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**SOCIAL CHANGE AN IMPACT UPON SECULARIZATION IN INDIA:  
AN ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

A secular society is one that is modern, pluralistic, coexisting, rational, and developing in tandem with its rapidly expanding multicultural population. The transition from a holy to a secular society is one of the most essential shifts that Indian civilization must undertake. As a traditional agricultural civilization evolves into a contemporary industrial one, this is a necessary component of transition. In order to understand the secularism enshrined in India's Constitution, one must look at the following sections, rather than through a Western lens: The right to freely profess, practice, and promote one's religion, as well as the right to found and oversee religious organizations, are all protected by the Constitution. Equal protection under the law, nondiscrimination in public accommodations, and fair treatment in hiring practices are all parts of this document, which also outlaw's religious discrimination and promotes equality for all citizens.

Keywords: Secular, Modernity, Pluralism, Multiculturalism, Religious freedom, Equality, Urbanization, Modernization.

**INTRODUCTION**

The process of secularization in India has been profoundly influenced by social change, which has resulted in a transformation of the country's traditional social landscape. In the process of

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secularization, a society that was once heavily affected by religion is transformed into a culture in which religious institutions, practices, and beliefs are no longer seen to be of significant social importance. Education, urbanization, and modernity are some of the elements that have contributed to the acceleration of this process in India.

The old religious authority and customs of Indian culture are being called into question and reformulated more frequently as the society continues to develop. The prominence of religion in public and political life has decreased as a result of the introduction of new values and ways of life brought about by modernization. Through the process of urbanization, many groups have been brought together, which has resulted in a more pluralistic and secular viewpoint. The spread of more reasonable worldviews and the decline in the prevalence of religious justifications for observed social and natural events are both outcomes of the educational revolution.

A more secular social order has been promoted as a result of these changes, which have combined resulted in a reduction in the control that religious institutions have over numerous elements of daily life. It is the continual interaction between traditional beliefs and current innovations that continues to create India's distinctive path toward secularization.

## **SECULARISM**

The term "secularism" describes a government policy that shows little regard for the religious beliefs of its citizens. We say that a political movement is secular when it seeks to limit the influence of religious organizations, bodies, or even ideologies on governmental policymaking. The word secular comes from the Latin word "sacularis," which indicated "that which is temporal, non-spiritual, and belonging to this world as opposed to something spiritual or ecclesiastical," among other things. "Secular education" refers to a method of instruction that categorically does not include religious instruction, and it is a generic term for the separation of religion issues from state politics and administration<sup>3</sup>.

A person who is "having no concern with religion or spiritual matters" is described as "secular" in English dictionaries. However, they also characterize it as "a system which attempts to order

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<sup>3</sup> Gupta, Giri Raj. "Secularization and Dynamics of Social Change in India." *Sociologus*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1971, pp. 168–83. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43644440>. Accessed 15 June 2024.

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and interpret life or concepts derived only from this world." Strictly speaking, secularism in politics is allowing the state to handle global matters independently of religious leaders.

"Secular" means "relating to things of this world that are not considered religious, spiritual, or sacred," as stated in the Random House Dictionary. A comparable explanation is provided by the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

To rephrase, "the neutrality of the state in regard to religion" is the main way secularism is understood in modern scholarship.

A man's religious life is unrelated to his political life, according to this definition. "Secularization" is another term that has its roots in secularism; it refers to historical movements and processes that suggest a shift in emphasis from holy and supernatural things to secular and earthly ones. The most important thing it meant was that the state is not religious.

### **BIRTH OF SECULARISM**

Transformation from a "sacred society" into a "secular society" is one of the most basic demands placed on Indian society. When transitioning from a traditional agrarian civilization to an industrialized one, this is an inevitable component of the change. It is widely recognized that individuals in Indian society, regardless of their religious affiliation, hold a very religious worldview. India has a long and storied religious history. It is safe to say that religious tolerance is one of the country's long-standing social norms. After all, the country's ability to maintain social order would have been severely limited in its absence.

Around the third century B.C.<sup>4</sup>, Asoka made history by declaring that the state would not oppress any religious group. He urged his listeners to study the holy books of different faiths. Even though there were instances of religious persecution in India, one of the valued social

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<sup>4</sup> Social change in India by Kuppaswamy .page no.560-561

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principles was the religious tolerance shown by Asoka over 2,300 years ago. One of the defining features of Indian and human civilizations alike is Asoka's secular attitude<sup>5</sup>.

"Render to Caesar the thing that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" was a powerful statement by Jesus Christ that marked a turning point in human civilization's secular viewpoint. The other two branches of secularism emerged in the modern era, with the Reformation and Renaissance in Western Europe in the 1600s and the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s<sup>6</sup>.

Technology, scientific inquiry, and the expansion of human understanding were central to the Industrial Revolution, which in turn led to greater output through the development of mechanized labour and the substitution of non-living energy sources for that of humans and other animals.

Tolerance and non-interference among India's many religious communities were societal principles upheld by the East India Company. The Company's political influence in India began with the grant of Diwani in 1765, but it remained politically and commercially neutral throughout, despite the Christian missionaries' requests for financial support of their proselytizing efforts. Edmund Burke's liberal political views also had an impact on the Company's administrators<sup>7</sup>.

The Indians with Western education who formed the Indian National Congress in 1885 maintained a secular worldview and followed Rammohan Roy's political and social lead.

Mahatma Gandhi was very secular in his outlook and was responsible for many fundamental changes in Indian society like-

- The abolition of untouchability,
- The breaking down of the barriers between the various castes, and
- The promotion of equality among the sexes, he was deeply religious in his outlook.

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<sup>5</sup> Loomis, Charles P., and Francis Abraham. "SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN MODERN INDIA : A SYSTEM ANALYSIS AS MANIFEST IN THE WORKS OF M. N. SRINIVAS." *International Review of Modern Sociology*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1972, pp. 197–209. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41420447>. Accessed 15 June 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Social change in India by Kuppuswamy. page no.560-561

<sup>7</sup> Social change in India by Kuppuswamy. page no.560-561

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Despite the fact that 85 percent of India's population adhered to Hinduism, the country's constitution was secular due to a number of factors. These included a long history of religious tolerance dating back to Asoka, a desire by the country's emerging middle class to build a secular democracy in the 19th century based on liberal principles, the humanistic outlook of prominent Indian leaders, and the overwhelming drive to industrialize the economy and improve the living conditions for the masses. In the 1950 Indian Constitution, passed by the Constituent Assembly, all four of these social movements are stated explicitly. That is why secularism became a fundamental tenet of Indian statecraft and Indian culture in a society as traditionally conservative, caste-based, and autocratic as India.

A secular state, according to Donald Smith's definition, is one that protects religious liberty for all citizens and businesses, treats all citizens equally regardless of their religious affiliation, is not bound by the Constitution to any one religion, and has no interest in promoting or interfering with religion.

In the 42nd amendment to the Indian Constitution, the word "secular" was added to the opening of the Preamble. The people of India had solemnly resolved to turn their country into a secular democratic republic and ensure that all of its residents would have access to it. The only purpose of this amendment is to clarify the constitutional definition of secularism. The state's secular nature does not include any mysticism. In fact, secularism respects the religiously devoted, the hostile, and the atheist with same respect; it is neither pro- nor anti-God. There can be no official religion for the state. It ought to be fair to all faiths. All three houses of worship—the church, the mosque, and the temple—deserve equal protection under the law. A secular state is one in which the primary focus of government is on interpersonal relationships amongst citizens. The relationship between God and humanity is unrelated. Discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or place of birth is outlawed. Consequently, there is no recognized faith as the state religion of India. Everyone is free to teach, follow, and spread their own faith. There can be no religious preference or bias on the part of the state. It

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ought to be respectful of all faiths. In the eyes of the law, every citizen is equal, regardless of their religious affiliation<sup>8</sup>.

### **THE BASIC OUTLINES OF THE SECULARISM ARE ENSHRINED IN THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES OF THE CONSTITUTION**

#### 1. Preamble:

Indeed, the term "secular" did not initially appear in any of the Constitution's Articles or Preambles, including Articles 25 and 26. The Preamble was revised by the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976, with the replacement of "Sovereign Democratic Republic" with "Sovereign, socialist, secular, Democratic Republic."

#### 2. No State Religion:

There will not be a "state religion" in India. Neither will the state create its own religion nor will it give any religion preferential treatment. No citizen shall be taxed by the state for the purpose of supporting or promoting a religion or any institution (Article 27). Any school that receives no less than 100% of its operating budget from the state shall not teach any religion.

#### 3. Freedom of Conscience:

The right to freely believe, practice, and spread one's religion is a fundamental human right. However, this freedom is not absolute and is subject to the following limitations:

1. State-imposed restrictions on religious freedom that are necessary to protect public morality, health, and order (such as bans on infanticide and other antisocial crimes);
2. Bills that impose governmental limitations on religiously-related commercial, financial, political, or extra-secular activities do not in fact respect the right to freedom of conscience.

#### 4. Freedom to Manage Religious Affairs:

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<sup>8</sup> Carroll, Terrance G. "Secularization and States of Modernity." *World Politics*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1984, pp. 362–82. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010379>. Accessed 15 June 2024.

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The right of every person, regardless of religious affiliation, to openly profess, practice, and spread his religion

#### 5. Cultural and Educational Rights:

A number of educational and cultural rights are provided by Articles 29 and 30. Any segment of the population residing in any region of the nation with its own unique script, language, or culture has the right to preserve it, according to Article 29. "Every religious or linguistic minority shall have the right to found and direct schools of their choosing," reads Article 30.

Secularism was a hotly debated topic during the Constituent Assembly's review of the articles pertaining to religious freedom, even though the term did not appear in the original Constitutional language<sup>9</sup>.

In Articles 25, 26, and 30 of the Constitution, it ensures that both individuals and corporations have the freedom to practice their faith. Articles 14, 15, and 16 state that it treats each citizen equally regardless of his religious affiliation. Additionally, it does not aim to promote or meddle with any one religion, and it is not constitutionally related to any single religion either. Some laws and provisions in the Constitution do infringe upon Hindu religious rituals and customs. Similarly, concrete examples of governmental action include the numerous social reform measures enacted both before and after independence. Also demonstrating official involvement in religious affairs are the statutes that allow individual states to establish religious endowments departments to oversee temple administration.

In India, the fundamental issue is the propagation of a humanistic worldview, which would lead to an end to the tolerance of poverty and misery and the active effort of the well-off to aid the downtrodden, the ignorant, and the superstitious. Raising the living standards of the population in rural areas and urban slums through increased production through the application of science and technology is another fundamental issue confronting Indian civilization. In the perspective of economic development, secularism entails replacing cosmic causation and cyclical time with

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<sup>9</sup> EASTWOOD, JONATHAN, and NIKOLAS PREVALAKIS. "NATIONALISM, RELIGION, AND SECULARIZATION: AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT FOR RESEARCH." *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2010, pp. 90–111. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20778549>. Accessed 15 June 2024.

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linear time, physical laws, and natural causality. The self-assurance and competence to control the physical and social elements of one's environment will follow, and man will be able to let go of his inclination to seek solace in the supernatural or in the supplication of occult powers<sup>10</sup>.

### **SOCIAL CHANGE IN INDIA**

The effects of secularization on Indian society have been profound. A secular mentality characterizes the modern family. Marriage is no longer seen as a sacred institution but as a legally binding contract between two people. At any moment, it may be broken. There has been a dramatic reduction in the influence of religion on marital and divorce policies. Marriages between people of different faiths are on the rise. The old idea of clean and dirty has fallen out of favour. Nowadays, coming into contact with a person of a lower caste does not necessitate any sort of purification ceremony. Interdining is no longer restricted by the caste system. Widows have been progressively freed from their limitations. To worship God however one sees fit is a divinely bestowed right. Legal mandates cannot dictate how a person must live their lives or adhere to their religious beliefs. As a result of western influence, educated youth are increasingly looking for scientific justifications for long-held cultural practices. Secularization altered the status of girls and women; before, they were taboo to leave the home and men held all the power in society. However, secularism has brought about the principles of freedom and equality<sup>11</sup>. A lot more women can start working now. In terms of society, the hiring of so many women into traditionally male-dominated professions like the military and law enforcement is revolutionary. As things stand, the women who have always been the rock of the family will soon be no more. Remarriage of a widow has been legalized. People used to think that everyday life was all about determining what was considered pure and what was considered impure. Regulations of personal cleanliness have superseded more conventional conceptions of innocence. The present generation has rejected the social taboos that were founded on caste systems. There is less and less adherence to the ideas of cleanliness and contamination. Free social interaction is now available. There is no longer any rigidity in the Indian caste system. Any profession can now be

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<sup>10</sup> Roy, Himanshu. "Western Secularism and Colonial Legacy in India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2006, pp. 158–65. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4417675>. Accessed 15 June 2024.

<sup>11</sup> *Cantwall v. Connecticut*, (1931) 310 U.S. 295

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pursued by any caste. The importance of the Brahmin caste has declined. The dietary limitations are now obsolete. Indian society has become more receptive. When it comes to the status of monastery heads with powerful political connections, secularization is also clearly at work. Religious leaders have an impact on policymaking; examples are Dharendra Brahmachari and Chandra Swami. Although the Ayodhya conflict is primarily a political one, the role of Hindu saints and sadhus has been significant. A significant addition to the literature on secularization would be a study of how the role of religious leaders in modern Indian culture, such as monastery heads, has changed.

Secularization has affected the notions of pollution and purity in Hinduism.

As a whole, the idea of pollution does not function in modern Hindu society, even though untouchability is still prevalent in rural regions. Hygiene regulations have also superseded more conventional notions of purity. Dussehra celebrations in Mysore, New Delhi, and elsewhere are only a few examples of how religious celebrations have evolved into secular events. Now more than ever, cultural events like Ganapathi and Ramnavmi feature week-long musical performances.

People still haven't completely abandoned their religious beliefs, no matter how much progress has been made in the social and cultural realms or how strictly the State's policies have been enforced<sup>12</sup>.

### **THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF INDIAN SOCIAL LIFE MOST AFFECTED BY THE PROCESS OF SECULARIZATION ARE AS BELOW**

#### **A. SOME LEGISLATION HAS PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN BRINGING ABOUT SOCIAL CHANGE.**

- i. THE UNTOUCHABILITY OFFENCES ACT 1955 was approved by the legislature in line with Article 35 of the Indian constitution. It formalized the practice of caste system as a criminal crime.

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<sup>12</sup> Gandhi, Raj S. "THE PRACTICE OF UNTOUCHABILITY: PERSISTENCE AND CHANGE." Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, vol. 10, no. 1, 1982, pp. 254–75. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23261867>. Accessed 15 June 2024.

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- ii. HINDU MARRIAGE ACT WAS PASSED IN 1955 mandating monogamy and allowing for legal separation and dissolution of marriage. Similarly, Hindu women often harboured resentment toward males who had married twice while they were living. There may be several societal shifts brought about by the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955. All marriage-related caste limitations were removed by the act.

It is now legal to marry within a different caste. It permits the registration of marriages and ensures that Hindus of all castes have equal rights in this regard. It establishes monogamy as a marital equality norm, which benefits both men and women. In terms of the legal ability to achieve a divorce or judicial separation, it gives both parties equal rights. A wide variety of religious groups are included under the umbrella term "Hinduism," including Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Veera Shaivas, Harijans, and many more. As a result, it cleared the way for a unified civil law for all Indian citizens.

- iii. In the same way, the HINDU SUCCESSION ACT OF 1956 could attain success. This law grants Hindu women, for the first time ever, unrestricted ownership of their own property. The right to inherit property is conferred upon both sons and daughters by this Act. The act eliminates the discrimination that prevents women from inheriting their father's wealth. The measure would be easy to enforce because the public is generally in favour of women having equal rights and opportunities.
- iv. THE HINDU ADOPTION AND MAINTENANCE ACT OF 1956 has contributed to women's advancement in society. A boy or a daughter can be born from it. It states that in order to adopt a kid, the wife's approval is required. Additionally, it grants the widow the right to adopt.
- v. In the Same way, the DOWRY PROHIBITION ACT OF 1961 rendered ineffectual the provision that had made dowry penal on both the giver and the receiver.

## B. INCREASING MOBILITY

People in India are unable to go from one job to another due to the caste system. Social mobility, however, has been fostered by the new class system. Additionally, social transformation and mobility have been fostered by legal compulsion.

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"The abolition of untouchability by law in India is an excellent example of social change by legal compulsion," says Prof. S.C. Dubey. When society is on the upswing, laws can be powerful agents of transformation. Marriage as an institution has changed: Marriage as a social institution has changed dramatically in India. In the past, heterogamy was observed with respect to the 'caste' and heterogamy with respect to the 'gotra'. The influence of modern races, however, is causing the endogamous constraints to progressively fade away. Intercaste marriage occurs frequently among educated individuals.

#### C. CASTE SYSTEM:

There were traditionally four divisions in Hindu society. The four-fold social stratification did not apply to the untouchables. The four castes were socially separated according to the idea of impurity and purity. The interaction between a person of high caste and a person of low caste rendered the high caste person dirty and unclean. In instance, if a person of high caste engages in practices that are often associated with lower castes, he risks being marked by impurity, as many acts are considered impure. This sense of uncleanliness is also associated with the concept of untouchability. The secularization process has diminished the traditional ideas of cleanliness and pollution.

#### D. NON BRAHMINS CAN BE APPOINTED AS PUJARI IN TEMPLE.

The supreme court's decision has far-reaching implications; it says that non-Brahmins can be chosen as pujaris if they are trained and familiar with the procedures, and it also says that Brahmins do not have monopoly over doing puja at a temple.

#### E. RESTRICTION OF INTERDINING:

The upper caste members of traditional Hindu society were subject to numerous rules concerning intercourse. A member of a higher caste who began to consume meat and alcohol was considered impure and required ritual cleansing. Restrictions on meals have vanished as a result of secularization.

#### F. OCCUPATIONAL PURITY:

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Some jobs were considered holy and some were considered dirty in the past. For instance, because they had to contact unclean items, members of the castes that worked with their hands were considered impure. So that they wouldn't become impure, members of the high caste were forbade from engaging in filthy labour. Traditional views of occupation as a source of either purity or contamination have been on the decline. People from all walks of life are now working in a wide variety of fields.

#### G. MARRIAGE CEREMONY:

Marriage in Hinduism has always been seen as a sacred institution that requires special preparation before two people can be joined in matrimony. One consequence of secularization is that marriage is no longer seen as a sacred institution. A small number of couples are opting for judicial weddings, while others are reducing the number of complex Vedic ceremonies they observe as a result of secularization.

#### H. TO START A BUSINESS:

In the past, people would perform certain ceremonies before launching a business. The secularization process has led to a fall in the importance of these rites and rituals as ceremonies associated with company startup.

#### I. STATUS OF WOMEN:

It was long believed that a wife should submit to her husband's authority, as he was considered divinely appointed. Pati Parmeshwar's conception caused the wife to sleep in the same position as her husband and eat only when he did. These rules are now disregarded as a result of secularization. Women were granted equal opportunities in education, employment, and political engagement as a result of both institutional and cultural transformation.

#### J. RELIGIOUS RITES:

Every householder was obligated to perform puja five to seven times a day, according to Sandhya and Upasna, and only then would his day be considered moderately excellent. Secularization has led to a decrease in the length of daily service and even a complete absence of worship for some.

#### K. FOREIGN TRAVEL:

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In the past, religious beliefs—particularly those around the concepts of purity and pollution—played a significant influence in prohibiting travel abroad. People no longer need to conduct purifactory ceremonies to become ritually clean before going overseas; this was a consequence of secularization.

L. THE CONSTITUTION (44TH AMENDMENT) ACT 1978 INSERTED A NEW DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLE IN ARTICLE 38 OF THE CONSTITUTION.

The State shall endeavour to promote the welfare of the people, as stated in Article 38 of the Constitution. Every citizen, regardless of gender, has the right to a sufficient means of subsistence, and no one has the right to coerce a youngster into a dangerous or physically demanding occupation, according to Article 39.

The right to labour, education, and public support in the event of unemployment, old age, sickness, or disablement must be effectively guaranteed by the state, as stated in Article 41.

The State must ensure that all citizens have access to a living wage and a fair level of living, as stated in Article 43. According to Article 45, the State must ensure that all children attend school until they reach the age of fourteen.

According to Article 46, the State must prioritize the economic and educational well-being of the most vulnerable citizens. The Constitution's concern for the welfare and well-being of both children and adults is evident in all of these, demonstrating its humanistic perspective. Rules enacted by state governments prohibiting the slaughter of animals and the sale of meat on certain days considered sacred by Hindus, as well as other restrictions, such as Article 48 of the Constitution, which directs the state to prohibit cow slaughter, and the playing of the band during a procession's passage by a mosque, among others.

M. NOISE POLLUTION IN THE NAME OF RELIGION IS NOT ALLOWED:

In Church of God v. K.K.R.M.C Welfare Association<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> AIR 2000 SC 2773

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In upholding the right to religious freedom guaranteed by Articles 25 and 26, the Supreme Court ruled that no one has the right to cause noise pollution or disrupt the tranquilly of others while practicing their faith.

#### N. FORCE CONVERSION NOT ALLOWED:

The freedom to preach one's faith does not grant one the authority to forcefully convert others. The government may decide to outlaw coercive religious conversion as a means to maintain public peace and safety.

#### O. FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN INDIA.

In National Anthem case<sup>14</sup>

No one can be forced to perform the national anthem if they have a real, conscientious religious commitment, according to the Supreme Court. No Indian citizen is obligated by law to sing the national anthem.

#### CONCLUSION

Thus, it is clear that there are significant changes occurring in the rites and rituals associated with the human life cycle. A more atheistic and nonreligious lifestyle is becoming the norm for us. Institutions surrounding marriage, views on the value of education, and the treatment of widows are all undergoing transformations.

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<sup>14</sup> 1984 SCC 615

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