
Secularism- A Phoenix which never rose from its Ashes

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Abstract:

Through this paper an attempt has been made to offer a better explanation to the most misunderstood word-Secularism and how it was intended initially to be used for breaking the fetters of fear, superstitions and irrationality. Secularism has been re-glanced and re-analysed with a fresh vision to study the reasons of its birth and evolution in west, its journey to Asia in general and India in specific. Role of secularism in shaping Indian politics and policies is delved deeply along with the sea changes which occurred in the very concept of secularism in India. Some of the questions scrutinised in this research work aims to analyse the need of, if any and requirement of secularism in India, the purpose and whether secularism has served for betterment and upliftment of Indian society. The under evaluation of minority community as backward class and their appeasement for the sake of vote bank politics along with the obliging exercise by those who get into the mitochondrial power house in state assembly or country's top deciding chamber-parliament, or minority community leaders drawing their most cherished pound of flesh in lieu of their community's votes; strategies to draw road map for strengthening the majority-minority bond for the harmony and prosperity of the nation, various positive and negative impacts of secularism on the Indian society and politics are also discussed to analyse whether the experiments with secularism were successful or not.

Key words: Secularism; minorityism; Natural Acceptance; Tolerance; Social Imaginary; Appeasement.

Content:

Bare secularism:

For a commoner Secularism means keeping the god, religion, religious faith away from the governance, administration, policy making and state related decision. To be more precise, divorcing all that is god or godly from the public, administrative and social spheres. It also strongly inhibited the governance from stepping in the sphere of religious functioning and its internal administration, the affairs of religion, its management, and the social services rendered by them must not be interfered by state government rather they should be left alone. Being secular means not connected with religious or spiritual matters rather divorced; "in our *secular* societies, you can engage fully in politics without ever encountering God".¹ Role of the State is neither to bring salvation nor to hinder it, role of religion

is neither to manage secular affairs nor to hamper social development and improvement, though it is also true that religions may help to social development and improvement. Secularism pleads that *religion should not be mingled with the ordinary social and political activities of a country*². The word secular is derived from a Latin word *saeculum* which means a fixed period of time, roughly one hundred years or so, dividing the god from temporal, *saeculum* is concerned to this life, this world and this time and with the very existence of one at the bare level without reference to the divine. This term was sculpted by George Jacob Holyoake a leader of English Secularist and Free Thought Movement in 1846 to draw a border line between a religion and social life, without criticising or condemning the religious belief and to describe 'a form of opinion which concerns itself only

with the questions, issues which can be tested by the experience of this life³. He defines secularism as: 'a code of duty pertaining to this life, founded on this considerations purely human, intended mainly for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate, unreliable or unbelievable.'⁴ Some opines that secularism is a movement towards modernisation and away from traditional religious values, this type of secularism, on a social and philosophical level has often occurred while maintaining an official state church or other state supported religion. Secularism according to its baptiser is *for those who defy religion*. They are often branded as *free thinking schematics* or are *political reformist*; often accused to the extreme as an *anarchist* and *atheist* who believe in infidels⁵. Charles Taylor- a prominent name in literary world, whose words are canonical, broadly diagnoses secularism as negative and positive secularism. The negative secularism opposes faith and on the contrary, later is engaged with the faith. The positive secularism is further classified by Taylor as –in sectarian mode (concerned with one particular sect)/or in non-sectarian mode. The non-sectarian positive secularism may include atheistic secular approach.

Medieval Church: A weapon of Oppression

During the medieval ages, the Church exercised jurisdiction over sin, and penalized a religious offenses like breaches of ecclesiastical regulations and discipline, heresy, sorcery, witchcraft, sacrilege and sexual sins. In sharp contrast to present, during that Dark Age, marriage was strictly considered a sacrament, thus making it quite obvious for the church to exercise control over matrimonial cases and matters like legitimacy of children, baptisms, wills bequeathing personal property, and distribution of the property of estates. To establish and exercise its full control over the people and to widen its jurisdiction, Church formed courts far more powerful and superior to civil courts in terms of procedure, differentiation of penalties according to modus operandi and

circumstances. Intensity of church on the psyche and administration of monarchies can be seen through an evident fact that whole Europe imitated organizational and procedural set up of ecclesiastical hierarchy, leading to the darker and grimmer dungeons of inhumanity and ferocious campaigns by the church leaders who in the name of God were serving the superstitions, irrationality and unscientific temperament to strike fear in minds of innocent by devising innumerable ways to curb the rebels or voices of the dissent under the cloak provided by church. The Church could foresee the rich probability of its grip getting loose if masses developed its grey matter and become vocal; to nip such voices in the bud, blood laced inquisition was introduced. Copernicus had to face wrath of the Church; Darwin's theory of evolution also didn't go well with the people in white robes. Pope Innocent III had stated; "anyone who attempts to construe a personal view of God which clashes with Church dogma must be burned without pity"⁶. But stronger the suppressor, more stronger is the spirit of a rebel; Martin Luther by aiming an arrow at church door had fathered the Protestantism and impregnated masses with free spirit and gifted the fear stricken frozen hearts with fire of passion for knowledge to come out of the darkness of heart and soul with a sole purpose of breaking down the fetters and chains of Church which have been binding them in horror for centuries; this multiplied with crucial movement called Radical Enlightenment Movement of 18th century, played a vital role in preparing a germinating environment for a cry for being secular and exercising secularism. Secularism finds its birthplace in a womb of Radical Enlightenment Movement as it rejected the concept of divine revelation or existence of supernatural powers, vociferously propagating scepticism and rationalism.

Church viz a vis Secularism;

Voltaire, one of the founding fathers of the secularism was quite hopeful about the role of rationalism to build a tolerant society. Some critiques are of opinion that Christianity cradled secularism: ‘Secularism is Christian ethics shorn of its doctrine. Its ongoing commitment to do good, understood in traditional Christian terms, without a concern for the technicalities of teaching of the earth’.⁷ The popular perception is that a religious person is an intolerant social animal. On studying is in the perspective of one of the biggest faith of the world-Christianity; we may find that in Europe, the so called secularist forces have gone too far off to return back to those realms of Christ figure who is neither dominating nor violent rather he commands his disciples to do unto others as they wish the others to do unto them.

Jacques Derrida, a well acclaimed French philosopher opines that: *The concept of tolerance, stricto sensu, belongs first of all to a sort of christian domesticity. It is literally, I mean behind this name, a secret christian community. It was printed, emitted, transmitted and circulated in the name of Christian faith*⁸. Charles Taylor identifies three different contexts of European secularism. In the *political context*, secularism is political arrangements that make the state neutral to religious faith. The credibility of government is not at mercy of any religion, nor do they favour any one religion or community. In the *sociological terms*, secularism is steep decline of religious belief or its practice. In the *cultural context*, there is a change in conditions of belief, *a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace*.⁹

Some despises religion and accuses it of jeopardising thought process of individuals and community with an aim to hamper functioning of state administration. An eminent contemporary scholar Professor Richard Dawkins regrets that *religion is a readymade system which grips our*

mind tightly, disabling our thinking abilities. It devalues this life. He accuses religion of under evaluating or rather devaluing and under evaluating this life¹⁰. Polly Toynbee, an eminent columnist of The Guardian also aimed his arrows and slings at one of the most dominating religion of Europe- Christianity as a *moribund religion*. He makes some serious observations that “those who believe theirs is the only way, truth and light will kill to create their heavens on earth if they get a chance”¹¹. General view is that the propagators of Islam and Christianity have transformed their religions to a violent campaign for hegemonizing people, by enticing innocents in the name of *another world* or life after death; reality of this existence is demolished as requirements of this life are not their concern. From here a secularist picks the thread and places his hopes in humanity thus performing *here and now*. God is accused to dehumanise humanity, and “godlessness is a humanising force”¹². Landon Schnabel makes crucial observation on the gender politics, that, as men went out for bread earning they were more exposed to the outside world; on the contrary, women were given sole responsibility of giving birth and raising offspring along with running home affairs. Thus, its impact was that “secularisation made men less religious because they were more exposed to new ideas that undermined religious beliefs.”¹³

Secularism –The mighty phoenix’s voyage to Asia:

Sixteenth century saw scientific discoveries, invention of press. England was at its strongest might. Queen Victoria gave the go ahead to voyagers to discover the world. East India company touched the shores of India to change their and India’s fortunes forever. They brought with them science, technology and White man’s burden to save humanity. By the end of sixteenth century, the same east India Company brought Catholic Christianity and missionaries to India, Japan, and China. In nineteenth century, Catholic and Protestant missionaries planted faith in

colonies of imperialist Europe; their religious contribution in the colonies was sort of a contemporary corporate social responsibility. It was difficult and practically impossible for colonist and imperialist British power to do business or rule on diverse land like Asia and India. Under political pressures, India served as a laboratory for various philosophical, strategic and political experiments. Secularism was also one of such experiments, which, once after its introduction changed the history, geography, ideology and destiny of India. Most of Indian philosophers, thinkers and political leaders of pre-independence era doubted if the word renaissance held any ground in India. Shri Aurobindo, a well known sage and philosopher of India doubted if renaissance “at all applies, since India has always been awake and stood in no need of reawakening.”¹⁴ Thus suggesting, Indians were the race of right understanding and inner peace as they possessed the *master key-spirituality*, *And they never lost hold of the insight. India saw that the physical does not get its full sense until it stands in right relation to the supra-physical*¹⁵.

The birth, nurture and growth of secularism took place in west. Western society dominated the shaping of secularism most of the time, it can be said that “early and middle history of secularism is almost entirely dominated by western societies. However, same cannot be said about the later history”. “The later history of secularism is more non-western than western.”¹⁶ Secularism though heard in vociferous and ferocious tones today is practically in tatters; to instance it: Egypt has declared itself as a Muslim state long time back. Sudan announced itself as an Islamic state in 1989. The countries like Algeria, Nigeria, Turkey and Afghanistan are happy to stay far off from the shores of secularism. Orthodoxy of Israel in the name of faith speaks a lot about the failed attempts of secularism to re-rise again. If we observe the state of secularism in Indian sub-continent, Singhalese led Buddhist nationalist in Sri Lanka,

and Sikh nationalist’s demands for a Sikh nation, in itself clears the clouds of sky to bring forth the clearer picture.

The south Asian countries do not at all demarcate or delimit the boundaries of personal and public life; politics and religion. In fact, politics necessitated religion and religion necessitated the politics; both impregnated social and religious and personal life. All modern East and Southeast Asian governments are secular in political context of Taylor. Asia has cradled many faiths and has witnessed the birth and growth of many prominent religions. Madsen has rightly remarked that “Asia is religiously dynamic”¹⁷. In Asia, the local temples, with its local deities of local communities have been descending from one generation to other by virtue of kinship or even on the basis of ethnicity, which Charles Taylor calls an *embedded religion*. In Asia such religions and shrines were supposed to ensure material health and prosperity of an individual, his clan and community as they were under protective covers of local spirits, quite similar to patron saints in west or ancestors (*pitr* in Indian context) and various local deities in many parts of Asia. Asia had its own cytoplasmic as well as nucleoplasmic growth. After undergoing the drastic changes of colonialism, anti-colonial and revolutionary movements; national autonomy and self rule was demanded vociferously. By exploiting natural riches, wealth, and power to build a strong, bureaucratically organized governments Asian political leaders created centralized, so called secular *modern states*, but countries, villages and societies never let the bond go off especially which bound local communities together (local stories, myths and cults that magically projected identity of such communities). In order to bring forth a national unity, and to preserve social order to mobilize large and diverse populations, the leaders studied the religious rituals and practices that could lead to divisions in society in name of caste, clan, regionalism, religion. The countries like China, and North Korea took important steps to iron it

out. Indonesia with the sole aim to segregate religious communities, put forth the national ideology of *Pancasila*, which stressed on national unity, mutual tolerance and presence of one Almighty Divine, the regime restricted conversions or convincing campaigns among various religions. Some countries adopted a mix of these strategies. Taiwan under the KMT a political party completely curbed the religious communities. Asian religions are not individualistic rather they are more family, society and clan oriented, community based, and thus pluralistic in approach. This was and is still the biggest challenge for the West's concept of secularism. Thus, secularism faces a challenge in Asia to develop moderate, democratic, stable but adaptable polities. Some pathway has to be found but it needs to be different from European designs. It is here the *cultural context of Charles Taylor can be looked upon*, where he suggests that 'belief in God is unchallenged' and 'unproblematic', but it is 'to be one option among others'.¹⁸ Such is the social set up of Asian countries that individuals are by no means entirely set free from ties to their extended families and communities of birth thus they can't technically live an individualistic life, and they cannot avoid their regional and ethnic identities. Their existence doesn't begin to end at individual level of existence; rather their life has to be lived at all the planes of existence: individual level, family level, societal and nature's level. Under these circumstances, those who do wish to maintain some connection with traditional religious practices may feel a need to modernize these practices by rationalizing them and transforming them for universal acceptance thus breeding religious fervour— leading to missionary activities and conversions. Nurturing one's religion and faith is not possible in an enclosed community. It requires getting other people to believe it as well setting stage for development of large scale religious movements that can be in direct clash with the people of other faiths or belief system. Such blunders have often lead to a

mess and imbroglio causing utter fiasco, proving conflicting nature of secularism for Asian sub-continent.

An Encounter of Secularism with India:

India, the land where *Vasudeva Kutambakkam* and *Sarv Dharam Sadhbhavna* is a mantra and co-existence is a way of life, the mischievous concepts of Majority, Minority and Backwardness were introduced by the East India Company and an Imperial power with a sole aim of colonizing India for political harvests. On the lines of divide and rule policy, in order to weaken nationwide fervor of patriotism, the strife was created in the population. The people were convinced to believe that majority population of Hindus was tyrannical, oppressive and cruel to the newly discovered tags of Mohmedans—the minority. The concept was too new in Indian perspective but it was tried and tested medicine, under the brand name of divide and rule policy of English might. They generated the Muslim backwardness theory in 1871; courtesy Hunters Report, thus painting the picture of deprivation, deterioration of Muslim nationals of India. A country, which since ages, have been praying for Vasudeva Kutumbakkam was all of a sudden projected as country where fellow citizens were deprived and decayed—courtesy White Man's secularism. Thus preparing the grounds for demarcating the territories based on religion—to be more precise—partition or division of India. The age old way of life Mutual co-existence gave us the precious gift of acceptance of other faiths or at least the tolerance but secularism brought with it an additional package of liberalism; with it came the politics and strategies of opportunism. In Indian politics, one of the impacts of secularism was sudden uprising of communalism, encouragement of unjustified communal demands and strengthening of communal organizations for launching terror strikes on society whenever they require. Another impact of British Induced Secularism was polarization of Muslims in their own motherland where they have lived since n-

number of generations. This polarization came in the name of religion, language, faith, education and policies. The strong social fabric of India after being dyed with polarization was communalized, thus shattering the very pillars of strength of India. Concept of Muslim backwardness was introduced not for emancipation of Muslims but to underline urgency of polarizing the community from masses- creating hype of insecurity to such an extent till they shrilled for partition. One thing can be commonly agreed upon – secularism which was fertilized with sole idea of sieving out religion from politics has been reduced to the failed, undeveloped and retarded philosophy. It could not grow as healthily as it was envisioned by its founding fathers. It was destined to develop a healthy peaceful, rational, and progressive society which could do good to humanity. In sharp contrast, we can see today ghettos becoming hub of crimes, one community in the name of being minority or victim tries to blackmail or victimize society. Exploitation of minority status is at rampant, thus creating disgust in the hearts of other citizens. Concepts of equality and uniformity have been molested to such an unrecognizable extent that you fail to identify India as a land which nurtured *Vasudeva Kutumbakkam*. Secularism- a beautifully conceived baby of enlightenment has been reduced to Frankenstein of sort, which has done only one thing to India- uglification of its sacred thread of Mutual co-existence.

The advent of East India Company was based on trade and business. An Imperial Power took over this business corporate to govern India, to frame policies for better business and higher profit: to administer those policies and strategies on its subjects for achieving desired success in raising their economy and filling their coffers with gold. Secularism was introduced in Indian Civilization to administer and govern multitudes in diversity, but same secularism has become millstone around neck of the nation. Minorityism, backwardness, communalism, appeasement

policies has weaned away the already malnourished baby – Secularism from the nourishment of equality in democracy and peaceful coexistence.

“Secularism had no historical roots in India and was a transplant from contact with and exposure to European philosophical tradition”¹⁹. Experts observe that capitalism, science and the nation-state act as a “carriers of secularisation and therefore the separation of religion from the public sphere is happening in India too.”²⁰ But the question is where does this leads to - “an existential insecurity” is experienced by the people. This existential insecurity is faced not only by minorities in majority dominated areas but also by the members of majority community, who are in minority in minority dominated areas. This cycle of fear psychosis continues and the way of life is uncertainty “as secularism emerged into the context of the partition of the sub continent into India and Pakistan”²¹. Another School of thought in India believed that people and their interests can’t be sacrificed for the religion, thus they place people above religion. The religion could be sacrificed for collective good of people and society. The mool mantra of this school of thought is that *people are supreme, their interests are supreme, if the religion is to be sacrificed for common good, it must go to the altar. It must be always remembered that, God is the only possibility and man a reality*²²; suggesting an atheist approach; according to them, religion serves no good purpose in the politics of India. Nehru, the first prime minister of Independent India was an atheist, rational and sceptic who has “no place for religious dictates in political matters.”²³ The leaders like Subhash Chander Bose, and Nehru voiced the similar views that it was wrong for a religion to interfere in politics²⁴. Nehru strongly advocated the west’s concept of secularism; on the contrary, his contemporary- Gandhi had pluralistic approach towards the concept of religion. He practiced and propagated the equality of all religions.

One of the few positive impacts of Indianization of the secularism is that the forefathers of Indian politics believed in co-existence of different religions peacefully. *Sanatan Dharama* popular as a misnomer *Hinduism is Polytheistic in its basic nature*, as it gave fertile ground for religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and even the Judaism to grow, nourish and flourish in India. It becomes inevitable to mention here that Zoroastrian sect was attempted to be strangled by Islamic extremist in middle-east found their solace in India. Thus, by the virtue of this basic nature, *Sanatan Dharama* is pluralistic in approach where the coexistence of different religion was peaceful in nature. But with the advent of whites and their concept of secularism the social fabric was stained by the **minorityism, backwardness, discrimination, favourism and riots**. Failure in implementation of **uniform civil code** as such for all nationals is the biggest failure of secularism in India as personal laws of minorities creates imbalance resulting in different punishments for different citizens based on their religion; thus unmasking the double standards in administering the nation. Enforcement and implementation of uniform civil code is a far distant reality and this has widened the gap and harmed national integration thus demolishing national character and identity of citizens; thus seriously questioning the equality of nationals of India; leaving huge chunk of population still dangling with obsolete practices like depriving women of exposure to education, freedom of expression etc. The law of land is not bible but laws laid by centuries old religion holds ground for them; and still Indian constitution is hailed as secular. To be precise, personal religious laws and not the laws of parliament or ruling of Supreme Court runs the nation. In the name of secularisation, India has become, to the greater extent desecularised. India –the biggest democracy of the world is constitutional in nature and not the *majoritarianist*. Some observe this Indian avatar of secularism has made it possible “for people of

all religions to live together under the legal protection and keep any community in the majority from violating the rights of the minority”²⁵. As far as the *dalits were concerned*, secularism had to offer them the much needed humanist relief from rigid caste system and victimisation of untouchability promoted by some of the corrupt and vested interests within Hinduism; which had become for them a symbol of oppression. Their Leader- Dr. Ambedkar, who was also contemporary of Gandhi and Nehru, declared that secularism aims for ‘liberation at dignity in this world rather than well being in heaven’²⁶.

Gandhi believed in *Sarva dharma-sadabhavana*; that all religions are equal, leading to one supreme power. He declared that ‘the religion and the state are inseparable and irreligiosity encouraged by the State leads to demoralisation of the people’.²⁷ (119 domenic) It may be briefly said that Gandhi’s concept of Indianised secularism had everything to do with the religion and the religious teachings on the peaceful and happy co-existence. Impact of Nehru’s exposure to west made an unerasable impact on his shaping of secularism in Indian scene. ‘As an agnostic, he believed in rationality, secularism and a scientific approach as a true means of progress in India.’²⁸ He identified that we can get rid of religious superstitions by secularism only. The Indian concept of secularism is agnostic, rational, sceptic and scientific and can be best understood on the three planes from Taylor’s perspective:

- a) loss of reference to transcendent in public spaces,
- b) Secularism leads to decline of religious belief and practice,
- c) Secularity in third sense recognises the changing conditions of belief where believing in or reference to the divine is merely one of the option.²⁹

As discussed, Taylor’s diagnosis of three different contexts of secularism- *political, sociological, cultural contexts* do not fit

anywhere in India Secularism has failed itself in its *political context*, as no government either in state or in centre has tried to remained neutral to religious faith. The *credibility* of the government is always at mercy of various religions and faith; the political leaders at state or centre are either at liberty or due to number game, forced to favour one religion or community. In the *sociological terms*, secularism is steep decline of religious belief or even its practice among citizens. In the *cultural context*, it has been nullified as religion acts as a magnet to problems and the tolerance level is zero. A land where *sarv dharma sadbhavna* was the way of life, *vasudev kattumbkam* was the daily prayer, was orphaned of its ideology by the colonists and Imperial. And then secularism was foisted on it as a foster parent. When love, brotherhood was taught in Europe; it was lived in India. When an Indian was breathing with nature fully aware of its existence and its role in entire existence, west was in queue buying secularoxygen cylinder to breath in the society. In 1976, 42nd amendment was made in Indian constitution and for the first time officially and formally it was stated in the preamble of Indian constitution that India is a secular nation.

Secularism: Phoenix deplucked - Indian Version

The meaning changed from *Sarva dharma Sadbhavna* to secularism. The practical application and its impacts so far has been not that good as envisioned. It has become all the more important to study the practical application, functioning and impact of secularism on India. India has chosen for itself a republican, democratic and secular form of governance. These values and goals are enshrined in our Constitution, yet religious discords communal conflicts, ethnic and caste strife can be seen everywhere. These phenomena are at best symbols of quests for identity, security and power. Secularism in the constitutional sense was limited to guarantee against theocracy of any kind. But, in political terms secularism was

interpreted as merely protecting the minorities against the majority thereby justifying whatever the minorities said or did as part of their legitimate political action. Keeping a track of the immediate reasons why the concept of secularism as had been perceived and as practiced is being questioned very seriously for uncountable times since the constitution of India was framed:

The Punjab problem ranks as the first. The Sikhs were always regarded as part of the Hindu society and were in fact called the protectors providing the military protection to Hinduism till the other day. The Hindu law was specifically made applicable to them and their society was based on caste as much as the parent Hindu society. After independence, this community began to assert itself not only as a separate minority after the Constitution came into being but also began claiming autonomy as a linguistic-cum-religious unit. And finally a section of this community has taken to violence against the Indian nation to achieve Khalistan. The issue is like a suppressed volcano which erupts every now and then. The second reason is the Kashmir problem. In a matter of a couple of months the entire Hindu population of the Kashmir valley was driven out by the frenzy of communal Muslims. The Hindus constituted a minuscule minority in the valley. This crisis went unnoticed and unreported by the intelligentsia of the nation even the so-called secular leaders, writers, poets did not utter one word when this small minority was swept out of the valley and forced into roadsides and schools in Jammu and Delhi. The Hindu nationals were stunned by the mute silence of the secular voices. The third reason is the Assam situation. In the three decades commencing from 1950, the entire demography of Assam had undergone a sea change. The students and locals, began to agitate against the decimation of their culture. They asked the nation for urgent attention as they are geographically in a corner of country and at the threshold of people who could be nation's most

harmful enemy; they rendered the cry of being out-numbered by people from an unfriendly neighbour but unfortunately they were called communal, their agitation separatist and they anti secular people. Thus the victim branded as a victimiser – courtesy secularism. Moreover, the caste factor in the Hindu society has miserably worsened the present scene and even shameless promotion of caste associations and aggregate caste-based parties as part of the efforts to secure social justice and equality in the society. To be called a Jat leader, Yadav leader is no shame and certainly not communal, but, to aggregate all the castes and call them Hindu which represents big chunk of the Indian population, is necessarily communal.

The question mark hanging over the concept of secularism as practiced in India today is the ideological contradiction between the exclusive Islamic society versus the inclusive mind of the Hindu society. Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore wrote in the year 1924 in the *Times of India* that the greatest problem India would face would be Hindu-Muslim unity and the biggest challenge to this unity would come from the Muslims. And the provision of special rights to the minorities is definitely not a part of secular constitution but still its prevalence merely for the vote bank purpose, using it for political ground is something posing a danger in nation's integrity. The concept of secularism was introduced strictly to separate religion from politics but in current scenario, with the advent of various political parties, secularism has lost its worth. It seems this old and once powerful phoenix of west is withering away with its power and impact, shrivelling to nothing.

We see religion being used for political purposes, as a result of which myriad problems of mutual distrust and suspicion, of heat and passion, of hatred, revenge and violence amongst various communities and castes arise, time and again. Ours is professedly a secular state, but unfortunately, we are surrounded by some countries which are theocratic, who by their

choice have embraced fundamentalism, which is serving as a carrot or a trap for the masses laid by the elites for staying in power. This phenomenon has given rise to deep apprehension in the Indian mind. The unrest and anxiety has crept in the Indian territories. The rise of fundamentalism is perceived as a serious threat to the Indian culture, the Indian identity and to the very unity and integrity of India. The origins of fundamentalism can be traced to traditionalism, economic and social backwardness and the manipulation of feudal elites to stay in power. Traditionalists have been forced by history and circumstances into rapid activism. They see themselves as under some kind of a political, cultural and economic siege with need to fight back using threat and violence, if called for, against the forces of secularism and modernism. They depend on a selective, favourable and partial retrieval of the past, on the finality of religious texts and on various forms of moral absolutism and intolerance which can go beyond national borders. Fundamentalism gives rise to equally unhealthy responses from those who fear it. A vicious circle gets formed causing serious problems, disrupting peace and order. One can observe world-wide trends which constitute different kinds of separatism. All around us, in the last several decades, we have been witnessing a sharp rise in the politics of cultural exclusivism and xenophobia. Ethnic separatism, hatred and distrust are sentiments that have been on the rise. We can see the rise of different kinds of fundamentalism which may be religious racist or ideological.

Magic of the phoenix withers away- Impacts of Secularism on Indian Sphere:

On the one hand our foundation as an Independent state is said to be laid on secularism –dismissing the role of religion in the administration and politics and on the other hand when this foundation was being laid; we as a nation were being amputated in the name of religion. None has forgotten the partition in 1947. As per UN reports 14 million people had

lost their homes. It was the biggest mass migration recorded in history. The motive behind this was to execute *the divide and rule policy*; and few of the political leaders of those times with vested interests satiated their hunger for the power by dividing Nation on communal lines. After partition, the so called secular broad minded politicians decided to treat all communities the same. A noble thought. And in comes the constitution with articles 14 and 15(1) enjoining to state that- The state shall not discriminate against any person on grounds of religion, caste, race or other such issues! It may have sounded like a brilliant plan for peaceful nation; with a thought that their future generations are secure now as nation has turned *secular*. It may not be their fault. They were absolutely unaware of the anti-climax that would be shoved in the face of their future generations. Having stated the above facts, it is been a very long time since the constitution and nationals are still holding the flag of secularism high. There has been a constant evolution in misleading the concept of secularism. Now we are at a latest version of secularism-called Pseudo-secularism. We may end up being a global joke in the name of world's biggest democracy with secularism as a decorated medal on our governments shoulder. Amazing political system of our nation, with secularism as its anthem, needs urgent attention as majority of the political parties in the corridors of Delhi are regional and depends on their target voters, or a fancier name- **Vote Bank**. A nation with more than a billion people with n number ethnic groups that form the so called minorities and here we are trying to satisfy every group and in the process completely flush the concept of national integrity down the toilet. But what is a sane Indian worried about- national integrity... that's a long lost concept. Very few or rather none cares about that. What matters is VOTE. What matters is winning the elections, by hook or by crook and majority of leaders are known for going the crook way. Favouring one community at the cost of the common people of

all or no faith at all is a sin in terms of secularism and still the cries of the leaders in terms of *be and become secular* are too vociferous. In a current scenario, our leaders are offering the perfect example of masterminds of Dante's limbo. The hard earned money of the tax payers is squandered by visionless eyes and merciless hands to appease the minority leaders for the vote bank politics. The world has the liberty to mock at the secular Indian Government which continues with its Haj subsidy, even when it was abolished long time back by Pakistan, a constitutionally theocratic or rather a fundamental Muslim country in 1997. More than 1,00,000 Indian Muslims make use of the subsidy every year. In May 2012, the Supreme Court set a deadline for Government to end the Haj subsidy by 2022. It sounds divine, as no such subsidy is offered to any other religious community in India. And what is to be noted is even to remove just a single subsidy that benefits a so called minority Supreme Court needs 10 years! Again a classic example of how the new version of secularism has hijacked rationality. And here we sit in hope that judicial system of India is doing everything to speed their work process, one among the many illusions our citizens live in. As soon as general elections approach, a new and fresh pack of promises to these minorities begin.

Actually we are an absolute liberal country. Anything that anyone wants has to follow three simple steps. Step 1: identify your need that benefits only your specific "group", and don't even give a fig to the remaining population. Step 2: project it to the government. Step 3: if accepted, celebrate, else, wreck havoc in the minds of political parties, threaten them to withdraw your votes, block roads, train tracks, sit on Dharnas till the government accepts what you want. These steps are religiously followed by these so called minorities because they are very well aware that what affects the political parties most is not their welfare, not the welfare of the nation, but, their vote bank. The situation has

gone from bad to worse. Riots, crimes, acts of terrorism, are all being overlooked by law just because the subject is from some minority and are strong backed by political parties whose vote bank they fall in. Since western secularism cannot be branded as atheism, in contrast, it's the decision to ignore and avoid God. Secularists do not necessarily deny the existence of God; they simply live as though God did not exist and if does exist, his existence is irrelevant and abstract just by the virtue of being non-concrete. Man is *autonomous* and he excludes God from the cytoplasm of his life to allot Him a remote place on the periphery. Michael Horton has observed: *essence of secularism – the process of eliminating the acknowledgment of the supernatural. Reason refuses any place to revelation; nature cancels grace; morality replaces salvation.*³⁰ In the name of secular, we are desecularised to such an extent that minority appeasement, reservation, special privileges – everything related to the religion finds place in the process of hijacking the national integration, peaceful co-existence and growth of a nation.

Tragic Hamartia of Secularism:

Indian way of living can't be substituted with white man's concept of secularism. India since times unknown has taught its people love, compassion, tolerance, non violence and acceptance for all the faiths. Faith, in its sublimity brings communion and not the divisions. Religion or *regerio* means to unite with fellow beings and the Supreme Being; not to be in the discord. When one loves his fellowmen, one accepts them. There is peace and harmony. But when one don't or can't love; one can't accept; due to some compulsions of the circumstances one has to bear or tolerate, till the situation changes in his favour. Once the equation changes; the one who is tolerating stops tolerating and burst out giving way to the pent up feelings; leading to catharsis of his decades or age old tolerance of all that was not naturally acceptable to him. It often comes out as an undigested, ugly, pungent reaction. We have

witnessed these ulcerated reactions every now and then. Thus, tolerance is not a cure, rather it is a catalyst. Today, both the majority and minority have 'common strategy and objective of taking over state power through shaping mindset and gaining institutional hold over society'³¹. Thus being reduced to selfish self centred level. This is the basic tragic flaw or hamartia of our leadership for all the past years. It is still not so late. The government knows facts, the right way to do things and maybe they'll implement some of these or else we can kiss our world super power dreams goodbye. Leaders both at the state and national level have failed to sensitise and mobilise the religious communities and civil society to strengthen the political secularism. The religious communities are not provided with the adequate social imaginaries thus leading to secularism in jumbo and dilapidated state. The very word secularism is exploited by all the communities to sieve out the maximum gains for their respective religious groups. Politically, secularism is a dead bird and all the communities want to draw maximum pound of flesh from it due to the game of numbers. Instead of disintegrating and dividing the nation by providing explosive imaginary to members of minority community, our leaders should thrive and strive tirelessly for becoming the next super power. Our political leaders are not jolting the minority from the sleep of ignorance and self created insecurity; rather they sing lullabies of fear, mutual distrust and hatred to lull them to being backward class. And this too, when they need to impel and compel quick leap for growth.

The way out:

Though unfortunate, but it is quite evident that *a State cannot be neutral* as a matter of rule. Neutrality is an *operational* State principle or attitude which applies only to certain areas of human activity³². Secularization has two *caveats*. The first is that the secularization theory has evolved according to European circumstances, situations and standards.

Therefore it cannot simply be applied on as such or implemented like a mathematical formula on other civilizations. The second caveat is that traditional theories on secularization, which equate Modernity, scientific development, economic improvement, migration to urban centres, etc. with secularization, have been replaced with theories which equate modernity with pluralism³³. Charles Taylor put forward a beautiful concept of social imaginary to delve deep into the secularism fiasco. He states that transformation of nation's social imaginary is important in order to gain *ascendancy in popular imagination* to make it society friendly. We already have a strong social imaginary based on our age old traditions, customs, cultures and generations of experiences. But Taylor Divides imaginary into: a) common sense-which may be religious or non religious. b) It may be based on folk lore which may be religious/non-religious (c)The nucleus of imaginary may be the religion of the popular which may further of rebellious or non-rebellious. (d) Social Imaginary may consist of religion of the intellectual.

In the political terms, secularism has lot to learn from social imaginary which can improve and enrich our background understanding of Indian society's grass root facts since centuries which are entrenched in folk wisdom. Some consider Charles Taylor's concept as pre theoretical exercise for secularism to rise from both theoretical and strategical ashes; thus making it all the more important to revisit and reconsider India's secular constitutional system. The concept of secularism, its doctrine, issues, policies and strategies in Indian political arena needs to be revisited. Social imaginary can help us understand the doctrine of secularism in new perspective .The opportunistic and politically rigid mindset of secular front can't be replaced till social imaginary is understood. Before achieving right understanding of secularism and to engineer plans for success of secularism in India, political and social scientists need to focus on social imaginary to renew and rethink over

new strategies. When, as discussed at the initial point in this paper, the positive secularism is politically inactive towards the social imaginary, then the social imaginary can't be transformed thus secularism as a formula or a political theory is totally divorced from the imagination of common national. In the absence harmony inducing and brotherhood promoting imaginary, the minority community is bugged with imaginery of being aggrieved or victimised by the fellow majority citizens. This explosive Imaginary created by the socio political leaders of minority community might have resulted in few short lived, narrow gains but in a bigger panorama , it has consequentialized into a horrible scenario of transforming the nation into Dante's Limbo.

The Indian political system and Indian version of secularism has various critical lacunas which can be filled by plug-in provided by social imaginary. The major accusations which can be levelled against secularism is that its politically motivated and "elite initiated project"³⁴. As and when the idea will be transformed from social imaginary to a framework of secular political society –This lack on the part of secularist forces has deteriorated the situation. Taylor defines *social imaginary* as "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations"³⁵. A social imaginary is not a theory, it is a way ordinary people imagine their social surroundings; carried in images, stories and legends rather than theoretical formulations, a social imaginary is complex involving both how things are in current scenario and how things ought to be for a better picture. It is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Since pre independence state of struggle and post independence years; minorities have been occupying such a position that they have been receiving the spotlight from the word go. Their position, status and stand has

attracted the senses of almost all the great leaders of freedom struggle cutting across the party lines. In a historic statement, Damodar Veer Savarkar in 1938 assured that: "The Hindus will ever be ready to grant equal rights and representation to all minor communities in India in legislatures and services, civil and political life in proportion to population and merit."³⁶ On the 20th congregation of Hindu Mahasabha, Savarkar was speaking as a newly appointed president. He made a commitment that Hindus in spite of being in *overwhelming majority* will, unlike other majority communities in other countries of the world will *waive their right of claiming any preferential treatment and special prerogatives*. But unfortunately what was waived off by Hindu Mahasabha has been served on a silver platter to the minorities due to strategic political arrangements and plans- the preferential treatment, "The special favours and weightages"³⁷. The far sighted leaders like Sardar Vallabhai Patel was wise enough to observe that "in the long run, it would be in the interest of all to forget that there is anything like majority or minority in this country and that in India, there is only one community"³⁸. Even Nehru opined that *in a full blooded democracy*, for the sake of safeguarding a minority community, they are isolated. They get so called protection or safeguard by paying heavy price of being isolated from the *main current* thus losing the inner *sympathy and fellow feeling of the majority: At the cost of isolating it and keeping it away from the main current in which majority is going...At the cost of forfeiting that inner sympathy and the fellow feeling with the majority*".³⁹ The minority appeasement has been on such a rampart since Independence of India, that in the name of safeguarding the interest of the minority n-number of committees, government programmes, institutions were created in spite of zero demand from the community. This serves as the classic example of first creating the product and then hyping the need. The worst part is that the secular leaders of

the majority community are marketing the concept of secularism for vote bank calculations and politics, thus taking to the appeasement politics. Secularism has served no purpose in the turmoil, where we are losing the motto of, *One people one nation*. Due to the paucity of the visionary nationalist leaders, philosophers and intellectuals, the majority is still wandering in the search of their promised India. The minority leaders with their own politico power purpose create *ever escalating imaginary grievances of the minorities*⁴⁰. This imaginary created by such leaders is explosive in nature. The members of the minority community are made to see the things which really do not exist. As assured by Savarkar, majority has already waived or were made to waive their "right of claiming any preferential treatment and special prerogatives."⁴¹ But there is breaking point of everything. The magnification of minorities by policy of minority appeasement by those in power, vote bank politics, political blackmailing by playing the number game, double faced policy of minority by becoming secular when less in number and becoming intolerant or rather taking to acts like cow slaughter and culminating the majority's festival into violent blood bath; people in power changes the rule as per their convenience, as per the situation thus resulting in the ultimate frustration of the majority community and isolation of the minority. This is definitely not an arrow shot by secularism. This is exactly why, how and where the secularism has been killed never to rise again. As per our age old values, the chances of Indian society being transformed into an atheist stand no chance. The imaginaries which we have inherited from our ancestors have made the god inescapable even from our vaguest attention. God in India is not a possibility but a reality. He has a corner to live in and is served food in almost all the households irrespective of faiths. In Indian perspective, religion is not about choosing one particular god from gods and goddesses and becoming its fan or worshipper, it is rather a way

of life which teaches what to do and what not to do, how to take decisions with the right evaluation, assessment and understanding, and to take decisions while keeping in mind the existence, which is not confined to an individual level but flourishes at the family, society and nature's level. The religion in India is what to eat and when to eat; righteousness in thought, speech and action, the conduct at personal and family level; and all germinates from the way of life which is firmly rooted in the spirituality of India, thus, making it almost impossible to divorce religion from daily life, administration, governance and even politics. To put it in simple words; separation of religion from public or political sphere would be like producing the fake personality who is ingenuine and suffers of split personality disorder; and wears masquerades for different occasions thus producing distrust and a corrupt society. We are already struggling with insecurity at all the levels of our existence as most of leaders lack consistency in private and public level, living split lives, double entendre in words and actions. Though secularism was supposed to cement different communities and diversity of India but what was supposed to happen didn't happen as this imported seed like idea could not fit well in the complex and diverse Indian conditions with altogether different history and perspective of religion and faith. The great phoenix which was supposed to take the flight died down in its ashes, and we like foolish babes are waiting for the miracle to happen: to see the rise of phoenix from the ashes. It had been dead since 1947-India's doomed Day of amputation and partition. It was detected long time back by the 19th century Indian sage-philosopher Swami Vivekanand who on analysis detected this major flaw in this western philosophy-a cruel separation from religion. Although Gandhi and other nationalist leaders didn't want to divorce religion and religious values from politics but they couldn't even provide a strong alternative system to secularism or offer a social imaginary. Apart from that the

leaders and intellects were so strongly swayed and uprooted by the euphoria of science that religion could not enter their realm of thought. Religion has to be pursued in terms of humanity as Swami Vivekanand held that *religion is the soul of humanity which responds to the reality of life and evolution of human consciousness*. Infact, he observed religion as a very comprehensive and essential component of growth and development of humanity.⁴² Religion, according to him brings the real awakening of the humanism as it awakens divinity in the humans and arbitrates its manifestation through speech and action at all the levels of existence. It seems that the only panacea which could save the nation from the plague of this dead corpse of secularism is mutual acceptance. Some not so wise men may still go on to suggest tolerance; but why to tolerate, it has fear of breeding frustration. Rather acceptance will mother mutual happiness and prosperity. The Natural Acceptance comes with right understanding which is a faculty awakened only after proper assessment and self evaluation. A citizen with right understanding will be a true nationalist. And for a true nationalist there is only one religion-patriotism; only one community – brotherhood of fellow citizens irrespective of faith, caste or creed; one facility- freedom, one aim- to enrich nation by his service. Phoenix has failed the nation by dying and not resurrecting itself. Let the nation's tiger be unleashed and roar. Let the world know who is on the prawl.

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