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Religion Meets Modernity: Changes and Challenges

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Abstract: This article aims to delve into the mediatory role of religion in our contemporary world in that it investigates how religion is shaped by and shapes human beings in their encounter with modernity, its evolving characteristics, institutional arrangements, multi-locational interests and ideological compulsions. To achieve this goal, it begins its inquiry by focusing on the genealogy of political secularism and demonstrates the pitfalls of the 'wall of separation between state and religion' and the implications it bears upon the treatment, space and situatedness religion obtains in different nation states at different historical times. It further discusses the relationship between European colonial powers and the notion of religion by highlighting how the modern sense of religion emanating from Europe was proselytised, historicised and re-historicised in colonial countries since seventeenth century till our present times. The article also calls for the recognition of the proactive role of religion in the secular modern state, especially for its citizens who have become the unfortunate victims of the state's policies and administrative decisions.

Key Words: Modernity, Religion, Colonial Power and Secular Nation State.

Introduction

We live in a world of competing discourses and conflicting ideologies. While some would claim that we live in the post-modern world, others would say that modernity has not exited yet. Modernity lingers on, re-invents and recasts itself in various modes, forms and avatars to retain its abiding presence in human civilization. It is there to stay forever in our midst, perhaps with different hues and shades that change from one place to another, from one historical period to another, and from one socio-economic and cultural context to another. While definitions, descriptions and meanings of modernity are wide-ranging that include enlightenment, rationalization, disenchantment of the world, industrialization, individualism, the

rise of representative democracy and nation-state, the increasing role of science and technology in human life and the like, secularity is seen as one of the key components of modernity. While the theory of secularization solemnly proclaimed the demise of religion in a secular age, what we experience now is the post-secular resurgence of religion. Against this background, what is the relationship between religion and state, and what is the role of religion in modernity, especially in a country like India? These are some of the lead questions that animate the reflections in this article.

Deceits of Secular State and Religion

One of the important historical moments in the evolution of modernity is the Peace of Westphalia established in 1648. Though many would place this treaty as a watershed in the genealogy of the secular state system in the West, in fact what it directly produced was the founding myth of modern international relations.[1] Ending thirty years of warfare in Europe caused by religious forces, this treaty sought to do away with the doctrines of divine right and make each monarchical territory sovereign, protecting it from any external interference. "It attempted to banish religions from relations between states. It urged treating religion as a domestic matter."[2] In doing so, it pioneered a new historical trend of delimiting religion's domain of influence. A social imaginary that started off with containing religion within the boundaries of state would further result in banishing religion from the public sphere to the private. Both these ways of treating religion were invalidated in course of time. The first mode of treatment proved ineffective in a number of instances. To cite one example, the champions of secularity in international relations became so deeply engrossed by it that they "became all but blind to religious influence on international affairs."[3] It is only when al-Qaeda struck the World Trade Centre that scholars of religion woke up to the operation of religion as a force in international politics, a reality which had escaped their eyes thanks to antipathy and indifference created by secularisation and modernity. Paradoxically, both anti-secularists and secularists work out their strategies in their camps to bring back religion to the centre stage. If the attempts of Islamic terror networks like al-Qaeda can be read as anti-secularist's efforts to centre-stage religion in international power-politics, the US legislation of

International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 is evidently the secularist effort to place religion as a bone of contention, a topic of debate and, a matter of political arrangement of religious liberty in international relations and polity—which the Peace of Westphalia worked hard to overcome. Even in the formation of EU (European Union), religion was willy-nilly brought in. Though Europeans perceive themselves as increasingly secular, yet Europe's boundary is very much drawn along Christian lines. Analysing the emergence of European Union, Grace Davies observes, "whether consciously or not, the effective barriers to entry coincide with a geographical definition of Christendom. Nations dominated by Western (Catholic) Christianity will, in my view, find it easier than their Orthodox equivalents to enter European Union; Muslim states will find it harder still (if not impossible), despite the existence of significant Muslim communities within most, if not all, Western European nations."[4] The second mode of treatment of religion which aimed at evicting religion from the public and confining it to private sphere did not take place as anticipated. The wall of separation between state and religion could not be established strictly in all places; nor could it be actualised in all instances and circumstances in the same way. Theories like neutrality, indifference, equidistance and principled-distance were proposed to characterise the patterns of separation and the types of secularism that are in practice in different parts of the globe. As a result, what has come to stay is not estrangement but some sort of engagement and involvement between state and religion. To maintain secularism, non-interference of the state in religious matters was relinquished in the French exercise of *laicite* as we witnessed in the case of the ban on students wearing head scarves in public schools and of the bureaucratic barriers against the construction of mosques.[5]

Further, 'twin tolerations' is described as one of the important characteristics of liberal democracy by which the secular state continues its relationship with religions. The state on the one hand, accepts and permits the right of all religions to practice and express their faith and to participate in democratic policies, while religions, on the other hand, forgo hitherto-enjoyed legal and constitutional prerogatives that grant religious officials special authority to formulate or approve public policy.[6] In this approach of 'twin toleration' while a total divorce between the state and religion is realistically ruled out,

what has come about is a redefinition of the relationship of principled distance and proximity between the state and religion. However, this principled distance and proximity, when implemented in different states, has acquired varying degrees and intensities depending upon local factors and historical experiences. It is in this context that scholars refer to multiple modernities.

The idea of multiple modernities as proposed by many thinkers subscribes not to the notion of single-polar modernity but to the pluriverse of modernities characterised by 'culturally specific forms of modernity shaped by distinct cultural heritages and socio-political conditions'[7] that would produce variations in value systems, perspectives and institutions. This multiple-modernity outlook views modernity as "a story of continual development and formation, constitution, and reconstitution of multiplicity of cultural programs and cultural patterns of modernity."[8] In these productions, it is my submission that religions do play a crucial role not only in advancing the phenomenon of multiple identities by creating beliefs, practices and perspectives that emphasise the idea of non-sameness in place of oneness but also in cultivating the attitudes, inspirations and motivations that cater to the fall-outs of modernity to be discussed later.

Modernity, Genealogy of Religion and Colonial Powers

Though the phenomenon of religion(s) was found everywhere perhaps from time immemorial, the term 'religion' becoming a matter of systematic study and theorization is rather recent. As Asad observes, though the term religion has its origin in pre-modern times, its sense was produced only in modern times and the idea of religion gradually crystallized roughly around the seventeenth century onwards when European thinkers came to realize that in every society people had their own narratives about beliefs in supernatural beings, about the origin of the world and about life after death, and it dawned on them that religion was not a prerogative of Christians alone.[9] David Scott also illustrates how the idea of "religion" is basically a western invention and how it came to be viewed as a "demarcatable system of doctrines-scriptures-beliefs, and that of its plural, "religions," as "rival ideological communities."[10] According to David Scott, religion's "rise coincides and indeed is interconnected with

the emergence of other transforming social processes in early modern Europe: most notably, the emergence of the new science and of reason as the new adjudicating truth discourse, the rise of the modern secular state, and, of course, the great march of European colonial expansion."[11]

The Europeans who arrived in India in the sixteenth century and thereafter like Robert De Nobili,[12] Henry Lord, Abraham Roger and Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg who had not yet come fully under the influence of modernity's full-blown ideological apparatuses were more inclined to portray the so-called Hinduism in more pluralistic terms, calling different types of Hinduism as 'sects'. If at all they had occasionally described them as 'religions', it was more to refer to their pluralistic religious characters, some of which were based on Indian self-representations. But as the idea of 'religion' got conceptually more crystallised later in its evolution, it came to refer to a unified system of beliefs, doctrines and practices based on authority of the canonical texts and monotheism, which were very much effects of modernity's overarching worldview in the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.[13]

As Asad perceptively observes. "defining is a historical act and when the definition is deployed, it does different things at different times and in different circumstances, and responds to different questions, needs, and pressures. The concept "religion" is not merely a word: it belongs to vocabularies that bring persons and things, desires and practices together in particular traditions in distinctive ways."[14] Thus the category of 'religion' did affect the construct of Hinduism and other Asian religions during the colonial period. Be it Europeans or modern Indian thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ranade, Tilak and Vivekananda—all their interpretations of Hinduism were heavily influenced, shaped and constructed along the lines of modernity's much celebrated virtues of reason, neat-systems and unified doctrines. Even the Sanskrit pandit, Dayanand Saraswati who was never formally trained in English/western education came under the influence of this dominant thinking so strongly that he would uphold, based on reason, only Vedic Hinduism, totally rejecting Puranic and later forms of Hinduism as irrational and superstitious.

One of the pitfalls of the implementation of the modern view of religion is that it did not merely serve as a weapon of domination and control in the hands of the powerful during the colonial period. "In the past, colonial administrations used definitions of religion to classify, control, and regulate the practices and identities of subjects ,"[15] observes Asad. Rather, it "altered the conditions of the lives of non-European peoples in ways that obliged them too to reconstitute themselves as members of one exclusive "religious" community against others."[16] The transforming conditions brought about by Europe and its world-conquering project of empire not merely produced "the new conceptual space of 'religion' as such, but the space of its potential ideological and political appropriations as well."[17] It is this constructed space (by the colonial power) that would eventually become a site of competing discourses and identity politics by various fundamentalist religious agencies in India and other colonies in South Asia.

Thus colonial decisions, Western disciplinary frameworks and their classificatory devices—the by-products of modernity—did construct the category of what we call the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism in former colonial states. Though the political decision of religious construct was of the British, the idea was often well-received by the native political ideologues who capitalised on the process to unify India under one religious label and to consolidate anti-British sentiments using religious resources. Strong differences, in some cases enmity, between religious traditions, were glossed over in the face of the common enemy. However, it is also true that what was 'constructed' as religion in the modern period of colonial times is revisited at times through the interventions of liberal democracies, another phase of modernity.[18]

Religion in Service of the Secular Modern State

Vibrant discussions on secularism, one of the important reigning ideas of modernity, have so far revolved around the relationship between the state and religion, and its implications for inter-state relations and policies and intra-state relations and policies have been the topics of study for a while. Here the preoccupation has been so far about how to manage best the domain of the state,

its administration and its arrangements (be it political, cultural, legal or economic) vis-a-vis the sphere of religion. In such an approach, what is employed is the perspective of the state and it turns out to be a top down approach on secularism. Instead, if one were to look at secularism from the view-point of victims of the nation state and its administrative and economic policies, and look for the understandings of and answers to the issues emerging thereupon, new views on secularism would spring forth calling our attention to new areas of engagement between the state and religion. The victims of secular modern state(s)—which are of different types—are not only people of particular religious tradition(s) alone. As fallout of nation states' policies, not only religions suffer; cultures, ethnicities, tribes, and other vulnerable and marginal groups too feel disadvantaged. At times, these people may experience discrimination in the religious sphere. But often their experience of marginalization is too large to be located in the domain of religion alone. Though their religious belonging may play a role in their experience of marginalization, there are multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization these people undergo. Yet, as citizens of a nation state all have a right to be in the state and the state has to discharge its duty delivering its goods to all in a non-discriminatory manner and to make national goods accessible to all. It is here that religions—all of which invariably promote the well-being of all, with their varied emphases on the values of compassion, love, justice, fraternity and peace—can bring in their philosophies, principles, perspectives and values, and prevail upon the nation state and its citizens to act in favour of the victims and the marginalized.

The motive for humanitarian work often finds its inspiration from religious sensibility as we see in the works of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant who in the nineteenth century established the Red Cross. He adopted the symbol of Cross as its official emblem, even though there is an ongoing debate as regards the political, cultural and religious connotations of use of such a symbol as a universal symbol. Further, though religious humanitarians prefer to be viewed by and large as apolitical providers of humanitarian works to overcome such difficult conditions as genocide, war-conflicts, famine, rape and 'hopelessness generated by institutional oppression and poverty,'[19] the role of religion cannot be ignored in such initiatives and in projects which can be called

'selfless vocation of service.'[20] In the last four decades or so, there has been a sustantial transition in religious humanitarianism of the Christian NGO's, with a shift from a charity-based approach to a rights-based approach. For Lynch, this shift is the effect of changing religious discourse. "Charity Model has difficulty in fulfilling the Gospel mandate to 'heal' the world, instead of promoting Band-Aid solutions to suffering."[21] Rights-based approach mentioned above is in consonance with the Christian Gospel's view of ministry which demands a holistic vision that includes striving for basic rights, empowerment and social justice. It means that religious reasoning changes the way NGO's act in the secular domain, and shape up their patterns of involvement in society. To put it differently, religions not only motivate religious NGO's to take care of the ill-effects of modern ideas, policies and practices at the personal and institutional levels, but also produce religious reasonings that alter the way religion-based agencies insert themselves in the social realm by fashioning their vision and mission.

This contributory dimension of religion can be identified as the performance-role of religion, to borrow Peter Beyer's idea,[22] and it is very significant in the functioning of the nation state and in the transformation of the life-worlds, especially of the common people. The humane ethos of the 'immanent frame'[23] cannot merely be imposed from above nor can be legislated by the state. It has to spring forth from below (within) and percolate people's lives all the way upward to their mind-set, and to their individual, collective and institutional consciousness and behaviour. It has to become part of their habitus which in turn would affect democratic nation state, its policies and its day-to-day public life.

It is in this context, we need to note that certain theological trends and ideas in our modern times demolish the predictions about neat separation between the secular and the religious and about restricting religion to the private sphere. At least two examples can be furnished in support of this view. For instance, the movement of liberation theology—which began and flourished in Latin American countries and Third World nations after 1970's—was based on the Christian idea of liberator God Yahweh who delivered the slaves from Egypt. It drew Christianity's attention to Jesus who intervened

in human history in support of the oppressed and marginalized. Its emphasis on liberator God provided compelling motivation and unparallel inspiration for the religious actors to get involved in the burning issues of society, and to take up the problems of exploitation and injustice, and thus to transform the world. They sought to address such simmering ill-effects of modernisation as exploitation of labour and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor rendered by various economic schemes, educational projects and social practices. The second example is about the inculturation processes of the Catholic Church which began after Vatican II. Inspired by the Christian idea of the incarnation of God in the world (i.e. invisible God assuming visible human nature), this project calls for re-visioning of the 'word of God' as being born in local cultures and indigenous traditions. Within this framework, it is strongly argued that the Christian message should be translated into locally appropriate cultural idioms and practices which should be adopted and adapted for this purpose. Christian practices of Asian spiritual exercises such as *Yoga*, *Vipasana* and *Zen* meditation and establishment of Christian Ashrams and Christian centres of indigenous medical care which uses and preserves local herbs, some of which have become very rare, all of which illustrate that Christian agencies and organisations in the last four to five decades have been progressively evolving a more holistic and an inclusive view of the sacred in which the demarcation between the sacred and the profane, between the inner and the outer, the private and the public is made to vanish gradually. Thus the two examples that we cited indicate that the Christian movements, agencies and NGOs[24] show sustained interest in human emancipation here in this world rather than liberation in the next life, in the well-being of this worldly human existence rather than that of life-after death, and in a more holistic vision which embraces both the sacred and the profane as two sides of the same coin. Such a view engenders in religious actors perspectives and motives that drive them to get involved proactively with the day-to-day problems of secular modern states.

Ambivalent Roles of Religion in Modernity

Religion's relationship with the secular realm is not a one-sided affair. Religion affects and gets affected by the developments of the mundane

realities in which it is embedded. It is true all the more of our modern era which effects changes all around. Here, religion finds itself in a situation of continuity and change. As an agency of transcendental order and divine revelation, religion claims to transmit eternal truths and to provide stability. However, religions find themselves located in an unstable mundane world. Religious practitioners carry out their lives precariously, both individually and communally, here on earth. Hence the developments of the secular realm affect not only the life-styles, perspectives and personal preferences of the believers individually, but also those of the community collectively. Religion as an agency of meaning-system would make itself irrelevant if it cannot offer to its believers a meaningful re-interpretation of faith practices and a new set of religious services in this changed context. It means religions are forced to change in response to the changing contexts. However, as a transmitter of long-surviving tradition religion has to be beholden to the past. Thus religion finds itself in conflicting functions and ambivalent dynamics. In this context, I want to elaborate on five areas in which religion finds itself in a situation of ambivalence.

1. Religion and Globalisation

We live in a globalised world. Globalisation has become an all-compassing mega-phenomenon in which "the world is more and more becoming a single place," to borrow Ronald Robertson's expression. It has come to rein in every aspect of human life producing mutations in economic, political and cultural domains. More importantly, it has redefined borders and redrawn boundaries between these realms. Besides, globalisation is distinctively characterised by an unprecedented massive system of global communication. It has made it possible for each of the social subsystems like political, economic, scientific and religious to invent their own specific modes of communication. Thus each of the subsystems not only invades foreign territories and penetrates new soil, but in turn gets inhabited and encroached by other subsystems as well. As a result, their borders become porous and territories vulnerable to influences from outside. It is in this context, Peter Beyer talks about the 'performance' role of religion by which religion is believed to possess the power to wield influence in other subsystems as mentioned earlier. Others call

this the soft power of religion as opposed to the hard power of military and economic regimes of world systems. It is also true that just as other systems cannot remain impervious to religious influence in our globalized world, religion also becomes vulnerable to the outside forces and ideologies. When religious practitioners turn to other sources to come to terms with the opportunities and challenges of our era, their dependency on religion gets increasingly shrunk and religion loses its grip on its believers. Religion is no more the only source of reference for individuals to exercise their moral agency. Under these and other circumstances, both the leaders and the practitioners of religions feel threatened and religions undergo an identity crisis. To recover from this sense of identity loss, religions react very strongly by guarding its borders, reasserting its regime of doctrines and beliefs with high certitude, thus turning to religious fundamentalism which admits neither freedom to be exercised nor uncertainty to creep in. Thus, in this context of globalisation, religion finds itself in a situation of ambivalence. On the one hand, religion appropriates happily the newly evolving global networks to spread its ideas transnationally and reach out and take care of its diasporas spread across the globe. But on the other hand, it tends to withdraw into its own safe ideological and structural cocoons to shut off its practitioners from any threats and dangers of globalisation. Religion, once a pioneering agent of globalization of ideas, practices and cultures in human history, now resists the globalization process under which it faces loss of identity.

2. Religion and Development

Though development has come to be perceived as one of the visible markers of modernity, its meaning has been changing in the last four decades, leaving behind an interesting trajectory of how human beings altered their perspectives of progress and advancement. The concept of 'development' meant different things to different people at different times.[25] Buijs and other theorists point out that religion has played a 'substantive role' in the project of development.[26] By 'substantive role' is meant a set of motivations and actions provided by the system of religious values in initiating, promoting, universalizing, maintaining and sustaining the agenda of development.

For instance, Christians believe in the notion of the universal divine love which compels them to do good to all peoples and to all nations "even regardless of whether they themselves experience the intervention as *good* "[27] or not. Some also view the western notion of progress as a secularized and technicised translation of the Christian longing for a new heaven and a new earth. In this connection, it is interesting to note that development practice is also described as a missionary practice. "For without a missionary zeal, be it Christian, socialist or otherwise, it becomes very hard to keep up the motivation for and in the practice."[28] This enables people to connect the longing for a better world for the whole of humanity with the actual and concrete practice. Historically speaking, religions like Christianity did play a vital role in the old model of development. They developed hospitals, schools etc which, in many ways, promoted human development. They made people move from one part of the globe to the other for various charitable activities and developmental works. Religion thus did engage in the project of what Bas calls 'global responsibility.'[29]

However, in developmental theories, as Govert Buijs points out, there is a lack of recognition of the fact that behind the development practices there hovers a specific cultural-religious horizon. In fact there is a belittling of the roles that religious sentiments and religious experiences of meaning play in the practice and theory of development.[30] Bujis puts forward four reasons for the non-recognition of religion's ability to take part in the process of development: a) An assumption that modernization or development will drive out religion; b) religion is a private affair and hence is socially irrelevant; c) the religions of some people and cultures are unsuitable for development; d) religion cannot be changed or influenced. These reasonings help us understand the kind of cold relationship that existed between religion and the development theories.

Besides, the latest theorising on 'development' as promotion of human dignity shows that religion and development can move closer to each other in this mission. For instance, Nauta points out that development has to become a praxis, engaging in the recovery of the original meaning of intervention: *intervenire*, a process of

'coming in between' which involves much more than 'doing'. It should involve love, care and good will.[31] Accordingly, the author suggests that development has to be reconstituted as "a relational field of sharing and contestation where coming in between involves establishing an appropriate relationship between care of the self and care of the other."[32] Religion, as a moral interlocutor in any culture, can positively and constructively 'intervene' in cultural practices and social institutions, and can effectively become a partner with 'development' in constituting, confirming and sustaining an appropriate relationship between 'care of the self and care of the other.' However, a caveat is in place here: "care for the other carries the seeds of paternalism."[33] Both the projects of development and religious engagement in the world should take the necessary precaution not to be trapped by a kind of condescending paternalism.

As Giri points out, understanding the project of development in terms of the human (human right, human dignity) has helped only the broadening of the agenda of development, which perhaps lacks its complementary component of 'deepening.'[34] Giri suggests that this deepening can be actualized by bringing both an aesthetic and an ethical perspective and mode of participation to this field of relationship.[35]

Further, care of the poor—the current concern of the ethics of development—has been, for centuries, the legacy of most religions' teaching on love. All religions, be it Christianity, Islam, Jainism or Hinduism, have given importance to the care of the 'poor' and the needy,[36] though they might do so in varying degrees. Religion's proactive role in the development project calls for new ways of theorising which will take into account, on the one hand the different concepts of the 'other' given in different religious traditions, and on the other hand, reinterpret them in a manner that will pave the way for aesthetics of self that will lead to better inter-religious dialogues/ praxis-collaborations. In order to do this, the philosophers and theologians of each religious tradition have to aim at trans-disciplinary engagement, wherein, without losing one's rootedness, one transcends one's systemic chauvinism, and communicates one's specificity to the other, not so much for the transformation of the other, but for

the mutual enhancement of one another. This type of religious engagement can play a vital role in the global modern society.

3. *Religion, Communal Violence and Peace-building*

Conflicts and violence seem to have become one of the recurring events of our modern society. Phenomenologically speaking, the fact that more and more communal violence takes place, not in the rural areas, but in the urban settings goes to show its relationship with modernity. At the intersection of religion and violence are the possibilities provided by modernity and its manifestations such as urbanisation, migration, economic opportunities which the social actors engage in and compete for in the modern societies. As Wilkinson argues, though these possibilities and practices do not directly cause violence in most cases, they contribute to the perpetuation and spread of violence.[37] As Jafferlot[38] and Brass[39] demonstrate, most of the incidents of communal violence is deliberately orchestrated for political mileage by political parties during election time—an important event in democracy, one of the most acknowledged features of modernity—'to raise communal temperature and solidify the electorate behind the party.'[40] So too the social actors who have interest in real estate or other lucrative businesses or a grouse against the migrants of a particular religion capitalise on this communally tense situation to settle scores with their religious opponents and thus participate in communal violence.

That said about the relationship of communal violence to modernity, it is equally true that the modern period witnesses across the globe more and more initiatives taken by different agencies to tap into religious resources for conflict-resolution and peace-building. The seed of peace and harmony is to be found in all religions. Hindu's thrice-repeated prayer of "*om, shanti, shanti, shanti'* invokes the idea of tranquillity and calmness of mind. The Buddhist practice of *metta* meditation aims at generating loving kindness, a process which proceeds from kindness and concern toward oneself, extends itself to one's friends, to those who are indifferent, even to ones' own enemies and gradually expands to include all persons in the world, and all beings throughout the whole of space and time. The Hebrew idea of '*shalom*' calls for harmonious relationship within the family,

local community and among the nations, and it comes from a root, meaning 'wholeness', considered to be a richer concept than the English word 'peace'. Muslims' greeting of *'salaam'*, an Arabic word which means 'peace with you', was a customary salutation since the time of the Holy Quran. *'Salaam'* also means more than peace as it includes contentment, good health, prosperity, security and fullness of life. Contrary to the general perception that Islam promotes religious militancy, Muslims in general understand Islam as a religion of peace, for "Quran sees peace as the will of Allah, whom it describes as 'the King, the Holy, the peaceful." The Christian idea of peace is said to be founded on the famous *Sermon on the Mount* which says, 'Blessed are those who are peace makers, because they shall be called sons of God.' Peace-makers like Dalai Lama, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Desmond Tutu, Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar, Nelson Mandella, Abdul Ghaffar Khan from Afghanistan, Helder Camera and Oscar Romero do represent various religious traditions which they found as valuable sources of inspiration for peace and harmony. German Theologian Hans Kung's famous 1991 book *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* contains an often quoted famous statement "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions; no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions." [41] Kung played a very significant role in producing the 'Declaration toward a Global Ethic' promulgated by the Parliament of the World Religions in Chicago in 1993. Religion's role in peace building is also reiterated in *The Earth Charter* of UNESCO promulgated in 2000, which calls upon humanity to attend to 'the wisdom of the world's great religions and philosophical traditions'[42] to evolve fundamental principles for constructing 'a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st Century.'[43]

Organisations like WCRP (World Conference on Religion and Peace),[44] Universal Peace Foundation which also promotes peace through its journal Dialogue and Alliance, The American Quaker and Peacemaker Elise Boulding (1920-2010) and initiatives like Annual week of World Peace supported by different faith traditions of the world do highlight the centrality of religions' contribution to bring about global peace.[45]

4. Religion and Ecology

One of the worst fallouts of modernity is its mindless destruction of natural resources by human beings who have taken recourse to instrumental rationality in the name of development. This approach rests on the view that human beings, with their power of reason is superior to all beings and as pinnacle of creation/evolution, have a right to instrumentalise their reason only towards their personal well-being, comfort and happiness. This view clearly discredits the worth of other beings and the value of natural resources, reducing them to be mere objects to be exploited. This view translated into developmental and technological practices has proven to be catastrophic. Although the ecological crisis is often ascribed to the Christian worldview which not only hails human beings as the crown of creation but also has given to them a god-given mandate of subduing the earth, this has been shown to be untenable; rather it is a product of modernity.[46] This is further confirmed by the fact that exploitation of nature and its resources are rampant not only in the global north but also in the global south, i.e., Asia, which is primarily a non-Christian world. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness and consensus among the academia that religion and culture are key players to solve the problem of current ecological crisis. They fall back upon religio-cultural resources and try to unearth views, motives, dispositions and practices buried in religious myths and rituals. In particular special attention is paid to indigenous religious beliefs and rituals that make humans respect nature as an extension of oneself.

5. Religion and Human Rights

The relationship between nation and religion is not a one-way process. As religions can suggest correctives and offer humane practices to the effectiveness of the nation state, nation state and its best practices can also offer changes to religions. For instance, the idea of democracy, equality and justice, the reigning ideals of nation state needed to penetrate the religious domain especially in countries like India where discrimination based on caste, class and gender in the social realm is religiously sanctioned and sustained, and has come to affect the very character of religious practices whose equalitarian face continues to remain much to be desired even in Independent

India in spite of the efforts taken to correct them. The provisions of Article 25 clause 2 of Indian constitution came to defend the religious freedom of the Hindu Dalits, the ex-untouchables of India. It stipulates the responsibility of the state to ensure the public character of Hindu religious institutions by opening its doors to all classes and sections of the Hindus. In conformity with this constitutional principle, state after state introduced and passed in its legislative assembly the controversial Temple Entry Law in favour of Dalits. This constitutional principle and the Temple Entry Law were seen as defiance of Hindu *varnashrama dharma* by the orthodox Hindus, while for the founding Fathers and the architects of Indian Constitution, the existing Hindu Dharma was a violation of the basic human and democratic rights of the Dalit citizens. Hence the new law was seen as a major step to ensure the restoration of dignity, liberty and the human rights of the Dalits, denied until recently by the Sanskritic Hindu religion. Thus the famous statement that 'state and religion are mutually constitutive in secularism' acquires a new contextual meaning in India's democratic secularism.

Further, religions can play a significant proactive role in protecting human rights, especially of the women even in Muslim countries. For instance, in the Muslims dominated democratic state of Senegal, many feminist and human rights groups wanted to stop the inhuman practice of female genital mutilation (FGM).[47]And the campaign against FGM could not have borne positive results had ANIOS (National Association of Imams of Senegal) not openly declared that this heinous practice had no sanctions either from the Quran or from the Haddiths. ANIOS further sought the help of government authorities and NGOs to train imams on the ills of FGM and to provide facilities to the imams to give talks on radio and television to convey the message to the people. Subsequently, Abdoul Aziz Kebe, the coordinator for the largest Sufi order in Senegal, the Tijans, wrote a powerful forty-five page document detailing religious and medical reasons in favour of the ban on FGM, which was widely circulated and well received by the general public in Senegal.[48]

Conclusion

As open-ended beings, humans evolve and adapt themselves to the changing conditions of their inhabitation. Hence they can neither remain immutable with regard to the social conditions of their life-world nor stay immune to the impeding changes of their historical period. As they advance, their former notions, institutions and structures need to be altered and repositioned, and new meanings of the old and fresh visions, goals and directions of ever growing new frontiers need to be acquired. No institution can escape this inevitable process. Not even religion, one of the oldest institutions of human civilisation, can circumvent this route. However, religion also remains as the most enduring phenomena in human history since humans, as meaning-seeking animals, seek—with the help of religious resources—transcendent meaning in the contingencies of human existence, and beyond the new frontiers humans explore. As people undergo complex transformations in multiple social locations of our modern world, their consciousness gets altered and religious reasoning and sacred ideas enter their discursive and practical consciousness to deal with the new situations. In such contexts, the religious practitioners do experience two discordant sets of roles played by religion: one in support of transformations and another quite critical and subversive of recent and imminent changes encountered in our modern era. This article has shown how this process transforms, and gets transformed by religion, and the way religion is received, rejected, defended, contested and condoned in the bargain of modernity.

Notes :

1. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntherpen, "Introduction" in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntherpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15.
2. Ibid., 16.
3. Ibid.
4. Grace Davies, "Global Civil Religion: A European Perspective," *Sociology of Religion* 62, no 4 (Winter 2000): 467-68.

5. Alfred Stephan, "The Multiple Secularisms of Modern Democratic and Non-democratic Regimes" in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntherpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 118.

6. Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel, "Faith, freedom, and Federation: the Role of Religious Ideas and Instructions in European Political Convergence" in Timothy A.Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein, eds., *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 47.

7. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Jens Riedel and Dominic Sachsenmaier, "The Context of the Multiple Modernities Paradigm" in Dominic Sachsenmaier and Jens Riedel with Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, eds., *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 2002), 1.

8. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Some Observations on Multiple Modernities" in Dominic Sachsenmaier and Jens Riedel with Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, eds., *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 2002), 27.

9. Cf. Talal Asad. "Thinking about Religion, Belief, and Politics." in Robert A. Orsi, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 36–57.

10. David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Post-coloniality* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 55.

11. Ibid., 56.

12. While the prevalent western/Christian categorisation of religions was four-fold, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Heathenism, early Europeans did explore varieties of 'sects' or 'religions' in category of 'Heathenism.' Cf. Will Sweetman, "Unity and Plurality: Hinduism and the Religions of India in Early European Scholarship," *Religion* 31 (2001): 209–224.

13. Cf. Ibid., ; Bryan Smith 'Questioning Authority: Constructions and Deconstructions of Hinduism,' *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 2 (1998): 313–39.

14. Asad, 'Thinking about Religion,' 39.

15. Ibid. [24] See Lynch ('Religious Humanitarianism,' 218-221) takes note of various religious agencies and NGO's that seek to promote the

well-being of this worldly human existence in different parts of the world.

16. Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 56.

17. Ibid., 58.

18. Cf. Ibid., 55 ; Asad, 'Thinking about Religion,' 39.

19. Cecelia Lynch, 'Religious Humanitarianism and the Global Politics of Secularism,' in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntherpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 208.

20. Ibid., 207.

21. Ibid., 217.

22. Peter Beyer in his book Religion *and Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 1997) distinguishes between the function and performance of religion. While function refers to religion's ability to deal with problems arising in its domain, performance refers to religion's capability to influence other domains.

23. See Charles Taylor's book *Secular Age* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007) for the distinction between transcendental frame and immanent frame.

24. See Lynch ('Religious Humanitarianism,' 218-221) takes note of various religious agencies and NGO's that seek to promote the well-being of this worldly human existence in different parts of the world.

25. Scholars identify three post-World War II phases of development. In the first phase (1947-1949) between the world war and the beginning of the cold war, development was seen as a 'work of hope,' aiming at alleviating poverty. In the second phase (1949—1980's) of cold war, development was first defined as 'growth with change,' referring to economic and cultural change, influenced by structural functionalism. Later in mid 1970s, it meant a decent standard of living for all humans, in line with the basic human rights as defined in the UN charter, and measured by 'human development indicators.' In the third phase (1990-), the natural environment and its ecology became integrated into the development discourse, and 'sustainable development' became the watchword. Yet, development had little to do with equity and justice for all. It was in this context that the UN General Assembly resolution called for politi-

cal will to invest in people and their well-being in what could be the trend setter for the next millennium, and set up a special committee in the year 2000 to review the process of development. Following these, a whole array of new discourses of development, such as Amartya Sen's idea of development as freedom (i.e., development as expansion of substantive freedom to achieve alternative functions), development as human dignity and human rights, development as 'global responsibility' development as cultivation of 'self' etc...has acquired significance in the development theories.

26. Not all religions were always positively evaluated by social scientists in relation to development as in the case of development as economic progress. For instance, Max Weber indicted Hinduism as anti-development. It not only lacked resources to promote development but contained within itself ideological and doctrinal underpinnings that demote development, a controversial position contested by many. At the same time, his famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* illustrates the positive role of Protestant Christianity in inspiring and motivating Christians to undertake with rigour economic pursuits not for materialistic benefits but for a spiritual goal.

27. Buijs, "Religion and Development," in Giri et.al, *The Development of Religion and the Religion of Development* (CW Delft: Eburon Delft, 2004), 104.

28. Ibid.

29. Cf. Bas de Gaay Forman, "In Search for a New Paradigm" in Ananta Kumar Giri et al. *The Development of Religion and the Religion of Development.*

30. Buijs, "Religion and Development," 102.

31. Cf. Wiebe Nauta, "A Moral Critique of Fieldwork," in Ananta Kumar Giri et al. *The Development of Religion and the Religion of Development*, 91.

32. Ibid.

33. Cf. Quarles van Ufford, Ph. and Ananta Kumar Giri, "Development as a shared responsibility: Ethics, aesthetics and a creative shaping of human possibilities" in Ufford and Giri, eds., *A Moral Critique of development* (London: Routledge, 2003).

34. Cf. Ananta Kumar Giri, *New Horizons of Social Theory* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2006), 200

35. Ibid.

36. One might wonder if Hinduism has an other-centered ethics. The concepts of *daya*, *dana*, *seva* and *lokasangraha* in Hinduism show that it has the other as a reference point for the pursuit of one's *dharma*. The total welfare of all (*lokasangraha)* is integral to one's liberation. For instance Gita says, "Lokasangraham evapi sampasyan kartum arhasi (3:20)." It means one's action, which leads to salvation, has to be for *lokasangraha*. The first verse of *Isa Upanishad* states, "Behold everything in the form of God". This 'advaitic' statement should create a deep respect for all forms of life and cultivate a sense of equality among all beings. Later *visistadvaita* philosophy and other bhakti schools of Vedanta viewed the whole world and the human beings either as different parts or as different aspects of one God. This indicates how the concept of the 'other' understood as a reality outside one's self is regarded *metaphysically* sacred in Hindu traditions.

37. Steven I. Wilkinson, "Introduction" in Wilkinson ed., *Religious Politics and Communal Violence (*New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-23.

38. Christopher Jafferlot, "The Politics of Processions and Hindu-Muslim Riots" in Wilkinson , ed., *Religious Politics,* 280-307.

39. Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: OUP, 2003)

40. Wilkinson, "Introduction," 13.

41. Ursula King, "Reflections on Peace, Women, and the World's Faiths," *Dialogue & Alliance* 25, no 1 (summer 2011) 15.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. WCRC is the outcome of the dream of four religious leaders Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, Bishop John Wesley Lord, and Bishop John Wright who held a number of local conferences in the US and several consultation meetings in different parts of the world including one in New Delhi in 1968 which finally culminated in the first World Conference on Religion and Peace in Kyoto, Japan in 1970. So far, five such worldwide conferences have been held so. While openly and humbly stating that religious elements have aggravated rather than reconciled existing tensions and conflicts among communities, the conference is resolved to "work to-

gether as religious people and with all people of good-will for the realization of a world free of violence -- a world in which all people may live in freedom, justice, and peace." (See their web site at http://info@wcrp.org)

45. Cf. Ursula King, "Reflections on Peace, Women, and the World's Faiths," *Dialogue & Alliance* 25, no 1 (summer 2011), 8-18.

46. See, for example, George Karuvelil, "Contemporary Ecological Crisis: Tracing Its Emergence, *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 8, no 2 (July 2006), 5-19.

47. Cf.Alfred Stepan, "The Multiple Secularisms of Modern Democratic and Non-Democratic Regimes" in Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntherpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism*, 114-144.

48. Ibid., 132-134.