

## Difference between the western and Indian secularism

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### Abstract

It is true, Western paradigm cannot replicate in India because the material conditions and the ground realities vastly differ in both. Besides the polyglot nature of Indian society characterized by mind-boggling diversities in terms of religions, languages, regions, economic conditions and cultural patterns, a wide gulf separates the educated minority and the largely illiterate mass shaped in categories of understanding and modes of perception derived from religion and in ways of life still bearing the impress of a predominantly agrarian or rural civilization in transition. Secondly, secularism as it developed in the west a particular outcome of the confrontation between organized church and state and, in particular cultural ambience of west and the United States of America.

**Keywords:** Western, cultural, religion and society

### Introduction

Therefore its verbatim importation to India would not be proper. There is however not to suggest that secularism and secularization is unique to western society without being of any benefit to India or any other country for that matter. As Rudolph C. Heredia says, "The Understanding of secularism in a pluri-religious multi-lingual society like India will certainly be different from that in the west a difference not just in degree but in kind. However, to deny and relevance for our society of the realities of change that the concept attempts to capture, would be to fall into a kind of cultural solipsism of 'East is East' and 'West is West'. That is hardly tenable in an inter-dependent world. What is required is a critical and fine-tuned analysis of the sweeping changes in our society in the context of social processes that may not be exclusive or unique to it alone for the relationship of religion to society is problematic one in any differentiated society, though the concrete context may indeed make for specific and significant differences." We have seen how the word secularism as an Alice in Wonderland has been subjected to varied interpretations. In the charmed world of Alice in wonderland, world could have multiple meanings depending on the bias of the speaker. Not so outside that wonderland'. Words must be used with utmost care keeping in mind their context if we are to avoid inflicting unnecessary sorrow and suffering around. Ever since human being began expressing themselves through words and then language, a measure of sacredness has been attached to word. According to our own tradition, in the beginning there was a 'word' and that word was "Om". Great care was taken in articulating the vibrant resonance of "OM". Similarly sanctity was attached to Muezzins call "Allah-O-Akbar". In the Christian system of faith and belief the second person in the Trinity is 'word'. When a person makes a statement or promise to do something upon my word sanctity attaches to that statement.

Therefore, at the on it would in the fitness of things to clarify and distinguish terms like secularism" and secularization not with standing there complexity and comprehensive character while 'secularization' is a social process, secularism as a socio-political ideal or ideology is a value-loaded concept, its

values derive from the must be contextualized in our understanding of the social process we call secularization. While a fully secularized society is myth, Secularization is a condition precedent to secularism becoming a reality. As Nasir Tyabji writes: "The truism that there can be no secularism without a process of secularization is now wisely (and perhaps limply) accepted, but he challenge of actualizing if through concrete social, political, economic and educational measures is an enormous task."

We can certainly find homologies' to these Western concepts and processes in our society as well. And a comparative perspective can make our analysis much more invasive. After all, "Secularism in India (as in fact, in Europe) is intrinsic part of the process of giving shape to a modern identity for the people of a multi-language and multi ethnic society, the necessity for which is being continuously generated by processes of industrialization and urbanization. But this concept of secularization is not easy to define. For this reason some sociologists have argued that "secularization should be erased from the sociological dictionary. And Younger prefers religious change in lieu of secularization."

Initially, 'secularization' referred to the confiscation of church property or the exclauzation of religious persons. However, 'secularization' is now understood as the process whereby various elements of human life (such as opinion, customs, social forms and even things and persons) or the whole of human life cease to be determined by religion. Berger also defines it as the process by which sections of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. Rufus M. Jones defines it was a way of life and interpretation of life that includes only the natural order or things and that do not find God, or a realm of spiritual reality, essential for life or thought. Dr. Hue Sue brings out a secular animadversion on religion, "The most important contribution that the religions of the world could make to modern societies in the World today would be to combat suicide."

A secular state is one which is separated from unconnected with and not devoted to religion or to use a terminology which is employed to indicate such a relationship between state and

religion it is a shape where there is a separation of the state and the Church. The genesis of the concept can be traced to the Roman Empire when the Caesars demanded unflinching obedience and allegiance from the subjects in all departments much of life, both temporal and religious. Many subjects protested and found their philosophical underpinnings of their resistances in a sermon of Christ recorded in St. Mark's Gospel (xii) Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar and to God the things that are God's".

#### Development of secularism in western secularism

Yet during most of period of the middle age the church and the state were so inter-wined in the activities of one another that the church was state-Church and the state was church-state. It was only from 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards that new forces and new ideas started emerging to undermine the authority of this Roman Catholic Church. Renaissance enlightenment and humanism with their emphasis on secular, scientific and these worldly values ran head on with the ecclesiastical power. Navigators and explorers brought stories which appeared heretical in the eyes of church. The progress of international commerce also called for the establishment of a state of spiritual neutrality which would facilitate trade among Jew, Catholics, Protestants and Chinese.

But most of all, the tremendous strides in the arena of science and technology administered a heavy blow to many of the religious dogmas and marred a great leap forward in secular thinking. Astronomy of Copernicus (16<sup>th</sup> century), Galileo (17<sup>th</sup> century), Newton (late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century) and Laplace (late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century) demolished the Biblical cosmology and weltanschauung: like the world being only few thoughts and year old and the anthropocentricity of the entire criterion. The controversy between the church and scientific community after the Darwinian theory of evolution knocked out of basis the Christian belief of human race descending from a common ancestor – Adam is too well-known. Furthermore, the empiricism of Locke (17<sup>th</sup> century); Bacon and Hume (18<sup>th</sup> century); the rationalism of Descartes (17<sup>th</sup> century); Kant (18<sup>th</sup> century) the utilitarianism of Bentham (18<sup>th</sup> century) and Mill (19<sup>th</sup> century); and the positivism of Comte (19<sup>th</sup> century), provided the intellectual framework for the development of secularist ideology. The forces from without Renaissance, Enlightenment, Humanism discoveries, international trade-joined hands with forces of reformation to cut the church down to size. Luther's advocacy of individual's right to understand God sans intermediaries (Church) gave a great emphasis to the idea of secularism. The positive outcome was that the states could no longer effectively enforce any particular religion or sect, less the followers of other sects take umbrage to it and disturb peace and order. As one author has remarked, it is the unified religion of the great majority of the citizens that makes a state Catholic or a Protestant state. The enunciation of the doctrines of freedom of conscience and religious toleration, principally by John Locke and Thomas Paine must be seen in the above context. The Politics also, in keeping with the current trend, insisted that the civil society must not punish for the conscience sake. The interests of peace came first; the religious interest is a secondary consideration. The other Model called jurisdictionalism, is based on the principle of equality of churches and aims to maintain equal status for the confessions within its domains. It does not mean

that the jurisdictional states maintain a hands off approach towards churches, they do exercise control over the activities of churches and in some cases, give them subsidies. This pattern can be seen in Holland. However in both cases since the states were not separate from churches, they couldn't be secular in the strict sense of the Term. A better arrangement was put in place, for the first time in the United States constitution soon after 1776, vide the first amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise therefore".

President Jefferson remarked that the legislature would pass no law regarding religion and that the Amendment built us a wall of separation between the church and state. He further said "... no power to prescribe any religious exercise or to assume authority in religious doctrine has been delegated to the general government".

The principle of the separation of the state and the Church means that there must not be interlocking of their (Church and state/respective institutional processes by law or the administration of law or any execution, fiat or action. In the Everson Versus Board of Education's, the American Supreme Court (S.C.) in its five to four, majority decision gave a comprehensive interpretation of the concept in 1941. Justice Black delivering the opinion of the court said that the separation of the state and the church meant that neither a state and nor the federal government can set up a church, Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another....., No tax in any amount large or small can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called or whatever form they may adopt to each or practice religion. Neither a state nor a federal government can openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa..... state power is no more to be used so as to handicap religions than it is to favor them.

It would be patently wrong to say this view does not have relevance to our secular practice as underline by our constitution. Justice Jackson, in his statement, highlighted an important nuance of the concept. He said that the separation of the state and the church had placed religion in a unique position vis-a-vis the state. While the state could undertake to promote individual welfare, health education, entertainment and security....Religion could not be made the business of the state.... and thereby be supported in whole or in part at tax payers' expense.... He further said that if the state were to aid these religious schools, it may therefore regulate them. That would be contrary, he said, to the very essence of their separation. Besides arguing that the constitution forbids state support, financial or other of religion in any guise, form or degree, Justice Rutledge made an important point which has bearing on the Indian concept of secularism as Sarva Dharma Sambhav or equal respect for all religions. During the course of the proceeding of the court it had been argued that the reimbursement of funds by the state did not amount to any discrimination by the state among the various religions. Justice Rutledge rejected the argument as irrelevant saying that the purpose of the separation of the state from the church was not to secure equal treatment by the state of the various religions but to uproot all relationships between the two. He said that the amendment's purpose was not to strike merely at the official establishment of a single creed or religion, outlawing only a formal relation such as had prevailed in England and

some of the colonies. Necessarily it was to uproot all such relationships.

Another case of far reaching implications was *Mc. Column Versus Board of Education* in 1940; some members of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths formed an association called the campaign council on Religious Education. They obtained from the board of education permission to impart religious instruction to pupils studying in public schools during regular school hours. One Mrs. Mc Column challenged the permission as contrary to the first amendment. The Supreme Court accepted the writ and held that the arrangement amounted to a close co-operation between the public school authorities and campaign council. The public school authorities were instrumental in providing tax-supported school premises to the religious bodies for religious education. This was against the constitutional injunction of separation of state and church the court held. In the *Zorach Versus* clause case some religious organizations in New York entered into an arrangement with Public Schools where by the latter, on the consent of the parents of the pupils released the students for religious education at religious centers away from schools.

However one Mr. Zorach challenged the arrangement as a contravention of the first amendment. But the Supreme Court upheld the arrangement. It argued that the "released time" programme involves neither religious instruction in public school classrooms nor the expenditure of public funds. In the *Mc Collum Versus Board of Education*, the classrooms were used for religious instruction. This then, in brief, the development of secularism in the U.S.A with its tenets of:

(a) Separation of state and church

(b) Freedom of conscience and limited religious liberty to the individual and corporate religious freedom to church and other religious, bodies subject to reasonable restriction.

But what of the secularization of world Catholicism with its attendant repercussions marginally on U.S.A and principally on Europe? As a matter of fact "secularism" was coined by G. J. Holyoake in 1851 to describe a socio-political movement pioneered by him and others which affirmed the worth of mundane existence. Soon afterwards the term began to be used to connote five important ideas:

1. The rule of reason,
2. Separation of ethics from religion,
3. Concept of knowledge as product of reason, not faith,
4. Liberty of expression and
5. Participation in the struggle for making the world a better place to live in.

Thus, secularism was largely a movement which aimed to improve the lot of people here on earth and emancipate them from all tyranny, whether of the church, or of a capitalist socio-economic order. According to Eric S. water house, the relation of secularism to religion was understood by him as mutually exclusive, rather than hostile". Secularism is only concerned with this world, not about the "other world and neither offers nor forbids any opinion about these matters. Holyoake was more interested in countering the irrationalism and supernaturalism of Christian theology than in the denial of religion per se.

Secularism has now ceased to be an active movement in the west; the current buzz word is secularization and secularization has been seen, as noted above, as decline of religious hegemony, of religious institutions coming out of

sacred canopy, a process of decline in religious activities, beliefs, ways of thinking and institutions. Wilson defines secular society as one in where "The sense of the sacred, the sense of sanctity of life and up religiosity are most conspicuously absent. And according to Cox, the characters of secularization are: urbanization pragmatism, profanity, pluralism and tolerance. As religion is denied any role in social life, it is privatized. But with the widespread religious revivalism today, from aggressive fundamentalism to popular religiosity, from ecstatic spiritualism to committed. Liberationists, the decline or the 'demise' of institutional religion is a far more complex and contested issue then was once thought. One is force to the conclusion that it is obvious no simple uni-linear and one dimension theory of 'secularization' in Modern society can be maintained." The immediate historical consequences of the declaration were:

1. The acceptance of the modern principle of disestablishment and separation of state and church.
2. The contestability of any Catholic party or political movement officially sponsored by the Catholic Church and
3. In the long run, the incompatibility of a dogmatic conception of authoritative tradition and the principle of freedom of conscience.

Traditionally, the political mobilization of Catholicism had been oriented towards the state, its aim being either to resist disestablishment or to counteract state oriented secularist movements and parties. After the final recognition of the principle of religious freedom, Catholic Churches have ceased being or aspiring to become state compulsory institutions and have become free religious institutions of civil society. It is this voluntary disestablishment", that has permitted the church to play a key role in recent transitions to democracy throughout the catholic world. As Samuel Huntington has pointed out, the third wave of democratization of the 1970s and 1980s has been a predominantly a catholic wave. This is particularly significant because in the previous democratic revolutions organized catholic churches allied with anti-democratic-forces. The fact, however that the Church appears to have accepted not only disestablishment from the state but also disengagement from political society proper does not mean that Catholicism becomes necessarily privatized or that the church is no longer likely to play any public role. It only means that public locus of the church is no longer the state or political society, but rather civil society.

Yet the statement that "Religion is a private affair is constitutive of western modernity in a dual sense. First of all, it points to the fact that religious freedom, in the sense of freedom of conscience, is chronologically "the first freedom" as well as the precondition of all modern freedoms. In so far as freedom of conscience is intrinsically related to the right to privacy", i.e., to the modern institutionalization of a private sphere free from governmental intrusion as well as free from ecclesiastical control, and in as much as the "right to privacy" serves as its very foundation of modern liberalism and of modern individualism, then indeed the privatization of religions is essential to modernity. There is another sense in which privatization of religion is intrinsically related to the emergence of the modern social order. To say that, in the modern world "religion becomes private" refers also to the very process of institutional differentiation which is constitutive of modernity, namely to the modern historical

process whereby the secular spheres emancipated themselves from ecclesiastical control as well as from religious norms. Religion was gradually compelled to leave the modern secular state and to find refuge in the newly found private sphere. Like modern science, Capitalist markets and modern state bureaucracies also manage to function “as if” God would not exist. This forms the unassailable core of modern theories of secularization, a core which remains unaffected by the frequent assertion of critics who rightly point out that most people in the modern world still, or yet against, believe in God and those religions of all kinds, old and new manage to thrive in the modern world.

Theories of secularization however, have greater difficulty in answering those critics who point out that the modern walls of separation between church and state keeping developing all kinds of cracks through which both are able to penetrate each other; that religious institutions often refuse to accept their assigned marginal place in the private sphere, managing to assume prominent public role, that religion and politics keep mixing up in all kinds of symbiotic relationships, to such an extent that it is not easy to ascertain whether one is witnessing political movements which don on religious garb or religious movements which assume political forms.

More ever the institution of state chaplains, appointed by the state for many of its state organization/institutions is a classic case of mixing of religion and politics, for on many occasions political considerations have influenced the executive in the appointment of chaplains, and Chaplains on their part, have often used religious position to pedal political agenda. Of all religions, Christianity since it is observed by the majority of the people has been singled out by the state for favor. The Church is today organized in the United State and exercises pressure on politics on a continuous basis. The method employed by the Church to this end include helping to draft party platforms, making friends in congress, drafting legislation, furnishing information to legislators, working with congressional committees, etc. Nevertheless the norm and ideal of the secular state – the separation of state and church-remains despite the many compromises and difficulty to draw a clear-cut line. Indeed, the distinction between private and public religions was drawn by the liberal political tradition in the context of the separation of church and state. State associated churches are designated as “public” religions, while all other religions are considered to be private.

The dual no “establishment” and free exercise clause of the first amendment to the American constitution incorporated this dual historical rational for separation. There is a sense in which the liberal principle of privatization is also unimpeachable. In so far as the legal principle of separation is based not solely on *raison’etat* principle or on liberal principles of toleration as necessary conditions for a modern differentiated and pluralist social order but on the very principle of freedom of conscience which is the foundation of the inviolable “right to privacy”- without which there can be neither a modern democratic state, nor a modern civil society – then, the deprivatization” of religion presupposes the privacy of religion and can only be justified if the right to privacy and the Freedom conscience are legally protected also from religion. For instance, the deprivatization of religion can be justified in at least through instances:

1. To protect not only its own freedom of religion, but all modern freedoms and rights, and the very right of a

democratic civil society to exist against an absolutist authoritarian state. The active role of the Catholic Church in processes of democratization in Spain, Poland and Brazil demonstrates it.

2. To question and contest the absolute lawful autonomy of the secular spheres and their claims to be organized in accordance with principles of functional differentiation without regard to extraneous ethical or moral considerations. The Pastoral letters of the American Catholic Bishops questioning the morality of the arms race and of the state’s nuclear policies, as well as the “justice” and in human consequences of a capitalist economic system etc.
3. When religion enters the public sphere to promote the traditional life from administrative or juridical or state penetration it opens up issues of modern discursive ethics for public and collective self-reflection. Public mobilization of the “Moral majority” and the Catholic Public stand on abortion in support of the right to life may serve to illustrate the third instances.

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