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Cultural Marxism vs Dharmic Civilization

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Abstract:
In order to reinterpret secularism as a security endeavour rather than a civic standard, this paper explores how fourth-generation military rhetoric in India blends with Cultural Marxist themes. Its goal is to interpret the current political climate in India through the prism of Cultural Marxism, demonstrating how important organizations and discussions are portrayed as locations of an internal cultural conflict. This conflict is visibly demonstrated under the current BJP regime, which portrays itself as the antithesis of Cultural Marxism. The article argues, their public confrontation has resulted in a state of securitized secularism, where opposing civilizational camps weaponize secular principles as conflicting security agendas.

Fourth Generation warfare

Even though Bharat appears to be a peaceful country on the map, its daily politics resemble a war diary filled with traitors, urban Naxals, tukde-tukde gangs, and India's forces being broken. What if the next war is not on our borders but in our courts, campuses, and newsrooms? Bharat might be in the midst of it already. Has fourth-generation warfare quietly come home?

One of the best minds in military strategy, William Lind, co-wrote a groundbreaking paper. The term "FOURTH GENERATION WARFARE" (4GW) gained widespread usage after that. According to Lind, the goal of 4GW is not to physically destroy the enemy but to bring them down from within. He describes a qualitative shift in how wars are fought. The population's support for the war and the enemy nation's culture are now the main targets of such conflicts, rather than just armies and territory. The strategic "centres of gravity" are widely scattered in this model. The lines between "war" and "peace," as well as between "civilian" and "military," become increasingly hazy as action takes place simultaneously at several societal levels, including political institutions, media networks, economic networks, and daily social interactions[1].Battlefields become ill-defined in both space and time; if they successfully hit this identified centre of gravity, they can quickly cause disproportionate strategic damage.

In terms of tactics, 4GW involves a close combination of military and political action: psychological warfare plays a key role, and the opponent's civil society and political infrastructure are viewed as legitimate targets. Lind foresees that in certain situations, media and information operations would be more important than armoured divisions because they have the power to shape public opinion both domestically and internationally to the point where they prevent or undermine the use of conventional force. In this situation, television news and other mass media outlets are potential operational weapons meant to weaken the enemy population's support for its government and war effort rather than being agencies of impartial observers[2].

Lind adds that non-Western cultural traditions, like Islamic or Asiatic traditions, might give rise to 4GW. Some non-Western regions, like the Islamic world, may develop a 4GW through ideas rather than

technology due to the lack of their technological prowess. Terrorism and insurgency that primarily rely on concepts, symbolism, and media effects rather than on technological superiority or large-scale manoeuvres may exhibit elements of 4GW. Importantly, non-state actors take advantage of liberal societies' freedoms and openness by using legal protections and civil liberties to infiltrate, organize, and defend themselves while attempting to undermine the very system that provides those protections. For democratic states, this presents a dilemma: if the state responds with extra-legal repression, the media and public opinion can quickly flip the narrative and recast terrorists as victims, further undermining the state's legitimacy. However, if the state treats such actors strictly within the law, they may gain significant protections. Therefore, according to Lind's framework, success in 4GW depends on psychological advantage and narrative dominance throughout society[3].

Another crucial aspect of Lind's argument is that 4GW adds new "levels" of war: the physical, mental, and moral and reverses their conventional significance: the moral level, which is concerned with issues of justice and legitimacy, becomes crucial, while the physical level, which involves killing people and destroying things, is now the least powerful[4]. This directly relates to his assertion that contemporary 4GW are essentially political, social, and moral phenomena that stem from a crisis in the legitimacy of the state, as people turn their primary allegiance from states to tribes, religions, ideologies, and other non-state entities. He claims that exclusively military response is not an answer to 4GW threats in such a case because military force cannot restore legitimacy on its own and may actually worsen moral defeat even while winning physical battles if it is used in ways that harm local populations[5].

Additionally, Lind highlights that 4GW is difficult because it is a particularly complicated human undertaking with a wide range of participants pursuing a wide range of objectives, from financial gain and political dominance to religious martyrdom. In contrast, 4GW creates what he refers to as the "strategic corporal," where the actions of a single soldier or, consequently, a lone activist, terrorist, or media actor can have strategic ramifications, especially when cameras are rolling and images circulate instantly[6]. In previous generations, it was the domain of generals and statesmen.

Lastly, Lind places 4GW in its historical context by pointing out that the multi-sided conflicts that state armed forces currently face those involving gangs, clans, religions, and commercial enterprises resemble the pattern of warfare that existed prior to the establishment of the modern state and the Peace of Westphalia. 4G conflicts indicate a return to a "pre-Westphalian" world in which many different kinds of actors wage war simultaneously, frequently without clear fronts or declarations. From 1648 onward, modern war had mostly been reduced to contests between states using regular armies[7]. This historical framing reinforces the central point: 4GW is about the erosion of the state's monopoly over legitimate violence and loyalty, and therefore any analysis of 4GW in India must pay close attention to how non-state networks, narratives, and cultural loyalties interact with the constitutional state and its secular framework. It is precisely at this point that the language of "cultural Marxism" enters contemporary Indian debates, naming a supposed network of ideas and actors that are said to fight this new kind of war not with bullets, but by reshaping curriculum, media narratives, and rights-based claims against the Bhartiya civilizational state.

Cultural marxism

According to Lind, America's older, cohesive culture did not simply "change" but was deliberately undermined by a long cultural offensive driven by elites who captured schools, media, and law and then used ideas like tolerance and rights to delegitimize traditional norms[8]. In Indian terms, you can say

something similar as a description of a powerful narrative, not as a proven conspiracy. Many Indic voices claim that what changed India after the 1950s was not only urbanization and globalization but also a sustained ideological push in education, media, NGOs, and courts that framed the civilizational state as oppressive while celebrating minority and Western liberal identities. They argue that "cultural Marxism" uses the language of secular rights, human rights, and social justice to erode the confidence in the "religion of India" (the core of civilization) and to mobilize the "religions practicing in India" plus various victim groups as instruments of 4GW from within. Just as Herbert Marcuse once anticipated in the context of advanced societies that Marxist revolution would no longer come from the traditional proletariat but from a "coalition of the marginalized" including Black activists, radicalized students, feminist women, and homosexual minorities[9], these critics now propose that a similar alliance has been consciously engineered in India.

Cultural Marxism reimagines classical Marxism's economic class war as a cultural crusade, targeting institutions like family, religion, and nationhood as tools of oppression. Pioneered by Frankfurt School thinkers, it infiltrates education and media to "deconstruct" Western traditions (or, in India's case, Indic traditions), fostering identity-based fractures of caste, gender, and region under the guise of liberation. This narrative pivot from 4GW's kinetic disruptions to Cultural Marxism's slow ideological corrosion creates internal enemies, making societies self-destruct without external invasion. As Burke warned, "Manners (culture) are of more importance than laws," for destroying cultural foundations makes way for societal collapse without external force.

This, however, remains abstract unless we trace how such cultural Marxist logics appear in concrete institutions and controversies. In the Indian case, three clusters of examples demonstrate how devotional figures, legal decisions, campaigns, and university spaces are progressively drawn into this ideological re-engineering.

1. Cultural Marxism in Art:

A disturbing collection of artistic disputes in contemporary India shows how cultural Marxism and 4GW function through symbolic subversion rather than traditional coercion. In Ms. Militancy, Meena Kandasamy's poem "Random Access Man" rewrites the episode of Sita's abduction in an aggressively erotic register, presenting Ram as a sexually inadequate husband whose repeated refusal of intimacy intensifies Sita's bodily desire. Drawing on this, the poem imagines Sita sending Ram away in pursuit of a golden deer as a kind of symbolic quest for lost virility, while she chooses a "random man" with many heads and hands—clearly Ravana as the figure who can satisfy her corporeal needs[10]. The poet herself characterizes this kind of work as "pure and total blasphemy," stating that the poem "gossips about the sex between Sita and Laxman" and "is a witness to the rape of Shurpanaka,"[11] thereby explicitly signalling a deliberate violation of Ramayana piety rather than an innocent retelling but all framed as Dalit feminist resistance to Brahminical patriarchy.

M. F. Husain produced multiple nude or semi-nude depictions of Hindu deities such as Saraswati, Durga, Sita, Hanuman, and others, as well as a famous painting of Bharat Mata shown nude, her body mapped onto the Indian subcontinent. This prompted multiple criminal complaints, civil unrest, and ultimately his self-exile even as the high court valorized his work as modernist experimentation.[12]

More recently, Toronto-based Indian filmmaker Leena Manimekalai released a poster for her short film "Kaali" as part of the "Under the Tent" project at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto. The poster shows a woman dressed as Goddess Kali smoking a cigarette, with a rainbow Pride flag in one hand and

traditional weapons in the other. Manimekalai claimed she was being targeted by "Hindutva outrage" and defended the piece as her artistic vision of Kali and “choosing love over hate”[13] . “We artists cannot be choked by the climate of fear.We need to be louder and stronger," she said[14]. Later, she petitioned the Supreme Court to have the FIRs quashed, and the Court gave her protection from arrest.

"Fire" by Deepa Mehta. The characters in the movie were named Radha and Sita, names that are highly respected in Hindu culture, yet it showed a lesbian love. The fact that the movie was somewhat influenced by Ismat Chughtai's Lihaaf, which had two Muslim characters, makes it even more striking. However, the filmmakers chose revered Hindu names instead of Muslim ones. They used characters connected to the Hindu faith without reluctance, but they dared not depict two Muslim women in such a relationship.

Until such incidents are compared to the model of Georg Lukács's cultural strategy, one may be inclined to write them off as harmless examples of artistic freedom. As deputy commissar for culture in the short-lived Béla Kun Bolshevik regime in Hungary in 1918, Lukács openly questioned, "Who will save us from Western civilization?" and initiated what he called "cultural terrorism," the main tool of which was the introduction of radical sex education in Hungarian schools. He explicitly calculated that by first undermining the nation's traditional sexual morals, he would take a significant step toward destroying its Christian faith and traditional culture[15].

When compared to that model, the ongoing eroticization and desacralization of Hindu icons in modern literature, film, and visual art appears less like haphazard provocation and more like a deliberate attack on civilizational symbols intended to demystify, desacralize, and ultimately delegitimize the religious imagination of the majority. By sexualizing revered deities, these works move them from the realm of the sacred to the realm of mere bodies and desires, normalizing the idea that Hindu traditions are just another oppressive "text" that should be ridiculed rather than a living faith.

2. In Public Discourse:

The Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers and Artists Association organized the “Sanatana Ozhippu Maanaadu” (Sanatana Abolition Conference) in Chennai on September 2, 2023, explicitly calling for the eradication of Sanatana Dharma. Speakers invited to this conclave were K. Veeramani of Dravidar Kazhagam, Stalin Udhayanidhi, a DMK minister, Madhukkur Ramalingam, a member of the Communist Party of India, T.L. Thirumavalavan from the Liberation Panthers Party, Peter Alphonse from the Congress Party, S. Venkatesan of the Marxist Communist Party, and Adhavan Deetchanya of the Tamil Nadu Progressive Writer Association with Ponmudi, a DMK minister. These speakers collectively occupy significant political and cultural authority. They are precisely the kinds of actors whose role is to translate the abstract principle of secularism into everyday governance, lawmaking, education, and public discourse. The conclave's own session names clearly reveal its ideological focus.

The program is organized as a continuous bill of indictment rather than a neutral academic review of "religion and society." Panels on "Deadly History of Sanatan (Sanatan Dharma)," "Sanatan and Women," "Tamil Norms and Sanatan," "Caste Theory & Conspiracy Theory," "Tamil Music & Sanatan," and "Sanatan Imposition & Opposition in Media" only depict Sanatan as a source of oppression or deceit, never as a valid framework for civilization[16]. The concern that what is being promoted here is not secular neutrality but rather a culturally Marxist project of redefining an entire religious tradition as a pathological structure to be dismantled, symbol by symbol and domain by domain, is further reinforced by this agenda and the stature of the invited speakers. The controversial

speech of DMK leader Udhayanidhi Stalin at this conference, where he said, "I congratulate the organizers for calling the conference eradicate Sanatana Dharma instead of opposing Sanatana Dharma," and compared Sanatana Dharma with mosquitoes, malaria, and dengue[17]. It drew intense political criticism and multiple FIRs and petitions before the Supreme Court, but it did not trigger a wider diplomatic crisis or nationwide violent mobilization. By contrast, before the cases were consolidated in Delhi, BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma's 2022 TV remarks about the Prophet sparked a number of FIRs across states, violent street protests in some locations, strong protests from several Muslim-majority countries, ongoing death-threat allegations, and harsh oral criticism from the Supreme Court.

Same case, different reaction. Read through the lens of cultural Marxism. It is precisely a politics of liberating tolerance in the Marcusean style. Which he defined as tolerance for all the ideas coded as progressive or minority affirming and active intolerance through social ostracism or moral panic for views marked as conservative, majoritarian, or reactionary.

3. In Academics:

Nationalism has historically and traditionally functioned in the Bhartiya civilizational state not only as a political catchphrase but also as the moral language that enabled a diverse subcontinent to see itself as a single people battling foreign domination. Jawaharlal Nehru University's (JNU) post-2016 "nationalism" debate offers a concentrated look at how elements of the academic left are reimagining the Indian nation-state. This is one important place where this broader shift in culture and ideology is evident. In his review essay "JNU, the Headquarters of the Breaking India Enterprise," historian Saumya Dey shows how several JNU "Nationalism Lectures," later collected as What the Nation Really Needs to Know, consistently portray India not as a single national community but rather as a collection of caste, regional, and class fault lines held together only by a thin constitutional or contractual glue. Prominent academics like Janaki Nair, Gopal Guru, G. Arunima, A. Mangai, Nivedita Menon, Achin Vanaik, and Prabhat Patnaik have contributed to this discourse, which normalizes the idea that the Indian nation-state is either artificial, inherently oppressive, or at most a negotiable arrangement that different groups may lawfully leave. Lenin's "right to secession" in heterogeneous societies is even invoked[18]. This is remarkable in a society where nationalism has historically derived its moral energy from the anti-colonial struggle (beyond Britishers) and was deeply entwined with civilizational and religious-symbolic resources, from invocations of "Bharat Mata" to Sri Aurobindo's spiritual-nationalist vision of the nation as a living shakti during centuries of foreign rule, offering a shared grammar of obligation and belonging to a diverse population. Within the broader cultural-Marxist reframing of nations as contingent, oppressive constructs, it is not surprising that contemporary public discourse, especially on social media on August 15 and January 26, increasingly shifts to seemingly radical questions like "Are we really free?" These questions often encourage viewing the nation-state primarily as a suspect or illegitimate structure that needs to be critically renewed, diverting attention away from anti-colonial martyrdom and the hard-won transfer of sovereignty.

JNU is not a unique case. The greatest intellectual environments in India are now impacted by the same ideological drift, as evidenced by queer-theoretical readings of bhakti from esteemed institutions like the IIT. These studies shift the devotional axis of Radha–Krishna or Mira–Krishna to Radha's or Mira's intimacy with their sakhis, which is re-described as "romantic friendship" best viewed from a lesbian perspective[19]. Radha and Mira are recounted less as spiritual exemplars and more as lesbian subjects,

subtly removing the devotional archive from civilizational continuity and positioning it as a site of repression to be subverted.

Given that JNU and the IITs are India's leading knowledge-producing institutions, this change will have far-reaching effects. Their graduates apply these interpretive practices to education, bureaucracy, and the media, turning esteemed universities into de facto command centres of an internal cultural offensive. They appear to be both intellectually diverse and ideologically compromised in this way, normalizing a framework that progressively desacralizes majority traditions while claiming the moral authority of secular advancement and research.

Secularism

Secularism is now more than just a constitutional theory; it is the focal point where cultural Marxist narratives and fourth-generation warfare merge. The idea behind Indian secularism was to allow a highly diverse community to coexist without using religious differences as political points of contention. It is based on "principled distance" in its more complex formulations: the state may interact with faiths, but only to provide equal citizenship, dignity, and freedom of conscience; it will never impose the theology or culture of one community over another. Speech, association, education, and minority institutions are examples of secular rights that, in that perspective, are shared civic rights rather than tools in a cultural conflict. In due course of time this framework has been drawn into a securitized secularist logic throughout time. In this paradigm, secularism becomes a language of defence against a perceived existential adversary rather than a neutral concept of managing diversity.

Hindu political assertion is pre-emptively classified as a security danger to their modern & progressive civilization, religion, and democracy. While minority assertion, rights litigation, and critical scholarship are framed under a Cultural-Marxist reading as necessary but flimsy safeguards against an aggressive Hindu majority. Any challenge to their ideological orientation is portrayed as an attack on fundamental safety rather than as a typical democratic contestation because secular norms and institutions courts, universities, media, and NGOs are viewed as protective bunkers that must shield vulnerable populations from "majoritarian fascism."

In response, the government of the day & current BJP dispensation takes an overtly pro-Hindutva stance. It labels and acknowledges "Cultural Marxism" as a major ideological danger to the survival of Bhartiya civilization. Many uses of secular rights, such as in left-liberal campus politics, NGO advocacy, or minority mobilization, are recast by 4GW language about "breaking-India forces" and "internal enemies" from this side of the political spectrum as elements of a covert war against the civilizational State, waged through narratives, lawfare, and psychological operations rather than traditional violence. In response, through universities, think tanks, curriculum, and symbolism, the government and its broader ecosystem have started to construct a counter-narrative, mainstreaming concepts like dharma, decoloniality, and civilizational revivalism, and advocating policies that explicitly prioritize civilizational cultural memory. One obvious aspect of this counter-securitization is symbolic reclamation in public areas. Renaming places like Aurangabad to Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar or Allahabad to Prayagraj is portrayed as

decolonization and historical correction, but it also serves as a daily inscription of a revitalized Hindu narrative into the environment. Simultaneously, this 4GW/Cultural-Marxist framework is used to interpret instances such as Udhayanidhi Stalin's demand for the "eradication" of Sanatana Dharma and Nupur Sharma's statements regarding the Prophet. Hindutva voices point to disparate patterns of

outrage, policing, and diplomatic repercussions as evidence of a Marcusean regime of "liberating tolerance," which treats majoritarian speech as intrinsically dangerous while granting maximum tolerance and legal shelter to speech classified as progressive or minority-affirming. They see secularism and liberal tolerance as fundamental Cultural-Marxist tools that criminalize Hindu criticism of other religions while selectively defending assaults on the "religion of India."

As a result, the Republic is caught in an endless loop of double securitization. Secularism is mobilized on the one hand as a defensive security effort for progressive causes and minorities against an allegedly advancing Hindu rashtra. However, the same idea is transformed into a majoritarian security agenda, where safeguarding Hindu culture and interests becomes the state's top priority, and criticism of Hindutva can be reinterpreted as antagonism to the survival of Indian civilization. Expansive hate-speech regulations, renaming sprees, and syllabus conflicts are just a few examples of the extraordinary steps each party justifies by portraying the other as an existential threat rather than a legitimate competition within a shared constitutional framework.

Conclusion

The article reconstructs how a complex web of events, symbols, and policy actions from narrative regulations to city renaming and high-profile speech controversies are woven together into a single narrative of civilizational war using the combined lenses of 4GW and Cultural Marxism. When these "dots" are examined in connection to one another, it becomes clear why both Cultural-Marxist and Hindutva narratives have such resonance: they turn structural shifts in the media, economy, and social hierarchy into morally complex stories of betrayal, infiltration, and recovery. The analysis also draws attention to the expense of this narrative approach. Whether they are labelled as "fascist majoritarian" or "breaking-India Cultural Marxist," there is a strong temptation to regard political opponents as security issues rather than constitutional interlocutors once they are routinely perceived as 4GW players supported by hostile ideological networks. Conclusion is not that India is particularly doomed to such securitization, but rather that understanding how these frames function is an essential first step if academics and citizens wish to reclaim a space where secularism, rights, and civilizational identity can once more be debated as political issues that are amenable to compromise and persuasion rather than as proof in an unending internal conflict.

Footnotes

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