Shifting Paradigms of Culture: Rise of Secular Sensibility in Indian Literature

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Abstract—Burgeoning demand of 'Secularism' has shaken the pillars of cultural studies in the contemporary literature. The perplexity of the culturally estranged term 'secular' gives rise to temporal ideologies across the world. Hence, it is high time to scan this concept in the context of Indian lifestyle which is a blend of assimilated cultures woven in multiple religious fabrics. The infliction of such secular taste is depicted in literary productions like 'Satanic Verses' and 'An Area of Darkness'. The paper conceptually makes a cross-cultural analysis of anti-religious Indian literary texts, assessing its revitalization in current times. Further, this paper studies the increasing popularity of secular sensibility in the contemporary times. The mushrooming elements of secularism such as abstraction, spirituality, liberation, individualism give rise to a seemingly newer idea i.e. 'Plurality' making the literature highly hybrid. This approach has been used to study Indian modernity reflected in its literature. Seminal works of stalwarts are used to understand the consequence of this cultural synthesis. Conclusively, this theoretical research inspects the efficiency of secular culture, intertwined with internal coherence and throws light on the plurality of texts in Indian literature.

Keywords—Culture, Indian, literature, plurality, religion, secular, secularism.

I. INTRODUCTION

SECULARISM undercovers a massively pervasive projectile which is wrought into different cultures, thereby giving room for myriad interpretations. It can be rendered as a normative doctrine that builds up castle of temporal ideologies espousing anti-religious philosophies. But to see it with an anti-religious spectacle misleads us to a certain degree. This is because secularist regimes are interwoven into a trinity—religion, art, and philosophy. Hence, tolerance and acceptance are key aspects on which secularism lays its foundation. On the ground level, secular culture corresponds to state neutrality and thus, generates harmony, comity and an apparent uniformity.

When people in the inter-cultural domain endeavor to recognize each other as individuals transcending the social and cultural mores, they shed off variance and see themselves as a distinct part of the same plane [1]. Territories and boundaries split cultures to flourish in a self-compounded region but a secular stretch helps in blooming traditions collectively where high and low, elite and popular have freedom to prosper in entirety.

Indian lifestyle assimilates plentitude of belief systems in its whole capacity and gives a legal workstation to people of diversifying ethnicities in developing plurality. Indian

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literatures in contemporary times reflect the epoch of this converging society and drift the conventional strands of thought to a secular taste. Cultural studies are an interdisciplinary desk that has examined Indian sensibilities taking a secular form through establishment of power relations. Intersection of different religions along with internal coherence in the nation state is central to the study of secular studies. In the recent years, cultural artefacts of literature are products of secularism where authors grapple with the changing communities, working towards social liberation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Literary Compositions

What helps in mitigation of singular conviction is a tool that surpasses the confines of cultural hegemony. Indian culture bestows a placid stoicism on account of its secularism alone. Representation of different religions on the forefront of nation belt signifies the perfect calculus. Distinct belief systems, individual perceptions tied in manifold languages and customs manifest *differentiation.* The abstract notion of country, same ethnicity and unified fraternity shows no less of *integration.* This gives rise to a literature holding ethics of secularism and the one projecting plurality in its discourses.

Subjects like equality and nondiscrimination pertaining to secular studies or secularism in cultural studies have given vent to its increased popularity in literature [2]. Most modern writers tend to make a pertinent straightforward choice of being secular in their writings. It is either a personal selection of opting religion or it is completely absent otherwise. Secularism in India has significantly seen a transition as most readers and writers desire to base their work of interest on this theme itself. Literary secularism traverses across cultures and mystics to assemble the theme of secularization in novels and manuscripts. Literature of polar regions tune in with harmony due to reinforcement of such ethics. It is usually seen as a sample of dynamo creating pandemonium in the society with its principles against religious domination. But the craze and passion in people for togetherness has given vent to its acceptability and adaptability, despite being controversial.

In the argument by James Wood in *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief* [3], he inadvertently states that the modern literary text is the "enemy of superstition, the slayer of religions, the scrutineer of falsity," this places the modern compositions on an anarchical pedestal. But the emerging literatures of twentieth century glorify the secular current in a much-nuanced manner. Novelists like V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie along with others set an ideal

example as the true exponents of secularism and pluralism. Both novelists portray the mirror reflection of the society and the associated exercises as a reality check though their discourses. Quite evidently works of Naipaul [4] and Rushdie [5] appear like pen-photographs of the world they have captured in their minds. The characterization takes us to a whole new cosmos where classical wayward behavior is less enigmatically seen, instead, fellow shots in their novel potentially fits in the modern thought process i.e. depicting secular sense of mortality.

Another engagement is quite structural: the profound debate over secularism and religion inhabits the form of the narratives themselves. This is one technique that creates a passage for comparison for the readers to comprehend the right choice and obviously to take a personal stand whether what notion they support or inherently follows. In contrast, the scriptural influence on the form of the novel is much more direct and singularly heads at motto of single nation unfurling diversity in magnitude. This is aptly brought by Salman Rushdie in *Satanic Verses* [5]. The context might not be much Indian as the "dream" chapters emulate the episodic and visionary form of the Quran but it states the multifaceted phenomenon of secularism on crossing hands with global cultures.

Culturally fixed yet emancipated readers, conversant with the logic of religious fundamentalism, have the right to pin down or pull the thematic comparisons between secularism and religion. The accentuating hype seen in the past few decades to rattle down the staunch adhesion to principles of certain communities has made it easier for writers to flow into the masses and mindsets without much difficulty. This means that the dissenting minorities have also an equal participation in the nation state negotiations, legally, academically, culturally, politically, spiritually and precisely in all social spheres. It is through the assertion of their creative will that writers tend to put forth human relations before any divine provenance. In the country where languages, customs, beliefs and rituals intermittently change, take new shapes, acquire newer fumes and identify a separate India, it is not only the faith and creed that turns secular, but ideologies and mental constructs as well. It is from this source that the best literature rich in anti-religious corporeal parameters, knit in sacredness of religion is produced and celebrated.

Indian authors extending from dewy north to spectacular south, navigating from crystal east to earthly west add their own colors to the rendition of India. Thus, literatures visualize like a kaleidoscope of cultures not adhering to a single chain of tradition. Authors sometimes conceal their ethnicity to illuminate the corals of their work exclusively, keeping themselves aloof from the contexts and only concentrating on pretexts. Authors like V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie predominantly wrote about secularism which they witnessed in India. Even though they did not reside in the country for long intervals, they could successfully project the changing phases, both constructively and destructively, with ethno-linguistic, cultural indifferences.

B. Indian Model of Secularism

The commonalities in the "literary secularism" of the authors in this study give us a reminiscence of the relation between one's native life with the present narrative. Rapid exchange of ideas and interests which is characteristic of the modern era in literature in general, flows into one another like an electric flux. The term "secularism" has its own magnetic appeal due to its constitutional imprints. Countries like Iran and Pakistan remain petrified by the ramifications of enforcing secular hegemony in the Indian states. The Indian constitutions speak of its incorporeal embodiment of secularism. These inscriptions embark the uniqueness and distinctness which becomes the source of appeal for many writers. Besides protecting communal rights of the people, proponents of administration try to justify emerging voices of women yearning for feminist rights. It is not easy for a state rich in custom colors to ally with conservatives and reformists. For instance, petitions of the Muslims cannot be overlooked considering any change in the progression of politics. This holds true not only for the political structure but also encapsulates fields of Humanities including literature. Secularism is always retained as a central claim to the universal struggle for modernity.

As cultural studies is a discipline in Humanities and Social Sciences that extensively and exhaustively studies cultural anthropology, political economy, communication, philosophy, art, history, social theory, literary theory, sociology and derails the concepts of ideology, nationality, ethnicity, social class and gender, it is not appropriate to limit secularism that consumes almost all the pivotal elevation of this interdisciplinary staircase. Pluralism is a correlated phenomenon that intertwines with secular sensibilities of the state of India. More than 22 official languages, 60,000 dialects and 125,000 colloquial tools are being used for different representative strategies to glorify the power of plurality [6]. Max Weber [7] ascribed cultural modernity as the separation of substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous regions—Science, Morality and Art. Peter Berger [8] suggested five mushrooming elements of secularism, which then constitutes for plurality in secular literature.

1. Abstraction
2. Futurity
3. Secularization
4. Liberation
5. Individualism

The aforementioned factors are pioneering pillars which demystify the watertight compartments of culture in literature. It refers to the cultivation of human minds, human knowledge, belief, and behavior. Kroeber and Kluchohn [6] gave more than 150 possible definitions of cultural aspects of human beings comprising the content and intent of the culture. These correspond to the universalistic, hierarchical and pluralistic features based on the human understanding. We can create typologies, conventions, belief systems, symbols, state reasons, refute subjectively and are inclined towards

emancipation. Hierarchical parameters include central/ marginal, mainstream/subaltern, literate/illiterate, east/west, so on and so forth.

Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* [7] has enumerated three unifying principles of culture, namely culture as way of life, culture consisting norms and principles, and finally the written texts pertaining to the same. *Aurobindo* in *Foundations of Indian Culture* [8] vindicates *sadhana, vidya* and *kala* as three interrelated aspects of Indian culture. A culture can possibly be evaluated in three ways: cognitive, connotative, and normative. The cognitive parameter holds back the conversation between the human intelligence and different traditions. Subsequently, connotative denotes the typical behavior that drives one's perception in leading the life. Normative on the other hand, technically analyzes the imbalance between mainstream and subaltern culture. Concerning Indian culture, it does not swing in isolation, rather is overloaded with notions of secularism and pluralism.

On skim reading of novels like Naipaul's *Finding the Center* [9], there is picturization of secularism being peeled off and litters of ambiguity casted out. Ambivalence lies when protagonists in such depictions encounter experiences that contrast with the public semblance and images of the authors. Their innermost expressions seem unsuitable with their literary projections. Naipaul, due to his ethnicity as a Hindu Indian, struggles with this rotten identity to explicate his belongingness with the country. His narratives predominantly revolve around secularism as an advanced tool for improving the nation state on social, political and cultural grounds [10]. But to the utter amusement of the reader, the sociological and political formula do not fully describe the plethora of themes and ideations, therefore, secularity covers most of the psychoanalytical backdrop on his understanding of the cultures of India. Further, it is not just literature but also history overlapped with politics which plays an essential role in brewing the propaganda of secular studies.

III. METHODOLOGY

A cross-cultural analysis is used as an effective methodology to study impact of secular studies in Indian literature. A pluralistic perspective and dialectical dialogue between secularism and religiosity are deployed to understand the differences in a much-nuanced form. This type of comparative method provides local premiere to the studies in literature. It endorses statistical technique to generate ideas about cultural universals. Cross-cultural analysts formulate a proposition and seek help of databases to elicit major correlations or to see the establishment of relationships between two or more variables. This kind of approach was peculiarly propounded by cultural evolutionists, namely Edward Burnett Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan [13]. It was taken to advanced levels by George Murdock [14], compiling the heaps of ethnographic studies into one consolidated database. Methods that are specific to cross-cultural analysis are:

1. Specifications drawn from different cultures.

2. Entire ethnographic compilations can be fetched via logs of research forums, arranged according to regional locations.

3. Comparisons which may or may not agree with presets of initial hypothesis.

Cross-cultural analysis is a modus operandi that measures the relationship between society and culture in a statistical sense. Different societies tread on distinct evolutionary stages which may or may not be identical to other cultures; this urges the researcher to make a cross-cultural approach. In the current paper, India has been treated as the final desk for comparison of different cultures within its domain, thereby assisting in knowing the higher trends in secular potency and strength. The approach seemingly appears crude and ethnocentric, but it greatly offers platform for juxtaposition of different entities, cultures in this case. Some cultures attaining a superlative score and few with the determining minimums gives a sense of divergent existence of disparate cultures in one country *India.*

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Probable outcome that forms the spine of this research is the fact that Indian secularism is independent of its western counterparts. Rise in the secular model of literatures is not mere emulations but a plural synthesis of different cultures sought into Indian modernity. It influences the constitution of India with its very introduction on the preamble itself. Definitions of words, rather a notion runs into various connotations. 'Equal protection by the State to all religions' is a secular duty of the independent nation state towards its citizens. Figuratively, academicians see secularism through an angular spectrum where tolerance of temporal ideologies is placed central to the periphery of cultural studies. The paper seeps into literatures of the selected authors from the twentieth century to exemplify the modernist perception of secularism in India. Rushdie [5] and Naipaul [4] emphasize on the formlessness of religious customs and highlight on the creation of plurality of images. Even though it sounds quite impossible when considering semiotic religions of India, the new wave of secularity has doped liberal democracy and pluralism into the tribunals of Indian mindsets. They mourned all kinds of limitation, kinds of self-destructiveness within religions.

Secularism is objectively protecting all religion in maintaining the equilibrium in society. This suggests that one religion is not entertained any special powers on the expense of other. Indian culture on account of its vast diversity also meets some of the challenges, one being the construction of secular state without challenges or hurdles. Due to strong religious fervor in the cultural context, secular regimes and principles give allowance to protection of different belief systems, redefining the secular policy of the country. One of the interesting facets of this temporal sensibility across the regions lies in its operational value. French revolution spiked the circulation of Equality, Unity, and Fraternity. This has greatly influenced early Indian reformists, literati and the

common man to remove the society from religious fanaticism and move along the tracks of secularity.

Another significant result that can be drawn out of this theoretical research is that the uncompromising attitude of writers and journalists find its source back into traditions in guise of secular discourses. The link which binds the discrete cultural conceptions is *internal coherence*. Secularism is metaphorically, eddies flowing against the communalism and compatible with religious domination. Modern literature is based on this equality and amity; repulsion between identity cohesion and role confusion. The writers' corpus goes beyond his native and adapted frames as references, such as West Indianness, British Indianness etc. The advent of western modernity brought to the fore hitherto neglected and marginalized aspects of equality in Indian thought. It sharpens the whole idea of equality into equal proportions. The illegit divisions drawn on any basis pertaining caste, religion or differences in belief are replaced by stacks of French propounded notions—namely equality and fraternity. Indian secularism in a broader sense is the symbiosis of this diversity that already existed in the social arena and from the west, a schematic design of creating nation states despite variability. There is uniformity in participation of interreligious and intra-religious enterprises.

V. CONCLUSION

Correspondingly, at this pinnacle of the era, it is to be noted that literature does not flourish by itself by propelling the concept of secularism into its skin; it is the compositions and artifacts which roll into secular culture and produce defining bodies of textual interpretations. The context on the inside develops the text outside. In other words, mass of writings carved plainly with no cultural associations cannot be called a secularly drenched work. It has to have political, social and religious representations. In '*Literary Secularism: Religion and Modernity in Twentieth-Century* flourish author pins the fact that secular literature is by far not a politically knitted groundwork but a lot beyond what one might think of, as indicative of my research – a literary mélange.

Secular sensibilities in blooming cultures of India are rendered as a sort of absence, just like some sabbatical leave. Such finer feelings prevail when a suction is created through vacuuming of religion. This is misleading. We need to discern secularism as a presence; therefore there is a need of clearer understanding and augmentation. Whether we see secularism as coordinates of esoteric philosophical system or an approach towards constitutional and religious arrangement, it is something that needs in depth scrutiny and cognitive contemplation. We cannot really corner it as a subject of utmost controversy as it includes integral kernels of religion. Segments of secularism not merely subside attendant horrors of stereotypical thinking by bringing rationale into limelight but serve as a primer for the literary critics emphasizing over transcendental aspects post renunciation of religion. It is informed by its ubiquitous acceptance which evidently can be seen in the articulation of contemporary writers, spokesmen

and historicists. It demands for attention in the epoch. Moreover, profusion of neutral and diplomatic theories does not show that working within a sharp binary of secularism versus religion is unproblematic. Not all days are roses and sunshine; there are times when it is better for civilians to have polar choices to strengthen the secular theories. This may be objectionable, but secularism belongs to all the polarities. Its function is to eradicate radical powers not to homogenize the diversity.

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