CHAPTER VII

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The present study is a modest attempt to trace the meanings of secularism in Modern Indian Political Thought. Here an attempt has been made to trace the germination and evolution of secular thinking in India during the formative years of its national liberation struggle. The formation in 1885 of the Indian National Congress (INC) was the first all India expression of the emerging national sentiment. It was only after 1885 that political activists in India started talking as one common nation. Initially it was the moderates who dominated not only the INC but the Indian political scene as a whole.?
It is these moderates who were the first secularists of modern India. We have analyzed the views of a few prominent moderates on secularism. These are: Dadabhaji Naoroji, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Sir Pherez Shah Mehta, Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. We have analyzed the individual viewpoint of each of them as well as the common thematic elements that emerge in their argument.

Around the beginning of the present century, the leadership of the national movement split into two clearly identifiable streams: Moderates and Extremists. From the extremist school, we have taken four important representatives for our present analysis: Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Sri Aurobindo. The individual viewpoint of each of them and the common element in their thinking has been identified.

In addition to these two, there was a group of Muslim leaders who cannot be classified either as Moderates or as Extremists in the strict sense of the terms. From this group we have picked up three prominent Muslims: Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Mohammed Iqbal and Mohammed Ali Jinnah. One thing common to all of them was that they were champions of the 'two-nation theory'. Their individual viewpoints on secularism/communism and the common denominators in them has been indicated.
Having studied these three streams separately we have also provided a comparative perspective of the three taken together. This has been done with a view to ascertain the points of convergence and divergence in them.

We have shown that in modern India the idea of secularism is of Western origin. In the west the idea of secularism evolved out of many different kinds of historical situations. In the United States of America, the idea came into being in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The problem before the leaders of the United States was that there was one common religion i.e. Christianity with its multiplicity of sects and sub-sects. The question was that if there has to be an official church for the people of United States, which was this church to be? It was with a view to resolve this question that Jefferson talked of a wall of separation between the State and the Church. In France, the great intellectuals that inspired the French Revolution also inspired the idea of secularism. Voltaire, protested against religious prejudice and bigotry. Rousseau held that religion should not command exclusive loyalty of the citizens. He argued that one's loyalty to religion should not supersede one's loyalty to the state. It was the French revolution that laid down the foundations of secularism in France.
Many forces and factors helped the process of secularization. The growth of science and the scientific temper in the west was one of the principle causes of secularization. The scientific temper meant rationalization, which further meant a decline in the religious beliefs. The authority of science came to be perceived as superior to the authority of religion. Nation-building and state-building were the other forces of the modern times that strengthened and consolidated the process of secularism in the west. Capitalism also extended the arms of secularism while the philosophy of Liberalism and socialism consolidated the process of secularization.

We have identified certain important components of secularism. Firstly, religious toleration is the basis of secularism. Secondly, secularism implies some kind of decline in the religious beliefs. Finally, secularism implies decline in the control of the church or religion over the affairs of the state or other non-religious institutions. These components of secularism are universally acknowledged. However, different countries had different historical situations. Indian secularism has been different from the conception of secularism in the West because it is the product of a unique historical situation that obtains in India.
A brief historical review of Religion and State in India which we have undertaken indicates that what existed in India was not the idea and spirit of secularism as it is understood in the west. However, there existed a strong tradition of religious toleration. We have found that this religious toleration acted as prelude to the development of a secular ideology in India.

This means that secularism in its full cry was not there in ancient and medieval India. However, it existed only in an embryonic and a somewhat dormant form. This is so because in religious toleration there were elements which could help the process of the germination of secularism in modern India. It was during the British rule that the real foundations of secularism were laid down in India. It were the officials of the East India Company and Western education which brought the western notions of secularism in India.

Secularism entered India through Benthamite Radicals. It was during the phase of liberal imperialism represented by William Bentick, Sir Charles Metcalf and Lord Macaulay that the process of secularization started in India. However, this growth was not smooth. The Mutiny of 1857 was a great set-back to the growth of secular ideology.
After the Mutiny, the British rulers followed a policy of religious toleration but carefully avoided any help to the process of secularization.

It was also during the British rule that the foundations of the Modern-Indian state were laid. The process of nation building also began around this time. Secular education and secular institutions came into being. It was because of India's contact with the British that the ideas of liberalism, the spirit of enquiry, the spirit of enquiry, the spirit of rationality and the scientific temper came to be accepted by the educated middle class in India. This class started questioning the orthodox religious ideas, customs and practices. It also started questioning the prevailing social ideas, customs and institutions. It started making a distinction between one's loyalty to religion and loyalty to the state. This class also started developing a new loyalty i.e. loyalty to the nation. In this way, the British helped in the origin, growth and development of the idea of secularism in India.

The various socio-religious movements of the nineteenth century strengthened the growth of secular tendency. This tendency got a definite encouragement from some of the social and religious
reformers who attacked blind faith, religious rituals and superstitious practices. They preferred secular education to religious instructions which in turn created a trend in favour of the rational view of life and also helped in building up of a scientific temper. These two elements, the rational view of life and the growth of scientific temper ultimately helped the growth of secular ideas in modern India.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy who founded the Brahmo Samaj was the central figure of the nineteenth century Hindu Renaissance. The Prathrama Samaj in Bombay was founded on the pattern of the Brahmo Samaj. The leaders of these movements applied rationality, spirit of enquiry and scientific temper in their understanding and analysis of religious and social matters.

In some way the revivalists like Swami Dayanand also helped, the process of secularization. It is only the most die-hard conservatives among the Hindus that refused to accept the idea of secularism, even marginally.

During the earlier years of the Indian National Congress, it were the moderates who dominated the scene. They claimed to be secular. The idea of secular nationalism was common to all of them. Partly by compulsion and partly by design they raised the sentiment of nationalism on secular grounds. They
believed that the use of religion for creating nationalism was dangerous and would split the Indian society. They believed that they were Indians first and anything else afterwards. They subordinated their devotion to religion to their devotion to the nation. For them, secularism implied nationalism, anti-imperialism and anti-communism.

The moderates believed firmly in the need for Hindu-Muslim cooperation and in the need for cooperation between different religious communities. They recognized that there had been differences between different religious communities but they viewed these differences as merely religious and social in character. They wanted to create unity between different communities for the sake of the common welfare of the country. They advocated a policy of religious toleration so that the differences between different religious communities could be ended.

Another aspect of their secularism was their preference for secular education to religious instruction. They wanted the Indians to be educated in science, technology, arts, history and politics of the western countries. They pointed out that for over three thousand years, Indians had preferred
spiritual progress to secular well-being. They felt that this process had to be reversed with the help of secular education.

Yet another aspect of their secularism was that some of them not only emphasized religious reforms but also radical social reforms. For the Hindu moderates and more particularly for Ranade, social reforms constituted a major component of secularism.

Even among the moderates, there were differences of degree if not of kind in regard to secularism. Gokhale was an agnostic and did not want to have anything to do with religion at all. As against this, Ranade was a believer and did not want to reduce the role of religion altogether. Ranade thought that the process of state-building, industrialisation and the development of capitalism in India would usher in a process of secularization in India at a rapid speed.

Dadabhai Naoroji emphasized the economic foundations of secular nationalism in India. This idea that secular nationalism can be based on economic foundations was acceptable to most of the moderates. Under their leadership the membership of Congress Party was thrown open to people of all religious faiths. Even the Presidentship of Congress...
Party amply reflected its secular character.

The moderates can be easily distinguished from the extremists in so far as the nature of their secular ideology is concerned. While the moderates were substantially secular the extremists were only marginally secular.

The extremists realized that the heart of India was in religion. They felt that the common people of India would not understand anything, unless it was stated in religious terms. They also felt that a purely political programme without the touch of religion would not appeal to the masses.

For the extremists, the limitation of secularism was that it could promote nationalism only among the microscopic English educated middle class and not among the Indian masses. Their purpose was to create mass nationalism. Therefore, they appealed to the three principal ties which are common to both the educated and the uneducated. These ties are language, history and above all Religion. They used religious idiom and religious symbols to intensify Hindu devotion to the country. They used various religious functions for political mobilization of the people. They also revived memories of the Hindu past.

The extremists did promote the growth of
nationalism in India but in the process of doing so they retarded the growth of secularism in the country. Rather they strengthened the feelings of religious obscurantism. By doing so they alienated a significant section of the Muslims who hesitated to join the main stream of Hindu dominated nationalism.

Another dimension of the extremists' ideology was that they did not have a social and economic programme which alone could serve the foundations of secular nationalism. For them, the question of Hindu-Muslim unity was a secondary issue. They underplayed this aspect of secularism in India. By doing so they failed to secularise the Indian politics.

To be fair to the extremists one must say that in a limited sense they did promote the cause of secularism. They did so by emphasizing the nation-building processes. On the whole, the extremists were far less secular than the moderates.

Among the Muslims of India, the growth of secular nationalism was slow and weak. There were secular Muslims like Badruddin Tyabji and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. However, the vast masses of Indian Muslims and most of their leaders preferred Muslim Communalism to secular nationalism. In due course this communalism culminated in separatism.
We have focussed on three Muslim leaders only: Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Mohammed Iqbal and Mohammed Ali Jinnah. One thing which is common to all the three is that explicitly or implicitly they advocated the doctrine of 'two-nation theory' and pleaded for Muslim separatism, which ultimately led to the partition of the country and the founding of Pakistan.

Many forces and factors were responsible for the lack of secularism among the Muslims. Firstly, the Muslim theory of the state did not accept the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual. Secondly, towards the turn of the century, Indian Muslims were relatively backward in education, as well as in trade and industry. In fact, there was a generation gap between the Hindus and the Muslims in this respect. Thirdly, the British policy of 'divide and rule' fostered Muslim communalism. Finally, Muslim communalism grew as a reaction to Hindu communalism. The Hindu extremist leaders were not anti-Muslim but their ideology created a strong Hindu communalism. This strategy created a strong Hindu solidarity and brought the Hindu masses in the main stream of Indian Nationalism. However, it also created a reaction among the Muslims who justified their communalism on the excuse of Hindu communalism.
Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was the first Muslim leader who sought to unite the Indian Muslims. In a certain sense, he played a secular role. He sought to reform Islam as a religion. He also wanted to change the Islamic society. Like Hindus moderates he preferred secular education to religious instructions. He played a great role in modernising the Islamic society and provided education to the Muslims. He upheld the view that science was separate from religion. He advocated that in matters pertaining to science, the scriptures had no role.

Sir Syed did talk of composite nationalism before the INC was established. However, afterwards he talked of Muslim separatism and demanded that the Hindus and Muslims should be treated separately and that they were two nations. Thus, he restarted the process of secularism, in so far as he based his nationalism on religion instead of secular lines. He believed that if separated from his religious community a Muslim would stand to lose. He wanted the Muslim to be counted only as a member of his religious community and not outside it. In his view this alone could establish his parity with the Hindu community which was numerically large. In this way he preferred communalism to secularism. In short, he was a child of English liberalism but the father of Muslim
Mohammed Iqbal is generally accepted as the father of the idea of Pakistan. Even Jinnah admitted that it was from Iqbal that he borrowed the idea of Pakistan. More than any one else it was Iqbal who opposed the idea of secularism and hence put hindrances in the way of secularization of politics. Iqbal pleaded that the teachings of Islam were superior to the teachings of all other religious systems. He said that Quran was a sure guide not only in the spiritual but also in the temporal affairs. He argued that nationalism and patriotism were against Islam and they, therefore, must be condemned. Nationalism was against Islam because it was a form of idolatry and more so because it divided the Muslims. Thus instead of nationalism, Iqbal preached the idea of pan-Islamism. This was based on his belief that the Muslim Community was indivisible.

Iqbal was also a religious revivalist. He condemned the western civilization, liberalism, nationalism and the very idea of secularism. He condemned nationalism also because it was based on hatred and was a negative force. He believed in Humanism which was more broad and positive. For Iqbal, the spiritual aspect of life superseded all other aspects.
In advancing the two nation theory, Iqbal made two important contributions. He based his nationalism exclusively on religious considerations. This led to Muslim separatism and a demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims. Secondly, he indicated a territorial base for a separate Muslim homeland and named it Pakistan.

The third prominent Muslim, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was in his private life a secularist. His early public life was also devoted to the cause of secularism and more so because he was in the good company of the moderates. He was described as the 'Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim cooperation' because he was the architect of Lucknow Pact. However, the Lucknow Pact accepted the idea of separate electorates for the Muslims. This tactfully gave recognition to the idea of Muslim separatism. Later on it led to the demand for a separate Muslim homeland. It was under Jinnah, as the Head, that Pakistan was declared a theocracy. This was a complete reversal of his earlier secular role.

A comparative perspective on the three streams—Moderates, Extremists and Muslims—who show their relative positions in regard to the theory and practice of secularism. The moderates were the first to advocate secular ideology in so
far as loyalty to the nation was supreme consideration for them. The extremists based their nationalism on history, language and religion. They believed that political work was most important in the contemporary situation. Questions of religious and social reforms were secondary in their calculations. They were not communal but their methods did sow the seeds of Hindu communalism. The extremists insisted that nationalism was not based on territorial unity but on cultural and spiritual unity. They used Hindu Gods, Hindu Heroes and other Hindu symbols, in order to give a mass base to the nationalist movement in India.

Among the Indian Muslims, a few were secular in their thought and practice. But others were secular only in a limited sense. So much so that a few of them either frankly condemned the idea of secularism or hampered the process of secularization of politics. Iqbal was the most anti-secular among the India leaders. He advocated Muslim communalism and pleaded for pan-Islamism. Jinnah also played a communal role when he persuaded the moderates, the extremists and the Muslims to accept the Lucknow Pact in 1916 which accepted
the idea of separate electorates.

Sir Ayyub was most secular among the three. He liberalised Islam as a religion and tried to modernise the Islamic society.

We have talked of three concepts of nationalism namely personal nationalism, plural nationalism and secular nationalism. We may identify the Muslim leaders in the first category, the extremist in the second category and the moderates as the third category.

We may sum up by saying that all the leaders whom we have analysed subscribed to the conception of religious toleration and to that extent they promoted the cause of secularization of politics. All the individuals were also deeply impressed by the western spirit. But some of them were most secular than others.

The moderates believed that loyalty to the nation was superior than loyalty to religion. The Muslim leaders believed that it was the other way round. The extremist leaders sought to reconcile the two loyalties. However, their purpose was to promote nationalism through religion.

There were serious differences among them in terms of their attitudes against communalism. The moderates were strictly opposed to communalism.
The extremists made compromises with communalism while the Muslims preached communalism.

All of them were in favour of secular education. They worked for the promotion of secular education. However, some of them like Sir Syed and Lajpat Rai were more active than others on this front.

For the moderates, social reform was an important component of secularism. The extremist were against social reform being carried out by the state. Among the Muslim leaders it was only Sir Syed who was in favour of social reforms.

Thus, moderates were most secular, the extremists were partially secular and the Muslims were anti-secular.