CHAPTER I

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For many centuries religion has been a dominant force in all human societies embracing numerous aspects of man's life. World, both physical and human, was sought to be understood and explained in terms of religion. Religion was used to cover up all prevalent material injustices and social myths. For a long time, institutionalized religion operated as an instrument of suppression of people. It was with the path-breaking discoveries of sciences of physical phenomena; the Newtonian physics, the rejection of geocentric view of the world in favour of heliocentric view, the discoveries of the mysterious celestial sphere by Galileo, Copernicus
and Kepler, the reformation and the renaissance that shattered the hegemony of obscurantism of middle ages.

Gradually, a wall of separation between the Church and the State began to be built in the West. The first foundation of secularism began to be laid with this separation. Thus, secularism appeared, to begin with, as a rival to Christianity. In due course, it was identified with a way of life and an interpretation of life that did not admit any communal bigotry. By and by, the secular attitudes became necessary for a modern rational society, for, as Max Weber has argued:

The attitudes of secularism began to be considered essential because the origins of economic rationalism depend 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.¹

The materialist view of secularism finds expression in the writings of Karl Marx, who began to identify religion as a symbol of oppressed culture, the heart of the heartless world and the spirit of a spiritless

situation. Although the western view of secularism which sprang from the Medieval history of the Church as an antithesis between state and religion is the dominant view in the world, in India, secularism carries a different connotation altogether. It bears some resemblance to the ancient Indian value of Sarva Dharma Samanata. Thus, in the Indian context, secularism is not viewed as an attitude of positive hostility to any religion, rather it is marked by tolerance for all religions. It is viewed as individual as well as corporate freedom of religion.

Secularism has been a critically important development in the modern times. In India, secularism acquires added significance keeping in view the crucial fact that Indians have been deeply wedded to religious considerations in the past and are hardly devoid of such considerations even today. So much so, that India represents a multiplicity of socio-communal groups which, on occasions, bring the situation to an impasse, generating lots of anomie and tensions leading even to sporadic incidents of violence.

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. Therefore, one must find out the foundations on which the whole edifice of secularism has been raised during the freedom movement. After all, secularism emerged as a part of our freedom movement before it found a place in the new Constitution of India.

In a multi-communal society like India, it is all the more important to trace the moorings of secularism and identify all its contours because it is this comprehension of the past that helps us in understanding the present and the future shape of things. For a variety of historical reasons, the objective situation in India is such that secular society and secular state are indispensable for social harmony and social peace. It will be no exaggeration to say that whole social dynamics in India today hinges a great deal on how and to what extent various religions are reconciled, both at the level of the polity and at the level of society. In fact, any understanding of economy, polity or society in modern India is impossible unless one understands and analyses the genesis and growth of secularism.
Many scholars have attempted to study the genesis and growth of the concept of secularism in the West. In most of these studies, secularism is identified with a distinction between the divine and the human law. It has been understood as non-interference of the state in matters of religion and separation of religious and temporal aspects of life. In these studies the whole notion of secularism hinges on the distinction between the sacred and the temporal. In some of these studies, secularism is equated with the notion that religion is outside the jurisdiction of the civil government. In short, various studies dealing with secularism in the West highlight the need to separate the Church from the State. These studies are useful and relevant. But for our present purpose we must go beyond them because the concept of secularism as it has developed in India is substantially different from the western notion of the term.

There are only a few works which deal with the nature of secularism in India. One that deserves mention here is a study by Donald Eugene Smith. He has dealt with the nature of secularism as it has been incorporated


in the Indian Constitution. Smith's study attempts to show how and to what extent post independence India is a secular state? How far does it deal with the individual citizen irrespective of his religion?

Smith's study is quite comprehensive and undertakes a detailed assessment of the secular aspects of the Indian State. He concludes that India is a secular state. In his view the ideal is clearly embodied in the constitution and is being implemented in substantial measure.\(^4\) Obviously the author is rather optimistic. This over optimism also becomes evident when he asserts that caste and religion are likely to remain powerful for another generation.\(^5\) However, he does not analyse the genesis of secularism in India and its growth during the initial years. Thus, his study does not pinpoint the compulsions of our national liberation movement which made the adoption of secular stance of a sort necessary. He also does not identify the opportunities which the national liberation movement provided to advance the concept of secularism nor does he assess the role of the different shades of leadership of the national movement in evolving our specific notion of secularism.

\(^4\) Ibid., p.300.
\(^5\) Ibid., p.329.
There is also a study by V.P. Luthera. It also attempts to study the nature of secularism as it has been incorporated in the Indian Constitution. The author lays emphasis on the Supreme Court decisions in order to identify the concept of secularism in India. His study reflects legal-juridical aspects of present day Indian Secularism. But like Smith, Luthera also does not undertake to assess the impact of our freedom struggle on the development of the idea of secularism in independent India.

A. Appadorai in the course of his study of Indian political thinking, has made some useful observations about the distinct nature of Indian secularism. However, the major focus of his study is not to analyse or assess secularism but to understand the modern Indian political thinking in more general terms. Appadorai does not talk about the different views on secularism held by political personalities of the national movement. More generally, one can say that secularism is touched by him in his study only in a tangential manner and not directly.

Mention may also be made of a work by K.P. Karunakaran. His work substantially deals with the role

7 A. Appadorai, Indian Political Thinking (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).
of religion in India's freedom struggle. The purpose of his study is to focus attention on the political significance of the social and religious reform movements of the nineteenth century. Karunakaran's work examines the social and religious movement of the nineteenth century. However, he does not analyse the views on secularism as preached and practised by important political actors who have dominated the Indian political scene during the last one hundred years or so.

Karunakaran started with the question as to why religion played such an important role in the political development of modern India. He raised many questions. He emphasized that students of history should try to find an answer to the question:

Why did religion play such an important role in the political developments of modern India? ... Did the economic stagnation of the country play a part in the development? ... Another unique feature of the Indian situation is the presence in the country of a well-organised and numerically significant religious minority, viz., the Muslims. How did this fact and that the gap between the Hindus and the Muslims in regard to educational development and
standards of living affect this question of the role of religion in politics.\textsuperscript{9}

Karunakaran agrees that satisfactory answers to these questions cannot be given in a short study. His book is short and certainly does not answer very satisfactorily the questions that he has posed.

W.C. Smith wrote a book, \textit{Islam in Modern India},\textsuperscript{10}

This book gives a good account of Muslim leaders of modern India and of the various movements which they led. He classified the various thinkers and movements in four categories as under:

01 The Movement in favour of Contemporary British Culture;

02 The Movement in favour of Islamic Culture of the Past;

03 The Movement in favour of a New Culture of the Future-Progressive;

04 The Movement in favour of a New Culture of the Future- Reactionary.\textsuperscript{11}

The difficulty with this study is that it provides dogmatic and rigid interpretations. Smith was a Marxist and he looked at the whole question of secularism from a

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 20.


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 5.
Marxist point of view. Moreover, the classification which we have used in the present study is different from the categorisation of Muslim leaders in Smith's study.

Rajni Palme Dutt, a noted Marxist scholar was a political activist. From England, he provided ideological direction to the Communist movement in India. Because of his own political role, he looked down upon most of the political leaders and thinkers of his times. He dismissed the Indian liberals as leaders of the middle class. He also condemned the extremist leaders of Indian National Movement on the ground that they did not have any social or political theory or outlook. In his own words:

Had the new leaders been equipped with a modern social and political outlook, they would have understood that their main task and the task of their supporters lay in the development of the organisation of the working class and of the mass of the peasantry on the basis of their social, economic and political struggle for liberalism.... Cut off from any scientific social and political theory, the new leaders sought to find the secret of compromising ineffectiveness of the moderate leaders in their 'denationalised' 'westernised' tendencies, and concentrated

their attack against precisely those tendencies in respect of which the older Moderate leaders were progressive. Against these, they sought to build the national movement on the basis of orthodox Hinduism and affirmation of the supposed spiritual superiority of the ancient Hindus or 'Aryan' civilisation. They sought to build the national movement, the most advanced movement in India, on the basis of the most antiquated religion and religious superstitions. From this era dates the disastrous combination of political radicalism and social reaction. 13

We find that in his book Dutt refuses to look at the role of the earlier nationalist leaders of India in a proper historical perspective. He is more in a mood to complain and condemn. Therefore, his assessment of the people of this period lacks objectivity.

Jawaharlal Nehru also dealt with this period in two of his important books: Autobiography 14 and Discovery of India. 15 He dismissed the moderate leadership of Indian nationalist movement as ineffective. He describes

13 Ibid., p. 305.
15 Jawaharlal Nehru, Discovery of India, (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1961).
the extremists as revivalists. He was of the view that:

Socially speaking, the revival of Indian nationalism in 1907 was definitely reactionary. 16

In his *Discovery of India*, he confirms this view by saying:

There was a spiritual and religious element about all this, and yet there was a strong political background to it. The rising middle class were politically inclined and were not so much in search of a religion; but they wanted some cultural roots to cling on to something ... that would reduce the sense of frustration and humiliation that foreign conquest and rule had produced. In every country with a growing nationalism there is this search apart from religion, this tendency to go to past. 17

Nehru also condemned the Muslim League rather summarily. Difficulty with Nehru was that he was not looking at the earlier leaders in terms of their historical role. He was not in a mood to appreciate what had been achieved by them. Rather he was keen to discover the inadequacies of the moderates and the extremists. He was looking at them with a view to find

out their limitations. In view of his own role in the freedom struggle Nehru was somewhat partial and lacked academic objectivity. Even then his analysis is extremely useful.

M.N. Roy in his book, *India in Transition* dealt with the leaders of national movement. But he followed the traditional Marxist approach and presented the same view as had been presented by Rajni Palme Dutt. He like the latter is equally harsh on the extremist leaders. His purpose was also more practical than academic. Therefore he lacked objectivity and historical perspective.

Stanley A. Wolport published his work *on Tilak and Gokhale*. In this book, he collected useful data and looked at the extremist and moderate leaders with great amount of freshness. The book is very useful in understanding the differences between the moderates and the extremists. However, the question of secularism is of secondary importance to the author.

Generally speaking, one can say that the above mentioned studies have made some contribution to the

understanding of the nature of secularism in India, but none of them has tried to trace its moorings in a comprehensive manner.

The present study is a modest attempt in this direction. It attempts to trace the germination and evolution of secular thinking during the formative period of Indian National Movement and the societal context that made this evolution imperative. The present study proposes to concentrate on 1885-1915 period. We have chosen this period because it was initially dominated by the moderates and it would be worthwhile to analyse the nature of secularism to which they subscribed. Around the beginning of the present century the national movement split into two clearly identifiable streams: the Moderates and the Extremists. In the present study the nature of secularism of these two streams has been juxtaposed with a view to highlight the points of convergence and the points of divergence in them. A few prominent representatives from each stream have been identified for the purpose of present analysis. From the moderate stream the views of Dadabhai Naoroji, Phiroz Shah Mehta, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Surendra Nath Bannerjee have been analysed.
Another aspect of the problem which has been analysed is related to ascertaining the relation between what was preached and what was practised by each individual thinker and each group. In short, the study is an attempt to find out how intense obscurantism, aggressive communalism and crypto-religious postures were proposed to be transformed into a secular syndrome. In cultural terms, to what extent each of these thinkers was adherent of rationalism in tolerating other religions.

Before we attempt to undertake this analysis it is useful to broadly understand the genesis of the ideas of secularism in the West. This would enable us to put the discussion about Indian secularism in proper focus.

In the West, the secular state evolved out of many 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 and State.

Jefferson talked of a wall of separation between the State and Church. This wall became necessary in the
United States because there was 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 was this church to be? In order to resolve this problem, the idea of separation of Church and State which they described as secularism was presented by the leaders of the new nation. 

In the context of the United States, secularism principally meant separation between Church and State. However, it must be pointed out that even in the United States complete separation between the State and the Church did not and does not exist. In fact, the actual relationship between the State and the Church keeps on fluctuating.

Another country in which the idea of secularism found good ground and where it flourished was France. In France, Montesquieu attacked the idea that there should be religious uniformity in the state. Voltaire protested against religious prejudice and bigotry. Rousseau talked of the qualities of a good citizen in preference to the qualities of being a good member of the Church. He rejected the idea that religion commanded superior and exclusive loyalty. More than the views of these intellectuals

it was the event of the French Revolution of 1789 that helped to establish the principles of secularism in France. The French revolution overthrew the established Catholic Church. Moreover, anti-clericalism played a significant role in French politics. In 1905, the control of the Church over the public schools was withdrawn. By this time separation between the State and the Church had taken place in France.

However, secularism is not identical with separation of powers between the Church and the State. Nor is it peculiar to United States, France or even the West. What has happened is a process of secularisation which is the result of certain forces and factors that came into existence in the modern world.

The growth of science and the scientific temper was one of the principle causes of secularisation. The scientific temper meant rationalization. The spread of rationalization meant a decline in the religious beliefs. It also meant a decline in the authority of the religious institutions. It happened because rationalization meant that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play. Science established that in principle we could master all things by calculation. This meant that the world is disenchanted. This also meant
that rationalization was a force which was superior to
the mysticism of religion. The authority of science came
to be perceived as superior to the authority of religion.22

Nation-building and state-building which are the
phenomena of modern times also strengthened and consolidat-
ed the forces of secularization. Nations were often
composed of more than one religion. In order to build up
loyalty for the nation in countries which had multi-
religious communities and sects, it became imperative to
create conditions of religious toleration and to subordi-
nate one's loyalty to one's religion to his devotion to
his 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

22 The following comment from Max Weber is very
pertinent:

The increasing intellectualization and rationaliza-
tion (in modern societies) do not indicate an
increased and general knowledge under which one lives. It means
namely the knowledge or belief that one could learn it at any time. It
means that principally there are no incalculable forces that can
rather that one can, in principle master all things by calculation. This means that the world
is disenchanted. See, Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills
s, 1946), p. 199.
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.23

What Weber has pointed out is the fact that modern economic system which is based upon mammon worship replaced the loyalty to God and the Church.

The ideas 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.

Since secularism was the result of different historical situations that existed in different countries

its components could not be the same everywhere. However, we can discern some principal components of secularism which can be described as common to the process of secularisation wherever it has happened. Religious toleration is the basis of secularism and religious bigotry is the very anti-dote of secularism. This, then, is the foremost important component of secularism. Another component of secularism is the decline in the religious beliefs. This can take many forms and can pass through many stages but secularism would not be perfect unless there is an escape from extreme religiosity and unless there is some kind of decline in the religious beliefs. Finally, the most important component of secularism can be described as a decline in the control of the Church or religion over the affairs of the state or other nonreligious institutions. In fact, whether a particular state is secular or not and if secular, to what extent is it so can be decided only on the basis of these criterion.

What happened in the West as a result of the rise of secularisation is that the church became differentiated from other institutional spheres. In the words of David Martin:

The church becomes partially differentiated from other institutional spheres; such as justice,
ideological legitimation, the state apparatus, social control, education, welfare; and this is paralleled by a compartmentalization of an individual's religious role which may encourage a range of variation in personal religion which contributes to institutional disintegration.\textsuperscript{24}

What Martin has talked about in the paragraph which we have cited above are certain broad tendencies which are visible throughout the West. However, the broad tendencies which were associated with the rise of secularism in the West are not necessarily the same as in case of India. In fact, secularism acquired a different meaning and shape in India because Indian secularism was a response to a different and unique historical situation that obtained in India. Indian response was different inspite of the fact that the idea of secularism was a western importation and it was frankly accepted as such.

Religious toleration as we shall see in the first chapter was a part of the Indian historical tradition. It existed before the idea of secularism was imported. Therefore, it got associated with Indian secularism and in fact, became its base and the foundation. The strength of Indian secularism is derived from this historical legacy. However, the Indians suffered from

extreme religiosity throughout their history. Moreover, major Indian religions both Hindu and Muslim militated against intellectualization, rationalization, the spirit of enquiry and the growth of the scientific temper. This was the greatest bottleneck in the path of Indian secularism. We shall see how the moderates worked fearlessly to remove this bottleneck but the extremists exploited this to consolidate nationalism and were in turn exploited themselves by this bottleneck and were charged with the process of retarding secularism in India.

Nation-building is an agent of secularisation but secularisation is also an agent of nation-building. The moderates used secularism as an agent of nation-building. In fact, the moderates used nationalism and secularism as synonymous terms. The extremists separated the two but even the extremists could not retard the process of secularism completely because they only sought to relegate secularism which was the means to a secondary place but gave extra importance to nationalism which was the end. Since the end of nation-building was not lost the process of secularism was not completely retarded.

The moderates like Ramsde also sought to strengthen the process of state-building by transferring more and more authority and greater and greater jurisdiction to the state at the expense of religion and society.
This further consolidated the forces of secularism in the Indian conditions because the most important component of secularism is the transfer of jurisdiction from religion and society to 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 secularism if in his thoughts and public role, he has contributed to the spreading and strengthening of the:

01 conception of religious toleration;

02 introduction of rationality, spirit of enquiry and the scientific temper to things secular and sacred;

03 separation of the secular and the sacred. In the Indian context, it particularly means:
   a) Devotion to religion is subordinated to a new devotion to the nation;
   b) Education is liberated from religion.
   c) Religion and law are separated.
   d) Reforms are carried out in the religious and social fields.
   e) Religion is separated from morality and ethics.

a) Devotion to religion is subordinated to a new devotion to the nation;

The idea of secularism and nationalism were treated as synonyms in the earlier period of India's struggle for freedom. This had become necessary because it was
a pragmatic solution to the problem of religious pluralism. The concept of nationalism as perceived in India was based on the geographical fact of a territory known as India. Everybody who claimed India as his homeland was a member of Indian nationalism. The term nationalism and secularism principally meant two things: These represented the freedom movement of the Indian people opposed to the alien rulers. Secondly nationalism and secularism was also a movement which was opposed to the separatist political tendencies based on loyalty to religious communities. The word used for these separatist loyalties was communalism. In this manner, secularism represented nationalism, anti-imperialism and 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 was associated with religion, in the words of William Neston:

> The Indian mind finds it hard to think of an education worthy of the name which is disassociated from religion. The schools of the past owed their distinctive features to what was taught in the precincts of Hindu temple and Mohammedan mosque.\(^{25}\)

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c) Religion and law are separated:

This means that Divine law and Human law are perceived as separate. The various religious communities give up or slow down their insistence on having a personal law of their own and have a uniform civil code. We must point out that traditional Hinduism and traditional Islam historically represented total ways of life. They prescribed detailed regulation for virtually every act of Human existence. These religions regulated the whole area of what we now called criminal and civil law. In traditional India the king had no legislative power. The function of the state was to enforce the law and not to make it. As Sir Henry Maine pointed out that even a despot like Ranjit Singh did not have the capacity to change the law which had its sources in the sacred texts and historical traditions and customs. The separation between religion and law was completely a new idea and had come from the West. It was an important component for those who in India considered themselves secular.

d) Reforms are carried out in the religious and social fields:

The two traditional religions i.e. Hinduism and Islam were so pervasive that they regulated not only the relation between man and God but practically all the relations between man and man. In traditional Hinduism
and traditional Islam there was practically no difference between religious order and social order. Social relationship were tied up with religion. Social practices and relationships were controlled by the religious authority. Perverse social relationship and social theory had the sanction of religion behind them. To give an example the caste system was clearly based on inequality had religious sanction. Secularism in India was not possible without social reform. Existing social practices and social relationship were a bottleneck 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 component of secularism. To quote Jawahar Lal Nehru, 'A caste ridden society is not properly secular'.

The attempt of the secularist was to bring about a divorce between religion and social reforms. Their ultimate aim was that the state should have the authority to carry out certain social reforms. They realised that this kind of a demand could not be easily met. Therefore, they concentrated on persuading their respective religious communities to give up or at least slow down their insistence that it is their religious establishment that shall decide the nature and content of social reform within their community.
e) Religion is separated from morality and ethics.

Traditionally, religion had provided the bases for the principles of morality and that of ethics. The attempt of the secularist was to bring about a divorce between religion and the principles of morality and that of ethics. Traditionally the religious establishment had the responsibility to look after the moral and material welfare of the individuals who belonged to that religion. The attempt of the secularist was to transfer this responsibility to the state.

To conclude, the attempt of the secularist was to transfer the responsibility of all the above functions which were earlier discharged by the religious establishments to the state or other non-religious establishments.

After having defined what we mean by secularism, we may now explain the purpose of our study and the methodology which we have used. The chief purpose of this study was to find out the views of certain important public men of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century on the concept of secularism and to examine what was their role and contribution in promoting or retarding the process of secularization in India.
The period that we have chosen is 1885-1915. The idea in choosing this period was that we wanted to start with the founding of the Indian National Congress and cover a thirty year period i.e., before the advent of Mahatma Gandhi on the Indian Political scene.

The present study is largely a historical analysis. By and large, it is based on primary sources. It is based on the writings and speeches of the leaders and/or thinkers whom we have identified. In addition to the collection of the speeches and writings, we have also examined the files of contemporary newspapers to study public statements and speeches made by these leaders. Since the extremists and the moderates belonged to the Indian National Congress, the Congress documents have also been examined. In fact we have examined party documents like resolutions, reports and pamphlets of both the major parties, i.e., the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. In addition to this, various historical accounts of this period by native as well as foreign historians have also been consulted in order to have an idea of the assessment of the role and contribution of Hindu and Muslim leaders in the process of secularisation in India.
Autobiographies as well as biographies of some of these leaders have also been examined. An attempt has also been made to comprehend not only the text but also the context in which these thinkers operated. We have tried to place each of the twelve thinkers and each of the three streams along communal-secular continuum by analysing what each of them preached, practised along with the constraints and opportunities in which each of them was placed.

 Attempt in this study is to find out the moderates', extremists' and Muslims' perspective on secularism. We have also attempted to compare and constrat the perspectives of these three schools. We have also tried to identify the points of convergence and divergence in them. This analysis is prefaced by a historical overview of the relationship between religion and the state right from the ancient times.