



**Paper: Political Processes In India**  
**Lesson: Debates on Indian Secularism**  
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## Introduction

The cornerstone of Indian Democracy, Secularism is a highly contested concept. It is contested because two different line of understanding are competing for ideological domination ever since independence and even before.

(a) One side of this understanding was Jawaharlal Nehru who had a vision of separating religion and Politics manifesting in the concept of '**dharmanirpeksata**'.

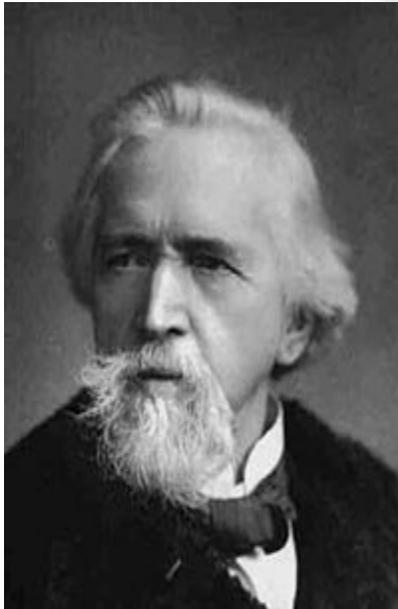
(b) By way of contrast Mahatma Gandhi rejected the idea of separation of religion and politics and believed in the principle of equal respect of all religions manifesting in the concept of '**sarva dharma sambhava**'.

The contest between these two different understanding of secularism was an issue of debate in the Constituent Assembly and later in academic circles and political life of young Democratic India. The focus of debate was, Is Western conceptualization of Secularism is appropriate in a deeply religious society of India? What is Secularism - 'a wall of separation between state and religion' or 'treating all religions as Equal'? What precisely does equality mean State staying away from religious beliefs equally or State intervening in matters of religious groups equally? What policies does State entail to protect minority religious groups from dominant and culturally hegemonic majority religious groups? Is secularism capable of warding off Communalization of Indian society and polity and ensure inter religious harmony or Secularism is only relevant for western society that has undergone a process of secularization? The debate became important due to certain developments that included partition of the country, rise of Hindutava forces, religiously motivated violence. Famous academician

**Ashish Nandy** commented India witness approximately one and a half riot daily. **T N Madan** said "though the ambiguity of secularism was at one point considered its strength, its vagueness is now a poor foundation for clear headed public policies" (**Neera Chandhoke**, 2010: 333) In this background on one side were scholars questioning appropriateness of secularism in India and on the other were scholars defending secularism as the only tool to save religiously divided society. This was one of the reason why in an essay written in **Rajeev Bhargava's** edited work "**Secularism and its critics**" **Charles Taylor** declared,

“Secularism in some form is a necessity for the democratic life of religiously diverse societies” (Taylor, 1998:46).

To understand this debate it is important to understand two different line of understanding on secularism represented in the ideas of Nehru and Gandhi.



**Value Edition: Did You Know**

**The Usage:**

Secularism was first used by British Writer George Jacob Holyoake in 1851. He described Secularism to promote a social order separate from religion without actively dismissing or criticizing religious belief. He argued that secularism is not against Christianity but independent of it. Secular knowledge is that kind of knowledge which is founded in this life, which relates to the conduct of this life, conduces to the welfare of this life, and is capable of being tested by the experience of this life.

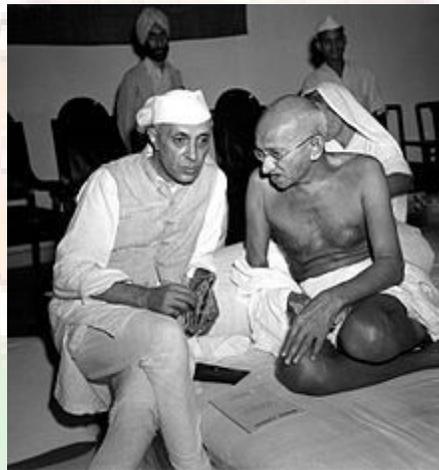
(Wikipedia Secularism accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2015 at 10: 30 am)

According to Bipan Chandra Nehru’s definition of secularism was “Secularism means first separation of religion from political, economic, social and cultural aspects of life, religion being treated as purely personal matter, second dissociation of State from religion, third full freedom to all religions and four equal opportunities for followers of all religions and no discrimination and partiality on grounds of religion. (Jakob De Ronver, 2002: 4048)

Nehru’s notion of secularism dharamnirpekshata did not mean a state where religion is discouraged. It rather meant a State where people have freedom of religion and conscience and freedom for those as well who have no religion. Nehru Jee himself said “It is perhaps not very easy to find a good word for ‘secular’. Some people think it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct. What it means is that it is a state which honors all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities, that as a state, it does not allow itself to be attached to one faith or religion, which then becomes the State religion”

(Neera Chandhoke, 2010 :335) Nehru Jee's secularism was understood as freedom of religion or irreligion, no state religion and due honour of all religion equally. Different articles of our constitution define the Secular character of the State. Constitution guarantees freedom of religion to individual, also to religious denomination, guarantees equality of citizenship, equality of opportunity in public services, no discrimination in educational institutions, no communal electorate, although there is provision for reservation of seats for Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes , no special taxes for promotion of religion, no religious instructions in state educational institutions.

### **Gandhi and Nehru in 1942**



[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/da/Gandhi\\_and\\_Nehru\\_1942.jpg/220px-Gandhi\\_and\\_Nehru\\_1942.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/da/Gandhi_and_Nehru_1942.jpg/220px-Gandhi_and_Nehru_1942.jpg)-accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> February at 11:50 am

Through principle of sarva dharma sambhava Gandhi tried to bring people from different religions together. It was also a way to form mass movement in a religiously divided plural society. Gandhi also realized and recognized value of religion in people's lives and believed in equal respect of all religions. The difference in opinion of two stalwarts Gandhi and Nehru on Secularism was even visible in Constituent Assembly Debates.

### **Debate in the constituent Assembly**

**K. T. Shah** demanded separation of State from any religious activity. He even demanded separate article and word Secularism to be included but failed to do so. **Tajamul Husain** and **M Masani** defined right to religion to mean practice religion privately and religious instructions to be given only at home. They were opposed to the idea of religious instructions imparted through educational institutions. On the other side of the debate were

**K M Munshi, Lakshmi Kant Maitra and H V Kamath.** K M Munshi was of the view that non establishment clause of the US Constitution was inappropriate to Indian conditions. **Jaya Prakash Narain** was of the view that communal violence take place when religion was used to serve socio, economic and political interests and to prevent that an article need to be incorporated in the Constitution that prohibits use of religious institutions for political purposes. The Constituent Assembly Minority sub Committee defined Freedom of Religion as "Freedom of conscience and right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion". This terminology was formally dissented by **Amrit Kaur, Jagjivan Ram, G B Pant, P K Salve and B R Ambedkar.** (Sheefali Jha, 2002: 3177)The main line of argument was if religion is defined in such broad category it may also mean including anti social customs like child marriage, polygamy, unequal laws of marriage and inheritance also. However right to religion remained limited by public order, morality and health in the Constitution.

The idea of Uniform Civil Code was also debated in the Constituent Assembly. While Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Hansa Mehta and M R Masani were among few to emphasize importance of Uniform civil code Ismail Saheb, B Packer Sahib and Mahboob Ali Baig wanted to include personal law in the fundamental right to religion. Finally it was accepted that uniform civil code need to be done away slowly with the consent of all communities. Uniform Civil Code was included in the Directive principle with due support of Dr B R Ambedkar.

**Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is hailed as the prime architect of the Indian Constitution**



[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/8/87/Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar.jpg/220px-Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/8/87/Dr._Bhim_Rao_Ambedkar.jpg/220px-Dr._Bhim_Rao_Ambedkar.jpg) accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015 11:45 am

**Idea and politics of Secularism in Independent India**

## Debates on Indian Secularism

In the post partition realities and communal riots it was “proved that religious prejudices more than religious sensibilities had become a constituent feature of Indian politics and to ignore this would have been bad historical understanding as well as bad politics.” (Neera Chandhoke, 2010: 335)

The issue which was matter of debate from very beginning became all the more important in post 1980s.

### **Value addition-Did you know**

#### **Position in Indian constitution**

The word secularism was added in the preamble of the Indian constitution by 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment in 1975 .

Debate centered around two main points one What does secularism mean wall of separation between state and religion or treating all religions as equal and the other was how to accommodate minority rights into concept and practice of secularism. Secularism was challenged as a western construct which is alien for country like India where religion is so important and pervasive that it controls almost each and every aspect of our life. The Hindu right groups accused the Congress government of practicing pseudo secularism for selectively intervening in the religious matters of the Hindus which is a majority community. According to this understanding if secularism is interpreted as equality of all religions then selective intervention in matters of one religious community, group rights for minority communities and existence of personal laws violates basic premise of secularism. Instead of dismissing secularism Hindu right are in favour of Sarva Dharma Sambhava interpreted as formal equal treatment of all religions and this became the basis of supporting Uniform civil code while special rights for minorities were opposed either as ‘pseudo secularism’ or ‘appeasement of minorities’. Rise of religiously motivated violence and tensions following the rise of hindutva forces made the issue even more significant.

One side argued that policy of secularism is responsible for exacerbating the problem of communal violence and religious fundamentalism the other side was of the view that secularism is indispensable and instead of discussing its alternative it is important to find alternative conception of secularism that suit Indian realities.

**Value addition-Know it better**

**Pseudo-secularism**

The first recorded use of the term "pseudo-secularism" was in the book *Philosophy and Action of the R.S.S. for the Hind Swaraj*, by Anthony Elenjmittam. In his book, Elenjmittam accused leaders of the Indian National Congress, of pretending to uphold secularism. The BJP leader LK Advani characterizes pseudo-secular politicians as those for whom "secularism is only a euphemism for vote-bank politics". According to him, these politicians are not concerned with the welfare of the minorities, but only interested in their votes.

A very important point of debate was separation of religion from State is a feature of all modern western societies and thus not suits the realities of India. However it is important to understand Secularism is essentially contested in west too and different perception exist on its meaning, values and interpretation. The idea that separation of State from religion is the sine qua non of secularism is problematic and overlooks the experience of European Countries which neither build a wall of separation between State and religion nor De-establish official religion. Secularism is interpreted differently in USA, Britain, Germany and France to name a few.

**Riots and India**

## Debates on Indian Secularism

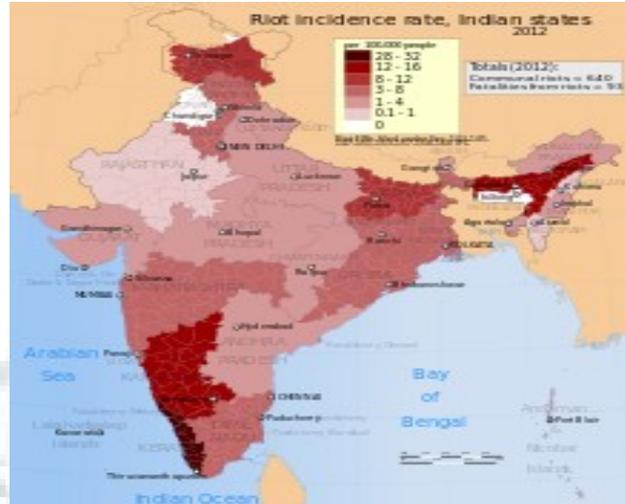


Image accessed from Wikipedia on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2015 at 12o' clock

### Value addition-know it more

#### Speaking through facts

According to PRS India, 24 out of 35 states and union territories of India reported instances of religious riots over the 5 year 2005–2009 period. The highest incidences of communal violence in the 5-year period were reported from Maharashtra (700). The other three states with high counts of communal violence over the same 5 year period were Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. Together, these four states accounted for 64% of all deaths from communal violence.

For 2012,<sup>[9]</sup> there were 93 deaths in India from many incidences of communal violence. Over 2013, 107 people were killed during religious riots and 1647 got injured. (Accessed from Wikipedia on 20<sup>th</sup> February at 12 pm)

In England not only the Church of England is the official Church but Queen is the member of Church also. In Germany State is responsible to collect tax that goes to a religious institution of person's choice. Even in America its President takes oath on the Bible, there are Chaplains appointed for the Armed services and God is referred in the public domain. Countries in the West have also followed range of policies to become secular democracies. Thus it cannot be identified with a specific policy of separation of state and religion. Secularism became very important concept of debate in the academic circles.

**Value addition-Did you know**

**Matter of personal law**

Personal laws that dealt with matters relating to family such as marriage, adoption, divorce, inheritance were accepted for Hindus, Muslims, Christians and parsis separately. Equality of citizenship is guaranteed by article 14, 15 (1) and 29 (2). State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth or any of them. Indian constitution also affirms equal opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointments to any office under the state.

**Debates on Secularism**

While one group of scholars tried to defend secularism especially in the face of the threat posed by increasing communal politics and religious strife, another group called for its reexamination arguing that secularism may be the cause and not the solution of religious violence.

**Value addition-for better understanding**

Key Questions of debate

What is required of a secular state?

What is the meaning of separation of state and religion?

- Mutual exclusion of two or equidistance or principled distance
- No support at all to any religion or support in same degree to all religions or some mixed version

Why separation is required?

To prevent sectarian warfare or to provide freedom of religion.

Academicians and scholars problematize and thematize the debate on secularism invoking ideas of varied Indian and Western thinkers with the following patterns:

- While **Nandy and Madan** stand is anti modernist and gave Neo Gandhian critique,
- **Vanaik** gave Marxist critique of Neo Gandhism of Nandy and Madan
- . **Rajeev Bhargava** criticized Nandy and Madan for vulgar Gandhism and gave contextual theory of secularism.

## Debates on Indian Secularism

- **Bilgrami** criticized secularism due to its Archimedean character and argued for a negotiated secularism that could emerge by negotiation between the substantive commitments of particular religious communities.
- Critics such as **Nandy and Madan** rejected secularism as radically alien to Indian culture and tradition and advocated a return to genuine religious and the indigenous tradition of religious tolerance as the best means to preserve and maintain pluralist and multi religious Indian society.
- **Partha Chatterjee** argued for a reconfiguration of the problem of secularism that is of a shift in the understanding of the nature of the challenge presented by the Hindu right. He also argued for re conceptualization of the concept of toleration. For better understanding let's read the main argument of each of them.

### Value addition-know the focus

Important questions debated among scholars, Is secularism an appropriate normative value within the Indian context or it represents the imposition of a western colonial normative value ill suited to the historical realities of Indian society.

A group of scholars also argued for a total reconceptualization of secularism within the Indian polity. Scholars also claimed that idea of secularism is linked to a flawed modernization that is integrally connected with the repressive structure of the nation state and an increasingly indefensible conception of science and rationality. ( Ashis Nandy)

Another important claim was it is tied to liberal individualism which gives little importance to communities in the life of religious people and therefore cannot protect community specific rights of communities.

To know more on secularism read Rajeev Bhargava (1998) Secularism and its critics Oxford University Press : New Delhi

### D E Smith

**Donald E Smith in his work "India as a secular State" published in 1963** provides elaborate and logical analysis of Indian Secularism. He discuss theoretical outline of a secular state that involve three connotations—Freedom of religion, citizenship and right to equality and separation of State and religion. This understanding incorporates three distinct interrelated set of relationship concerning State, religion and individual. In relationship between individual and State religion is excluded and individual is viewed as citizen. In a relationship between Individual and Religion State is excluded. Third is the relation between state and different religions and Secularism entails mutual exclusion of state and religion.

Considering this important framework of secularism according to Smith while freedom of religion and equal citizenship has been duly incorporated in the Indian Constitution, State right to intervene in religious matters compromise these two principles in an important way.

**Hindu temple in Khajuraho India, incorporating a Hindu spire, a Jain cupola, a Buddhist stupa and a Muslim style dome, in place of the usual shikharas**



[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/8a/Khajuraho\\_India%2C\\_Parvati\\_Temple\\_05.JPG/300px-Khajuraho\\_India%2C\\_Parvati\\_Temple\\_05.JPG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/8a/Khajuraho_India%2C_Parvati_Temple_05.JPG/300px-Khajuraho_India%2C_Parvati_Temple_05.JPG) 19th-century accessed on March 7 2015

Thus India has some but not all features of a secular State. In Smith's views heritage of Hinduism that has characters conducive to secularism, presence of different minority groups as well as legacy of national movement under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru provides prospects for strengthening secular State. However consolidation of Secular state is problematic one due to caste and religious loyalties that may take ugly turn of communal rivalry and conflict and second aid to groups based on communal stratification. State interference in Hindu religious institutions to reform them and continuance of personal law is also opposed to the principle of secularism. India had to resolve whether non sectarianism or non religiosity is the true meaning of secularism. Despite these problems in Smith's views India is a secular State. Galanter criticize Smith for considering American experience based on two conceptions of secularism as strict wall of separation doctrine and no preference doctrine as an ideal. According to **Galanter** Indian secularism cannot be judged with reference to an idealized American pattern and to have its better understanding it is important to delink it from western moorings. Secular State cannot leave religion entirely untouched. To understand this transformation of religion he distinguishes two the mode of limitation and the mode of intervention. In the mode of limitation public standard are promulgated, their field of operation specified and religion is shaped in accordance with these standards and in mode of intervention religious authority is directly challenged and a change is attempted from within the religious tradition. Both modes accept the external

superiority of legal norms. According to Galanter Secularism embodied in the Indian Constitution exemplifies the limitation mode

**Value addition-Did you know**

**Constitutional placement of religion**

India affirms the policy of no established religion along with religious liberty that also incorporate right to profess, practice and propagate religion, right to set up religious institutions and minority educational institutions.

The constitution of India grants its members through article 25 Freedom of conscience and right to profess, practice and propagate their religion with limitation of public order, morality and health. Right to profess religion brings religion in the public domain because it permits them to declare their religious identity. For example our dress is a marker of our religious identity in public. Right to practice religion allows communities to organize practices of collective worship example are processions, Jaagran, Durga pooja.

Further right to establish religious institutions (Article 26) establish public presence of religion with limitation of public order, morality and health.

Article 25 2 (a) gave state authority to regulate any economic, financial, political or secular activity associated with religious practice thus there is enough space for the intervention of state.

Article 29 grants all citizens right to conserve their language, script and culture and article 30 give right to linguistic and religious minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

These institutions could receive financial and other material support from the State.

**Ashis Nandy**

**Ashis Nandy** calls himself “**an anti secularist**” and argues that ideology and politics of secularism has exhausted its possibilities in India. He even asks for a different conceptual frame which he visualizes at the border of Indian political culture. He locates the cause of new religious violence in secularism and modernity. A ‘gift of Christianity’ and child of modernity and colonialism secularism is a product of western science and rationality and function as the ideology of modern State which according to Nandy is a source of most contemporary problems. Nandy’s rejection of secularism is rooted in a twofold critique of modern culture and society and critique of secular state.

## Debates on Indian Secularism

According to Nandy, Indian secular State has much to learn about morality from Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism while Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism have nothing to learn from the secular state in this respect. As an alternative to secularism Nandy pleads for the recovery of India's traditional religious tolerance. Nandy's critique of the ideology of secularism is against western state centered version which is adopted by India's westernized intellectuals. In this version of secularism religion should be abolished from the scientific management of the public sphere. In contrast is the non western religion centered understanding of secularism that supports equal respect for all religions and suits South Asian realities.

Nandy defines religion in South Asia has split into two, Religion as faith and religion as ideology. Faith means religion as non monolithic, operationally plural way of life. Ideology means religion as sub national, cross national or national identifier of population protecting political or socio economic interests. Religion as ideology is usually identified with one or more text and become the final identifier of the pure forms of religions and modern state prefers to deal with this form of religion. This idea is the product of modernity, statecraft and developmentalism. Secularism which is an imported idea from west does not use religion to link up different faiths or way of life which has its own principle of tolerance. The idea of secularism that give state the role of ultimate arbiter among different religions and communities is incompatible with understanding and role of religion in life of people in south Asia.

Nandy discuss **two different meaning** of the word in modern India, the first meaning of secularism demarcate two distinct sphere public life and private life and one's religion is not admitted in public life. "One can be a good Hindu or a good Muslim within ones home or at one's place of worship but when one enters public life, one is expected to leave one's faith behind"( Ashis Nandy,1997:333)This ideology believes that public realm is dominated with vision of science and universal and bringing religion may lead to potential threat to modern polity. Pitched against this is the non western meaning of secularism that believes in the principle of equal respect to all religions. Implicit is the idea that public sphere must have space for continuous dialogue among different religions because each include within it 'an in house version of the other faith, both as an internal criticism and as a reminder of the diversity of the theories of transcendence" (Ashis Nandy, 1997:333) This version of secularism is compatible with Indian understanding of secularism but India's westernized intellectuals have opted for abolition of religion from the public sphere. Nehruvian secularism which separates state and religion is a part of modern western package of scientific growth, nation building, national security and development. These according to

him constitute a 'modern demonology a tantra with a built in code of violence' (Nandy, 1988:185)( Thomas Pantham, 2004: 238)

According to Nandy 'religion has entered public life but through the backdoor'( Ashis Nandy,1997:336)The public sphere where the organizing principle is modernity and religion as faith is being pushed to the corner religious violence is associated with the sense of defeat of the believer. "...

**.What the State says to a religious community the modern sector often indirectly tells the individual 'you give up your faith at least in public we also shall give up our faith in public and together we shall be able to live in freedom from religious intolerance' ( Ashis Nandy,1997:337)**

But for an individual whom religion provides overall theory of life this idea of secularism is not adequate. Moreover while on the one hand state may ask believer to keep public sphere free of religion on the other it may use ideology of secularism, development and nationalism to silence non conforming citizens.

In modern India religious violence is increasing with a rate of almost one and a half incident a day. Moreover more than 90% of these riots begin in modern India in and around the industrial areas. "Somewhere and somehow religious violence has something to do with the urban industrial vision of life and with the political processes the vision let loose" (Ashis Nandy, 1997:340) Secularism has failed to promote religious tolerance as well as eliminating religion from politics. The reason being people in India are not ready to separate religion from public sphere. Nandy is not in support of 'positive secularism' of RSS either. According to him, the ideology of Hindu nationalist revivalism or fundamentalism with its borrowing of the models of Semitic religions and of the modern western nation state is an instrument of another form of westernization. (Thomas Pantham, 2004: 239)

According to Nandy whereas ills of religion have found political expression the strength of religion are not available for checking corruption and violence in public life.

Nandy presents non modern, pre secular conception of religion as accommodative tolerant faith as an alternative to the modern western secularism. This version of secularism derives religious tolerance from Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism respectively. This was practiced by Ashoka, Akbar and Gandhi as well. For Gandhi religious tolerance was not only 'tolerance of religions but also a tolerance that is religious'(Thomas Pantham,2004: 240)The roots of which were in traditional Hinduism or sanatana dharma and as Sanatani Hindu Gandhi

claimed to be a Muslim, a Sikh and a Christian simultaneously. Nandy's anti modern version of secularism proposes space for continuous dialogue between religious traditions and between religion and secular. This implies "each major faith in the region includes within it an in house version of the other faith both as an internal criticism and as a reminder of the diversity of the theory of transcendence" ( Nandy 1988, 80-81) (Thomas Pantham, 2004: 240) Nandy writes "we are at point of time when old style secularism can no longer pretend to guide moral or political action. All that the ideology of secularism can do know is to sanction the absurd search for a modern language of politics in a traditional society which has an open polity"(Ashis Nandy,1997:338)According to Nandy traditional societies have developed internal principles of tolerance that helps them to live together thus inter religious riots were rare in them. According to Nandy

**"while secularization of Indian society has gone far (...) there are limits to its capacity to secularize society" (Peter Losonczi, 2014: 11)**

since idea of secularism creates rigid separation of two spheres religion enters politics through different means in the form of ideologies and instrumentalized religious exclusivism. Thus even threat of Hindu right has to be coped with religious and not secular means through reactivating traditional forms of tolerance. Secularism is also insensitive to politics of culture and believer is treated as person with inferior political consciousness in this process traditional culture based on tolerance is eroded tendencies of extremism increases generating communal politics. Thus he suggests Gandhian path of inter faith dialogue.

#### **Value addition-Know it more**

##### **Classification of political actors**

Ashis Nandy gives four fold classifications of political actors in the Indian subcontinent

**Top** of the hierarchy are those who are suppose to be rational scientific, believer neither in public nor in private life and dominate political culture e.g. Jawaharlal Lal Nehru

**Second** in the ladder are people like Indira Gandhi who is devout believer in private live though chose not to appear the same in the public life

**Third** in the hierarchy are those who chose to be believer in the public life though are the opposite in the private live. According to Nandy two examples in this category are Mohammed Ali Jinnah and V D Savarkar. Savarkar was an atheist in private life but declared

Hinduism as his political ideology. Similarly Jinnah used Islam very successfully in public life. They use religion as political tool

**Last** in the ladder are those who are believer in the public as well as private live .This has its strengths and weaknesses and Gandhi is an example of strength whereas Jurnail Singh Bhindranwale shows weakness.

(Nandy, 1997:340)

### **T N Madan**

Madan also criticize the idea of secularism though not dismiss it absolutely. He cautions against unproblematic adaption of secularism in south Asian realities. Coding Bankim Chand Chatterjee Madan argues how translations are difficult because words can be translated but it is difficult to translate an idea that the word denotes if that idea does not exist among people whose language translation is required. The idea of secularism as transferred to countries of South Asia also poses many difficulties. South Asia is a multi religious society and the majority of people living in this region are active adherents of some religious faith. While Secularism is impractical for State action because Buddhism and Islam have been declared as State religion, Policy of equidistance is also difficult to maintain since religious minorities do not share the majority's view of what this entails for the State. It has failed to bring under control divisive forces which resulted in the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and also failed to counter religious fundamentalism. Madan argues that it was possible to privatize religion in the West because of developments internal to Christianity such as reformation that facilitated the process. Whereas In South Asia major religious traditions do not assume any radical antinomy between the sacred and the secular. Religion covers all aspects of life and its impact is totalizing in nature thus it was impossible to restrict it to private domain. Religion as the doctrine of overarching ends is the most important factor in the lives of the people of India and South Asia. Religion gives meaning to lives of most of the people and also determines their place in society Thus to impose secularism on believers is wrong in the words of Madan "an act of moral arrogance and political folly" (Thomas Pantham, 2004: 241).Religion and the belief of people must be taken seriously and should be given its place in society as non religions because denial of legitimacy to religion in society of believers provokes fundamentalism on the part of religious zealots. Through religious pluralism inter religious harmony could be established. Secularism and religious faith must be recognized to be compatible with each other. The

alternative conception in Madan's views is Gandhism because it has the possibilities of inter religious understanding.

Though Nandy dismiss secularism altogether Madan suggests that state practices of secularism have to be based on the recognition of religious practices. This has to be buttressed by discovering and strengthening the internal resources of religious pluralism and tolerance. Nandy and Madan raised two sets of distinctions to the forefront of the debate between secularism and secularization and that between the state and civil society. If India's civil society is deeply religious then this poses a problem for secularism as a state project .But in the end both theorists ground their understanding of tolerance in largely undefined and unarticulated lived practices. That these practices may have changed or degenerated in the context of competitive electoral politics and an equally competitive market economy is something that they would rather not take into account.

### **Achin Vanaik**

According to Achin Vanaik idea given by Nandy and Madan is based on traditional idea of embedded self and support a form of religious Communitarianism. Despite theoretical insightfulness the 'anti secularist' legitimizes politics of religious identity. According to Vanaik Nandy's idea of replacement of secular state and secular public morality with religion based public morality of tolerance is dangerous. While for Nandy Secular state is imposed from above on traditional society Vanaik in his thesis proposes that traditional beliefs and practices are responsible for undermining the secular state and democratization of society. The root cause of religious communalism is religion itself. The struggle against religion should not be limited to setting up a state equally tolerant of all religions but extend to the secularization and diminution of religion in civil society. To secularize civil society religious influence, importance of religious identity in everyday life and increasing privatization of religious commitments has to be reduced. Secularism means three things, Right to freedom of worship, primacy of citizenship and non affiliation of State to any religion. The secular State must separate state and religion, secularize state laws and policies. Recognizing due importance of Gandhian legacy Vanaik argues that though Gandhi did not separate religion and politics his role was remarkable in giving principle of equal respect to all religions. But many of Gandhi's perspectives were against modern conception of secularism. Secular democracy requires rights centered relationship between individual and society. Sharing a common ideological ground with both the orthodox and subaltern schools of Marxism Vanaik interprets Gandhi's mixing of politics with religious idioms of ahimsa trusteeship etc as a strategy of class accommodation for preventing any socialist revolution against capitalism.

Gandhi mobilized masses in the Indian national movement but this contributed to a conservative though anti communalist, religious nationalism in contrast to a secular, democratic and egalitarian nationalism.

### **Akheel Bilgrami**

Akheel Bilgrami criticizes Nehruvian form of secularism but rejects Nandy's views on secularism also. He criticizes Nandy for practicing both nostalgia and skewed historiography. While Nandy is right in arguing that different religious traditions have their specific source of the realization of a tolerant way of life his ideas of the rise of Hindu Nationalism is oversimplified. According to Bilgrami Nandy's anti secular proposal has flaws in it because the condition for different religious traditions and communities has changed in modern India. In Bilgrami's opinion Nehruvian secularism stands in a conceptual and political space that lies outside the sphere of substantive political commitments. Secularism did not emerge as the product of a negotiation and dialogue between religious communities. It was adopted from above as an Archimedean point. If it would have been the result of debate and understanding of different communities then different groups would have subscribed to it. Presence of different communities in State is important and these communities could play a very important role in designing secular principles. Bilgrami presents the model of negotiated or emergent secularism which is based on moderate religious persons embracing principle of secularism not on the basis of universalistic rationality but on their own internal value system. Secularism should also incorporate clarification of those principles that belong to illiberal religious persons also. Instead of seeking neutral common agreement communities should contribute to a secular outcome for different reasons from within their different substantive value economies. Instead of being imposed it should emerge from bottom up incorporating moderate political voices and assumptions of different communities. In his later writings he calls this liberal model post classical liberalism. He is also critical of contextualization of secularism including Taylorian proposal of redefinition. He proposes various conceptions of secularism may complicate the issue thus theoretically it is important to uphold unified definition of secularism.

### **Partha Chatterjee**

Partha Chatterjee like Madan and Nandy is of the opinion that secularism is embedded within Western modernity and is problematic when applied in Indian context. He is specifically concerned to know whether secularism is adequate to counter political challenge of Hindu majoritarianism because those who defend rights of religious minorities are

accused by Hindu nationalist for practicing Pseudo Secularism. Because of this Chatterjee seems to be in agreement with Nandy that modern forms of secularism do not necessarily ensure toleration and the Hindu right politics is a clear example of intolerance hidden under seemingly secular arguments (Peter Losconci, 2014: 73).

**Value addition-Did you know**

**Issue of conversion**

Government has also intervened in the matters of conversion. In the constituent assembly conversion as an issue was discussed and the constitution grants right to propagate but word conversion was not included. After Independence different State government made these acts to prohibit force, fraud and inducements for conversion. When matter relating to conversion was discussed in the Court ,Supreme court differentiated propagation of religion from conversion and viewed it as contrary to freedom of conscience.

According to Chatterjee in post independent India the model of secularism adopted by India's westernized elites implied exclusion of Indian alternative to Western secular modernity. It also introduced direct involvement of state in religious and social matters especially in Hindu religious matters. Chatterjee problematize implementation of secular principles in Indian realities. If secularism is interpreted as strict separation of religion and politics this can prove fairly compatible with the discrimination against minorities. If secularism is interpreted as equidistance from all religious groups then its practice in India raise some doubts because State has intervened selectively in personal laws of different communities making laws to reform Hindu personal laws but the same reformist agenda has been absent for other communities like Muslims, Christian and parsis. Hindu right describe this as appeasement of minorities. Chatterjee refers to the exceptionality of India though he does not call for a new version of secularism. Chatterjee is in favour of idea of political tolerance that incorporates autonomy and respect for persons and accommodates different reasons coming from different cultural and traditional institutions. He seems to be in agreement with the idea that Minorities resist homogenization from outside but may introduce democratization within the community.

**Neera Chandhoke**

**Sarvdharam-sambhav**



Source: <https://i0.wp.com/www.blogcdn.com/www.coolage.in/media/2013/07/indian.jpg>  
with due credit to <https://ramanan50.wordpress.com/> accessed on March 7 2015

According to Neera Chandhoke to understand secularism it is important to situate it in the wider conceptual context of which it forms part and unravel its meaning in relation to meaning of equality, freedom and democracy. Indian version of secularism is rooted in the principle of sarva dharma sambhava which requires equal respect for all religions. The premise of equality of all religions is problematic in multi religious society where religious communities are divided on the basis of majority and minority and some minorities are weak and extremely poor. In this background the idea of secularism as equality of religion when employed by Hindu right put pressure on religious minorities. She employs the principle of substantive equality to ensure both inter group and intra group equality and defends protection of minority rights. This principle demands to recognize institutionalized inequalities in society and to rectify them employ measures to benefit the least well off that may include accommodating minority rights. Neera Chandhoke offers a normative theory of minority rights based on the shift from secularism to the universal principle of moral equality.

### **Gurpreet Mahajan**

Gurpreet Mahajan discusses the relationship between state and religion in India with the assumption that secularism requires a commitment to the principle of separation and that the ideology of separation is a central attribute of secularism. Yet, a strict separation of the two domains of religion and State is neither possible nor even desirable. Democracies in India and Europe may have followed different policies but the end pursued was the same namely religious non discrimination. It means no citizen would be disadvantaged or discriminated against on grounds of religious affiliation. She argues that the relationship between the policy and the concept can be understood best in terms of the relationship between forms and the universal. The latter represents the end the shared aspirations that permeates particular expressions and policies embody the different paths that countries take to realize that shared end. Policies must be understood and analyzed in relation to the universal that they seek to realize. The underlying idea of secularism in America or democracies in Europe or India is not to discriminate or disadvantage on grounds of religious identity or beliefs. This shared norm was followed by different countries through different policies. The policies of different nations were also shaped by different political and historical experiences and context. According to Mahajan the problem arises when we define secularism through the grid of policies.

In India policy of secularism created a situation in which constant involvement of State in religious matters became a norm. The institutions of the State were required to determine what an "essential" practice is. At times of clash between practices associated with two or more Communities State was required to adjudicate between conflicting claims. State addressed these concerns by following the policy of no established religion and religious liberty for all groups and communities. India presents a different case because it affirms both the idea of no established religion and religious liberty. According to Mahajan India gave specific meaning to the idea of religious liberty through three important dimensions of religious liberty –right to profess, practice and propagate religion, right to set up religious institutions and minority educational institutions. Religious liberty was valued because it entails condition of non discrimination and ensures religious communities autonomy to determine their religious and cultural life. "Religious communities in this way received the same rights as any other association or group to participate in the political process, to articulate their demands and mobilize support for them" (Peter Losconci, 2014: 47)

## Rajeev Bhargava

Rajeev Bhargava discusses the meaning of secularism; differentiate states on the basis of relation of state and religion and why it involves different treatment for different groups.

### Value addition-Know it better

#### Defining Secular state

A secular State can be contrasted with a theocratic state, a state that establish one religion and a State that establishes multiple religions.

Theocratic State: In a theocratic State religious and political order are identical and priestly class directly administer State with reference to divine Laws.eg State in Afghanistan run by Taliban

State that establish one religion

Religion is granted formal recognition. The revenue collected by state is available for religious purpose even State may pass laws defining individuals role in religious matters.

For example Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are Islamic states.

State that establish more than one religion recognize the existence f multiple religions.

According to Bhargava political secularism that defines appropriate relation between State and religious institutions is open to varied interpretations. Thus different conceptions of secularism depend on how metaphor of separation is defined. This argument begins with the assertion that religious world views are constituted by ultimate ideals. When the believers of different religions and non believers have to live together clash of their ultimate ideals is always imminent. A clash of such ideals could deprive people of leading an ordinary life. Since it is the state's task to secure a minimally decent existence for its citizen all ultimate ideals must be expunged from the affairs of the State. Therefore Politics and religion have to be separated the two domains have to keep a principled distance and respect each other's boundaries.

Rajeev Bhargava discuss three variants of secularism.-

#### Hyper substantive secularism

This version of secularism separate religion and state with special reference to ultimate substantive values like autonomy, development and reason

### Ultra procedural secularism

This version of secularism separates religion and state in the name of rational procedures, rules and bureaucratic and technocratic rationality.

### Contextual Secularism

This version of secularism discusses principled or non sectarian distance between State and religion. States excludes religion for some purposes and include it for some other but it is always guided by non sectarian principles constituting set of values that incorporates equal dignity for all. Within contextual secularism if there is any conflict then State relies on minimalist procedures to control or remove controversial ideals. The policy of principled distance entails a flexible approach on the question of inclusion/exclusion of religion and the engagement/disengagement of the state, which at the third level of law and policy depends on the context, nature or current state of relevant religions. This means that religion may intervene in the affairs of the state if such intervention promotes freedom, equality or any other value integral to secularism. Principle distance allows for differential treatment. It may even require state intervention in some religions more than in others, considering the historical and social condition of all relevant religions. For example suppose the value to be advanced is social equality this requires undermining in part caste hierarchies then it may be required of the state that it interfere in caste ridden Hinduism much more than say Islam or Christianity.

Insert q. no 2

### Characteristics of religious groups (2001 census)

Religious group	Population %	Grow th (1991–2001)	Sex ratio (total)	Literacy (%)	Work participation (%)	Sex ratio (rural)	Sex ratio (urban)	Sex ratio (child)
Hinduism	80.46%	20.3%	931	65.1%	40.4%	944	894	925
Islam	13.43%	29.3%	936	59.1%	31.3%	953	907	950
Christian	2.34%	22.6%	1009	80.3%	39.7%	1001	1026	964

## Debates on Indian Secularism

Religious group	Population %	Growth (1991–2001)	Sex ratio (total)	Literacy (%)	Work participation (%)	Sex ratio (rural)	Sex ratio (urban)	Sex ratio (child)
<b>Sikhism</b>	1.87%	18.2%	893	69.4%	37.7%	895	886	786
<b>Buddhism</b>	0.77%	18.2%	953	72.7%	40.6%	958	944	942
<b>Ethnic faiths, others</b>	0.72%	103.1%	992	47.0%	48.4%	995	966	976
<b>Jainism</b>	0.41%	26.0%	940	94.1%	32.9%	937	941	870

Source: Wikipedia, accessed on March 7 2015

According to Bhargava secularism is fully compatible with the defense of differentiated citizenship rights and secularity of the state does not necessitate strict intervention, non intervention or equi distance but any or all of these as case may be. Indian constitution presents vision of contextual secularism and exclude religion for some purposes example exclude separate religious electorate and include it for example personal laws for religious communities. But different institutions have practiced other two versions of secularism at different times. For instance in the Shah Bano case courts followed hyper substantive secularism and parliament by refusing to participate in Muslim personal law practiced ultra procedural personal law. Bhargava criticize Nandy and Madan thesis on secularism and writes, “modern secularism arose because the resources of tolerance within traditional religion had exhausted their possibility” (Thomas Pantham, 2004: 246)

### Value addition-Did you know

#### Features of Indian Secularism

Features that make Indian Secularism distinctive

Multi value character—it values religious liberty, equality, peace and toleration.

Constitution respects and recognizes Community specific rights

Principled distance---It is not mutual exclusion of State and religion. It accepts a disconnection between State and religion at the level of ends and institutions but does not make a fetish of it at the third level of policy and law.

It uniquely combines an active hostility to some aspects of religion with an equally active respect for its other dimensions.

It attends to the issues of intra religious oppression and inter religious domination.

(Based on Professor Rajeev Bhargava's essay)

### **Amartya sen**

Amartya Sen argues that the principle of secularism does not require that the state must steer clear of any association with any religious matter whatsoever. Rather what is required is to ensure that in so far as the State has to deal with different religions and member of different religious community there must be a basic symmetry of treatment. The virtue of this approach he emphasizes is that the requirement of symmetric treatment leaves open the question as to what form that symmetry should take. Sen's formula of basic symmetry of treatment illustrates that the theoretical inadequacy of the secular discourse is largely due to lack of stability in the essential conceptual distinction between the religious and the secular.

Sen defends secularism as part of more comprehensive idea that of India as an integrally plural country made up of different religious beliefs, language groups and divergent social practices. It is part of bigger project of recognizing this heterogeneity. Engaging with six strands of critique against secularism Sen argues that any reexamination of the difficult question relating to the principle of symmetrical treatment of different religious communities must arise within a commitment to secularism.

### **Value addition-For better understanding**

#### **Important cases**

Former chief justice of India P B Gajendragadkar interpreted secularism as The State does not owe loyalty to one religion, it is not irreligious or anti religion, gives equal freedom to all religions and religion of citizen has nothing to do in matter of socio economic problems. In one of the case Justice Sawant said secularism is a part of the basic structure of the constitution.

In a very famous case in 1996 Justice Verma endorsed Hindutva as representing way of life and therefore not violative of secularism. Court concluded that simply referring to Hindutva

or Hinduism in a speech does not automatically make the speech one based on the Hindu religion. However in another case *Suryanant Venkatrao Mahadik vs Saroj Sandesh Naik* The court held that although in its general or abstract meaning of the word "hindutava" refers only to Indian culture and heritage in a particular context it could only be interpreted as an appeal to religion. (Brenda Crossman and Ratna Kapur, 1996 :2614)

In *Bomma vs Union of India* Justice Sawant J. said concept of secularism as religious tolerance and equal treatment of all religious groups included an assurance of the protection of life, property and places of worship of all religious groups.

## Conclusion

The important core features of secularism freedom of religion for citizens, nondiscrimination, equality of treatment, no established religion of the state are part of Indian understanding of secularism which has been enumerated in special historical and social construct. It is opposed to institutionalized religious domination.

## Glossary

**Constituent Assembly:** A Constituent Assembly is a body set up to make a new, or amend the existing, constitution. Members of the Assembly are usually elected, though some may be chosen through other methods. Constituent assemblies have sometimes been very like a Parliament; in fact sometimes a nation's parliament has acted as its Constituent Assembly (like South Africa), or the Constituent Assembly has had the functions of Parliament also (like India). The Constituent Assembly exists only to make the constitution.<sup>54</sup>

**Constitution:** A constitution is the fundamental law, the basic law, of a country. The constitution determines the fundamental political principles of the government, rules of procedure of that government, rights and obligations of the citizenry and also sets forth methods to ensure accountability of governmental branches.<sup>56</sup>

**Minority community:** A sub-group within a larger population, which may live on a given territory, which does not form either a majority or a plurality. Definitions of a minority group sometimes refer to a group that is disadvantaged in relation to a dominant group in terms of its social status, education, employment, health and political power, whatever its

numerical size.<sup>162</sup> Mixed electoral system: A combined electoral system of first-past-the-post and the

Preamble: The preamble is the introductory part of the constitution that normally sets out some, or all, of the following: the history of the constitution, the values and aspirations of the people, the nature of the state and the authority under which the constitution is made. The preamble is still one of the oldest and most common ways of incorporating values and may also hold great symbolic significance.<sup>219</sup>

Secular state: A secular state is a state or a country that is officially neutral in matters of religion, neither supporting nor opposing any particular religious system. This belief of keeping state affairs free from religion arises out of ideology of secularism.<sup>262</sup> 26

Secularism: An ideology according to which religion or religious beliefs should be excluded from certain human activities and decisions, especially those pertaining to public and political affairs.<sup>263</sup> Self-determination: In modern international law, a collective

### Exercise: Questions

1. 'Secularism and Democracy are the twin pillars of The State, the very foundation of our society' in the light of the Statement discuss secularism in India?
2. Indian understanding of secularism is different from western understanding. Discuss
3. Discuss debates on secularism with special reference to views of Rajeev Bhargava?
4. Do you think secularism is essentially contested concept in West also. Elucidate your answer with suitable examples
5. "Secularism in some form is a necessity for the democratic life of religiously diverse societies" In the light of this statement of Charles Taylor discuss debate on secularism in India?

### Multiple Choice Questions

## Debates on Indian Secularism

1. The words 'Sovereign Democratic Republic' were substituted with the words 'sovereign socialist secular Democratic republic' in the preamble by -----Amendment in the Constitution of India
  - a. 42nd Amendment Act, 1976
  - b. 44<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act, 1978
  - c. 40<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act, 1976
  - d. 41st Amendment Act, 1976
2. Who among the following has coined the term principled distance to define Secularism in India?
  - a. Rajeev Bhargava
  - b. Ashis Nandy
  - c. T N Madan
  - d. Neera Chandhoke
3. In Indian context which term is used to describe policies that involve minority appeasement?
  - a. Secularism
  - b. Pseudo Secularism
  - c. Multiculturalism
  - d. Communitarianism
4. Who among the following call himself "an anti secularist" and argues that ideology and politics of secularism has exhausted its possibilities in India.
  - a. Ashis Nandy
  - b. T N Madan
  - c. Achin Vanaik
  - d. Akeel Bilgrami
5. Which article of Indian constitution prohibits religious instruction in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State Funds?
  - a. Article 25
  - b. Article 26
  - c. Article 27
  - d. Article 28

Correct Answers

1a

2a

3b

4a

5d

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