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REQUIEM TO ENLIGHTENMENT? GADAMER AND HABERMAS ON TRADITION, RELIGION, SECULARISM AND POST-SECULARISM

Anil Kumar Vaddiraju∗

Abstract

In the context of the resurgence of religion as a major phenomenon in politics across the contemporary world, this paper examines the different theoretical lenses from which this phenomenon can be explored. In this paper, we use the terms religion and tradition interchangeably, as most traditions in the developing countries are religious traditions. Currently, there is the recrudescence of Hindu nationalism in India, radical Islam in West Asia and movements of radical Christianity across the Western hemisphere. In such contexts, this paper examines how three political theories earlier viewed the phenomenon of religion. These are: Modernization; Marxism and Hermeneutics. We examine Jurgen Habermas' attempts at dealing with the phenomenon in the light of the above three theories.

Introduction

Contemporarily, there is a global resurgence of religion. Religion, which according to modern social and political theory is only a primordial phenomenon, which is supposed to wane away with the onset of rationalisation and modernity, is witnessing a comeback, as if with a vengeance. The current forms of resurgence of religion are not only a soft comeback of the same but are militant and are often combined with violence. Traditionally, social and political theories, both in their Modernisation and critical theory forms, have postulated that with the rise of the modern economy, secular society and the spread of liberal democracy, religion would get diluted over time and eventually get replaced with secular values, rational world views, and modern, and tolerant ways of living. However, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the discrediting of Marxian theory that followed, and the attacks of the 9/11 on the United States, a new era of awakening among social and political theorists towards the growing importance of religion in the social and political world has begun. This is a global phenomenon. It is not only that some religions have come to play a prominent role in some parts of the world; globally, almost all the religions are playing a role increasingly in politics in all the nations, for example neo-Nazis in Germany, neo-fascists in Italy, white supremacists and the Klu-Klux Klan in the United States of America and radical Islam across the world. These have led to right wing authoritarian regimes in all these nations and across the world. While it may be radical Islam in one continent, it is radical Christianity in another. And simultaneously, we are also witnessing the emergence of Hindu nationalism in India. The nature of this politics is generally conservative, combined with neo-liberal capitalism, ultra-nationalist ideologies and xenophobia.

The above is the context in which this study is conducted. This paper holds that it is interesting to see how critical social and political theory and the leading exponents of the same respond to the challenges posed by this phenomenon. Among the variety of critical socio-political theories available, we choose the Frankfurt School to see how it responded to the rising phenomenon of religion across the

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world. We are interested in its theoretical response to the challenges posed by the phenomenon. And among the theorists of the Frankfurt School, we are focusing on the theory of one particular social theorist, Jurgen Habermas.

Among all the traditions of critical social theory, the Frankfurt School is known to have shown more openness towards the study not only of the economic bases of social and political phenomena, but also their political, juridical, cultural and ideational superstructures. The Frankfurt School, by now in its long history, has not treated the latter phenomenon merely as a reflection of the former. These so-called superstructures have been the central focus of the research at the school by not treating them as mere epiphenomena. Firmly rooted in the tradition of Continental philosophy (Critchley, 2001), the school's theorists draw inspiration from the entire European tradition of social and political theory (Held:1980; Kolakowski:1978).

First, Frankfurt School treats religion as more than an 'ideology'. Second, it does not take the claims of orthodox Marxism as 'science' seriously. Frankfurt School views the entire effort of Marx more as a *critique* rather than as a positivist science.

Jurgen Habermas is one of the foremost critical thinkers of the 20th and 21st centuries. His contribution to critical theory is immense and spans a wide range of issues. His major contributions have been to the theory of public sphere, communicative action and deliberative democracy. Habermas has early-on engaged with a critique of tradition and hermeneutics when he criticised Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of philosophical hermeneutics as elaborated in Gadamer's magnum opus*, Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 1975, 1989). In between, he has focused on different other aspects of social theory. In the recent period, that is, in the wake of 9/11 and wars against terror etc. and in the context of the rise of the right-wing religious-nationalist politics across the world, Habermas has started devoting his attention to religion and its role in public sphere. In this context, he has debated on the nature of these politics with prominent philosophers of our time such as Charles Taylor. Though Habermas is more known for his work on communicative action and theorisation of public sphere, we however, in this paper, deal with Habermas' critique of ideology as reflected in two aspects: 1) Habermas' critique of Hans-Georg Gadamer and tradition; 2) Habermas' recent critique of, and engagement with, religion. Habermas has criticised Gadamer early in his writings in the 1970s and he started his engagement with religion since the influx of migrants to Europe and particularly since 9/11.

In the following section, to begin with, we deal with the treatment of religion by Modernization theory; the next section is about how Marxism deals with the question of religion. Though the two theories fundamentally differ in terms of premises and outcomes, they surprisingly share similar attitudes/approaches toward religion as fundamentally a transient phenomenon in the development of societies.

The following sections deal with Gadamer and Habermas. The point of combining this addressing of Modernisation theory, Marxism, hermeneutics and critique of hermeneutics, is that these all address religion and tradition in different ways. First, considering them at one place together gives an idea as to how religion and tradition are looked at from different vantage points. Second, and particularly, philosophical hermeneutics looks at 'tradition' in a particular way and promises ways out of the impasses of discord in different views of tradition. Finally, Habermas is considered because first he

critiqued the Gadamerian notion of tradition, but lately, he addressed himself to religion in a very positive sense. This comes as a surprise to us. A critical theorist, who holds that Enlightenment modernity is still an unfinished project, is now advancing a theory of transcending the secularist approach to religion and is advancing a notion of post-secularism. This is indeed why we need to look at the different debates involved in Modernization theory, hermeneutics and the antinomies of Jurgen Habermas. In all this, the attempt is to glean any message that can alleviate the rampant discord on grounds of religion that we held is so prominent a feature of our times. The rising discord across the world is both owing rising religion and religious nationalism. Nationalism in the Third World is not a new phenomenon, rising religious nationalism, is.

Modernisation Theory and Religion

Modernisation theory is an evolutionary theory. The Modernisation theory assumes that societies change on an evolutionary scale from traditional to modern societies, and further, Modernization is also considered as a form of Westernisation. The same historical processes of secularisation, rationalisation, societal differentiation, and development of capitalist economy that have taken place in the West are assumed to take place in the developing countries. The developing countries are called traditional societies and the progress is from tradition to modernity; from religious to secular societies; from backward to advanced; pre-modern to modern; and non-Western types to Western types of societies. In this model, tradition is something which is a backward-looking *weltanschauung* that renders societies static.

And it is held that 'tradition' is not a monolith. Within tradition, social anthropologists of India inform us that again there are 'high traditions' and 'little traditions' (Edward Shils, 1981). Both of these are supposedly hierarchically arranged. Again, there are traditions according to caste and sect; also, according to sub-caste and sub-sect.

Religion is part of that tradition whose importance is supposed to get reduced with the process of secularisation. This may happen in a variety of ways. The role of religion in the development of modernity, capitalist modernity, is indeed complex (Weber, 1965; Marx, 1970).

Max Weber elaborated the idea that the Protestant ethic indeed helped develop capitalism in Western Europe. Weber's thesis was that in societies where such ethic does (or did) not obtain, the development of capitalism may not happen. Weber particularly singled out Asian societies for their stasis and static nature of their religious world views; that hinder the development of modern, secular, capitalist values. According to Weber, the concept of secularisation is part of the larger process of rationalisation that occurs with the development of modernity and capitalism. The argument seems somewhat circular; first, capitalism developed in the West because of the Protestant ethic and the entailing religious values. However, the same process of development of modern capitalism leads to increasing rationalisation and dilution of religious values. According to Weber, the Protestant ethic is one of the major conditions for the development of capitalism but not the only one (Weber, 1965). The processes of rationalisation and secularisation which accompany the development of capitalism are larger processes, wherein there entail the processes of increasing societal differentiation, the growth of industrialisation and urbanisation. Rationalisation of world views and the dilution of magical religious

world views,– based essentially on mythological world views, whose dilution leads to the 'disenchantment of the world'–are processes that take place gradually owing to the development of other historical processes, such as the growth of commerce, industry and urbanisation. According to this view, the rural, agrarian societies are likely to be largely traditional and religious, whereas urban, industrial societies are likely to be less religious and more secular. This evolutionary view of societies is at the core of Modernisation theory.

According to the above view, social institutions such as caste or tribe are destined to wither away or get radically modified or transformed; and the individual and social identities based on such social institutions are likely to be become modern universalist identities. This is both at the societal scale and at the individual level. This takes place because of the waning away of the world views that rationalise and provide justifications to such world views or *Weltanschauungen*. This, however, takes place gradually over a long span of historical time.

It would be incorrect to assume that Modernization is a simple unilinear theory. Some theorists of the Modernization process hold that reversals of the Modernization process are possible. And not only a smooth transition to Western type of society and democracy, social unrest and political conflict is possible owing to the processes of Modernization (Smelser:1966).

However, all said, Modernization theory as it was in the 1950s and 1960s saw the process of Modernization as a 'conceptual cousin' of economic growth. The economic growth that was initiated by the ex-colonial countries was seen as an independent variable, whereas the process of Modernization a dependent variable. Thus 'Modernization' theory, for all its reasons, had given primacy to economic growth and development. Here too, though, religion was not seen as an epiphenomenon, but was surely seen as a phenomenon that alters, in a process of fading away, in myriad ways, owing to the rapid progress of economic growth. Thus, in a very interesting but quite in a different manner, Modernisation theory shares the feature of according primacy to the economic factors along with Marxian theory.

The latest in the thought of Modernisation theorists is the theory of 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington:1996) which explicitly recognises that 'civilizations' other than that of West need not aspire to Modernisation and Westernisation as was postulated in the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, the hypothesis forwarded by Huntington is that in the post-Cold War period, there is likely to be more and more identity politics internal to civilisations and cultural clashes between civilizations. That identity and culture become organising principles of politics of nations and world politics (In all it is a philosophically relativist world).

Marxian Critique of Religion

Marxism is a post-Enlightenment theory. By the time Marx wrote and Marxian theory developed the critique of religion as a false set of ideas, it was already established in Western European culture. At any rate among the critics of that society (Hobsbawm, 1962, 1975). Certainly so, in the critical quarters and emerging socio-political movements. The Enlightenment was an intellectual, philosophical, social and political movement in Europe that began with and was a product of the scientific advancements around 1680 and after great intellectual and social ferment was finally overtaken by the 1789 French

Revolution. Enlightenment, which took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, trenchantly critiqued Christianity as a religion. One may recall that this critique of religion by Enlightenment and its *Philosophes* took place already in the backdrop of the long processes of Reformation and the Protestant critique of Roman Catholic Christianity. Admittedly, Enlightenment did not develop all at once. It developed historically (Robertson, 2015). Etymologically speaking, 'Protestant' religion began as a protest. Protest against the corruption in the organized, established church. The *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment, or *lumieres,* carried it forward against all religion, Voltaire being the most well-known philosopher and writer among them; the others being Diderot and D'Alembert and their associates. In political theory, most foundations for liberal political thought were laid in this period with a series of political thinkers, particularly of the social contractarian tradition, contributing to the thought of the period. These include Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and J.J. Rousseau, along with others like David Hume, Montesquieu and Edmund Burke. Enlightenment had its roots in German philosophy, as *Aufklärung,* its most prominent philosopher being Immanuel Kant who envisaged the slogan *sapere aude* (Dare to know) (And is also known for his writing *What is Enlightenment?*). Enlightenment privileged reason in both public and moral life. It challenged religion and attempted to know its limits. It also challenged superstitions and religious prejudices. It challenged the practices of Roman Catholic priests.

Two other aspects of the Enlightenment are worth noting. One, the emphasis on tolerance: particularly religious tolerance as it was very important to maintain peaceful relations between different religious communities. Second, most remarkably, the commitment for human betterment and universal happiness in *this world* of here and now; thus, enlightenment not only propagated a critique of religion, superstitions, bigotry and prejudices, it also had a positive agenda of propagating enduring mutual tolerance between different religious communities and that of improving the everyday living conditions of ordinary people in a broad sense.

The scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th Century Europe paved the way for the Enlightenment. The *'Age of Reason'* had many predecessors in the form of achievements in the natural sciences. These achievements had all the potentiality for both eradicating blind superstitions as well as bettering the conditions of the larger humanity. The Enlightenment was not only limited to France and Germany. The Scottish Enlightenment and its pioneer Adam Smith led to the birth of political economy in which lie the origins of today's discipline of "Economics". The focus of Scottish Enlightenment was on developing a science of political economy that would endeavour to better the living conditions of men in this world. The birth of political economy in turn proved revolutionary for human history and was concomitant with the nascent capitalism in Britain and in nineteenth Century when capitalism reached its most inhuman industrial form propelled by the industrial revolution, that led Karl Marx to critique the so-called science of political economy and capitalism.

The question of tolerance was a hard learned lesson from the preceding European history of religious wars, hatred and strife. Thus, what Enlightenment preached did not happen all at once, nor was it merely a theoretical artefact. The lessons learnt from natural sciences, stemming from the progress of discoveries and inventions, and the lessons learnt out of bloody and prolonged religious strife and the terrible human cost that involved, led to the emphasis of Enlightenment on both tolerance

and the concern, and new found possibility, of bettering the material condition of the human lot. We use the word 'human lot' because though the Enlightenment was an intellectual, political and social movement that occurred in Europe, it was universal in its thought and potential applications.

We should, therefore, understand the fact that Marx's ideas are, with all their originality, products of a post- Enlightenment intellectual and socio-political culture which helps to contextualise Marx's ideas towards religion.

Marx sees religion as an illusion. As something that holds men back from realizing their true humanity. In Marx's words, 'Religion is an illusory sun around which man moves so long as he does not move around himself'. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed--of a helpless human. A helplessness against the circumstances over which he/she has no control. And in such circumstances, it also serves the purposes of an assuaging opiate. It keeps people from seeing their true position in social structure; and their purposes in society, and in life clearly. Religion prevents people from *seeing through* their circumstances. To put it in Marx's words:

> 'Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic
> in popular form, its spiritualistic *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its
> solemn complement, its universal source of consolation and justification. It is the
> *fantastic realisation* of the human essence because the *human essence* has no true
> reality. The struggle against the religion is therefore indirectly a fight against the
> *world* of which religion is the spiritual aroma'. (Marx, 1957, 1975, 38-39)

However, according to Marx, under circumstances of capitalism, religion serving the function of what it does, is also necessary. It forms the inescapable superstructure of class societies in general and capitalism in particular. Any amount of criticism of religion *qua* religion cannot abolish it, unless the circumstances that give rise to it are abolished. Thus, in order to critique religion, one should begin from the *conditions* that lead to it. Only by abolishing the alienating and exploitative conditions of class society can one abolish its superstructure of religion. Without abolishing the classes and class divided society, there cannot be an abolition of its superstructure (Marx and Engels:1957, 1975, Callinicos:1983). Thus, in a post-revolutionary, classless, communist society, there will not be any religion; nor will there be any need for it.

This in a very brief nutshell is Marx's point on religion. Marx's critique is, of course, directed *prima facie* against Christianity. However, it is also directed at all the other-worldly religions. Moreover, it is not simple atheism and rationalism. Following Marx's writings, we can clearly hold that Marxism sees religion as an ideology; though it should be said that the term ideology is broader and more encompassing than religion in Marxian lexicon (Parekh:1982, 2015). Ideology, according to Marxian theory, is counter posed to science: the science of Marxism. And ideology has a specific function in society. The function is that of obfuscating the reality: In presenting reality in a topsy-turvy fashion. Religion according to this theory is only one form of ideology. How dominant is religion as a form of ideology depends on the nature and stage of the development attained by a society.

Thus, it is a radical, post-Enlightenment stance that Marx takes on religion. According to Marx, this is a universal theory; because, capitalism is universal. Capitalist society that originated in Europe

has transformed all the rest of the world, including the 'third world', in its image. Therefore, the theory that applies to Europe applies to all other societies organised on the lines of capitalist class structures.

Gadamer and Tradition

Arguably, hermeneutics owes its origins to Christian theology and philology. It is, as we understand it, an offspring of Reformation. We believe that despite its umbilical cord with Christianity and religion, hermeneutics is helpful in understanding many outstanding issues of traditions, and religions and the quintessential question of mutual understanding, toleration and dialogue between them. And, therefore, in the following section, we consider the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) belongs to the tradition of social theory known as hermeneutics. This tradition is also known as an interpretive tradition of social theory. Hermeneutic tradition deals with understanding and interpreting texts (Anderson, Hughes and Sherrock: 1986, Mahajan: 1992, 2011, Stevenson: 2000, Zimmerman: 2015). This tradition started with the Protestant reformation, wherein the interpretation of the Bible, for individuals unto and by themselves, without the authority of church and priests, became a major concern. Thus, the tradition has its roots in the Protestant religious tradition of interpreting the Bible. The major concern here was to correctly interpret the Bible so as not to misunderstand the word of God. However, this process of correct interpretation of the Bible, which was a major *theological* concern, gradually over historical time became a concern of correctly interpreting, without any misunderstanding, all texts, including *secular* texts. Thus, the key word for this tradition of social theory is, 'understanding'. According to the theory, 'understanding' is the essential prerequisite for interpretation. Correct *understanding* of texts leads to correct *interpretation* of texts without any misunderstanding of them. Thus, though the tradition of hermeneutics began as a process of interpreting theological texts, now it gradually developed as a method of understanding and interpreting secular texts as well, and is widely used to understand any text: juridical documents, utterances, dialogues, historical documents; discourses etc. What originally began as a method overtime became first a methodology, and then in the hands of Gadamer, an existential and ontological philosophy.

Hermeneutics transforms from being a theory of knowing to a theory of being. This takes place via the Heideggerian theory of *Dasein* or being-in-the-world (Inwood, 2019). Hermeneutics, thus, is not just a method or an epistemology, but rather a way of being itself. It is ontological and not just epistemological. Hermeneutics from here on becomes not just a way of knowing but a way of being itself. Heidegger achieves this transformation by applying phenomenology to hermeneutics, and therefore Heidegger's theory is known as phenomenological hermeneutics. Hermeneutics that began as a theological and philological method of explication, as a method of understanding, becomes thus ontology: a way of being itself; inseparable from the very human existence. And therefore, is a fundamental way of existence in the world. And thus, is also a universal aspect of human existence.

This transformation of hermeneutics from an epistemology to ontology is fundamental to understand Gadamer's philosophy. Without the development of phenomenological hermeneutics by Heidegger, much of Gadamer's theorisation would not have been possible. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is premised on the Heideggerian transformation of hermeneutics from an epistemological enterprise to ontological understanding.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics can be understood in terms of the following essential concepts: historicality of being; temporality of being; pre-judgements or pre-judices (Heideggerian 'fore-havings'); linguisticality of being; tradition; and fusion of horizons. We consider each of them below.

First, according to Gadamer, all understanding of human beings is historical as they are inevitably situated in history; they receive the social, cultural, political and all other conditions handed down to them. Besides, when they understand these conditions, they bring in their subjectivity. And according to Gadamer, this subjectivity is historical. That is, there is no 'objective' Archimedean point of understanding either texts or given conditions. The understanding subject is herself part of history and carries the historical consciousness. Besides this being part of history, or historicality, bequeaths the understanding person with certain pre-judgements or pre-understandings or pre-judices that the historicality has handed down to them. Again, there is no objective, Archimedean point of understanding either of texts or life. In all understanding, a person thus begins with certain pre-understandings; pre-judgements; presuppositions or what Gadamer calls, "pre-judices". Therefore, when we approach a cultural object, or social condition, or social circumstance, we are 'always already' conditioned. This pre-conditioning of the understanding over time, of the being is called by Gadamer, 'effective history;' that is, history as is carried by the subject of understanding within herself as part of the stream of historicity. We are all not only part of history; we carry 'effective history'. And our interpretations of the world therefore are continuous with the past interpretations; in that sense they are continuous interpretations with varying emphasis; this 'continuity of interpretations' is what Gadamer calls 'tradition'; in which every interpreter is herself a part.

'Tradition' in Gadamer's notion *does not* imply only rituals or ritual incantations, though it might or might not include them. In Gadamer's sense we are all—even resolute rationalists— part of our respective handed down 'traditions' which form our horizons. Or, what is the same, these form the horizons of our inherited worlds. Therefore, even in an attempt to break with them, we are defining ourselves '*vis-à-vis*' those traditions. In the first place, we come to be, and come to understand the world around us, and the circumstances around us as ontologically given to us. Nobody begins without a subjectivity of, or the understanding of the world, as a *tabula rasa*. The being is ontologically—'always already'— carries prejudgements and pre-given interpretations of the world. Therefore, the being or *Dasein* is 'being in the world'. Its 'thrown- ness' (Inwood: 2019) means that it can choose radically different circumstances, but can choose only from the circumstance that is pre-given or priorly conditioned (Recall Marx's sentence: 'Men make their own their own history; but do not make it just as they please'). Finally, the interpreter of the world, texts, circumstances, etc is herself part of the 'tradition' of interpretations and therefore carries the 'effective history'. Thus, interpretation is ontological. And 'understanding' is not something epistemological, a way of knowing, from an objective effort, without a background standpoint; rather it is the mode of being of the *Dasein*, or 'being-in-the-world'.

And being expresses itself, its mode of being in the world, in language; therefore, there is an inescapable linguisticality of being. According to Gadamer, existence, or being, in order to be understood at all, is only in and through language. Finally, being-in-the-world comes to understand

itself only when it encounters the other being, in language; thus, the human existence is dialogical or *dialectical.*

To put it differently, we come to understand our traditions, pre-judices and pre-judgements, of which we are unconscious, clearly only when we come to face a cultural social world which is ordered and formed in terms of different traditions, pre-judices and pre-judgements. Then, what takes place is a better understanding of ourselves (we come to 'realize' or 'understand' that we carry so and so pre-judgements), our own traditions and pre-judgements and pre-judices in the light of the others. This is what Gadamer calls fusion of horizons. In describing the above, we have used only a spatial metaphor of other cultures, but it can even be a culture from another time, gone by. Thus, what takes place is a meeting of our own ontological horizon with that of the other. This is what Gadamer calls, 'fusion of horizons'. This can happen across space or time; and across different cultures and between different individuals. What results is a dialogue and a new tradition; or addition to the continuing tradition.

Because *Dasein* is universal, and its being-in-the world is universal, Gadamer holds that philosophical hermeneutics is universal. *Universality of hermeneutics* means that all human beings, irrespective of their spatial or temporal locations, share these features. Understanding is both ontological and universal. And therefore, the fusion of horizons that we mentioned above is possible. This has two implications: it runs against relativistic understanding of the human condition and meanings embedded in human cultures. Secondly, because the hermeneutic condition is universal and ontological, a dialogue between two different cultures, however, different—inasmuch as they are human—is possible.

The dialogical dimension is significant. This can lead to the dialogue *with* cultures that are different; *between* cultures that embody different pre-judgements and pre-judices in their cultural traditions. Dialectical hermeneutics, thus, opens up possibilities of a political theory of inter-cultural dialogue and avoiding of inter-cultural conflict. Thus, it is the same as the inter-subjectivity, or dialogue, between two individuals of different cultural traditions attempting to arrive at mutual understanding.

However, Gadamer, following the concept of *Dasein* and 'thrown-ness' of the *Dasein*, holds the primacy of traditions, constituted by their pre-judices and prejudgments. We can dialogue with other traditions only standing in the tradition from where we come forth. Thus 'tradition' is inescapable. Moreover, being a continuous repository of interpretations constituting the 'effective history' the tradition in which we stand, is also authoritative; the tradition is above and beyond us.

Habermas's Criticism of Gadamer

Jurgen Habermas, while influenced by the achievement of Gadamer in the field of philosophical hermeneutics, criticises precisely this concept of 'tradition' in Gadamer. In holding tradition to be inescapable and authoritative, Gadamer is foreclosing the possibilities of emancipation from the domination of tradition and the past interpretations of modes of life, thereby making a case for conservatism (Warnke: 1987, Stevenson: 2000). The tradition may contain 'pre-judgements' and 'pre-judices' that may no more be in need of continuation, or may be in need of active break from them. Gadamer's insistence of authority of tradition over the present, in that case, is not tenable, even if we cannot make a new beginning from a historical *tabula rasa*.

Gadamer's emphasis on tradition and its authoritativeness goes against the emancipatory interest. Thus, it goes against the interest of critical reasoning. Habermas, at any rate at this stage of his writing, subscribed to the Enlightenment notion of emancipation and critique of the dominance of ideologies that cannot be justified in terms of the Enlightenment concept of reason (Mendelson:1979). Therefore for Habermas, Gadamer's concept of 'tradition' is open to criticism as an ideology. However, later Habermas sees these questions differently even while holding that Enlightenment modernity is still an unfinished project.

Habermas and Religion

Habermas is today one of the most influential thinkers about what he called the post-secular condition of humanity. Three circumstances have forced him to think or rethink the secularisations thesis. These are: the questions of religion and democracy in the European Union; the influx of immigrants into the European Union and Germany that have brought with them diverse religions that are not of European origin, and the attacks of the 9/11 on the United States. These have made Habermas consider the questions of religion in public sphere seriously. The paragraph provided below makes clear the attitude that Habermas takes toward religion.

> 'Even today, religious traditions perform the function of articulating awareness of what is lacking or absent. They keep alive sensitivity to failure and suffering. They rescue from oblivion the dimensions of our social and personal relations in which advances in cultural and social rationalization have caused utter devastation. Who is to say that they do not contain encoded semantic potentialities that could provide inspiration if only their message were translated into rational discourse and their profane truth contents were set free' (Habermas in Walsh, 2012:43-44)

Habermas, who calls himself 'religiously unmusical', has put forward the concept of 'post-secular'. Habermas is the only critical thinker who has shown exceptional openness to understand and appreciate the importance of religion to human life. In his later career, Habermas has engaged in debates and discussions with Christian Catholic theologians such as Joseph Ratzinger, who is now Pope Benedict XVI. Obviously, Habermas does not reject religion as mere ideology. For example, consider the statement below by Habermas:

> 'We find in sacred scriptures and religious traditions intuitions about error and redemption, about the salvific exodus from life that is experienced as empty of salvations; these have been elaborated as in a subtle manner over the course of millennia and have been kept alive through a process of interpretation. This is why something can remain alive in the communal life of religious fellowships..... something that has been lost elsewhere and that cannot be restored by professional knowledge of experts alone' (Habermas in Walsh, 2012: 46-47).

In this mode of thinking, religion is not dismissed *tout court*. Religion is seen no more as an ideology or opiate, as in Marx's terms. It is a meaning giving font of wisdom; something that complements the loss of meaning in the modern life. While it is not a substitute to modernity, it

completes modernity with what is lacking in it; not only in private life but also in public life and public sphere. Habermas calls this 'post metaphysical thinking on religion'. And according to him these are ideas '*that are still in flux'.* Habermas clarifies the definition of 'post secular' in the following terms:

> 'I use the expression "postsecular" as a sociological description of a shift in consciousness in largely secularized or "unchurched" societies that by now have come to terms with the continued existence of religious communities, and with the existence of religious voices both in the national public sphere and on the global political stage'. (Habermas, 2013)

And, he says:

> It is precisely the historical simultaneity of the forms of secular thought and of religious consciousness, which have now diverged into polar opposites, that leads me to explore the shared genealogy of post metaphysical thinking and the major world religions. For the self-referential question about how we as human beings should understand ourselves continues to set philosophy apart from the objectifying sciences' (Habermas, 2013).

Habermas's preoccupation is largely with Christianity and Western society and its grappling with the emerging world situation and the role of religion in it. Habermas does not engage prominently with eastern religions. His thought regarding post-secular condition is important to the extent that it addresses the human condition of secular, modern existence and the inadequacies that are inherent to it.

Much of Habermas's theory of religion is in the process of development. For example, a weighty volume devoted to the discussion of 'Habermas and Religion' (Calhoun, Mendieta and VanAntwerpen, 2013) largely deals only with Christian religion and is largely written by Western authors. The non-Western debates are conspicuous by their absence from the volume.

Post-Secularism, Liberalism and Their Discontents

We have seen in the forgoing that Habermas proposes a concept of post-secularism in the context of rising religious consciousness and strife in the contemporary world. In the following, we attempt to see in what way the concept of post-secularism is different from the earlier liberal concept of right to religion and faith. While the concept of right to religion and practice of faith under a liberal constitution has been a historically evolved right, the concept of post-secularism evolved out of the failure of the secularization process across the world. Thus, the concept of post-secularism has close affinities with the earlier liberal concept of right to religion, and only affirms that right. According to Habermas, one need not subscribe to a radical enlightenment disavowal of religion altogether, in order to practice progressive politics. However, the discontents with the concept of the earlier right to religion, and later concept of post-secularism, emanate from the fact that the practice of these rights and concepts in the real world is neither simple nor unproblematic. This chapter argues that in a world where religious strife is so predominant a reality, we argue that what matters are the degrees of secularism enforced by the states in order to manage and alleviate religious/communal/ sectarian strife. Thus, along with right to

religion, what is required is a detached secularism of the state and privatization of traditions, religious and otherwise, in stronger sense of the word.

It may be true that the meta-theories such as Marxism and Modernization have prognosticated the disappearance of religion. However, when answering the question as to why this did not or does not happen, we need to consider the fact of the liberal theory and liberal philosophy of granting individual and group rights to practice faith and religion. Polities that are organized in terms of the principles of liberal theory grant this as a matter of principle. Here, the question of rationality or irrationality of faith or religion or tradition is immaterial. Inasmuch as it is granted as a right, citizens have all the freedom to practice (and sometimes propagate) religion, however rational or irrational the practice of such religion is.

While discussing the phenomenon of resurgence of religion/tradition, we cannot overlook liberal philosophy and its concept of right to religion. Liberal constitutions across the world enable right to faith and right to religion. The same is included in the Indian constitution. This is an historically evolved right. This right evolved particularly after the Nazi denial of right to religion to the Jewish community and the consequent Holocaust. Thus, in societies organized under liberal constitutions, citizens have religious freedom to practice and to propagate any faith that they believe in to be true. Often, this may result in religious conflict and therefore the role of the state vis-à-vis religion becomes significant in the above-said contexts.

The crucial question concerning religion in liberal societies is whether what is practiced is religion in the public or private realm. Communist states do not allow religion even in the private sphere. Whereas, allowing right to faith and religion, liberal societies permit the practice of religion both in the public as well as private sphere. To what extent the practice of religion is allowed in the public sphere depends on the lines drawn by the state on the practice of religion and religious traditions. Indeed, today's religious nationalism and populist authoritarianism has the possibility of trumping the traditions of constitutionalism. Public/ private dichotomy is central to liberal theory inasmuch as liberal theory grants for citizens right to privacy and a private sphere to which the access is legally denied to the state. A related question is the concept of secularism adopted by the liberal state in question. Some states do not permit the practice of religion at all in the public sphere, defining the public sphere as completely secular or non-religious; for example, the French concept of secularism does not allow practice of religion in the public sphere. Whereas, some other states such as India and the United States, with broader principles of secularism, allow the practice of religion both in the public as well as in the private sphere.

Though religion has always existed and been practiced in India, it is through constitutional sanction that religious freedom thrives in India today. Religious freedom is one of the cornerstones of the Indian constitution. However, liberal constitutions such as that of India, for example, have the dual task of maintaining religious liberty and at the same time liberal, secular principles of religious tolerance. The particular nature of secularism thus becomes very important in this context. Two foundational notions of secularism for the state in India at the time of the founding of the post-colonial state have been that of 'equality of all religions before the state' and 'indifference of the state towards religion'. However, what the Indian state adopted was the former principle of secularism of equality of

all religions before the state. Thus, the post-colonial Indian state has justified the pre-existing diversity of religions in India. It may be recalled that the Indian state was itself born out of religious strife and the massacres of partition, but that did not prevent the Indian constitution makers from making the Indian state a liberal and the Indian secularism a pluri-religious concept. That multiple religious practices exist in India is a testimony to this fact of religious freedom granted through the Indian constitution.

The problems with the above-mentioned notion of treating all religions equally under the constitution arise when the religious communities themselves are placed unequally in terms of demography and political significance. Thus, when religious communities are divided on the lines of majority and minority communities, the question of tolerance of each other and particularly tolerance of minority communities by the majority community becomes extremely significant. Liberal theory from John Locke onwards does discuss religious toleration as a major virtue in a democracy. Democracy in principle and in practice means the exercise of majority rule and possession of minority rights. Thus, since majority communities come to power by dint of their demographic predominance, they also carry the burden of maintaining religious tolerance and the rights of religious minorities. All the discontents of liberal theory begin when this does not take place. Thus the religious communal politics in India (broadly since the mid-80s and in particular ascendancy since the 1992demolition of Babri Masjid/Ram Temple in Uttar Pradesh), are a red herring to any citizen who subscribes to liberal political philosophy.

The above digression into the liberal concept of right to religion is important in the context of post-secularism proposed by Jurgen Habermas. Our question regarding the concept of post-secularism is rather simple: in what ways is it different from the earlier liberal concept of religion and right to practice religion under the overall rubric of a liberal state? Once we accept the liberal right to religion, however, the claim that Habermas makes for methodological atheism falls apart. The liberal right to religion and the concept of religion as an obfuscatory set of ideas do not go together. Because under the liberal concept of constitutionally guaranteed right to practice and propagate religion, there will not be any further hinderances or limits to religion and religious practice. It becomes a question merely of upholding law and order. Or, to state the matter differently, liberalism comes with the espousal of Mill's 'Harm Principle'. As long as the practice of a religion by person X does not harm person Y and vice-versa; both can practice their respective religions in absolute freedom. No meta-theoretical justifications or rejections are therefore any more relevant. There is a distinct possibility that the concept of post-secularism can land us in such a quagmire.

However, in the light of the failure of secularization of the developing world, and in the light of the emergence of multiple fundamentalisms in the contemporary world, the Enlightenment project and its concomitant principles of secularism and tolerance still make great sense. The concept of post-secularism in fact dilutes the reasonableness of the Enlightenment project and to that extent may not really be of help in a world affected by religious or quasi-religious strife.

Post-Secular Theory and Pre-Secular Societies

In as much as the Enlightenment project of reason, tolerance and human betterment are incomplete in most of the non-European developing countries, they remain pre-secular. The pre-secular loyalties and identities of religion, caste, tribe and race remain quite prominent in the developing countries. In fact, these identities and loyalties often hinder the progress of reason, tolerance and human betterment in developing countries. Inasmuch as this is the case, the project of Enlightenment still remains a much-needed aspiration for these societies.

It is not only that many developing country societies remain pre-secular; given the liberal constitutional sanction to religion and acceptance of right to religion, faith and worship, in these societies, secularism remains a highly contested domain. It is definitely true that given the close adherence of the faithful to their religions and traditions, Enlightenment project is not something that can be enforced by the state. Sometimes, as is the case with India, the state itself is entangled with religion in its ambiguous and ambivalent relationship in terms of a highly flexible secularism (by which I mean the decision on matters of secular concern are taken context dependently and in a negotiated manner, rather than with fixed and definite iron laws). Rajeev Bhargava (Bhargava: 2013) calls this ambiguous and ambivalent relationship of the state to religion in India as maintaining of a 'principled distance' and 'contextual secularism'. However, since enforcement or imposition (these words may sound strong) of political secularism by the state is not an option available to these societies, nor is the strict separation of state and religion an available option, what is possible is only the dialogue between diverse traditions/faiths and religions. Herein is the significance of dialectical hermeneutics or a dialogue between different traditions/ faiths/ religions.

However, for dialogue to take place on an even keel, there should be neither inter-religious domination, nor intra-religious domination. The dialogic practice cannot be fulfilled in circumstances where one religion predominates over others. That will only lead to the political domination of one religion over others. The second problem is the domination of the secular by the religious. These latter two seem to be dominating the condition of liberal democracy in India today.

The domination of religion over the secular leads to theocracy. And domination of one religion over the other leads to fascism. Inasmuch as history is replete with examples of these, the lessons of Holocaust and Auschwitz need to be heeded. And post-secularism as a concept forwarded by Habermas can be helpful only if it does not lead to the above-mentioned circumstances. To the extent that theocracy and fascism are not welcome options to multi-religious societies, the only option would be either privatization of religion or domination of the secular over the religion. Since the liberal constitutional state provide right to religion, and since there are always threats of theocracy and fascism present in unevenly poised multi-religious societies like India, what appears to be the only solution is the combination of privatization of religion with the domination of the secular over religion in the public sphere.

Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion, we have considered three theories that have attempted to explain the phenomenon of tradition and religion. We have used the words tradition and religion interchangeably. The theories we have considered are: Modernization; Marxism and Hermeneutics. We have considered Habermas's account of religion in the light of these theories. We have argued that Modernization theory and Marxism postulated an imminent disappearance of religion and religious traditions with the progress of history. However, one of these theories, Modernization, now predicts a resurgence of cultural and identity politics and a resultant 'Clash of Civilizations'. Modernization is not seen as an inevitable process. Hermeneutic theory, on the other hand, holds a promise that inter-cultural dialogue is possible and can be a way out of the impasse of the post-modern relativism of Modernization theory.

Habermas's theorization holds much promise in explaining religion and religious traditions. However, the crucial point is that Habermas still attempts to explain religion *qua* religion. The major difference between classical Marxian theory and Habermas is that Marx's theory of religion is connected to the theory of capitalism, or class societies in general. Marx denounced the approach of explaining superstructures in general and religion in particular in their own terms. Following this, if Habermas is to develop a theory on the lines of Marxian theory, he has to connect the condition of post-secularity to the condition of 21st Century capitalism. We have seen that according to Marx, there is no abolition of religion without the abolition of the material conditions that lead to it. This is as true of the 21st Century as in Marx's 19th Century. This is the essential point that we would like to stress. Since Habermas is still developing his theory of the contemporary religious phenomenon, and he calls himself the 'last Marxist', it would be reasonable to expect from him the explanation of the 21st Century religious upsurge in terms of the century's material conditions. As long as he follows a Marxian approach, he cannot explain religious phenomenon in its own terms, however edifying he may find the religious phenomenon is.

A connected point is that we cannot explain the contemporary upsurge of the religious phenomenon in terms of the failure of the secularization thesis alone. The roots of the emergence of the phenomenon lie in the political economy of the times. This is the problem with Modernization theory which ended up in a *cul de sac* of 'Clash of Civilizations'.

Insights from hermeneutic theory can be developed, inasmuch as it holds the thesis of 'universality of the hermeneutic condition' as a dialectical way out through inter-cultural, inter-religious, inter-traditional dialogue. This approach will have to go beyond both the post-modern blind alleys, such as Modernization theory and that of positivist Marxian theory.

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