(Post) Secular Discomforts

Religio-Secular Disclosures in the Indian Context

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If the pronouncement of a post-secular age has been productive for scholarship that unpacks secular discomforts, a point of departure for this essay is to trace the entanglement of the secular and the religious in its colonial incarnation to contribute to extant scholarship on secularism and the post-secular in the Indian context. I trace some of the contrapuntal debates on the secular and the post-secular that have significance for questions of co-existence within the Indian nation-state. What does a reconsideration of the secular, a probing of its discomforts, offer for the question of religio-secular co-existence in the Indian context? And what are the limits of a post-secular turn—in the sense of a reconsideration of spiritual belief or theological conventions as a resource for co-existence—if we think through the forms of power generated by this turn? How do questions of majoritarianisms and minoritisations inflect these debates? As I suggest in this essay, these questions reveal what is at stake in discussions of the secular and its post.

The post-secular turn at the intersection of the fields of political philosophy, anthropology and religious, postcolonial and cultural studies has highlighted theological political formations which have informed differential histories of the secular. This turn has witnessed a reconsideration of the secularisation thesis.[1] Yet, in order to flesh out the intricate philosophical relationship between the religious and the secular, perhaps the best way to begin this discussion is with reference to Derrida's deconstruction of religion. In his essay, 'Faith and Knowledge', which comments on the Kantian text, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Derrida unpacks the religious and the secular through tracing their etymological genealogy during the Enlightenment period.[2] Derrida argues that Kant arrogates for Christianity a morality and a reason. But the evangelicism of this reason also constitutes something that comes to be defined as the other to religion—a world without God. This other emerges in the move to validate practical reason above faith. As Derrida traces it, the conduct of morality also necessitates a 'radical dissociation' from God or at least the need to suspend the 'existence of God' in theory.[3] Derrida describes this move by asking 'Is this not another way of saying that Christianity can only answer to its moral calling' to its 'Christian calling if it endures in this world, in phenomenal history, the death of God?'[4] For Derrida, this Christianity is also 'the death of God' that is 'announced and recalled by Kant to the modernity of the Enlightenment'.[5] Derrida's deconstructive move, therefore, identifies in Kant's formulation of proper rational religion (Christianity), an emergence of the secular, through the emphasis on reason. But in the process of this deconstruction, Derrida traces how the thesis of religion, limited by reason, is subject to an aporia or a conundrum. One of the aporias present in 'Faith and Knowledge' appears to be this: even as suspension and death of religion (implying the emergence of the secular) is heralded through an attempt to define a rational religion, the vocabulary of Christian theology (an integral part of the history of its link with different forms of political power) remains present in all that is considered secular in the present.[6]

Perhaps referring to the opposition between globalisation and religion invoked by writers like Samuel Huntingdon in *The Clash of Civilizations*, Derrida suggests that 'from here on, the word "religion" is calmly (and violently) applied to things which

have always been and remain foreign to what this word names and arrests in its history'.[7] Derrida then makes a significant suggestion: 'the history of the word "religion" should in principle forbid every non-Christian from using the name "religion", in order to recognise in it what "we" would designate, identify and isolate there'.[8] In making this suggestion, Derrida echoes Talal Asad and Tomoko Masuzawa's arguments about the making of the category of religion as a universal.[9] Asad and Masuzawa's contrapuntal discussion of how religion is made through a study of European and non-European relationships gives substance to the ways in which the term 'religion' is a colonising discourse. For example, in *Genealogies of Religion* Asad argues that a conception of Natural Religion paved the way for the universal category of religion. Tomoko Masuzawa traces how Christianity was saved through recourse to European taxonomies of religion. This redemption occurs through the conversion of other philosophical or sacred practices to the category of religion where, Masuzawa argues, the model of a rational Christianity dictates the terms by which other 'religions' are classified. Derrida's, Asad's and Masuzawa's studies suggest that European Christianity's hegemony has been maintained since the post-reformation era through a series of legitimations at different historical moments about its status as a rational religion; its relegitimation in the modern era is demonstrated with recourse to taxonomies of the other religions or the 'world religions discourse'. For Derrida, a deconstructive unpacking of the binary between a rational secular and a rational religio of the Enlightenment that highlights how colonial sovereignty arrogates to itself a European religio-secular reason, which emerges every time either the category of religion or the secular is invoked, becomes crucial.

For Arvind-Pal Mandair, this tracing of the religio-secular through a history of colonialism has profound implications for the Indian context. In *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation*, an impressive study and a call for a post-secular turn within postcolonial theory, Arvind-Pal Mandair fleshes out this problem through a critique of postcolonial theory.[10] Contemporary European post-secular theory, Mandair argues, has seen a 'reversal' of its 'atheistic roots in the "masters of suspicion" (Marx, Nietzche, Freud)'.[11] 'As a result', he suggests, 'theory has been used to legitimize the use of phenomena from Judeo-Christian traditions as resources not only for thinking

critically about religion, but for thinking more critically about theory itself.'[12] For Mandair, these Judeo-Christian resources have been used, particularly by Alain Badiou, Gianni Vattimo and Slavoj Zizek, to re-energise critical theory and the European left. So, for example, Zizek's '"engaged political interventions" are primarily intended to reformulate a leftist anticapitalist political project in an era of global capitalism and its ideological supplement, liberal democratic multiculturalism'.[13] Yet, these approaches remain Eurocentric in that they refuse to reconsider other theological resources and, in doing so, repeat a colonial gesture where the activity of theorising itself can only be confined to the west.

On the other hand, postcolonial theory, Mandair argues, has suffered from a Saidian hangover, a directive transmitted via Marx, that the 'the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism'.[14] Mandair references Edward Said's *The World, The Text, The Critic* which emphasised the need for secular criticism to counter the Orientalist construction of the non-West through ahistorical religious categories.[15] Following this directive, Mandair argues that 'most postcolonial theorists have treated the activity of *thinking about religion* as an oxymoron, thus forgetting that the activity of thinking (theory) and the work of religion-making have been inextricably connected in the history of Western thought and, of course, the colonial project'.[16] It is this refusal to take what is described as religion seriously that postcolonial theory consigns 'its own emancipatory project' to 'a kind of evolutionary historicism—the idea that whatever developed first in European modernity would inevitably follow later in the modernizing of the non-Western world'.[17] In order to understand this evolutionary historicism that Mandair refers to, I turn to the Indian context to examine debates about the (post) secular.

—THE INDIAN (POST) SECULAR

A brief glance at the connotations of Indian secularism suggests that something quite different from the Western meaning of separation of church and state emerges, even though such a separation, as Derrida has noted above, is impossible. Priya Kumar suggests that the complexity and slippages of the meanings of the secular in the Indian context are 'in *excess* of the western notion of separation of religious and political spheres'.[18] Secularism has meant neutrality or impartiality with regard to religion, but it has also been associated with 'tolerance of all religions' and has been

'made to serve the agenda of minority rights—to provide special treatment to marginalized religious groups'.[19] Paradoxically, 'the notion of tolerance, in its hegemonic versions, is articulated in the liberal and paternalistic idiom of the "protection of minorities"—both as a basis for state policy and as an ideal of peaceful coexistence in society'.[20] This notion of tolerance was also claimed by Gandhi for the broader traditions of Hinduism. Thus, secularism in this meaning has underwritten the ambiguities within Indian secularism and indicates its difference from the secular in Western contexts. These meanings of Indian secularism have been examined and debated through various theoretical and political positions since the 1990s, particularly since the rise of Hindu nationalist politics.[21]

Contesting the value and utility of secularism to counter Hindu nationalism, communitarians like T.N. Madan and Ashis Nandy have critiqued Indian secularism as an elite Westernising project.[22] For these theorists, secularism as an ideology which seeks to keep religion apart from public and everyday life is alien to the Indian context and hence cannot be used as a resource in everyday life. A left liberal position is articulated by Rajeev Bhargava who has defended the tenets of secularism, especially its goal to protect minority rights, and argues for a political secularism that can take on the role of regulating an ethical co-existence.[23] Both positions, it is important to note, appear invested in countering the force of Hindu nationalism. Named as communitarians, Madan and Nandy have both argued that secularism as an elite project has exhausted its resources, that it is time to turn to Indian religious traditions to mobilise extant non-modern forms of tolerance. Bhargava, on the other hand, argues for a rights-based secularism against what he terms the 'vulgar Gandhianism' of the communitarians.[24] This rights-based secularism, Bhargava suggests, is the best option for a 'politics of the common good' in a 'heterogeneous society' like India.[25]

Mandair argues that this crisis of secularism in the Indian context has witnessed the emergence of another position. This position is identified by Mandair as following Said's imperative of 'rethinking secularism as a safeguard against the injustices of democracy defined by a majoritarian community'.[26] Yet, Mandair's main point of contention against this attempt to rethink secularism is that it continues the refusal to rethink the religious.[27] Citing Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan's collection of essays *The Crisis of Secularism in India*,

Mandair shows how the editors inflect the question of religion through historicism: 'religion, in these essays, as well as in the broader discourse that constitutes them, is primarily addressed in terms of historical explanation or a sociology of religion'.[28] In doing this, the authors suggest (they cite Derrida's 'Faith and Knowledge' essay), 'a commitment to Enlightenment values' which operates as a 'limit' to 'a critique of secularism'.[29] For Mandair, the 'religious/secularism opposition by way of reference to Derrida is a serious misreading', but beyond that, he argues, these theorists 'fail to see that secularism is as much a colonial imposition as religion'.[30] While Mandair appears to concur with theorists like T.N. Madan and Ashis Nandy in making this statement, his point is slightly different. India's entry into history and modernity 'happened by way of a certain politics of religion-making' and even as Indians 'describe themselves as secular', one needs to acknowledge that this category was enabled by entry 'into the Christian-European category of religion'.[31] In other words, Mandair's argument about the making of Indian religions through European categories intervenes in Madan's and Nandy's arguments for a recovery of religious tolerance through attention to everyday forms of religious practices. Mandair makes a similar intervention with regard to theorists who argue for secularism by attempting to rethink it yet do not take into account secularism's theological political formation. But there is another position that Mandair does not take into account—the conceptualisation of a secularism that does avow the religious.

—Detranscendentalising the (post) secular

Mandair's argument is compelling and, I would argue, must be taken seriously. In fact, Spivak's ruminations on the religious and the secular in a post 9/11 context appear to lend support to Mandair's argument, albeit in a slightly different manner.[32] Navigating a role for the humanities teacher in relation to the binary that emerged between support for the US war on terror and the political position against the bombing of Afghanistan in 2001 (dismissed as support for the Taliban and its awful record of gender politics by the US administration), Spivak argues for a reading of secularism that does not disavow the category of religion.[33] Reworking Kant's discussion of reason and religion, for whom 'the judeo-christian is seen as the religion of reason, de-transcendentalized into secularism', Spivak argues that this de-transcendentalisation is '*also* a description of capturing and controlling the

possibility of the transcendental as that which is worshipped'.[34] Furthermore, Spivak rereads secularism in its Judeo-Christian formulation and legitimation via Kant against its own reason or otherwise, as it were. She suggests that this project requires reason 'to be our ally'; 'there is no compromise on that one, it cannot be fetishised, as in the most common version of secularism, laundered judeo-christianity'.[35] This common version, often expressed through the concept of tolerance, allows the West to 'de-transcendentalize all other religions' while disavowing the 'religion-culture language' that 'governs your own idiom'.[36] This disavowal, Spivak suggests, leads to the liberal celebration of the separation of church and state and the distinctions between public and private. These liberal separations enable the avowal of the transcendental (faith and religious practice) as a private practice, but disavows the religio-secular idiom which governs the practice of secular governmentality. But these distinctions of church and state, public and private, Spivak argues, 'are too race- and class-specific and indeed gender specific to hold up a just world'.[37] If we take into account the specificities of historical inequities of class, race and gender (sexuality is very much a part of this list even though Spivak does not name it given its fraught relationship to discourses of both the religious and the secular), then liberal separations of church and state, public and private are not tenable. Thus an assertion of secularism that is based on the privatisation of religious practice does not address the historical inequities of race, class, gender or sexuality.

This is where Spivak's rereading of the Kantian imperative to de-transcendentalise religion as reason becomes useful. Arguing for a de-transcendentalisation of religion so that we can 'acknowledge religio/culture as idiom rather than ground of belief', Spivak suggests a critical secular practice.[38] This practice involves undoing the binary between the transcendental (faith) and immanence (everyday religious practice). The detranscendentalisation of faith transfigured into religio involves thinking through co-existence. Spivak's call to detranscendentalise is made in the name of revisiting the concept of tolerance 'which flourishes best when religion is de-transcendentalized into something like linguistic competence'.[39] So, Spivak calls for a detranscendentalisation of the religio-secular, in order to think through an ethics of co-existence that appears to constitute a critical secularism. In doing so, Spivak echoes Geraldine Finn's call for de-

trancendentalisation within feminist religious studies.[40] In effect, Spivak also appears to be arguing for a state secularism which needs to be much more competent in 'juridico-legal' terms to fulfill its secularist credentials—but this competence can only be gained by learning the languages of the other. So, for example, 'the task, Spivak suggests, 'is to find something like the "secular/transcendental binary" in the contexts (languages) that we work in' (she refers to concepts within Islam and Hinduism here).[41]

What I find compelling about Spivak's rumination is precisely the attention to inequities of gender, class, race and sexuality fostered by a religio-secular idiom; this foregrounding, we need to remember, also contains the possibility of the decolonisation of the order-word religio. In this sense, Spivak's project of university secularism, I would suggest, is a case of rethinking the secular where the secular does not refuse to rethink the religious. But a key issue that resonates in Spivak's formulation of secularism has to do with thinking through co-existence from the position of those who have been excluded and/or minoritised. It is precisely this position that Aamer Mufti articulates in his reading of the centrality of the otherness of religious identity, indeed its minoritisation, to the project of liberal Enlightenment discourse.[42] Mufti argues that the '"beginnings" of the crisis of Indian secularism around the identity of the Muslims must lead to the history of the involvement of European liberalism with the question of the Jews'.[43] Mufti asserts that the 'fate of the Jews of Europe carries implications not simply for Europe and its peoples but for the projects of modernity as a whole'.[44]

In his book *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* Mufti is less concerned with anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim themes than he is to illustrate how 'liberal culture attempts, *sincerely*', as it were, 'to resolve the question of the Jews—or, in India, of the Muslims'.[45] For Mufti, this liberal concern is manifest in 'how liberalism historically talked about the modes of apartness of the Jews and the history of their persecution in Western society'.[46] Furthermore, Mufti argues that a European problematic in relation to Jewish identity emerges at a time of the 'normalization of European selfhood in terms of national identities in the nineteenth century to which Jewish identity poses a number of insurmountable difficulties'.[47] Citing Marx's discussion of 'The Jewish Question', Mufti argues that the 'paradox of Jewish particularity as the basis of

Jewish cosmopolitanism' informs this problematic.[48] So, '"the Jew" of modern Western imagination is both the threat of particularism confronting the secularizing and universalizing state and the figure of universal exchange that serves as a marker for the uprootedness and abstraction of bourgeois culture'.[49] Faced with this paradox of particularity and cosmopolitanism (in an identity that unsettles the abstract notion of the citizen, that is raced and religious and exceeds national borders), the European nation-state attempted to offer solutions to the Jewish problem, namely: '"uniform" citizenship, religious "tolerance", secular "national" literature and culture'.[50] Yet, these solutions produce a minoritisation of otherness. It is this structure of minoritisation that is common to the forms of sovereignty that include European secular state sovereignty as well as a secular Indian state sovereignty even as historical differences illustrate the differences in the debate. In this sense, there is something machinic about the structure of state sovereignty as it attempts to resolve the issue of the otherness of religious identity within the political discourse of liberalism. Yet, the reterritorialisation of this minoritisation produces a distinct set of problems in the South Asian context.

For Mufti, the majority/minority axis referenced by Indian secular criticism hinders its attempts to rethink the secular. So, Mufti argues, what theorists of nationalism in the Indian context have failed to recognise is that rather than 'a great settling of peoples' the 'distinguishing mark' of secular nationalism is that 'it makes large numbers of people eminently unsettled'.[51] So, one can say, the minoritisation of Muslims, Sikhs and Christians produces an unsettling effect for these religious identities. Thus, Mufti argues that the 'crisis of secularism' in the Indian context must 'be examined from the point of view, and at the site of minority existence'.[52] Mufti's discussion of the structure of minoritisation is a critique of Partha Chatterjee's discussion of secularism.[53] Drawing on a Foucauldian model of power and governmentality, Chatterjee has attempted to theorise the assertion of 'minority group demands' for 'cultural right' as something that is made 'in the language of rights'.[54] But these demands test the 'limit of liberal-rationalist theory' because a 'collective cultural right' is asserted which also is a 'right not to offer a reason for being different'.[55] However, Chatterjee argues, minority demands are made in the language of rights precisely because, for minority groups, the demands are 'a

contestation on the ground of sovereignty that the right is asserted *against governmentality*.[56]

For Chatterjee, the solution to the issue of minority rights, especially when it comes to women's rights in the Indian context given the history of personal laws, is not secular state intervention.[57] Rather, Chatterjee visualises an advocate for minority rights who has to engage in a two-fold struggle, 'resist homogenization from the outside, and push for democratization inside' which 'would be a strategic politics of toleration'.[58] Yet, as Mufti has pointed out, Chatterjee's formulation of 'the minority subject's refusal to give reasons for his or her difference in no way alters the structure within which the minority is cast as the site of unreason'; 'reason is subsumed entirely within the life of the state. It also leaves intact the externality of minority to the nation-state.'[59] In subsequent essays, both Gyan Prakash and Gyan Pandey have also critiqued the persistence of the majority/minority formulation in Chatterjee's revisions of his earlier essay on secularism.[60] Even though Chatterjee argues for a re-examination of secularism from a minority position, Gyan Prakash, for example, argues that 'secularism cannot simply reassert the case for "tolerance", for that merely reaffirms the minoritization of Muslims'.[61] Gyan Pandey argues that since the rise of Hindu nationalism, 'what we have in India today is an *intolerance* not so much of particular religious practices or beliefs as of the simple fact of existence of people belonging to other religious denominations'.[62] Thus, it is the question of religious identity rather than practice that he suggests attends the 'new politics of violence that comes with this intolerance'.[63] For Pandey, the response to such a politics of violence is to question the majority/minority axis and to 'celebrate a new society of multiple minorities'.[64] Such a formulation requires unyoking the 'state' and 'nation' so that 'the state does not cover up its own particular interests (and the interests of the ruling classes and factions) as the interests of the sacred community called the nation'.[65]

Yet Priya Kumar has suggested that it is hard to envision 'how such delinking of (majoritarian) nationalism from the state is to be achieved in political terms'.[66] Kumar argues that 'the very notion of Hindutva is premised on the idea of coerced cultural assimilation', so the counter-argument of secularist debates which focus on the protection of minority rights is inadequate if the state itself produces minoritisation.[67] 'Understanding religiocultural "differences" not as essentialized

preexisting identities, but as forms of exclusions engendered by nationalism and the modern state', Kumar states, 'will enable us to move past the multiculturalist paradigm of a "politics of difference"—to think instead in terms of power sharing and equality within the form of the nation-state'.[68] For Kumar, the answer is a 'redistribution of power and political participation'.[69] The redistribution of power would, in a sense, redress some of the production of minoritisation; however, claims for rights still need to be made through a minority identity. So, she states, 'the aporia of a minority rights discourse remains—mobilizing notions of a distinct, often bounded, cultural identity in order to stake its claims, this discourse risks fixing identities, besides denying ambiguities within the group'.[70]

For Nivedita Menon, the issue of identity is paramount in thinking through an anti-Hindutva politics. But a radical politics, she suggests, must confront the populist arguments that Hindutva leaders make in relation to identities which are minoritised rather than a rethinking of the secular only in academic terms as arguments made to state institutions. If Hindutva leaders such as L.K. Advani whip up a fear of conversions that will reduce Hindus to a minority status, Menon argues that the tactic is not to 'deflect the fear' but to 'confront it'.[71] So, she suggests, 'we need to ask another, more aggressive question of our own instead—so what if Hindus become a minority one hundred years from now', 'our argument should be about ensuring democratic institutions such that it will make no difference to your status no matter the size of your community of birth'.[72] For Menon, the question of conversions for Hindutva organisations is not about religion, but about the majority/minority preoccupation. If this is so, she suggests, we need to ask why 'religious conversion' is seen as 'essentially different, in a democracy, from other kinds of conversion' such as when 'political parties attempt to convert voters by wild promises' or 'when political ideologies' of 'Marxists, of feminists or of the Hindu right—attempt to convert with promises of redemption and threats of various kinds, both material and spiritual'.[73] So for Menon, the majority/minority axis common to both religious and secular state nationalism can, through a radical politics, be questioned and confronted. Such a move would destabilise the categories of majority and minority.

Both Kumar and Menon suggest that the project of rethinking secularism must take into account a concept of living with otherness or other identities though their

arguments take different directions. Kumar suggests that 'state secularism can only work to *restrain* or contain religious violence'.[74] So, 'the task before us', Kumar suggests, 'is not just how we can live together with some degree of civility, but how can we live together well'.[75] Living together well, Kumar argues (drawing on the Derridean notion of living well together), requires taking the question of co-existence 'outside the realm of the state where it is most debated'.[76] For Kumar, the secular in the Indian context has been burdened with too much of an expectation to provide solutions to the issue of coexistence. So, she suggests, 'secularism cannot take on the burden of ethical ways of relating to otherness even if it has become imbricated with the language of tolerance among Indian elites'.[77] In this sense, Kumar refers to Nandy's proposal that tolerance must be reactivated within the 'conceptual domain of the religious' even though she disagrees with Nandy in his rejection of 'Enlightenment secularism altogether'.[78] For Kumar, therefore, the concept of secularism is an important element of the coexistence, yet it is not 'the only mantra for envisioning a violence-free society'.[79] Tolerance, however, cannot be dissociated from power and governmentality, as Wendy Brown has pointed out.[80] In this regard, the recourse to Nandy's recovery of religious tolerance appears to be lodged within a majoritarian politics.

Menon, on the other hand, does not take the route of discussing living well together; rather, she focuses on the relationship between secularism and communalism. She suggests that 'living with secularism' in the current political climate is 'something that is ongoing, rather than something which has been achieved', something that 'will always be, in the process of becoming'.[81] What this means, Menon argues, is that 'to live with "secularism" is to live with "communalism"'; in other words, 'to live with secularism is to recognise its implication in statist and authoritarian discourses and to unhinge it, twist and turn it, to rework it into our everyday practices'.[82] For Menon, the issue of recognising the implications of secularism and communalism goes beyond the politics of the nation. 'To live with secularism', she suggests, 'is to question the fixity of national borders, to recall the past and present implication of what is today called India with other parts of Asia'.[83] 'What would it mean for secularism', she asks, 'to teach and learn the history of South Asia rather than of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh? To live

with secularism is to imagine the ghosts of centuries past and future silently breaching the borders of our nation-states.'[84]

In widening the lens within the debates on secularism, Menon touches on something crucial to the structure of nation-state sovereignty in South Asia. The focus on religious identity and the structure of minoritisation has been integral to the history of the formation of the nation-states of Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, each of which have negotiated with colonial sovereignty as well as the politics of communalisation and linguistic identities in their formation. Thus for Menon there is a need to avow or disclose hegemonic identities in the Indian context precisely because of their historical formation; as she states, this is 'inescapable' as it is 'intrinsically part of being an Indian citizen, and it is worth repeating that our religious community identity is also a regional, caste and linguistic one'.[85] Yet, the assertion of identity can be put to other uses by secularists—other, that is, than the expectation of an essentialised majoritarian or minoritarian identity. 'Such an assertion would say', she suggests, 'I reject the politics of Hindutva as a Hindu and a nonbeliever, it does not speak for me' or 'I reject the politics of Islamic fundamentalism as a Muslim and a secularist.'[86] Such assertions, Menon argues, 'can add a powerful new dimension to the struggle against the politics of majoritarianism and religious fundamentalism'.[87] For Kumar and Menon, rethinking the secular involves challenging the majority/minority structure inaugurated by the colonial state, but also perpetuated by the postcolonial secular liberal Indian nation-state. Kumar and Menon turn to the ethics of coexistence to challenge these structures of minoritisation. For Kumar, literature and film become sites where an ethics of coexistence can be renegotiated whereas Menon advocates a radical populist politics in a time of living with communalism. In a sense, both Kumar and Menon affirm Mufti's as well as Spivak's discussions of the secular even as these formulations take different routes.

So what is at stake in advocating the concept of critical secularism? Mufti argues that 'a critical secularism in South Asia today must confront the contradictions of its own genealogy'.[88] Legitimating Chatterjee's analysis as 'compelling and influential', Mufti argues that it leaves Nehruvian secularism, in the sense of its majoritarian/minoritarian formulation, untouched.[89] On the other hand, Gandhian communitarians champion a Gandhian ethics of co-existence by

referencing the non-modern. This 'anti-secularist' position, however, Mufti argues, 'is majoritarian in nature, to the extent that it places outside the bounds of critique and leaves intact normative notions of tradition and culture that have the nation-state as the historical horizon of their emergence and codification'.[90] For Mufti, therefore, critical secularism involves a radicalisation of secular nationalisms (its majoritarian formulations in the statecraft of secular nationalism or through its Gandhian politics) from the site of minority existence. Such a critique would inevitably destabilise the normative assumptions of majority/minority, Hindu or Muslim which could 'renounce the certainties of "home",' Mufti argues, 'if we resist the apotheosis of the nation-state as the only proper dwelling place of culture and self'.[91] In other words, Mufti traces the need to challenge the normative assumptions of nation-state sovereignty in order to think through an ethics of coexistence.

Mufti's project of highlighting this ethics is a detranscendentalising one in Spivak's sense of the term. Mufti's tracing of the search for Muslim tradition and writings on the political and the secular by Muslim writers (he analyses the writings of Askari, Maulana Azad, Sadaat Hasan Manto and Faiz Ahmed Faiz among others) detranscendentalises the religio-cultural idiom of Islam for the project of critical secularism. Situating Maulana Azad's writings within the religio-cultural idiom of Sufism, for example, Mufti sees a difference from the Nehruvian formulation of Muslims as a minority within the Indian nation. For Azad, minoritisation cannot be reduced to the technicality of numerics, rather it is a question of a power relation that is established between the groups constructed as majority and minority. Mufti argues that Azad resists the technical formulation, conceptualising instead an ethics of coexistence through the possibility of 'genuinely sharing a social space with the other'.[92] Thus the emphasis on the relation of power involved in the process of minoritisation as well as the conceptualisation of coexistence affirms Mufti's commitment to a detranscendentalisation of a religio-cultural idiom for the project of a critical secularism.

If the religio-secular machine produces a minoritisation of those it deems religious others, then the project of critical secularism envisioned by Spivak, Kumar, Menon, and Mufti, in particular, takes two routes. It involves disclosing that the religio, as

Mandair discusses it, has attempted to transcendentalise other forms of the sacred on the terms of colonial Christianity. This disclosure leads post-secularists like Mandair to the project of rethinking the theological political in the Indian context as a productive form of decolonisation. Yet such projects have their limits. Thus, a detranscendentalising disclosure of the ways in which religio-secular constitutes liberal nation-state sovereignty, a move which Spivak calls for, is necessary. It may lead us to identify the ways in which nation-state religio-secular sovereignty produces minoritised religious others. These forms of minoritisation may result in liberal tolerance and protection, but are simultaneously vulnerable to violence through majoritarian politics. Such a relationship thus thwarts the ethics of sharing space or living well together as Kumar via Derrida argues. In this sense, a critical secularism as formulated by the theorists above may not be just be a necessary project but a crucial one.

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A longer version of this article was published in the third chapter of my book, *Religious Freedom in India: Sovereignty and (Anti)Conversion*, Routledge, London, 2012.

[1] Talal Asad, 'Trying to Understand French Secularism' in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World,* ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan Fordham, New York, 2006, pp. 494–526; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003; Hent de Vries, 'Introduction: Before, Around, and Beyond the Theologico-Political' in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World,* ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, Fordham, New York, 2006; Hans Joas, *Do We Need Religion: On the Experience of Self-Transcendence*, Paradigm Publishers, Boulder, 2008; Jurgen Habermas, 'Notes on a Post-Secular Society', S*ight and Sound*, 2008, <http: www.signandsight.com/features/1714.html> (accessed 23 April 2011).

[2] Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, trans. T.M. Greene and H.H. Hoyt, Harper & Row, New York, 1960.

3 Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone' in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 11.

4 Ibid., p. 12.

5 Ibid., p. 12.

6 Derrida calls this mondialisation translated by Samuel Weber as globalatinisation. Globalatinisation is that which 'imposes itself in a particularly palpable manner within the conceptual apparatus of international law and of global political rhetoric'. Furthermore, 'wherever this apparatus dominates, it articulates itself through a discourse on religion'. Derrida, p. 29.

7 Derrida, p. 29. For the globalisation versus religion thesis, see Samuel Huntingdon, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996.

8 Derrida, p. 36. In the field of religious studies, Timothy Fitzgerald has traced how the Latin 'religio', in effect, meant something quite different from its English translation. Citing Richard King's thesis that 'religio' in the Latin context referred to ancestral practices of particular communities, Fitzgerald suggests that in the Latin context, 'religio' might have been a minor term that contributed to a 'more significant discourse on Roman identity, a sense of superior cultivation (*civilitas, romanitas*) as against the barbarians (barbarous)' and their 'uncultivated *superstitio'.* Timothy Fitzgerald, 'Introduction' in *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations,* ed. Timothy Fitzgerald, Equinox, London, 2007, p. 13.

9 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1993. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005.

10Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009.

11 Ibid., p. 3.

12 Ibid., p. 382.

13 Ibid., p. 396.

14 Ibid., p. 384. For a reading of Marxian thought against Marx's injunction against religion, see Wendy Brown, 'The Sacred, the Secular, and the Profane: Charles Taylor and Karl Marx' in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, ed. Michael Warner, Jonathan Van Antwerpen and Craig Calhoun, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 83–104. Brown discusses how Marx, in fact, lays the problem of destroying the sacred at the feet of capitalism.

15 Or as Said has stated: 'the idea of the Orient, very much like the idea of the West that is its polar opposite, has functioned as an inhibition on what I have been calling secular criticism', *Edward Said, The World, The Text, The Critic*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, p. 290.

[16] Mandair, p. 384. For a more recent discussion of the link between the idea of critique as a presupposition of the secular, see Tala Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2009.

[17] Mandair, p. 384.

[18] Priya Kumar, *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London 2008, p. 13.

[19] Ibid., p. 15.

[20] Ibid.

[21] See Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*, Viking, New Delhi, 1999. See also Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. Both Jaffrelot and Hansen discuss a history of Hindu nationalism and its rise through electoral politics in the 1990s.

[22] See T.N. Madan, 'Secularism in its Place' in *Secularism and its Critics*, pp. 297–315. See Ashis Nandy, 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Toleration' in Secularism and its Critics, ed. Rajeev Bhargava, Oxford University Press. New Delhi, 1998, pp. 321–44. Also see Ashis Nandy, 'The Twilight of Certitudes: Secularism, Hindu Nationalism and Other Masks of Deculturation', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1998, 283–98.

[23] Rajeev Bhargava, 'Introduction' in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 1–28.

[24] Ibid., p. 532.

[25] Ibid., p. 542.

[26] Mandair, p. 50. For a recent discussion of some of the debates in rethinking Indian secularism, see Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Crisis of Secularism in India*, Duke University Press, Durham and London. Earlier essay collections include Rajeev Bhargava's *Secularism and its Critics* cited above. Many of the debates touch on minority rights, an issue that is key to the problem of Indian secularism.

[27] For a discussion of this refusal to rethink the religious in another context, that of the inability of secularists to take account of the injury caused by the publication of cartoons satirising Prophet Mohammed in Denmark in 2005, which offended many pietist Muslims, see Saba Mahmood's 'Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?' in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*, ed. Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2009, pp. 64–100.

[28] Mandair, p. 51.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. 52.

[31] Ibid., p. 53.

[32] Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, 'Terror: A Speech After 9-11', *boundary*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2004, pp. 81–111.

[33] See for example, Hillary Rodham Clinton's reference to her support for the bombing of Afghanistan and its link to women's rights in the online version of *Time* magazine. Hillary Clinton, 'New Hope for Afghanistan's Women', *Time* (online), 2001, <www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,185643,00.html> (accessed 17 April 2011).

[34] Spivak, p. 105.

[35] Ibid., p. 105–6.

[36] Ibid., p. 106. The discussion of tolerance and its attendant critique is enormous. Tolerance appears to be a key term of the Enlightenment and its distinction of the religious and the secular. For a discussion of these distinctions and for a reading of tolerance as a discourse of power and governmentality see Wendy Brown, *Regulation of Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire,* Princeton University Press*,* Princeton and Oxford, 2006.

[37] Spivak, p. 106.

[38] Ibid., p. 111. Spivak calls this practice 'university secularism', a challenge for the humanities academic in interrogating the binaries mentioned above.

[39] Ibid.

[40] See Geraldine Finn, 'The Politics of Spirituality, the Spirituality of Politics' in *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*, ed. Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick, Routledge, London, 1992, 111–22. Finn critiques the splitting of the spiritual from the material, the transcendental from the immanent. 'The postulate of an immaterial and "transcendent" soul, spirituality or "Otherness"', she argues, 'secures the "quiddity" of the material world *as it is* and at the same time the safety of the political status quo which organizes it', p. 117.

[41] Spivak, p. 110.

[42] Aamer Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2007.

[43] Ibid.*,* p. 11.

[44] Ibid.*,,* p. 38.

[45] Ibid.*,,* p. 11.

[46] Ibid.*,,* p. 11.

[47] Ibid., p. 41.

[48] Ibid., p. 48.

[49] Ibid., p. 39.

[50] Ibid., p. 11.

[51] Ibid.*,,* p. 13.

[52] Ibid., p. 10–11.

[53] Partha Chatterjee, 'Secularism and Tolerance' in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. pp. 345–79.

54 Ibid., p. 371.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., p. 372.

57 For an account of personal laws from a feminist perspective, see Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *The Scandal of the State: Women, Law and Citizenship in Postcolonial India*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2003.

58 Chatterjee, p. 378.

59 Aamer Mufti, 'Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1998, p. 120.

60 Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Secular State and the Limits of Dialogue' in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2007, pp. 157–76; Gyan Prakash, 'Secular Nationalism, Hindutva, and the Minority' in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, pp. 177–88.

61 Prakash, p. 188.

62 Pandey, p. 174.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., p. 175. Pandey draws on William Connolly's formulation of minoritising all communities so that no community has a claim to hegemony within the state in *Why I Am Not a Secularist*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999.

65 Pandey, p. 176.

66 Kumar, p. 37.

67 Ibid., p. 38.

68 Ibid., p. 39.

69 Ibid., p. 41.

70 Ibid., p. 41.

71 Nivedita Menon, 'Living with Secularism' in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2007, p. 128. 128. For a discussion of the violence of anti-conversion campaigns, see Goldie Osuri, 'Transnational Bio/Necropolitics: Hindutva and its Avatars (Australia/India)', *Somatechnics*, vol. 1, no.1, 2011, pp. 138–60.

72 Menon, p. 129.

73 Ibid.,

74 Kumar, p. 42.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid., Kumar cites Jacques Derrida, 'Avowing—The Impossible: 'Returns,' Repentance and Reconciliatio', keynote address of the conference "Irreconcilable Differences? Jacques Derrida and the Question of Religion', trans. Gil Anidjar, University of California, Santa Barbara, October 2003.

[77] Kumar, p. 43.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Brown, *Regulation of Aversion*.

[81] Menon, p. 138.

[82] Ibid., p. 139.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., p. 137.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., p. 138.

[88] Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony,* p. 29.

[89] Ibid., p. 30.

[90] Ibid., p. 21.

[91] Ibid., p. 261.

[92] Ibid., p. 174.