CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

The work is entitled Gandhi's Secularism and Social Change. A world of explanation is necessary both for Secularism and social change. We have not used the word "Secularism" in its formal sense or in terms of its dictionary meaning. Secularism is a Western word and the concept is a western importation. In its technical sense, it has no base in India and perhaps would never have one. Even then, it serves as a guide-line. To talk of secularism in relation to Gandhi is also a misnomer. Gandhi was not a theoretician but a man of action. His intention was not to speculate or even to lay theoretical formulations for others. He did, however, lay certain guide-lines for themselves to regulate their social and political activities. These guide-lines are significant, valid and relevant even today. In his own lifetime, Gandhi had an immense impact on the thoughts and actions of people in India and elsewhere.

It is an exercise in futility to attempt to discover strong roots for Indian Secularism in her past. A tradition-bound, caste-ridden and authoritarian feudal society unwilling to make a break with the past does not provide a nourishing soil for secularism to take roots.
Gandhi was not fond of the word secular. He did at least once say that he stood for a secular State. That, however, was his style of speech. He also said that he was a better communist than the Marxists. Gandhi did use the word Secular and used it consciously and deliberately. However, there was a great deal of change in his perception of secularism.

Different scholars have looked at the concept of Secularism differently. However, there is one common idea and that idea that pervades the writings of scholars on secularism. The idea is that Secularism is a way of life outside the religious firmament.

Secularism appeared to begin with, as a rival to Christianity. The materialistic view of secularism finds expression in the writings of Marx, who began to identify religion as a symbol of oppressed culture.

In the west, the secular state evolved out of different kinds of historical situations. In the United States of America the idea of Secularism came into being in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. It came into being in the form of the principle of separation of Church from the State.

In the Indian context, we can measure the progress of secularism on the basis of certain broad tendencies which we
find in the thoughts and contributions of different people. A person can be said to have contributed to the strengthening of secularism is the:

1. Subscribes to the conception of religious toleration.

2. Introduces the elements of rationality, spirit of enquiry and scientific temper in the things secular and sacred;

3. Separates the Secular and the sectarian in the Indian context, it particularly means that:
   (a) Loyalty to religion is subordinated to loyalty to the nation;
   (b) Education is liberated from religion;
   (c) Religion and law are separated;
   (d) Reforms are carried out in religious and social fields; and
   (e) Religion is separated from morality and ethics.

The attempt of the secularists was to transfer the responsibility for all these functions which were earlier discharged by the religious establishments to the State or other non-religious establishments.
Most of the earlier Hindu scriptures show that the king in ancient India was strongly tied to religion. It can be said that in ancient India the State was a theocracy of a sort. To some extent, this situation continued until the age of the Vedas and the Brahmanas.

In ancient India, promotion of Dharma was regarded as the foremost aim of the State. The state was tolerant of all creeds and frequently aided them all. The religiously tolerant Hindu State which patronized all sects impartially provided one of the historical bases of secularism. Most of the earlier Hindu scriptures show that the king in Ancient India was strongly tied to religion.

Though religion had a prominent place in society, it would be wrong to believe that the Vedic period was a perfect theocracy. Actually the king was supreme, while the priests enjoyed highly respectable positions because of the spiritual assistance they could render to the king.

Though ancient India tolerated all religions, it was not still a secular state. This period may at best be described as the period of religious toleration. This atmosphere of religious toleration continued for a long time to come.
A change from the earlier politics of religious toleration can be witnessed from the tenth century onwards hereafter the Bhakti Movement started. Kabir, Chaitanya and Nanak were its main preachers. The essence of Kabir’s teachings was the inward purity of mind through which alone God could be found. Guru Nanak placed before the world the principle of “Brotherhood of man”. Chaitayna preached the doctrine of “One God”.

During the Mughal period, Akbar followed the policy of religious toleration. But Aurangzeb reversed this policy and changed to the Muslim Law.

Thus, our history offers many examples of religious toleration.

We also find made a distinction between religious toleration and secularism. Our contention is that Secularism is western importation and it entered India through the Benthamite Radicalism. It was during the phase of liberal imperialism when the process of secularization started in India. It was during the British rule that the real foundations of secularism were laid in India. They pleaded for secular education instead of religious instructions. In this, they were helped by Indian themselves. The reformation and renaissance also helped in the secularization of Indian politics. The central figure of Hindu Renaissance of Brahm Samaj in Calcutta. During the earlier years.
of the Indian National Congress, it were the Moderates who dominated the scene. They can be regarded as the first upholders of secularism in modern India. The Moderates believed firmly in the need for Hindu-Muslim cooperation and in the need for cooperation between different religious communities.

On the other hand, the Extremist school led by the famous trio of Lal-Bal-Pal and Sri Aurobindo mixed religion with politics. From the point of view of the extremist leaders, the problem with the concept of secularism was that even if it was a desirable objective in Indian conditions, it had limited applicability in the Indian social context. The extremists had realized that the heart of India was in religion. They also felt that a purely political programme without the touch of religion would not appeal to the masses.

Kautilya was the first scholar to separate morals and politics. His magnum opus Arthashastra indicates that positive law began to be differentiated from religious rituals and traditional customs. The king was regarded as the protector and enforcer of Dharma. However, during the times of Kautilya all religions, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, flourished alike.

In 1582 Akbar promulgated a new religion the Divine Faith. This religion was not enforced on the subjects by Akbar as is evident from the fact that only a limited number of courtiers
actually joined this new religion. Akbar tried to emphasize the concept of Sukh-Kul or peace and harmony among religions. He ordered the translation of important Hindu scriptures and epics.

The successors of Akbar, his son Jahangir and his grandson Shajahan also followed Akbar’s policy in matters of religion. However, it was Dara Shikoh the eldest son of Shahjahan who took exceptional interest in the study of Hindu philosophy and mystical practices of Hindus. Aurangzeb reversed Akbar’s policy of religious toleration.

Tarachand, has classified the different Muslim rulers and religious leaders of the Mughal period into three categories, namely : (1) Traditionalists or Externalists; (2) Internationalists; and (3) Synthesists who sought to bridge the gulf between the two schools.

It was during the British rule that the foundations of the modern Indian state was laid down. It was during this period that nation-building took place and secular education and institutions came into being.

It was because of our contact with the British that the idea of liberalism, the spirit of enquiry and rationality and scientific temper came to be accepted by the British educated middle-class intelligentsia. They started questioning their
religious ideas, customs and practices. They also started questioning the prevailing social ideas, customs and institutions. They started making distinction between human law and Divine Law and they learnt the distinction between loyalty to their religion and loyalty towards the State. In these various ways the British helped in the origin, growth and development of the ideas of secularism in India.

The various socio-religious movements of the nineteenth century made great contribution in laying down the foundations of secularism in India. The contact with the British created a secular tendency in India.

The various socio-religious movements of the nineteenth century made great contribution in laying down the foundations of secularism in India. The contact with the British created a secular tendency in India. This secular tendency got encouragement from various social and religious reformers of the time. These reformers attacked blind faith, religious rituals and superstitious practices and sought social reform. They helped in creating a national feeling. They also pleaded for secular education instead of secular western education which created a trend in favour of the rational view of life and also helped in building up of a scientific temper.
Secularism as a concept never existed in India and is a Western importation. It came to India mainly through the Benthamite Radicals. It came into being in India in three different ways. Those Indians who went to England or other European countries came in contact with the secular thought of the Western intellectuals and brought the ideas of secularism with them into India. Secondly, many British educated Indians came in contact with the secular ideas of the Benthamite radicals and other writings of the secular thinkers of the West. Thirdly, secularism was introduced in India, by some of the British officials who were the followers of Bentham or other secular thinkers of the West. People like Bentick, Metcalfe and Maculay were secular in their outlook. They wanted rapid transformation of India. They wanted the radicals to impart secular education instead of religious instructions. They wanted to modernise India in the image of the West.

It was during the phase of liberal imperialism of the days of Bentick, Metcalfe and Maculay that the process of Secularisation started in India. It was also during this period that the idea of secularism penetrated into the minds of Indian intellectuals. They responded to this idea and some of them accepted it.
In the early nineteenth century there were two streams of Indian responses to secularism. One response was that of conservatives and the other was of those who accepted Western reformism as the desired goal for modern India. The conservatives can be variously described as orthodox or revivalists. The other group of Western reformists can be described as liberals, progressives or even radicals.

Dadabhai Naoroji was the founder of secular nationalism in India. He talked of secularism through nationalism. His idea of secularism was that religion and politics must be separated. He went even further than this and asserted that religion must be subordinated to politics. He used this view in propounding his concept of secular nationalism. Dadabhai Naoroji firmly believed that India could get Swaraj (self-rule) only after its people realised that a thorough political union of all the Indian people belonging to various creeds and classes was absolutely necessary.

Dadabhai Naoroji promoted the cause of secularism in India in various ways. His idea of secularisation implied and represented nationalism and anti-imperialism. He pleaded with the people of India that they should subordinate their loyalty to their religion at the altar of their devotion to their nation. Dadabhai Naoroji’s protest against British rule in India
was not based on religious grounds but on material and moral grounds. In his essay on the poverty and Unbritish rule in India, his thesis was that the principal cause of India’s degradations was the employment of aliens in the Government of the Country and the consequent material loss to and the drain from the country. Dadabhai Naoroji stood for secular education and social reforms.

Ranade emphasized that Indian Nationalism cannot succeed without Hindu-Muslim cooperation. He pointed out that during the times of Akbar, Hindu-Muslim unity was possible and was achieved. However, during the period of Aurangzeb, there was an atmosphere of religious intolerance. As a result of this, the Hindus and the Muslims were separated and this was the main reason why the Mughal Empire collapsed.

He tried to introduce the principle of rationalism in the field of social practices and social relationships. He believed that the Hindus were a backward people because of their ancient social system which was founded on false differences between men, owing to their heredity and birth. Hindus were passive on-lookers to social injustices that had existed in their social system for thousands of years.

The Hindu family system was irrational as it resulted in the enslavement of women. Caste system among the Hindu was
unjust and irrational because the lower caste was enslaved. This was a very shocking state of affairs for Gandhi. He protested against it and tried to introduce reform in the Hindu social and cultural system.

More than anything else, Gandhi was a social reformer and it is through social reforms that he made his greatest contribution in the process of secularization of Indian politics. He preferred secular education to religious instruction. He fully realized that Hindus had talked of spiritual progress.

Gandhi too mixed religion with politics. However, his religion differed from that of the Extremists and the Moderates. Gandhi declared that his Hinduism included all that was best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. According to Gandhi, religion was the only means available to man that could make a man truthful. To him, religion was a living force.

Religion, on the contrary, is a way to live and experience life. The aim of religion is to bring out the best in man, that is to grow louts in mud. Gandhi, accepted the Biblical precept that it is far better to lose the world than to lose one's soul. Religion is not only a means for personal purification. It is an immensely powerful social bond. Gandhi gave equal importance to
all religions. To him, all religions were alike, that the fundamental of all religions were the same and born out the uniformity of Satya or Truth.

Gandhi stressed the religious basis of politics. The tried to bring religion to the masses rather than keep it mysteriously hidden into the hills, caves and forests.

But, because of misunderstanding of Gandhian concept of religion, our present situation is very critical. Religion is just like a opium. If we go back to its historical background, we will find the examples of interference of religion into politics. History may present many instances of bloody wars being fought in the name of religion. In British India and also soon after partition most of the riots took place on occasions of religious festivals. But the pursuit of politics in the spirit of religion, as exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi, did not admit of hatred; ill-will or rancor against the adversary.

Gandhi’s concept of secularism has its own value. Though it seems to have lost much of its relevance in the present context, owing to its misconstructions. For example, the Sikh’s demand of Punjabi Suba or Khalistan on the basis of religion has created many problems. Religions being exploited for political purposes. Religion in our Constitution is construed differently from Gandhi’s conception. A religion may not only lay down a
code of ethical rules for its followers to accept, it might prescribe rituals and observances, ceremonies and modes of worship which are regarded as integral parts of religion, and these forms and observations might extend even to the matters of food and dress.

Although, Gandhi introduced religion as a unifying bond for the varying groups of the country, it was successful for the time being to unite people during the freedom movement.

To sum up, it can be said that Gandhi brought about secularization of politics, by equating his religion with the principles of ethics and morality, by talking of Hindu-Muslim unity, by following a policy of religious toleration, by distinguishing the relationship between man and state and man and god and, moreover, by pointing out that religion is a personal matter.

Gandhi lived and died for the attainment of his goals. It is sad to find that his concept of secularism has been grossly misunderstood in India. In theory, we may talk about secularization of politics, but in practice the orthodox religion has taken deep roots in India. Everything is interpreted in terms of religion.
However, one can still say that India after Gandhi is trying to move towards a secular state. The policy of religious toleration is an important element in India’s social, economic and political goals. The promotion of scientific temper, spirit of enquiry and rationality is being introduced in public life. We are moving towards a secular India and in this respect much has been borrowed from Gandhi, the Father of Nation.

In his personal life, Gandhi was a very God-fearing and religious man, and implicitly accepted the basic text of the Hindus like the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita, although true to the Hindu tradition, he regarded the scriptures of other’s religions like the Bible and Koran also as revealed and sacred.

He prided himself as a Sanatani (Orthodox) Hindu. He regarded Hinduism as a most tolerant, most non-exclusive, most no-dogmatic and free religion of the world, and the religion that offered the greatest scope for individual self-expression.

To him, Hinduism is the most tolerant of all the religions. It neither advocates antipathy towards other beliefs, nor does it command persons of other faiths to join its fold. It is rather liberal enough to enjoin everyone to follow his or her own religion. And, since tolerance towards other religions is
implicit in it, Hindus are able to enrich their convictions by deriving the best from all the religions they happen to come in contact with.

It was because Gandhi wanted to use religion as a factor in human unity that he delimited it to morality. He recognised Religious pluralism and defended it. In Gandhi's Ashram, the inmates were asked to observe Sahishnoota (toleration). Gandhi wanted the state to be secular. However, by secular he did not mean that religion and the State should be separated. Gandhi did not believe in the separation of religion and politics. He wanted religion to pervade all spheres of life.

For Gandhi religion was more important than politics. He believed that he was a religious man first and that he took to politics only because politics encircles us like a coil of a snake. We cannot escape politics and that is why he was in politics.

The above statement would seem to suggest as if Gandhi were totally against secularism because secularism means separation between religion and politics and Gandhi believed that such separation was neither necessary nor even possible. However, we must try to understand what Gandhi meant by religion.
In his Autobiography, he significantly remarked that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means. He did not believe in State religion even where the whole community happens to have one religion. Gandhi often referred to Ramraj as the rule of Lord "Rama". Such instances developed a kind of misunderstanding and some people thought as if Gandhi wanted to establish a sort of Hindu Raj. However, he used the Hindu vocabulary only to bring home his viewpoint to the masses of people who were familiar with this vocabulary and could, thus, easily get to his basic ideas.

Refuting the allegation of advocating the cause of Hindu Raj in India, he clarified his position in unequivocal terms. All that he wanted was that every person should observe Dharma, i.e., the rules of ethics and morality and act in accordance therewith. If everyone acted in this way, there would be no rulers and no ruled; no government servants; all would be the servants of all.

Gandhi affirmed that the only purpose of his life was to see God to face and the whole of his activity was directed to that end. And, this he thought is possible through the service of God’s creation, for though we do not know God, we certainly know his creation.
Gandhi likened Hindus and the Muslims not only as the two wings of the same bird, but, like Syed Ahmed, also as "the two eyes of Mother India".

He hoped that if the Hindus and the Muslims reciprocate, neither would the Muslims in India be treated as vassals or slaves of the Hindus nor would the latter face the same fate at the hands of the Muslims in Pakistan.

The problems of Social change in India are vast, complex and difficult.

If achievement of independent India as a whole is assessed, we find that the changes that have taken place can be indicated as follows:

(a) there has been some change in the practice of untouchability and in the social structure; and that

(b) the position of women has improved.

In the changes that are visible, the contribution of Gandhi's ideas has been important in certain directions, whereas it has been insufficient in other respects. The main contribution of Gandhi is not so much in the realm of effecting actual social changes as in awakening social consciousness about the necessity of a change.
Gandhi, himself, was largely influenced by the social forces of his time, although he tried to control and regulate them.

Gandhi's ideals of peace and non-violence exert some influence on the present Indian society. His ideas on Sarvodaya, education and the status of women are generally favoured.

Gandhi's teaching against the practice of untouchability, coupled with the personal example he set, constitute one of the important causes that have brought about sea change in its practice.

Judged from the present conditions, Indian society has to progress a good deal if it is to attain a standard of social justice accepted by the world of today, not to speak of the ideal, a "Casteless", "Classless", "Non-violent" India of Gandhi's concept.

Gandhi's principal means for bringing about social change rest on the reformation of the individual. The "Salvation" of the Indian society lies primarily in its purification of the Indian himself. Gandhi wanted improvement of the individual, "internally, morally, spiritually".

Gandhi considered a self-regulated, Stateless society as his ideal. But the imperfections of the individuals who
constitute society compelled him to content himself with the second best, namely, a society with a predominantly non-violent Government which Governs the least. Suggesting the means of quelling communal riots non-violently, Gandhi had written in September 1940: "Goodness do not drop from the sky, nor do they spring from earth like evil spirits".

One of the cardinal features of Gandhi's society was his insistence on bread labour. However, Gandhi's propositions are valid only under very particular circumstances. If all the members of a society are spiritually disposes, that society might consider true progress as moral and not material.

Gandhi presupposes change in the individual. It is this factor that makes most of his other propositions inapplicable to modern society. The majority of members of a modern society primarily look forward to material advancement, and they attach primary importance to this.

Next is Gandhi's contribution to the caste problem and education. His views on the practice of cast and on education seem to be by far "the most progressive" of all his ideas. The situation in India was accentuated because measure adopted to check social retrogression was accentuated because measures adopted to check social retrogression were not properly developed. Instead of deliberately denying opportunities for
the import of modern education to the majority of the population, social policy should have been utilized as an important force to assist social changes.

Caste and untouchability with all its attendant evils constitute an important component of the "Social heritage" of India. The individual is born into a rigid social system; in the course of his development he eventually becomes overpowered by the weight of the system and finally succumbs to its. It is important to recollect the Gandhi's attack on the system was primarily directed towards the practice of caste and not towards its theory. He was convinced that the practice of untouchability was irrational and unworthy of the ideals of Hinduism as he interpreted them. For its abolition Gandhi relied on the individual.

Gandhi's views on the status of women seem to be by far the most progressive of his ideas. Education and employment were two important indicators of the status of women in society, as these two factors determined their access to material and social resources. Women traditionally played the role of wives and mothers and their domain of work was confined to housekeeping, bearing and rearing of children, while men worked outside the home. Gandhi mentioned that education had brought women out of the confines of the house and put them into contact with the
philosophy of liberalism and democratic traditions. To him, it was degrading both for men and women that women should be called upon or induced to forsake the earth. In trying to ride the horse that man rides, she brings herself and him down. Gandhi has suggested that woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa which infinite love and infinite capacity for suffering. Moreover, widowhood consciously adopted by a woman who has felt the affection of a partner adds grace and dignity to life, sanctifies the home and uplifts religion or custom is an unbearable yoke and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion.

Gandhi claimed himself to be a Sanatani Hindu like Tilak but he was a social reformer like Lala Lajpat Rai. To bring about social and religious reforms, he sought to arouse the conscience of the community rather than seek the intervention of the State.

The greatest contribution of Gandhi’s secularism is that he divorced morality and ethics from secularism and dogmatism. He insisted that his religion did not denote a particular faith but consisted of moral and Ethical Principles. Gandhi could not, even if he wanted, eliminate religion or sectarianism, he identified them with Morality. Gokhale, the perfect Secularist, had talked of spiritualisation of politics which actually meant
that religion and politics should be separated and that politics should become our new religion, our mission in life. Gokhle raised politics, Nation and the state to a level to which everything else, including religion, was subordinated. Indirectly, Gandhi sought to do the same except that he insisted on the moral and ethical foundations of the Nation, State and politics.

Gandhi was a man of action and not that of speculative theory. He, however, was inspired by certain ideas and did formulate and articulate some of his own ideas. Secularism was the one idea that inspired him. Gandhi started with the native idea of religious toleration. Nehru started from Marxism and the Western concept of Secularism.

They had their differences both at the theoretical as well as at the practical levels.

We may finally pose the question; did Gandhi fail to achieve secularisation of politics and social change? Secularisation and social change were in ideals, the ideals which are wholly unrealised and unrealisable. Their value lies in the direction that it provides and the growing extent to which there are realise that limited sense that Gandhi did succeed.
India of Gandhi and Nehru has made considerable achievements in these areas. And, the more it continues to work in that area the more would the traditions set by Gandhi and Nehru continue to be increasingly relevant and meaningful.

************