INTRODUCTION
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For centuries religion has been a dominant force in all the human societies. Only the path-breaking discoveries in the domain of physical sciences as well as movements like Reformation and Renaissance shattered the hegemony of obscurantism of the Middle Age.

India represents a multiplicity of socio-communal groups which on occasions generate lots of tension leading even to incidents of violence. The Constitution of India incorporates secularism as one of its objectives. It was a principal value in India’s struggle for freedom. There appears to be a great deal of consensus on accepting secularism as a norm in Indian life. The term has different meanings for different people. There are different definitions, perspectives and models of secularism in the contemporary Indian social and political life. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term 'Secular' is: 'sceptical or religious opportunity or opposed to religious education'.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica gives two meanings of the word 'Secular'.

"Occurring for a long indefinite period of time and non-spiritual, having no concern with religious- spiritual matters."
The term 'secularism' is derived from the Latin word 'Salculum'.

This word meant 'the age', 'the world' or 'this age', 'this world'.

The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics states that it is a "movement intensely ethical, negatively religious, with political and philosophical antecedents."²

Gandhi defined his concept of secularism in terms of religious toleration. According to him, religions are means to tame our savage nature and they bind man to God and man to man. He accepted the Biblical precept that it is better to lose the world than to lose one's soul. He gave equal importance to all religions. He believed that all religions are different paths leading to the same goal. According to him, all religions are alike, the fundamentals of all religions are the same.

Secularism is the spirit which informs the Constitution of India. But its incorporation in the Constitution was itself the culmination of a historical process. It is in the understanding of this historical process that the real key to the correct understanding of our present day secularism lies.³ Secularism emerged as part of our freedom movement much before it found a place in the new constitution of India. In a multi-communal
In India, secularism means different things to different people and different parties. To an extent, this is inevitable when a foreign description is sought borrowed for an indigenous policy. The word was originally used to mean the separation of the Church from the State in medieval Europe. In India, it was initially used to insist on a non-theocratic state. To some it meant the equality of all religions before the state. To others, especially after the partition, being secular was ensuring that members of a minority religion did not feel discriminated against by the Hindu majority. Before touching on the various aspects of the term secularism in India it would be worthwhile to trace its historical antecedents in different lands of its origin.

Secularism appeared, to begin with, as a rival to Christianity. In due course, it was identified as a way of life and an interpretation of life that did not admit any communal bigotry. By and by, the secular attitudes have become necessary for a modern rational society, Max Weber has argued that the attitude of secularism became essential because the origins of
economic rationalism depends not only on rational technology and rational law but also, in general, on the capacity and disposition which men had for certain kinds of practical rationality in the conduct of their lives. \(^4\)

In the West, the secular state evolved out of different kinds of historical situations. In the United State 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. Jefferson talked of a wall of separation between the state and the church. This became necessary in the American context of the multiplicity of sects. The question before the leaders of the United States was that if there has to be an official church for the Americans, which one was this church to be. In order to resolve this problem, the idea of separation of the state from the church was accepted.

One consequence of the separation of the State from the Church in the United States in the absence of the kind of anticlericalism associated with a link between Church and party found in many European countries is that, the combination of political protest and irreligiousness that stimulates anticlericalism is largely missing in America.
The founding of the American Republic was an experiment in the new approaches to the relation between the Church and the State. The State is forbidden by the constitution to authorize any single religion. This means no religion can be declared illegal because of its religious beliefs and practices. Specific ties between the state and a particular faith were prohibited, as was Church's interference in the running of the State. The First Amendment and the Bill of Rights (1791) declared, "Congress shall make no law regarding an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise there of...", the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1868) extended the free-exercise guarantee of the First Amendment to the States. All the States, too, have their constitutional separation of the state from the Church in the twentieth century, the Supreme Court has interpreted the Bill of Rights to mean that the State must remain neutral not only between religions but also between the religious and irreligions.

The Supreme Court considered the meaning of the First Amendment Clause with respect to religion six or seven times before 1940, and since then it has reviewed it several times. The separation of Church and State in the United State has not been constant or settled aspect of life. The "Wall" between the two has constantly been raised and lowered. The State is forbidden by the Constitution to legitimize or authorise any
single religion. This means that no religious group can be declared illegal because of its religious beliefs and practices. Yet, for one reason or another, some religious groups are defined as a threat to the social order by the State and are consequently controlled.

However, links between the Church and the State are close in both the United States and the United Kingdom. In the United States, the Church's impression upon the State must always be more indirect because of the Constitution. The formal separation of Church and State is not, then, an actual separation. Neither body is indifferent to the other, and each tries constantly to bring the other into closer conformity to its own needs.

On the other hand, the ties between the State and the Church of England have been so close that the impact of the Church on education has been profound. The Churches are not inactive in Washington too. They evade lobby laws by registering as educational institutions through which they help to "educate" congressmen. The Church-related agencies have offices in Washington that operate essentially as lobbies. The formal separation of Church and State is not, then, an actual separation. Neither body is indifferent to the other, and each tries constantly to bring the other into closer conformity to its own needs.
Another country in which the idea of secularism found good ground was France. In France, Montesquieu attacked the idea that there should be religious uniformity in a State. Voltaire protested against religious prejudice and bigotry. Rousseau rejected the idea that religion commanded superior and exclusive loyalty. More than the views of these intellectuals, it was the French Revolution that helped to establish the principles of secularism in France. The Revolution overthrew the established catholic church. In 1905 the control of the church over the public school was withdrawn.

The growth of science and scientific temper was one of the principal causes of secularisation. The spread of secularization meant a decline in religious beliefs. It also meant decline in the authority of the religious institutions. It happened because rationalization meant that principally there are no mysterious forces that come into play. Science established that, in principle, we could master all things by calculation.

Nation building and state building, which are the phenomena of modern times, also strengthened and consolidated the forces of secularization. Nations were often composed of more then one religion. In order to build up loyalty for the nation in multi-religious communities and sects, it became
imperative to create conditions of loyalty to one's religion into his devotion to this nation. State-building was even, more powerful as an agency of secularization.

Another salient characteristic of a Modern State is the use of Rational-legal administration. The Modern State builds up the idea of citizenship which means that one's devotion to one's religion is subordinated to his devotion to the State. Capitalism and its unhindered growth also helped and further extended the process of secularization. In the words of Max Weber:

"The Puritan wanted to work in a calling. We are forced to whether it is the realm of production, where industriousness, self control, and dedication to career are important virtues, of the realm of consumption where prodigality and display are the important virtues, the modern economic system is completely mundane, the transcendent ethic has vanished."5

The idea of liberalism and socialism and the coming into being of liberal and the socialist states further accentuated the process of secularisation. Secularism was an important component of liberalism. Socialism helped not only in the decline of religious beliefs but also established parity between religion and anti-religion.

To Gandhi, "True religion .. is faith in God, and living in the presence of God, it means faith in a future life, in truth and Ahisma."6
There are many areas in which this phenomenon of Gandhi is importantly relevant today more than three and a half decades after his assassination. One of these is religious pluralism. We need next, perhaps, to suggest a few caveats. It is important to remind ourselves today that Gandhi was not a religious thinker, fighting battles against the inroads of secularism as many theologians feel they are doing today.

To him, "all the principal religions are equal in the sense that they are all true. They are supplying a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity."  

Gandhi was, infact, throughout his life concerned with secular goals. In the formative years of his political career, he suggested for securing civil rights for Indian settlers in South Africa, and upon his return to India, he thought for the national independence of India.

In the context of India, 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 secularism if in his thoughts and public role, he has contributed to the spreading and strengthening of the:

Conception of religious toleration; Secondly, introduction of rationality, spirit of enquiry and scientific temper to
things secular and sacred; Thirdly, separation of the Secular and the Sacred, which in the Indian context consists of the following five distinct sub-components which follow as

a) Religious devotion is subordinated to devotion to the nation:

The concept of nationalism in India was based on the geographical fact of a territory known as India. Everybody who claimed India as his homeland was to subscribe to Indian Nationalism. The term nationalism and secularism principally meant two things:

First, these represented the movement to liberate India from the rule of the alien British rulers. Secondly, it was a movement opposed to separatist and fundamentalist political tendencies.

The word used for these separatist loyalties was communalism. In this manner, secularism represented nationalism, anti-imperialism, as also anti-communalism.

b) Education is liberated from religion:

Secular education is preferred to religious instruction and it is carried out outside the control of religious
establishments. In this context, we must point out that, for centuries, education in India has been associated with religion. To quote William Heston:

"The Indian mind finds it hard to think of an education worth the name which is dissociated from religion. The schools of the past owed their distinctive features to what was thought in the precincts of Hindu temple and Mohammedan mosque."  

**c) Religion and law are separated:**

This means that divine law and human law are perceived as separate entities. The various religious communities give up or slow down their insistence on having a personal law of their own and move towards a uniform civil code.

This separation between religion and law coming from the West, was an important component for those Indians, who considered themselves secular.

**d) Reforms are carried out in religious and social fields.**

The two traditional religions, i.e. Hinduism and Islam are so pervasive that they regulated not only the relations between man & God but also between man and man. In traditional Hinduism and traditional Islam there was practically no difference between religious order and social order. Social relationships were controlled by the religious authority.
Secularism in India was not possible without social reform. Existing social practices and social relationships were hindrances in the path of secularism. This was realised by those who believed in secularism and, therefore, they insisted that social reform by itself was an important part of secularism. Nehru thought that a caste-ridden society was not properly secular. The attempt of the secularists was to bring about a divorce between religious and social reforms. Their ultimate aim was that the State should have the authority to carry out certain reforms.

Religion is separated from morality and ethics. Traditionally, religion had provided the basis for the principles of morality and ethics. The attempt of the secularist was to bring about a divorce between religion and principles of morality and ethics.

In his first address to the nation, President Shankar Dayal Sharma asked his fellow countrymen to have equal respect for all religions as a concept and a way of life, and as a time tested approach for the attainment of their cherished goal to allow diverse people of various persuasions and temperaments to live in peace to the benefit of all.

The Yajurveda commands us to look on one another with the eyes of a friend.
In the Bhagwad Gita Lord Krishna declares that in whatever way men identify with me, in the same way do I carry out their desire: men pursue my path, partha, is all way.

An exquisite expression of secular dictates, stems from Buddhist Edict XII to the Mauryan Emperor Ashok. It states that:

"One who preserves one’s own religion and disparages that of another from devotion to one’s own religion and glorify it over all the other religions does injure one’s own religion most certainly." 10

Social change is a widely discussed subject but its position remains controversial. The interest of Gandhi in this area also fluctuated because of many vexed problems. There appears to exist on the other hand a certain constancy in some features of social and natural process. Some aspects of human society are constant, and we can isolate these factors for the sake of analysis. In the Indian society, from prehistoric times, new ideas have originated and change have been brought about both by individual action and collective behaviour. One characteristic of Indian society is that spiritual teachings are invariably intertwined with social precepts. The teachings of Gandhi were responsible for the expression of social patterns. Gandhi was an outstanding figure among Indian social reformers of modern time. He Raja Ram Mohan Rai and others, wanted
primarily to purify Indian society as is the case with almost every social reformers in the past. The method Gandhi considered best for this purification was the re-acceptance of some of the truths and values of the ancient texts and their adoption to modern society. Gandhi found a ready acceptance of his ideas by resorting to established values. This attitude of Gandhi can not be identified with a blind revival of an ancient past. Indian society is confronted with a number of problems. The rigidity of social stratification, the existence of untouchability, the low status of women, child marriage, illiteracy and poverty are some major evils that have to be talked. There is scarcely any difference among social reforms, themselves very important factors of change, as to the necessity of a change in Indian society Gandhi belongs to the later school of thought. He advocated a harmonious development in the standards of both and as a matter of fact, offered solutions to the major social problems.

Gandhi expressed his views about the Indian women several times. He had the deals of womanhood from ancient Indian in mind. He was not opposed to good things in the western way of life or to the status of women in the West. He was not for aping the manner of the West which may not be suited to the Indian environment or Indian genius.
Gandhi was against changes in Indian society which would bring it in line with "modern or western" civilisation: consequently, he was against industrialization, excessive State interference in individual freedom and mania for accumulating wealth.

Gandhi showed a reactionary attitude in so far as technological change in Indian society was concerned. He reacted against the motion that technical or material progress were synonymous with real progress. The major change which Gandhi suggested was aimed at the reestablishment of old values based on non-violent and just means. Other changes he suggested lay in the economic field. He admitted the value of social progress. In the political field he wanted the immediate establishment of complete democracy at the grass root level in villages. He desired to change society morally, economically and politically.

Indian women form one of the very large groups of victims of the unhealthy developments of misconception and rigidity in Hindu as well as Muslim societies. The observance of purdah, child marriage, denial of equal right in inheritance and continuing trend of relegating Indian womanhood to position of infertility have been and still are besetting sins of Indian Society. Modern Indian social reformers, led by Gandhi were
deeply concerned about improvement in the status of women.

Gandhi's contribution in the field of social reforms was of paramount important for the National reconstruction. His efforts towards this end embraced almost all possible aspects. The social reform, according to Gandhi social reform was an integral part of our fight for freedom. He did not subscribe to the view that the imperial ambitions of Britain were alone responsible for our slavery. It was the neglect of national duty that was primarily responsible for it.

The foremost idea of these reforms was the removal of untouchability. Untouchability was not the bane of Hindu society alone; other religious communities were also in its vice-like grip. But bringing about reforms in the Hindu community was of great national importance. The sense of equality that Gandhi claimed for the untouchables in Hindu society included the right to enter Hindu temple. It did not matter to him if these temples were built or endowed by caste Hindus.

Gandhi was opposed to the existing educational system which has been imposed upon the nation by alien government to serve its own administrative requirements. The need to reform this type of education was felt by some of our leading reformers long before Gandhi wanted the educational system to be in consonance with the genius and requirements of the nations.

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