SECULARISM: CONCEPTUAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS*

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In this paper, I'll conceptually clarify the term 'secularism' with reference to the religious and cultural realities of Europe and India. For the sake of clarity and precision, I'll divide the paper in to two parts .In Part –1; I'll explain the meanings of the terms like secular, secularization and secularism in the context of European modernity. I'll discuss such issues as secularism and religion, modernity in Europe with such operative terms as Abstraction, Futurity, Individualism, Liberation and Secularization and its appropriation in Indian modernity, cultural aspects of Europe and India. In Part –2; I'll try to examine Indian modernity comprising of *svatantrata, svadeshi, svarastra, svabhashya,* secularism in Indian religious and cultural realities. I'll propose pluralistic perspective and dialectical dialogue between secularism and religiosity.

PART-1

Secularism and Religion: On secularism, let us first clarify three words with their different meanings—secular, secularization and secularism. The word 'secular' has a very old origin, 'secularization' originated in the 16th century and 'secularism' in the 19th century. The word 'secular' as an adjective goes back to the Latin culture. It is a Latin word *saecularis* and it comes as an adjective after the word *saeculum* which in pre-Christian Latin meant 'a long period of time' almost something like our *yugam* which means 'world structure' but not the world as 'basically conceived' but as ' time conceived'. Likewise a long period is called *saeculum.* Then it came to be, *saeculum* meant 'century' or 'a hundred years' .Already in the time of Julius Caesar that is 44B.C., at the end of every century, they had *saeculum* games, once in a one hundred years, celebrating the century that is passing and welcoming the new century that is coming .But then *saeculum* meant 'belonging to the century' After the beginning of the Christian era, the word secular takes on a new meaning .It is distinguished from *saecularis* and religious. What does it mean? Religious means 'monastric' i.e. attached to a monastery i.e. community under a given set of rules. This is the meaning of religious till the 18th century. Opposed to it was the word secular.

Then the word 'secularization' came up during 16th century. The word was first used in the Peace of Westphalia in Germany in 1648[i].It was signed by the European nations fighting for the Thirty Year War. The drafters of the Treaty had used the word 'secularization'. What does it mean? It was a period of transition from feudalism to capitalism. In European feudalism, religion had a rigid control over every walk of human life. The ideologues of capitalism propagated the view that 'unless we defeat religion, we cannot defeat feudalism'. To defeat religion means to take away the two ways through which religion was having control over the society. These two ways were 'property' and 'ideas'. The first phase was to take away property that belonged to the Catholic Church and to give it to the public. This was known as 'secularization' .Then 'secularization' meant that not only property but also the institutions and the ideas should be taken away from the control of the Church and be given to public openness. That is the way 'secularization' came into being, i.e. the separation between State and Church.

Secularism is a peculiar 19th century word like all other 'isms' and it has a specific meaning. Around the beginning of 19th and 20th century, a man called G.J. Holiock in England started a view called 'secularism'. It was very popular promoted by some of the highest scientists of the time. What he said is this: 'All the religion belonged to the immature past of humanity. Now we are at the stage of science and positive thought.' In the beginning, it was very popular in England and America. But it collapsed in the 30's. When Hitler came up, people said 'this is what secularism has produced'. There was a reaction against Fascism and in that reaction secularism was also more or less abandoned by a large number of people.

Indian secularism is a peculiar thing. In India, we confuse secular, secularization and secularism with one another. At the time of partition, Mr. Jinnah said that Pakistan would be a religious country. In reaction to that, Jawaharlal Nehru said that India would be a secular state. There was no other word available that time as non-religious state or something. Therefore Nehru chose the word 'secular state'. I have no intention of questioning that decision. That was a period of big

crisis in which he had to take the decision very quickly and Nehru took over this word for his liberal education. But it moves away from the Western model and makes certain basic principles. One of them is that India as a state is secular but as a nation it is communal. The other principles are –state is not religious and that all religions are equal before the state and so on.

Modernity - Europe and India: Since European modernity, science and the scientific temper has been instrumental in moulding and transforming cultural beliefs and attitudes of the people. The question arises- is cultural identity getting lost or is it getting replaced with scientific temper? The liberalist ideology regarded man as 'given' and nature is regarded as another 'given' and nature is something for man to 'use' and have power to control natural forces and exploit its resources for human development. The Enlightenment Rationality had dual function to perform – to validate the development of science and to vindicate values of freedom, autonomy, sovereignty, rationality, tolerance, adulthood, public and private, property, etc. – and to be able to replace cultural values.

Max Weber characterized Cultural Modernity as the separation of substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous regions-Science, Morality and Art. Peter Berger[ii] suggested five phenomena characteristic of modernity: **a. Abstraction, b. Futurity, c. Individualism, d. Liberation and e. Secularization.**

I prefer Max Weber's definition for a start, but would amend that slightly. For behind that separation of 'substantive reason' from the religious consciousness, and also from its basic unity, is the fundamental act of the Modern- the repudiation of the Transcendent as the Unifying Principle, and its replacement by Human rationality as Sovereign and as the New Unifying principle of all experience and all understanding. The central and the fundamental thrust of the modern, it seems to me is the bold and unhesitating affirmation of the autonomy of human individual and society, as not dependent on, or answerable to, any other reality. It is that affirmation that repudiates all external authority, outside of human reason, whether of religions or of tradition. From that repudiation of external authority and the affirmation of human autonomy and sovereignty have come the other trappings of the Modern- e.g., Modern Science/Technology, Modern Urban/Industrial civilization, Modern Philosophy and Literature, and so on.

The beginnings of Modernity can be traced to that intellectual fever that spread in Europe from the middle of the 18th century. The French Revolution of 1789 was a high point in the spread of this intellectual-spiritual as well as political-economic-social ferment in western society. The process lasted from mid-18th to mid 19th century, and is still spreading geographically, encompassing all cultures, which adopt the urban technological-industrial system, with its Capitalist mode of production, Calvinist-individualist "value-system". Culture, medicine, communication system, educational system and political-economic institutions are all based on human sovereignty and autonomy. We "modern educated people" are all today, in large measure, product of the ferment and process. In India the process is pervasive, but has not yet conquered all the people since all the people have not yet been educated!

The Modern, if not identical with that process, is certainly a consequence of that intellectual-spiritual ferment which is sometimes referred to as the European Enlightenment to distinguish it from other enlightenments like the Buddhist, to whom perhaps the term originally belongs. Enlightenment Liberalism, with its twin children of modern Science/Technology and the Urban-industrial society, and its outcomes, namely, the Marxist attempt to construct the ideal society, and the Positivist-Linguistic-Discourse endeavor to capture the truth in words is based on the affirmation of the autonomy of the human individual and his /her capacity to know, shape and order the world. These four constitute the hallmarks of the modern.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) formulated an individualist definition of "enlightenment" similar to the concept of *bildung*: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity."[iii] He argued that this immaturity comes not from a lack of understanding, but from a lack of courage to think independently. Against this intellectual cowardice, Kant urged: *Sapere aude*, "Dare to be wise!" In reaction to Kant, German scholars such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) argued that human creativity, which necessarily takes unpredictable and highly diverse forms, is as important as human rationality. Moreover, Herder proposed a collective form of *bildung*. For Herder, "*Bildung* was the totality of experiences that provide a coherent identity, and sense of common destiny, to a people."[iv]

Culture - Europe and India: Culture (Latin *cultura* stemming from *colere*, meaning 'to cultivate') refers to the cultivation of human mind in terms of customs and traditions, values and virtues, language and literature, art and architecture, music and dance, and above all, an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning, the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize a community. In 1952, A.L. Kroeber and Klyde Kluchohn[v] have given 164 definitions of cultural aspects of human beings comprising of the content and the intent of culture, its universalistic character, the hierarchical status and the pluralistic features. The universalistic features are based on the distinction between humans and the animals- the former can create symbols, typologies. conventions, belief systems, reason, subjectivity and emancipation. Humans can even create symbols not understandable by means of five senses. There may be negotiating aspects of culture particularly in the context of hierarchies of cultures – central/marginal, mainstream/subaltern, literate/illiterate, west/east, and so on.

Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* has enumerated three features of culture; namely, culture as a way of life, culture consisting of norms and principles and finally the documentary aspects of culture such as oral/written aspects, museums, archaeology, symbols/meanings, etc. Sri Aurobindo[vi] in *Foundations of Indian Culture* vindicates *Sādhanā, Vidyā* and *Kalā* as three interrelated aspects of Indian culture. Indian culture is a culture of knowledge *parā vidyā* and *aparā vidyā,* of *Abhyudaya* and *Nihshreyas,* of *dialogue,* of spirituality *Ishāvāsyamidamsarvam,* of *Amritāsyaputrah, of Yoga,* of Global family, and so on.[vii] In view of different forms of life- world, one may take up Wittgensteinian approach of different 'language games' or Ryles 'logical geography of concepts'. A culture could possibly be evaluated in three ways- **Cognitive, Connotive and Normative.** The cognitive aspect consists of the world view, the apparent plurality with internal coherence and identity and reflects a continuing conversation between its different traditions and strands of thought. Connotive means acting in certain way within the culture, a way of life with meaning and significance. Normative means judging or evaluating in terms of majority and minority, mainstream and subaltern, high and low, etc. with the view of apprehending the crisis. In a nutshell we can say that culture consists of the aspects of religion/*dharma*, spirituality, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, archaeology and so on.

Part – II

Indian modernity: It started during late 19th century with the efforts of Ram Mohan Roy and others. Revival and revitalization of pre-Buddhistic and bhakti - Vedantic thought can be found in Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan, Raman Maharshi and others. There has been an unbroken continuity of culture. Besides the use of the Vedic-Upanisadic heritage for social and political purposes, there was in addition the creation of new institutions to achieve these purposes such as the Brahmo Samaj (1828) they sought to realize through the creation of new educational institutions where Vedic-Upanisadic traditions were as much a part of the teaching tradition as the new western knowledge. It was this kind of intellectual and cultural atmosphere that gave birth to, the Arya Samaj (1867) and the Prarthana Samaj (1764) including Ram Krishna Mission. These institutions created the intellectual basis for India's freedom movement with the four features; namely, **a)** *svatantrata, b) svadeshi, c) svarastra, d) svabhashya.* There was an effort to contrast Indian habits of mind different from European habits of mind. First of all Indian mind has perpetually been cosmo-centric. There is an organic unity between humanity and the rest of cosmic reality. And this is expressed in holistic values and attitudes of Indians. On the other hand, Europeans have an anthropocentric world-view. The early Greeks, particularly, Thales, Heraclitus, Democritus and others were cosmo–centric. With Sophists particularly with Protagoras the dictum came up—Man is the measure of all things. In modern times, particularly with liberal humanism, human being is regarded

as 'given' and nature is regarded as another 'given' and nature is something for you to 'use'. One of the founders of modern thinking Immanuel Kant has said "The order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle nature, we ourselves introduce. We could never find them in appearances; had not we ourselves, or the nature of our mind, originally set them there."[4] This was Kant's Copernican Revolution which quite literally shifted the direction of both epistemology and morality from the nature of reality, outside there, to the essential structure of human mind. Further, Indians have a cyclical perception. For them, the same divinity is born again and again or the concept of *Avatar*. Europeans have a linear vision like premodern, modern and postmodern etc. Indians are also idolatrous. We are idol worshippers. This approach differs radically from the semiotic religions- Judaism, Christianity and Islam who are bibliolatrous. In idol worshipping, what is so remarkable is the plurality of images taking place. Being imagistic, it has to have plurality. This is not possible in semiotic religions, which always emphasize on 'formlessness'. These are some of the ways of our thinking through which we fundamentally differ from Europeans.

Secularism in India: Like other democratic constitutions of the world, the Constitution of India also begins with a Preamble which outlines the main objectives of our Constitution in these words:

WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India in a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST *SECULAR* [viii] DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE-social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.

The Preamble is considered, as the key to the Indian Constitution. The term Secular was the most comprehensive amendment made in the constitution so far and has been described as a mini-constitution. It asserted Parliament's supremacy regarding amendment of the constitution; primacy of Directive Principles over Fundamental Rights; curtailed the powers of the High Courts and the Supreme Court with regard to issue of *writs* and judicial review; provided administrative tribunals for speedy and substantial justice; made amendments in the preamble; and made it obligatory for the President to accept the advice of the Council of Ministers. It also made certain changes in the centre-state relations of which I cannot go into the details. Let me offer an analysis of Indian secularism with reference to Indian society and culture.

Indian Religious and Cultural Realities: The initial characteristics of Indian society and culture are that it is diverse, liberal democratic and pluralistic in regulating and restructuring the features of secularism. As a matter of fact, Indian experience of democracy is in post colonial and anti-

contractarian society. The pluralistic nature of Indian society is manifested in various ethnic identities, community structure, linguistic identities, different nationalities, languages and so on. Because of these features India as a nation is communal. But as a state, India is secular. So there is an antinomy between India as a state and India as a nation .In the last 50 years of our independence, this antinomy has come out very strongly. Even the electoral process through which people's representatives are brought into power is under debate .If for 5 years these leaders are elected, do they remain responsible to the needs and aspirations of the people for even all these 5 years .In most cases they are not. This is not only a problem in India, but also it is a global problem. Let us go into the origin of this antinomy. This implies going back to people and search for their identities- the local identities.

In search of our local identities, we have to go into the details of our tradition. Indian tradition could be divided into two kinds; namely, the *Brahminical* tradition and the *Shramana* tradition. The former is the textual, the written, the intellectual tradition or the *Sastriya parampara* consisting of *the Dharma Sastras, Purusarthas, Asramas* etc. And the latter is the oral tradition, the folk tradition, the tradition of the people or the *Lokaparampara.* Fortunately we have had both the traditions as equally strong. However, it is the oral tradition, which has a stronger social basis. It consists of three pillars-family, community and the economy. Around these activities there developed idioms, symbols, proverbs, riddles and *sutras*. This was the corpus of knowledge.

In the conclusion, we can say that we have to secularize our local identities, ethnic groups, linguistic barriers and religious dogmas. For this purpose, we have to take recourse to our rich philosophic heritage to combat the ritualistic and mythological religious fanaticism. We have to develop our philosophy of tolerance by accepting other identities, other cultures and languages. This will be our contribution to the conceptual scheme of secularism and we have to revive and revitalize it.

We can attempt to evaluate culture in terms of the content and the intent of culture, the universalistic character of culture, the hierarchical status of culture and the pluralistic features of culture. Since different cultures represent different systems of meaning and visions of the good life, each realizes a limited range of human capacities and emotions and grasps only a part of the totality of human existence. Suppose I say that '**Everybody has freedom to live a good quality of Life'**. Now I split this statement into two parts- 'Everybody has freedom' and 'to live a good quality of life'. So far as the first part is concerned, there is no contestation but the second part is extremely contested. One may ask the question- is Christianity or Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism, etc. a good quality of life? Or is capitalism or socialism a good quality of life? Or is liberalism, conservatism, or nationalism a good quality of life? To answer this question, one culture needs other cultures to help it understand itself better, expand its intellectual and moral horizon, stretch its imagination, save it

from narcissism to guard it against the obvious temptation to absolutize itself, and so on. This does not mean that one cannot lead a good life within one's own culture, but rather that, other things being equal, one's way of life is likely to be richer if one also enjoys access to others, and that a culturally self-contained life is virtually impossible for most human beings live in the modern globalized and interdependent world. From a pluralist perspective, no political doctrine or ideology can represent the full truth of human life. Each of them – be it liberalism, conservatism, socialism or nationalism – is embedded in a particular culture, represents a particular vision of the good life, and is necessarily narrow and partial. Liberalism, for example, is an inspiring doctrine stressing such great values as human dignity, autonomy, liberty, critical thought and equality. However, they can be defined in several different ways, of which the liberal is only one and not always the most coherent.

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viii The Forty-Second Amendment Act, 1976, added the word Secular in the above Preamble.