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Cover Photo: A painting from the Divan of Mohammad Quli Qutb Shah, Founder of Hyderabad. Courtesy, Library of the Salajung Museum, Hyderabad.

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Religion and Secular Spirituality in India

An Islamic perspective

Mohd. Fahim Akhtar

[This paper discusses the concept of religion in the light of Quranic Texts, and tries to identify the basic characteristics defining any phenomenon as Religion. It also discusses the secularity in Indian context and the prevailing right wing cultural nationalism in contemporary India. This paper also elaborates the role of Islam in multi-religious societies and its approach towards the different forms of spirituality.]

India has been a land of different religions. One can experience a small world in India. Several religions are born here, and from here they spread to different parts of the world. Major world religions have been in India, and their followers are in a large number in this country. Thus India is a special country having its unique identity in the matter of religion. Of course it is India's strength, beauty and pride.

Diversity of Religions

India has a long history of religious diversity. The reason behind is its secular nature. Secular spirit is existed very deep inside of this land. India cannot be imagined without its secular characteristics. This is very clear from its history that India was a preferred place to where nation after nation migrated in the past. Different religions came and settled here. None of them was forced to exile completely. Judaism came here and till date its followers are cohabited in this land. Christianity is welcomed here and a sizeable population of Christian people lives in different parts of this country. Same case is with Zoroastrianism.

As for as Islam is concerned, this religion reached this land as early as it came into existence in sixth century AD, in the costal parts of India, with the traders who were coming to India for trade since a long period before that time. And soon Islam spread amongst native people and they embraced this religion. It is very important to note that in early thirteen century AD, when Muslim rule