CHAPTER III

SECULARISM: THE MODERATES' PERSPECTIVE
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In the present chapter we propose to analyze the moderates' perspective of secularism. Before we do so, it would be worthwhile to discuss the origin, nature and character of the Indian National Congress (INC) which was dominated by the moderates during its initial years.

The INC was the first All-India expression of the growing national awakening in India. Many forces and factors were responsible for this rise of national sentiment. Basically it was the British rule and its direct and indirect consequences which provided the objective conditions, material, moral and intellectual, for the development of a national movement in India.
The British rulers established a centralised state in India. It goes to their credit that the modern educational system and the modern means of communications were introduced in India. The entire economic structure was also changed for a variety of reasons. As a consequence of these steps, firstly, the administrative and economic unification of the country was brought about. The different parts of the country were woven in one network. This essentially happens when capitalism rises. Secondly, the modern educational system introduced by the British in India created a certain amount of uniformity of outlook among the educated middle class in India. The English language became the lingua franca of the middle class intelligentsia in the country. There was a virtual renaissance in India. Gradually along with the notion of nationalism, the notion of secularism also entered the minds of Indian middle class. The political ideas of Rousseau, Bentham, Burke, John Stuart Mill and other Western liberal thinkers caught the imagination of the western educated middle class in India.

The lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi also acted as a great source of national awakening. In fact, the nineteenth century was a period of great national awakening even in Europe. Therefore, Indian's contact
with the West, more particularly with the Western liberal thinkers, aroused ideas of national consciousness in India. The Press, specially the Vernacular press played a significant and effective role in spreading the message of nationalism and patriotism.

In the social sphere, there was virtually a renaissance in the nineteenth century in India. Many socio-religious movements played an important role in the field of religious and social reforms. The sphere of these reform movements was not only confined to the socio-religious field but as Sitaramayya had remarked, "They were like so many strands in the thread of nationalism."¹

The rediscovery of India's past by scholars of oriental learning helped in building up great national confidence. As against this, the racial arrogance of the Britishers was intolerable, particularly the intelligenza in India was hurt by this attitude and this created among it a strong sense of unity.

The most important factor which was responsible for the rise of nationalism in India was the realisation of the fact of economic exploitation of the country by the British. The effect of British rule was to create economic backwardness. After 1857 the agrarian segment

¹ Pattabhi Sitaramayya, The History of the Indian National Congress, Vol.1, (Bombay: Padma Publications,
of the population had to bear greater burden of land revenue and rent. The handicrafts and the artisan industry was gradually destroyed. This created more and more pressure on the agriculture. A number of disastrous famines broke out between 1867-1880. The famine of 1877 was exceptionally severe.

It was realized by the educated middle class that the British were in India not to civilize them but more to exploit them. The trade between India and Britain was clearly to the disadvantage of the former. Even Western revolutionaries like Karl Marx condemned the economic exploitations in strong terms. Marx argued that:

... the British destroyed the trade and industry of the country. It started by excluding the Indian products from the European markets. It then broke up the Indian handloom and destroyed spinning wheel and finally inundated the very mother country of cotton with cottons.2

By 1870's a certain amount of national consciousness had come into being and there was discontent against the British rule in India. During the period of Lord

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Lytton (1876-1880) various acts of the administration intensified this discontent against the foreign rule and helped in the firm establishment of a feeling of nationalism. The Ilbert Bill Controversy acted as a spark and the Indian National Congress was founded in December, 1885. This was the first All-India expression of the Indian National Congress Movement.

A.O.Hume, a British Civil Servant has been usually described as the father of the Indian National Congress. It is true that Congress was established on the initiative of Hume but there was a great contradiction in the motivations of Hume and the Indian representatives who responded to his call. The role of Hume was only that of a catalytic agent. The idea was already in the air and the motivation of the Indian intelligentsia who joined the Congress were quite different from that of Hume.

Before this, national consciousness had been organised but only in some pockets of the country. For example in 1855, Dadabhai Naoroji had organized the East India Association in London. The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha was established in 1870's. In the year 1876, Surendar Nath Banerjee founded the India Association in Bengal. In 1881, the Madras Mahan Sabha was born. In 1882, the first National Conference was held at Albert Hall in Calcutta. On January 31, 1885, the Bombay Presidency Association was formed.
The Indian National Congress during the first few years of its early phase was a body of moderates. The Congress during this period was essentially loyal to the British Government and did not talk of independence but of interdependence within the British empire. Many Congressmen at that time honestly believed that British connection with India was in the best interests of the Indian themselves.

The liberal intelligentsia dominated the Congress during the first twenty years (1885-1904). The early Indian leaders were in the words of Macaulay, "English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect".  

The immediate demands of the Indian National Congress were quite moderate during the first decade. It hoped to win National freedom gradually. From 1885 to 1892 it demanded the expansion and reform of the legislative councils and expansion of franchise. It also demanded that the members of those councils should be elected representatives of the people. Finally, it demanded an increase in the powers of the central and provincial councils. The British Government in India was forced by the agitation of the moderates to pass the

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Indian Councils Act of 1892. However, soon after this enactment the nationalists expressed their total dissatisfaction with the Act of 1892 and declared it to be a hoax. They demanded a still larger share for Indians in the legislative councils.

In the economic field, the early nationalists complained of India's growing poverty and economic backwardness and the failure of modern industry and agriculture. They put the blame for these ills on the policies of their British rulers.

The liberals also blamed the British for the destruction of India's indigenous industries. The chief remedy they suggested for the removal of India's poverty was the rapid development of modern industries. The moderates complained that India's wealth was being drained to England and demanded that this drain must be stopped. As time passed more and more liberals came to the conclusion that economic exploitation and impoverishment of the country and the perpetuation of its economic backwardness by the British more than outweighed some of the beneficial aspects of their rule.

The most important administrative reform that the Indians desired at this time was the Indianisation of the higher ranks of Indian Administrative Services. The
liberals demanded the separation of the judiciary from the executive branch of the Government. They also opposed the official policy of disarming the people and asked the government to trust the people and grant them the right to bear arms and thus defend themselves and their country in times of need. They urged the government to undertake and develop welfare activities of the state.

The methods used by the early nationalist leaders were also moderate. It had a two chief purposes: Firstly, they tried to build a strong public opinion in India in order to arouse the political consciousness and national spirit of the people, and to educate and unite them on political questions. Secondly, they tried to persuade the British Government to introduce reforms along lines suggested by the Indian leaders.

The Indian National Congress during the first twenty years was dominated by the moderates. In the following pages we propose to discuss their attitude towards the place of religion in political activities and actions. We shall also examine the role played and contribution made by them in advancing the idea of secularism and promoting the process of secularization in India. There were many moderates but we propose to discuss only five of them who are the most prominent

One of the most outstanding moderate leaders in the opening decades of the Nationalist Movements was Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917). He is popularly known as 'the Grand Old Man of India'. He was elected President of the Indian National Congress thrice. He became famous mainly because of his research papers on India's Poverty. His greatest contribution to Indian thought lies in his theory of the Drain. However, he did play an important role in secularising Indian politics and made valuable contribution in advancing the process of secularism in India. In the following pages, we shall examine some of his views.

In many ways Dadabhai Naoroji was the first 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 realized
that a thorough political union of all the Indian people belonging to various creeds and classes was absolutely necessary. In his own words:

All the people in their political position are in one boat. They must sink or swim together. Without this union, all efforts will be vain.  

Dadabhai Naoroji clearly recognised that what had existed in India was imperial unity and that the process of nation-building has started only with the arrival of the British in India. In his Presidential Address in 1886, he pointed out that a meeting of the kind that took place in the sessions of the Indian National Congress was not possible either during the Hindu period or under the Muslim period of Indian History.  

The sessions of the Indian National Congress symbolised and represented Indian Nationalism in which people of all religious communities had a role to play. Such a thing was not possible at all even in the days of the best of the Hindu rulers i.e., King Vikramaditya. During the rule of Vikramaditya there was a process of empire building but not the process of nation-building. Dadabhai Naoroji pointed out that even Hindu Nationalism was not possible.

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under the rule of Vikramaditya because even Hindus of
different provinces of his kingdom could not have collected
and spoken as one nation. Dadabhai also pointed out that
the extent of the Muslim empire was even greater than
that of the Hindu emperors. He emphasized that even
under Akbar a meeting like the session of the Indian
National Congress, cross-cutting the religious boundaries
was not possible.

According to Dadabhai Naoroji, the significance
of the sessions of the Indian National Congress was that
they were assemblies composed of all classes and communi-
ties, all speaking one language and all having uniform
and high aspirations of their own. In one word they
were inspired by the sentiment of nationalism.

Dadabhai Naoroji tried to create loyalty to the
nation on the basis of non-religious grounds. He realised
that the economic consequences of the British Rule in
India were disastrous and they were so for all Indians
alike. Therefore, people of India belonging to different
religions could come together and unite against the
British rule in India on the ground that it brought
economic ruin to all of them.

From the above account, we can say that Dadabhai
Naoroji introduced the western idea of secularism in
modern India. One important reason why he admired the
British rule in India was that it had brought with it the notions of nationalism and secularism. It is these ideas to which Dadabhai Naoroji fully subscribed. He propagated them among the educated middle class of India.

It would be relevant here to point out that we are not merely concerned with the views of the various leaders on religion and politics but are also making a brief attempt to examine their contribution in the process of secularization of Indian politics. We have already delineated in the previous chapter some of the broad tendencies which can be expected in the process of secularization in India.

It is in the light of these components of secularization that we shall examine the contribution of Dadabhai Naoroji and other thinkers in the field of secularism.

Although Dadabhai Naoroji belonged to a minority community of India yet he rose to be the most popular leader of the Indian National Congress. He was acceptable to people belonging to different religious sects of India. He was also acceptable to the moderates as well as the extremists. This clearly demonstrated the secular nature of his personality. His leadership of the Indian National Congress for a long period also demonstrates the secular nature of the Indian National Congress itself.

Dadabhai Naoroji promoted the cause of secularism in India in various ways. We may highlight some of these dimensions of secularism which were promoted by him.

Since Dadabhai Naoroji was a member of a minority religious
group of India, he had fundamental faith in the idea of religious toleration. The very survival of the Parsees community to which he belonged was possible because of the prevailing atmosphere of religious toleration. Dadabhai Naoroji sought to achieve secularization which is even higher than religious toleration. However, he made use of this atmosphere of religious toleration in consolidating and strengthening the process of secularization in India.

Dadabhai Naoroji's idea of secularization implied and represented nationalism, anti-imperialism and anti-communalism. 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. It must be emphasized that the nature of his anti-imperialism was quite different from that of the early Indians. To provide a contrast we might make a reference to the leaders of the 1857 events. In 1857, the protest against the British rule in India was mainly on religious grounds. However, Dadabhai Naoroji's protest against the British rule in India was not based on religious grounds but on material and moral grounds. In his papers on the poverty of India, his thesis was that the principle cause of India's degradation was the employment of the aliens in the Government of the country and the consequent material loss to and the drain from the country. He calculated the economic consequences of the British rule in India and pointed out that on the moral side the loss was even greater. In his words the moral consequences of the
British rule in India, for the Indians were that:

They could not rise; they could not develop their capacity for higher government, because they had no opportunity; the result was, of course, that their faculties must be stunted. Lastly, every European displaced an Indian who should fill that post. In short, the evil of the foreign rule involved the triple loss of wealth, wisdom and work.  

Dadabhai Naoroji stood for secular education and social reforms. In fact, he praised the British rule in India because it had introduced secular education and had also helped in bringing about social reforms at least among the Hindus. It is true that Dadabhai Naoroji did not succeed very much with the people of his own community. He could not persuade the Parsees to accept the idea of a uniform civil code. They did not agree to his idea that the state has an important role to play in bringing about social reforms. They stuck to their religious orthodoxy. However, Dadabhai Naoroji acted not as a leader of the Parsees but as a leader of the Indian middle class. It is in this position that he helped the process of secularisation in modern India.

In the political field, he particularly played an important role, because, he introduced the spirit of

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enquiry, and the scientific temper in his description and analysis of the Indian political and economic situation. He demonstrated how India was the poorest country in the world. Through his research, he tried to establish that poverty in India was because of the nature and character of the British rule in India. It is on the basis of his analytical research that he asked the people of India to change the existing relationship between England and India. It was on the bases of his enquiries and scientific work that he pleaded for building up economic nationalism in India which demanded devotion and loyalty from the people of India irrespective of what religion they belonged to. This was his greatest contribution in the process of secularisation in India.

Second prominent leader of moderates was Sir Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915). He also belonged to a Parsee family like Naoroji. He was known as the 'Lion of Bombay'. He was the President of the Indian National Congress at its Calcutta session 1890. Along with Dadabhai Naoroji and G. G. Ranade, he was one of the founders of the Indian National Congress. Along with Badruddin Tayabji and Telang he had founded the Bombay Presidency Association in 1885. He was the member of the Legislative Council of Bombay for fifteen years and a member of Indian Legislative Council for three years.
Sir Ferozshah Mehta had friends among leaders of different religious communities of India. He said that we must be loyal to the land of India. He wanted Indians to be loyal to India irrespective of the fact whether one was a Parsee, a Christian, a Muslim or a Hindu. He went further and said that a Parsee would be a better Parsee or a Muslim would be a better Muslim or a Hindu a better Hindu, the more he was attached to his country and more he was bound in brotherly affection to all the children of the soil. He said that we must consider ourselves Indians first, than Hindu, Christian, or Muslim; only afterwards.

Although like Dadabhai Naoroji, he belonged to a minority community yet he rose above his religion and pleaded for secular nationalism. He recognised that India is a multi-religious society and that Indian Nationalism could not be built on religious grounds. The problem was if nationalism in India was to be raised on religious grounds, the question that will arise would be on which religion? If Indian nationalism were to be raised on Hindu religion, the Muslim would be alienated and vice-versa. In the Indian context it was very clear that there was no alternative to secularism. This is what Sir Ferozshah Mehta pleaded for.
In addition to his views on secular nationalism, we must also make a reference to his contribution in the field of secularization. He was a devoted follower of Dadabhai Naoroji and in most of the matters his role was more or less the same as that of Dadabhai Naoroji. However, there is one aspect in which special reference should be made to the contribution of Sir Pherozshah Mehta. His significant contribution was that he created loyalty for the Congress Party among the politically conscious English educated middle class of India belonging to different religious communities. The building up of the authority of the party and creating loyalty for it among people drawn for different religious faith is an important component of the process of secularization. This is so because the Congress Party was a secular institution and devotion to the party created loyalty on secular lines which competed with one’s loyalty to his own religion. Loyalty to the party helped in diminishing the role of religion in political matters. It increased the authority of a secular political organisation.

Although he was a Parsee, Sir Pherozshah Mehta became the chief strategist of the moderates
who were drawn largely from amongst the Hindus.

It was because of his secular approach that Gokhale went to the extent of saying that "he would rather be wrong with Pherozshah Mehta than to be in the right without him".

Sir Pherozshah Mehta was responsible for the Congress split of Surat in 1907. He opted for the Congress split because he wanted to save the organisations from the extremists who wanted to use the religious slogans. In other words, he wanted to save the Congress from the extremists because they believed in religious nationalism whereas Pherozshah Mehta believed in secular nationalism. He had realized that the extremist philosophy of religious nationalism would break the Congress into many parts whereas he stood for one composite nationalism in India in which all Indians irrespective of their religions could join. He had realized that secular forces could be gathered around the Congress. He realised that once the Congress was allowed to collapse, people of different religious communities could never be gathered on a single platform because of their religious and social differences.
Another important leader of the moderate school was Justice Mahadev Govinda Ranade (1842-1901). He is popularly remembered as a great patriot, a religious reformer, a distinguished jurist, an eminent economist, and an able historian.

Ranade's secularism has many manifestations. The most important dimension of his secularism was that he tried to secularize Indian politics by pleading for secular nationalism and particularly for Hindu-Muslim unity. In his speech to the Indian Social Conference of 1899, he stressed the importance of Hindu-Muslim cooperation and the value of religious toleration. 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. In his view the great virtue of Akbar was that he realized that the Hindus and the Muslims had common interests. It was in the interests of both the communities to bring about a fusion in the thoughts and feelings between them. Ranade believed that in order to create national unity, the
Hindus and Muslims should give up the idea that their interests are separate and distinct. They should realise that any such attempt to create separation was harmful for both the communities. He also asserted that Indian history provides many instances when there was clash and hatred between different communities.

It was necessary in the interest of national unity that this is not repeated. He wanted that Indians must learn from their history. They must learn of what Akbar had achieved. They should try to practice what Akbar had practised. However, the people of India should avoid doing what Aurangzeb had done and should realize the great risk in preaching what Aurangzeb had preached.

It would be useful here to allow him to speak for himself on the important problem of Hindu-Muslim cooperation. In his speech to the social conference, he said that:

No progress is possible unless both Hindus and Mahomedans join hands together, and are determined to follow the lead of the men who flourished in Akbar's time and were his chief advisers and councillors, and sedulously avoid the mistakes which were committed by his great grandson Aurangzeb. Joint action from a sense of common interest, and a common desire to bring about the fusion of the thoughts
and feelings of men so as to tolerate small differences and bring about concord—these were the chief aims kept in view by Akbar and formed the principle of the new divine faith formulated in the Din-i-ilahi.  

Even after this longish quotation from Ranade, we feel tempted to quote him again because what has been said by him was very significant and remains so in the cause of secular nationalism. Ranade cautioned that:

Every effort on the part of either Hindus or Mahomedans to regard their interests as separate and distinct, and every attempt made by the two communities to create separate schools and interests among themselves, and not to heal up the wounds inflicted by mutual hatred of caste and creed, must be deprecated on all hands. It is to be feared that this lesson has not been sufficiently kept in mind by the leaders of both communities in their struggle for existence and in the acquisition of power and predominance during recent years. There is at times a great danger of the work of Akbar being undone by losing sight of this great lesson which the history of his reign and that of his two successors is so well calculated to teach.  

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9 Ibid., p. 123.
Another dimension of Ranade's secularism was that he introduced rationality and the spirit of enquiry in the field of religion. Ranade was a religious reformer and was a follower of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and on the parallel of Brahmo-Samaj, he established the Prathana-Samaj in Bombay Presidency. As a leader of the Prathana-Samaj, he stood for rationality and reform. He was a great critic of Hindu orthodoxy and Hindu revivalism. He refused to accept the authority of the Hindu religious leaders even in the field of religion. He would accept religion and religious practices only if they satisfied his test of rationality. He was not afraid of even ridiculing Hindu religious and social practices which were clearly irrational.¹⁰

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. Ancient Indian social system believed in fictitious differences between man

and man due to heredity and birth. Hindus were passive onlookers on social injustices that existed in their social system for thousands of years. Hindu family system was irrational and unjust because the women was enslaved. Caste system among the Hindus was unjust and irrational because the lower caste was enslaved. Rationalism was lacking not only in the Hindu social system but in their cultural system as well. This was a very shocking state of affairs for Ranade and he protested against it and tried to introduce reason in Hindu social and cultural system.

Ranade accepted the British connection with India as provedential. Politically this statement appears as backward and reactionary. However, one should try to understand why Ranade became a admirer of the British rule in India. Ranade believed that the Britishers in India introduced rationality, the spirit of enquiry and the scientific temper in their religious, cultural and social matters.

More than anything else Ranade 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 instructions. He fully realized that Hindus had talked of spiritual progress but had ignored secular well-
being. Their religion had made them orthodox and fatalist. He emphasized how during the last three thousand years Hindus had lagged behind in national welfare. It was because of the emphasis of religious instructions that secular well-being had been ignored. Ranade admired the British rule in India mainly because it gave secular education, secular culture and secular values. He believed that with the help of the British rule, Hindus and the Muslims would be so trained that they will catch up with the people of western Europe.

Another every significant contribution of Ranade in the field of secularism was that he strongly pleaded for an expansion of the power and function of the state. He pleaded that there should be transfer of power and functions from the religious field to the field of the state. Ranade talked of the positive functions of the state. According to him,

The state is now more and more recognized as the national organ for taking care of national needs in all matters in which individual and cooperative efforts are not likely to be so effective and economic as national effort. This is the correct view to take of the true functions of a state.¹¹

Ranade wanted the state to play an extensive role in various fields. He wanted the state to help in the sphere of social reforms. He wanted the state to industrialise the country. He wanted the state to help in bringing about capitalist growth in India. He had a very exalted opinion about the role of the state. In his view, the state represents:

... the highest and most disinterested wisdom of the times... The state in its collective capacity represents the power, the wisdom, the mercy and charity of its citizens.\(^\text{12}\)

The purpose of the state was defined by Ranade as one of making individual members composing it nobler, happier, richer, and more perfect in every attribute with which men are endowed. Ranade was in favour of a very active state which shall take on itself the responsibility of radical and social reforms. He was the first great Indian who emphasized on the need for state building, industrialization and growth of capitalism. Scholars on secularism are practically united on the view that industrialization, modernization, capitalism and radical social reform are agents of secularism. One must also remember that he was conscious of the fact that religious ideas and practices do come in the way of the growth of industrialization, capitalism and social reform. But he was very

clear that such religious ideas and practices which came in the way of rationalization, industrialization, capitalism, social reform and state building must be discarded. At one place he argued that:

Our laws and institutions favour a low standard of life, and encourage subdivision and not concentration of wealth. The religious ideas of life condemn the ardent pursuit of wealth as a mistake to be avoided as far as possible.13

In this manner, Ranade was very clearly and consciously trying to transfer power and functions from the religious field to the state and other secular authorities.

From the above account, one can see that there were many dimensions of Ranade's secularism and he made great contribution in the process of secularization of politics by pleading for religious tolerations and Hindu-Muslim cooperation as the basis of Indian nationalism. He pleaded for secular education. He emphasised secular values and fought against religious orthodoxy and fatalism. Above all he emphasized on the need for state building, industrialisation and capitalism which inevitably led to secularism.

Surandranath Banerjee (1846-1926) is the fourth important representative of moderate school that we propose to refer to. He became famous by the nickname "Surrender-Not-Banerjee". He was selected for the prestigious Indian Civil Service but was dismissed. He set up a newspaper and a college and used his oratory to arouse secularism among the people. He became the President of the Indian National Congress twice. He left the Congress in 1918 to preside over the All India Liberal Federation.

Like other moderates, Surandranath Banerjee also believed that the unity of India depended on secularism and cooperation between Hindus and Muslims. In one of his speeches in 1876, he pleaded that the youth in India must accept the great principle of Indian unity. He admitted out that this great principle was not his original idea it was advocated by many others. Hindu-Muslim cooperation was preached by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion. In his words:

Three hundred years ago, in the Punjab, the immoral founder of Sikhism, the meek, the gentle, the blessed Nanak preached the great doctrine of Indian unity an endeavored to knit together Hindus and Musalmans under the banner of a common faith. That attempt was eminently successful. Nanak became the spiritual
founder of the Sikh empire. He preached
the great doctrine of peace and goodwill
between Hindus and Muslims.¹⁴

Surendranath Banerjee emphasized that this
principle of cooperation between Hindus and Muslims should
be further universalized and it should include all sections
of the great Indian community. He agreed that the history
of India was full of conflicts between the people of
different communities. There were jealousies, dissensions
and animosities in the past. Moreover, many a battles
were fought between the Hindus and the Muslims. In addition
to these political differences there were also religious
and social differences which divided the people of
different communities. What Surendranath Banerjee pleaded
for was that in spite of all these differences it was possible
to achieve national unity. It could be achieved on
foundations of secularism. In his words:

But there is a common platform where we may
all meet, the platform of our country's welfare.
There is a common cause which may bind us
together, the cause of Indian progress. There
is a common Divinity, to whom we may uplift
our voices in adoration, the Divinity who
presides over the destinies of our country. In
the name then of a common country, let us all,
Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, members

¹⁴ Surendranath Banerjee, Speeches and Writings of
Hon. Surendranath Banerjee, (Madras: Natesan and
of the great Indian community, throw the pall of oblivion over jealousies and dissensions of bygone times and embracing one another in fraternal love and affection, live and work for the benefit of a beloved Fatherland.\textsuperscript{15}

What Surendranath Banerjee wanted was that Indians should forget their differences and realize that they have a common destiny. Like other moderates, he wanted that Indians of all creeds should be loyal to their country irrespective of their affiliation to a particular religion or community.

There is another dimension of Surendranath Banerjee's views on secularism. In this respect he is different from other moderates like Dadabhai Naoroji and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta. Dadabhai Naoroji wanted to build nationalism only on the basis of secular consideration and sought a complete divorce between religion and politics. He rightly realised that the use of religion could retard the process of secularism. As against this Surendranath Banerjee had a double strategy for building and consolidating nationalism in India. He pleaded that secular considerations must be used for building up nationalism in India. He was also in favour of unity and cooperation between people of different sects. Of course he also believed that different religious communities should be allowed to

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p.229.
use their respective religions in order to strengthen and consolidate the forces of nationalism within their communities. He did use Hindu religion in his movement for creating nationalism in India. He did so because he felt that a strong and militant nationalism could not be created on the basis of non-religious grounds alone but by bringing people of various religious in one stream even while keeping their distinct religious identities.

Another dimensions of Surendranath Banerjee's secularism was that he was an important leader of the Brahmo-Samaj which was a socio-religious reform movement. As its leader he stood for rationality and spirit of enquiry in the field of religion itself. Similarly, he also sought the rationalization and restructuring of the Hindu society. This became an important aspect of his attempt of secularising Indian politics. Infact, he felt satisfied that a certain amount of secularization had taken place among the Hindus.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866–1915) was a Chitpavan Brahman from Maharashtra. He joined the Deccan Education Society in Poona at the age of nineteen. In 1889 he became a member of the Legislative Council of Bombay. At the age of thirty-six, he was a member of the Imperial Legislative Council. In 1905 he founded the Servants of
India Society. He was from an orthodox Brahman family but in his religious thoughts he was an agnostic.

Gokhale believed in and preached secular nationalism for India. Like other moderate leaders, he divorced religion from politics. He did not want to use religion in the process of creating sentiments of nationalism in India. In fact, he was opposed to the extremist leaders, principally because he thought that they did use religion for arousing nationalism in India. He believed that religion would be dangerous as a base for nationalism in India. When he established the Servants of India Society he insisted that everybody who was a member of the society must take seven vows. Out of these seven vows, two related to secular nationalism. The first vow was that the country will always be first in the thoughts of the members of the society. This meant that loyalty to the country was primary and all other loyalties were secondary. This also implied that loyalty to the country was superior and would supersede one's loyalty to religion. This idea of devotion to the country was reinforced by another vow which said that the members of the society will regard all Indians as brothers and will work for their advancement without distinction of caste or creed.
It was admitted in the Constitution of this society that secularism had become the established creed of the educated middle class. In the preamble of the Constitution of this society, Gokhale pointed out that:

The growth, during the last fifty years, of a feeling of common nationality, based upon common tradition, common disabilities, and common hopes and aspirations, has been most striking. The fact that we are Indians first, and Hindus, Mahomedans, Parsees, or Christians afterwards, is being realized in a steadily increasing measure, and the idea of a united and renovated India, marching onwards to a place among the nations of the world worthy of her great past, is no longer a mere idle dream of a few imaginative minds, but is the definitely accepted creed those who form the brain of the country—one of the educated classes of the country.  

One essential condition of this society was that the members of this society must work in the spirit in which religious work is undertaken. He emphasized that public life must be spiritualised. This quotation from Gokhale became very famous and has come to summarize the social and political philosophy of Gokhale. What he meant by spiritualisation of public life is that we must take social and political work as seriously as

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the religious work. In fact, social and political work for Gokhale was more important because he was not interested in the so called religious work at all. In his own words:

Love of country must so fill the heart that all else shall appear as of little moment by its side. A fervent patriotism which rejoices at every opportunity of sacrifice for the motherland a dauntless heart which refuses to be turned back from its object by difficulty or danger, a deep faith in the purpose of Providence that nothing can shake. Equipped with these, the worker must start on his mission and reverently seek the joy which comes of spending oneself in the service of one's country. 17

Elaborating on the work of the members of the society Gokhale said that:

Its member will direct their efforts principally towards: 1) Creating among the people, by example and by precept, a deep and passionate love of the motherland, seeking its highest fulfillment in service and sacrifice; 2) organizing the work of political education and agitation and strengthening the public life of the country; 3) promoting relations of cordial goodwill and cooperation among the different communities; 4) assisting educational movements, especially

17 Ibid., p. 703.
those for the education of women, the education of backward classes and industrial and scientific education; and 5) the elevation of the depressed classes.  

From this reference, it is quite clear that Gokhale wanted was to build national consciousness, spirit of public life, political education, unity between different religious communities, secular education of various kinds and upliftment of the down-trodden and low. All this helped in the process of establishing secularism in India.

Another significant aspect of his secularism was that he was openly and fully opposed to Hindu religious orthodoxy. He lived in Poona and belonged to a orthodox Brahman family. The contemporary atmosphere in Poona was that of religious orthodoxy. The great leaders of Poona of those times like Tilak (whom we shall discuss in the next chapter) chose to represent Hindu religious orthodoxy. Even Ranade made some compromises with this spirit of religious orthodoxy. Two instances can be cited. One is that Ranade was in favour of widow remarriage but when his first wife died he had to marry a virgin girl because of the pressure from his orthodox mother. Similarly, there was a tea party incident in Poona. In this incident, Tilak, Ranade and Gokhale took tea from the hands of a Christian lady. The orthodox Brahmins of

\[p.18\] Ibid.
Poona asked them to do repentance for this breach of religion. Tilak went to Benares to offer his repentance. Even Ranade apologized for this sacrilege. However, Gokhale refused to accept the demands of the religious orthodoxy and did not regret this violation of Hindu social norms. This incident establishes the fact that Gokhale, more than any other leaders of his times stood opposed to and faced the forces of religious orthodoxy and practiced secularism in his private as well as public life.

Another significant aspect of Gokhale's secularism is that he never accepted the idea of separate electorates for the Hindus and the Muslims. We shall discuss this point later in this dissertation but right now it must be emphasized that he did not believe that religion should be the base of representation. As a concession, he did agree to communal representation but the idea of separate electorates which cuts at the very roots of secular nationalism was not acceptable to him.

Rationality and the spirit of enquiry first entered the religious field itself. It liberalised religion. Liberalization and rationalization of religion opened the way for the rationalization of the Indian society and more particularly the Hindu society. In fact, secularism in India could not be possible without social reforms because existing social practices and social relationships were based on religious orthodoxy and superstition. Even
our cultural and value system was based on superstitions and fatalism. The introduction of rationality and the spirit of enquiry brought about a significant change. Liberalisation led to the introduction of rationality and spirit of enquiry and these forces added to the process of secularization of politics. Secularization in the Indian context brought about some amount of separation between the secular and the sacred. In the Indian situation secularism and nationalism came together. That was the reason why there was a great deal of consensus on the concept of secularism inspite of the fact that secularism hurt the religious orthodoxy of the people. The moderates preached and also to a great extent practised secularism. The extremists who were reluctant about secularism and who even opposed it partially had to pay lip service to the idea of secularism.

The idea of secular nationalism was common to all the moderate leaders. They believed that nationalism must be raised on secular grounds. They also sought a divorce between religion and politics. They believed that the use of religion for creating nationalism was dangerous and would split Indian society. They believed that they were Indian first and everything afterwards.

Their devotion to their religion was subordinated to a new devotion to their nation. For them secularism implied and represented nationalism, anti-imperialism and anti-communalism.
The moderates also believed firmly in the need for Hindu-Muslim cooperation and in the need for cooperation between different religious communities. They recognised that there had been political differences between different religious communities. They were religious and social in nature. They pleaded that we should forget these differences and create unity between different communities for the sake of the common welfare of our country. They also believed in creating an atmosphere of religious toleration so that the differences between different religious communities could be ended.

Another aspect of their secularism was that they emphasised on secular education in preference to religious instructions. They wanted the youth of India to be educated in science, technology in the arts, history and politics of the western countries. They wanted that the youth of India must have political education. They realised that for the past three thousand years Indians had preferred spiritual progress to secular well-being. The moderates wanted this to be reversed with the help of secular education.

Another aspect of their secularism was that some of them sought not only religious reform but also radical social reforms. For the Hindu moderates and more particularly
Ranade's social reforms were an important component of secularism. As against this, Dadabhai Naoroji and Sir Pherozshah Mehta were lukewarm or indifferent to social reforms.

Even among the moderates there were differences of degree if not of kind in regard to secularism. Gokhale was an agnostic and he did not want to have anything to do with religion at all. As against this Ranade was a religious reformer but he did not want to reduce the role of religion to zero. Ranade's views on the role of the state were shared only by Gokhale. Ranade wanted that the process of state-building, industrialisation and the growth of capitalism should start even under the British rule. This would have brought about secularisation in modern India at a very fast speed because as the authority of the state increases and as capitalism and industrialisation grow the process of secularisation becomes swift and strong. We also find that Dadabhai Naoroji had also emphasized the economic foundation of secular nationalism in India. The idea that secular nationalism be based on economic foundation was acceptable to most of the moderates. But some moderates like Ranade did not emphasize anti-imperialism or the economic foundations of secular nationalism with the same zeal with which Dadabhai Naoroji had done.
To sum up we must say that the Indian moderates were the first nationalists of India. They were the first to preach the idea of secular nationalism. They stood for the unity of India through cooperation between different religious communities. They believed in religious toleration. They helped in the creation of loyalty to the nation which superseded one's loyalty to his religion. They pleaded for secular education instead of religious instructions. They pleaded for rationalism and sought reform in the religious and also in the social spheres, on the basis of rationalism. They demanded secular well-being as against fatalism. They fought against superstitions, fatalism and religious orthodoxy. They believed that the authority of religion should decline and would decline and the power and function of the state and the secular forces would increase at the cost of religious authority. In fact, the moderates were the first secularists of modern India. This also distinguishes them from the extremists insofar as secular ideology is concerned. To what degree the extremists were secular will form a part of our discussion in the next chapter.