POLITICAL SECULARISM: WHY IT IS NEEDED AND WHAT CAN BE LEARNT FROM ITS INDIAN VERSION

Rajeev Bhargava

Secularism appears to be under siege everywhere. The predicted decline or privatisation has failed to occur not only in non-western but in western societies. (Casanova 1994). In hindsight it seems the ascendance of secular-humanism was episodical and temporary, restricted anyway to a few highly visible European societies. Moreover, political secularism, the doctrine of the separation of state and religion was jolted with the establishment of the first modern theocracy in Khomeini’s Iran. Soon other religious voices began to be heard and then to aggressively occupy the public domain. In Egypt, people were urged to free themselves of the last vestiges of a colonial past and to establish a Muslim state. In 1989, an Islamic state was established in Sudan. In 1991, the Islamic Salvation Front won the election in Algeria. Islamic movements emerged in Tunisia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Chad, Senegal, Turkey, and in Afghanistan. (Westerlund 1996; Kepels 1994) The states of Pakistan and Bangladesh increasingly acquired theocratic and Islamicist overtones. (Ahmed 1987; Mohsin 1999)

 Movements that challenged the seemingly undisputed reign of secularism were not restricted to Muslim societies. Singhalese Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka, Hindu nationalists in India, religious ultra-orthodoxy in Israel and Sikh nationalists who demanded a separate state partly on the ground that Sikhism does not recognize the separation of religion and state all symptomised a deep crisis of secularism (Jeurgensmeyer 1994).

 Protestant movements decrying secularism emerged in Kenya, Guatemala and Philippines. Protestant fundamentalism became a force in American Politics. Religiously grounded political movements arose in Poland. In Western Europe where religion for many is still largely a private response to divinity rather than an organized system of practices, migrant workers of former colonies and an intensified globalization begun to question the existing, rather marginal place of religion in society. A privatized Christianity has been thrown
together with Islam, Sikhism and pre-Christian, South Asian religions that draw a boundary between the private and the public differently. These strange bedfellows have created a deep religious diversity the like of which has not been known in the West for centuries. (Turner 2001, 134) As the public spaces of western societies is claimed by these other religions, the weak but distinct monopoly of any one religion is beginning to be challenged by the very norms governing these societies. This is evident in Germany and Britain but was highlighted most dramatically by the headscarf issue in France.(Freedman 2004) The suppressed religious past of these societies is now fore-grounded in a way that questions any claim about the robust secular character of these states.

The secular state is contested not only by politicians, civil society groups and clerics; it is questioned even by academics. Indian academics were among the first to voice their opposition to secularism. (Nandy 1998, Madan 1998, Chatterjee 1998). By the 1990s, this criticism was also voiced by several scholars in the west. Initially, critical academic writing in the west accepted the framework of liberal democracy and sought to fine tune it. It argued that (a) the public justification of a policy by secular reason should not preclude actual decision making to be grounded solely on a religious rationale (Greenawalt 1988) or (b) that not only political decisions but their justification too, could in certain contexts, rely exclusively on a religious reasons. (Perry 1991) or (c) by demanding the exclusion of religious convictions from public life, liberal democrats violated their own principle of equal respect. (Eberle 2002, 188-189).

Critiques of western secularism have since become sharper and gone much further. Several western scholars claim that by trivializing faith, secularism is hostile to religious believers. By enjoining believers to leave behind religious convictions when they step into public life, secularism, it is argued, inhibits diversity and homogenizes the public domain. Some claim that modern political secularism is a child of single-religion societies and while it may be suited to Protestantism and religions that are weakly protestantized, it excludes or is actively inimical to other religions. (Keane 2000, 14-18; Connolly 1999, 23-25; Asad 2003). Some say that secularism has failed to accommodate community-specific rights and therefore is unable protect religious minorities from discrimination and exclusion. Others argue that secularism has become immodest, demanding from others what it dare not expect from itself.
– blind to its own assumptions and presuppositions, it denies dependence on a visceral register that it publicly denounces as irrational. Besides, how can it fight religious hegemony and in the same breath try to establish itself as the sole basis of adjudication in public life? Secularism is a deeply parochial doctrine with universalist pretensions. (Connolly 1999, 38-39). Critics even argue that its peace-talk is mere sham because deep down it is a conflict-generating ideology that threatens pluralist democracies.

However, critical writing on secularism is deeply ambiguous between two claims. First, that the deep crisis of secular states signifies that we must look for alternatives to them and second, that we look not for an alternative to secular states but rather for their alternative conceptions, and by implication, for alternative conceptions of political secularism. It is important then to begin this enquiry by asking what distinguishes secular states from their competitors and - this remains largely unclear - what precise alternatives critics have in mind when they seek to replace them. More importantly, we must ask what the merits and demerits of secular and non-secular states are. This is a sensible question, given that any sound ethically sensitive practical reasoning must be comparative in nature, and must tell what ethical gains or losses might ensue if we are to transit from a secular state to some other kind of state that presumably grants more importance to religion. If secular states are indeed more worthy, we must also ask if this is true of all secular states or of only some? And if only some, which of these? This issue cannot be addressed unless we ask another important question: what are the different forms of secular states? Which of them are better and why? In what follows, I deal with these questions by elaborating what in my view is the proper conceptual and normative structure of secularism. This I hope will not only distinguish secular from non-secular states but also help individuate different types of secular states. I do this not because I have an interest in classification per say. But rather because of the need to identify a version of secularism that meets the most important religious objections mentioned above and because of my belief that an indifference to this objection and the consequent smugness that ensues from this neglect bolsters otherwise indefensible anti-secular states. Finally, I explore if a search for alternative conceptions of secularism leads us towards conceptual resources that cut through the division between a modern West and a traditional East. For example, I ask if the Indian version of secularism is a mere specification of an idea
with Western origin and imprint or if it is a genuine alternative to its Western counterpart, one from which everyone, including the West, may benefit in the future. ¹

Theocracy and states with established religions

To identify the conceptual structure of secularism, it is best to begin by contrasting it with doctrines to which it is both related and opposed. Such anti-secular doctrines favour not separation but a union or alliance between church/religion and state. A state that has union with a particular religious order is a theocratic state, governed by divine laws directly administered by a priestly order claiming divine commission.² (The Catholic Encyclopedia of Religion, Volume 14, 13) Historical examples of celebrated theocracies are ancient Israel, some Buddhist regimes of Japan and China, the Geneva of John Calvin and the Papal states. The Islamic republic of Iran as Khomeni aspired to run it is an obvious example. A theocratic state must be distinguished from a state that establishes religion. Here religion is granted official, legal recognition by the state and while both benefit from a formal alliance with one another, the sacerdotal order does not govern a state where religion is established.

Because they do not identify or unify church and state but install only an alliance between them, states with an established church are in some ways disconnected from it. They do so in different ways. For a start, these are political orders where there is a sufficient degree of institutional differentiation between the two social entities. Both the church and the state are distinct enough to have separate identities. This difference in identity may be due partly to role differentiation. Each is to perform a role different from the other- the function of one is to maintain peace and order- a primarily temporal matter. The function of the other is to secure salvation, primarily a spiritual concern. In a theocracy, both roles are performed by the same personnel. In states with established religions, there may even be personnel differentiation. State functionaries and church functionaries are largely different from another. Thus, disconnection between church and state can go sufficiently deep. Yet, there is a more significant sense in which the state and the church are connected to one another: they share a common end largely defined by religion. By virtue of a more primary connection of

¹ I have yet to take into account the important and increasingly voluminous work of Veit Bader on the relationship of religion and politics.
² The Catholic Encyclopedia of Religion defines Theocracy as a form of political government in which the deity directly rules the people or the rule of priestly caste. The rule of Brahmin in India is accordance with the Dharma Shastras would be theocratic. Volume 14, p 13.
ends, the two share a special relationship with another. Both benefit from this mutual alliance. There is finally another level of connection between church and state at the level of policy and law. Such policies and laws flow from and are justified in terms of the union or alliance that exists between the state and the church. The institutional disconnection of church and state - at the level of roles, functions and powers - goes hand in hand with the first - and third-level connection of ends and policies. So this is what differentiates a state with established church-based religion from a theocracy: the second-order disconnection of church and state.

Table-1 below clarifies these distinctions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of connection (C) or disconnection (D)</th>
<th>Theocracy</th>
<th>State with established religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ends: First order C/D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions and Personnel: Second order C/D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Public Policy: Third order C/D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just as a theocracy is not always distinguished from the establishment of religion, just so a distinction is not always drawn between the establishment of religion and the establishment of the church of a religion (a religious institution with its own distinct rules, function and social roles, personnel, jurisdiction, power, hierarchy (ecclesiastical levels) and a distinct and authoritative interpretation of a religion.). But clearly not all religions have churches. Yet, a state may establish such a church-free religion, i.e. grant it formal, legal recognition and privilege. Put differently, the establishment of a church is always the establishment of a particular religion, but the converse is not always true. The establishment of a particular religion does not always mean the establishment of a church. A majority of Hindu nationalists in India may wish to establish Hinduism as state religion but they have no church to establish. Such an establishment may be expressed in the symbols of the state as well in the

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3 The whole question of church-state separation, I would claim, emerges forcefully in what are predominantly church-based, single-religion societies. The issue of religion-state separation arises, however, in societies without churches or/and with multiple religions or when the hold of religion in societies has considerably declined, when religion is considered by the majority to be largely insignificant.
form of state-policies that support a particular religion. Early Protestants may have wanted to disestablish the Roman Catholic Church without wishing the state to derecognize Christianity as the favoured religion. Alternatively, they tried to maintain the establishment of their preferred religion by the establishment of not one but two or even more churches. The establishment of a single religion is consistent therefore with the disestablishment or non-establishment of church, with the establishment of a single church or with the establishment of multiple churches. This issue is obscured because in church-based religions the establishment of religion is the establishment of the church and the establishment of Christianity is so much a part of background understanding of several western societies that this fact does not even need to be fore grounded and discussed.

Finally, it is possible that there is establishment of multiple religions, with or without church. Possibly, the emperor Ashoka in India came closest to it. It may also have been an aspiration of the Mughal emperor Akbar. Perhaps another example is the 14th century Vijayanagar kingdom that granted official recognition not only to Shaivites and the Vaishnavites but even the Jains.

We can see then that there are five types of regimes in which a close relationship exists between state and religion. First, a theocracy where no institutional separation exists between church and state and the priestly order is also the direct political ruler. Second, states with the establishment of single religion. These are of three types: (a) without the establishment of a church, (b) with the establishment of a single church, and (c) with the establishment of multiple churches. Third, states with establishment of multiple religions.

Secular States

Secular states are different from each of these five kinds of states. To further understand this issue and distinguish different forms of secular states, allow me to unfold the structure of the secular state. For a start, we must recognize that a secular state is to be distinguished not only from a theocracy (feature-a) but also from a state where religion is established. But a non-theocratic state is not automatically secular because it is entirely consistent for a state neither

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4 It is frequently said that secularism cannot exist in India because Hinduism lacks a church and therefore that there is no church to separate from the state. The hidden assumption underlying this assertion is that secularism means church-state separation. This is both false and misleading.

5 The reader must be reminded that the three type of state-church regimes discussed above are all ideal-typical.
to be inspired by divine laws nor run by a priestly order, but instead have a formal alliance with one religion, exactly the sort of thing desired it seems to me by the Bhartiya Janata Party in India. Second, because it is also a feature of states with established churches, the mere institutional separation of the two is not and cannot be the distinguishing mark of secular states. This second-level disconnection should not be conflated with the separation embedded in secular states, because though necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for their individuation. A secular state goes beyond church-state separation, refusing to establish religion or if religion is already established, it disestablishes it. It withdraws privileges that established religion had previously taken for granted. Therefore, a secular state follows what can be called principle of non-establishment. (feature-b) Furthermore, the non-establishment of religion means that the state is separated not merely from one but from all religions. Thus, in a secular state, a formal or legal union or alliance between state and religion is impermissible. Official status is not given to religion. No religious community in such a state can say that the state belongs exclusively to it. Nor can all of them together say that it belongs collectively to them and them alone.

To grasp this point at a more general theoretical level, let me distinguish three levels of disconnection to correspond with the already identified three levels of connection. A state may be disconnected from religion at the level of ends (first-level), at the level of institutions (second-level) and the level of law and public policy (third-level). A secular state is distinguished from theocracies and states with established states by a primary, first-level disconnection. A secular state has free standing ends, substantially, if not always completely, disconnected from the ends of religion or conceivable without a connection with them. Finally, a state may be disconnected from religion even at the level of law and public policy. Table-2 clarifies these distinctions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of connection (C) or disconnection (D)</th>
<th>Theocracy</th>
<th>State with established religion</th>
<th>Secular (mainstream)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ends: First order C/D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions and Personnel: Second order C/D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Public Policy: Third order C/D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
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</table>

*As we shall see, this would also open up the possibility of distinguishing forms of secular states.*
Amoral and Value-Based Secular States

I return to this third level disconnection below. At this stage, it is particularly important to emphasise that the disconnection at each of the three levels may serve different ends. At the very least such ends are of two kinds. The first kind are amoral. Amoral secular states are so called because their entire purpose is to maximise power, wealth or both. They may have moral pretensions but really no commitment to values such as peace, liberty or equality. Usually, they are imperial and autocratic. A good example of such a predominantly secular state, despite the not infrequent allegation of its biased, Christian character, is the British colonial state in India that motivated almost exclusively by power, wealth and social order, had a policy of tolerance and neutrality towards different religious communities. This is not surprising, given that empires are interested in the labour or tribute of their subjects, not in their religion. Such self-aggrandizing, amoral states may or may not disconnect with religion at the third level i.e. at the level of law and policy. They may have a hands off approach to all religions, purely for instrumental reasons. However, if it serves their instrumental purpose, they may also connect with religion.

More on Value-based Secular States

Distinct from amoral states are value-based secular states. A fuller discussion of such states requires a better articulation of their connection with several important and substantive values. The first of these is peace or rather the prevention of a society from its regression into barbarism, not an uncommon tendency where there exist two or more incompatible visions of the good life. (Feature-c) The second is toleration, i.e. the state does not persecute or allow the persecution of anyone on grounds of religion (Feature-d). This value may be seen by some to be superseded by the discourse of rights but in certain context it has continuing relevance. Why so? Because there are areas of society which remain beyond the reach of the legal regime of rights. For example, we know that courts are ineffective when overburdened with claims. To check this rot, out of court settlements are encouraged. In the same way, it is sometimes better to waive one’s rights and rely instead on a policy of live and let live. A secular state must have room for this. Third, a secular state is constitutively tied to religious liberty, a value with at least three dimensions. The first refers to the liberty of
members of any one religious group. (Feature-e) It is a brute fact that in most religious communities, one or two interpretations of its core beliefs and practices come to dominate. Given this dominance, it is important that every individual or sect within the group be given the right to criticize, revise or challenge these dominant interpretations. The second aspect of this important liberty, (feature-f), is that it be granted non-preferentially to all members of every religious communities. The third dimension of religion-related liberty (feature-g), is that individuals be free not only to criticise the religion into which they are born, but to reject it and further, given ideal conditions of deliberation, to freely embrace another religion or to remain without one.

Religious liberty, when understood broadly, is one important value of a secular state. To understand another crucial ingredient, it is necessary to grasp the point that liberty and equality in the religious sphere are all of a piece with liberty and equality in other spheres. It is not a coincidence that the disestablishment clause in the first amendment to the American constitution institutes not only religious freedom but also the more general freedom of speech, of peaceful assembly and political dissent. It is entirely possible that a state permits religious liberty and equality but forbids other forms of freedom and equality. For instance, a person may challenge the authority of the religious head of his own denomination but not be free to challenge the authority of the state. This is impossible in a secular state which is committed to a more general freedom and equality. Thus, another critical value to which a secular state is constitutively linked is the equality of free citizenship.

The value of equal citizenship has two dimensions, one active, the other passive. To be a passive citizen is to be entitled to physical security, a minimum of material well-being and a sphere of one’s own in which others ought not to interfere. The benefits of citizenship – resources that enable a dignified ordinary life – must be available to everyone and there is no room here for discrimination on grounds of religion. (Feature-h) This equal treatment is entailed by equal (passive) citizenship. State agencies and the entire system of law must not work in favour of one religious group. If the state works to protect the security and well-being of some individuals or groups but fail to secure these meagre but important benefits to others then the principle of equal (passive) citizenship is violated. Likewise, since citizenship is conditional upon education, no one must be denied admission to educational institutions, solely on grounds of religion (Feature-i).
The active dimension of citizenship involves the recognition of citizens as equal participants in the public domain. (Feature-j). Active participation does not only mean the mere possession of the right to vote but also a right to participate in public deliberation and to stand for public office. In secular states, such active citizenship rights ought to be available to everyone, regardless of religion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features of a Secular State</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Non-theocratic</td>
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<tr>
<td>(b) The principle of non-establishment of religion</td>
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<td>(c) Peace between communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Toleration</td>
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<tr>
<td>(e) Religious liberty to any one religious group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(f) Religious liberty granted non-preferentially to members of every religious group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(g) The liberty to embrace a religion other than the one into which a person is born and to reject all religions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(h) No discrimination by the state on grounds of religion to entitlements provided by the state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) No discrimination in admission to educational institutions on grounds of religion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(j) Equality of active citizenship: no discrimination on grounds of religion in the right to vote, to deliberate on public matters and to stand for public office.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have claimed above that disconnection of religion from state serves different ends. I now want to stress that the third level disconnection may also take diverse forms. This helps us to distinguish different kinds of value-based secular states, each with a different understanding of what precisely this disconnection means. One type of secular state conceives disconnection at the third level in a wholly one-sided manner. To disconnect is to exclude religion from its own affairs but to have no limits on its own interventionist powers in the affairs of religion. Such states exclude religion in order to control or regulate them and sometimes even to destroy them. They may justify exclusion by claiming that religion is false consciousness or obscurantist or superstition or may they do so in the name of a single value such as equality. Such secular states are decidedly anti-religious. I have in mind some communist states, the secular state in Turkey and the French state for long periods in the 19th century.
A second type of value-based secular state conceives this third level disconnection as mutual exclusion. Such a state maintains a policy of strict or absolute separation. In this incarnation it typifies a hysterical brahminical attitude: Religion is untouchable, so any contact with it contaminates secularist purity. Secularism here becomes a doctrine of political taboo and prohibits contacts with religious activities. Such a view proposes that religious and political institutions live as strangers to each other, at best with benign or respectful indifference. Thus, here religion is excluded from the affairs of the state but the state too is excluded from the affairs of the religion. The state has neither a positive relationship with religion, for example there is no policy of granting aid to religious institutions nor a negative relationship with it; it is not within the scope of state activity to interfere in religious matters even when the values professed by the state are violated. This non-interference is justified on the ground that religion is a private matter, and if something is amiss within this private domain, it can be mended only by those who have a right to do so within that sphere. This, according to proponents of this view, is what religious freedom means. Mutual exclusion is justified on grounds of negative liberty and is identical with the privatisation of religion.

When a state is disconnected with religions at all three levels in this particular way, then we may say that a wall of separation has been erected between the two. In different ways, both the American and the French model create a wall of separation that disconnects the state from religion at this third level of law and policy, one predominantly for the sake of religious liberty and the other primarily for the sake of equality of citizenship. These are the liberal and republican conceptions of secularism. Since these are the most dominant and defensible western versions of secularism, I shall put them together and henceforth designate them as the mainstream conception of secularism.

Table 3 encapsulates the main distinction between 3 types of secular states.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of connection (C) or disconnection (D)</th>
<th>Amoral Secular</th>
<th>Anti-religious Secular</th>
<th>Mainstream Value-based Secular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ends: First order C/D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions and Personnel: Second order C/D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Public Policy: Third order C/D</td>
<td>Opportunistic C or D</td>
<td>One-sided C or D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I think we can now better answer the comparative question we raised at the beginning. When anti-separationists imagine the replacement of a secular state with some other type of state, which of the five religious states do they have in mind? Undoubtedly, some religious activists fervently desire the installation of theocracy or a state that establishes its own religion or church. However, most anti-separationist academics neither endorse this position nor explicitly reject it. They attack separation but wish to distance themselves from a wholly religion-centered polity. It is not hard to understand why, if they thought hard on this issue, they would eschew religion-centered states. For a cursory evaluation of these states shows that these are all deeply troublesome. Take first historical instances of states that establish a single church - the unreformed established Protestant Churches of England, Scotland and Germany, and the Catholic Churches in Italy and Spain- the state recognized a particular version of the religion enunciated by that church as the official religion, compelled individuals to congregate for only one church, punished them for failing to profess a particular set of religious beliefs, levied taxes in support of one particular church, paid the salaries of its clergy, made instruction of the favoured interpretation of the religion mandatory in educational institutions or in the media. (Levy 1994, 5) In such cases, not only was there inequality among religions (Christians and Jews) but also among the churches of the same religion, and while members of the established church may have enjoyed a modicum of religious liberty, those belonging to other churches or religions did not enjoy any or the same degree of liberty. When members of other church or religious groups possessed strength or number, then such a multi-religious or multiple-denominational society was invariably wrecked by inter-religious or inter-denominational wars. If they did not, then religious minorities were not even tolerated and faced persistent religious persecution. (Jews in several European countries till the 19th century)\(^7\)

States with substantive establishments have not changed colour with time. Wherever one religion is not only formally but substantively established, the persecution of minorities and

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\(^7\) One exception to this, however, was the Millet system of the Ottoman Empire which had Islam as the established religion but three other religious communities-Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and Jewish- were treated as equals and given a respectable degree of autonomy.
internal dissenters continues today. One has only to cite the example of Saudi Arabia to prove this point (Ruthven 2002, 172-181). It is important to dwell on this because in so many recent critiques of secularism, a more accommodative stance towards religion is recommended with an alarming neglect of some very elementary facts about what such an alliance might entail. Consider the situation in Pakistan where the virtual establishment of the dominant Sunni sect has proved to be disastrous to minorities, including to Muslim minorities. For example, under Article 260 of the constitution Ahmedis have been deemed as a non-Muslim minority and forbidden from using Islamic nomenclature in their religious and social lives. (Malik 2002, 10, Bhargava 2004, 30; A whole community has thereby been formally excluded by the state, both symbolically and materially, from its own religion. For over three decades, citizenship in Pakistan is defined with reference to majoritarian and exclusionary Islamic parameters. Therefore, political exclusion is built into the basic law of the land. By making adherence to Islam mandatory for anyone aspiring to the two highest offices in the country, that of the President and the Prime Minister the Constitution ensures the exclusion of religious minorities from high political office (Malik 2002, 16).

I have taken Pakistan only as an illustration. Surely, after the pogrom in Gujarat in India, there is no doubt how disastrous the establishment of a Hindu Rashtra would be for Muslim minorities. Or consider the democratic state of Israel. Can any one reasonably claim that Christian and Muslim minorities in this Jewish state enjoy the same rights as Jews themselves? It is therefore astonishing to read the claim that 'in modern democratic politics, there is not much reason to fear a religious majority more than a secular majority' (Peter Van Der Veer 2001, 20). Charles Taylor's arguments about the exclusionary tendencies in modern democratic states with religious or ethnic majorities point clearly towards the inherent possibilities in these states towards de facto singular establishment and the wide range of exclusions and injustices that make them what they are. (Taylor in Bhargava 1999, 138 – 163) To say, at this point, that religious majorities are no worse than secular majorities because different religious communities have lived in the past without coming into violent conflict is both ambiguous and misses the point. It is ambiguous because it is hard to understand what a secular majority means. If by this is meant a group of hard-nosed secular absolutists who are deeply anti-religious, then the statement is true. But if by this is meant, a

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8 The distinction between formal and substantive establishment is important. In Saudi Arabia, Islam is both formally and substantively established. Britain has a formally established church (The Anglican Church) but few exceptions apart, only a secular state grants liberty and equality to all.
majority that wishes not to politicize religion in all kinds of unprincipled ways, then this statement is deeply wrong. The statement misses the point because peace between communities is entirely compatible with all kinds of exclusions from the domain of freedom and equality. A fearful minority is willing to buy peace at any cost - something that Indians painfully learnt again after the anti-Muslim Bombay riots in 1992-93.

What of states with multiple establishments of churches? Historically, states of New York or the colonies of Massachusetts in the middle of the 17th century officially respected more than one denomination. (Levy 1994, 12) These states levied a religious tax on everyone and yet gave individuals the choice to remit the tax money to their preferred Church. They financially aided schools run by religious institutions but on a non-discriminatory basis. They may have punished people for disavowing or disrespecting the established religion, but did not compel them to profess the beliefs of a particular denomination.

States with substantive establishment of multiple churches are better in some ways than states with singular establishment. For example, such states are likely to be relatively peaceful. Members of different denominations are likely to tolerate one another. The state grants each denomination considerable autonomy in its own affairs. But states with establishment of multiple churches have their limitations. For a start, they may continue to persecute members of other religions and atheists. Second, they are indifferent to the liberty of individuals within each denomination or religious group. They do little to foster a more general climate of toleration that prevents the persecution of dissenters. Closed and oppressive communities can thrive in such contexts. Third, they may not have legal provisions that allow an individual to exit from his religious community and embrace another religion or to remain unattached to any religion whatsoever. Fourth, such states give recognition to particular religious identities but fail to recognize what may be called non-particularized identities, i.e. identities that simultaneously refer to several particular identities or transcend all of them. Fifth, such states are unconcerned with the non-religious liberties of individuals or groups. Finally, such states are entirely indifferent to citizenship rights. States, which establish multiple religions, face similar problems but are better than states with multiple church establishments in one important respect. There is peace and toleration and perhaps equality between all religious communities.
So are secular states better, from an ethical point of view, than theocracies and states with establishment? It would be hasty, indeed wrong to answer this question in the affirmative. As we have seen, from a moral point of view, some secular states are deeply problematic. Amoral secular states have no commitment to any values. Anti-religious secular states have a poor record in promoting or even protecting religious freedoms. Indeed, states that fail to protect religious freedom usually trample upon other freedoms also. Overtime they also develop a hierarchy between the secular and the religious. Thus, such states are also likely to fair badly on the index of freedom and equality.

Critics who wish to rehabilitate religion in political life usually contrast states more hospitable to religions with self-aggrandizing amoral or mindlessly anti-religious secular states. This is not a fair comparison. An attempt is made here to antecedently shift judgement in favour of states closely aligned with religions by deliberately pitting them against the worst forms of secular states. Little is to be gained from damning secularism, as Talal Asad does, by citing the atrocities of Hitler and Stalin or crimes committed by ‘secularists’ such as Saddam Hussain or Ali Hyder (Asad 2003, 10). Nonetheless, this comparison serves a point: there is not much to choose between theocracies or states with established religions on the one hand and amoral or absolutist secular states on the other. Their deep formal structure is identical. Both fare miserably on any index of freedom or equality.

But what about the third type of secular state, one that strictly separates religion and state for the sake of religious liberty or equality of citizenship? How does the mainstream conception of secularism fare in comparison with ideal-typical theocracies and states with established religions? From a liberal and egalitarian standpoint, pretty favourably. For example, it grants the right to criticise, revise or challenge the dominant interpretations of the core beliefs of their religion to every member of all religions. In such states individuals are free not only to criticize the religion into which they are born, but at the very extreme, to reject it. Such states also grant equality of citizenship. All citizens are entitled to the same basic benefits. They have a right to vote as also a right to participate in public deliberation and to stand for public office.

Thus, when evaluating the relative merits of religious and secular states, it is this mainstream conception which must be kept in mind for comparison and not the routinely debunked, severely anti-religious or self-aggrandizing secular states. Secularism, a value-based doctrine,
is as committed to denouncing these secular regimes as it is to berating religious states that violate principles of liberty and equality. The moot question is whether this mainstream conception itself has serious problems.

**Critiques of Mainstream, Liberal-Democratic Secularism**

The criticisms of this model are many. First, this secularism takes separation to mean exclusion of all religions on a non-preferential basis. It wishes by fiat to eliminate religion from public life and from politics more generally. For example, liberal secularism enjoins the citizen to support only those coercive laws for which there is public justification. Why so? Because if others are expected to follow a law in terms that they do not understand and for reasons they cannot endorse, then the principle of equal respect is violated. (Audi 1993, 701: Solum 1990, 1095; Macedo 1990, 249; Rawls 1971, 337 - 38; Weithman 1997, 6) Coercive principles must be as justifiable to others as they are to us and therefore must be based on terms that all citizens can accept on the basis of their common reason. (Larmore 1996, 137) If other reasonable and conscientious citizens have good reason to reject a particular rationale in support of a coercive law then this rationale does not count as public justification. Because a religious rationale is a paradigmatic case of a reason that other citizens have good reasons to reject, it does not count as public justification and because it does not count as public justification, a law grounded solely on a religious rationale must never be enacted. In short, purely religious convictions or commitments have no role to play in democratic and pluralist polities. This requirement that religious reasons be excluded from liberal democratic politics is offensive to religious persons who like others wish to support their favoured political commitments on the basis of their conscience. (Sandel in Eastland 1993, 483 - 496) If people believe that their politics must be consistent with their morality and since morality is derived from religion, with their religious connections then why should they be discouraged or stigmatized for doing so? Besides, it is mistaken to assume that only religious people bring passion and sectarianism into politics or, as Richard Rorty believes, that only religion is a conversation stopper (Rorty 1994, 2; Eberle 2002, 77) By asking a religious person to exercise restraint and exclude religious reasons in their justification for a coercive law, liberal secularism forces her to act against her conscience and in doing so it fails not only to respect the moral agency of that person but also violates its own principle of equal respect. Indeed, the demand that restraint be exercised is counterproductive because exclusion from the larger public sphere forces the religious to form their own narrow public where resentment and
prejudice will flourish. (Spinner - Halev 2000, 150 - 156) This would lead not only to the freezing of identities but to the building of unreachable walls between the religious and non-religious citizens. Therefore, ‘engagement with religious people is typically better than shunning them’ (Spinner-Halev 2000, 155).

Second, this secularism does not understand the believer’s life as it is lived from the inside. It misses out on perhaps the most significant feature of most religions that they encourage their members to choose to live a disciplined, restricted, rule-bound, and desire-abnegating life. A religious life is not just a life of personal and whimsical attachment to a personal God but one in which one submits to his commands and lives obediently by them. This may be a nightmare for a standard liberal but gets the constitutive features of most religions rather better than liberal secularism does. Third, by interpreting separation as exclusion it betrays its own sectarianism; it can live comfortably with liberal, protestantized, individualized and privatized religions but has no resources to cope with religions that mandate greater public or political presence, or have a strong communal orientation. This group-insensitivity of secularism makes it virtually impossible for it to accommodate community-specific rights and therefore to protect the rights of religious minorities. In short, while this secularism copes with inter-religious domination, it does not possess resources to deal with inter-religious domination. Fourth, western secularism is a product of protestant ethic and shaped by it. Therefore, its universal pretensions are perhaps its greatest drawback. Moreover, it presupposes a Christian civilization that is easily forgotten because over time it has silently slid into the background. Christianity allows this self-limitation and much of the world innocently mistakes this rather cunning self-denial for its disappearance. (Connolly 1999, 24) But if this is so, this ‘inherently dogmatic’ secularism cannot coexist innocently with other religions. (Keane 2000, 14; Madan 1998, 298) Given the enormous power of the state, it must try to shape and transform them- a clear instance of illegitimate influence, if not outright violence. Thus, with all its claims of leaving religions alone, of granting religions liberty, this secularism is hostile to non-liberal, non-protestant believers. (Hamburger 2002, 193 - 251) Overall, it would not be wrong to say then that this secularism forces upon us a choice between active hostility or benign indifference. Fifth, liberal secuiralism relies excessively on a rationalist conception of reason that imposes unfair limits on the manner in which issues are to be brought in the public domain. Some issues are constitutively emotive; others become emotive because they are articulated by people who are not always trained to be rational in the way liberals mandate. (Connolly 1999, 27) In short, the model of moral reasoning typical
of secularism is context-insensitive, theoreticist, absolutist (non-comparative), enjoining us to think in terms of this or that, and too heavily reliant on monolithic ideas or values considered to be true or superior or wholly non-negotiable.

These are powerful critiques with some of which I agree. But I also have serious disagreement with the conclusion that they rebut political secularism altogether. I agree that in our imagination of social and public life, greater space must be given to non-liberal religions; such ways of life have moral integrity that liberal secularism frequently fails to realize. Yet, in our effort to accommodate such religions, we cannot ignore that these very religions also continue to be a source of severe oppression and exclusion. States that align with these religions frequently condone these morally objectionable practices. Let me offer an example each from Pakistan and India. In Pakistan, the religiously sanctioned law of evidence, *Qanoon-e-Shahadat*, holds on par the evidence of two women or two non-Muslims with that of a single male Muslim, thereby establishing the intrinsic superiority of Muslim men over women and minorities and contravening the fundamental principle of equality (Malik 2002, 18). In Hinduism, religiously sanctioned customs related to purity and pollution continues to exclude women from the affairs of their own religion and perpetuate an institutionalized system of subordination of women. For example, at the Srimalai/Ayappa temple in Kerala, women between the ages of 15 and 55 are not allowed entry at all on the ground that their very capacity to menstruate makes their bodies impure for this entire period. This violation of the religious rights of women severely compromises the secular character of the Indian state.

What does all this show? It demonstrates three things. First, that we must be sensitive simultaneously to the moral integrity of liberal and non liberal religious ways of living as well as to religion-based oppression and exclusions. Second, states that are strongly aligned to religions may be sensitive to the moral integrity of non-liberal religions but not always to their oppressions. Third, that a policy of non-interference (mutual exclusion) typical of liberal secularism is self-defeating. In short, a conception of secularism needs to be worked out that goes beyond liberal notions and does justice to both these dimensions referred to above. What concerns me then is a general failure to explore other alternative versions of secularism that are able effectively to meet the challenge some of these critiques and imaginatively open up new possibilities of expanding our horizons. Do such versions exist? I think such a version that is not parochial, i.e. neither wholly Christian nor western exists. This model meets the
secularist objection to non-secular states and the religious objection to some forms of secular states. To my mind, when properly interpreted, Indian secularism best exemplifies this model.9

**Alternative Conceptions: Indian Secularism**

Seven features of Indian secularism make it distinctive, marking it out from other variants. *First*, its multi-value character. Indian secularism more explicitly registers its ties with values forgotten by western conceptions - for example, peace between communities - and interprets liberty and equality both individualistically and non-individualistically. It has a place not only for rights of individuals to profess their religious beliefs but the right of religious communities to establish and maintain educational institutions crucial for the survival and sustenance of their religious traditions. *Second*, because it was born in a deeply multi-religious society, it is concerned as much with inter-religious domination as it is with intra-religious domination. Thus it recognizes community-specific socio-cultural rights. Although community-specific political rights (special representation rights for religious minorities such as Muslims) were withheld in India for contextual reasons, the conceptual space for it is present within the model. *Third*, it is committed to the idea of principled distance, poles apart from one-sided exclusion, mutual exclusion and strict neutrality or equidistance. Table-4 clarifies how this alternative conception is different from other types of secular states.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of connection (C) or disconnection (D)</th>
<th>Amoral Secular</th>
<th>Anti-religious Secular</th>
<th>Mainstream Value-based Secular</th>
<th>Alternative Value-based Secular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ends: First order C/D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions and Personnel: Second order C/D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Public Policy: Third order C/D</td>
<td>Opportunistic C or D</td>
<td>One-sided D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Principled C or D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 I speak of Indian secularism not out of chauvinism, but because Indian society has for centuries addressed problems which western societies are only now beginning to face. Much has been written on Indian secularism. The interested reader may read Bhargava, 1998; Vanaik, 1997; Mahajan, 1998; Chandhoke, 1999; Jacobsohn, 2003; Nigam, 2006.
In addition to these features, there are others that further distinguish it from the mainstream conception. Fourth, it admits a distinction between depublicization and depoliticization as well between different kinds of depoliticization. Because it is not hostile to the public presence of religion, it does aim to depublicize it. It accepts the importance of one form of depoliticization of religion, namely the first and second-level disconnection of state from religion but the third-level depoliticization of religion is permitted purely on contextual grounds. Fifth, it is marked by a unique combination of active hostility to some aspects of religion (a ban on unsociability and a commitment to make religiously grounded personal laws more gender-just) with active respect for its other dimensions (religious groups are officially recognized, state-aid is available non-preferentially to educational institutions run by religious communities, no blanket exclusion of religion as mandated by western liberalism). This is a direct consequence of its commitment to multiple values and principled distance. The Indian model accepts the view that critique is consistent with respect, that one does have to choose between hostility and respectful indifference. In this sense, it inherits the tradition of the great Indian religious reformers who tried to change their religions precisely because it meant so much to them. Sixth, it is committed to a different model of moral reasoning that is highly contextual and opens up the possibility of different societies working out their own secularisms. In short, it opens out the possibility of multiple secularisms. Seventh, it breaks out of the rigid interpretative grid that divides our social world into the western modern and traditional, indigenous non-western. Indian secularism is modern but departs significantly from mainstream conceptions of western secularism.

**Principled Distance**

Let me further elucidate two of these features: its contextual character and the idea of principled distance. As seen above, for mainstream western secularism, separation means mutual exclusion. The idea of principled distance unpacks the metaphor of separation differently. It accepts a disconnection between state and religion at the level of ends and institutions but does not make a fetish of it at the third level of policy and law. (this distinguishes it from all other models of secularism, moral and amoral that disconnect state and religion at this third level) How else can it be in a society where religion frames some of its deepest interests? Recall that political secularism is an ethic whose concerns relating to religion are similar to theories that oppose unjust restrictions on freedom, morally
indefensible inequalities, inter-communal domination and exploitation. Yet a secularism based on principled distance is not committed to the mainstream Enlightenment idea of religion. It accepts that humans have an interest in relating to something beyond themselves including God and that this manifests itself as individual belief and feeling as well as social practice in the public domain. It also accepts that religion is a cumulative tradition (W.C. Smith 1991, 154-169) as well as a source of people's identities. But it insists that even if turned out that God exists and that one religion is true and others false, then this does not give the 'true' doctrine or religion the right to force it down the throats of others who do not believe it. Nor does it give a ground for discrimination in the equal distribution of liberties and other valuable resources. Similarly, a secularism based on principle distance accepts that religion may not have special public significance antecedently written into and defining the very character of the state or the nation but it does not follow from this that it has no public significance at all. Sometimes, on some versions of it, the wall of separation thesis assumes precisely that.

But what precisely is principled distance? The policy of principled distance entails a flexible approach on the question of inclusion/exclusion of religion and the engagement/disengagement of the state, which at the third level of law and policy depends on the context, nature or current state of relevant religions. This engagement must be governed by principles undergirding a secular state, i.e. principles that flow from a commitment to the values mentioned above. This means that religion may intervene in the affairs of the state if such intervention promotes freedom, equality or any other value integral to secularism. For example, citizens may support a coercive law of the state grounded purely in a religious rationale if this law is compatible with freedom or equality. 10 Equally, the state may engage with religion or disengage from it, engage positively or negatively but it does so depending entirely on whether or not these values are promoted or undermined. This is one constitutive idea of principled distance. This idea is different from strict neutrality, i.e. the state may help or hinder all religions to an equal degree and in the same manner, that if it intervenes in one religion, it must also do so in others. Rather, it rests upon a distinction explicitly drawn by

10 Principled distance rejects the standard liberal idea that the principle of equal respect is best realized only when people come into the public domain by leaving their religious reasons behind. Principled distance does not discourage public justification Indeed it encourages people to pursue public justification. However, if the attempt at public justification fails, it enjoins religiously minded citizens to abandon restraint and support coercive laws that are consistent with freedom and equality based purely on religious reasons. See Eberle, 2002.
the American philosopher, Ronald Dworkin between equal treatment and treating everyone as an equal (Dworkin 1978, 125). Treating people as equals entails that every person or group be treated with equal concern and respect. It may sometimes require equal treatment, say equal distribution of resources but it occasionally also dictate unequal treatment. Thus treating people or groups as equals is entirely consistent with differential treatment. This idea is the second ingredient in what I have called principled distance.

I said that principled distance allows for differential treatment. What kind of treatment do I have in mind? First, religious groups have sought exemptions from practices in which states intervene by promulgating a law to be applied neutrally to the rest of society. For example, Sikhs demand exemptions from mandatory helmet laws and from police dress codes to accommodate religiously required turbans. Muslims women and girls demand that the state not interfere in their religiously required chador. Principled distance allows then that a practice that is banned or regulated in one culture may be permitted in the minority culture because of the distinctive meaning it has for its members. For the mainstream conception this is a problem because of their simple, somewhat absolutist morality that gives overwhelming importance to one value, particularly to equal treatment, equal liberty or equality of individual citizenship. Religious groups may demand that the state refrain from interference in their practices but they may equally demand that the state give them special assistance so that these groups are also able to secure what other groups are able to routinely get by virtue of their dominance in the political community. For example, it may grant authority to religious officials to perform legally binding marriages or to have their own rules of obtaining a divorce. Principled distance allows the possibility of such policies on the grounds that it might be unfair to hold people accountable to an unfair law.

However, principled distance is not just a recipe for differential treatment in the form of special exemptions. It may even require state intervention in some religions more than in others, considering the historical and social condition of all relevant religions. For the promotion of a particular value constitutive of secularism, some religion, relative to other religions, may require more interference from the state. For example, suppose that the value to be advanced is social equality. This requires in part undermining caste hierarchies. If this is the aim of the state, then it may be required of the state that it interferes in caste-ridden Hinduism much more than say Islam or Christianity. However, if a diversity-driven religious liberty is the value to be advanced by the state, then it may have to intervene in Christianity
and Islam more than in Hinduism. If this is so, the state can neither strictly exclude considerations emanating from religion nor keep strict neutrality with respect to religion. It cannot antecedently decide that it will always refrain from interfering in religions or that it will interfere in each equally. To want to do so would be plainly absurd. All it must ensure is that the relationship between the state and religions is guided by non-sectarian motives consistent with some values and principles.

**Contextual Secularism**

A context-sensitive secularism, one based on the idea of principled distance, is what I call contextual secularism. Contextual secularism is contextual not only because it captures the idea that the precise form and content of secularism will vary from one to another context and from place to place but also that it embodies a certain model of contextual moral reasoning. This it does because of its character as a multi-value doctrine. To accept that secularism is a multi-value doctrine is to acknowledge that its constitutive values do not always sit easily with one another. On the contrary, they are frequently in conflict. Some degree of internal discord and therefore a fair amount of instability is an integral part of contextual secularism. For this reason, it forever requires fresh interpretations, contextual judgments and attempts at reconciliation and compromise. No general *a priori* rule of resolving these conflicts exist; no easy lexical order, no pre-existing hierarchy among values or laws that enables us to decide that, no matter what the context, a particular value must override everything else. Almost everything then is a matter of situational thinking and contextual reasoning. Each time the matter presents itself differently and will be differently resolved. If this is true, then the practice of secularism requires a different model of moral reasoning than the one that straightjackets our moral understanding in the form of well delineated, explicitly stated rules. (Taylor 1994, 16-43) This contextual secularism recognizes that the conflict between individual rights and group rights or between claims of equality and liberty or between claims of liberty and the satisfaction of basic needs cannot always be adjudicated by a recourse to some general and abstract principle. Rather they can only be settled case by case and may require a fine balancing of competing claims. The eventual outcome may not be wholly satisfactory to either but still be reasonably satisfactory to both. Multi-value doctrines such as secularism encourage accommodation – not the giving up of one value for the sake of another but rather their reconciliation and possible harmonization i.e. to make each work without changing the basic content of apparently incompatible concepts and values.
This endeavor to make concepts, viewpoints and values work simultaneously does not amount to a morally objectionable compromise. This is so because nothing of importance is being given up for the sake of a less significant thing, one without value or even with negative value. Rather, what is pursued is a mutually agreed middle way that combines elements from two or more equally valuable entities. The roots of such attempts at reconciliation and accommodation lie in a lack of dogmatism, in a willingness to experiment, to think at different levels and in separate spheres and in a readiness to take decisions on a provisional basis. It captures a way of thinking characterized by the following dictum: ‘why look at things in terms of this or that, why not try to have both this and that.’ (Austin 1972, 318). In this way of thinking, it is recognized that though we may currently be unable to secure the best of both values and therefore be forced to settle for a watered-down version of each, we must continue to have an abiding commitment to search for a transcendence of this second best condition.\(^{11}\) It is frequently argued against Indian secularism that it is contradictory because it tries to bring together individual and community rights, and that articles in the Indian Constitution that have a bearing on the secular nature of the Indian state are deeply conflictual and at best ambiguous. (Tambiah 1998, 445 - 453) This is to misrecognise a virtue as a vice. In my view, this attempt to bring together seemingly incompatible values is a great strength of Indian secularism. Indian secularism is an ethically sensitive negotiated settlement between diverse groups and divergent values. When it is not treated as such, it turns either into a dead formula or a façade for political manoeuvres.

**Is Secularism a Christian and western doctrine?**

What then of the claim that secularism is a Christian, western doctrine and therefore, is unable to adapt itself easily to the cultural conditions of, say, India, infused as they are by religions that grew in the soil of the sub-continent. This necessary link between secularism and Christianity is exaggerated, if not entirely mistaken. It is true that the institutional separation of church and state is an internal feature of Christianity and an integral part of western secularisms. But as we have seen this church-state disconnection is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the development of secularism even in societies with church-

\(^{11}\) Such contextual reasoning was not atypical of the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly in which great value was placed on arriving at decisions by consensus. Yet, the procedure of majority vote was not given up altogether. On issues that everyone judged to be less significant, a majoritarian procedure was adopted.
based religions. It is clearly not a necessary condition for the development of all forms of secularisms. Moreover, as I have argued, the mutual exclusion of religion and the state is not the defining feature of secularism. The idea of separation can be interpreted differently. Nor are religious integrity, peace and toleration (interpreted broadly to mean 'live and let live), uniquely Christian values. Most non-Christian civilizations have given significant space to each. Therefore, none of them are exclusively Christian. It follows that, even though we find in Christian writings some of the clearest and most systematic articulation of this doctrine, even the western conception of secularism is not exclusively Christian.

All right, one might say, secularism is not just a Christian doctrine, but is it not western? The answer to this question is both yes and no. Up to a point, it is certainly a western idea. More specifically, as a clearly articulated doctrine, it has distinct western origins. Although elements that constitute secularism assume different cultural forms and are found in several civilizations, one cannot deny that the idea of the secular first achieved self-consciousness and was properly theorized in the west. One might then say that the early and middle history of secularism is almost entirely dominated by western societies. However, the same cannot be said of its later history. Nationalism and democracy arrived in the west after the settlement of religious conflicts, in societies that had been made religiously homogenous, or had almost become so. (with the exception of the Jews, of course who continued to face persistent persecution). The absence of deep religious diversity and conflict meant that issues of citizenship could be addressed almost entirely disregarding religious context; the important issue of community specific rights to religious groups could be wholly ignored. This had a decisive bearing on the western conception of secularism. However, for non-western societies such as India, the case is different. Both national and democratic agendas in countries such as India had to face issues raised by deep religious difference and diversity. In India, nationalism had to choose between the religious and the secular. Similarly, the distribution of active citizenship rights could not be conceived or accomplished by ignoring religion. It could be done either by actively disregarding religion (as in all political rights) or by developing a complex attitude to it, as in the case of cultural rights, where it had to balance claims of individual autonomy with those of community obligations, and claims of the necessity of keeping religion 'private' with their inescapable, often valuable presence in the public. By doing so, Indian secularism never completely annulled particular religious identities.
In addressing these complex issues, the idea of the political secularism was taken further than had been evolved in the west. Mainstream theories or ideologies in modern, western societies have taken little notice of these features. Hence, they are struggling to deal with post-colonial religious diversity of their societies. The later history of secularism is more non-western than western.\textsuperscript{12} To discover its own rich and complex structure, western secularism can either look backward, to its own past or else look sideways, at Indian secularism that mirrors not only the past of secularism, but in a way, also its future. Doing so will certainly benefit the secularisms of many western societies. For example, French secularism needs to look beyond its own conceptions of laïcité in order to take into account its own multi-cultural and multi-religious reality. It cannot continue to take refuge in claims of exceptionalism. A good hard look at Indian secularism could also change the self-understanding of other western secularisms, including a very individualist, American liberal secularism.

\textsuperscript{12} And by implication, the history of secularism must include the history of other non-western societies that have sought to install and maintain secular states.
References:


