
The Divergent Meanings of Secularism in India

*

Hriday Narayan**

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

Email: hridayn@hufs.ac.kr

Abstract

The term secularism first emerged in the West in ancient Greece's classical philosophy and politics. It dissipated for the time being after the fall of Greece but reemerged during the Renaissance and the Reformation era. This doctrine advocates the separation of the State and the Church in the West. In the case of India, the context is very different because the country is home to nearly all of the world's major religions, and many native sects developed within the country as a result of the internal and external interaction of different belief systems. Secularism has little meaning in India the way it is understood in the West. Secularism is understood and defined according to the Indian Constitution as 'Equal respect for all religions,' which is not correct as understood in the West. How, then, did this expression become a part of India's political and social debate? This study attempts to understand the varying meanings attached to the interpretation of secularism vis-a-vis religion in India.

Keywords: Religion, Secularism, Dharma, Panth, Dharma-nirpeksh, Panth-nirpeksh

Introduction

While the concept of Indian secularism is strongly tied to its own historical and cultural traditions, it is very much a part of the nation's social fabric. Secularism in India is quite distinct from Western secularism. The unique Indian conception of secularism has been one of the most discussed and contested issues in recent times. In modern times, India's secularism has emerged not as a closed compartment of traditional and cultural values but rather as a fusion of ideas that appeared in the constituent assembly, making Indian democracy functional by combining individual rights with group rights. As Bhargava asserts, 'India's own conception of secularism is neither Christian nor Western, as it is rooted in its long-standing local traditions,'¹ embedded in Hindu literature with a very different understanding and context. When adopted in India's constitution and introduced in educational institutions, the concepts of religion and secularism formulated in the West seem to have little or no attempts have been made to contextualize or conceptualize them in the modern Indian context. We frequently return to understanding the meanings of religion and secularism in ancient Indian history and culture, mainly Hindu literature,

* This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2017S1A6A3A03079318)

** Professor, Department of History, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, South Korea

¹ See Bhargava, R. (ed), Politics and Ethics of the Indian Constitution, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008. And, The Promise of India's Secular Democracy. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, P. 102.

which provides more philosophical understanding in abstract form than an accurate understanding in the present context. I do not attempt in this paper to discuss or resolve the complex but fascinating issue of religion and secularism. However, try to understand religion and secularism broadly through explanations and interpretations based on Indian scriptures.

Since the origin of secularism is mainly tied with the idea of religion, it is also essential to understand the historical and cultural background of religion in the West and India. Both regions provide a very different philosophical and cultural understanding of religion. I believe that understanding the meaning and context of religion in the Western and Indian contexts is a gateway to understanding the contextual difference of secularism in both regions.

Religion and Secularism: West Vs. India

In many parts of the world, the distinction between religious and secular life is contentious. Since the turn of the century, there has been a strong emphasis on social issues such as same-sex marriage legalization, assisted dying, abortion rights, and equality issues. As a result of these societal conflicts and tensions, some assert that secularism is on the verge of becoming post-secular or that there has even been a 'return to religion' in public life. Since its inception, the term 'secularism' has been a source of contention. The exact nature of the 'secular' and 'religious' spheres of life is debatable, and secularism manifests itself in various ways in practice. It can range from exclusive forms of secularism in the US and France to inclusive secularism in India. Religious believers argue that religion provides various valuable 'public goods'² and a sense of meaning and identity to individuals. On the other hand, secularists contend that the separation of Church and State provides the best framework for ensuring the rights and liberties of all citizens, regardless of religion or belief.

Conceptual definition issues impact disputes regarding secularism. Secularism is a self-explanatory concept in various regards. At its most fundamental level, secularism entails the State's normative commitment to religious neutrality, which compels the State to avoid favoring, discouraging, promoting or discouraging any specific religious (or non-religious) belief or opinion over another. In institutional terms, it is often understood to indicate a commitment to the separation of religion and State.

Nonetheless, this concept's simplicity conceals more subtle undercurrents. The term 'secular' is inextricably linked to its binary polar opposite, 'religious.' Both terms originated in Europe during the Middle Ages, the term 'religion' (derived from the Latin '*religio*') initially referring to the communal life of Christian reverends and the term 'secular' (derived from the Latin '*saeculum*') referring to the world outside these monastic communities. Since their inception, the terms 'secular' and 'religious' have been construed as diametrically opposed, with 'secular' defined mainly through what it wasn't. It meant things, places, and ideas that didn't fall under the authority of religious people or groups.³

² Steven Kettell. *Secularism and Religion*, Department of Politics and International Studies, the University of Warwick, 2019, p.1. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.898> Published online: 25 January 2019)

³ See Taylor, C. *A secular age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

A related issue is ambiguity and contention surrounding the concept of 'religion.' This, too, is connected to the historical and geographical context in which the term originated and developed, initially being used to refer to a form of Christianity unique to western Europe. Additionally, the utter diversity of religious beliefs and practices makes it extremely difficult to develop a coherent and widely accepted definition of 'religion.' Not all scholars agree on whether religion entails specific types of faith. For example, the presence of a god or gods (which many folk religions lack), particular forms of practices such as affiliation with a specific institution, or attending a place of worship (which are not very significant for the religions such as Buddhism and Confucianism), or a commitment to a divinely inspired moral code are not universally agreed upon by scholars (early hunter-gatherer societies, for example, had tyranny).⁴

These conceptual problems have far-reaching consequences. According to some scholars, the binary framework of distinct 'secular' and 'religious' spheres is so historically and culturally specific that the terms lose their meaning outside this Western-centric framework. Employing the terms to non-Western cultures and societies that do not make such a transparent division (for example, Islamic societies in which religion permeates all aspects of life) is occasionally regarded as misleading and inappropriate. Following that, some commentators, such as Timothy Fitzgerald, argued that the term 'religion' should be abandoned entirely. Others have attempted to demonstrate how the ostensibly distinct categories of 'secular' and 'religious' are mutually constitutive.⁵ According to Talal Asad, secularism constructs religion as its 'other' to achieve an internal sense of coherence.⁶ It entails imposing a fixed and unchanging concept of 'religion' founded on supernatural beliefs and presenting secularism as a rational category concerned with the natural world and social order.⁷ Others, such as Charles Taylor, have argued that secularism has theological roots. The rise of monotheism, particularly the Protestant Reformation, paved the way for a progressive diminution of the sacred and the concept of supernatural forces present in ordinary social-cultural life.⁸

Religion as a modern abstraction encompassing distinct sets of beliefs or doctrines is a relatively recent addition to the English language. This usage began in the 17th century due to events such as the Protestant Reformation's division of Christendom and globalization during the age of exploration, which involved contact with numerous foreign cultures speaking non-European languages.⁹ According to some, regardless of its definition, the

⁴ See Boyer, P. *Religion explained: The evolutionary origins of religious thought*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001.

⁵ See Fitzgerald, T. A critique of "religion" as a cross-cultural category. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 1997, 9(2), 91–100.

⁶ See Asad, T. *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

⁷ Also see Mahmood, S. *Secularism, sovereignty, and religious difference: A global genealogy?* *Society and Space*, 2017, 35(2), 197–209.

⁸ See Taylor, C. *A secular age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

⁹ Roberts, Jon H. "Science and Religion". In Shank, Michael; Numbers, Ronald; Harrison, Peter (eds.). *Wrestling with Nature: From Omens to Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2011, p. 254; Harrison, Peter. *The Territories of Science and Religion*. University of Chicago Press, 2015; and Harrison, Peter. 'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

term religion should not be applied to non-Western cultures.¹⁰ Others argue that imposing religion on non-Western cultures affects people's behavior and beliefs.¹¹

The concept of religion developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,¹² given the fact that ancient sacred texts such as the Bible, the Quran, and others lacked a word or even a concept of religion in their original languages, and neither did the people or cultures that produced these sacred texts.¹³ For example, there is no precise Hebrew equivalent to religion, and Judaism does not clearly distinguish between religious, national, racial, or ethnic identities.¹⁴ One of its central concepts is *halakha*, a Hebrew term that translates as the path that governs religious tradition and faith and many attributes of day-to-day life.¹⁵ Even though Judaism's beliefs and practices date back to the ancient world, ancient Jews viewed Jewish identity as a matter of ethnic or national identity, not a mandatory belief system or regulated rituals.¹⁶ In the first century CE, Josephus used the Greek term '*ioudaismos*' (Judaism) as an ethnic term that had nothing to do with modern abstract concepts of religion or a collection of beliefs.¹⁷ The Christian Church invented the term 'Judaism.'¹⁸ It was not until the nineteenth century that Jews regarded their ancestors' culture as a religion comparable to Christianity.¹⁹ The Greek word '*threskeia*' is found in the New Testament. It was used by Greek writers such as Herodotus and Josephus. Although the term '*threskeia*' is frequently translated as 'religion' in modern translations, the term was widely understood as generic 'worship' throughout the medieval period.²⁰ The Arabic word '*din*' is frequently translated as religion in modern translations of the Quran, but until the mid-1600s, translators used the term *din* to mean 'law.'²¹

In the West and India, states and religions developed very differently. The term religion was borrowed from the Judeo-Christian heritage and used arbitrarily to describe various

¹⁰Fitzgerald, T. *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity*. Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 45–46; and Dubuisson, Daniel. *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

¹¹Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

¹²Nongbri, Brent. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. Yale University Press, 2013, p. 152. While the Greeks, Romans, Mesopotamians, and many other peoples have a long history, their religions have a relatively recent history. Ancient religions as objects of study developed concurrently with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' development of religion as a concept; Harrison, Peter (1990). p. 1. The existence of entities known as 'religions' in the world is an undisputed fact... This was not always the case. However the terms 'religion' and 'the religions' as we now understand them emerged relatively recently in Western thought, during the Enlightenment. Between them, these two concepts established a new framework for categorizing specific facets of human life.

¹³Nongbri, Brent. "2. Lost in Translation: Inserting "Religion" into Ancient Texts". *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. Yale University Press, 2013; Morreall, John Sonn, Tamara. *50 Great Myths about Religions*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 13. Many languages do not even have a word equivalent to our word 'religion'; nor is such a word found in either the Bible or the Qur'an

¹⁴Hershel Edelheit, Abraham J. Edelheit, *History of Zionism: A Handbook and Dictionary*, p. 3, citing Solomon Zeitlin, *The Jews. Race, Nation, or Religion?* Philadelphia: Dropsie College Press, 1936.

¹⁵Whiteford, Linda M.; Trotter II, Robert T. *Ethics for Anthropological Research and Practice*. Waveland Press, 2008, p. 22.

¹⁶Burns, Joshua Ezra. "Jewish ideologies of Peace and Peacemaking". In Omar, Irfan; Duffey, Michael (eds.). *Peacemaking and the Challenge of Violence in World Religions*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, p. 86-87.

¹⁷Nongbri, Brent. 2013.

¹⁸Boyarin, Daniel. *Judaism: The Genealogy of a Modern Notion*. Rutgers University Press, 2018.

¹⁹Burns, Joshua Ezra. 2015.

²⁰Nongbri, Brent. 2013.

²¹*Ibid.*

Indian ideologies, mythologies, rites, and customs. However, there is no single term for religion in Indian Hindu literature. There has never been. The term *dharma* is loosely translated as a religion not synonymous with religion in the Western sense.

In broad terms, *Dharma* could be translated as duties or responsibilities. Duty could refer to social responsibilities, which are frequently interpreted in caste terms in the *dharma shastras*. Thus, *Kshatriya-dharma* would be warfare, but *shudra-dharma* would be service. However, there may be universal obligations such as *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *anrishamsyata* (non-cruelty). Individual duties may also exist, such as those owed to gods, ancestors, teachers, and the needy, where responsibility acquires the form of unpayable debt. The following *Dharma* was *karma*, which consisted of religious actions such as sacrifice, worship, and pilgrimage varied widely among localities and groups.

Then, several devotional *sampradayas* (sects) and Sufi *silsilas* (schools) across ancient and medieval India, each with its own rites, customs, instructors, martyrs, and gods. The world of popular spirituality frequently arose in opposition to or indifferent to the dominant order of things. Specific communities were subsequently absorbed into Brahminism (Orthodox Hinduism adhering to the pantheism of the Vedas and the ancient sacrifices and family ceremonies) or *Wahabism* (*Wahab* is a member of a Saudi Arabian Sunni Muslim sect that adheres to rigid orthodoxy and condemns all innovations occurring after the third century of Islam), while others developed into significant counter-communities such as the Sikhs, and yet others became the focal point of strong anti-caste campaigns among Hindus and Muslims alike.

And then, there were terminologies such as *mata*, *Darshana*, and *agama* - viewpoints, pathways – such as *Vedanta*, *Mimamsa*, Yoga, Buddhism, and Jainism, which addressed philosophical issues concerning the nature of the self and the world. Some of these beliefs alluded to a god or divinity, while others did not. None of these were theologies in the traditional sense in Western Europe. None of these were based on the Bible. And none of them suggested ‘faith’ as a counter-argument against logic. Indeed, all theologies are concerned with philosophical and logical insights into the natures of reality and unreality, changeability, and immutability. Most significantly, none of these had any concept of a political establishment, such as the Church, that would support its various schools of thought. These disparate facets and manifestations of spirituality did not constitute something termed Hinduism in ancient India (although there was something known as Brahminism, which was never without its detractors, whether in religious or political terms.)

As in Europe, the modern absolutist State obtained its monopoly of violence by usurping political power from its most formidable adversary, the Church. Like the State, it had armies and police forces of its own (recall the Inquisition and the Crusades). States in Europe began establishing state religions in the sixteenth century, persecuting Jews, Muslims, and heterodox Christians (such as Catholics in England and Protestants in France) within their borders in order to deny the Church or any other extraterritorial power the right to exercise political or moral authority over their citizens. Therefore, the Western concept of secularism has its basic premise in separating religion and State. In contrast, secularism in India holds a more varied view of religious tolerance, accommodating multiple faiths. According to the secular model, religion and the State should remain

separate, and neither the State nor religion should attempt to influence the other. Since secularism holds that religion and the State should be separated, the concept is found primarily in the West. But in India, no wall of separation between religion and the State exists, either by law or in practice. With the State and religion interacting and intervening in each other's affairs within legally and judicially established parameters, this can happen in India. It means that Secularism in India does not necessitate the expulsion of religion from the affairs of the State. The western model is based on the principle that governments are not permitted to support institutions managed by religious communities. The Indian model has chosen a positive mode of engagement, while the European model has decided to take an aggressive approach. Indian state-funded religious institutions provide for all minority religions, regardless of their size. In the western model, the State generally does not get involved in religious matters unless religion breaks the law. While some favor a hands-off approach to religion, others argue that the State should intervene in religious affairs and fix its problems. In the view of the West, religion should be entirely relegated to the private sector and utterly absent from public life. The Western model has imposed the rule that governments can't pass any legislation based on religion, which results in a separation of Church and State that places citizens' religious activities and practices entirely outside the government's reach. In India, the State mandates the Departments of Religious Endowments, *Wakf* Boards,²² and other similar departments.

Additionally, the State also used to appoint trustees of these organizations. The State is impartial to all religions, as the Indian Constitution stipulates, but society is deeply religious. Indian secularism is in danger due to efforts by religious groups to galvanize political support using artificial religious identities, such as religion, caste, and ethnicity. Though Indian intellectuals place a high value on the concept of secularism, one would expect its content to be more or less obvious. Additionally, whenever participants in a debate attempt to define secularism, they create complications and misunderstandings. Indian intellectuals have debated secularism for two decades, but the concept has remained undefined. As a result, one might be suitable to ask what secularism means, especially in the Indian context?²³ Secularism, a notion that the average person is familiar with and accustomed to, has developed the sense of a riddle, a mystery, or an enigma among intellectuals.²⁴ Throughout the last few decades, identical observations have been made repeatedly. And Indian literati tend to interpret concepts in their own subjective way or use more pointed terminology. In India, the idea of secularism has procured numerous interpretations that have now come to mean different things for diverse groups of people.²⁵ Like liberal Hindu gods who can take various forms and allow devotees to worship in any form they like, secularism has acquired so many interpretations that it now

²²Waqf is the permanent commitment of movable or immovable property by philanthropists to religious, pious, or charitable purposes authorized by Muslim Law. The grant is referred to as *mushrut-ul-khidmat*, and the individual who makes such a commitment is referred to as Wakif.

The Central Waqf Council of India is an Indian statutory body established in 1964 by the Government of India under the Waqf Act, 1954 (now a subsection of the Waqf Act, 1995) to advise it on matters relating to the operation of the State Waqf Boards and the proper administration of the Waqfs in the country.

²³Mushir-Ul-Haq. *Islam in Secular India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1972, p.6.

²⁴Sankhdher, M.M. 'Understanding Secularism' in M.M Sankhdher (ed), *Secularism in India: Dilemmas and Challenges*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992, Pp.1-2.

²⁵Srikanth, H. 'Secularism versus Pseudo- secularism: An Indian Debate' in Heredia (ed), 1994, P. 39.

means different things to other groups of people. Whether Muslim or Hindu, rightist or leftist, sociologist or philosopher, these philosophers all agree on one point in the Indian context: the term 'secularism' has so many varied interpretations that it appears to have lost any meaning.

Secularism entails separating the State from religion, all faiths, or any particular religious order; it represents a separation of non-religious and religious bodies²⁶. When secularists argue that such secularism is essential in India, their responsibility is to offer a theoretical account of Indian reality, proving that the only conceptual solution is distinguishing politics from religion.

There have been numerous attempts to define the term 'religion'²⁷ throughout the history of religious studies. Most of these have been monothetic in nature, attempting to identify a common, essential feature shared by all religions, which can be used to define 'religion' as a category and must be present for something to be labeled as a 'religion.'²⁸ There are two types of monothetic definitions. The first is substantive, attempting to pinpoint a particular core of religion, such as belief in a God or gods or emphasizing power.²⁹ The second is functional, trying to define 'religion' in terms of what it accomplishes for humans, for example, by arguing that it exists to alleviate the fear of death, unite a society, or reinforce one group's domination over another. Other definitions are polythetic, in which a list of common qualities of religion is generated. This concept does not require that all forms of religion share anyone attribute.³⁰

Further complicating matters is the existence of other secular world views, such as nationalism and Marxism, that have many of the traits of religion yet are rarely considered religious.³¹ According to religion professor Russell T. McCutcheon, 'many of the peoples we study have no corresponding name or notion.' For instance, there is no term for 'religion' in Sanskrit. When the British Empire arrived on the subcontinent, it classified many activities and customs as religious and defined Hinduism as a religion.

Understanding The Term 'Dharma' (religion) Through Hindu Literature

Hinduism does not fit into the concept of religion the way it is understood in the West. It is a culture, a way of life, and a set of rules. It is represented in the phrase, *Sanatana Dharma*, used by Indian traditional scholars to characterize the Hindu religion, which means eternal faith or the eternal way things are (truth). Unlike Buddhism, Jainism, or Sikhism, Hinduism has no historical founder. Instead, its authority is based on a vast body of sacred scriptures that provide Hindus with laws controlling ceremonies, worship, pilgrimage, and daily activities, among other things. Although the earliest of these books

²⁶Smith, Donald E. *India as a Secular State*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1963; Bhargava, Rajeev. 'What is Secularism For?' in Bhargava (ed), 1998, P. 488; Sen, Amartya. 'Secularism and Its Discontents' in Kaushik Basu and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *Unravelling the Nation: Sectarian Conflict and India's Secular Identity*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1996, P.13; Gopal, Sarvepalli. 'Introduction' in Sarvepalli Gopal (ed), *Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India*, Zed Books, London and New Jersey, 1993, P.13.

²⁷Capps, Walter H. *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, p. xviii.

²⁸ Ibid. and Herling, Bradley L. *A Beginner's Guide to the Study of Religion* (second ed.), London: Bloomsbury, 2016, p.37.

²⁹Herling. 2016, p. 37.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹Smart, Ninian. *The World's Religions* (second ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 22–26.

may be four thousand years old, the earliest surviving Hindu images and temples were built about two thousand years later.

Hinduism evolved throughout millennia from various sources, including cultural practices, religious texts, philosophical movements, and local popular beliefs. The confluence of these variables is responsible for the variegated variety of Hindu practices and beliefs. While no single text or creed provides the foundation of all Hindu ideas, numerous writings are vital to Hinduism's sects. Hindu religious literature is grouped into two main categories:

- i) *Shruti*- that which has been heard, and ii) *Smriti*- that which has been remembered

Shruti is considered eternal and canonical, comprising of revelation and undeniable truth. It primarily refers to the Vedas themselves. Smriti is supplemental and subject to change. It is only authoritative to the extent that it adheres to the shrutibase.

There are many other writings, but the following Ten are considered to be the Principal Texts:

- a) Primary *Shruti* texts (three)
 - i) The Four Vedas: Among the texts inspired by the Vedas are the *Dharma-sutras*, or “manuals on *dharma*,” which contain rules of conduct and rites practiced in various Vedic schools.
 - ii) The 108 *Upanishads*
 - iii) The *Vedanta Sutra*
- b) Primary *Smriti* texts (four)
 - i) The *Itihasas* (histories or epics)- *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*
 - ii) The *Bhagavad-Gita* (philosophy)
 - iii) The *Puranas* (stories and histories)
 - iv) The *Dharma Shastra* (law books)- First among them stands the *Dharma-shastra* of Manu, also known as the *Manu-smriti* (Laws of Manu; c. 100 CE), with 2,694 stanzas divided into 12 chapters.
- c) Other texts (three)
 - i) The *Vedangas* (limbs of the Vedas)
 - ii) The *Upavedas* (following the Vedas)
 - iii) Sectarian texts (e.g., *agamas*, *tantras*)

A) Various meanings of *Dharma*

In Hindu philosophy and religion, *Dharma* is a central concept. It has a variety of meanings in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism. It's challenging to define *Dharma* succinctly, given the term's lengthy and varied history and the fact that it encompasses a complex collection of meanings and interpretations. There is no single word that expresses *Dharma* in western languages. Numerous competing attempts have been made to translate ancient Sanskrit literature, including the term *dharma*, into German,

English, and French. According to Paul Horsch,³² the notion has created extraordinary challenges for modern commentators and translators. While Grassmann's³³ translation of the *Rig-Veda* recognizes seven distinct meanings for *Dharma*, Karl Friedrich Geldner's translation of the *Rig-Veda* employs twenty distinct translations for *Dharma*, including 'law,' 'order,' 'obligation,' 'custom,' 'quality,' and 'model.'³⁴ However, the term *dharma* has become a widely accepted loanword in English, appearing in all contemporary comprehensive English dictionaries.

The word '*dharma*' is loosely translated as religion in English. But it has spiritual, religious, and social meaning in the Indian context that signifies one's righteous duty or any virtuous path in the broadest sense. In Indian (Sanskrit-based) languages, it refers to one's faith. *Dharma* is a significant idea in Indian philosophy, used to describe the 'greater truth' or ultimate reality of the Universe, 'that which supports, that which holdstogether the peoples....'³⁵ The concept of *Dharma* is maintained throughout the *Upanishads* as a universal basis of law, order, harmony, and truth. It serves as the Universe's regulating moral principle. The *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* is defined as the law of righteousness and equated with *Satya* (truth).³⁶

In Buddhism, *Dharma* refers to 'cosmic law and order,'³⁷ the Buddha's doctrine, the universal truth that all individuals share at all times. The Buddha, the *Dharma*, and the *sangha* (congregation of believers) comprise the Triratna, or 'Three Jewels,' to which Buddhists seek shelter. In Buddhist metaphysics, the plural term (*dharmas*) refers to the interconnected elements that comprise the empirical Universe. In Jain philosophy, *Dharma* refers not only to moral excellence but also to an eternal 'substance' (*dravya*), the channel through which entities travel.³⁸ In Sikhism, *Dharma* refers to the road of righteousness and proper religious practice, and an individual's moral obligations to God.³⁹ Hinduism's epics exhibit numerous facets of *Dharma*; they serve as a vehicle for imparting *Dharma* through metaphors.⁴⁰

Adharma is the antonym of *Dharma*, which means unnatural or unethical. But at the same time, the word '*dharma*' has four different connotations and meanings, as explained in various Hindu texts. They are-

i) *Svabhava*- Nature, Character, Virtue, Quality

Svabhava means 'own being or 'own becoming.' It is the inherent nature, essential nature, or essence of beings. *Dharma* (*svabhava*) refers to the universal laws of nature that apply to everyone. In Vedic literature, the plural noun form of *Dharma* is frequently used to allude to religious laws or ritual acts. *Agni* (fire) is supposed to be a protector of laws

³²Horsch, Paul, "From Creation Myth to World Law: the Early History of Dharma", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, December 2004, Volume 32, Issue 5-6, pp. 423-448.

³³ Hermann Grassmann, *WorterbuchzumRig-veda* (German Edition), MotilalBanarsidass.

³⁴Horsch, Paul. Op.cit.

³⁵ Mahabharata, KarnaParva, chapter 69, verse 59.

³⁶Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.4.xiv.

³⁷ See 'Dharma', The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Rinehart, Robin, in Pashaura Singh, Louis E. Fenech (Editors), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 138-139.

⁴⁰ See Huston Smith, *The World Religions*, and Harper One (2009); For summary notes: Background to Hindu Literature Archived 2004-09-22 at the Wayback Machine.

(*dharmani*).⁴¹ *Soma* (distill, extract, sprinkle), like a vigorous and fertile steer, establishes laws.⁴² Even today, we hear *Dharma* employed in this context. For instance, the *Dharma* of fire is to burn and to cause fire to burn. *Dharma*, in this context, refers to the nature of fire rather than any religion. How can a fire be Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, or Sikh? Fire is just fire.

Similarly, ice is ice. Ice's *Dharma* is to be cold and to cause others to be cold. It is the global and eternal character of ice. Likewise, when a person develops negative emotions such as wrath, aversion, envy, and hostility, he experiences unpleasant sensations and becomes unhappy. There is no such thing as Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain mental negativity or suffering. The nature of mental defilements is to make one unhappy.

ii) ***Kartavya- Obligation, Duty, Responsibility***

Dharma has numerous dimensions, one for each role in one's life. In the most basic sense, *dharma* principles are one's responsibilities within a role. The duty to fulfill a function reflects the *Dharma* of that role. It could be a role at one's office, possibly one of caring for others, or it could be a role of being a human (towards other lives). It could also be the role of a parent, mother, or son. *Dharma* is the true embodiment of these tasks. Various spiritual practices can help with each of these functions. For *Dharma* to be meaningful, one must perform *karma* against a role one has in this lifetime. *Dharma* is what determines if an activity is acceptable or not. *Manusmriti*⁴³ describes five kinds of *Dharma* or Duty-

- i) *Varna-dharma*- duties of caste
- ii) *Asrama-dharma*- duties about Life-stages
- iii) *Varnashrama-dharma*- duties of caste and life-stage
- iv) *Naimittika-dharma*- occasional Duties
- v) *Guna-dharma*- duties about qualification

In the 7th Chapter of *Manusmriti*, Manu explains the *Raj dharma* (the Constitutional Law or Laws for Kings) that the Kings must safeguard their citizens while serving the Brahmanas (the priestly or sacerdotal class of the society). Rulers should follow four principles- refrain from coveting unreachable land, capital, or the like; defend what they have inherited or earned; make every effort to protect the *Dharma*, and use their resources to help the populace. A monarch should employ the military forces to collect what has not yet been obtained, care for inherited or previously acquired wealth or grow business activity to secure additional revenues for protective objectives. To prevent civic upheaval, use pressure to keep citizens under control.

iii) ***Majahab, Panth, Sampradaay- Religion, Cult, Sect***

Majahab (more commonly transliterated as *madhab* from Arabic) is a school of Islamic jurisprudence. This term has changed its meaning through the centuries before dealing with its current usage. Initially, when students of Islam gathered around a great scholar ('*alim*) or jurist (*faqih*) and followed his verdicts, they became known as that scholar's school or *madhab*. The meaning of *Majahab* or *Panth* is closer to the concept of religion in general in India today. Still, it also includes different cults, sects, and communities which are not

⁴¹Rigveda 5.26.6; 8.43.24.

⁴²Rigveda 9.64.1.

⁴³Manusmriti Chapter 7, verse 149.

followers of a particular religion but the various school of thought or faith. Sampradaya is a Sanskrit word that means 'tradition, spiritual lineage, 'sect,' or religious system.'⁴⁴ To ensure the continuity and transmission of *Dharma*, various sampradayas have the *Guru-shishyaparampara*, in which the *parampara* or lineage of successive *gurus* (masters/teachers) and *shishyas*(disciples) acts as a spiritual conduit and establishes a stable network of relationships that lends stability to a religious identity. *Shramana* is a Sanskrit phrase that refers to a seeker or *shishya*. Identification with and devotion to sampradayas are not fixed. Sampradayas offer flexibility in leaving one to attend another or practicing religious syncretism by adhering to multiple *sampradayas* concurrently. *Samparda* is a Punjabi name for *sampradayas* in Sikhism.

iv) **SaadhanaPaddhati- Cultivation method, Way of Worship**

There are a variety of worship styles in use by different faiths, although prayer is one of the most ancient as well as widely used forms of religious expression. The traditions and rites of contemporary native tribes may provide a window into previous forms of religious behaviour. Despite the fact that prayer takes on different things in different faiths across the globe, it often follows precisely defined patterns. The use of Benedictions (blessings), invocations (alternative declarations, designations of the god or gods, requests as well as responses), formal as well as ritualised prayers, free prayers (prayers which do not follow a static method), resonances or formula prayers (e.g., the repetition of the name of Jesus in Eastern Orthodox Hesychasm or the repetition of the title of Amida Buddha) are examples of these types of praying (statements of praise or glory). Hinduism is characterised by the disciplines including meditation, yoga, prayer, and fasting.

Secularism-Whether it is 'Dharma-nirpeksh' and 'Panth-nirpeksh'?

A) Background of Secularism in West

In the West, the Church and the State have tightly interwoven over most of the Middle Ages that the Church was state-Church, and the State was church-state. Until the 16th century, new forces and ideas began to undermine the Roman Catholic Church's dominance. The clergy power struggled with the Renaissance enlightenment and humanism, emphasizing secular, scientific, and worldly ideals. The advancement of international business also called for establishing a state of spiritual neutrality, which would promote trade among Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and Chinese. Above all, considerable advances in science and technology have dealt a severe blow to many religious dogmas and tarnished a significant leap ahead in secular thinking. Copernicus (16th century), Galileo's (17th century), Newton's (late 17th and early 18th century), and Laplace's (late 18th and early 19th century) astronomy seriously dented the Biblical cosmology and worldview of the time. The world is just a collection of a few concepts and is only a few years old, and the whole system is built on one point, which is human-centered. The debate between the Church and the scientific community erupted when Darwin's Theory of evolution demolished the Christian idea that the human race descended from a common ancestor, i.e., Adam.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Gupta, R. (2002), Sampradaya in Eighteenth-Century Chaitanya Vaishnavism, ICJ.

⁴⁵ Madhu. 'Difference between the western and Indian secularism,' International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research, Volume 2; Issue 6; June 2016; Pp. 09-12.

Moreover, the concepts of empiricism of Locke (17th century), Bacon and Hume (18th century); the rationalism of Descartes (17th century), Kant (18th century); the utilitarianism of Bentham (18th century), Mill (19th century); and the positivism of Comte (19th century), laid the foundation for secularist ideology in the West. Together, external factors, including those resulting from the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Humanism, and international trade, joined forces with reformers to pare down the Church to size. Luther emphasized secularism due to his championing of individuals' right to discover God without any middlemen (such as the Church). It is beneficial that the states can no longer impose their religion or sect upon their citizens. Other denominations are no longer upset by this and attempt to break order and harmony. Some agree that most inhabitants belong to a single religion, which characterized the State's Catholic or Protestant nature. Enunciating the principles of religious freedom and tolerance, primarily by John Locke and Thomas Paine, must be viewed in the context of the preceding statements. Due to the existing trend, the political views started to be formed that civil society should not hand punishments out of personal conviction. Peace became the first motivation, and then religion.⁴⁶

Then, secularism was a movement aimed at improving ordinary people's living standards on earth and emancipating them from all tyranny, whether of the Church or the socio-economic capitalist order. Eric S. Waterhouse believes that the relationship between secularism and religion was not hostile but mutually exclusive. Holyoake is concerned solely with this world, not with the 'other' world, and does not express or prohibit any position on these topics. Instead of the ultimate repudiation of the religion, per se, he was more interested in fighting the illogical and supernatural elements of Christian theology. Secularism is now no longer the active movement in the West; secularization is the current catchword. And secularization has been seen as a decline in religious hegemony, religious institutions, a process of decline in religious activity, religious beliefs, thinking, and institutional actions. Wilson characterizes a secular society as one in which a sense of the sacred is most obviously absent, the notion of sainthood and upward religiousness. Cox says that urbanism, pragmatism, profanity, pluralism, and tolerance are the features of secularization. Religion is privatized because it is denied any function in social life.

B) Background of development of Indian Secularism-Dharma-nirpeksh Vs.Panth-nirpeksh

On November 15, 1948, during a heated debate in the Constituent Assembly about the character of the constitution of the newly independent dominion of India, Prof. KT Shah intervened, requesting that the term 'secular' be entered into the preamble. During the subsequent debate, the participants agreed on the Indian State's nature in keeping with secular ideals, but the word 'secular' was removed from the preamble. It did, however, make an appearance about three decades later when the Indira Gandhi-led government inserted it as part of the 42nd amendment to the constitution.

Some have embraced secularism in the Indian Constitution over the subsequent decades. Nevertheless, some others have been criticized for pointing out the alien roots of the word, how it cannot be employed in the Indian context, and how it is being used in India. In his

⁴⁶ Ibid.

work 'Imagining India,' historian Ronald Inden wrote, 'The independent government has implemented secularism mostly by refusing to accept the religious past of Indian nationalism, and at the same time by maintaining Muslim 'personal law.' The majority of the architects of modern India, who were influenced by European ideas and practices, were also staunch supporters of secularism. Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first prime minister, was foremost among them. For him, a secular state was an essential sign of modernity. 'We have only done what every country does, except for a few misguided and backward countries,' he stated during Constituent Assembly talks. Ironically, Nehru and the chairman of the constitution's drafting committee, B R Ambedkar, were most opposed to adding the word 'secular' to the constitution's preamble.

Slavery was integrated into the basic structure of the constitution, which took up a large amount more time in discussion during in the Constituent Assembly's deliberations just on preamble. In Europe, the connection between secularism and the proper functioning of democratic was well established, and since India was really to follow democratic values, secularism was seen to be absolutely necessary in that nation. However, arguments in the Constituent Assembly spotlighted the ambiguity of the term when it was applied in the Indian context. There have been lingering questions about the nature of its use and whether or not this is even practical.

Nader Nehru and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar were both staunch followers of the secularist philosophy. A secular society is an ideal to aim for, and none of us can be certain that ourselves are free of bias as well as free of the taint of communalism, whether we are Hindus or Muslims, Sikhs or Christians, as Nehru said. However, when it comes to inserting the word 'secular,' all parties were reticent to do so. It was well known to Nehru and Ambedkar that the deliberations in the Constituent Assembly were continuing and that the constitution was being shaped just at time. That secularism, in the strictest meaning of the word, as it was supposed to be interpreted in the context of its genesis, could not be applied in the Indian context was well understood by the British.

Though Ambedkar was a strong supporter of secularism, due to its ambiguity in the Indian context, he believed that state policy and society should be organized on a social and economic level according to time and circumstance; otherwise, democracy would be annihilated. As a result, the Constituent Assembly passed Articles 25, 26, and 27 of the Constitution to promote secularism.

A number of constitutional revisions were launched on June 26, 1975, by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It was the 42nd amendment, in particular, that brought significant modifications to nearly each portion of the constitution, such as the preamble, in practise. A change was made on the basis, and India's definition in the prologue was changed from a "sovereign democratic republic" to a "sovereign socialism secular democratic republic." The 42nd amendment fully merged the spirit of secularism, which had always been a component of a constitution, into the text of the constitution.

Following the passage of the amendment act, widespread political battles erupted over the term 'secular,' which has been popularised as 'dharmanirpekshta.' However, nor technically or legally, the genuine meaning of the word 'secular' can ever be linked with the term 'dharmanirpekshta,' as is currently the situation. However, the Law and Justice Ministry of India has released the official Hindi version of the Preamble to the Constitution, which is a written record. The definition of the word 'secular' is interpreted as well as written as 'Panthnirpeksh,' meaning means 'secular' in Sanskrit. *Adharma-nirpeksh* state is a concept of

secularism whereby a state or country declares itself to be officially neutral in religious matters, advocating neither religion nor *adharma*. But as discussed earlier, the meaning of the word '*dharma*' in Indian literature is extensive. Duties, code of conduct, rules, customs, rituals, communal ethics, moral conduct, etiquette, etc., are included in one word, '*dharma*.' The meaning of religion has also been above, which is considered more as a way of life than a religion. Hindi translation of the word secular seems complicated; however, it is necessary to have a word. The word secular may have something similar or translate as 'cosmic.' The word secular for secular is prevalent in Hindi. In fact, no suitable word has been found in Hindi for the word secular yet. Over time, words take their form and meaning. Hence the words secular and secular have been used here for secular.

If we see the synonyms of the '*panth*,' it is cult, path, or religion. The word '*panth*' refers to the path by which one can achieve something remarkable: attainment of knowledge, attainment of powers, attainment of God, attainment of peace of mind, achievement of salvation, etc. To achieve all this, man chooses a path, and that path is called a cult, especially any sect a person decides to get to God. When other people gradually follow that sect, this cult becomes bigger and can affect any country's political system.

The government should be independent of this cult system; if there are hundreds of sects in its State or country, then the government ruling over the people of all the sects cannot attribute any one denomination to any one of those hundreds. We have to be treated as equals, which is what secularism is. The government can be secular but cannot be *Dharma-nirpeksh*. Therefore, many believe that *Panth-nirpeksh* should be used in place of *Dharma-nirpeksh* in the constitution.

India being a multilingual country, many sects have flourished over time. And these sects perform their religious activities, so the issue of secularism in India has been the principal political issue since independence, and secularism was translated into *Dharma-nirpeksh* in Hindi at the time of independence. Because the exact Hindi translation of secularism was not agreed upon, politicians and media, in a hurry, started uttering secularism as *Dharma-nirpeksh*. Due to this, both *Dharma-nirpeksh* and *Panth-nirpeksh* words became synonymous. Even today, the term *Dharma-nirpeksh* is used more in India. In India, political parties often try to set up their vote banks based on religion. But according to the strict rules of the Constitution of India, it is almost impossible to form a political government based on religion, creed, or in this way. Because of so many different sects and cults in India, India's government can only be formed after bringing these diverse groups into confidence. It is only possible by being secular. However, political parties use this word too often in their own way to get political leverage.

Conclusion

Although secularism in modern India goes back to 1976, whenever the 42nd amendment to a Indian Constitution declared the nation a secular state, it must be understood how no state can be totally secular until secularism is written into constitution. Since the notion of secular is intricately linked to the concept of religion, it is a difficult concept to grasp. The meaning and meaning of religion in Western and Indian settings, I think, is important for understanding the differences in secularism in the two regions' possible role of development. The ambiguity and contention around the idea of 'religion' is tied to the geographical and cultural setting in which the word originated and evolved, first referring

to a version of Christianity that was specific to western Europe and later expanded into a more general proposition. Moreover, because of the extreme range of religious beliefs and practices, it is difficult to come up with a clear and commonly recognised definition of the term "religion." The growth of state and religion in the West and India were fundamentally opposed. Religion was hijacked from of the Judeo-Christian legacy and then used indiscriminately to describe a variety of Indian philosophies, myths, rites, and practises, all of which were derived from the same original source. Religion, on the other side, is not referred to by a single term in Hindu literature. There was never any such thing. When used in a colloquial sense, the word dharma alludes to a religion that is not identical with religion in the Typical sense. In India, secularism has taken on a multitude of interpretations, and it has meant various things to various kinds of people throughout history. Secularism, like liberal Hindu gods that may manifest himself in a variety of ways and enable devotees to worship in whichever manner they choose, has accumulated so many interpretations that it now means different things to different people. These thinkers, whether Muslim or Hindu, rightist or leftist, sociologist or scholar, all agree on one point in the Indian context: atheism has become so cramped that it appears to have lost all meaning. In other phrases, atheism has become so cramped that it appears to have lost all significance.

References

1. Asad, Talal. *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.
2. Bhargava, Rajeev (ed), *Politics and Ethics of the Indian Constitution*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008.
3. Bhargava, Rajeev. *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010.
4. Boyarin, Daniel. *Judaism: The Genealogy of a Modern Notion*. Rutgers University Press, 2018.
5. Boyer, Pascal. *Religion explained: The evolutionary origins of religious thought*, New York, Basic Books, 2001.
6. Burns, Joshua Ezra. 'Jewish ideologies of Peace and Peacemaking.' In Omar, Irfan; Duffey, Michael (eds.). *Peacemaking and the Challenge of Violence in World Religions*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.
7. Capps, Walter H. *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
8. Dubuisson, Daniel. *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.
9. Fitzgerald, Timothy. A critique of "religion" as a cross-cultural category. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 1997, 9(2), 91–100.
10. Gopal, Sarvepalli. 'Introduction' in Sarvepalli Gopal (ed), *Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India*, Zed Books, London, and New Jersey, 1993.
11. Harrison, Peter. *The Territories of Science and Religion*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.
12. Harrison, Peter. 'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment,

- Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
13. Herling, Bradley L. *A Beginner's Guide to the Study of Religion* (second ed.). London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
 14. Hershel Edelheit, Abraham J. Edelheit, *History of Zionism: A Handbook and Dictionary*, 2000.
 15. Hinnells, John R. 'Introduction.' In John R. Hinnells (ed.). *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005.
 16. Madhu. 'Difference between the western and Indian secularism,' *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, Volume 2; Issue 6; June 2016.
 17. Mahmood, Saba. *Secularism, sovereignty, and religious difference: A global genealogy?* *Society and Space*, 2017, 35(2), 197–209.
 18. Morreall, John Sonn, Tamara. *50 Great Myths about Religions*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
 19. Mushir-Ul-Haq. *Islam in Secular India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1972.
 20. Nongbri, Brent. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. Yale University Press, 2013.
 21. Roberts, Jon Harrison. 'Science and Religion.' In Shank, Michael; Numbers, Ronald; Harrison, Peter (eds.). *Wrestling with Nature: From Omens to Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2011.
 22. Sankhdher, M.M. *Secularism in India: Dilemmas and Challenges*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992.
 23. Sen, Amartya. 'Secularism and Its Discontents' in KaushikBasu and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *Unravelling the Nation: Sectarian Conflict and India's Secular Identity*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1996.
 24. Smart, Ninian. *The World's Religions* (second ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
 25. Smith, Donald E. *India as a Secular State*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1963.
 26. Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
 27. Solomon Zeitlin, *The Jews. Race, Nation, or Religion?* Philadelphia: Dropsie College Press, 1936.
 28. Srikanth, H.' *Secularism versus Pseudo-secularism: An Indian Debate*' in Heredia (ed),1994
 29. Steven Kettell. *Secularism and Religion*, Department of Politics and International Studies, the University of Warwick, 2019.
 30. Taylor, Charles. *A secular age*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
 31. Whiteford, Linda M.; Trotter II, Robert T. *Ethics for Anthropological Research and Practice*. Waveland Press, 2008.