

Unit 24

Secularisation

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Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- define the concept of secularism;
- explain what is meant by the process of secularisation;
- discuss the concept of secularism in the Indian context;
- describe the reasons why secularism became an important feature of the Indian National Movement and finally;
- discuss the important and significant nature of this concept in the Indian Constitution.

24.1 Introduction

Secularism, it is said, stands for a tendency that is broad and basic, primordial and significant, in the evolution of human thought and experience. Secularism is not a mere protest or discontent with excesses of religious zeal. Secularism is defined in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as a branch of utilitarian ethics, designed for the physical, social and moral improvement of mankind, which neither affirms nor denies the theistic premises of religion. It would be generally correct to say that in the contemporary modern world any man/woman considers his or her religion as a private and personal affair, governing his/her relationship with some unseen power God, or whatever one may call it. This relationship should help and not hinder the efficient performance of duties of the individual in other spheres of life. The process of secularisation of life and thought consists in the withdrawal and separation of 'religion' from other spheres of 'life and thought'.

Its essential principle has been to seek for human improvement by material means alone. The main thrust of secularism is towards the secular, social issues and reforms, which demanded the concerted efforts of all persons, regardless of their theological affiliations. The important thing was that those secular issues were to be tackled without any recourse to religious dogmas. Thus, secularism was largely a movement which aimed to improve the lot of people here on earth and emancipate them from all tyranny, whether of the church, or of a capitalist socio-economic order.¹

Etymologically, the word secular originates from the Latin *seculum* which implied "great span of time" or the "spirit of the age". Subsequently, it acquired different meaning - that of belonging to 'This World'. Thus, two worlds are conceptualized i.e. the secular and the religious or the temporal and the spiritual. In the Christian discourse, the spiritual order is regarded as decisive in terms of ultimate truth. The term secularisation was the subsequent

outcome. It was coined in 1648 after the Peace of Westphalia which originally referred to the transfer of ecclesiastical lands to civic control.²

Secularism is a "process whereby religious thinking practice and institutions loose their social significance".³ To speak of secularism is to speak of the triumph of science over religion and reason over faith. Secularism is a celebration of man's reason, ability to emancipate him/her from the influences of religious customs, beliefs, practices. Therefore, Secularism means the inevitable "desacrilisation" of the World. The World loses its sacred character as man and nature become the object of rational-casual explanation in which the supernatural plays no part.

24.2 Secularism and Secularisation : A Definition

'Secularism' is a value-loaded concept, its values derive from, and must be contextualised in our understanding of the underlying social process we call 'secularisation'. 'Secularisation is a social process and 'secularism' is a socio-political ideal or ideology. In actuality 'secularism' can become a reality in our social institutions only in so far as these are affected by 'secularisation'. Therefore, secularism is a product of, and, in turn, strengthen the process of secularisation. For the truism that there can be no secularism without process of secularisation is now widely accepted, but the challenge of actualising it through concrete social, political, economic and educational measures is an enormous task .⁴

Secularism is, above all, a product of the *weltanshauung* of the Renaissance and Enlightenment. It was the expression of Western man's urge to live his own life independently of the domination by the church which was the prevalent feature of medieval Western society. Secularism also affirmed the reality and worth of life in this world and the authority of reason and science in all secular matters.⁵

The word "secularism" was coined by Gorge Jacob Holyoake in 1851 to describe the socio-political movement started by himself, Charles Bradlaugh and others. G.J Holyoake used the term secularism to define an ideology, wherein social and industrial morality hitherto determined by reference to the transcending principles of religion, were now to be determined by reason, and firmly anchored to the good of man in this life. Secularism was subsequently projected as a rationalist movement, agnostic or indifferent to Religion.⁶

The secularism of Holyoake was a simple philosophy, which affirmed concern for life in this world, as articulated by the humanists and positivists alike. Secularism affirms the worth of this worldly existence, the independence of scientific knowledge, and human happiness as the only legitimate aims of social institutions. Holyoake described secularism as a "way of thinking", and as being concerned with "issues that can be tested in this life".⁷

According to Eris S, Water house, the relation of secularism to religion was understood as "mutually exclusive, rather than hostile." Secularism's only concern is that this world be known by experience and reason. It is not concerned about the "other world", or life after death; and neither offers, nor forbids, any opinion about these matters, it is willing to leave such questions to theology and is equally indifferent to both theism and atheism. Before adopting the term "secularism", Holyoake had considered the term "nethesim" and "limitationism" as alternatives. Holyoake was apparently more interested in countering the irrationalism of Christian theology, than in the negation of religion *per se*. His second aim was the affirmation of the worth and dignity of person and the autonomy of secular life .⁸

To begin then with secularisation in the West was hailed as “the liberation of modern man from religious tutelage” by some, while others bewailed it “as Christiamisation, paganisation and the like...”⁹ But historically the process of secularisation for the social scientist is intimately linked with the rise of modernity in the West and some would consider it as “perhaps the most significant development of the last several hundred years”¹⁰. It was the apparent decline in traditional church-oriented religion in recent times that heightened the process of secularisation and brought it to its present culmination. Yet it is a process whose roots can be traced to the very founding of the major religions and in fact it stands in an ambiguous and dialectical relation to the very phenomena it supposedly undermines. In this perspective, secularism is a Western concept to the extent that secularisation is a process that is located in Western society.

The term ‘secularisation’ is defined by Bryan Wilson as the process in which different social institutions ‘become recognised as distinctive concerns operating with considerable autonomy.’¹¹ It is also a process of “decline in religious activities, beliefs, ways of thinking and institutions.”¹² This decline in religious consciousness is the result of the universal acceptance of pragmatic or scientific approach to secular issues. In a secularised society people turn to science for explanation of natural phenomena and for remedial measures for their mundane problems. They no more take recourse to the “supernatural” for either cognitive understanding of the world, or even for emotional support.¹³ As a result, “Religion in the West has generally become a department of the social order rather than the pervasive or even determinant influence it once was.”¹⁴

In another work, Wilson mentions three features of a secular or secularised society, i.e.

- a)The prevalence of instrumental values,
- b)Rational procedures,
- © Technological methods.

He also defines a secular society as one in which “the sense of the sacred, the sense of the sanctity of life and deep religiosity are most conspicuously absent.”¹⁵ Let us see how the concept of secularism is understood in the context of Indian Society.

24.3 Secularism in India

Right from the beginning, Indian secularism drew its strength from pluralism. Secularism in the Indian tradition, was not the opposition of religion but was related to communalism, while Europe, being mono-religious, secularism was not the opposite of communalism as there was no struggle for domination between various religious communities. This is the crucial difference between the Western and Indian concepts of secularism. In Europe there was a struggle between the Christians and the church, while in India the struggle was between one religious community and the other. In India the saner leaders of both the communities emphasised justice in power sharing without questioning the religious authority of either community at any stage. ⁶²

Indians came across the concept of secularism in nineteenth century under the influence of the British rulers. It had never been the part of Indian scene before. Unlike Europe, India did not undergo any renaissance movement. It was only in late nineteenth century when the mutiny failed and the British consolidated their rule that the Indians opened their minds to the Western influences. But the Western ideas became popular only among a small section of Indians in urban areas. The British rule was essentially secular, as they began to impose secular laws replacing many of the religious laws. They also

imposed common criminal code, though they did not touch personal laws. It was a new experience for the Indians. They had always followed religious laws and traditions so far. There did not exist any concept of secular law until then. Any deviation from these laws and traditions was strongly condemned. It even attracted punishment like social boycott and excommunication. In the case of Hindus, caste rules were followed very rigidly indeed.

The word 'secular' in political sense was used after formation of Indian National Congress in 1885. The word secular in Indian political terminology came to be used in a pluralist setting and not in a Western sense that it indicated indifference to religion. As we know in the West the concept of secularism emerged as a result of a struggle between the Church and the political rulers. The Church was dominating the political scene and denied independence to the ruling monarchies in various parts of Europe. Thus, as a result of this struggle, the concept of secular polity emerged in Europe. It should also be noted that the European society was, for all practical purposes, a mono-religious society. Thus secularism had a very different connotation in the Western context. It is essentially signified a political authority totally independent of Church. The concept of secularism in India emerged in the context of religious pluralism, as against religious authoritarianism in the West. Secularism was emphasised by the Indian National Congress to allay the apprehension of religious minorities, particularly the Muslims, that it was not a Hindu political formation. It was a religious community, rather than religious authority, which mattered in Indian context.⁶³

Reflection and Action 24.1

Interview five people in your community belonging to different caste, class, occupation and religion. Ask them about their views on whether India is a 'secular' society or not?

Write a report of about two pages on the outcome of this interview, comparing the opinion of the interviewees and your own opinion. Compare your report with those of other students at your Study Center.

Secularism, in the Indian context, had very different connotation right from the very beginning. It related more to community and its secular interests rather than religion and its authority. Throughout our independence struggle, we were faced with secular/communal dichotomy. But none of our political leaders thought of challenging any religious authority, Hindu or Muslim. On the contrary, these leaders held out repeated assurances that both Hindus and Muslims would be free to profess and practice their respective religions both in an individual and a collective sense. Not only this, the political leadership used existing religious institutions to draw Hindu and Muslim masses in to political processes. Thus, Tilak used Shivaji and Ganesh festivals to create political consciousness among the Hindu masses. Gandhiji, too, used the concept of "Ram Rajya" on the one hand, to draw Hindu masses, and the Khilafat movement on the other, to attract the Muslim masses. Religion and religious institutions had to be used repeatedly to inspire people towards political action. Thus, Indian secularism never collided either with religion or religious authority. On the contrary, it drew upon it and its institutions to reinforce political processes.

As the base of the freedom movement widened in the 1920s with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi and as he proceeded to fine tune the techniques of mass resistance that he had developed in South Africa, previously marginal groups were brought in to the freedom struggle and Indian society became united under the influence of the overarching call for freedom. But, paradoxically, the same period was to see the advent of fundamentalist and rabid groups, both Hindu and Muslim, who began to politicise religion and thereby divide Indian

society. And, as we have seen all over the world today, religious identification is often the product of a political movement and not necessarily the precondition for such a movement. In sum, we were to see parallel movements in India, one, that united people on the lines of the anti-colonial struggle and the other that divided people in the name of religion.

24.4 Secularism and the Indian National Movement

The leadership of the freedom struggle, therefore, had to devise a principle that would be capable of holding together people who subscribed to different faiths. This holding mechanism was provided by secularism. Nationalist movement, on the other hand, fought the colonial government for the goal of a united, free India. It sought to enlist the support of all religious groups in its nationalist struggle.⁶⁴This was, note, not a secularism that commands the separation of religion and politics but a secularism that ensures the equality of all faiths- *sarva dharma sambhava*. ⁶⁵

Communalism had a devastating effect on India's national life, finally resulting in the partition of the country and wide scale communal riots. It, therefore, came to be regarded as the greatest challenge to, or even negation of, both nationalism and secularism. The nationalist leaders very soon realised that they had to fight two enemies simultaneously - one, the British imperialist power and second, communalism within India. They saw in secularism an ideology that could serve both their purposes, that is fight or controvert communalism and provide a basis for a united Indian nation, which, in turn, would strengthen the nationalist movement for India's independence.

A nation can survive only when all sections of the populace share a sense of common nationality and to that extent transcend their limited, regional, ethnic, linguistic, or religious identities. In the words of Nehru, "Possibly, the most essential characteristics of national consciousness is a sense of belonging together and together facing the rest of mankind."⁶⁶ Since communal loyalties are the greatest hurdle in the emergence of a national consciousness, the latter can be founded only on a secularist ideology.

Nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw an overwhelming rise in Indian nationalism. The Congress led nationalist movement included persons with varying shades of opinion. It was, therefore, not entirely free from communalist elements, but its main thrust was towards a nationalist, secularist, and democratic ideology.

Unlike the social reformers and revivalist ideologues of that period, the leaders of Indian National Congress were secular in their approach to national problems. For the founders of Congress, national identity and the interests of the nation as a whole were all-inclusive and transcended the differences of religion, caste, language etc. the report of the second session of the Congress (1886) made its secular and nationalist character clear:

"The Congress is a community of temporal interests, and not of spiritual convictions, that qualify men to represent each other in the discussion of political questions. We hold their general interests in this country being identical, Hindus, Christians, Muslims and Parsis may as members of their respective communities represent each other in the discussion of public secular affairs". ⁶⁷

During the first decades of its existence, Congress was dominated by leaders like Dadabhai Nauroji, Surendernath Banerjee and GopalKrishna Gokhle. They were known as moderates who believed in rationalism, secularism, constitutionalism and liberalism. They were gradually replaced by more extremist leaders like Bipinchandra Pal, B.G. Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai. These leaders were strong nationalists, but there was a religious tinge to their speeches and

actions, such as the idealisation of Shivaji and Rana Pratap and popularisation of the religious festivals associated with Durga and Ganesh. Bipan Chandra has argued that both the shift in the Muslim leaders' stand from a nationalist one to a communalist one, and the religious tinge in the speeches and actions of the "extremist" leaders (as compared to the rational, liberal stand of the "moderates") were due to the compulsions of the mass politics. All of them knew that religious idioms, symbols and the talk of religion being in danger would have much greater appeal for the masses than any secular ideology.⁶⁸

In spite of this religious tinge, the nationalism of Congress leaders was very different from that of Hindu chauvinists and other communalists. Their concept of the nation was territorial, that is, included all the inhabitants of India, irrespective of their religious creed, or any other differences. They emphasised equality - of status for all the inhabitants of India, whatever their religion. Gandhi repeatedly affirmed "India cannot cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it. If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in a dreamland. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Parsis and Christians who have made India their country are fellow countrymen. In no part of the world are one nationality and religion synonymous terms, nor has it ever been so in India."⁶⁹

Another basic difference between Indian nationalism and the so-called "Hindu and Muslim nationalisms" lies in their respective attitudes towards religion. While the latter made religion the basis of both the individual's and community's identity and all their secular interests, Indian nationalism firmly asserted the irrelevance of religion for India's nationhood. Though all the nationalist leaders, with the exception of two Nehrus, were men of religion who accepted it as a worthy dimension of human life, they, at the same time, affirmed the need to separate religion from secular national concerns. They believed the national integration, or the sense of national identity could be achieved only if Indians set aside their religious identities and joined hand in the freedom struggle. Mahatma's efforts to integrate the "lower" caste Hindus in to the larger Hindu society, as well as his efforts to bring the Muslim and other religious minorities in to the national mainstream, were expressions of nationalist leaders to a large extent. This approach implied a total rejection of communalism, but frankly accepted the desirability and importance of religion in a person's life.

Further, religion was not the *bete noire* of Indian ideologues and nationalist leaders as it was in the post-Reformation West. In India, religion never tried to question scientific discoveries, or the use of scientific technology in everyday life. More importantly, religion was never perceived by Indian nationalist leaders and scholars of the crucial decades before Independence as the cause or source of the miserable condition of Indian masses. Instead, the colonial rule was perceived as the chief or only source of the misery and backwardness of the people. The solution to India's problems was again visualised as the attainment of Independence (*swaraja*), rather than the negation of religion.

The emphasis in most nationalist leaders, from Gandhi to Patel and Azad, was on the acceptance of the fact of existence of separate religious communities, while at the same time seeking to neutralise this fact by a greater emphasis on the need and value of their peaceful existence in one nation-society.⁷⁰ On the other hand, religious identity was not important for Nehru who emphasised a secular national identity rather than peaceful coexistence of different religious communities. Thus, Indian nationalism was based on the perception that a nation is constituted by a people who share common everyday problems, and endeavour together to achieve common goals of freedom, democratic rights and a just social order.⁷¹

Indian nationalism was further intimately allied to a secular standpoint. From the beginning, communalism, or the alliance between religion and politics,

was seen as the greatest danger to both nationalist movement and national integration. The entire concept of Indian secularism was developed in the process of attempting to weld together a rather heterogeneous populace, divided on communal lines, into a modern nation. This required a total rejection of communalism and the affirmation of the need to separate politics and other secular institutions from religion. "The alliance of religion and politics in the shape of communalism", said Nehru, is the most dangerous and yields the most abnormal kind of illegitimate brood."⁷²

Secularism was understood as the negation of communalism and implied the separation of religion and politics. D.E. Smith observes: "The main current of Indian nationalism assured the separation of religion and politics; there was no conflict between India's religious pluralism and the goal of independence with political unity."⁷³

The need for secularism arose in India and secularism was conceived accordingly in two related contexts - first, to counter the challenge of communalism to national integrity and second, to provide a basis for nationalism or nationalist movement which should be shared by all Indians.

Satish Chandra has pointed out that the two major concerns of leaders of national movement were "the nature of India's nationhood and the basis on which its unity could be preserved."⁷⁴ "The concept of secularism", according to him "arose in this context. It sought to mediate between the interests of various communities, and postulated a united Indian state where the followers of any religion would neither be favoured nor discriminated against. Thus, unlike Europe, secularism in India arose not as a process of conflict with organised religion, but an attempt to unify the followers of different religious faiths in India in their struggle against the foreign rulers by making secularism the premise of a united free India.

The emphasis, therefore, was not an opposition to religion at all, but on its accommodation in secular life by all religious groups. The idea of religious national life by all religious groups. The idea of religious toleration in terms of *sarva dharma sambhava*, or equal regard for all religions, became pivotal to Indian conception of secularism, as it made possible the harmonious existence of several religious communities in one nation-state. It was expected that communalism or exclusive loyalty to one's religious community could be countered by a positive ideal of equal regard for all religions.

Reflection and Action 24.2

Go to a library near your home or the Study Center library and look for history text books on the Indian National Movement and India's freedom struggle.

Write an essay of about two pages on "India's Struggle for Freedom and the use of Religious symbols."

Compare your essay with those of other students at your Study Center.

The Indian leadership continued to hold fast to this normative principle despite the fact that the country was partitioned ostensibly in the name of religion. Given the deep polarisation of Indian society and given the massive massacres and the brutality that marked the partition of the country, the leadership could easily have swung in the direction of majoritarianism. But it refused to be swayed and remained true to its commitment that all religions in post-independent India would be treated equally by the state.

Secularism, therefore, was the norm that inspired the forging of a mass coalition that fought for the independence of the country; it informed the debates in the constituent Assembly and underlay the spirit of the Constitution. And it was this meaning of secularism that was given a concrete shape in the Constitution.

Consider that the first principle of secularism that was codified in the Constitution carried the assurance that everyone had the freedom to practice their religion via Article 25 of the fundamental rights chapter. It follows that religion itself was not sought to be discouraged. 'We call our State a secular one. The word "secular" perhaps is not a very happy one. And yet, for want of a better, we have used it. What exactly does it mean? It does not obviously mean a state where religion as such is discouraged. It means freedom of religion and conscience, including freedom for those who may have no religion,'¹⁴stated Nehru.

Now, strictly speaking, we do not need to proclaim secularism in order to have religious freedom. This freedom can emerge from, and form part of the fundamental rights that are assured to every citizen. But a secular state cannot stop at granting the right to religion. The principle of secularism goes further and establishes equality between all religious groups. The concept of equality or sameness of all religions was inspired by the doctrine of *sarva dharma sambhava* that had permeated Gandhiji's understanding of religious toleration.

Box 24.1: Dr. Radhakrishnan's Views on Secularism

Dr. Radhakrishnan was to phrase his understanding of secularism as:

"We hold that no one religion should be given preferential status, or unique distinction, that no one religion should be accorded special privileges in national life, or international relations for that would be a violation of the basic principles of democracy and contrary to the best interest of religion and government....No group of citizens shall arrogate to itself rights and privileges which it denies to others. No person shall suffer any form of disability or discrimination because of his religion but all alike should be free to share to the fullest degree in the common life."⁷⁶

Now just as religious freedom does not necessarily need secularism to support it, the equality of religions can be established via the fundamental right of equality vide Article 14. but if we were to stop at this, secularism would be rendered redundant. For secularism extends beyond equality and freedom to declare that the state is not aligned to any particular religion. **It is this particular commitment that establishes the credentials of a secular state. Or secularism.** We can say, outstripping provisions for freedom and equality stipulates that the state will maintain an attitude of principled distance from all religious groups. It also contracts that the state would neither align itself with any particular religion, especially the majority religion, nor pursue any religious tasks of its own.

Jawaharlal Nehru was to state as much on one occasion. 'It is perhaps not very easy even to find a good word in Hindi for "secular". Some people think that it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct. What it means is that it is a state which honours all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities; that, as a state, it does not allow itself to be attached to one faith or religion, which then becomes the state religion.'⁷⁷ The second and the third component of secularism, that is, equality of all religions and the distancing of the state from all religious groups, was specifically meant to assure the minorities that they had a legitimate place in the country and that they would not be discriminated against. Correspondingly, secularism established that the majority would not be privileged in any manner. The creed, therefore, discouraged any pretension that the religion of the majority had any right to stamp the body politic with its ethos.

24.5 The Constitution and Secularism

Indian Constitution is a creative blend between state secularism and religiosity of the civil society. The Indian Constitution treats all citizens equal, irrespective

of caste, creed, race, sex or religion. Article 14 guarantees equality before law. It says, "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India." Article 15 says, 1) "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. 2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing, roads and places of public resort maintained, wholly or partly out of state funds or dedicated to the use of the general public."⁷⁸

Thus, the article does away with caste discriminations and Article 16 guaranteed equality of opportunity in matters of employment. Article 25-to 30-guarantee freedom of religion, of culture and language. Article 30 also guarantees to minorities the right to establish their own educational institutions. These Articles from 25 to 30 are extremely significant as far as minority rights are concerned, the minorities could be religious or linguistic.

Though our constitution is secular, originally the word secularism did not occur in it. It was during emergency in mid-seventies that the words "secular and socialist" were added and India was described as "secular and socialist republic". But the words secularism or secular were not defined. According to H.M.Seervai's *Constitutional Law of India*, "Realizing that the words 'secular' and 'socialist' required to be defined, the 45th amendment bill (which became the 44th amendment) proposed an amendment of article 366 by inserting definitions of the words 'secular' and 'socialist'. However, this amendment was not accepted by the Council of States. Consequently the words 'secular' and 'socialist' have remained undefined. But a footnote to this gives the proposed amendment defines secularism thus:

Article 366 of the Constitution shall be renumbered as clause (2) of that article and before clause (2) as so numbered, the following clause shall be inserted, namely, (1) in the preamble to the Constitution the expression 'secular' means a republic in which there is equal respect for all religions.⁷⁹

Thus, we see the words secular and secularism remain undefined in the Indian Constitution. 'Secularism' in the Indian Constitution connotes that:

- 1) the state, by itself, shall not espouse or establish or practice any religion,
- 2) public revenues will not be used to promote any religion,
- 3) the state shall have the power to regulate any "economic, financial or other secular activity" associated with religious practice (Article 25(2) (a) of the constitution);
- 4) the state shall have the power through the law to provide for "social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of public character to all classes and sections of Hindus" (Article 25 (2) (b) of the constitution);
- 5) the practice of untouchability (in-so-far as it may be justified by Hindu religion) is constitutionally outlawed by Article 17);
- 6) every individual person will have, in that order, an equal right to freedom of conscience and religion;
- 7) these rights are, however, subject to the power of the state through law to impose restrictions on the ground of "public order, morality and health";
- 8) these rights are furthermore subject to other fundamental rights in Part III; and
- 9) the courts, auspiciously the Supreme Court, shall have the 'say' on adjudging state action as valid or otherwise under the above principles.

By this time, the nine features of secularism had marshaled behind them a quarter century of national constitutional consensus. To these nine features has been now added, since 1976, a fundamental duty of all citizens (under Articles 51-A (f) to “preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture”. This duty is addressed to all citizens (including leaders of political parties, and all holders of state power) and it is declared their fundamental obligation. Neither political practices, nor practices of power (including judicial power) will be legitimate if they contradict this duty.

The Constitution has undoubtedly erected a ‘wall of separation’ between the State and religion. While there are no doors opening from the side of religion in to the State, there are, however, several doors opening from side of the State in to religion. If the interests of public order, morality and health so demand, the right to profess, practice and propagate religion may be breached; so also the right of a religious denomination to manage its own affairs in matters pertaining to religion. The right to profess, practice and propagate religion may also be breached if the enforcement of other fundamental rights require it or if the demands of the social welfare and reform require it.

Thus the constitution contemplates and compels the supremacy of secular authority and secular interest over religious authority and religious interest.

We see, therefore, that secularism under the Constitution is an attitude, and a way of life, partly commanded and partly commended by the Constitution, embodying a system of values in which the relation between fellow human beings and between the State and citizen are freed from the bondage of the prejudices and loyalties of religion, race, caste, language and region and are ruled by a mutual concern for a life with dignity and culture for a society where everyone is free and equal and in which science and reason triumph over superstitious and blind belief and love of humanity over love of any particular section thereof.

24.6 Conclusion

In sum, the concept of secularism that emerged in India possessed three substantial components:

- The state would not attach itself to any one religion, which would thereby establish as the state religion.
- All citizens had the freedom of religious belief.
- The state would ensure equality among religious groups by ensuring that one group was not favoured at the expense of another. Correspondingly, the minorities were reassured that they would not be discriminated against in any way.

Therefore, in the first instance, secularism was designed to regulate debilitating religious strife, to assure the minorities of their safety and to set at rest any apprehension that the state would align itself with the dominant religion. In retrospect, it is not surprising that secularism proved to be attractive to Indian leadership. For one, secularism had historically emerged in the West as a formula to put an end to the religious wars that has devastated Europe in the sixteenth century. It was on the principle of secularism that communities that had gone to war over religion and societies that had tortured non-believers throughout the period of the Inquisition, could learn to live together. India faced similar problems. The anti-colonial struggle had provoked separate and potentially divisive communities to define themselves not only in opposition to colonialism but also in opposition to each other. This posed a distinct threat to the coherence of the new nation. The articulation of the principle of secularism, a principle that was strictly outside the ideological formulation of these identities, was designed to allow people to live together in civility. This is what contemporary critiques of secularism seem to forget.

In sum, for the country the attraction of secularism lay in the fact that it was the only prudent option for constructing a nation out of the fragmented and polarised identities that had emerged and consolidated themselves during the colonial and the anti-colonial phase. In India, where two new nations had materialised out of a blood drenched partition, i.e. India and Pakistan, the need was to forget that people who shared the same historical consciousness, the same language and the same folklore for centuries had split over religion. The need was to integrate these divided people on new ideologies, new perspectives, new issues. This issue could only be secularism that gave due recognition to religious identities and yet attempted to transcend them as far as the public sphere was concerned. *The state could not refuse to recognise the religious identities of its people.* That would have been bad politics and bad historical understanding. *What it could do was to stipulate that all religions were in principle equal.*

24.7 Further Reading

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"Secularization" in the Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. Mircea Eliade, Vol. 13. p. 159.

Neera Chandoke. Representing the Secular Agenda for India in Mushirul Hasan (ed.)