organize people's material encounters with the world (cf. Valsiner, 2003). Hence, for instance, images are ideologically decoded depending on where one stands in this Orient–Occident and religious–secular divide. When these decoded images become a significant part of a culture they begin to dictate terms to the extent that even events are viewed as socially meaningful when they fit in with the dominant representations. With reference to secularism this can be witnessed globally.

Debates on issues related with constitutional and lived secularism are occupying significant space in the public domain in many countries. This is particularly true in more traditional Asian countries where there often exists a discrepancy between secularism that is written into the constitution and the secularism that people are willing to live in everyday life. But western orientation and reflections on the subject of the "other" indicate that such culturally and politically loaded perceptions can bring about social change. Those with power define what constitutes social change and this is the ground reality.

R. Sen et al., *Secularism and Religion in Multi-faith Societies: The Case of India*, SpringerBriefs in Political Science, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-01922-2_4,

4.2 Anchoring and Conflict Resolution

In this research we looked at the illustrative case of the Hindu–Muslim conflict in India. Moving a little closer to the resolution of this interethnic or "interreligious" conflict, in our research we identified a few salient anchoring points across diverse constituencies. This common ground may provide a shared trajectory for change on either side: it may help blur the lines of demarcation not only between different religious groups but also within ethnic groups which are a mix of traditionalists, secularists, fundamentalists, and a host of "greys" in between. The responses to the queries of how would you help to reconcile differences between religious groups and within religious groups cluster around three main anchoring points: communication, re-presentations, and operationalizing of a shared dream which is very much like "common destiny" (National Research Council, 1989), a powerful concept for improving intergroup relations.

The first cluster deals with the need to understand and to be understood and encourages processes of mutual acculturation. In order to achieve this it is recommended that ideally there should be more conversation and intermixing, sharing of festivals, entertainment, sports, dialogue on humanity, and thereby consciousness raising. The second clusters around changes in mind-sets, and mutual perceptions, where Muslims and Islam are portrayed in a balanced way and exploitation of religion for political purposes is stopped. The third main thrust is the involvement of the common, regular person, a focus on children who are the future and the ultimate fait accompli, which calls for a shared goal and a shared dream. In multi-faith and divided societies often the assumption is that visions and dreams would be different. However our data related to the issue of homogenous versus multi-faith societies shows a remarkably clear and shared vision of an ideal society. It is truly hegemonic and underscores the uniformity of moral reasoning. The representation of an ideal society, barring a few exceptions, was unanimous. It was described as a multi-faith society, which based itself on trust and reciprocity, which was high on social capital, i.e., networked, and where religion is given space though the degree of religiosity required differs. This creative use of anchoring in mutual interests and feelings along with corresponding legal and policy changes may be crucial in overcoming the divide between and within religious groups which are more often than not created by politically vested interests.

In essence, the divergences in all of these perspectives are related to fundamentally different ways in which groups value their existence and construct a meaningful picture of who they are in relation to others. New meanings can not only be produced through messages coming from outside a group (e.g., other cultures, experts, and active minorities) but also be created by innovative use of social resources which already exist in a society. For example, in his discourse Gandhi created linkages between historical experience (independence of India, struggle against British imperialism) and representations (Sita, the subservient wife of Lord Ram, was shown to wear Khadi which was symbolic of the freedom struggle) (Sen & Wagner, 2009) in order to generate new perspectives, such as involvement of

women in the freedom struggle. In one masterstroke, the medium of clothing carried the message to millions. It was more effective than many other esoteric symbols.

Similarly, Islam and Muslims, secularists, and fundamentalists require a change in image and a change in mind-set. Some respondents suggested changes such as "Hindustani Muslim," "Islam is for peace," "*Dargah* a place for unity," and "Muslims are not traitors". Negative attributes, such as "big brother Hindu, good–sibling Muslim, bad," which are associated with the Muslim community, need to be changed. This dichotomizing and essentializing of the "other" have many negative consequences such as religious divides, "othering," and strongly demarcated boundaries between "us" and "them," and these would only be exacerbated if such ideas continue to be unchecked within the public sphere. The respondents highlighted that the tendency to fundamentalist thinking was not unique to Islam; it exists in other religions also.

There is a need to challenge the "Fundamental(ist) Attribution Error": they are fundamentalists but we are not. After all it is a case of representations, and representations are fluid and dynamic. But political will and involvement of "regular people" are mandatory for this social change to take place.

Such referential points of anchoring can help to overcome interreligious divides. As discussed, Gandhi defied the logic of the divide between religion and secularism and used a diverse collection of referential points, symbols, and myths as mechanisms of collective symbolic coping to unify Indians against British imperialism. He broke through well-defined boundaries and astutely perceived that people live by a set of beliefs, which may be embedded in atheism, secularism, environment, disarmament, or a host of other issues in which religion, culture, and tradition play a central role. This insight should be underscored. Further, his views regarding religion still remain largely relevant in contemporary times since schisms based on religious—or cultural—differences have become the bane of modern societies, and these need to be accommodated within the framework of secularism as defined in the Constitution. It would be perhaps prudent to accept that in different geo-cultural contexts, wherever we are placed globally, religion and secularism should be perceived as dialectically connected on a continuum. In Western contexts they are often presented as opposites, but even here, there is an assumed unspoken religious element to many seemingly secular traditions—such as the role of Christianity in official politics and in the House of Lords and House of Commons or an increasing number in the public domain who subscribe to "belief without belonging" (Davie, 1994), spirituality (Heelas & Woodland, 2005), or "implicit religion" (Bailey, 1997). Modood (2012) for example brings to surface the statistics in Britain which show that while belief in a personal God has gone down from over 40 % in the middle of the twentieth century to less than 30 % by its end, belief in a spirit or a life source has remained steady at around 35–40 % and belief in the soul has actually increased from less than 60 % in the early 1980s to an additional 5–10 % today (BRIN, 2011). Cady and Hurd (2010) have also underscored the "explosion of spirituality" globally and observe that those who believe they are "spiritual but not religious" caricaturize religion as authoritarian, dogmatic, and static and hence they

reject this institutionalized religion in favor of a more personalized, eclectic, and journey-like approach to life. The point to note is that religion is not rejected per se; instead variants are accepted because to reiterate a point people need a set of beliefs as astutely understood by M.K. Gandhi. This nebulous, envisioned, spirituality is neither isolated from secular domains or religion but is a syncretic mode of positioning. It combines two great traditions, religion and secular, to produce a new social category—religious–secular. When this fluidity, which is a result of social flux, is given cognizance only then justice can be given to the term secularism. In India this appears to have been initiated amongst the common people whose representations have not remained static but have been dynamic entities that have changed in accordance with the demands of the present (László, Ferenczhalmy, & Szalai, 2010, p. 1; Wagner & Hayes, 2005). These representations have unfolded within a specific historical, cultural, and civilizational context. "Holy" words, whether they are enshrined in sacred books or constitutions, too need to be contextualized. Given this we need to address issues such as when dress codes begin to be legally imposed in secular nations in the West then do they become white-Christian-theocratic nations. Our respondents believe this to be true.

4.3 Acculturation, Enculturation, and Syncretic Cultures

Finally the running thread in the data is the need felt for understanding/sharing and not just accepting/tolerating each other's culture—"Secularism to me is respecting (if not loving) all religions. It is difficult to love another religion (*dusre mazhab ko pyaar karna mushkil hai*)" (H m lc 11). This highlights the need for the creation of syncretic cultures and acculturation. Nowadays, unfortunately, both are in short supply in India. The marginalizing of syncretic culture is in sharp contrast to earlier Indian culture which was inclusive and where the religious space of common people remained fluid and incorporated elements from the great traditions, whatever their origin: Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, or tribal. This eclectic assimilation had helped people to transcend the boundaries of ideological religion, and this gave rise to syncretic popular cultures, which are not centrally organized and lack a formal canon. The most outstanding example of such cultural intermingling was that which took place between Hindus and Muslims. Both religions had integrated some aspects of the other within their own mainstream religio-cultural matrices. Consequently, unusual gurus, "the dramatist of popular angst" (Banerjee, 2002), struck a chord in people's imagination. Banerjee's account of saint Satyapir or Satyanarayan, who claimed, "I am Rahim in Mecca, in Ayodhya Ram," lucidly illustrates this dual religious identity. Two distinct religious identities (Hindu and Muslim) were merged and used interchangeably. Yet another testimony of this cultural intermingling was that all over India, posters were sold which, together with the icons of Mecca and Medina, depicted the portraits of saints and a pictorial version of the legends and miracles associated with them. All this is beginning to be

lost (Sen & Wagner, 2009). However our respondents' suggestions that religious festivities be shared, "I read Quran in the *mandir* (temple)," or that "*dargah*," Sufi Islamic shrine built over the grave of a revered religious figure, often a Sufi saint or dervish, be treated as a place for unity are examples of syncretism. Such "*dargahs*" still occupy an important sacred space amidst both Hindus and Muslims in contemporary India.

The second stumbling block, which needs correction, is misinterpreted acculturation. Despite definitions and evidence that acculturation entails a two-way process of change, research and theory have primarily focused on the adjustments and adaptations made by minorities such as immigrants, refugees, and indigenous peoples in response to their contact with the dominant majority (e.g., Berry, 2011; Farrell & Oliveri, 2006). It has generally stopped at enculturation. Enculturation is the process where a child attains the current culture and the accepted norms and values in a process combined with learning the language in his or her vicinity. Thereby, the individual can become a competent and therefore accepted member of the group and fulfill the necessary functions and roles. Most importantly the individual knows and establishes a context of boundaries and accepted behavior that dictates what is acceptable and not acceptable within the framework of that society. It teaches the individual their role within society as well as what is accepted behavior within that society and lifestyle.

As enculturation is used to describe the process of first-culture learning, acculturation can be thought of as second-culture learning. This will correct the balance caused by being located as the "other" which can severely damage one's self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-respect (Honneth, 1995). Data suggest the felt need for operationalizing of this two-way acculturation process via the agency of shared culture, moral maturation, ways of seeing, and freedom to practice cultural and social norms which are not defined by the dominant majority group. For instance, Sirin and Fine (2008) speak about hyphenated identities rather than acculturation because there is a dynamic transformation of both cultures when they are engaged at the hyphen. All groups need cultural space. We cannot crowd them in and then have discourses on cultural differences and civilizational deficits. If secularism is to prevail in multi-faith societies then the dominant culture needs to go beyond tolerance to understanding and openness. It needs to be a two-way process in a mature and secular democracy. To a certain extent this is true for India in the streets. At the theoretical level the take-home message is that in democratic societies, representations are intimately connected to societal discourses that allow precious few segments to operate in a hegemonic manner (Liu & Sibley, 2009). However for street-smart India it is crystal clear that a heterogenous and multi-faith society must be based on trust and reciprocity; it must leverage on social capital and foster peaceful coexistence. It should leave little space for corrupt politicians but pivotal space for the religious–secular. It calls for the involvement of civil society and regular people. This is the central message for the powers that be at both the national and global levels.

4.4 Policy Recommendations

The salient issues, which could be used for effective policy formulation and in social psychological research, are several. Firstly a reconceptualization of the relationship between religion and secularism that is not simply bipolar. In fact this is best represented by the response, "we are religious but secular, trust us." This nebulous, envisioned, spirituality is neither isolated from secular domains or religion but is a syncretic mode of positioning. It combines two traditions, religion and secular, to produce a new social representation: religious–secular. This redefinition may provide a way beyond the obviously stalled political processes in western countries: there the visible and often clandestine influence of the church on the states is taken as granted even if it grossly contradicts modern constitutions. Only the recent Muslim immigration has pushed this contradiction into the limelight of a not yet "morally mature" democratic public.

Secondly, there is no single pan-Islamic view, and Islam is not a monolithic unit. Hamid (2013), writer of the novel, "The Reluctant Fundamentalist," mentions, "Islam is not a race, yet Islamophobia partakes of racist characteristics." On the contrary, he states, "most Muslims, like people of any faith, are born into their religion. They then evolve their own relationship with it, their own, individual, view of life, their own micro-religion, so to speak." Further, sharpening the difference there is an assumption that Muslims, as a race, are rigid and orthodox. Our data contradicts this proposition. A large section of the Muslim respondents were open-minded and believed that they could be highly religious and secular simultaneously. This in fact is a running theme in the data. Then it is believed that interaction is welcome but pressure should not be on integration. Instead, the need of the dominant culture adapting to minorities must appear on the radar of policy makers, activists, or academics. This increases the space for creative, syncretic cultures. This needs to be addressed and taken note of. The need to be trusted and understood in minority communities runs deep, and the burden of peaceful coexistence requires mutual understanding. It cannot be a one-way process where the onus for change is rested only on the minorities as suggested by the vast existing research on enculturation. Acculturation, understood as the dominant culture adapting to minority cultures, hardly merits a mention in the literature. Through this "acceptance and not just tolerance" syncretic culture could be brought up front and purity of religion be overshadowed.

The getting together of the minority community referred to as bonding should not be viewed as counterproductive to social cohesion (Hopkins (2011). It is a psychological journey towards enhancement of self-esteem in a hostile atmosphere. The starting point of conflict resolution is when two groups perceive themselves on a level playing field and as equals. This is the cornerstone for meaningful dialogue. Generally this strong identification with religion and identity is seen in a negative way. This needs rectification. Identity empowerment and a psychology of self-belief and self-respect is a necessity for conflict resolution. This brings to the forefront the issue of majority–minority and the dynamics of the interpretation of this religious overtone especially amidst the minority community. Incommensurability leads

members of the lower status group—mostly minorities—to identify more strongly with their in-group and attempt other strategies to reestablish a positive social identity. They are forced to find ways to re-present their identities not only to wider society but also to themselves in order to protect their sense of worth and belonging (Geschke, Mummendey, Kessler, & Funke, 2010; Howarth, 2002; Wagner, Holtz, & Kashima, 2009; Wagner, Sen, Permandelli, & Howarth, 2012). In this instance in-group identification and hostility towards the majority can, therefore, be seen as a means of overcoming the psychological violence of discrimination and asymmetric power. This is also reflected in literature on intergroup threat and social identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Steele, 1997). In a study of female African immigrants in Europe, perceived cultural discrimination was positively related to self-esteem, whereas perceived personal discrimination was negatively related to individual self-esteem (Bourgoignon, Seron, Yzerbyt, & Herman, 2006). Typically such heightened religious awareness is conceptualized as an impediment to social cohesion. However, from the point of view of the actors themselves, this religious allegiance and increased display of overt markers and signifiers could be seen as important for creating the self-definition and confidence that could allow more equal interaction (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004, 2006).

The communication policy requires a marginalized sensitive approach and be accordingly customized. In the contemporary context there is a need to reconstruct the heroes. It appears from the data that leaders of the minorities such as Ambedkar and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad need to brought center stage when dealing with issues such as secularism and allied topics.

The representation of the leader needs to be overhauled. Presently it is perceived as synonymous with politicians and that translates into a completely negative baggage. In fact, it is a firm belief that politicians are the root cause for conflict, and consequently a visualized ideal society has no space for politicians. Instead a networked society, which bases itself on trust and reciprocity, is the hegemonic representation. By most, religion is seen as an essential part of such a society although the degree to which it should prevail varies. A homogenous society is not seen as acceptable. This underscores the fact that there is complete faith in a multi-faith society, and this augurs well for secularism. The spirit of secularism, i.e., peaceful coexistence, is supported even at a time when social fragmentation has become the norm.

Further we need to go beyond psychological contact theory and emphasize moral maturation (Habermas, 2005), which is not judgmental or does not pass verdicts and neither does it place the social actors in a challenging situation. Many attempts have been made at "contact," but they do not yield dividends since the minorities in an ambience, which is dominated by the majority, tread with caution and feel powerless (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005) and experience contact differently (Hubbard, 1999). They are well aware of their negative stereotyping. *Dalits*/untouchables always know their caste, whereas the upper castes can always ignore it since in their identity construction this is not a flaw. Similar is the case in majority–minority relationship, and this requires recognition and rectification. This need for moral maturation, i.e., giving due respect to the perspective of others, has been clearly seconded by our respondents.

There is a need to investigate the social actor's own representation of their minority position. This is essential if social policy has to base itself on cultural interpretation rather than on cultural imposition. For instance the ban on the *burkha* is perceived as a cultural imposition because the subjects of "welfare" resist this upliftment. However in a caste-ridden and gendered society as in India, a ban on Sati or Ambedkar's defiance as embodied in the entering of the "sacred" temple by the profane *Dalits*/untouchables is cultural interpretation. In this case the subjects of liberation were keen to break their shackles. This distinction requires careful consideration; otherwise the validity of reform itself gets challenged. It is worth noting that the majority culture is not necessarily the right culture, which requires emulation. The minorities have to be respected if peaceful coexistence is the aim. Without attempting to offer a blueprint or one-size-fits-all prescriptive framework, we seek to encourage greater self-consciousness about the multiple meanings of secularism and map the social changes, shifts, and displacements that are currently taking place in the streets while dealing with the religious–secular divide or should we address it as a contiguity and an amalgam? It will depend on which side of the divide we position our perspective.

To conclude, the implications of this research are twofold. Firstly it can be used in the formulation of policies, which focus on conflict resolution with special reference to interreligious conflicts within nation-states. Secondly it will help in theory building within a lacuna, which urgently needs to be addressed in social psychological research.

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R. Sen et al., *Secularism and Religion in Multi-faith Societies: The Case of India*, SpringerBriefs in Political Science, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-01922-2,

Index

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