

Unit 20

Secularism and Secularization

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Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- provide definitions of secularism;
- outline what is secularization;
- delineate theories of secularism; and
- describe the Indian and European experience of secularism and secularization.

20.1 Introduction

The word secular is derived from the Latin word *saeculum* which means century or age. *Saeculum* was the profane time and the time of ordinary historical succession, as opposed to sacred time. Time was interwoven with higher times variously called 'eternity', the time of the Ideas, or the time of the Origin, or the time of God. Human beings were living in all these times but only some acts, institutions, lives and social forms were more thoroughly directed towards temporal and non-spiritual goals. Government was more 'in the *saeculum*' in contrast with the Church (Taylor 1998: 31-2). The division of life in these two spheres was recognised as far back as Jesus Christ. In *circa* 30, legend has it, when he was asked whether taxes should be paid to Rome, Jesus replied, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' (Storey and utter eds 2002: 32).

The term secularism was coined in 1851 by George Jacob Holyoake, a socialist. In the background of 19th century liberalism, the term secularism was a by-product of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. While Renaissance asserted the dignity of the person, Enlightenment highlighted the autonomy of reason and science. Before proposing the term secularism, Holyoake had considered the terms 'nethesim' (meaning neither theism nor an atheism) and 'limitationism' (probably hinting at limiting the religious influence). His first aim in proposing secularism was not to negate religion but to counter the irrationalism and supernaturalism of Christian theology. Holyoake's second aim in proposing secularism was to affirm the worth and dignity of a person and the autonomy of secular life (Jhingran 1995: 39-40).

20.2 Definitions of Secularism

Out of the commonly accepted three definitions of secularism one is people-centric, another is state-centric and yet another is India-specific. Firstly, the first people-centric definition emphasises the idea of separating religion from politics, economy, education, social life and culture. The purpose of this separation is not to stamp religion out from life but to contain it to the private lives of individuals. A secular state is not supposed to discourage the practice of religion but neither can it base its policies on religion. The ultimate goal is to make religion a personal affair. The initial steps in the containment of religious influence in society were taken at the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648 and during the French Revolution. In 1648 at the end of the Thirty Years' War in Europe, properties of the church were transferred to the exclusive control of the princes. Another significant moment in secularization came on 2 November 1789 when Talleyrand declared in the French National Assembly that all 'ecclesiastical goods', meaning religious institutions of which schools were prominent, were at the disposal of the nation (Mandan 1998: 298-9).

Most societies have followers of different faiths and this puts a great responsibility on the state to be neutral. The state-centric definition of secularism emphasises the need to keep the state neutral to all religions. Religious people would like to see the state to show equal regard to all faiths but others may demand the same respect for atheism. The demand normally is that the state must treat all its citizens equally. This means that the state must neither favour nor discriminate against citizens on grounds of their religion.

The containment of religion in life and the separation of state from religion are universally accepted definitions of secularism, even though these ideas had a distinctly European origin. The third India-specific definition of secularism underlines the importance of the unity of all people against colonialism and communalism. A secular state and society were a part of the social vision of the Indian national movement. Hence, despite the horrendous violence in 1947 and the making of Pakistan ostensibly on religious lines, secularism remained the abiding principle and opposition to communalism was the chosen policy in Independent India (Chandra 2004: 3-29).

20.3 What is secularization?

The process by which the sphere of influence of religion was contained in institutions and human consciousness is secularization. Secularism is no longer an active movement in the West and hence, scholars there prefer to talk about secularization of institutions and human consciousness. Bryan Wilson defines secularization as the process in which social institutions gain 'considerable autonomy' and religious consciousness declines whereby instead of being the pervasive, determinant influence, religion becomes 'a department of the social order'. Wilson mentions the following three features of a secular society, viz. the prevalence of instrumental values, rational procedures and technological methods (Wilson 1987: 159-60). In his *The Secular City* Harvey Cox maintained that secularization was a consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation and that its characteristics were urbanization, pragmatism or lack of interest in the mystery of life, profanity or this-worldliness, pluralism and tolerance due to which no world-view is imposed on anyone (Cox 1966:2-3). Peter Berger defined secularization as the 'process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols' (Berger 1973:113).

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Secularisation causes a decline in the social importance of religion and

secularism minimises the role of religion in the social and political affairs of society. The important processes of change triggered by secularisation, which comes in tow with modernity, are:

- 1) withdrawal of religion from such social spheres as education and marriage following a differentiation in institutions, structures and functions;
- 2) the development of pluralisms at the level of social groups (including religion) and world views;
- 3) rationalisation as described by Max Weber which refers to the emergence of a scientific, rational world view which 'disenchants' society from myths, mysteries, miracle and magic; and
- 4) the development of critical consciousness that reveals the ideologies hidden in the institutional and belief structures of religion (Alam 2002:106).

Box 20.1 Process of Secularization

The process of secularisation was greatly aided by transformation of human consciousness triggered by the popularisation of scientific ideas among common people. Secularism was the product of the Enlightenment which emphasized the autonomy of reason and science. The contributions of the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) who said the earth moves around the sun and was immediately condemned by the Church, the Italian Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) who suffered house arrest for life after the Catholic Church denounced him as a heretic because he endorsed the discovery that the earth moves around the sun, the German Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) who spoke of planetary bodies following some laws of motion and the English Issac Newton (1642-1727) who gave the laws of motion a sound footing by incorporating mass, force and gravity into them. Newton's book *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy) or *Principia* (1687) was popularized by Voltaire and its ideas that the world is governed by rational laws overflowed from science into philosophy and politics. *Principia*, therefore, became a major inspiration for the 18th century Enlightenment. All this together demolished biblical cosmology. Biblical worldview asserted that creation took place a few thousand years ago, that the earth was the centre of the universe, and that the entire creation was anthropomorphic (meaning human form was the measure for everything, whether God or animal). Astronomical time and space, on the other hand, reduced humans and their history to absolute insignificance.

Similarly, the theory about evolution demolished another dogma that the entire human species descended from one ancestor, viz. Adam and Eve. Charles Darwin (1809-1882), English naturalist, wrote to Karl Marx in 1880, 'It seems to me ... that direct arguments against Christianity or Theism hardly have any effect on the public; and that freedom of thought will best be promoted by that gradual enlightening of human understanding which follows the progress of science. I have therefore avoided writing about religion and have confined myself to science.' He is well known for his theory of evolution. He collected data during his round-the-globe trip on HMS *Beagle* in 1831-36 when he observed variations between related species on the Galapagos Islands. By 1837 Darwin had already concluded that species 'change' or 'evolve' over time through the appearance of new traits that slowly modify ancestral forms until their forms are distinctly different (Rohmann 1999: 89-90). There was opposition to the ideas of these scientists also around the same time. For instance, in USA, the state of Oklahoma passed the first anti-evolution law in 1923. This law

20.4 Theories of Secularism

Theories of secularism grew in a historical context of differing religious visions and acute strife among people having these differences. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1776), David Hume asked, 'If religion is salutary to society, why are its consequences so pernicious (like factions, civil wars, persecutions, subversions of government, oppression and slavery) to public affairs?' (Lorenzen (ed) 1995) The point of origin of modern secularism in Europe is the Crusades or rather 'the search in battle-fatigue and horror for a way out' of religious wars. Crusades, as we know, were a series of eight holy wars that took place between 1095 and 1464 ostensibly to reclaim the holy lands in Palestine from the Muslims. 'Rules of peace, even with heretics, and of obedience to legitimate authority, even where schismatic, had to be put beyond revocation in the name of one or other version of orthodoxy.' Two approaches were devised in those days to overcome religious hatred. One was the *common ground strategy* to establish the ethics of peaceful co-existence and political order. In giving their different versions of natural law, Aquinas, Pufendorf and Locke subscribed to this strategy of secularism. This strategy downplayed confessional dogma and highlighted common beliefs, and it could manifest in Deism (or the belief in one God which is in contrast with polytheism or atheism). This strategy appealed to people with different commitments to converge on certain fundamentals.

The second way devised to overcome religious conflict was to evolve an independent political ethic. Outside warring beliefs, this strategy proposes a political morality which provides a common basis for living together. Certain norms of peace and political obedience were deduced from features of the human condition. It was said that humans were rational creatures who were sociable and they would not violate any solemnly given word. Grotius is the celebrated earliest explorer of this strategy. He said 'even if God didn't exist, these norms would be binding on us' (Tuck 1979 pp 33-4).

Secularism, as an ideology, consists of the following five ideas. Firstly, it stresses the role of human autonomy. This means that secularism recognises the right of an individual to order her life independent of authority. The *Secular Humanist Declaration* declares, 'Secular humanism places trust in human intelligence, rather than divine guidance. Sceptical of theories of theories of redemption, damnation and reincarnation, secular humanist attempts to approach the human situation in realistic terms; human beings are responsible for their own destinies.' (Kurt 3 (n.d.) p 12)

Secondly, secularism asserts that not only state and laws but family relations, education, morality, knowledge and values are also completely free from the dominance of religion. The specific point in India, according to Marc Gallanter, is not to keep religion out of politics but to keep it out of social relations (Gallanter 1998).

Thirdly, secularism seeks not just the autonomy of the individual but also the autonomy of reason. Reason is made the sole criteria of truth and this undermines the faith in religion and the authority of the church.

Fourthly, secularism makes room for the values of pluralism and religious toleration because it does not make any religion final, infallible and beyond rational scrutiny. A plurality of religious world-views is therefore considered natural by secularists and tolerance is an attitude they value towards other religions and value systems.

Fifthly, secularism is not anti-religion. Instead, it is concerned with the affairs of this world and considers that secular life and knowledge is autonomous (Jhingran 1995: 46-9) People's Republic of China officially has a policy opposed to religion and going strictly by the definition of secularism, it is not a secular state.

20.5 The European experience

Secularism was the conscious affirmation of the goals of Reformation and the Renaissance which asserted the dignity of the person. The individual person was the concern of Reformation in the 16th century. Martin Luther (1483-1546), the principal initiator of the Protestant Reformation, had advocated the individual's right to understand the word of God, independent of the Church. The problem, however, was that Reformation was basically a religious movement which later became quite reactionary. Two notable things about the Reformation were that it did not produce more toleration and religious liberty and that the popular masses/ illiterates were little influenced by the sophisticated controversies of the Reformation. Popular religion continued to be the folk religion. The biggest influence of Reformation was that Christianity was divided into several Churches, mostly into national churches. Political authorities tried not to formally recognize more than one Church but yet the universal Catholic Church gave place to several religious perspectives, bitterly opposing one another. The existence of different religious options did not entail a sense of toleration or religious liberty because all parties believed in the notion of objective truth and they claimed to be against the public expression of religious error (Hillerbrand 1987: 253).

The secularization process could be initiated only after non-metaphysical rational and scientific explanations were satisfactorily provided for the evolution of the universe and human life thereon. The Renaissance thinkers and astronomers, as noted above, challenged the theological visions of the cosmos. Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection confronted the Christian dogma about the earth being a creation of God and Adam and Eve being our common ancestors. The ideas produced by the astronomers and naturalists were confined to a few. The secularization process popularized them among people through publicity, viz. mass education, free press and social movements. In the 19th century, the great secularist campaigner, Charles Bradlaugh believed that extensive propaganda would ensure secularization. He held that secular ideas could be spread better not by playing on flutes but by the beating of drums (Chadwick 1985: 103)

Secularization Process

The secularization process in the West, as also in India, took place in a specific social milieu. It had several distinctly national features. The struggle between feudal lords and the bourgeoisie took a religious form in England and in The Netherlands but not so in France (Havrilyuk 1984). It is necessary to take cognizance, howsoever briefly, of the social history of secularisation 'for we live not only in nature but in human society which has its history of development and science' (Engles and Marx 1976: 206). The feudal state had very close relations with religious institutions. Monarchs lavished revenue-free land grants on religious institutions and the latter endowed their feudal patrons with the 'Grace of God.' For a short duration in its fight with the feudal state, the bourgeoisie took recourse to science and rationality with an anti-religious edge. The demands of parishes were curtailed, a number of clerical establishments were liquidated, the staff of the clergy was reduced and the principle of election was instituted among clergy men. Practice of feudal privileges based on heredity,

oppression based on the will of the Sovereign and the 'Divine Right' of monarchs to rule was challenged on rational grounds. In the emerging modern nation-states, democracy was proclaimed and the rights of citizens were guaranteed through evolution as in England or through revolution as in France. One of these rights was the freedom of conscience.

Freedom of conscience is considered the 'voice of God within us' by theologians. Instead, the rationalists believe that conscience is a by-product of the development of society. They hold that freedom of conscience passed through three stages in its development. The first stage was when people struggled for religious tolerance in a confessional state. The second stage was when religious freedom of conscience was asserted in a liberal democratic polity. In the third stage genuine freedom of conscience was accomplished because atheism was freely allowed on the assumption that conscience is the yardstick of religion and not vice versa.

Action and Reflection 20.1

Talk to a cross section of people and ask them what is secularism and secularization. Note your discussion in your notebook.

Even before the current phase of globalisation, capitalist institutions, like the market, integrated vast areas and people in different parts of the world. But the capitalist social relations divided the large national states distinctly into what Disraeli called 'two nations', viz. the wage-earners and the capitalists. The wage earners were devoid of ownership of the means of production due to their poverty. After being paid a subsistence wage, these workers were alienated from the fruits of their labour due to the prevailing social relations. Hence, they grasped the conception of God and institutions of religion to compensate in imagination what they had lost in the real world. Religion was welcomed by them into their culture in order to make the conditions of the 'heartless world' slightly more bearable. On the other hand, capitalists needed religion to buffet the brutal uncertainties strewn in their lives, both as individuals and firms, busy with the task of accumulating capital. The capitalists may occasionally also need religion to be used as an instrument to pacify potential rebels among wage-earners. Ironically, therefore, the liberal state, dominated by the capitalists, also resorted to religion to bless its actions, crown its dictators, sanction its laws, define as just its war against its enemies or violence against its citizens and generally be the decorous master of national ceremonies.

Secularization and other Institutions

Secularisation also gave birth to a large mosaic of relations between socio-political institutions and religion in western Europe itself. Lutheranism is the established faith in the Nordic countries (like Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland) and Catholicism enjoys a privileged position, though is not the established faith, in Italy, Spain and Portugal. Church of England has never been the state church but it has enjoyed some privileges like 26 top most Anglican bishops have seats in the House of Lords and Anglican priests preside over most state ceremonies. Yet, the Church of England is subordinate to the British sovereign because s/he is also the supreme governor of the Church of England. France, though Catholic, has become rigidly secular since 1905 when the Catholic Church was disestablished. Now, the French Government shows no preference for any religious group and prohibits clerics from teaching in the public schools. Mexico, where Catholics formed 92% of the total population in 2000, has implemented the most anti-clerical legislation in the West. Here it is legislated that:

- Church property belongs to the state;
- Worship services outside the Church was forbidden till some years ago;
- The government can open any place of worship and determine the number of clerics permitted in it;
- The clergy cannot vote, participate in politics, wear vestments in public or criticize public officials; and
- The church cannot own radio and television stations (Storey and Utter eds 2002: XI-XII)

Capitalist societies can be divided into two main categories according to the nature of Church-State relations. The first category consists of those who have a declared State religion and in the 1980s their number was around four dozen or about a quarter of all countries of the world. In these countries only the adherents of the State religion could become the head of the State, member of high state institutions and participate in the management of State affairs. In the second category fall countries which have officially declared the separation of the State from any religion but in practice religion is present in the cultural life of the nations. Agencies of the State get involved with the religious ceremonies in the interests of public order, religious education is regulated in the interests of uniform educational standards and religious institutions are overseen in the interests of public good. The Indian case falls in this latter category where there is a formal separation but actual involvement of the State with religious affairs.

20.6 The Indian experience

Secularism is 'not an optional extra for a modern democracy,' it is a necessity. There are several religious and caste groups whose members wish to relate with each other on a pluralist but egalitarian basis. Pluralism existed in India during the medieval times as well but the challenge to pluralism in our times is different. In medieval times hierarchy, and not equality, was the norm. Hence, the diverse religions and cultures had to find their place in the social hierarchy. On the one hand, even a non-Hindu religious group like the Syrian Christians had to be fitted in the caste system as one more *jati* (Bayly 1989 Ch. 7). On the other hand, the prime source of legitimacy was the force of arms but the conquering groups (like Mughals, Marathas and Sikhs) also tried to exercise cultural hegemony. The ruling, dominant groups would tolerate, even subsidize, different faiths provided the others publicly accepted their power. Bayly found that, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the dominant cultural groups of UP (whether the Muslim gentry in small towns or the Hindu merchants in Benaras) set the limits within which other cultural groups found their rights (Bayly 1983: 335-8). In modern times, all seek equal rights and no one would like to exercise them as a courtesy showered on them after bowing to the power of some dominant cultural group. Hence, there is a demand that the rights of people be equal and that they be engraved in law formulated by popular vote.

Colonial Impact

The European marvel of secularism hinged on Renaissance thought and industrial capitalism. The Indian secular experience is different from the European marvel due to colonialism. Colonialism, as we know, was not chosen by Indians but was foisted on India aggressively since the 18th century. Colonialism had a debilitating impact on both the development of Renaissance-like thought and industrial capitalism in India. Sushobhan Sarkar

said the Renaissance in Bengal, which was the leader of India in the 19th century, was partial and artificial. He noted two vital differences between the Indian and European forms of Renaissance. Firstly, the European Renaissance flourished in free and independent states whereas the Indian Renaissance struggled to make its appearance in a colonial situation of foreign conquest and domination. Secondly, the European Renaissance liberated the mind but this liberation was a part of a magnificent process in which Europe 'discovered' the world. The world witnessed a revolution in religion, the foundation of modern science, the rise of centralised states, a beginning of the break up of the old social system in which the bourgeoisie limited the power of monarchs, and the reorganisation of trade, industry and agriculture. The Indian Renaissance did not have any such sweep or vitality (Sarkar 1970: 149-50).

Box 20.2 The Salad Bowl

In India, after the revolt of 1857, the colonial state pulled itself out of the Utilitarian inspired, William Bentinck-led social reforms. Instead, by playing one religion and caste against another, the colonial state tried to practice the policy of 'divide and rule' so as to kill the possibility of a united opposition to it. Hence, the anti-colonial nationalists became the torch-bearers of secularism, social reform, national unity and much else. In the context of secularism, these nationalists were inspired by three distinct ideals. Firstly, they drew inspiration from modern western thought and especially from the English industrial and French political revolutions. Secondly, the Indian religious reformation also helped the nationalists to initially draw people into public activity and to conceptualise a future better than the 'oppressive present.' Thirdly, India is and was a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country. The nationalist strategy of 'unity in diversity' served the political ideal of national unity just as well as it gave a boost to the secular ideal of a society with tolerance towards differences and of a culture which was a composite 'salad bowl', not a melting pot. In a 'salad bowl' each item retains its uniqueness but is also a part of whole. Similarly, the different socio-cultural groups retain their respective identities but also form a part of a bigger politico-economic entity called the Indian nation.

Secularism and Religion

In the context of secularisation, there has been a considerable debate about the suitability of the concept and practice of secularism in India and the differences between Gandhi and Nehru on this issue. T.N. Madan in his 'Secularism in its Place' makes a guarded attack on modernization. He says that secularism and Indian culture are mismatched due to two reasons. He said the mainstream Enlightenment view was that religion is irrational. If secularism wants to remove religion from Indian public life and culture, this will not happen. Secondly, Madan says that no religion would go away on eviction. In fact there will be a strong cultural resistance if religion is forcibly evicted. Nehru did not adopt the forcible eviction model of Turkey but Nehruvian ideologues tried to use state institutions for attaining secular objectives. They failed and some of the responsibility for the eruption of religious bigotry and communal violence must be laid at their door, said Madan (Madan 1991: 398).

To counter bigotry and intolerance, Madan offers two incompatible proposals. First, he wants that nobody should demand the removal of religion from public life. He wants the resources of every religion to be used for spreading tolerance and fighting fanaticism. Second, Madan wants the available versions of secularism to be rejected and, in their place, he

would like to have 'a modern secularism appropriate to the cultural context of India' (Bhargava 1998: 524).

Ashis Nandy has made a flamboyant and sweeping attack on Modernization. He distinguishes religion as faith from religion as ideology. Religion as faith is 'a way of life, a tradition which is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural.' Religion as ideology, on the other hand, is a 'subnational, national or cross-national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic, interests' (Nandy 1991: 398). Modernization produces religion as ideology and then generates secularism to meet its challenge. Nandy says modern scientific nationalist secularism is in crisis. He says that in places where religion has immense importance it is not possible to make religion a matter of private preference. Religion inevitably enters public life through the back door and this leads to communalization of politics. On the other hand, Nandy observed, secularism has turned into an intolerant ideology with modernization, development, scientific growth and nation-building as its allies or constituents. This secularism alienates believers and breeds both old and new kinds of violence. Such secularism breeds old violence in the form of backlash of marginalized believers which in turn reinvigorates bigotry and fanaticism. Secondly, this secularism generates new violence between nation-state and religious communities.

Notions of Secularism

Like Madan, Nandy also wants the rejection of secularism and inclusion of notions of tolerance existing in different faiths of India. Nandy says that there exist two notions of secularism. One is the standard Western one which keeps religion out of politics. The second alternative, non-Western secularism must have space for continuous dialogue among religious traditions and among the religious and the secular. This Nandy felt might lead each of the major faiths in the region to include within it an in-house version of other faiths which in turn will encourage internal criticisms and remind one of the diversity in the theories of transcendence (Bhargava 1998: 524-5). Nandy has two versions of secularism but only one version of modernity and that too negative. Hence, while Nandy rejects modernity and the modern notion of secularism, he is left with tolerance of traditional religions to defend his secularism with.

Madan and Nandy make an effective critique of hysterical anti-religiosity and the hyper-substantive secularism which excludes religion from public life. They would not like to privatize religion and rationalize politics. They criticize secularism for being invalid in circumstances where religion is of immense importance to people. The fact is that modern secularism arose because tolerance of traditional religion was exhausted and religious beliefs had become a reason for conflict. When these religions are faltering again, we cannot return to religion whose resources have proven inadequate in the past.

Modern culture is a mixed bag and its outright rejection may not be the best way to have secularism. On the one hand, modern culture has some frightening flaws like a drive to control; a purely instrumental and destructive stance towards nature and human life, towards poor, marginalized sections and victims of the savage side of capitalism; disorientation and a felt lack of meaning; a trivialization of freedom in consumer choice; and a confused hedonism. On the other hand, modern culture also promises great goods like freedom, human rights, democracy, the right to be different, and great movements for peace and human welfare on a global scale (such as Amnesty International and Medecins Sans Frontieres) (Taylor 2006 p 7).

Box 20.3 Tradition and Secularism

This brings us to the question as to what differences did Gandhi and Nehru have on the question of modernity, tradition and secularism. Nehru is seen as the modern monster and Gandhi is portrayed as a blind propagator of tradition. Both were deeply involved with changing Indian society and none of them was unmindful of its vast cultural treasures. They were not satisfied with any textbook definition of secularism. Gandhi's definition of secularism included respect for all religions but neutrality towards all forms of spiritual beliefs, including atheism. He changed the proposition 'God is Truth' to 'Truth is God' and performed the marriage of the daughter of an atheist disciple, Prof. Gora, in the name of Truth. When objections were raised, Gandhi had the invocation to God dropped from the Congress pledge in 1925 (Chandra 2004:3-23). Nehru not only led the struggle for Indian Independence but also had to venture into nation-building. His conception of secularism included religious pluralism, full civil liberties and equal opportunities. Not just tolerance, Nehru emphasised equality and suggested that his task was to build a modern state within the framework of India's culture (Gopal 1996: 209).

It is thought that Gandhi would have wanted the sacred to pervade the secular sphere and Nehru would have nothing to do with it. Facts are very different from this impression. Gandhi was a deeply religious man but he did not want Hinduism to interfere with secular political matters, especially those of State policy. In his *My Experiments with Truth* he wrote, 'My devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics... those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion means.' (Gandhi, 1929: 591). Gandhi even called his Non-Cooperation Movement, in 1920-21, 'a religious, purifying movement' and as a 'religious effort' (Young India, 1929: 14). He believed that politics cannot be divorced from politics because he wanted religion to pervade every action of human beings. But, in 1940, Gandhi declared, '...Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe...This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc.' (Harijan, 1940: 177-8). But, with the experience of cantankerous debates and horrific violence in the name of religion, since the 1940s, the same Gandhi demanded that religion be kept out of politics. At the time of the Quit India Movement, in August 1942, Gandhi said, 'Religion is a personal matter and should have no place in politics' (Harijan 1942:402). In September 1946, Gandhi told a missionary, 'If I were a dictator, religion and state would be separate. I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it' (Harijan 1946). Less than three weeks before his assassination by a Hindu communalist, Gandhi told people at a prayer meeting on 11 January 1948 that 'he wanted all nationalists not to mix religion with politics. They were Indians first and last in all secular matters. Religion was a personal affair of the individual concerned' (Tendulkar 1969: 240).

20.7 Conclusion

Much is made of the agnosticism and anti-religiosity of Nehru. But it is often not understood that 'Nehru was without religious faith but not without religious feeling.' He praised sages and savants and agreed with Vinoba Bhave that the days of politics and religion had been replaced by the days of science and spirituality (Gopal 1996: 208-209). He appreciated the value of religious epics in the life and culture of India. In his foreword to N. Chandrasekhara Aiyer's *Valmiki Ramayana*, Nehru acknowledged that the epic 'must have peculiar virtue in it' because it had a 'powerful

influence on millions of people, during some millennia of our changing history.' Nehru underlined the importance of seeing the whole of India (and not just a part) to have a full picture of her and of appreciating the deep roots of her past (and not just see the present) to understand her. He said an intellectual understanding of history is necessary but 'we must have even more an emotional awareness of our past and the present.' Nehru added that to understand India and her people fully it is necessary to have a 'knowledge of the two magnificent epics that are India's pride and treasure' (Nehru 1954). Barely two days before his death, Nehru asserted that India should increase production by modern industrial processes 'but in doing so we must not forget that the essential objective to be aimed at is the quality of the individual and the concept of *dharma* underlying it' (Gopal 1996: 209).

20.8 Further Reading

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