

INDIAN SECULARISM AND RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

The Introduction

Is India a secular state and society, and can it be? What are the forces, secular and non-secular, currently operating in the Indian polity? Can our Constitution and governments live up to the large secular claim made by our national leadership! Do religion and para-religion infiltrate into neighbouring areas of labour, education and social services corrosively?

A geo-secular glance reveals that Pakistan is openly Islamic in politics while Bangladesh is secular by constitutional assertion. People's China and the Soviet Union possess a flavour of anti-godism. Britain has an established religion coexisting with a democratic set-up and America has built a wall of separation between God and Caesar. India that is Bharat is a curious hybrid secular in text but sacerdotal in attire, with a leaning wall of State-Church separation and suffering from a constitutional solicitude for religious minorities. The paradox of liberal religious thought and communal belligerency, of constitutional commitment to a social revolution and the politics of religion which even revolutionary parties play, and the phenomenon of two 'total' religions that regulate worldly and other-worldly affairs-can this vast Indian mosaic fulfil a secular promise or should we so condition the genetic code of the nation as to ensure an Indian humanity not blotted by deities and divided by Gods but spurred on by science and socialism and informed by cosmic spirituality?

The Aim

What do we mean by a secular state and a secular society in the Indian context? The former implies a national policy and the latter a social philosophy. The Church-state controversy of the West is absent here and so the role of the state vis-à-vis the majority and minority religions is more pertinent for us.

Secularism is not an end in itself, nor another 'religion' but a specific defensive plus-offensive mechanism at the service of India's millions in their march towards the great future which modern science, socio-economic justice and ancient super-rational thought promise.

Pragmatic thinkers take a secular state to mean one where the demarcation of jurisdictions between political authority and religious hold is well laid out and religion excluded from matters temporal and confined to the limited, may be deeper, sphere of private conscience, belief and practice in relation to the Supreme Being. The classic exposition of this dichotomy is contained in the reproof of the pharisees by Jesus: “ Render unto Caesar what is due to him and unto God what is His. “ A secular view of life holds that morality is based on the well-being of mankind in the present life to the exclusion of considerations drawn from belief in God and the other world and accepts a scientific explanation of the cosmic working in contrast to the crudely religious.

The pressure of the secular process for the Indian people arises from the unhappy facts of communal history, religious demography, unfortunate ‘*Iswar versus Allah*’ allergy caused by agent provocateurs read in the light of the urgent need to end mass poverty and to build a just social order.

A View.

A study of our historical and cultural heritage, contemporary conditions and political leadership helps identify the secular and non-secular forces at work and to prepare a project report for national secularisation. The broad Indian spectrum, from the Marxian war on all religions to the Gandhian veneration for all faiths, is represented by outstanding men like M.N. Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr Radhakrishnan, Rabindranath Tagore, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Mahatma Gandhi, Roy sponsored the materialist view of life. Dr. Radhakrishnan, speaking as president, stated that secularism did not mean did not mean irreligion, and implied respect for all faith, the state itself not identifying with any, H.V. Kamath, Intervening in the Constituent Assembly debates, adopted similar language, Nehru, the humanist and agnostic, was nearer Marx than the Mahatma, He wrote: “ The spectacle of what is called religion---- in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror, and I have repeatedly condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it. Almost always it seems to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation, and the preservation of vested interests. “If the distemper of religion annoyed him, its finer spirit fascinated him- the value of the “Peace which brings satisfaction not

only to our physical and material needs but also those inner imaginative urges and adventurous stirrings that have distinguished man.....in the realms of thought and action". The spirit of science and 'reverence for all that lies beyond, as well as, a sense of mysteries of unknown depth' blended in him. But he knew that 'the real struggle today in India is not between Hindu culture and Muslim culture, but between these two and the conquering scientific culture of modern civilisation.'

That noble humanist, Rabindranath Tagore, castigated the irreligion of religiosity and advocated the deliverance of God from religion to bring Him back to man. His semi-secular gospel, the Religion of Man, is unfriendly to other-worldly moonshine and is very much concerned with this world of "the poorest, the lowliest and the lost". "Leave this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee! He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!. Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense!. Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow" run the divine verses in the Gitanjali which represent the quintessence of Indian spirituality.

Gandhiji was a man of God with a secular mission, a political leader with a religious appeal. Inevitably, he intrigued Nehru and angered Roy but roused the slumbering masses steeped in India's backward villages,. His swadeshi cult was as mediaeval as his anti-imperialist drive was modern. He lifted religion to great heights. "To me God is Truth and Love" he said, "God is ethics and morality, God is fearlessness....." "To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God dare appear is work and promise of good as wages." He expressed himself strongly thus: 'I may as well place before the dog over there the message of God as before those hungry millions who have no lustre in their eyes and whose only God is their bread.... It is good enough to talk of God while we are sitting here after a nice breakfast looking forward for a nicer luncheon. To the millions who have to go without two meals a day.....God can only appear as bread and butter". Our multi-religious society found Gandhiji pleading for mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions; for, to him "the soul of the religious in one, but it is enmeshed in a multitude of forms". Again, he struck a secular note: "Hindusthan

belongs to all these who are born and bred here.....Free India will be Hindu-raj. It will Indian-rajwithout distinction of religion.....Religion is a personal matter which should have no place in politice.” State aid to religion in his view: “A society or a group,which depends partly or wholly oin Sttate aid for the existence of its religion, does not deserev, or bettter still, does not have any religion worth the name.” He was opposed to denominational education out of public funds. Gandhiji also said that” land and all property is his who will work it”. However, he had many anti-secular strands in his thinking. Was it not Himalayan blunder for him to have believed the Bihar earthquake to be God’s punishment for the sin of untouchability. He did not mince words: “There is no such thing for me..... as leaving polties for religion. For me, even, the tiniest activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion.” His dear concept of Ram Rajya itself had a non secular savour and his satyagraha and fasting unto death, prompted by his inner voice,wrer spiritual means for achieving temporal ends. In the final analysis, he was more a half naked fakir directing the moral fury of the masses against a foreign power. For him polties was the handmaid of religion even as for Jinnah religion was the hand-maid of politics. Never-theless, who will not be stirred by the tragic saga of that frail figure walking alone through streets and villages conulsing with communal frenzy and talking to his countryaman, in that still small voice, about the brotherhood of man and the oneness of Ram and Rahim, and offeringthe supreme sacrifice when the assassin’s bullet tor’through his bosom! Gandhi was Indai, the sacred –secular split personality and mysterious synthesis.

The Muslim orthodox had kept away from secular western education till Sir Syed AHMED Khan the inspire of the Aligarh Movement, told his co-religionists to give up their fads and seek modern education. He taught tem the need to keep politics and religion apart. Do you inhabit the same land? Remember that words Hindu and Mohammedan are only meant for religious distinction, even the Christians who reside in the country, are all in this particular respect belonging to one and the same nation. “ The impact of Sir Syed and others of his ilk was not unmixed secular blessing; for, they fomented an Islamic uppsurage by creating ‘ conscious’ middle class through English education. Only Moulana Azad asserted the

opposite: “ Islam does not commend narrow mindedness and racial and religious prejudice. It teaches us to respect every man who is good, whatever be his religion, to let our selves be drawn towards merits and virtues, whatever the religion or the race of the person who possess them.....”

The Hindu reformes like Ram Mohan Roay and Keshub Chandra Sen. and movements, like the Brahma Samaj, the puissant currents of thought released by neo-vedantist Sri Ramkrishna and divine revolutionary Sri Aurobindo, do, and the cyclonic evangelism of the patriot-monk Vivekananda, did much to rid Hindu orthodoxy of its anti-secular elements, and acted as a climatiser for the symbiosis of science and spirituality.

Swami Vivekananda's writing best illustrate the point He wrote:”.....Experience is the only source of knowledge! The same methods investigation which we apply to the sciences and to exterior knowledge should be applied to religion”. If a religion is destroyed by such investigation it was nothing but a useless and unworthy superstition; the sooner it disappeared the better.” “Our religion is in the kitchen, Our God is in cooking pot and our religion:’don’t touch me, I am holy,’ ‘He even declared : “I am a socialist” To Aurobindo’s philosophy of divine life was rational and super-rational, For him, apparent Nature is secret God and in the march of cosmic creation to God – realisation man must evolve into super the language of science although in his early years his patriotic diction sounded religious. Nationalism is not a mere political programme. Nationalism is a religion that has come from God!

The Pre-British Past

Indian cultural memory goes back to the Indus Valley civilization, a predominantly secular one in which the religious element, though present, did not dominate the scene. The Aryan civilization, however, drew sustenance from and sought to circumscribe human actions and aspirations within religion and to inflict on society brahmanical supremacy. Just listen to Manu: The world is under the power of God. God is under the power of Mantras. The Mantras are under the power of Brahmins.” Women were unfree and social stratification had religious sanction.

Then came the Buddha with his great ideals of social equality and universal love producing a ferment on the Indian social scene. He preached: "Go unto all the lands and say that all men are equal." Man, not any God, is the arbiter of his own destiny." The Asoka edict, the high water mark of religious tolerance, is refreshingly humane. But even but even when this revolutionary tide of Buddhism swept over the whole of Asia came the counter-attack from the Brahmins during the Gupta Age-not so golden as is imagined-because during this period the Brahminical social order was re-established and the caste system reappeared. In later days, Buddhist monks were massacred under brahminical inspiration evidencing the ancient bond between human blood and religious bigotry! Centuries sped by; invasions came and a new and love arrived India in the name of Islam, although occasionally wearing a gory mein. The oppressed and lowly arrived were fascinated by the equality offered Indiaa in the name of Islam, although occasionally wearing a gory mein. The oppressed and the lowly were fascinated by the equality offered by the Muslim culture and the lowest in the Hindu rungs of society embraced this egalitarian religion. Dr.Kareem, a young but authentic historian, refutes the theory of forced conversions by Muslim power and attributes the process to caste oppressor. He cites Dr. Ramgopal and writes : "Statistics must be made to speak about this vital point. If power was abused and forced conversions made,then in U.P., the capital of Muslim Rule for more than 600 years, the percentage of Muslims there would not be low as 11. Mysore that witnessed a veritable storm has still only 5 per cent of Muslims. At the same time in places which did not come under Muslim rule, the percentage of Muslim population remains higher. This paradox is not man-made. It is rather the inevitable outcome of our age-old caste system and of rules that imposed on the low-born Hindu, an unbearable burden which he could shake off by becoming a Muslim. "The conversion of a Hindu untouchable threw up the glaring difference between his conditions as a Hindu and as a Muslim. As a Muslim he used it by right and if any Hindu questioned that right a crowd of the Prophet's followers would accompany him to enforce it. It was the force of simple logic which was sending into the pale of Islam thousands of Hindns".

A blending of Hindu Muslim ideologies took shape in several spheres and there came great seers like Kabir, Nanak and Tulsidas whose vision embraced and harmonized the diverse religions. Kabir reasoned with religion, in moving poetry . “if god be within mosque, then to whom does this world belong? If Rama be within the image then who is there to know what happens without?” nanak also proclaimed his creed of culture synthesis: “There is no Hindu or musclemen but man”. Religion consisted not in mere words. He who looketh all man as equal is religious. Religion consistent not is wandering to tombs or places of cremation, nor in bathing in places of pilgrimage.”

The British Position

The early days of British rule and the East India Company had a wholesome secularising edge, what with the abolition of Sati and caste disabilities and a non-religious educational policy. A bold secular order was passed then by a Governor, Bentinck, forbidding the use of caste marks and ear-rings by native soldiers in uniform! Our present governors, a century and a half later, dare not touch a totem!

The homogenization of ill religious denominations into nation was inhibited by the British strategy of separate electorates ushered in by the Moriley-Minto Reforms which Gandhi had later declared to be “our undoing”. The Moutagu Chelmsford Report itself has condemned this vice but pleaded for it as a necessary evil. This Report says: “We conclude unhesitatingly that the history of any self-government among the nation who developed it, and spread it through the world, is decisively against the State of any divided allegiance; against the State’s arranging its members in any way which encourages them to think of themselves primarily as citizens of any smaller unit than it self ...There is another important point.. A minority which is given special representation owing to its weak and backward state is positively encouraged to settle down into a feeling of satisfied security: it is under no inducement to educate and qualify itself to make good the ground which it has lost compared with the stronger majority. On the other hand, the latter will be tempted to feel that they have done all they need do for their weaker fellow-countrymen and that they are free to use their power for their own purposes. The give and-take which is the essence of political life is lacking.....The communal

system stereotyped existing relation.' Division by creeds and classes means the creation of political camps organised against each other, and teaches men to think as partisans and not as citizens....."Is it not national perversity that free India often practices *de facto* communal electorates, the parties stooping to conquer by choosing to set up candidates with an eye on the caste composition of the electorate? Adult franchise, far from being a great secular impetus, has been misused to give a long lease for caste politics, Constituencies have become a vast communal complex with block-voting caste-and religion-wise.

Reservation of posts in public services on a communal or caste basis-not backward by economic or social yardsticks but by the good luck of birth- was British way of creating a vested interest in fragmenting India at the middle class level. Weight age to backward people necessary but hooking it on to caste and religion only is wrong, Political parties with caste-backing had British blessings.

Another secular misfortune derives from the separation of communities through their personal laws. Divinely ordained law represents the static past and it drags and divides a society. Which desires a cohesive, dynamic future? The secularisation of law is thus an important aspect of a modern society.

Without going into the history of the British and pre-British periods, we may trace the present situation to Warren Hastings whose plan- probably a welcome step for the Hindus of those days -was to apply Hindu law to Hindus and Muslim law to Muslims in matters of inheritance, marriage and other religious institutions." The consequence was a state of arrested progress in which were heard voices unless they came frame the tomb" . So much so, a Common Civil Code is relegated to the Directive Principles of State Policy (Article44) and largely remains frozen ambition If only the British were sincere in secularizing the family law it could have been done even as Portugal did, without fuss, in their erstwhile province of Goa. What other Islamic nations, including Pakistan, have done to modernise and codify Muslim law has not been attempted in India.

The most alarming virus inducing communal malignancy in the national system is cartelism. The British regime benefited by this cancer and did nothing to abolish unsociability or force temple entry or transform society into casteless polity.

Encouragement of high caste aristocracy like the princelings, Zamindars and hereditary Matathipathis was a policy. The national movement frowned on these non-secular factors but the promise has largely proved illusory. Castes and denominations, instead of showing signs of vanishing, are celling up their strength, organizing for electoral bargaining and show-downs. And de facto castes exist among Christians and to a lesser extent among Muslims and Jews. There are a score of non-inter-marrying Harijan castes, a hundred such non-brahmin castes and several among brahmins themselves- even among Muslims and Christians. In short, India was and may be still is a social jungle of communities, castes and sects.

The birth of Independent India

A Non -Secular Start.

The birth of India's Freedom was heralded by an act of superstition, the auspicious day for beginning the rituals being chosen, on the advice of Delhi astrologers, a day before the appointed day'. 15 th August 1947. The presentation of the new colures of the Madras Regimental Centre took place at a colourful ceremony in the august presence of the President of India and lo! In that military function quite a few priest sanctified the colors by sacred sprinklings and holy invocations! Every religion is getting its quota from the All India Radio and State dignitaries sublimate their activities in religions.

Constitutional Provisions and Current Realities

The Constituent Assembly declined to declare India secular although the stamp of secularism is impressed on the Republic by the various Articles of the Constitution which mandate the State to observe equality regardless of caste and religion, to respect freedom of faith including practice and propagation of religion and to guarantee to minorities the right' to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. The practice and propagation of religion and the founding and running of religious and charitable institutions are guaranteed rights but they are subject ot public order, morality and health.' This form of 'police power' to interfere with religious practices is probably permitted even in America but is essential in our land of religious pluralism. Another insufficiently used

constitutional power [Article 25 (2) (b)] provides for measures of 'social welfare and reform' in all religions.

In another sense, our Constitution has overtones of anti-secularism. Article 48 suggests prohibition on cow slaughter and, as interpreted by highest court, the cow-not the bull or the buffalo though- enjoys a near-fundamental right to life even if humans, In consequence, lose the meat the nourishes life! Article 30(1) ensures the right of religious groups to run even technical colleges with State aid but enjoying 'untouchable' administrative autonomy. What nexus religion has with engineering, medicine or other secular educationn social scientists cannot easily guses but that is the law of the Constitution. This is a sensitive issue where statesmanship must secure secularity.

An other anti-secular danger lurks in Articles 15(4) and 16(4) which enable reservation of posts and special provision for the advancement of backward classes – an impeccable instrument for democratic leveling up- But the mischief lies in political governments, suffering from communal myopia, which conveniently confuse between class and caste. The Supreme Court has illumined the concept of 'backward class'. It covers a multitude of environmental, occupational and inherited misfortunes Mainly it is economic, partly it is caste-or-community based. The present approach is neither secular nor socialist and needs a re-orientation, even if constitutional clarification is called for. Otherwise, the battle for secularism may be lost in court before it begins in the colleges and public offices.

Rural India still preserves the caste vocational relationship. Barbers, butchers, carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, priests, temple servants, even coconut climbers go, by caste. Lower jobs are traditionally meant for 'inferior' castes. We must evolve a man power development and utilisation policy and programmes which will break the existing links between castes and vocations. A secular value-system will thus be evolved. Imagine the chemical change if leading temples appoint Harijan purohits!

Consciousness of caste can be abolished only by confusion of blood which inter-communal marriages may produce provided *no conversion* of either spouse takes place. communal harmony is so precious and communal disturbances so

disastrous that a secular vigilance commission- and not the policeman only- should undertake special responsibility for promotion of amity and prevention of flare-ups. The promise of India, its student youth, must be initiated into secular culture avoiding the opium of religiosity and the heroin hippie cult. But the means new history-writing; new text-books of radical thought new scientific temper, anti communal academic atmosphere, reverence for the truth and eschewal of the dross in all religions and the faith in man as the master of his destiny, not the plaything of the god .the battle here is between mediaeval India and modern education.

Article 28 of the constitution prohibits religious instructions in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds; all these highlight the secular character of education and circumvention of this under any pretext, even by so-called minorities, should be put down by the state.

If only a sober scheme were adopted to secularise our education not by denigrating religion but by injecting a scientific outlook exalting humanism as values of life, if only the Indian people modernized their feudal ethos , if only in public life and public elections a national norm of non-religious behavior were introduced , we might have gone a long way towards the sprit of the Vedas and the secularism of the modern age.

A viable philosophy

The generation of youth, the sector of scientists and the thinking salt of the earth today turn away from spectacular technological achievement to search within for the wave of awareness which awakens, to listen to that still small voice which is real and to probe the layers of our soul which illumine. The hopeful phenomenon of a new human faith and light cuts through east and west, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and even materialism homogenize mankind into an energized oneness. For it rejects the irrationality of religion and the irreligiousness of reason. This beacon light which rouses the inner being of man will be powerful secular force tomorrow. Let me tilt the angle a little in vision the issue. The religion of man, on which, with the enlargement of knowledge and wisdom, the materialist and the occultist will

eventfully agree, is no narrow, conventional religion at all but the super science of spirit and matter. Ritual, dogma, bigotry and other worldly shibboleths are based essentially on the dread of disease and death and fed by small gods, tribal theologies, feudal faiths and proselytising passions. There science and spirituality, forging a more comprehensive law of evolution meet on the transcended plane, and 'each sucked into each, on the new stream rolls, whatever rocks obstruct'. Such a supra-secular philosophy will dethrone ritualist religions through 'astral' knowledge, undo communalism through universalism and kill fear of death by a lucent look at death as not an end of existence but as the beginning of a fresh chapter. True secularism is not truce among lore-laden religions or fellowship among credulous creeds. Indeed, it is termination of the tyranny of the human mind from materialist half-knowledge and belief-bound other-worldism. Such an enlightened secularism must be founded on the free fearless stream of thought that over flows both complacent reason and distorted religion as I have already under scored.. Secularism is not a clever art to bury morbid communal sentiment in the name of nationalism but the wash-it-white attitude with the lacerative science which relies only on truth and on the discovery of the life-death-life continuum which is the cosmic process. Moral and material well-being of man based on the firm embrace of secular spirituality is the message of modern research. Remember, organised religion and entrenched sects have a vested interest in credal other-worldliness and will fight spiritualism as they do science secularism. True humanism comes when spirituality is divorced from religiosity. An unshakable secular philosophy will emerge only when photospheres who used to ask 'what is matter' and replied jokingly 'never mind' and psychologists who used to enquire what is mind' and answered 'not matter' unite to formulate a scientific synthesis of man incarnate and discarnate. In my humble view, the secular resolution of Reason versus Religion is the revolutionary answer to the challenge of the human spirit which restlessly rejects as imperfect both religion and materialism. Let us intrepidly update our orthodox secular concepts.

A new world view as it evolves by the turn of the century may not face the crude and crueler of the century may not face the crude and cruel dilemma of the secular versus the sacred or bleed man at the altar of the Gods. The guiding light of a

super-science which sees a new unity in nature and supernatural and a complementary projection of the astral into the physical universe, will do away with religion in its gross ritualism, bloodshot bigotry and communal complexes and usher in an enlightened era where caste, creed, materialism and religion will lose their grim hostility or blinkered identity, being subsumed by what I may call the secular-spiritual vision. That is the call of the Vedas which affirmed the Matter and Spirit; that is the re-discovery of the cosmic law and order by science reaching out to the stars and reaching down to the recesses of the self. We are universal, if we are Indian. To be less, is to betray the Old and the New. M.N. Roy was at once a mystic and a rationalist. Such a constructive soul, had he been with us today, would have inhaled the spirit of science and society with a romantic response to the quest of our day, free from time-tired inhibitions secular and sacred. A great rationalist realises the limitations of reason; a true mystic sees the infinite in every man. Both, together, inaugurate the age of enlightened.

To sum up, let us not surrender to the unscientific in reason and religion or give up to passion and instincts, vulgar like communalism, absolute like atheism and cheap like God baiting but become aware of the new dimensions of secularism through the cultivation of the cosmic mind, thereby we would have redeemed in some measure our tryst with the spirit of March 21st and paid homage to a radical humanist. Thereby we would have responded to the Vedic mandate: lead us from darkness to light.

I will not end on this starry note since we are in hard fact on Indian country. Realism suggests we are in many ways anti-secular as a people; truth tells us that the state, far from being non-religious, is polygamous with many religions, that crypto-constitutional religionsism runs through our State Law. The time has come for us to be more rational and scientific in social temper and far more secular. We should now outlive the colonial sin of communal divisiveness and fanatical mediocrity and be a free people worthy of our own great past and the glory of the age in which we live. I cannot foretell, 'Secularise or perish is the only lesson we have to learn, but refuse to do-at our perils.'

The hortative words of M.N.Roy will be opposite here:

“Secularism is not a political institution; it is a cultural atmosphere, which cannot be created by the proclamation of individuals, however highly placed and intensely sincere...In India secularism must have a cultural connotation.....What is necessary is not facile profession of secularism, but a movement for the popularisation of modern cultural values. The process of secularization cannot be promoted by legislation of executive orders.”

Indeed, M.N.Roy was the apostle of a New Humanism anchored on goodness and morality and developed by ceaseless spiritual and intellectual effort to realise something, which is super personal. He was critical of negative, barren secularism and advocated a democratic and ethical society not enslaved by theocratic or totalitarian ideas. In the issue of May8, 1949 of the Radical Humanist, he wrote:

“The danger implicit in the concept of the secular state has often been pointed out by arguing that such a state is not committed to any system of metaphysics or a scheme of moral values. Secularism is generally identified by the critics of the ideal with materialism and the absence or negation of morality.”

“It may therefore be remembered that secular state need not necessarily be ant-religious. It might on the contrary encourage and use religion as an instrument for realizing its objectives. Those arrayed against secularism have therefore the responsibility of clarifying what they mean by religion. The manner in which religion has been used in the country as a political weapon in the past simply indicates that such use may not be inconsistent with a secular state. It is only when the term signifies the higher ethical values that a secular state may probably come into clash with it. It is there that it's assuming a totalitarian character, seeking to integrate life in all its aspects on the basis of power, may prove to be incalculably harmful to good life or to decent and moral behavior.

“One need not however concede the argument that a secular state is necessarily an immoral state or is bound to show an utter disregard for all moral considerations. Such a position implies the belief that the moral norms can be maintained only on the basis of a supernatural or transcendental authority, unless it means a relapse into

relativism. The possibility of moral values being accepted and respected on secular grounds, without invoking the aid of a hypothesis regarding the divine, has been opened up as a consequence of our increased knowledge of man.”

“It is becoming increasingly clear that man’s humanity is essentially a function of his own nature and those questions of good and evil can be decided only on the basis of the decisions regarding the questions of good. The search for truth, the will to know is the basic urge in the human being as a biological entity. A secular state therefore can be a moral state provided it is composed of free, rational and therefore moral men, to create whom is essentially the function of education. But it may be argued that there is no reason to believe that it must be so. And it is here that the essential difficulty about a secular state arises. Unless therefore it is realised that the ideal of building up a secular state involves a tremendous responsibility on the part of those seeking to do so and unless the realisation is further accompanied by actual efforts in the direction of discharging that responsibility, a secular state may easily become the instrument of social and cultural degeneration.

The nature of the responsibility can be understood if the concept is looked at from a different angle.”

“A secular state, if it is not degenerate into a vulgar scramble for power cannot commit itself to ideas and ideals which lay claim to absolute truth and demand implicit obedience in the same manner as religion. If the claims of religion are dogmatic and involve acceptance through blind faith, equally so are perhaps the claims of national or proletarian collectivism. A state committed to these may be secular but it would be devoid of any progressive significance. As a matter of fact, its secularism may itself be open to question by those who regard an outlook based on blind faith as the essence of religion. It may be argued that all such a state achieves is the replacement of one religion by another and perhaps a worse one. The fear that a secular state would simply be a battlefield of various conflicting ideologies does not appear to be warranted if it is borne in mind that authority in such a state

can derive its sanction only from the ruled and therefore ought to be founded on what can be termed as their essential, distinguishing and universal feature. Such a state cannot be free from ethical considerations nor can it be devoted to the worship of geography, Cosmopolitanism would be an essential accompanying feature of secularism.

The secular state has little in it to be proud of, unless it is also a democratic state founded on reason.”.

The texture of secularism is democratic humanism; its temper is ethics and goodness, its enemy is authoritarianism, religious, political or other, its grammar is man’s scientific perception of Reality.

The foremost architect and the first servant of Free India, Nehru, was a secularist in every sense while the lone, frail, one-man resistance movement against communal carnage, Gandhiji transformed later as Father of the Nation, was also in life and death a religiously secular soul, in a different sense though. The founding father *par excellence* of our Constitution and Chairman of the Drafting Committee was an aggressive secularist. The country itself, even during the critical year when the Constitution was being framed, was a bleeding victim of religious killings on a tremendous scale. And yet a clause describing our Republic as secular failed to be enacted and a divided society dies hard even after partition! All these burning realities highlight the national urgency for an activist policy to struggle successfully against any remnants of bigotry and communalism still lingering in the land.

I may conclude on a pessimistic note, at least for the reason that it is realistic. No dynamic programme of secularization can succeed unless informed political action can be organized. And in a democracy with a touch of kilkenny cat politics, this postulates broad secular commitment among the major parties. The tempo has been too slow and the peril to progress real. An ambitious project is overdue. The countdown must begin now and the blast-off must follow if we mean business in our socialist or even democratic professions. But do we mean business? I hope we do and, if we do, a master strategy for secularisation of State and society must be actively fashioned and implemented. To be dramatic is to be deceptive, but to stanate is to sink.