

Secularism in India: Its Origin and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

India is a land of religions, languages and customs. Many religions are flourishing here since long back, which have their own traditions and beliefs. Therefore India is a multi religious and multi cultural country from its known history. It was never mono-religious or mono-cultural. In view of the intrusion of religious passions and caste loyalties into politics one may ask whether India is a truly secular or a theocratic state. Indian society is like a mighty river fed with many tributaries and the main stream flows on and on. Hence, Indian society is very rich, and well known for wisdom and great thoughts. Secularism is an important aspect of Indian society, for which it is also well-known in the world. The present paper sheds the light on Secularism in India, its objectives and challenges in the context of India.

Key Words- *Secularism, Origin, Challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

The discrimination of one community or its members by another community or its members on account of their religious identity are the instances of religious persecution and they reflect inter-religious

domination. Secularism is the first and foremost doctrine that opposes all such forms of inter-religious domination. Separation, loss and sufferings are endemic to the human condition, while large part of our suffering is man-made and hence eliminable; at least some of our suffering is not manmade. Religion, art and philosophy are responses to such sufferings. Secularism too accepts this and therefore it is not anti-religious. Religion has its own share of some deep-rooted problems. In religions such as Hinduism, some sections have been persistently discriminated. For example-Dalits have been barred from entering Hindu temples. In some part Hindu women cannot enter temples. When religion is organized, it is frequently taken over by its most conservative faction, which does not tolerate any dissent. Religious fundamentalism in parts of US has become a big problem and endangers peace both within country and outside. Many religions are fragmented into sects, which leads to frequent sectarian violence and persecution of dissenting

minorities. This religious domination is known as inter-religious domination. As Secularism is opposed to all forms of institutionalized religious domination, it challenges not merely interreligious domination but intra-religious dominations. It (Secularism) promotes freedom within religions and promotes equality between, as well as within religions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mahmood Tahir, (2011) "Religion and the Secular State: Indian Perspective" India is a unique State, believing in secularism and yet preserving its spirituality through constitutional provisions, legislation, State policy and judicial pronouncements. Maintaining a rational balance between secularity and religiosity, accommodating religious sensitivities of the people to a reasonable extent, avoiding religion-based discrimination among the citizens as far as possible, and endeavoring to put them on a par regardless of religious affiliation, are the basic features of religion-state relations in India. God and Caesar both have a place under the constitutional and legal set up of the country, but the scope of "what belongs

to God" remains wider in India than in most other professedly secular societies.

Lalu Dyavappa and Rathod P.B (2014)

"Secularism and Indian Constitution: An Overview" They tried to show the

secularism and Indian constitution which is very necessary to build peaceful society.

The study has included about the discussion of secularism and how it acts according to

the Indian constitution. The constitution of India has adopted secularism under the

article 25th to 28th, here nobody has right to declare their religion as national religion

because, India is basically secular state therefore, all religion is treated as equal.

They concluded that India has been declared a secular state by its written constitution and

it is every Indians duty to stand by and believe in this declaration. In the end,

secularism begins in the heart of every individual. There should be no feeling of

"otherness" as we all have is a shared history. India being a traditional society that

contains not one, but many traditions owing their origin in part to the different religions

that exist here has so far managed to retain the secular character of its polity. Lastly, the

secularism was not included in the constitution of India, but, later on it was

adopted by 42nd amendment in 1976 in the preamble.

Ali, M.D Musa (2015) "Secularism in India: Concepts, Historical Prospects and Challenges" India is a land of religions, languages and customs. Many religions are flourishing here since long back, which have their own traditions and beliefs. Therefore India is a multi religious and multi cultural country from its known history. The author concluded that the Indian society is very rich, and well known for wisdom and great thoughts. Secularism is an important aspect of Indian society, for which it is also well-known in the world.

Objectives of the Study

- ◆ To study the origin and the objectives of Secularism in India.
- ◆ To study the challenges faced by Secularism in India.

Research Methodology

Research simply means search for facts, answer to the questions and solutions to problem. Research becomes a systematic, controlled and critical investigation of hypothetical pre questions. In the proposed study secondary sources have been used, Secondary data have been collected from various books, research papers and articles.

In addition to this study, data have been collected from various journals also.

ORIGIN OF SECULARISM IN INDIA

Constitution of India has adopted a system of political philosophy that all forms of religious faith and worship are of equal status and has accepted the view that public education and other matters of public policy should be conducted without the introduction of religious sentiments. Nehru's view was "Equal protection by the state to all religion". He wanted a secular state to be one that "protects all religions but does not favour one at the expense of others and does not itself adopt any religion as the state religion". Gandhi ji's view was that "Religion is a personal affair of each individual, and it must not be mixed with politics or national affairs. Indian secularism is fundamentally different from western secularism. It does not focus only on Church-State separation and the idea of inter-religious equality is crucial to the Indian conception. Indian constitution has elaborated the principle of secularism in great detail. It specifies that the state should refrain from either penalizing or favoring any of its people on religious considerations.

In fact, India adopted secularism to facilitate the promotion of religious tolerance and cultural co-existence. It is true that the word 'secular' did not first occur either in article 25 or 26 or in any other article of Preamble of the constitution. By the forty-second Constitution Amendment Act of 1976, the preamble was amended. Since then India becomes a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic. The constitution says that, there shall be no 'state religion' in India. The State will neither establish a religion of its own nor confer any special patronage upon any particular religion. It follows from this that; the state will not compel any citizen to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious institution (Article 27). No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly provided by state funds Article 28(1). According to Article 28, every person is guaranteed the freedom of conscience and the freedom to profess, practice and propagate his own religion, subject only (a) to restrictions imposed by the state in the interests of public order, morality and health, (b) to regulations or restrictions made by state relating to any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be

associated with religious practice, but do not really appertain to the freedom of conscience, (c) to measures of social reform and for throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus. Subject to above limitations, a person in India shall have the right not only to entertain any religious belief but also to practice the observances dictated by such belief (Article 25).

Differences in Indian Secularism:

- Indian secularism equally opposed oppression of Dalits and women within Hinduism. It also opposes the discrimination against women within Indian Islam or Christianity and the possible threats that a majority community might pose to the rights of the minority religious communities.
- Indian secularism deals not only with religious freedom of individuals but also with religious freedom of minority communities; i.e., individual has the right to profess religion of his/her choice. Likewise, religious minority also have a right to exist and to maintain their own culture and educational institutions.

□ Indian secularism has made room for and is compatible with the idea of state supported religious reform. For example, Indian constitution bans untouchability under article 17. There is also abolition of child marriage and lifting the taboo on inter-caste marriage sanctioned by Hinduism.

CHALLENGES OF SECULARISM IN INDIA

Indian is known for its cultural heterogeneity with respect to language and religion. Hindus constitute the majority, while the Muslims constitute the largest minority. The animosity between the Hindus and Muslims was largely the creation of the British rulers. In order to keep themselves in power, they adopted a policy of 'divide and rule' and tried to promote feelings of hostility among the members of these two communities. After a long history of independence, at present too, the lack of proper adjustment between them has often resulted in violent outbursts and communal riots, which unfortunately becomes a serious challenge to the secular identity of our country. On the other hand, very often the

political parties, including the national parties, too sometimes, do not allow secularism to take precedence over their political interests. The electorate in India, guided by tradition, tends to be responsive to appeals based on caste, religion and language. By announcing various schemes favoring a particular community, political parties, openly violate the idea of secularism they claim to stand for. While distributing tickets during elections, nearly all political parties take religion of a candidate into consideration. Such a practice in India poses the greatest threat to secularism.

One of the challenges deals with education. The State claims a leading role concerning education as a tool for fostering democracy and shaping the profile of responsible and proactive citizens. This role has been growing in recent years because both International organizations and States are aware that education is vital to overcome some critical aspects of post-modernity and globalization. At the same time, religions claim to have an important role in education too, both as an agent promoting education at the service of parents and society, according to their own perspective and worldview, and as an

important subject of the educational syllabus. These claims may clash between them and cast many questions: Does the State have the only leading role in education? Is it proper to the State to have the monopoly of educational issues? Can religion be part of the educational syllabus at the different levels? And, how can religion be part of the syllabus?

CONCLUSION

To sum up, India has been declared a secular state by its written constitution and it is every Indians duty to stand by and believe in this declaration. In the end, secularism begins in the heart of every individual. There should be no feeling of "otherness" as we all have a shared history, India being a traditional society that contains not one, but many traditions owing their origin in part to the different religions that exist here, has so far managed to retain the secular character of its polity. It is point to note that we need proper educational plan too, to slightly redesign our existing curriculum in the schools and colleges. The text books presenting distorted historical facts have to be changed and secular ideas will have to be inculcated in the innocent minds of our

young generation. All religions should get their weightage in the textbooks of history. The culture, traditions and festivals of any particular religion should not be over-projected. The sacrifices and hardships of all religious communities and their contribution towards freedom and development of the country need to be focused in the books of the history at school and college level. The importance of various culture and traditions of different religions in the peculiarity of the country should have to be discussed properly.

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