

J. P. Memorial Lecture

COMMUNALISM
AND HUMAN RIGHTS



V. M. Tarkunde



Indian Radical Humanist Association
Bombay

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MR. V. M. TARKUNDE is one of the outstanding personalities in India. He was associated with M.N. Roy since 1936, and has been active in the cause of human rights and humanism. He was awarded the International Humanist Award by the International Humanist and Ethical Union at its World Congress in London in 1978.

He was a judge in the Bombay High Court from 1957 to 1969 when he resigned and has been practising as a Senior Advocate in the Supreme Court of India.

In 1974 Mr. Tarkunde, in co-operation with Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan started an organisation called Citizens for Democracy (CFD) and in 1976 formed the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) of which he is now the Advisor.

Mr. Tarkunde was the President of the Indian Radical Humanist Association from 1969 to 1980, and since April 1970 has been the Editor of the *Radical Humanist* - formerly a weekly journal founded by M.N. Roy. It was made a monthly in 1970 and is being published from Delhi.

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on 23 March 1993 in New Delhi.**

THE 23RD OF MARCH IS OBSERVED by the People's Union for Civil Liberties every year as the J.P. Memorial Day. It was on this day in 1977 that the emergency which had been declared by Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 25th June 1975, was lifted by the Janata Government which came to power by defeating the Congress of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in the 1977 election. Jayaprakash Narayan played a pivotal role in forging unity of the opposition parties and fashioning the electoral defeat of the Indira Congress. The 23rd of March 1977 is rightly regarded as the day of India's liberation from authoritarianism, and it is very appropriate that the day should be observed to express our regard and gratitude for Jayaprakash Narayan.

The danger of Indian democracy being replaced by a personal dictatorship did not altogether disappear with the lifting of the emergency on 23rd March 1977. The danger of authoritarianism re-appeared with the success of Mrs. Gandhi in the post-emergency election of 1979-80 and it continued even under the unprincipled regime of Rajiv Gandhi. After Rajiv Gandhi's tragic death, however, the Gandhi-Nehru family has ceased to be in possession of political power and the danger of personal dictatorship has receded into the background.

In the meantime, however, a graver and more serious danger to Indian democracy has appeared on the horizon. It is represented

by the growing strength of the Bhartiya Janata Party and the power behind it - the R.S.S. and the Sangh Pariwar consisting of such organisations as the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal. They are giving to the Indian people a heady mixture of aggressive Hindu communalism and an equally aggressive Hindu nationalism. In that process they are promoting animosity between Hindus and Muslims. The events which led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya on 6th December 1992 show that the forces involved in this communal-nationalist movement have no regard for the rule of law and the institutions of judicial administration. As I will show later, the movement which is being fostered by these forces contains all the essential characteristics of fascism. By promoting communal animosity, the BJP has during a short time of about two years increased its strength in Parliament from 2 to 119 members. During this process, more than 2000 persons have died as a result of communal riots prior to the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and more destructive communal riots have taken place thereafter all over the country. As the Congress(I) is now much weaker than before and the opposition parties are unable to unite to form an anti-communal secular platform, the BJP expects to come to power in the next election. If this happens, secular democracy in India is liable to be replaced by a potentially fascist theocratic State.

I am of the view that the communalist nationalism which is being propagated by the BJP and the Sangh Parivar represent a far greater danger to Indian democracy than the personal authoritarian rule which Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the Gandhi-Nehru family were likely to impose on the country. A personal authoritarian rule is a lesser danger because it is largely external to the people. Most of the people do not approve of it, although they are usually too afraid to stick out their necks and openly oppose it. It is true that those who are in favour of the *status quo* are positively in favour of such an

authoritarian rule, but they do not form the majority of our people. In the course of time, an increasing number of bold spirits come forward to openly oppose the imposition of individual authoritarianism. That is what happened during the emergency between June 1975 and February 1977.

Communalism, however, particularly when it is the communalism of the majority and can therefore take the form of ardent nationalism as well, can find a positive response in the minds of the people who are still prone to religious blind faith and among whom the humanist values of democracy - the values of liberty, equality and fraternity - are yet to be fully developed. Communalism in such cases is an internal enemy residing in the human mind and it is far more difficult to eradicate than an external enemy like an autocratic ruler. Elimination of communalism can be achieved only by a process of socio-cultural change, and usually a change of this nature is a slow time-consuming process. Our difficulty arises from the fact that a theocratic State may possibly be established in the country after the next election and therefore it is necessary that besides a long-term programme of a socio-cultural transformation, we must have a short term programme which would prevent a communal party coming to power in the country in the near future.

In order to decide what we, the humanists, democrats and secularists, should do to meet the danger, we must, in the first place, appreciate the cultural and socio-economic roots of communalism and aggressive nationalism and must also be aware of the factors which are likely to help or to hinder us in the work which we have to undertake.

Psychology of Collectivism

It is necessary to understand clearly the psychology of communalism as well as of aggressive nationalism. Communalism is rooted in one's attachment to one's religion, just as nationalism

springs from one's attachment to one's nation. But religiosity does not necessarily lead to communalism, just as nationalism does not necessarily promote enmity or antipathy towards persons belonging to other nations. Communalism (in the sense in which the word is used in the Indian sub-continent) means antipathy of persons belonging to one religion towards persons belonging to some other religion. There are many religious minded persons, amongst Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and those belonging to other religions, who do not feel any antipathy or animosity towards persons belonging to a religion other than their own. Gandhiji, in spite of being a devout Hindu, was obviously a person who was not communal at all, but I wish to emphasise that there are hundreds of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Jews in India who are religious without being communal. Similarly, a person who has attachment to his nation need not feel any sense of antipathy, let alone aggressiveness, towards persons who belong to other nations. Communalism and aggressive nationalism are essentially collectivist phenomena. They arise not merely from one's attachment to one's religion or one's nation, but from the subordination of oneself to the communal or national collectivity and one's identification with that collectivity. The psychology of subordination of oneself to, and one's identification with, a collectivity requires further explanation.

Every person in the course of his mental growth develops standards for judging what is good and what is bad. We need not concern ourselves at this stage with whether the standards in a particular individual are derived from socially accepted norms or whether they are the result of his independent judgement. What is important in the present context is that in the case of every self-reliant and self-respecting individual, his standards of judgement between what is good and what is bad are based upon considerations of individual merit and not the merit of belonging to a collectivity. A self-reliant and self-respecting Hindu or Muslim would, for

instance, judge himself to be good or bad on the basis whether his own feelings and conduct do or do not conform with his own standards of what is good and what is bad. In other words, he judges himself as an individual and not as a person belonging to any collectivity, such as the religious community or the nation to which he belongs. Since his self-regard is based upon the appreciation of his own merit or demerit as an individual, his approach towards other persons is also based on similar individual standards. If he comes across a person of another religion or another nation, his regard towards that person will result from his appreciation of that person as an individual and not on the basis of whether he belongs to a particular religion or a particular nation. If, however, a person has subordinated himself to, and identified himself with, his religious community or to his nation, and if consequently his self-regard is based on the religious community or the nation to which he belongs, his approach to other individuals will also be based on the community or the nation to which those other individuals belong. Thus, for a communal Hindu, a Muslim is bad because he is a Muslim and not because he is a bad individual. That would be the approach of a Muslim communalist also. Similarly, in the case of a nationalist who has subordinated himself to, and identified himself with, a national collectivity, persons belonging to his nation are good but not persons who belong to some other nation which he regards with a degree of hostility. It is thus that the merger of an individual into a collectivity and his identification with that collectivity lead to collectivist attitudes, including those of communalism and aggressive nationalism.

This explanation about the origin of collectivism, though not in the same words, was given by Dr. Erich Fromm in his famous book *The Fear of Freedom* published in the early 1940s. He explained in that book the psychological origin of fascism and the cause of its aggressiveness. Dr. Erich Fromm pointed out that in the

feudal order of society in Europe, which was later disrupted by the growth of capitalism, every person had a preordained place in the social structure. The place assigned to him in the social structure provided to him his security of life. An agricultural labourer was then merely a serf, but his social position and means of livelihood were secured by the prevailing social custom. The artisans working in towns were members of their respective guilds and they had a secure position as guild members. When the feudal order was disrupted by the growth of capitalism, the agricultural workers were freed from their serfdom and the artisans from their guilds. But this freedom deprived them of the security of life which the feudal order had provided. The agricultural labourers and the artisans were free to seek employment, but their freedom could result in unemployment and starvation. Freedom, therefore, became an unbearable burden to many of them. The fear of freedom led to their identification first with their religious community and later with their nation. The persons who felt themselves to be weak as individuals could derive psychological strength from being parts of a much larger collectivity, such as a religious community or a nation. Despite being weak as individuals, their strength was derived from the number and cohesiveness of the religious community or the nation. In order to increase the strength of the collectivity, it was felt necessary that the individuals who composed it must subordinate themselves to the collectivity and undergo all the sacrifices to increase the strength of the collectivity. That is why, according to Dr. Erich Fromm, "surrender inside and aggressiveness outside" were the characteristics of fascism which developed in Italy and in Germany in the 20s and 30s of this century. Under the Nazis, every German was expected to sacrifice for the nation, but the nation was to be the greatest nation in the world. Self-sacrifice for the nation and the aggression of the nation against other nations were the characteristics of fascism both in Italy and in Germany.

Fascism in Germany had the added strength derived from the deliberate fomentation of hatred of Jews.

There is reason to believe that a parallel development has been taking place in India and some of the other third world countries. In India, the system of self-sufficient villages which secured customary employment to agricultural workers as well as village artisans provided security of life to the people as a whole. The disruption caused in this system first by foreign rule and then under an independent India rendered the people free from customary bonds, but increased their insecurity of life at the same time. Unemployment and insecurity of large sections of the people have been increasing in our country on account of a phenomenal increase in population and a very lopsided economic development. A large number of young persons, educated and uneducated, remain unemployed, and the number of families living below the poverty line has been increasing all the time. The situation in many respects is similar to the one created by the disruption of feudalism and the growth of the capitalist system in Europe.

Historical Background of Communal Tension

There are some historical factors which explain the hostility which exists to some extent between Hindus and Muslims in the Indian sub-continent. Several outsiders came to India from time to time, but they either left the country or they remained in India and became amalgamated with the local people. The Muslims, however, had a distinct and well defined religion and that was probably the reason why they remained a distinct community in the sub-continent. Some degree of hostility was created between the Muslim invaders and the local people because the invaders looted many temples and destroyed Hindu idols. Some Muslim rulers imposed the *Zijia* tax which was payable only by their non-muslim subjects. The *Zijia* tax was lifted by Akbar, but was reimposed by

Aurangzeb. The hostility between the two communities was, however, not so great as is made out in some history books. Many Hindu princesses were married in the Muslim ruling families. The mothers of both Jahangir and Shah Jahan were originally Hindu princesses. Many Muslim Sufi Saints were highly respected by Hindus and the Hindu *Bhakti* cult was popular amongst Muslims. A majority of the Muslims in India are Hindu converts and there is no ethnical difference between them and other Indians. The conversion of Hindus was facilitated by the caste system and the custom of untouchability prevailing among the Hindus. Coersion was rarely used in these conversions. Moreover, toleration of rival religious creeds has always been a distinctive Indian tradition. Buddhism and Jainism, both of which did not believe in the existence of God, were born and developed in the Indian sub-continent. The Charvaka philosophy, which was a well-developed system of atheistic materialism, was quite popular in India even at the time of Chanakya (341 B.C.). Even amongst the six systems of philosophy known as Hindu systems, two (Sankhya and Poorva-Mimansa) did not believe in God as the creator of the world. Religious intolerance was never a part of ancient Indian culture.

The Indian tradition of toleration of different creeds and religions was probably the reason why the RSS which was formed in the mid 1920s in cities like Nagpur and Pune, and its political concomitant the Hindu Maha Sabha, remained comparatively weak and ineffective for several decades. Non-communal Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru and progressive Muslims like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Dr. Kitchlu, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and others, did not find it difficult to keep within limits the influence of the RSS and the Hindu Maha Sabha. The second world war, however, exposed the democratic weaknesses of the Indian nationalist movement led by the Congress. On the one hand, the nationalist movement failed to realise the implications of

the anti-fascist nature of the second world war and could not appreciate the fact that the defeat of the fascist powers -Germany, Italy and Japan - was necessary for promoting the attainment of democratic freedom by India. On the other hand, the nationalist movement was unable to assuage the fear of the Muslims that after the disappearance of British rule, they (the Muslims) would be subjected to a perpetual Hindu majority rule. This Muslim fear of being dominated by a permanent Hindu majority after the British left India, was fostered and exploited by the Muslim League under the clever leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and this eventually led to the partition of the Indian sub-continent. The partition was accompanied by a communal carnage on an unprecedented scale and it is now quite clear that neither the Muslims nor the Hindus benefitted in the least from the country's partition. All that was achieved by partition was an increase in communal bitterness in the sub-continent.

Political and Economic Factors

Nonetheless, even after the partition of the country, communalism in India was held in check by the able leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru supported by some secular Muslims like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai. Whatever his other faults might be, Jawaharlal Nehru was genuinely committed to the principles of democracy and secularism. With the passage of time, however, he and his able colleagues have disappeared from the political scene and we have now entered an era of unprincipled politics. That brings us to one of the main causes of the recent growth of communalism in the country and the prospect of the majority Hindu communalism degenerating into an Indian variety of fascism.

Persons who joined the nationalist movement during the era of British rule did not do so for achieving self-advancement. They

were willing to undergo any sacrifice for achieving the freedom and independence of the country. Most of them have now passed away and they are replaced by what may be regarded as the normal breed of politicians. This normal breed consists of persons who either consciously take to politics for the purpose of self - advancement or who genuinely believe that they must come to power in order to advance the good of the people. In course of time, even the latter category of politicians come to regard the attainment of political power as their primary goal. In a country where only a formal democracy has been established amongst a people who are divided into castes and communities and who are largely illiterate and prone to blind faith, political power can be attained more easily by those who are willing to take advantage of the casteism, communalism, ignorance and blind faith prevailing among the voters. Party politics in these circumstances tends to become unprincipled politics. That is what is increasingly happening in the country after the disappearance of the pre-independence nationalist leaders from the political scene.

Unprincipled politics not only fostered the growth of casteism and communalism in the country but also increased the corruption prevailing in our political administration. There was a phenomenal growth in corruption during Mrs. Indira Gandhi's regime and the rate of growth has been increasing all the time after Mrs. Gandhi passed away. Another development which is also the result of the growth of unprincipled politics is the increasing criminalisation of the entire public life of the country. An unholy alliance between the local administration (particularly the police forces), the local anti-social elements consisting of smugglers, drug-traffickers, land-grabbers, liquor contractors and others, and the local political bosses belonging to different parties, has arisen and has become a frightening reality in almost all parts of the country. The increase of corruption on the one hand and the

increase in the criminalisation of politics on the other have denuded the legislative elections in many areas of all democratic content. Unprincipled power - politics and the growing criminalisation of the political process have provided a fertile ground for the growth of communalism in the country. Communalism has now spread among the security forces also. Communal riots are presently dominated by communalised policemen and anti-social elements.

Apart from the growth of unprincipled politics, the other cause of the increase in communalism is the prevailing economic situation in which a large number of young people, including those who have received a very superficial type of school and college education remain largely unemployed. Moreover, there are a growing number of marginal farmers and poorly paid artisans in rural areas, and pavement dwellers and hutment dwellers in towns and cities, who live below the poverty line. For reasons already explained, such persons, being constantly harrassed by the uncertainties of life, are prone to be the victims of collectivist appeals based on casteism and communalism.

It is in this situation of political and economic degeneration that the BJP and the Sangh Parivar have launched a campaign of promoting communal animosities with the object of coming to power with the help of votes of the Hindu majority. The BJP leaders have often charged the leaders of the Congress(I) as well as of some other political parties of being "pseudo-secularists" on the ground that they have frequently appealed to the religious leaders of the Muslims to call upon their followers to cast votes in favour of their respective party candidates. This charge of pseudo-secularism is justified, but it should not be overlooked that what is being presently done by the BJP and the Sangh Parivar in promoting communalism is much worse than the pseudo-secularism of the Congress(I) and some other political parties. The Congress(I) and the other political parties have taken advantage of the existing communal differences

for securing electoral success in the elections. While taking advantage of the existing communal feelings, they were not trying to deliberately foment and increase communal animosities. Moreover, by appealing to the religious leaders of the Muslims for the votes of their community members, the Congress and other party leaders were indirectly supporting fundamentalism and not communalism. I will presently explain the difference between fundamentalism and communalism. For the time being, it is necessary to emphasise that what the BJP and the Sangh Parivar have been doing in recent years is not merely to take advantage of the existing communal feelings, but to undertake a well-planned programme for promoting and increasing the religious animosities between the majority and minority communities. The movement for the construction of a Shree Ram Temple *by destroying a Masjid* was clearly a movement for encouraging the Hindus to humiliate the Muslims. It was a movement for fostering and promoting communal ill-will. The BJP and the Sangh Parivar have many such communal issues in stock and it is obvious that they want to come to power by bringing such issues to the centre stage and thereby promoting hatred between the majority and minority communities.

There is indeed a great deal of similarity between the politics of the BJP and that of Hitler's Nazi party. Hitler fostered a sense of pride among Germans on the ground of their Aryan race and hatred of the Jews because the Jews diluted the ethnic purity of the race. The BJP and the Sangh Parivar are striving to promote the pride of Hindus in their Hinduism, and to foster hatred of the Muslims. Secondly, the Nazis were aggressively nationalistic and wanted Germany to be the strongest and greatest nation in the world. The BJP and the Sangh Parivar is also intensely nationalistic, and although it cannot, under the existing circumstances, think in terms of India being the strongest country in the world, they want it to be militarily a strong country so that it would dominate over

the neighbouring States. They insist that India must have atomic weapons and that its military strength should be on the increase. Recent events, moreover, have demonstrated that, like the Nazis, the Sangh Parivar have no regard for law and they believe that might is right. Although there are some obvious differences between the Nazi movement and the movement of the Sangh Parivar, they have basically the same fascist characteristics.

Why Secularism

It is necessary to have some clarity with regard to the meaning of secularism when the term is used in the context of Indian politics. Secularism is sometimes taken to mean "equal respect for all religions." However, neither respect nor disrespect of religion is involved in secularism. Clearly, secularism (when used with reference to a State) has two implications. Firstly, it means that there will be no discrimination by the State between persons belonging to different religions. They will have the same rights and responsibilities. This will also apply to persons who are atheists or agnostics and do not believe in any religion. The second implication of secularism is that there will be a separation between politics and religion. Politics will not interfere with religion and religion will not be allowed to interfere with politics. Secularism with both of these implications is broadly accepted in the Indian Constitution, with only one important exception, namely, that interference would be allowed in religion for the purpose of social reform. No secularist can object to this exception.

Some intellectuals have started saying that secularism is a foreign plant and it is not suitable to the Indian soil. Nothing can be further from the truth. Secularism in the sense described as above, of non-discrimination and non-interference, is even more necessary for Indian democracy than for Western European democracies. In those countries, the main religious differences are

between different denominations of the same religion, namely Christianity. India is a country of many religions - Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jews, Jains, etc. One of the essentials of democracy is equality between all citizens, and in Indian conditions equality between persons belonging to different religions is not possible in the absence of a firm commitment to secularism.

Communalism and Fundamentalism

In deciding our programme for meeting the danger arising from the growing communal virus, it is essential to differentiate between communalism and fundamentalism. Both are required to be opposed by those who believe in freedom and democracy, but one should not be confused with the other. Fundamentalism consists of uncritical adherence to ancient beliefs and practices. Communalism on the other hand consists of animosity of persons belonging to one religion towards persons of another religion. A fundamentalist need not be a communalist at all. There are a large number of Muslim as well as Hindu fundamentalists who have no sense of animosity towards persons belonging to any other religion. Fundamentalism is harmful to the members of the same religion as that of the fundamentalist, but not to persons of other religions. Thus the insistence of Muslim fundamentalists that women must cover their faces with *Burkha* in public is directed towards Muslim women and not towards women of other religions. Opposition of some Muslim leaders to the Supreme Court decision in the Shah Bano Case was an instance of fundamentalism and not of communalism. The opposition did not affect the Hindus as Hindus. When the Government of Rajiv Gandhi passed the Muslim Women Act for nullifying the decision in the Shah Bano Case, what the Rajiv Gandhi Government did was to appease Muslim fundamentalists and not Muslim communalists. The Muslim Women

Act was harmful to Muslim divorcees and not the divorcees of any other religious community. Similarly, the insistence of Muslims that their personal law should not be subjected to any reform is an instance of fundamentalism and not communalism. There are many Muslim fundamentalists who are extremely keen that there should be amity between Hindus and Muslims in India and that the the communal poison prevailing in the country should be eliminated.

On the other hand a communalist need not be a fundamentalist at all. The RSS and the Sangh Parivar are not fundamentalists. On the contrary, they are opposed to untouchability and some of them oppose casteism also. Many members of the RSS are, to my knowledge, not intensely religious. They do not have idols in their houses. They do not perform orthodox Hindu rites. They however, have one characteristic: they have intense animosity towards Muslims. Veer Savarkar, who was the first President of the Hindu Maha Sabha, was indeed a social reformer. He was against not only untouchability but also the caste system. But he wanted the abolition of untouchability and the caste system in order to strengthen and consolidate the Hindu community. He had two slogans - Indian politics should be Hinduised and Hinduism should be militarised. This is precisely the present policy of the BJP. Fundamentalism requires to be opposed because it comes in the way of progress of the particular religious community in which it prevails. There is obviously greater fundamentalism amongst Indian Muslims than among Indian Hindus, and that is the main reason why Muslims are even more economically and culturally backward in India than Hindus. Fundamentalism requires to be opposed by all humanists and democrats, but that opposition should not be mixed up with our opposition to communalism. In fact, many members of Muslim fundamentalist bodies may be helpful to us in promoting communal

amity in the country.

What We Can Do

We must now turn to the steps which people like us, democrats and humanists, can take to meet the danger of communal chauvinism which is being promoted by the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. We must have both a long-term and a short-term programme. It is obvious, however, that even the long-term programme has to be commenced immediately and not be postponed.

In my opinion, the long term programme must be aimed at promoting the values of democracy and humanism in the broad masses of the people. I have been advancing the view for a long time that humanism is the philosophy of democracy. The democratic values of liberty, equality and fraternity are based upon the recognition of the dignity of the individual, and that is the basic principle of humanism. In fact, the birth of modern democracy in Europe was a sequel of the movement of the European renaissance which was essentially a humanist movement. Propagation of the values of liberty, equality and fraternity among the broad masses of the people will gradually reduce the strength of communalism.

It is essential to remember in this connection that these values of liberty, equality and fraternity must not be confined to politics, but should be realised in economic and social life. The main task of democrats in India must be the removal of poverty and mass ignorance which are necessary for economic and social equality. Because of their religiousity the masses in rural and urban areas may succumb to communal waves from time to time, but unlike the elite, their abiding interest will be in movements aimed at their socio-economic betterment.

The work of spreading the democratic values of liberty, equality and fraternity among the broad masses of the people can best be carried out by non-party activists working at the grassroot.

level for helping the people to stand on their own legs and strive for the betterment of their own lives. Our main task should be to increase the number and strength of such grassroot activists.

We must also realise that communal chauvinism promoted by the Sangh Parivar cannot be successfully combated on the basis of nationalism alone. It is true that by promoting enmity between Hindus and Muslims, the Sangh Parivar is disrupting the unity of the nation and thereby adding to its weakness. It is therefore legitimate to oppose communalism, even of the majority community, on the basis of nationalism. After all, there are as many as 12 crores of Muslims in India and they have no other country of their own except India. We must, however, bear in mind that members of the Sangh Parivar are also ardent nationalists and nationalism alone cannot be the main instrument of opposing them. The main instrument must be the promotion of a multi-dimensional democracy, a democracy in which the values of liberty, equality and fraternity will be realised in our political, economic and social life.

We will be aided in this long-term programme by the fact that Indian culture has always been relatively tolerant of different creeds and religious communities. We will also find support from the fact that, all over the world, democracy is marching ahead at the cost of authoritarianism, and that the creation of a communalist fascism in India will be contrary to the ethos of modern times. However, our efforts will above all be aided by the fact that in a country immersed in poverty and distress, our humanist appeal for a life free from economic want and mass ignorance will find a greater and more abiding response than a religious appeal based on communal hatred.

Our short term programme must be directed to the objective of ensuring that a party which wants to create a theocratic State in the country will not be elected in the next or subsequent elections. It is not safe to depend upon political parties which claim to be

secularist for creating a joint secular anti-communal platform. We cannot forget that the main reason why the Babri Masjid was destroyed on 6th December 1992, was that the Central Government of Congress(I) did not want to take any firm action against the so-called Kar Sevaks because it was reluctant to alienate Hindu votes. Anti-communal secular fronts should, in my opinion, be created by all the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which believe in democracy and secularism and which are determined that India will never have an anti-humanist theocratic State. Such anti-communal secular fronts consisting of non-governmental organisations and other supporting individuals should be formed in all important cities and towns and they should propagate against communalism and in favour of a democratic and secular State. Such educative work can be carried out through the publication of literature and through meetings, processions, exhibitions, street plays and other means of mass communication. There is ample reason to believe that such an anti-communal movement can be developed on a non-party basis and it can overcome the danger of communal chauvinism coming to power in our country.

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