

Ep 26: Hindutva with Gita Sahgal

Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWXaP6g8QgA>

0:00:03.880,0:00:10.370

We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a

0:00:10.370,0:00:15.980

sovereign socialist secular Democratic Republic and to secure to all its

0:00:15.980,0:00:23.300

citizens justice social economic and political liberty of thought expression

0:00:23.300,0:00:30.410

belief faith and worship equality of status and of opportunity and to promote

0:00:30.410,0:00:36.770

among them all, fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity

0:00:36.770,0:00:42.079

and integrity of the nation in our constituent assembly this 26th day of

0:00:42.079,0:00:53.090

November 1949 do hereby adopt enact and give to ourselves this Constitution that

0:00:53.090,0:00:57.140

was Gita Sahgal reading the preamble to the Constitution of India. (EP): You are

0:00:57.140,0:01:00.739

listening to the National Secular Society podcast hosted by Emma Park. In

0:01:00.739,0:01:04.489

this episode Gita, a human rights activist and honorary associate of the

0:01:04.489,0:01:09.200

NSS, will be speaking to me about secularism in India and in the UK. We will

0:01:09.200,0:01:12.950

be discussing the Hindutva movement and the threat it poses to secularism in

0:01:12.950,0:01:17.270

India and how secularists have been reading out parts of the Constitution as

0:01:17.270,0:01:20.390

an active protest. We'll also be looking at how the pro-

0:01:20.390,0:01:24.320

Hindutva government of Prime Minister Modi is using the corona virus pandemic

0:01:24.320,0:01:28.580

to crack down on dissent, and at the wider influence of Hindu nationalism on

0:01:28.580,0:01:32.420

politics in Britain and in the United States. Finally, we will consider how the

0:01:32.420,0:01:36.350

ideology of Hindutva is bringing its version of Hinduism closer to a

0:01:36.350,0:01:39.159

monotheistic religion.

0:01:39.450,0:01:44.799

Gita thank you for reading out that preamble to the Constitution of India. I

0:01:44.799,0:01:50.439

know that it actually says that India is a social socialist secular Democratic

0:01:50.439,0:01:54.219

Republican; specifically it has got that word 'secular' in. Was that something that

0:01:54.219,0:01:57.579

was there from the beginning? (GS): Well secularism was a very precious

0:01:57.579,0:02:03.850

ideal in India in its independence and during the discussions that took

0:02:03.850,0:02:08.800
place in the Constituent Assembly. But
the word 'secular' was not inserted until

0:02:08.800,0:02:13.209
much later and it is an irony that it
was actually at a very dark period in

0:02:13.209,0:02:19.120
India in history - the emergency in the
nineteen mid-1970s - that the term 'secular'

0:02:19.120,0:02:22.690
was actually inserted into the
Constitution. But the values of the

0:02:22.690,0:02:28.900
original Constituent Assembly were very
definitely to see Indian nationalism as

0:02:28.900,0:02:36.549
a product of a very pluralist nation and to
NOT respond to the creation of Pakistan,

0:02:36.549,0:02:41.860
which was supposed to be a Muslim
homeland, by creating a Hindu homeland.

0:02:41.860,0:02:49.060
But rather to stand very firmly against
the idea of India as a state that was a

0:02:49.060,0:02:54.250
homeland only for Hindus and to say it was
a homeland for all those who had been

0:02:54.250,0:03:01.920
born in that India, even if as the
Constitution later says: even if they're

0:03:01.920,0:03:06.340
now living in Pakistan
that they would still have access to

0:03:06.340,0:03:11.440
Indian citizenship. And it doesn't
specify that only Hindus would have

0:03:11.440,0:03:19.600
access to Indian citizenship so

Indian Muslims were very clearly, by the

0:03:19.600,0:03:25.780
Indian founding fathers and mothers,
included within the idea of India as a

0:03:25.780,0:03:29.470
pluralist nation so I think that's
really really important. That's one thing.

0:03:29.470,0:03:34.540
And the other thing that we often
don't mention or understand is the

0:03:34.540,0:03:42.430
absence of the idea that God or any God
or any deity of any sort, any form of

0:03:42.430,0:03:50.739
theism was responsible for giving us in
India rights. The preamble clearly

0:03:50.739,0:03:57.610
states that Indians gave
themselves the rights that were in the

0:03:57.610,0:04:01.480
Constitution. In contrast what
Britain has is this tradition of having

0:04:01.480,0:04:05.709
the established Church always there. They,
the Hindutva movement , has something

0:04:05.709,0:04:09.579
perhaps similar. (EP): It originated as a very
much minority movement in India didn't

0:04:09.580,0:04:17.979
it? (GS): It did, it's now nearly a hundred
years old so it was invented, the

0:04:17.980,0:04:23.480
term Hindutva has its origins in
19th century religious reform movements.

0:04:23.500,0:04:28.700
But the term was invented
in 1923 and what it literally

0:04:28.700,0:04:38.820

means is the idea that India is a state of Hindus and that India is both the

0:04:38.830,0:04:45.460
fatherland and the holy land of its people. And therefore the people who have

0:04:45.460,0:04:52.030
a religion that is supposed to have come from abroad, outside the boundaries of

0:04:52.030,0:05:02.110
India are not true Indians so that means of course Muslims and Christians cannot be

0:05:02.110,0:05:12.610
true Indians and so the idea of Hindutva is the political idea of Hinduism which

0:05:12.610,0:05:19.690
made it the ruling ideology of the state. In other words - to overturn the idea of a

0:05:19.690,0:05:24.970
constitution, that is it doesn't have a religion in the Constitution and which

0:05:24.970,0:05:29.410
guarantees the rights of all its citizens no matter what religion they

0:05:29.410,0:05:34.449
are. In other words Hindutva is directly in conflict with secularism. It's

0:05:34.449,0:05:38.680
directly in conflict with secularism and with the Indian Constitution as it

0:05:38.680,0:05:45.370
stands. And that's why the reading of the preamble to the Constitution became one

0:05:45.370,0:05:55.110
of the most powerful tools of the resistance movement against Hindu

0:05:55.110,0:06:02.380
majoritarianism and against the idea that people who cannot prove their

0:06:02.380,0:06:06.550
citizenship by the production of dozens of

0:06:06.550,0:06:10.750
documents to which they may have no access and therefore may be actually stripped

0:06:10.750,0:06:14.290
of being Indian citizens, even though they've never been in any other country

0:06:14.290,0:06:20.560
and have nowhere else to go. You know the idea that they were citizens

0:06:20.560,0:06:25.990
of India and that they had rights under the secular Constitution - it became

0:06:25.990,0:06:31.900
the sort of rallying cry of a movement that had been going on really until

0:06:31.900,0:06:38.140
the corona virus crisis hit India. So people were still proponents of

0:06:38.140,0:06:43.780
secularism, were still reading out the Constitution even recently, very recently.

0:06:43.780,0:06:52.000
All through last year and early this year it became an activity that was a

0:06:52.000,0:06:58.870
popular activity right across India. So students stood in and people read it

0:06:58.870,0:07:05.560
out aloud in groups as if they were making a vow, as if they were committing

0:07:05.560,0:07:12.580
themselves to this idea of human rights and civil liberties and to secularism.

0:07:12.580,0:07:18.400
And so they read it out in groups, groups of students read it out, groups of

0:07:18.400,0:07:26.440
lawyers read it out on the lawns of you
know of the court houses, Muslim women

0:07:26.440,0:07:34.810
particularly have, had mobilized all over
India, apparently quite spontaneously.

0:07:34.810,0:07:39.970
First in Delhi in an area called Shaheen
Bagh then in many many other places where

0:07:39.970,0:07:44.800
they staged sit-ins, where they sat
through the coldest winter we've known

0:07:44.800,0:07:51.010
in 100 years and what they want (I mean
the Muslim women who were reading out

0:07:51.010,0:07:55.750
the Constitution) what was their aim they
were claiming their

0:07:55.750,0:08:03.040
fundamental right to be recognised as
Indians and citizens of India and their

0:08:03.040,0:08:08.050
rights under the secular Constitution
which they believed protected them and

0:08:08.050,0:08:13.720
they were doing this in considerable
danger to themselves because quite apart

0:08:13.720,0:08:19.030
from any action the government might
take it was absolutely freezing. So they

0:08:19.030,0:08:23.780
were protesting
the promulgation of new laws one

0:08:23.780,0:08:30.230
of which was a law that supposedly was a
law for the protection of refugees and

0:08:30.230,0:08:35.960
that fast-tracked certain categories of

people from certain neighboring

0:08:35.960,0:08:40.490
countries which are Muslim majority
countries, so Pakistan, Bangladesh for

0:08:40.490,0:08:46.490
instance, but not all our neighbours like
not Sri Lanka. It's fast tracked the

0:08:46.490,0:08:56.120
citizens who were Hindus and I think
Christians, as citizens of to get to give

0:08:56.120,0:09:00.500
them refugee status if they were in
India. (EP): Are these people who already

0:09:00.500,0:09:04.010
were living in India at the time? (GS): They
were already living in India. By

0:09:04.010,0:09:06.980
fast-tracking I mean they may have been
living in India for years so it wasn't

0:09:06.980,0:09:11.810
that they were you know, it was creating a
pathway to citizenship. So

0:09:11.810,0:09:15.320
there are lots of different times with
refugees who've come. But these laws

0:09:15.320,0:09:19.120
that have been recently introduced by
Modi's government they're trying to

0:09:19.120,0:09:23.840
fast-track refugee status for some
refugees but not for Muslims on the

0:09:23.840,0:09:29.840
basis of religion. Yes solely on the
basis of religion. So Rohingyas for

0:09:29.840,0:09:38.450
instance who also have come to India
quite recently from Myanmar they would not
have been included in this.

you know and were at risk of being sent

0:09:38.450,0:09:44.810
So this was the first law that used a religious basis solely. This

0:09:44.810,0:09:48.230
is not to say that religious persecution doesn't exist in those (other) countries,

0:09:48.230,0:09:53.060
obviously it does and obviously some people would need refugee status or

0:09:53.060,0:09:56.330
have already fled to India and living in India would need their status

0:09:56.330,0:10:03.589
regularised. But it was , that's that's one law that they that

0:10:03.589,0:10:10.580
was kind of posing as as an enabling law but set this dangerous precedent of

0:10:10.580,0:10:15.650
introducing a citizenship based on religion. (EP): Since the corona virus what's

0:10:15.650,0:10:20.330
happened to those tensions between the secularists and the Hindutva

0:10:20.330,0:10:24.320
supporters? (GS): Well as with everywhere in the world

0:10:24.320,0:10:33.439
this corona virus has intensified other inequalities and increased

0:10:33.439,0:10:40.579
the authoritarian actions of the government so it's brought into sharp

0:10:40.579,0:10:49.039
focus the differences between secular and universalist approaches based on

0:10:49.039,0:10:54.279
public health and concern for people and

sort of top-down authoritarian measures.

0:10:54.279,0:10:59.179
So a number of things are happening. One is that all these movements, because of

0:10:59.179,0:11:04.129
course they were gathering in public places, and even though they were

0:11:04.129,0:11:07.519
trying, some of them are trying to practise isolation and distancing

0:11:07.519,0:11:11.659
measures you know within those like reducing the number of people in the

0:11:11.659,0:11:15.049
sit-in and keeping them separate from each other and so on, they basically had

0:11:15.049,0:11:20.059
to close down. But how specifically has this lock down turned as the authoritarian

0:11:20.059,0:11:26.809
government used it to quell or to put a stop to protest against these

0:11:26.809,0:11:34.299
laws. So it of course ended these Muslim women's protests that were sit-ins

0:11:34.299,0:11:38.629
because people couldn't publicly sit-in anymore. So those protests that had been

0:11:38.629,0:11:44.839
happening all over India had to be ended but even more seriously than that, is

0:11:44.839,0:11:52.579
that there has been a clamp down on a huge number of people who were prominent

0:11:52.579,0:11:58.850
human rights defenders and civil society activists. So in my Bradlaugh lecture I

0:11:58.850,0:12:04.600

told then which was two years ago now, I discussed how there were attacks on

0:12:04.600,0:12:12.409
people who were well-known human rights advocates and how some of them had been

0:12:12.409,0:12:18.559
able to get bail at that point because there had been attempts then you know,

0:12:18.559,0:12:23.239
their lawyers had gone to court and in some cases the courts had listened

0:12:23.239,0:12:27.859
And in fact the Supreme Court had said the defence's dissent is a safety valve and

0:12:27.859,0:12:32.599
it's very important in a society. It shouldn't be shut down. And some people

0:12:32.599,0:12:37.819
had been granted bail on charges that appeared to be absurd because they were

0:12:37.819,0:12:42.769
extremely serious charges that were being pursued by regional police force

0:12:42.769,0:12:46.830
rather than the national crime agencies. You know

0:12:46.830,0:12:49.950
charges included 'attempt to murder the Prime Minister'

0:12:49.950,0:12:55.080
you know 'gathering arms'. I mean these serious terrorism charges. But anyway

0:12:55.080,0:13:01.920
some people at that time briefly were given relief and bail but then some of

0:13:01.920,0:13:05.790
them were arrested and now the others who are not arrested at that time have

0:13:05.790,0:13:09.750
been arrested along with a number of other prominent journalists who are

0:13:09.750,0:13:13.770
under attack.
News you know of proprietors of online and

0:13:13.770,0:13:19.910
other newspapers. The media is much more heavily controlled not because it has

0:13:19.910,0:13:24.690
overt censorship but because the ownership of the media has largely gone

0:13:24.690,0:13:29.580
into hands which are very sympathetic to the government and where they will only

0:13:29.580,0:13:39.360
hire people who you know are attack dogs for various kinds of Hindutva politics.

0:13:39.360,0:13:43.560
(EP): So what's the outlook would you say for secularism in India in the near and

0:13:43.560,0:13:52.770
medium future? (GS): The outlook at the moment is very bleak because of the weak

0:13:52.770,0:14:02.480
opposition and the fact that there is not a very concerted

0:14:02.480,0:14:08.250
parliamentary opposition to the government that looks like it can at

0:14:08.250,0:14:15.080
national level win another election and restore some of the secular principles.

0:14:15.080,0:14:21.630
The media is being increasingly controlled; people who do stand out are

0:14:21.630,0:14:28.200
being threatened or intimidated or arrested. These popular movements at the

0:14:28.200,0:14:32.250
moment have no room to manoeuvre because they can't come out in masses on the

0:14:32.250,0:14:38.250
streets because of the corona virus situation and if in fact what they're

0:14:38.250,0:14:43.350
doing - and I think this is where we have to try and gather some hope from the

0:14:43.350,0:14:48.000
bleakness of the situation- is that they're facing the

0:14:48.000,0:14:54.270
oppositional movements which are largely civil society movement so people

0:14:54.270,0:14:59.630
who are progressive who some of who were on the Left who are liberals are

0:14:59.630,0:15:05.750
mobilising in order to face the humanitarian crisis.

0:15:05.750,0:15:10.940
That is - there is Modi himself who identifies as a member of the Hindutva

0:15:10.940,0:15:16.220
movement. Yes Modi is a product, a prime product. I mean I'm not imputing

0:15:16.220,0:15:21.470
anything to him that he wouldn't be proud to own. He was trained in the

0:15:21.470,0:15:29.480
Hindutva movement, he was a functionary of one of its main components which is a

0:15:29.480,0:15:35.500
large charitable organization that says that it's not a political organisation

0:15:35.500,0:15:43.430
but which is the ruling intelligence

behind the political party BJP that is

0:15:43.430,0:15:49.900
in power. So Modi cut his teeth as somebody in that movement. He's written

0:15:49.900,0:15:58.040
extensively about the ideologues of the Hindutva movement who themselves were

0:15:58.040,0:16:05.150
admirers of the German and Italian fascists and he's you know shown how

0:16:05.150,0:16:10.820
much he admires their writing and their commitment so he has been part of that

0:16:10.820,0:16:18.710
movement. He himself is a very very skilled user of the media and of social

0:16:18.710,0:16:27.050
media in particular and has more than 56 million followers on Twitter. He himself

0:16:27.050,0:16:32.780
only follows about 2,000 people but among the people he follows are people who

0:16:32.780,0:16:41.030
praised those who were involved with lynchings of Muslims - because they

0:16:41.030,0:16:47.060
were deemed to be eating beef you know or they were thought to

0:16:47.060,0:16:52.610
be transporting cattle for slaughter. (EP): And how about in the UK because the

0:16:52.610,0:16:56.810
Hindutva is an international movement these days isn't it? It's spread both to

0:16:56.810,0:17:02.920
the UK and the US and further afield. How far is it influential within the UK?

0:17:02.920,0:17:07.490

(GS): Let's remember that when Prime Minister Modi came to the UK when he came to

0:17:07.490,0:17:12.980

London a few years ago he was greeted as a rock star at Wembley and who was his

0:17:12.980,0:17:16.079

supporting act? And his you know the person who

0:17:16.079,0:17:20.819

introduced him? It was none other than David Cameron who hoped that some of

0:17:20.819,0:17:27.900

Modi 'star dust' would rub off on him. And at the same time the members of the

0:17:27.900,0:17:32.520

Labour Party, not Jeremy Corbyn in this instance, but other members of the Labour

0:17:32.520,0:17:41.040

Party like Keith Vaz and and Barry Gardner were vying to you know give up

0:17:41.040,0:17:47.520

parts of their salaries and so on to fund this jamboree at Wembley and

0:17:47.520,0:17:56.070

also take advantage of it. So Hindutva is very well embedded in all areas of

0:17:56.070,0:18:02.790

British political life. (EP): Are there any public figures who were there who support the

0:18:02.790,0:18:06.420

Hindutva movement?

(GS): Well Priti Patel, our very own Home

0:18:06.420,0:18:12.720

Secretary in Britain, has welcomed senior figures in the Hindutva movement to HSS

0:18:12.720,0:18:18.420

meetings and has been very vocal in support of it and attacked those Indians who

0:18:18.420,0:18:23.040

were critical of the election of Modi. I think she went on Newsnight - you know

0:18:23.040,0:18:28.530

she's very critical of people like Anish Kapoor, the famous sculptor. And Anish

0:18:28.530,0:18:33.000

Kapoor had warned of the dangers of Hindutva and she you know she sort

0:18:33.000,0:18:39.360

of attacked all these you know Indians in Britain - British people of Indian origin

0:18:39.360,0:18:45.120

who were raising a warning about him. But first what's a basic position is a

0:18:45.120,0:18:50.160

position of how does she feel about Hindutva? I think she views Prime Minister Modi as

0:18:50.160,0:18:58.380

a close ally of the Conservative Party. I mean in the past and you know and

0:18:58.380,0:19:03.120

recently I mean they have definitely been MPs on all sides of the House who

0:19:03.120,0:19:08.120

are pro-Hindutva. So in Labour as I said Barry Gardner was a prominent one

0:19:08.120,0:19:14.390

who was Pro Hindutva , but it's absolutely embedded in the thinking of

0:19:14.390,0:19:19.980

the Conservative Party at the moment and and seems to have thrown its lot in with

0:19:19.980,0:19:25.110

them as internationally Modi is close to Trump and also had rallies in America

0:19:25.110,0:19:28.500
where you know Trump also attended and so on so

0:19:28.500,0:19:33.840
you know there's a constellation of right-wing political leaders also

0:19:33.840,0:19:39.330
Nauru, and Brazil is another one who have come together you know to promote very

0:19:39.330,0:19:44.340
similar views to support each other's authoritarian tendencies through this

0:19:44.340,0:19:48.540
massive humanitarian crisis that we face. So saying you see I'm Hindu not a

0:19:48.540,0:19:55.380
nationalist. And as part of a wider global authoritarian trend I see Hindu

0:19:55.380,0:20:01.370
nationalism as part of a wider global authoritarian trend which is much older

0:20:01.370,0:20:05.250
than many of the other authoritarian trends.

0:20:05.250,0:20:10.080
So sometimes it's seen as another populist movement and to me the word

0:20:10.080,0:20:15.930
populism tends to imply something that's kind of risen almost from nowhere, that's

0:20:15.930,0:20:20.970
just grabbed you know various ideas that are out in the ether and then use them

0:20:20.970,0:20:28.130
towards you know in a convincing way you know towards authoritarian

0:20:28.130,0:20:34.440
purposes. But the Hindutva movement is a

very disciplined movement. It's worked

0:20:34.440,0:20:43.350
very hard for a century for its ideas to become mainstream. It has built up this

0:20:43.350,0:20:51.120
huge internet you know both in India and internationally: these charitable and

0:20:51.120,0:20:57.390
cultural structures which by the way I wonder where they are now because they

0:20:57.390,0:21:03.330
have very good command structures and exist all over India and in other parts

0:21:03.330,0:21:08.970
of the world in order to raise money and to be on the street doing humanitarian

0:21:08.970,0:21:12.630
aid. (EP): But you're not saying you're not saying that today since the corona virus.

0:21:12.630,0:21:16.530
(GS): Well I think they're doing some food distribution and things like that

0:21:16.530,0:21:22.380
but they're doing it you know there are reports coming in that where they are

0:21:22.380,0:21:27.360
distributing food therefore forcing Muslims in particular to shout Hindutva

0:21:27.360,0:21:31.590
slogans. So Jai Shri Ram which means victory to Ram, to the god Ram. In

0:21:31.590,0:21:36.960
itself nothing wrong with the slogan as it's only used in a religious

0:21:36.960,0:21:42.030
context but when it's used in a political context it's about

0:21:42.030,0:21:44.700

forcing everybody to recognise that there's one

0:21:44.700,0:21:48.900

Supreme God which is also really a really rather odd idea of tradition for

0:21:48.900,0:21:53.790

traditional Hindus who believe in either no particular deity or many deities

0:21:53.790,0:22:01.200

but not in one you know not in one particular one and you know forcing

0:22:01.200,0:22:05.130

Muslims to acknowledge him you know the idea of Ram as a supreme

0:22:05.130,0:22:09.990

master and only to get aid on you know a food packet on that basis. If you think

0:22:09.990,0:22:14.160

Hindutva is changing the nature of Hinduism Hindutva is fundamentally

0:22:14.160,0:22:18.900

about changing the nature of Hinduism. So it's the idea the Hindutva movement has

0:22:18.900,0:22:24.600

has changed Hinduism by making the god Ram more important and making it

0:22:24.600,0:22:29.070

almost like a monotheistic religion. Yes it's creating a sort of imitation of

0:22:29.070,0:22:33.810

some of the monotheistic religions, it's taking some of the original ideas of

0:22:33.810,0:22:37.410

Hindutva which were not about the god Ram it was as I said about creating this

0:22:37.410,0:22:43.110

modern Hindu identity that kind of that leftover you know the

0:22:43.110,0:22:47.160

traditional caste divisions in Hindu society and making a more unitary

0:22:47.160,0:22:51.000

identity of it. But in the course of doing that what they've done is they've

0:22:51.000,0:22:57.900

grabbed other images and leaders so Ram is a very popular deity the idea of Ram

0:22:57.900,0:23:03.660

you know it's popular to a lot of Hindus in their worship and Gandhi also

0:23:03.660,0:23:09.240

talked about Ram Raja you know the rule of Ram as the perfect

0:23:09.240,0:23:13.860

Kingdom but it's not something that he wanted to enact in law so now you have

0:23:13.860,0:23:20.100

this idea of this very beloved figure in Hindu mythology in the Hindu

0:23:20.100,0:23:27.090

imagination being transported into this you know aggressive warrior who is the

0:23:27.090,0:23:34.920

pre-eminent God and where there's a specific place like a Mecca you know

0:23:34.920,0:23:39.600

where Hindus can go and worship. You know at this origin point and Hinduism

0:23:39.600,0:23:44.610

traditionally has always resisted that specific precise you know one precise

0:23:44.610,0:23:49.320

God in one precise origin that's very interesting. (EP): So it's just a final

0:23:49.320,0:23:56.090

question. What is your next step in this fight against the Hindutva?

0:23:56.090,0:24:00.980
(GS): Well I think you know to talk about my next step I want to go back to the

0:24:00.980,0:24:05.780
origin of the secular movement you know which you've been discussing in the

0:24:05.780,0:24:12.140
series of podcasts and to go back to Charles Bradlaugh and what he

0:24:12.140,0:24:21.320
represented and he had a very close connection with Indian nationalism so he

0:24:21.320,0:24:28.910
supported Irish Home Rule and he supported Indian freedom and at the

0:24:28.910,0:24:31.910
request of Indian nationalists and having checked with his amazing

0:24:31.910,0:24:35.090
constituents who kept electing him to Parliament even though he couldn't

0:24:35.090,0:24:40.010
actually take his oath for the longest time and actually sit in Parliament so

0:24:40.010,0:24:44.030
he checked with them whether he could spend some of his time working on behalf

0:24:44.030,0:24:47.660
of Indian interests because there were you know people representing them in

0:24:47.660,0:24:53.630
Parliament and he represented Indian interests and raised the issue of unfair

0:24:53.630,0:24:59.750
trade and of famine in India and he forced the British government to issue

0:24:59.750,0:25:07.670
measures of famine relief. Now that

activism on behalf of said Bradlaugh

0:25:07.670,0:25:13.150
shows us that at its inception secularism was part of a wider movement

0:25:13.150,0:25:20.840
for both liberty and equality and so he put himself on the side of Indian

0:25:20.840,0:25:28.490
Liberty when he spoke at a conference of Congress in the late 1880s, in 1889 and

0:25:28.490,0:25:35.510
he said that you know let me he warned against divisions between Hindus

0:25:35.510,0:25:40.040
and Muslims and called for unity but he put himself on the side of Liberty which

0:25:40.040,0:25:46.000
was the absolute opposite of people supporting the British Raj who said who

0:25:46.000,0:25:50.090
enhanced the divisions between Hindus and Muslims and said that the Raj were

0:25:50.090,0:25:55.240
the only people who could manage these children and keep these divisions in

0:25:55.240,0:26:01.420
check. And he nearly saw this was a fight to be overcome not by more colonialism

0:26:01.430,0:26:07.000
but by moving towards Libert. (EP): So do you see yourself as carrying on Bradlaugh's

0:26:07.009,0:26:13.649
secularist's values of equality and liberty? (GS): I think yes and they are twin

0:26:13.649,0:26:18.240
values: they're not about one or the other and so we see in the state of

0:26:18.240,0:26:22.620

India in in the state of Kerala in India there's a southern state which is

0:26:22.620,0:26:27.299 actually communist-ruled now. And India communists have to rule by democracy by

0:26:27.299,0:26:32.249 democratic means, they have to be elected. That state has stood against religious

0:26:32.249,0:26:41.460 superstition in Hindu temples and when the corona virus came very early on in the

0:26:41.460,0:26:45.809 crisis, when the very first cases were detected as having come into that stage

0:26:45.809,0:26:52.169 they introduced track and tracing measures. You know they locked

0:26:52.169,0:26:56.700 down very early, long before the the national lockdown.

0:26:56.700,0:27:01.200 They sent children home from school but they also organised relief efforts

0:27:01.200,0:27:07.049 working with local NGOs and working with State-paid like child care workers,

0:27:07.049,0:27:10.590 you know sending them with meals to the houses of the children who were in the

0:27:10.590,0:27:16.470 nurseries so they did both at the same time and they have had a very very

0:27:16.470,0:27:22.740 successful fight against corona against the virus as well as a

0:27:22.740,0:27:28.259 humanitarian policy and in their background is a very strong defence of

0:27:28.259,0:27:33.600 secular traditions and against religious superstition where they took a

0:27:33.600,0:27:40.730 strong stand against the the refusal of temples to admit women of a certain age

0:27:40.730,0:27:46.769 because they might be menstruating. So they've done all those things and it can

0:27:46.769,0:27:53.690 be done even in a poor country and even in this gravest crisis of our times. (EP): And

0:27:53.690,0:27:59.639 yourself first about here? (GS): There are many plans: I'm working with the "one law for

0:27:59.639,0:28:06.509 all" campaign which includes Southall Black Sisters on issues that are

0:28:06.509,0:28:11.850 concerned both with Hindu but also with the British government's vast tolerance

0:28:11.850,0:28:17.009 for Sharia law and people you know think this is something that only the Left tolerates.

0:28:17.009,0:28:21.180 And I'd like your listeners to understand that

0:28:21.180,0:28:30.120 the British government is allowing the Sharia councils to exist

0:28:30.120,0:28:34.920 and is pushing women back into them by refusing to allow for instance marriages

0:28:34.920,0:28:40.620 to be voided and for women to actually get relief in British boards so we go

0:28:40.620,0:28:45.600 on fighting around the things that need to be done. (EP): Okay - thank you very much.

0:28:45.600,0:28:50.100
That's some very interesting
conversation with a lot for listeners to

0:28:50.100,0:28:53.460
go back and think about. Certainly
I'll be thinking about that a lot in the

0:28:53.460,0:29:00.860
next few weeks and so thank you again
and best of luck. (GS): And you Emma thank
you.

0:29:05.780,0:29:10.740
(EP) That was Episode 26 of the National
Secular Society podcast hosted by Emma

0:29:10.740,0:29:15.600
Park. My guest speaker was Gita Sahgal. If
you would like to help us challenge

0:29:15.600,0:29:19.290
unfair religious privilege and support
freedom of and from religion in Britain

0:29:19.290,0:29:23.760
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episode on the website Thanks for

0:29:32.700,0:29:35.150
listening.

0:29:38.940,0:29:41.000