

## **Chapter Three**

# **Indian Secularism**

In the previous chapter, broadly the political functions of religion were explained. In theocratic states, justification for the existence of this function, by far, is not problematic. But one might ask as to how this function is possible in a secular State like India while it does not go beyond secularism. Indeed, this discussion is different from the case of political religion. The political function of religion can be seen in every society that has religious community regardless of whether it is a secular or a non-secular State. However, confusion or ambiguity sometimes has led some to raise some questions on post-secularism, though it is not meant to replace secularism but involves some modifications within secularism framework itself. On these lines, some authors, talk about post secular stage in connection to places like Europe. To prove their claims they mention religious movement in Europe and the discussions on referring to God in the preamble to the Constitutional Treaty in European Union.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, indeed, these issues are not against secularism. The movements seek their group rights and equality, and secularism has provided a ground for raising their aspirations. The use of some religious words also cannot be taken as crossing the lines of secularism or going beyond it. As already mentioned, secularism is not against religion and does not mean to replace religion in society. Moreover, religion, as a structure in society, has remained and has functions in society and the adherents have their rights in democratic countries. This holds true for India also which is a secular country but with multiple religions and where religion plays an important role in politics.

Hence, in order to clarify the fact that religion does have its function even within a secular State and that it does not go against the concept of secularism, it is necessary to explain secularism. Within this context, in this chapter, the researcher would like to explore the questions: What is secularism for? Or what is the purpose of secularism? Is it possible to have a political function of religion in secular countries like India? For this purpose, the relationship between religion and politics in secular state including the meaning and root of the word 'secular', secularization, secularism, secular state; relationship between religion and politics in Hinduism and Islam and Indian secularism are explained in great detail.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Fokas, 2009.

## **A) Relationship between Religion and Politics in a Secular State**

Secular outlook has been regarded as an ideal in the modern age. In a secular country, the people may follow various religions and cultures, while they live together amicably. Religious tolerance and respect for other religious people are found in such a society. So, the old view of separation between religion and state is a part of secularism and meaning of secularism is not mere separation between religion and politics. Both of them are and will be in relationship and interaction, even if there is a religious person whose vote the politicians would want to gain from. According to Bhargava, 'The mere separation of religion from politics is compatible with the absence of religious liberty and the presence of religious discrimination.'<sup>1</sup>

In this context, Friedland opined that the rise of the nation-state led to an enormous shift in the meaning of religion. In the nineteenth century and in the context of the emergence of nationalism, religion produced the secular as much as vice versa. At the political level, the claims to be secular became closely bound up with the ideologies and policies of nation-states, especially in that century.<sup>2</sup> Such ideas from West European nations were exported to many other parts of the world. So that much of the recent work by anthropologists of India understands secularism as an aspect of state ideology.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this view also shows that religion during secular age was not separate from politics.

In continuation of above-mentioned views and to clarify the relationship between religion and politics in secular state, here, the researcher discusses the term 'secular' and its related concepts in detail.

### **1- Meaning of the Term 'Secular' and Its Religious Root**

The term 'Secular' itself has a Christian root, i.e. a word that finds its original meaning in a Christian context. This English word is derived from the Latin 'saeculum', which means century or, more generally, 'an age' or 'the spirit of an age'<sup>4</sup>, took on "a special meaning as applied to profane time, the time of ordinary historical succession, which the human race lives through

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<sup>1</sup> Bhargava, 2010, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Friedland, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Fenella Cannell, "The Anthropology of Secularism," *Annual. Review. Anthropology*, 39 (2010), accessed at: [www.annualreviews.org](http://www.annualreviews.org).

<sup>4</sup> Madan, 2011, 6.

between the fall and the parousia.”<sup>1</sup> According to Gorski and Altınordu, in the theological writings of Augustine and the early church fathers, also, ‘saeculum’ maintained this temporal connotation specifically to refer to the present world as opposed to the world to come. They mention that ‘The opposite of saeculum, in this context, was not the religious realm, but the ‘eschaton’ - the end of time at the moment of Christ’s return.’<sup>2</sup> Gorski and Altınordu, apart from this layer (first one) of the meaning of secular, mention three other layers. The second is related to the early Middle Ages. ‘In canon law, secularization referred to a monk’s renunciation of the rule of his order, his exit from the monastery, his return to the world, and more specifically to his transfer to the worldly or secular clergy that ministered to the laity. Importantly, a secularized priest retained traces of his monastic past: He was required to wear the emblem of his order.’ In this stage, both a spatial and an individual dimension are added to the concept: ‘spatial, in so far as the sacred space of the monastery is opposed to the profane space of the world; and individual, in so far as the departure of the monk implies a loss of heart or commitment, if not of belief itself. It also anticipates another common figure in secularization theory: the notion that secularized realms still bear religious traces.’<sup>3</sup>

They traced the third layer of meaning to the Reformation, when Protestant rulers seized church properties and monies based on the argument that worldly rulers could use them better or more efficiently. Here, the concept acquires two opposed political meanings: ‘Negatively, it suggests unjust expropriation and illegitimate usurpation; positively, it suggests increased rationality and efficiency.’ The final layer of meaning is related to the late nineteenth century with the growth of free thought and the rise of secular societies in Western Europe. The principal goal, here, was the liberation of various social institutions, ‘not necessarily from religion to the court, but certainly from clerical and ecclesiastical influence and control.’ The secularists wanted to enable individuals to make their own world-views. ‘The political program involved the secularization of educational institutions, scientific research, the liberal professions, and cultural production more generally.’ Despite this, they insist that it is wrong to think that this limits the application of Christianity to secular societies.<sup>4</sup> For instance, Christianity has maintained a distinctly strong presence in Europe through culture and tradition (e.g. church weddings,

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, “Modes of Secularism,” in *Secularism and its Critics* ed. Rajeev Bhargava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Philip S. Gorski and Ates Altınordu, “After Secularization?” *Annual Review Sociology*, 34 (2008), accessed at: [www.annualreviews.org](http://www.annualreviews.org).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

baptisms and funerals), as well as through architecture and town planning. In this regard, David Martin (2006) mentions that: 'Christianity embodies a dialectic of the religious and the secular that more easily generates secular mutations of faith than straightforward replacements and displacements.'<sup>1</sup>

Hence, the term 'secular' in origin is religious and it has been explained in the religious context. Even, for some scholars such as Taylor, secular concept is not declining religion. For Taylor, as in his book 'A Secular Age' mentions, Secular 'is not the decline of religion but a type of social context, in which religious faith is held with an awareness that it is one of many options rather than simply an unproblematic feature of the architecture of the universe.'<sup>2</sup>

## **2- Secularization**

The term 'secularization' was first used in 1648, at the end of the Thirty Years' War in Europe, to refer to the transfer of church properties to the exclusive control of the princes.<sup>3</sup> The sociological concept of secularization has been defined by Peter Berger (1969) as 'the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.'<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, secularization is not intentional process to remove religion. Although, with the growth of modernity, religion, by far has been marginalized. However, some seculars as Weber and Berger and others believe secularization to be a result of modernization. For centuries, it has been understood that the processes of modernization such as urbanization and cultural and structural pluralism lead to secularization. It has been the demystifying of the world, where religion is relegated to a smaller and smaller role among a decreasing number of people and organizations. Religious faith becomes individualized.<sup>5</sup> So, it is a notion premised on the prediction that the all-encompassing process of modernization will replace religion.

Dobbelaere mentions three levels of analysis; macro, meso, and micro. Accordingly, he distinguished three major processes: the functional differentiation of societal subsystems, the emergence of competitive religious markets and the individualization and privatization of

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by: Fokas, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by: Daniel Philpott, "Has the Study of Global Politics Found Religion?" *Annual Review Political Science*, 12 (2009), accessed at: [www.annualreviews.org](http://www.annualreviews.org).

<sup>3</sup> T. N. Madan, "Secularism in Its Place," in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bharagava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 297.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by: Madan, 2011, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Michael O. Emerson and David Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism," *Annual Review Sociology*, 32 (2006), accessed at: [www.annualreviews.org](http://www.annualreviews.org).

religious practice and belief. In this context, Casanova mentions three separate premises for secularization theories: differentiation, that religion has come to be objectified and separated out from other functions, particularly politics and economics; privatization, that religion exits the public sphere; and decline, that that religion as sentiment and practice will tend to dissipate with progressive modernization. According to him, among these premises only the differentiation is plausible. He also argues about the relationship between the different levels and contends that differentiation as macro-level secularization actually sets the stage for a sort of meso-level desecularization: the emergence of public religions.<sup>1</sup> So, ‘according to the role of religions as grand legitimators, responsible for integrating and regulating society as a whole, they can become movements and pressure groups that vie with rivals in the public sphere.’<sup>2</sup>

According to the above mentioned definitions and descriptions, secularization process, indeed, is a competition between religion and other social structures with regard to social functions, and it does not necessarily lead to removal of religion. In this connection, Bruce mentions two sets of interrelated propositions: (a) Religion is undermined by the advance of individualism, pluralism, egalitarianism, and rationalism in the modern world; (b) religion persists if, “it finds work to do other than relating individuals to the supernatural”, as when it becomes a means of “cultural defense or integration.”<sup>3</sup> In short, secularization has been defined in a variety of different ways. Most of the definitions are multileveled, though there are some that are unidimensional.

However, like all revolutions, “secular revolution,” in Smith’s words, has been interpreted very differently by supporters and opponents.<sup>4</sup> But, according to Gill, politically, secularization theory has predicted two important consequences, although in recent decades it was partially seen contrary to this. First, religious values and beliefs should play a decreasing role in political decision making and should serve less as a basis for mobilizing collective action today than in the past. Social movements should have little in the way of spiritual content, and religious leaders should not be prominent among such movements. Religious cleavages in electoral politics should also disappear. Secondly, at the institutional level, the eventual separation of church (or religious institutions in whole) and state has been predicted. As the state dominate the social welfare functions of churches, little reason remains to support churches with public funds

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<sup>1</sup> Cannell, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Gorski and Altınordu, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

or official policy. Thus, the secularization process will at times appear as a pitched battle between forces of progress and those longing for a more traditional time.<sup>1</sup>

Although secularization theory predicts the kind of consequences mentioned above, most of the documents on secularization process consider religion as a permanent element of society. Bauberot mentions 'Declaration of the rights of the Man and the Citizen' as the secular sample rule. The Article 10 of this declaration proclaimed the principle of religious freedom. According to Article 16, it is essential for the good order of society and preventing secret offences that both law and religion be respected. Article 17 emphasize the maintenance of religion requires public worship. Respect for public worship is, therefore, indispensable.<sup>2</sup> According to these articles, secularization is not against religion and religion has been respected in society. These articles have been drafted from the perspective of a social usefulness of religion. Religion is a constitutive element of the social bond and such a conception was professed by Rousseau at the end of the 'Social Contract', where he says, 'never was a state founded without religion serving as its basis.'<sup>3</sup>

### **3- Secularism; A Sense for Political Ethics**

Secularization was transferred into the ideology of progress when George Jacob Holyoake coined the term 'secularism' in 1851 and led a rationalist movement of protest in England.<sup>4</sup> Madan has cited:

If secularism as an ideology is placed within the setting of the enlightenment, as I think it should be, it is obvious that its roots are better defined positively as a reasonable theory about human agency, rather than negatively as merely an anti-religious ideology. Indeed, scholars from Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch to Louis Dumont and Peter Berger have in their different ways pointed to the umbilical cord between heaven and earth, and presented secularization as a gift to humankind. David Martin too proclaims that 'secularization initially occurs within the ambit of Christian societies.'<sup>5</sup>

The independent-ethic mode of secularism as a variety of comprehensive secularism justifies separation of religion from the practices of the state by reasons entirely independent of particular religious world-views.<sup>6</sup> This mode of secularism is related to the question outlined in the beginning of this chapter that if religion has still some functions and it is used in politics, what is secularism for? One answer, in the literature of secularism that Bhargava mentions is that it 'emphasizes its value for and its constitutive link with modern democracy and equal

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<sup>1</sup> Gill, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Bauberot, 2010, 96-97.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>4</sup> Madan, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Madan, 2011, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 9.

citizenship.’<sup>1</sup> Because of the value of equal citizenship, as Charles Taylor clarifies, political secularism is regarded as a functional requirement of modern citizenship<sup>2</sup>, especially in multi-religious countries.

In this respect, for some scholars the distance between religious institutions and the state is necessary to prevent sectarian warfare, to ensure that disagreements between religious groups do not turn violent. The justification of separation is found in civic peace and toleration by others. Charles Taylor mentions ‘the wars of religion’ as the root of modern western secularism. It was a ground for coexistence of the different sects within Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Some scholars mention full religious liberty as the principal reason behind the separation of state and religion. Others justify it by the requirements of a life lived within the bounds of human reason, and also the notion of autonomy.<sup>4</sup> So, secularism has been regarded as the ‘conscience of democracy’, a ‘creative ethics of solidarity’, an effort ‘to prevent the ossification of scientific thought in dogma’, and ‘to contain religion within its limits without denying its immense cultural significance’, historical and social.<sup>5</sup>

According to what has been said above, secularism not only is not against religion but also uses it especially in relation to morality. In this respect, as Durkheim mentions, religion tends to transform itself rather than to disappear. ‘Building upon a tradition that was about three centuries old in the west, Durkheim looked forward to a purely secular but moral education to take on some of the social functions or responsibilities that religions- none of them false, in his judgment, all true in terms of their social function- had been performing for so long.’<sup>6</sup> Durkheim warned against a complacent view of the secularization of morality. To guard against a secularized but ‘impoverished and colorless morality’, he said, ‘we must seek, in the very heart of religious conceptions, those moral realities that are, as it were, lost and dissimulated in it .... In a word, we must discover the rational substitutes for those religious notions that for a long time have served as the vehicle for the most essential moral ideas.’<sup>7</sup>

However, by explaining the notions, secular, secularization and secularism, by far, the relationship between religion and politics in secular society has been shown. For distinguishing

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<sup>1</sup> Bhargava, 2010, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, 2010, 32

<sup>4</sup> Bhargava, 2010, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Bauberot, 2010, 125.

<sup>6</sup> Madan, 2011, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

these notions, Philpott has at least summarized nine concepts as following, of which four are neutral or positive and five are negative:

1. Secular means pertaining to the world outside the monastic sphere.
2. Secular means a concept or use of language that makes no specific reference to religion or revelation but is not necessarily hostile to them.
3. Secular means a differentiation between religion and other spheres of society (political, economic, cultural, etc.) but not necessarily the decline of religion's influence.
4. Secular describes a social context in which religious faith is one of many options rather than an unproblematic feature of the universe.
5. Secularization is a decline in the number of individuals who hold religious beliefs.
6. Secularization is a decline in religious practice and community.
7. Secularization is a differentiation between religion and other spheres of society (political, economic, cultural, etc.) in a way that entails, and is part and parcel of, a long-term decline in the influence of religion.
8. Secularization involves a decline of religious influence on politics, not because of a general long-term decline in religion but rather because of the intentional efforts of regimes to suppress it. This concept does not imply a decline in religious belief or practice.
9. Secularism is an ideology or set of beliefs that advocates the marginalization of religion from other spheres of life.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the distinctions amongst the above mentioned conceptions, Madan also says:

(1) Secularization ordinarily refers to socio-cultural processes that enlarge the areas of life –material, institutional and intellectual- in which the role of the sacred is progressively limited; (2) secularity is the resultant state of social being; and (3) secularism is the ideology that argues the historical inevitability and progressive nature of secularization everywhere. While modern secularism generally see the three concepts as mutually entailed or harmoniously integrated elements of a preferred world image, some contemporary scholars of Christianity have written about secularization as the will of God. But denounced secularism as ungodly.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, as Cannell mentions, 'secularism is as a form of political constitution that follows the development of the concept of the secular and secularization is as a particular historical instance of the adoption of secular logic.'<sup>3</sup> And secular state is the resultant of these two.

#### **4- Secular State**

After critically studying the concepts of secularization and secularism, now, it is imperative to explore the concept of the secular state, as the research is about a secular state. In this connection, D.E. Smith's definition is significant. His conception of the secular state is derived from the liberal-democratic tradition of the west. Thus, it should be distinguished from the Marxian communist tradition, which is motivated by an active hostility to religion so that it cannot be laid in a secular framework. Smith's definition of secular state is as following: 'the secular state is a state that guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a particular

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<sup>1</sup> Philpott, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Madan, 2011, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Cannell, 2010.

religion, nor seeks either to promote or interfere with religion.’<sup>1</sup> According to him, the conception of a secular state involves three distinct but interrelated sets of relationships concerning the state, religion, and the individual. The three sets of relations are: religion and the individual (freedom of religion), the state and the individual (citizenship), the state and religion (separation of state and religion).<sup>2</sup> In the other words, according to Chatterjee, three principles are usually mentioned in the liberal-democratic doctrine on secular state: liberty, equality and neutrality.<sup>3</sup>

In a secular state all religions are, partially in some respects, subordinate to as well as separate from the state. The religious groups as voluntary associations of individual citizens are responsible for the proper discharge of civil responsibilities such as payment of taxes, maintenance of public order, etc. under the general laws of the state. In these situations, religions are viewed by the state as other voluntary associations based on common social, cultural, or economic interests. However, ‘this minor qualification does not affect the essential principle of separation of state and religion.’<sup>4</sup>

Under the principle of separation, both religion and the state have freedom to develop without interfering with one another. All religious groups, without interference from the state, can organize, frame their own creeds and regulations, choose their own religious staff, constitute their own educational institutions, and finance their own activities. The organized religious groups act as autonomous entities in religious affairs. The state, on the other side, does not have any financial responsibility of supporting an official religion. It is free from the troublesome problem of deciding religious questions, and from the political interference of vested religious interests. Thus, separation of state and religion seeks to free religious institutions (such as church and ‘Hozeh’ in Iran) in free state.<sup>5</sup>

So, in the secular state, in reality, there is a complex maze of the three vital relationships, of which church(religious institutions)-state separation is but one. Church -state separation can exist simultaneously with obvious denials of religion’s freedom, as in soviet Russia, while this was not

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<sup>1</sup> D. E. Smith, “India as a Secular State,” in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bharagava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 177.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Ibid.*, 178-80.

<sup>3</sup> Partha Chatterjee, “Secularism and Tolerance,” in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bharagava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 2010, 181.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

a secular state. On the other hand, a state-church system can exist simultaneously with broad freedom of religion and a democratic conception of citizenship, as in England; while this is in many respects a secular state.<sup>1</sup>

The above outlined conception of the secular state is an ideal that cannot be perfectly achieved in any country. Nevertheless, on one hand, most of the modern states within the liberal-democratic tradition have many of the characteristics of a secular state especially the US comes quite close. The UK, for example, can be regarded as a secular state in many respects, although the existence of a state church is contrary to one important part of the definition. On the other hand, while liberal-democratic traditions have saved western modern states from the more dangerous historical state church system, these traditions in Asia generally have not yet taken rigid root. Thus, an Asian State often with official religion has easily faced dangerous religious system.<sup>2</sup> However, a little interference by a secular state in religious matters is sometime unavoidable. According to Bhargava, a secular state cannot operate 'without presupposing a normative conception of religion; it must judge and evaluate religion. Thus, some degree of interference by a secular state in religious matters is unavoidable.'<sup>3</sup>

The above discussions show that secularism is not perfect and mere separation of religion from politics. And when in secular state there is religion and its freedom are recognized, it is used in politics because some characteristics and functions of religion as a social structure are applied by government, parties and politicians. For instance, Hinduism and Islam have played important roles in the Indian secular state.

## **B) Relationship between Religion and Politics in Hinduism and Islam**

### **1) Hinduism**

Hinduism has been the major indigenous religion in India. About 1,500 B.C. the Aryans brought the basic contents of Hinduism (as contained in the Rig Veda) to India. Hindus are originally the

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, 2010, 182-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 181-2.

<sup>3</sup> Bhargava, 2010, 19-20.

settlers of the land of the Indus River.<sup>1</sup> B. G. Tilak summed up the main tenets of Hinduism in a Sanskrit verse which meant acceptance of the authority of the Vedas, diversity of means and worship of numberless deities.<sup>2</sup> So, this religion consists of numerous beliefs and practices, which has led to different socio-religious institutions. At present, Hinduism covers various doctrines, cults, and ways of life.

According to Chaudhry, Hinduism believes, ‘love of family grows into love of village, love of village into love of district, love of district into love of province, love of province into love of nation ... and love of nation shall grow into love of humanity and all religions weld one day in a universal religion. Thus, religion is inextricably interwoven in the life of the Hindu community and plays an important part in all its activities.’<sup>3</sup> And one of the remarkable principles in Hinduism is that human action should always be guided by the dictates of religion. It links religion with all human activities including economic, social and spiritual. In Hinduism, economic activities without religion create a society with violence, social activities divorced from religion make a social order based on pleasure and spiritual activities without the influence of religion create a social organization with self-interest. Hinduism also goes beyond day to day activities so that it even controls the behavior of its followers in times of war and in their dealings with enemies in times of peace. A war is justified only when it is sanctioned by religion. Among Hindus, thus, religion is a strong force, and influences the life of an individual in all stages. The importance of religion in Hindu community is such that a Hindu has to be lived for "the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his gods" Such is.<sup>4</sup>

Because of some issues such as conversion of low caste Hindus to other religions, the proportion of the Hindu population in India shows a slight decline at every census. Due to the partition of British India in 1947 into India and Pakistan, the proportion of Hindus in the total

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<sup>1</sup> Ashok K. Dutt and Satish Davgun, "Religious pattern of India with a factorial regionalization," *GeoJournal*. Vol. 3. No. 2 (1979).

<sup>2</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

population abruptly increased from 1941 to 1951 (see: Table 1). But after 1951, again there has been a slight decline in the proportion of the Hindus in the total population.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1:** Different Religious Groups in India Rated by their Percentage to the total Population

Census	Hindus	Muslim	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists	Jains	others
1881	75.1	19.97	0.71	0.74	0.07	0.49	
1891	74.2	20.41	0.77	0.68	0.09	0.51	
1901	72.9	21.88	0.98	0.77	0.10	0.47	
1911	71.7	22.39	1.21	1.00	0.11	0.41	
1921	70.7	23.23	1.47	1.06	0.12	0.39	
1931	70.7	23.49	1.77	1.28	0.23	0.37	
1941	69.5	24.28	1.91	1.40	0.12	0.37	
1951	84.99	9.93	2.30	1.74	0.45	0.36	
1961	83.5	10.69	2.44	1.79	-	-	
1971	82.7	11.21	2.60	1.89	0.70	0.47	
2001	80.5	13.4	2.3	1.9	0.8	0.4	0.7

Sources: Dutt & Davgun, 1979; <http://www.indiaonlinepages.com>

Distributional Pattern of Hindus is generally spread all over India with lesser concentration in the periphery. The only areas, which do not have a Hindu predominance, are the Punjab plains, Kashmir, the western part of Uttar Pradesh, the north-eastern part of India, central Maharashtra and the Malabar coast. 'The spatial distributional pattern of the Hindus has not undergone any major change since at least 1881, when the first census was taken. But in spite of a few local changes at the time of the partition, Hindus have retained their overall majority in most districts.'<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted that there has been a Hindu revivalism or renaissance that, according to Weiner, it is a political statement, a reassertion less of religion than of nationalism. It takes many forms: 'the militant stance of the RSS towards Christian institutions; the establishment of the Virat Hindu Samaj as an institution both for social reform and for the assertion of Hindu solidarity; the call to treat Bharat Mata as a kind of 'national' deity; the call for the establishment of compulsory national Hindu holiday; and Hindu movements for the reconversion of Muslims and Christians and for the Hinduization of tribals.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dutt and Davgun, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Myron Weiner, "India's Minorities: who are they? What do they want?" in *State and politics in India*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 480.

## 2) Islam

Islam started in Arabia in the 7th century A.D. as a result of the preaching and teaching of the Prophet Mohammad. It came to India along with invaders from Persia, Afghanistan and Western Asia, during the 8th to 11th century A.D. Later on, for centuries Muslims ruled over the major part of India. Some people accepted Islam by force, some others voluntarily embraced it and many low caste Hindus became Muslims voluntarily as a reaction to high caste tyranny. The majority of the Muslims in India are the descendents of converts from Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> As Hinduism, this religion also interferes in all human activities including politics.

In British India, Muslims formed about one quarter of the population. At the time of partition in 1947, many Muslim-majority areas were incorporated into Pakistan and some Muslims from Indian Territory migrated to Pakistan, an Islamic country. Consequently, the proportion of Muslims in India decreased substantially, although it regained its trend of steady increase since 1961 census. In present day India, Muslim is the largest religious minority (see: Table 1, p. 78). India ranks fourth in the world in Muslim population. Distributional Pattern Muslims are concentrated in a few local areas only, whereas in the rest of the country they are sparsely distributed. Muslims are mostly concentrated in those areas which were under Muslim rule for a long period. In present day India, Muslims are an overall majority in only eight districts, mostly in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Except Jammu and Kashmir, there is no other state where Muslims have an absolute majority.<sup>2</sup>

However, the political functions of these two above-mentioned religions and their impact on Indian politics are the subject of this study.

## 3) Secularism, in Non-Christian Societies: Muslim and Hindus Communities

Secularism has had different and negative conception outside Christian societies. According to Taylor, many non-European societies are against 'secularism' and they see it as an import from ex-Christendom. 'the Christian origins of the idea are undeniable, but this does not have to mean that it has no application elsewhere. What does, however, give color to this story of imposition is precisely the independent ethic model.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dutt and Davgun, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, 2010, 37.

In this respect, some critical sociologists on secularization have stressed that secularization can take quite different ways within different global contexts. They have argued on the value of seeing modernity as capable of taking religious forms like what there is in Latin America, and it has been alert to continued Christian valences in apparently secular Western Europe. For example, according to Casanova (2006), “the European concept of secularization is not a particularly relevant category for the ‘Christian’ United States” because in the U.S. the advance of the secularization has, in fact, been accompanied both by continued high levels of religious adherence and by continued public roles for religion. According to him, other religious traditions may not construct the same tension between the religious and secular categories and therefore that the relationship between modern differentiation and religion may unfold quite differently in other religions, for example, Chinese Daoism (Taoism) and Confucianism.<sup>1</sup>

According to what has already been mentioned, secularism itself has its roots in religion and it was for elimination of violence and sectarian problems. As in Christianity, in Islam also there are some points that emphasize on being secular in life, although there are also some points against it as according to Quran ‘for God, religion is only Islam.’<sup>2</sup> For instance, the Quranic declaration, ‘to you your religion, to me mine’<sup>3</sup> can be mentioned that had been told to Prophet Mohammad from God concerning other religion’s adherents and social groups. ‘To subscribe to it would amount to live in a state of mutual exclusion but not conflict.’<sup>4</sup> But, in contrary to such points of Quran and based on those many opposite points, in Islamic countries secularism was not accepted and it is supposed to be anti-religious for some reasons such as: 1) the ‘Shariat’ comprises an infallible doctrine of ethics, the public and private life of those who profess Islam, the whole religious, political, social, domestic. In this context, Wach mentions two groups of prescriptions: ‘regulations of worship and ritual duties and regulations of judicial and political nature. The fundamental tendency in the growth of the Shariat was the religious evaluation of all the affairs of life; legal considerations were secondary.’<sup>5</sup> 2) Because of misunderstanding, this concept as a non-Islamic notion has been perceived against religion, not the sense and process that deposit the political representative to state for removing religious violence and sectarian. 3) Although in Islam some implications of secularism can be seen – as mentioned - but Islam has been growing with politics and government and both religion and politics normally did not

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by: Cannell, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Quran, Al-Imran, 2: 19 & 64.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Al-Kafirun, 109: 6.

<sup>4</sup> Madan, 2011, 32.

<sup>5</sup> wach, 1971, 295-6.

separate from each other. As Weber mentions, “The religion of Muhammad is fundamentally political in its orientation.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, almost all the Islamic governments apply the Islamic law and there has been no equalities between Muslims and other religions’ adherents and also between a dominating Islamic sect and another too. Believing in religious government and religious developments are indications of the need for existence of a government and denying separation of religious institutions and state. Apart from ‘jihad’ in Islam, some sects reject other sects and it creates a barrier to accept secularism and co-exist. Hence, most of the sects follow politics and their own religious government to dominate over other sects. They have no tolerance. In T. M. Scanlon’s opinion, the competition among religious groups is a clear example of informal politics of social life.<sup>2</sup>

In this context too, the effect of some Islamic thinkers and writers has been important such as Ibn Taymiyya, Abu Ala Mawdoodi and so on. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) was an eminent Muslim thinker who tried to consider the political realities of his time. He regarded political order as the focal point of politics. He says that if religion and power are separated it would result in disorder. Some of these thinkers had effect on accepting the institution of kingship. They called ‘Sultan’ (king) as the Shadow of God upon earth, a title that was widely used by the Muslim kings during the Middle-ages and they were of the opinion that even an unjust or ignorant ruler is to be obeyed. Disobedience, according to him, is only allowable when ruler’s decision being manifestly contrary to the Quran, the Sunnat, and the consensus of the earlier Ulama. For them, disobedience leads to general disorder (fitna) and it is an unforgivable sin.<sup>3</sup>

Mawdoodi, the contemporary Islamic thinker, is totally opposed to the idea of secularism. According to him, the religion of Islam does not accept any other way of life except the one of the Quran and Shariat as formulated by the early Ulama (eminent clerics) on the basis of the Prophet’s tradition or Sunnat. Shariat is invariable as it is based on the divine laws. For Mawdoodi, Islam should become an integral part of a Muslim’s life. It should be his entire life, its spirit and its moving force. ‘One’s understanding, consciousness, thinking and views cannot be other than what Islamic teachings are. Religion should guide a person from beginning of his

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> T. M Scanlon, “The Difficulty of Tolerance.” In *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bharagava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 58.

<sup>3</sup> Engineer, 1980, 78.

life and through its journey to the other world (Akhirat) and should enable him to pass through all these phases successfully.’<sup>1</sup>

Al-Marayati et al. (1972) mention that ‘man is a political animal, and almost everything he does is colored by political behavior. Only religion has had a deeper and more pervasive effect... and religion often has a political dimension as Islam clearly shows.’<sup>2</sup> Indeed, for Islam, there is ideally no sphere of religion separable from the political one. As al-Qaradawi, one of the famous clerics and Egyptian Islamic theologian, in his book ‘political Jurisprudence’ mentions, Islam without politics is not Islam.<sup>3</sup> The political and religious functions are almost fused in Islam. The integration of religion and politics in Islam, can be stated in more precise terms as “the inherent link between Islam as a comprehensive scheme for ordering human life, and politics as an indispensable instrument to secure universal compliance with that scheme.”<sup>4</sup> However, in Islamic history, religion and religious institutions have always justified the political power.

During the new period after Khilafat age, also, this belief that religion and politics are inseparable, became an important factor in movements. In this context, Lewis in 1993 has discussed that Islamic revolutionary movements in the second part of the twentieth century were rooted in the universal belief in the unity of religious institution and state, and Islam has formed the central element in Muslim identity.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, various Islamic movements in the modern period from pan-Islamism of Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Aziz in the 1870s, the rise of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhoods in the 1930s, the Iranian Revolution of 1977–1979 to recent movement in Arabic countries under ‘Arabic spring’ were manifestations of this universality and centrality.

The researcher has spoken about the Christian roots of secularism earlier. In the above paragraphs, secularism has been considered in the context of Islam. Hence, it is necessary now, to consider the concept of secularism in the context of Hinduism too. In Hinduism pluralism can be seen but not fully separation of religion from politics and there is the unity of the sacred and the secular. Nevertheless, there are some aspects of secularism in Hinduism also.<sup>6</sup> In ancient India, there were some secular characters. There were different religions among people of

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<sup>1</sup> Engineer, 1980, 124.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by: Karaman, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Political Jurisprudenc*, trans. Abdul Aziz Salimi (Tehran: Ehsan, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Karaman, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Moaddel, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Madan, 2011, 180.

ancient India like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. They gave importance to morality and unity.<sup>1</sup> According to Sentha, ‘the concept of “Sarva Janah Sukhino Bhavantu” (May all have happiness and peace) shows that the ancient Indian culture believed in the welfare of all.’<sup>2</sup> Despite this, ‘the autonomy of the King as the supreme symbol of secular power, although present, is, in fact, so bounded in the Vedic corpus as to provide no obvious grounds for constructing a theory of the secular state for times that might legitimize non-religious values.’<sup>3</sup>

On one hand, the concept of pure power has been formulated in Kautilya’s Arthashastra (300 BC), although it is not separate from other aspects of life. For Kautilya “Material well-being alone is supreme”<sup>4</sup> and, spiritual good (dharma<sup>5</sup>) and sensual pleasures (kama) have been based on material well-being (artha). So, Kautilya gives primacy to material well-being, which includes both economic and political power but they are in interrelation.<sup>6</sup> Writing of the king, Kautilya prescribes ‘equally to the three goals of life which are bound up with one another. For, any one of (the three, viz.,) spiritual good, material well-being and sensual pleasures, (if) excessively indulged in, does harm to itself as well as the other two.’<sup>7</sup>

On the other, as Lingat has cited, in Indian tradition: ‘the Brahman is master when the question is one of ritual and... of penance. But his scope extends in reality over all the field of royal activity, as much on its political side as on its religious. There are no two powers here each functioning in its proper sphere, the sacred to one side, and the profane [secular] to the other. Secular power alone has the capacity to act, but it is a blind force which needs to be directed before its application can be effectual.’<sup>8</sup> Some writers consider the political function with the relative autonomy but the relationship of spiritual authority and temporal power is in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> Mani Lal Bose, *Social and Cultural History of Ancient India* (New Delhi: Second revised, 1998), 117.

<sup>2</sup> K. D. Sentha, *The Indian Spirit and the World’s Future* (India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2004), 55.

<sup>3</sup> Madan, 2011, 184.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by: Ibid, 184.

<sup>5</sup> Dharma, ‘Sometimes narrowly translated as "religion." the term actually denotes a whole series of duties: personal, social, moral, and religious. It is the way in which one is expected to behave in different situations: toward one’s kin and fellow men, the old and the young, husband and wife, the poor, the aged, the infirm, the warrior, the merchant, the landowner, the scavenger, the tanner, the servant, religion, God, and one’s own soul. Every situation calls for a specific code of behavior, a specific dharma; indeed the conception of a common standard of behavior, of an "absolute" ethic, is alien to the Hindu way of life. Dharma is essentially a logic of behavior in a variety of settings; it forms the basis of customary virtue. For the supreme Dharma (and here it also can be translated as “religion”) is the salvation of one’s own soul’ (Kothari, 1970, 27).

<sup>6</sup> Madan, 2011, 184.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 187.

superiority and inferiority, and not complete separation as someone presented Hindu Kingship as self-sufficient and fully secular.<sup>1</sup>

Many modern Hindu intellectuals, however, have asserted their own tradition is in fact secular. Nirad Chaudhuri writes: 'In India secularism of even the highest European type is not needed, for Hinduism as a religion is itself secular and it has sanctified worldliness by infusing it with moral and spiritual qualities. To take away that secularism from the Hindus is to make them immoral, and culturally debased.'<sup>2</sup> He has argued that the religious life of the Hindus is worldly in orientation so that the world of gods reflects the world of men. 'Hinduism is a social contract between two acquisitive communities, and artha rules everywhere; but artha has its rules, its specific morality, and Hinduism is not wholly 'sordid'. In this view, dharma has supremacy in all domains including the material, but it is called a moral rather than a religious 'entity'.<sup>3</sup>

It is said religious pluralism, the dominant view of secularism in India that stands for non-preferentialism as state policy and of inter-religious tolerance as social philosophy, is a traditional Brahmanical idea that was revived by Hindu social reformers during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) one of the first modern intellectuals in 1893 on tolerance and acceptance declared: 'I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we [also] accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth.'<sup>4</sup> Vivekananda's message of tolerance, according to Madan, shows the Hindu platform to the followers of all religious faiths, as he emphasizes:

we not only tolerate, but we Hindus accept every religion, praying in the mosque of the Mohammedans, worshipping the fire of Zoroastrians, and kneeling before the cross of Christians, knowing that all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of them marking a stage of progress.<sup>5</sup>

Despite above discussions on existing a kind of secular belief in Hinduism, Madan has discussed that, first, the Hindu religious tradition based on ancient texts from the Vedas through the Smritis to the Epics, 'does not recognize a mutually exclusive dichotomy of the religious versus secular, nor the idea of religion as a private activity.' Indeed, 'the Hindu tradition is the

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<sup>1</sup> Madan, 2011, 188.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by: Ibid., 189.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 189-90.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by: Ibid., 191.

opposite of the Christian tradition before and after the Reformation.’<sup>1</sup> According to him, the resources of the Hindu religious tradition do not promote an ideology of secularism that is seen as an antidote to religion. Second, ‘the Hindu religious tradition has been pluralist in character by reasons of both internal dynamics and external challenges, But in its own hierarchical fashion.’<sup>2</sup>

Hence, as Madan concluded, the Hindu religious tradition is similar to Islam, and different from Christianity, in denying the religious-secular dichotomy. It is also different from both Islam and Christianity in its pluralist though hierarchical orientation. As Islam, conversion is not also allowed in Hinduism but the reasons are different. The Hindus, justify it that, ‘the refusal to grant legitimacy to the change of religious faith, particularly in the form of institutionalized conversion, has been claimed to be a proof of the positive attitude of Hinduism toward religious diversity.’ It is claimed that, as secularization has been called a gift of Christianity to humankind (a Christian but rationalist alternative to Christianity, as it were), religious pluralism, has been similarly considered as ‘a gift of the Hindu cultural tradition’, in Madan’s words, especially in neo-Hinduism, most notably the Gandhian, but not others, such as currently Hindutva. For Mahatma Gandhi secularism was not as a preferred way of life based on the divorce of politics from religion totally, but he considered religious equality and endorsed the idea of a secular state, which acts in the impartial manner and doesn’t interfere in the religious lives of the people.<sup>3</sup> This idea as it will be explored in depth, has been the base of Indian secularism.

### **C) Indian Secularism**

In pre-independence India, British government obviously had a Western view on secularism and its basic policy was ‘religious neutrality’. During certain periods in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it gave grants of money to Hindu temples and Muslim mosques to support them, so that the Christian missionaries were actively discouraged.<sup>4</sup> After the British government, as a legacy, religious neutrality remained in India and ‘under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru, Indian nationalism knit an inclusivist character.’<sup>5</sup>

Indian politicians and intellectuals almost universally have considered secularism as an idea that devolved from European history and philosophy and was imported into India under British

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<sup>1</sup> Madan, 2011, 197.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 188 & 200.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 2010, 189.

<sup>5</sup> Bharagava, 2010, 18.

colonialism. But according to some writer like Madan, as mentioned, the Western model of a state freed from religion cannot succeed in India. It was specific to and possible within a particular European, post-Protestant context.<sup>1</sup> Religion in India is a powerful, constitutive, and a certain component of culture. In India, modernity has not still been able to destroy religious belief systems.<sup>2</sup> So, secularism in the Indian context has taken a different meaning from its standard use in the European context and it cannot mean the same thing as it does in Europe. According to Arora, 'Secularism in India broadly means equal treatment of all religious denominations and provision for special protection to and welfare schemes for religious minorities.'<sup>3</sup>

Smith (1963) mentions the three central explanations and justifications for secularism in India. The first is related to many supporters of the Congress Party that they believe in a civic identity for all Indians but not based on any religious identity so that the nation is not threatened by social cleavage between Hindu and Muslim. The second, as mentioned, is that Indian secularism rests largely on Western models and is rooted in British policies of religious neutrality and like the first view tends to separate state from religion if freedom of religion and equal right are protected. The third, differently, argues that ancient values of tolerance inherent in Hindu culture guarantee the religious freedoms because Hinduism recognizes that aspects of the universal divinity are discernible in all forms of worship.<sup>4</sup> In this view, according to Cannell, secularism has been regarded as a form of pluralism with metaphysical foundations and not as the replacement of religious values by irreligious ones. Because of some aspects of the Hindu formula that would not be acceptable to Muslims, Christians, and others, Smith leans toward the view that to prevent the potential interreligious violence, the separation of state and religion is necessary. He tends to link Western secularism with democratic modernity and progress.<sup>5</sup>

However, at the time of independence, politicians and the leaders of the Congress did not see a contradiction between making Indian nation and Hindu religious tradition, as this tradition was viewed as tolerant and as based on indigenous religious pluralism. This intertwining of religion

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<sup>1</sup> Cannell, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Catarina Kinnvall and Ted Svensson, "Hindu Nationalism, Diaspora Politics and Nation-Building in India," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*. Volume 64. Issue 3 (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Vishal Arora, "Religion and Politics in India," 2008, accessed at: [http://vishalarora.co.in/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=27&Itemid=21](http://vishalarora.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=27&Itemid=21)

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by: Cannell, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

and politics was influenced by some independence leaders such as Gandhi who ‘often employed a discourse that resembled the Hindu notion of dharmic obligation.’<sup>1</sup> Although Gandhi was a hero of Hindu–Muslim unity, ‘his continued reference to ‘Mother India’ invoked characteristics of Hindu religious worship and, his calls for religious tolerance and universalism were often based on Hindu beliefs and practices.’<sup>2</sup> A glance at his views and that of his successor Nehru further clarifies the foundations of Indian secularism.

### **1- Gandhi’s View on Religion and Secularism**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi or Mahatma Gandhi (1868-1948), known as the Father of the Nation and the spiritual father of Indian secularism was the charismatic leader of India and some believed that religion had an important role in his politics against British and serve Indian nationalism.<sup>3</sup> His religious convictions came from the studies that he began as a political activist in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> In 1927, Gandhi wrote: ‘believing as I do in the influence of heredity, being born in a Hindu family, I have remained a Hindu. I should reject it if I found it inconsistent with my moral sense or my spiritual growth.’<sup>5</sup> Here his view on religion and secularism and the role of religion in his politics are explained:

#### **a) Religion as Ethics: Gandhi's Ideas about Religion**

For Mahatma Gandhi religion was ‘the be-all and end-all of life.’<sup>6</sup> He called himself a Hindu and even a Sanatanist Hindu. Indeed, he acted as a reformist and theologian in Hinduism. In South Africa, he decided that salvation for him was possible only through Hinduism. Gradually, his experience in life deepened his faith in the central teachings of Hinduism and he said that Hinduism signifies a relentless search after truth. He once wrote: "Hindu Dharma is like a boundless ocean teeming with priceless gems. The deeper you dive, the more treasures you

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<sup>1</sup> Kinnvall and Svensson, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Essential Writings* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9. And,

Bidyut Chakrabarty and Rajendra Kumar Pandey, *Modern Indian Political Thought* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2009), 41.

<sup>4</sup> C. M. Chakraborty, *Gandhi, Gandhism and Gandhians* (New Delhi: Swastik Publications, 2013), 134.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by: Madan, 2011, 228.

<sup>6</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 234.

find.”<sup>1</sup> He had a different definition of religion. His views were set on religious transcendentalism. In 1920, he wrote:

I have been experimenting with myself and my friends by introducing religion into politics. Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.<sup>2</sup>

He looked at all religions with an equal eye. He recognized the fundamental basis of unity and equality of all religions if it is proper and necessary. In his words: “That master key is that of Truth and Non-Violence.”<sup>3</sup> Taking pride in himself as a Sanatani Hindu, he claimed “my own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith” and “because I am a Sanatani Hindu, I claim to be a Christian, a Buddhist and a Muslim.”<sup>4</sup> He also granted the same plural identity to those belonging to other faiths. “Traditional Hinduism, or rather Sanatan Dharma, was the source of his religious tolerance.”<sup>5</sup>

It was his effort to purge Sanatan Hindu Dharma of all its orthodoxy and rigid traditionalism and to make reason the supreme arbiter in matters of religion. His religion was founded on eternal laws and it was free from all local, communal or even national prejudices. According to Gandhi, religion has to emphasis on the moral values of man as spirit. He believed, “All religions are founded on the same moral laws. My ethical religion is made up of laws which bind men all over the world.”<sup>6</sup> Such conception of religion led to the growth of Gandhi's secularism and transcended all barriers of caste, color, creed, sex, community or nationality. So, he reached the reality that truth was not the monopoly of any special persons or groups. Apart from the different prevailing religions, for Gandhi, there was a higher religion with the essential principles of all conventional or traditional religions. It was ‘the Religion of Man’ which ‘taught people to respect the dignity of man, to fear God, to treat all living creatures as fellow beings, to imbibe such virtues as sympathy, good will, truth, non-violence, self-help, self-discipline and the ideal

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<sup>1</sup> Vishwanath Prasad Varma, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya* (Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 1972), 63.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by: Ibid., 70; Madan, 2011, 230-1.

<sup>3</sup> Varma, 1972, 63.

<sup>4</sup> quoted by: Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ashis Nandy, “The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Toleration,” in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bharagava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 344.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by: Chaudhry, 1978, 234.

of the detached service of humanity.’<sup>1</sup> This was Gandhi's cosmopolitanism, universalism, and secularism. Thus in Gandhi's religion there are all the good qualities of other religions especially Hinduism, his own original religion.<sup>2</sup>

So, Gandhi believed in the creative force of religion in human life. He had claimed to be a practical religious idealist but not much interested in the eschatological aspects of religion, although he accepted the teachings of the Gita and the fundamental metaphysical and theological conceptions of the Hindu religion. And also Gandhian theology postulated belief in God, the transmigration of souls, although he did not concern himself much with the supernal mysteries of the beyond but was primarily involved in the ethical aspects of religion.<sup>3</sup> Religion for him was belief in the ordered moral governance of the world and the spirit of faith in and dependence upon the ‘absolute Truth which is God and implied an emphasis on the moral values of man as spirit.’<sup>4</sup> Gandhi, therefore, always talked of "Ethical Religion" and wrote:

For me morals, ethics, and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built upon sand. And religion divorced from morality is like ‘sounding brass’ good only for making a noise and breaking heads.<sup>5</sup>

For Gandhi the realization of God and soul is the service of mankind. According to Varma:

Although Gandhi only spoke of Ethical Religion, he had a more penetrating, intense and personal grasp of the depths of religious experience than Plato and Rousseau who also to a certain extent, preach the doctrine of the religious foundation of politics. Gandhi's spirit cried for the personal realization of God and he wanted to make a purified life the basis for social and political action. He practiced what he preached. He himself practiced the religious virtues and wanted that they should be practiced by other individuals even on a social and political scale.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, in this regard, there are similarities between Rousseau and Gandhi. As Varma mentions, the fundamentals of Rousseau's Civil Religion are: Belief in God, Belief in a future life of happiness for the good and punishment for the wicked, Belief in the sanctity of the social contract and the law, No toleration for intolerance. And the fundamentals of Gandhi's Ethical Religion include: Belief in God, Belief in Karma and Transmigration (according to the balance of papa and punya), Belief in the universal presence of a moral order and the efficacy of the

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<sup>1</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 235-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Varma, 1972, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 60-1.

eleven "great vows" (ekadasa mahavrata), Not only tolerance but belief that all religions are equally true and entitled to respect.<sup>1</sup>

### **b) Religion in Gandhian Politics**

Gandhi wanted, as his political Guru, Gokhale (1866-1915), a spiritualization of politics. Gokhale stressed the incorporation of moral value in politics. For him politics was the pathway to the service of God.<sup>2</sup> The central principle of Gandhian political philosophy is that the fundamental religious ethic common to all the great religions has to be made concrete in individual, social and political life. It is thus opposed to regarding political action as the sphere of the non-moral. As Varma mentions, 'by the religious basis of politics Gandhi would, hence, mean the supremacy of the concept of the moral right of conscience in place of the divine right of rulers, princes and other ascendant groups.'<sup>3</sup> So, Gandhi claimed to adopt a religious attitude to political problems. He was sometimes called a saint dabbling in politics. "His contributions to the religious reconstruction of Hinduism entitle him to a prominent place among the great religious prophets and saints of India... Gandhi is a saint among politicians and a politician among saints."<sup>4</sup> In 1920, in answering a question on being a Saint or Politician, he wrote:

[...] The politician in me has never dominated a single decision of mine, and if I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake, as I have been doing, with more or less success, consciously since 1894, unconsciously, as I have now discovered, ever since reaching the years of discretion.<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi, also, in an article entitled "Hinduism," while categorically declared his faith and creed said:

Most religious men I have met are politicians in disguise. I, however, who wear the guise of a politician, am at heart a religious man... I call myself a Sanatani Hindu because I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures and therefore in the Avatars and rebirth, I believe in the Varanasharam Dharma (caste) in a sense, in my opinion, strictly Vedic but not in its present popular and crude Sense, I believe in the protection of the cow in a much larger sense than the popular and I do not disbelieve in idol worship.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Varma, 1972, 74.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>4</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 231.

<sup>5</sup> Gandhi, 2008, 217-8.

<sup>6</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 236; Varma, 1972, 63.

In Gandhi's words, "Religion binds man to God and man to man." and "Religions are not for separating men from one another, they are meant to bind them."<sup>1</sup> The quest of the religious consciousness in this socio-moral sense is the basis of a stable social and political structure. Thus, according to Varma, 'Gandhi wanted the religious spirit to flourish which means a recovery of divine faith and the consequent purification of motives and conduct. It implies the cooperative adherence to the moral laws of God by the members of society.'<sup>2</sup> Gandhi's political philosophy, was thus, grounded on religion. Gandhi categorically said that he wanted to bring religion into politics. He turned every activity into religion. Human life for him was but the glorification of God. In his own words:

My national service is part of my training for freeing my soul from the bondage of flesh I have no desire for the perishable kingdom of earth. I am striving for the kingdom of Heaven which is Moksha ... For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives. In the language of the Gita, I want to live at peace with both friend and foe. So my patriotism is for me a stage on my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace. Thus it will be seen that for me there are no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. Politics bereft of religion are a death-trap because they kill the soul.<sup>3</sup>

So, he equated the religion with nationalism. Gandhi said, "Patriotism based on hatred Killeth life and that patriotism based on love giveth life."<sup>4</sup> His nationalism and internationalism were linked together and he believed that one could not be a fine internationalist without first being a true nationalist. Indeed, as Chaudhry mentions, 'under Gandhi's influence, therefore, politics was turned into a fine art.'<sup>5</sup> Gandhi's emergence as a national leader added a new dimension to the religion-politics syndrome. Gandhi's political thought 'was suffused with his religious faith that maintains a symbiotic unity in his apparently fragmentary statements.'<sup>6</sup>

Because of the existence of communalism among the nationalists, Gandhi's solution was to approach Indian nationality the way earlier nationalists (and the British) had seen it, as a composite of separate communities in which people's first loyalty was religious even though caste, class and regional ties were at least as strong as religious ones. As a result, Gandhi tended to approach mass organizing as a task of convincing established local figures to lead their co-

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<sup>1</sup> Varma, 1972, 75.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by: Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 242.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Indira Rothermund, "Gandhi's Satyagraha and Hindu Thought," in *Political Thought in Modern India*, eds. Thomas Pantham & Kenneth L Deutsch (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986), 298.

religionists into struggle.<sup>1</sup> Gandhian politics promoted a type of political power that was created on a religious base, although he had commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity and non-violence. 'Gandhi's top-down methods helped to strengthen the communal organizations that took the initiative when nationalist action ebbed.'<sup>2</sup>

His struggle was founded on religious beliefs.<sup>3</sup> He could not think of organizing and mobilizing people along non-religious lines. Gandhian politics, as mentioned, was inseparable from religion and, as he himself admitted, was rooted in religion. His political ideas were based on the teachings of 'Bhagwad Gita' and traditional Hindu virtues. His Hindu style of life made him appear a saint rather than a politician. The Hinduism influence on the political view of Gandhi was certainly eminent. His ideas on God and religion mark him out as the most prominent figure in the politics of modern India up to the forties. He used the Hindu idiom in approaching the Masses. His political strategies manifested from Hindu orientation. His non-cooperation movement was launched with an invocation to God. The Swadeshi and Boycott Movements sanctioned by religion.<sup>4</sup>

Gandhi sought to achieve his social and political objectives by purely truthful and non-violent methods and weapons such as prayer, fasting, immovable faith in God, high sense of duty and dedicated service of his country and of humanity at large. Obstacles in his way were removed through 'Passive Resistance, Boycott and Satyagraha which he termed as insistence on truth and which he regarded as the only weapons in the hands of a votary of non-violence.'<sup>5</sup> He believed that "the only weapon of the Satyagrahi is God."<sup>6</sup> Force or coercion in any shape was unpleasant to him.

On July 28, 1920, Gandhi inaugurated non-cooperation movement with fasting, prayer, Tilak's blessings, and support on August 1, 1920. It was launched on that very day when Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy, "The Imperial Government has acted in the Khilafat matter in an unscrupulous, immoral and unjust manner... I can retain neither respect nor affection for such a

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<sup>1</sup> Chakraborty, 2013, 146.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Muldoon, "The Cow is Still the Most Important Figure in Indian Politics!: Religion, Imperial Culture and the Shaping of Indian Political Reform in the 1930s," *Parliamentary History*, Volume 27. Issue 1 (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 291-3; Shakir, 1986 a, 137.

<sup>5</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 245.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Government.”<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, the triple purposes of non-cooperation - redress of the Punjab Wrongs, acceptance of the Khilafat demands and the establishment of Swarajya - was mutually agreed upon between the Congress and the Khilafat Committee.<sup>2</sup> Here, indeed, Gandhi used the Islamic symbols against the common enemy too.

Gandhi supported the khilafat movement and defended the sacred 'cow'. Considering these by him were political rather than religious. 'They may be viewed as experiments in evolving a scheme of communal and political unity on the basis of respect for all religions'<sup>3</sup>. Two Main Points of Gandhi's Speech at Gorakhpur on 8 February 1921 were: 'first Hindu-Muslim unity; and second Imminence of Swaraj that its realization conditional on innate strength of numbers when matched with peace, grace of God, self-sacrifice, and self-purification.'<sup>4</sup>

As also in his commentary in *Young India* (4 August 1920) about 'The Cow and the Caliphate', Gandhi showed how he uses the religious symbol to unity of Muslim and Hindus:

... I am as eager to save the cow from the Mussulman's knife as any Hindu. But on that very account I refuse to make my support of the Mussulman claim on the Khilafat conditional upon his saving the cow. The Mussulman is my neighbour. He is in distress. His grievance is legitimate and it is my bounden duty to help him to secure redress by every legitimate means in my power even to the extent of losing my life and property....<sup>5</sup>

Although Gandhi's belief was inner and by heart, but the 'God strategy' can be seen in his politics. The majesty of the divine power had priority in Gandhi's thinking. He emphatically declared in a speech: "If we trust and fear God, we shall have to fear no one, not Maharaja, not Viceroys, not the detectives, not even King George."<sup>6</sup> For him Loyalty to God had a higher obligatory character than loyalty to the political superior. He urged that people should obey God instead of an aggressive imperialism. 'Like Seneca and St. Augustine, he taught the priority of obedience to God to political obedience.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 251.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Shakir, 1986 a, 138.

<sup>4</sup> Shahid Amin, "Waiting for the Mahatma," in *Nationalist Movement in India; A Reader*, ed. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 73.

<sup>5</sup> Gandhi, 2008, 222.

<sup>6</sup> Varma, 1972, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

### c) Gandhi's Secularism

As has been postulated in the preceding paragraphs, for Gandhi every, the tiniest, activity was governed by what he considered to be his religion. And, he stated that 'those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.'<sup>1</sup> He has also said: "Politics divorced from religion, has absolutely no meaning . . . Politics are a part of our being; we ought to understand our national institutions. We may do this from our infancy . . . But we want also the steady light, the infallible light of religious faith."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in Gandhian politics religion played a predominant role. In Gandhi's opinion, political activity was as a means of humanitarian service and a technique of God-realization. So, politics had to be rooted in religious vows.<sup>3</sup> For him religion was the source of absolute value and hence constitutive of social life and politics was the arena of public interest. Without the former, the latter would become debased. While it was the obligation of the state to ensure religious freedom, no religion that depended upon state support deserved to survive.<sup>4</sup>

Gandhi, also, associated religion with politics by saying:

I cannot isolate politics from the deepest things of my life, for the simple reason that my politics are not corrupt; they are inextricably bound up with non-violence and truth. I could not live for a single second without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me because they say that even my politics are derived from my religion. I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion because religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath. For me politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words, a seeker after God and Truth ... Therefore in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>5</sup>

In Gandhi's view, it was necessary for a religious man to participate in politics:

I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind, and that I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political and purely religious work into water-tight compartments. I do not know any religion apart from human activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities which they would otherwise lack, reducing life to a maze of sound and fury signifying nothing.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Madan, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by: Varma, 1972, 73.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Madan, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 240.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 241.

In 1915 at a student's meeting Gandhi said, "while students should participate in politics, such politics should not be divorced from religion." In the following year in another meeting, he told, "I do not believe that religion has nothing to do with politics. The latter divorced from religion is like a corpse only to be buried."<sup>1</sup>

So, for Gandhi, politics and religion have been convertible terms. He believed that the spirit of religion must govern on political activity. For him "there are no politics that are not at the same time a religion."<sup>2</sup> According to his background, some religious instruments and his intimate knowledge of the legends and the symbolism of the religious folk heroes of India enabled Gandhi to have a clear understanding of India's people psychology and to use it for promoting the political interests of India.<sup>3</sup>

Although Gandhi wanted to strengthen the religious bases of politics, it was in a strictly moral sense, as mentioned. He would neither accept nor give preference to any particular religious group or sect. He would also disfavor religious dogmas by the State and state interference to make men religious. He did not also believe in a State religion even though the whole community had one religion. For him, religion was a personal matter. This did not mean that the State Schools would not give ethical teachings. The fundamental ethics were common to all religions.<sup>4</sup>

Although Gandhi's political outlook reveals religious stamp but he did not make politics subservient to religion. He used religion for mobilizing the masses and politically educating the people. Unlike his extremist predecessors, he did evolve a strategy to avoid communal confrontation which ultimately led him to support secularism i.e. making religion a personal affair and advocating neutrality of state in religious matters.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the western concept of secularism, Gandhi suggested peaceful co-existence of all religions to prevent conflicts caused by religious bigotry. Gandhi introduced the concept to counter the British policy of divide and rule and thereby to unify the various groups.<sup>6</sup> For him the faith-based respect to all religions was

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<sup>1</sup> Chaudhry, 1978, 237.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by: Ibid., 240.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>4</sup> Varma, 1972, 77-8.

<sup>5</sup> Shakir, 1986a, 137-8.

<sup>6</sup> Ragini Sen and Wolfgang Wagner, "Cultural Mechanics of Fundamentalism: Religion as Ideology, Divided Identities and Violence in Post-Gandhi India," *Culture & Psychology*, Vol. 5(3) (2009).

the best base for tolerance and peace in India, though he was a deeply religious Hindu. In his opinion, the state should not support any religious organization and it should govern on areas of common citizen interest, permitting the freedom of religious practices.<sup>1</sup>

Talking with a Christian missionary in September 1946, Gandhi said: '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. The state would look after your secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your and my religion. That is everybody's personal concern!' Soon after independence, he said: 'The state should undoubtedly be secular. Everyone in it should be entitled to profess his religion without let or hindrance, so long as the citizen obeys the common law of the land.' He was totally against the idea of a state's religion or state support for any religion, as he has said a society or group 'which depends partly or wholly on state aid for the existence of its religion, does not deserve or, better still, does not have any religion worth the name.'<sup>2</sup>

He also defended the local traditions where in individuals lived with dignity. Unlike the Enlightenment conception of individualism, which separate individuals from their tradition, Gandhi wanted to provide a theory of individuals' autonomy to strength individuals within their traditions and communities.<sup>3</sup> Also, as India is a multi-religious society, Gandhi's nation-making project for independent India was entailed a separation of religion and state. He thus proclaimed: "I swear by my religion, I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it. The state will look after your secular welfare, health, communication, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not my religion. That is everybody's personal concern."<sup>4</sup>

Hence, secularism for him is the separation of religion from state, but not from politics. In matters of social and political ideology, Gandhi was a mediator. He always tried to cover modern ideas in traditional forms.<sup>5</sup> As Nandy mentions, he was 'an arch anti-secularist if we use the proper scientific meaning of the word secularist.'<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the inseparability of religion and

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<sup>1</sup> Cannell, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Madan, 2011, 237.

<sup>3</sup> Chakrabarty and Pandey, 2009, 57.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley J. Tambiah, "The Crisis of Secularism in India," in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Judith Brown, "The Mahatma and Modern India." In *Nationalist Movement in India, A Reader*, ed. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 62.

<sup>6</sup> Nandy, 2010.

politics in the Indian context, and generally, was for Gandhi fundamentally a distinct issue from the separation of the state from the church in Christendom. When he did advocate that ‘religion and state should be separate’, he clarified that this was to limit the role of the state to ‘secular welfare’, and to allow it no admittance into the religious life of the people.<sup>1</sup> He had expressed ‘an idealistic rejection of complex legal and political institutions as the basis of a civil society and a state system that would distance the rulers from the ruled.’<sup>2</sup>

However, some believe Gandhi was not a secularist. His view was holistic and religion has been its constitutive principle. In this sense, religion means, in Madan’s words, altruism, ‘self-assurance arising from inner conviction, and the putting of one’s faith in the saving grace of God.’<sup>3</sup> So, in this view, Hinduism is a worldly religion and it does not need to follow secularism for being worldly so that secularism is sacred in this religion if morality is regarded. On the other side, in Bhikhu Parekh’s words on Gandhi’s political philosophy, ‘there was hardly a Hindu religious category and practice to which [Gandhi] did not give a worldly and secular content.’ In other words, ‘Gandhi secularized Hinduism as much as it was possible to do within a spiritual framework.’ It means that the relationship of the sacred and the secular or religion and politics is hierarchical. The latter category is opposed to the former but also encompassed by it. So, for some ones Gandhi secularize religion and for others he sacralizes politics. Both views have strong adherents. For some scholars like Margaret Chatterji and Madan ‘Gandhi seems almost a secularist’, but in regard to the communal (Hindu-Muslim) problem, not an attempt to prune away all religious considerations from political matters.<sup>4</sup>

## **2- Nehru’s View on Secularism**

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru criticized Gandhi’s religiosity. He criticized Gandhi’s use of religious instruments for some political issue. For example, in the time of Gandhi’s fast in 1932 on the subject of separate electorates, Nehru in prison wrote: “I felt angry with him at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question and his frequent references to God in connection with it.”<sup>5</sup> Nehru was against institutional religion, ritual, and mysticism and did not consider himself as a religious person. Nevertheless, he was not uninterested in spiritual matters. As he had some studies on world history and according to his encounters with the Indian masses he had

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<sup>1</sup> Madan, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Tambiah, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Madan, 2011, 235.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 239.

very negative feel about the role of religion in human affairs and he looked forward to a secularized society. While for Gandhi, religious pluralism was inter-religious understanding and mutual respect that it was the strength of Indian society not 'communal politics tied to statism would be its bane.' For Nehru, however, religiosity and the attendant conflicts were the badge of social backwardness.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Nehru's position on religion and secularization was rationalist and modern. His view derived from Marxian or Lockean roots. It was also idealist and reflected more the ideals of the European enlightenment than the reality of society and politics in India. Nehru, gradually, amended his previous position related to agnostic and progressive views. He argued that 'India could be ruled only by a government that afforded equal protection and respect to those of all faiths and none and that the Indian Constitution should strive to afford equal protection to all its citizens.'<sup>2</sup> The different situation of India led him to modify his view so that in 1931 he gave the message of the recession of religious differences persuaded the all-India Congress Committee to consider the resolution on fundamental rights including 'freedom of conscience and of the profession and the practice of any religion' and equality before the law for all citizens of free India, irrespective of differences especially religious, and the state would observe neutrality with regard to all religions. In S. Gopal's words, it 'was the first breakdown, in concrete terms, of the concept of secularism in the Indian context and formed the basis of the relevant articles in the constitution many years later.'<sup>3</sup>

In 1945, Nehru wrote: "I am convinced that the future government will not associate itself with any religious faith but will give freedom to all religious functions."<sup>4</sup> After independence, during the constitutional assembly debates, he emphasized the establishment of a secular state as an act of faith particularly for the majority community because through this they will demonstrate a generous, fair and just manner toward other religious minorities. Nehru, Gandhi and some other congress leaders maintained their view 'that there shall be no state discrimination on the grounds of religion or religious affiliation or extension of patronage to any one religion to the exclusion of, or in preference to, others.'<sup>5</sup> Besides, in 1961 Nehru wrote: "we talk about a secular state in India. It is perhaps not very easy even to find a good word in Hindi for 'secular'.

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<sup>1</sup> Madan, 2011, 238-9 & 246.

<sup>2</sup> Cannell, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by: Madan, 2011, 242.

<sup>4</sup> Tambiah, 2010, 422.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Some people think it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct... It is a state which honours all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Tambiah, the Nehruvian conception of secular policies in Indian politics after independence, supported by many Indian protectors of liberal democracy, has not meant the rejection of the transcendental values of religion or that society should be irreligious. By contrast, it accepts that all religions are meaningful and regards a valid place for them in the life of the nation. However, ‘religion is not a component in defining nationality or citizenship. The state should be neutral as between the country’s many religions and tolerant of all.’<sup>2</sup>

Hence, Gandhi and Nehru, India's founding-fathers, were two eminent leaders who have had a major effect on the secular character of the Indian political system. According to Das, for Gandhi, undemocratic political association was better than any form based exclusively on adherence to a particular religion. Nehru was against ‘a caste ridden society’ and advocated a secular national state that includes people of all religions. Both of them were strongly of the view that religious freedom was essential in India for removing any citizens’ fear of state interference in the religious sphere. Nevertheless, Nehru, more than others, provided the most dynamic and powerful thrust to Indian secularism and tried hard to secularize the democratic process in India.<sup>3</sup>

Eventually, India adopted secularism and constitutional religious rights to overcome the religious antagonisms of the pre-independence period. The leaders after the independence opted for a type of secularism that implied continued state involvement in religious affairs. Rather than separating religion and state absolutely, India opted for the principle of equal respect for all religions. The government intervention has been required in religious affairs and support of religious activities to provide an equal opportunity to all Indians for practicing their religions. Thus, ‘Indian national leaders claim secular credentials by visiting places of worship of all religious denominations and the broadcast media allot time equally to the prayers of different religions.’<sup>4</sup> Although, sometimes, the extensive interference by the state in Hindu religious institutions that reinforced its image as the principle agent of Hindu reform and separate personal laws for each religious community, and the protection of a religious group because of welfare,

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<sup>1</sup> Madan, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Tambiah, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Hari Hara Das, *Political System of India* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1998), 347.

<sup>4</sup> Kinnvall and Svensson, 2010.

privilege or immunity have been regarded as a problem of Indian secularism that may undermines the secularity of the state.<sup>1</sup>

In this respect, on one hand, some writers viewed the Indian concept of secularism as ‘an idealization and romanticisation of Western nineteenth-century universalist ideas, integrated into an elite political culture’ in Kinnvall & Svensson’s words. They have seen this as the weakness of the Indian sense of secularism, as it allows religion to play and enhances religiosity by preserving and protecting religious identities. This has led to the social distance between religious communities.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the religious variable became politically critical in the presence of an institutionalized religion, as there have been some attempts in this line. Although in India, according to Weiner’s (1960) opinion, "since Hinduism has no church, the power of the Brahmin was that of an individual rather than of an institution,"<sup>3</sup> but gradually during post independence with reinforcing Hinduism, a quasi church was shaped and organized temples and religious institutions was politically activated. Therefore, against some Indian politicians that believed to exploit Hinduism and Buddhism with little fear instead of Islamic tradition that makes no distinction between religious and secular life,<sup>4</sup> Hinduism also converted to a fear to secularism, as the events after 1980s show. However, as Madan mentions, secularization process, in fact, has proceeded almost without support of religion:

If secularism is not essentially anti-religious, but only against revelation and unreason, Indian secularism with its ideal of respect for all religions would be much less so. [...] neither India’s indigenous religious traditions nor Islam recognize the sacred-secular dichotomy in the manner Christianity does so and, therefore, the modern processes of secularization (in the sense of expanding human control over human lives) proceed in India without the support of an ideology that people in general may warm up to, such as one legitimized by religion.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, according to Bhargava, in India some degrees of interference by a secular state in religious affairs have been unavoidable.<sup>6</sup> These actions are for provide equality between religious group and community in the line of their definition of secularism. Besides, political secularism in India, whether in Gandhi’s words as ‘equal respect for all religions’ or in Nehru’s words as ‘neutrality or distance from religious matters’, sought to protect minorities against the numerical majority of mass democracy or Majoritarian democracy and preserve peace between

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<sup>1</sup> Bhargava, 2010, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Kinnvall and Svensson, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by: Janda, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Madan, 2011, 261.

<sup>6</sup> Bhargava, 2010, 20.

communities. This religious understanding of community and rights became a basis for Congress policy and Indian secularism. Although, since the 1980s the Hindu Right has redefined secularism as formal intercommunity equality, and thereby reinforcing majoritarian domination/privilege, But, today, Gandhi and Nehru views has been reinforced again and also 'secularism as a means of socio-cultural justice and peaceful coexistence necessitates, expanding its scope beyond religion into other categories of identity/diversity.'<sup>1</sup>

### 3- Secular State of India

According to what has been mentioned so far, there is medium definition of secular state in India; "a secular state is neither a Godless state nor an irreligious nor an anti religions state" in H. V. kamath's words.<sup>2</sup> Indian constitution makers considered secularism as a sign of modernity, plurality, coexistence, rationalism and multiculturalism of society. Particularly Nehru meant a secular state as "a state where religion as such is discouraged. It means freedom of religion and conscience including freedom for those who have no religion. It means free play for all religions, subject only to their not interfering with each other or with the basic conceptions of our state."<sup>3</sup>

Looking at the doctrine of the secular state as it has evolved in practice in India, it is observed that all three principles of secular state, as already mentioned, have been invoked to justify the secular state, although sometimes their application has been contradictory and has led to major anomalies. The first principle, that of liberty, has been incorporated in the constitution, which implies a right of freedom of religion and even religious denomination or any section thereof. It gives to citizens the profession, practice of their respective religion and their propagation. Besides, Indian constitution allows the right of establishment and administration of educational institutions along communal lines and even encouraged to be communally divided, and under it every religious denomination enjoys the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, articles 25 to 30 of Constitution can be mentioned. They guarantee 'freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion'(25), 'freedom to manage religious affaire' (26), 'freedom as to payment of taxes for

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<sup>1</sup> Anuradha Ramanujan, "Interpreting Traditions," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Volume 12. Issue 2 (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by: Avnindra Kumar Verma, *Political Science* (Delhi: Rahul Jain, 2010), 291.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by: Ram Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts Versus Myths* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 193.

<sup>4</sup> Das, 1998, 348.

promotion of any particular religion' (27), and 'freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions' (28). They protect the 'interests of minorities' (29), including their 'right ... to establish and administer educational institutions' (30).<sup>1</sup> Despite this, there are some limitations concerning this principle. According to Chatterjee:

Limiting these rights of freedom of religion, however, is the right of the state to regulate any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice, to provide for social welfare and reform, and to throw open Hindu religious institutions to all sections of Hindu. This limit to the liberty principle is what enabled the extensive reform under state auspices of Hindu personal law, and of the administration of Hindu temples.<sup>2</sup>

The second principle, that of equality, is also clearly recognized in the Indian Constitution which forbids the state from discriminating against any citizen on the basis of religion or caste, except positive discrimination when it makes special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes or for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, all laws passed by the state shall be equally applicable to all Indian citizens, irrespective of the religion to which they belong.

The third principle of the secular state, as mentioned, was the separation of state and religion. It has also been recognized in the Indian Constitution, and the state of India proclaimed itself as secular through the 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment in 1976.<sup>4</sup> The Constitution only once, directly, refer to word 'secular' in preamble without any direct reference to 'secularism', but that too to denote an aspect of religious practice. In the Hindi version of the constitution, a statement has been used that means 'neutral in relation to religious denominations' (i.e. non-sectarian) as the equivalent for 'secular'.<sup>5</sup> However, it declares that there shall be no official state religion, no religious instruction in state schools, and no taxes to support any particular religion.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, according to what was said up to now, and as Das also mentions, Indian secularism is not against religion or belief in God. It is not either antireligious or irreligious. Indian secularism means that there is no official religion in this country and the government according to the

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<sup>1</sup> Madan, 2011, 248.

<sup>2</sup> Chatterjee, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See: Constitution of India, 1949 (Consolidated with amendments), accessed at: <http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/details.jsp?id=6771>

<sup>5</sup> Madan, 2011, 243.

<sup>6</sup> Chatterjee, 2010.

Constitution has to show perfect neutrality towards all religions,<sup>1</sup> although in practice there have been some problems as will be explained in next chapters. Apart from other factors in society as consequences of modernity, Indian state itself has not directly acted towards reducing the role of any religion in society. It has not imposed any particular culture like what has been in some country like Turkey or Iran.

### **Sum up**

In this chapter, the researcher tried to critically look at what is secularism for. And it has been explained that the term 'secular' itself is a religious word and has a religious root. Secular state is not against religion. It is for regarding equality between religions and providing non-sectarian situation in society. It is characterized by its attitude of neutrality and impartiality towards all religions. This state regulates the relationship between man and man and leaves the relationship between man and god to be governed purely by his own conscience. In this kind of states, especially in India, religions have freedom. Indian secularism, with different definition, is often related to religious plurality and equality. Indian secularism is often related to religious plurality and equality. The separation of religion from politics is not perfect, though the separation of religion from state. Besides, according to the Constitution, neutrality and impartiality for the state is necessary. In India, secular state has provided a ground for activity of all religious communities and ensured their rights. Hence, in secular countries also the political functions of religion can be seen as it is still a social structure, especially in India. In the next chapters, these political functions of religion in India will be examined.

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<sup>1</sup> Das, 1998, 345-6.