

Seminar on Religion, Politics & Culture, Bangalore, 24th – 25th August, 2006.

Vikas Adhyayan Kendra organised a national seminar (with some speakers and participants from other countries) on the topic of *Religion, Politics, and Culture* in Bangalore on 24-25 August 2006. The 50 participants were scholars and activists from all over the country. There were 13 analytical presentations (including the key note addresses) in the seminar. Three more presentations dealt specifically with an Agenda for Action. The seminar was marked by thought provoking presentations and intense discussions.

The background of the seminar was the current national and international situation. The overarching reality is of course of the rapid and deep changes produced by corporate driven globalisation under the imperialist hegemony of the USA. The concept note clarified that the economic aspects and policy packages prompted by neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism had generated fair amount of attention but the political, social, and cultural aspects were not subjected to similar analyses. The note identified religious revival as a major feature of the political and cultural complexities of the age. The note explicitly stated that Islamic militancy and fundamentalism may be important aspects of this revival but not the only ones. Other religions too – Christian and Hindu in particular – had shown similar militant revivals. The seminar on this background was to attempt to address the following crucial questions.

- Is there religious revival across countries and across all traditions?
- What causes this revival?
- Is it in some ways related to globalisation? What is the relationship if any?
- What are the cultural dimensions of this revival?
- Why and how does it acquire a political facet?
- How does this facet get linked to violence, either Jihadi or Hindu communalist?
- Are all religions equally open to revivalist interpretations?
- Is there fundamentalism in non-scriptural or not-prophetic religions?
- Have secular alternatives lost out – including the idea of territorial nationalism?

These were the questions that formed the background of the seminar. They emerged repeatedly in the presentations and deliberations in varied forms and formed the matrix of the entire seminar. What is beyond the seminar? This means inculcating in our areas of activity the ideas we discuss here.

The seminar concluded after some discussion on these topics with a determination to continue the struggle against the forces of fundamentalism and communalism that threaten the secular democratic space in India in particular and in many other countries of the world. The sum total of the directions of future action was seen to be as follows:

1. Re-empowerment of the secular discourse to make it richer and more nuanced. The process involves serious critical introspection. It should differentiate between Hindu, Hinduism, and Hindutva.
2. Nation building to be treated as a transcending notion and an inclusive process.
3. Re-emphasising the secular character of nationalism and thereby denying legitimacy to cultural nationalism.
4. Attempt to ensure security and dignity to the minorities in the country. Make the civil society reassure the minorities through words and actions.
5. Increase communication with the broad masses.
6. Tackle and attempt to clear up misunderstandings (created by misinformation and disinformation) on three critical issues.
 - Ayodhya
 - Godhra Occurrence (no conspiracy, no mob)
 - Kashmir
7. Strengthening secularism is the creation of counter consciousness which can only be a continuous process and not sporadic, episodic activity.
8. Realisation in theory and practice that secular space in India is secular, democratic space.
9. This demands a development paradigm that examines development from below.
10. Resistance to communalism must include cultural resistance to forces of communalism and globalisation based on
 - Cultural inclusiveness
 - Pluralism
 - Assimilation and transcendence of the traditional/ inherited values & practices.
11. The issues to be tackled immediately will be
 - Examination and critique of text books

- Promoting inclusiveness
- Promoting sustainable democratic development.

These would include an emphasis on working with youth and students, along with other sections.