MAJOR CHALLENGES FACED BY SECULARISM IN MODERN INDIA

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Abstract

The present paper purports to examine and analyze the concept of Secularism in the context of world in general and India in particular. India is a secular state in the same way as it is a democratic state. Secularism is the only way of development in a plural society like ours. It is not a new phenomenon in India, we find its roots in the reign of Asoka the Great. But the occurrence of communal riots in the recent years indicates that the Indian Government has failed to establish a secular society. Communal politics, religious militancy, poverty, illiteracy and political corruption are posing serious threats to secularism. But the present turmoil will certainly be ever if sincere efforts with more stable secular policy are made. Majority of the problems will automatically be solved and the country will become an abode of peace progress and prosperity.

Keywords: Secularism, Communalism, poverty, illiteracy and political corruption, religious militancy,

Introduction

The term 'India' has varied implication. In modern political context, it refers to the country which gained independence in 1947 with a defined political boundary. In historical context, it was either described as the land beyond the Hindukush mountains or the land where the river Sindhu (at present referred to as River Indus). In social context, it was called as Hindustan referring to the people living in the Indian subcontinent as Hindus. For centuries, people from different parts of the world had entered the Indian subcontinent as invaders, traders, refugees, religious propagators, etc., and had settled down, and thereby bringing their individual culture, language and religion with them. India for over thousands of years had become a 'melting pot' of religious, linguistic and cultural diversity, and thereby created a unique cultural fabric based on the principles of multiculturalism and pluralism. The ancient Indian philosophy was based on the ideals of vasudaivakutumbakam, the whole world is one family, and sarvadharmasambhava, all religion leads to the same destination. These philosophical notions have attained legal status in India.

Indian secularism appears to be in a crisis. The development of the idea of secularism has been stunted because both, the opponents and the proponents of secularism define it as inherently and exclusively Western, Christian and foreign to India.

[1] The constrains to the idea of secularism may be as follows: It becomes a problem in a secular state with Muslim minorities because there is an inherent clash between the requirements of a secular way of life on the one hand and religious orthodoxy on the other.

[2] Dr. Bipin Chandra has identified three conditions for the birth of communalism, they are

People who follow the same religion have a common interest. The secular interest of different religions is dissimilar and divergent from the followers of other religion. When interest of different religions is seen to be incompatible, antagonistic and hostile.

From the above the following inference can be drawn:

Communalism is associated with religious affiliation.

It unites people of a particular religious' faith for secular causes and uses religion for political purposes. It arises from a perceived or even a concocted threat from other religious groups. It creates in-group solidarity by creating negative stereotypes about the out-group. It expresses itself in violent tensions designed to hurt the other party.

It also derives support from the followers of the same faith but belonging to the other political regimes.

[3] Such external support, not only emotional but also financial, and even in terms of arms tends to internationalize the conflict and this goes beyond disturbing the internal peace by threatening the very integrity of the nation. Secessionists' tendencies, exhibited by the extreme form of communalism, result in terrorist activities. Thus, communalism is a great menace to the secular nature of our polity.

Casteism The roots of the caste system are very deep. The ancient 'Varna' scheme is supposed to be the basis of the caste system. It may be said, that originally caste was associated with a specific occupation and village community and village economy.

The policies in India, especially at the state level, cannot be understood without the study of the caste in that particular state. There are some political parties which are organized to represent castes. Thus, caste consciousness has become the very core of the Indian polities and it has become the greatest roadblock to the furtherance of secularism in our polity.

Party Politics

Some of the political parties in India are organized on communal lines. These parties represent the interests of a particular region or a particular group. Some of the regional parties even desire and struggle for a separate independent State. They play communal politics for achieving and safeguarding their political interests. It has been remarked, that the known secular parties are not very secular in terms of composition and working.

Obscurantism

Obscurantism is one of the obstacles of the Indian secularism. Despite the progress in almost all the directions of life, obscurantism still persists. In all the religions, there are obscurantism elements which create obstacles in the way of evolution of human and dynamic social order. It is because of obscurantism, that the people give importance to customs and traditions rather than reason.

The Indian people in general whether Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs etc. are traditional in their outlook, and see many of the things in their traditions and customs. Thus, obscurantism is a great hurdle in the way of secularism in the Indian society.

Data on Communal Violence: Issues with it

Further, the data on communal violence as released by different agencies of the government is not clear, as seen in the image below there is a wide range of difference between the data on communal violence as released by the National Crime Records Bureau and Ministry of Home Affairs:

Has Secularism failed as a concept in India?

If Indian Secularism has indeed been such a failure, why, one might ask, has India continued to pay lip-service to it? The answer, it is possible to argue, lies in the imperatives of nationalism, first in the need to unite India behind the nationalist leadership, and later, in the need to invent a legal and political framework in which "national unity" might be realized. These imperatives pushed even those who had little real commitment to genuine secularism to proclaim publicly their adherence to secular values. There thus, has always been a hiatus, between the true meaning of secularism and the variant of secularism as espoused in India.

If secularization, therefore, is to be understood as a process in which ties of religion, casteist and ethnic particularisms are gradually transcended, in which the politics is defined on rationalist and ideological lines, and in which religion, caste and ethnicity are confined to the sphere of 'private" life, then its reverse has occurred in India. Communal politicians have successfully used the economics of inequality, uneven development and under-development to reinforce their stranglehold over the society.

Secularism is relevant to, and appropriate for India. The argument, that it has failed is not well-supported. There is no proof of how the State would have benefited had the Indian republic been a more religion-oriented one. I think the alternative to secularism in India, as in other spiritually diverse societies, would be disastrous. Secularism provides a check on the tyranny of the majority that is a natural part of any democratic society. It must, therefore, be defended.

Communalism

Religious life plays an important role in shaping the social atmosphere of individuals. Though the basic concept of all religions are similar, each religion tends to mould their followers' social life in different ways. Rituals, ceremonies, beliefs, ways of worship, lifestyle, rules of social order, etc… differ across religions. And these aspects play a crucial role in shaping the lives of individuals who together form our nation. India is a country with a vast number of religions and subdivisions within itself. Each of these groups has their own unique ways of living and worshipping. It is no easy task for a country like India to balance its diversity and unity with its enormous population. Indian secularism is the key concept that served as the keystone for the success of India's unity despite its diversity. Secular means that religions will have no role to play in the Government or governance. The concepts of Human Rights and Secularism are the indispensable elements of Modern Democracy. Secularism is the principle, followed in all modern democratic systems by treating all religions in an equal manner.

However, despite all the developments that we have achieved towards forming a secular unified nation, the concept of Indian secularism was never left unchallenged. Ever since independence, religious tensions rose between different groups and individuals. The partition of India is a heart-touching example of how dangerous religious tensions can become. It could challenge the unity and even the very existence of a nation. Such religious tensions still exist among different groups in our country and it poses a major challenge to the secular existence of our nation. This article is an attempt in that direction to analyze those modern challenges and discuss the importance of secularism in the modern scenario.

Objectives of the study

• To analyze the modern Challenges faced by secularism in India

• To analyze the condition of Secularism in modern India

Hypothesis

• The major challenges faced by secularism in modern India are communalism and corrupted politics.

 • Secularism at a national level is exploited by religious and political leaders.

Methodology;

In order to carry out the study, both primary and secondary data were used. The primary data is in the form of newspaper reports, online periodicals etc… and the secondary data is collected mainly from books, websites and online journals.

Communalism and communal riots are not new for India. What is more alerting is that, even though our society is developing giving importance to individuality and education, communalism still holds a strong grip over us. Every time a communal riot breaks out, the safety and integrity of the whole country will be at stake. Innocent lives are taken, children are orphaned and many families left homeless and hopeless. Most importantly such outbreaks

and violence leaves an everlasting scar in the minds of the people that may undermine their faith in the working of our democracy. This needs to end. India have to fly above the boundaries of religion and join hands to live together in harmony. There is only too much the laws could do. In the end, the harmony of a nation lies with its people. The only way to overcome this nasty trend of communalism is if we learn to accept and live with the diversity of religions among us. As Gandhiji once said, "Religion is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it." (Gandhi, 1955) Only that realization could bring religious harmony.

It is true that Politics and vote bank plays a very major role in the spread of communalism. Politics and government will be corrupted as long as the people holding power are corrupted. The only way to end this is for us to vote against those who uses religion as a vote bank. Strict laws should also be made to ban leaders and parties who spread religious hate and communalism from contesting in elections. Good governance will be delivered when the actual power holders realize their power and use it for the common good. Hence, it lies with us to decide the future of our country. For a harmonious future, we need to rise above the boundaries of religion and work together to build a secular country that thrives with unity in diversity.

Conclusion:

In the case Mrs. Valsamma Paul v. Cochin University, the Supreme Court aptly stated that Pluralism is the keynote of Indian culture and religious tolerance is the bedrock of Indian secularism. It is based on the belief that all religions are equally good and efficacious G pathways to perfection or God-realization. It stands for a complex interpretive process in which there is a transcendence of religion and yet there is a unification of multiple religions. It is a bridge between religions in a multi-religious society to cross over the barriers of their diversity. Secularism is the basic feature of the Constitution as a guiding principle of state policy and action. Secularism in the positive sense is the cornerstone of an egalitarian and forward-looking society which our Constitution endeavors to establish. It is the only possible basis of a uniform and durable national identity in a multi-religious and socially disintegrated society. It is a fruitful means for conflict-resolution and harmonious and peaceful living. It provides a sense of security to the followers of all religions and ensures full civil liberties, constitutional rights and equal opportunities.

It is the mandate of the Constitution that the secular character of the Indian nation must be protected and all attempts should be made to strike a balance between the rights of the individuals and the duty and commitment of the state to establish an egalitarian social order by upholding the principles of equality and non-discrimination. But it is equally to protect the dignity and worth of women and any social or religious practice which is being practiced or perpetuated in the name of religious practices and customs, then the freedom of religion should be deemed to be subservient to fundamental freedoms and human rights of women.

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