

Defining Indian Notion of Secularism: Challenges and Remedies

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Abstract:

The framers of the Indian Constitution sought to establish India as a democratic republic country. At the same time, it has also emphasized on preserving secularism as the base of its democratic structure. The word secularism was added into the Indian constitution by 42nd Amendment, 1976 and it is also a part of the basic structure of the Indian constitution. India being a land of diversity in terms of language, culture, religion etc. at many instances faces challenges which put a threat to the societal fabric of India. At many times, question has been raised at the need and practice of secular ideas in India. However, it is the secular values imprinted in the life and constitution of India that binds the people against common threat. In this paper, attempt will be made to outline the nature and characteristics of the secular structure of India, the Indian notion of secularism as well as the challenges faced by secularism over the years.

Keywords: Freedom of expression, Basic Structure, Constitution of India, Justice

I. Introduction:

Secularism is said to be one of the necessary pre-conditions for every modern nation state. It is a goal which every country tried to achieve to have a strong democratic base. Secularism in its simple terms can be understood as equality among all religions i.e. equal treatment to all religion by the state, freedom to propagate any religion, state's tolerance on religion, non- discrimination on the ground of religion, separation of politics from religion and also absence of any kind of global or universal religion. The preamble of the Indian constitution signifies the word secularism and made it a part of the Basic Structure provision. Besides, secular ideas are expressed through Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy etc.

The Indian notion of secularism differs from the Western model. The Western notion of secularism means the absence of a state sponsored religion and separation between religion and state, while the Indian notion of secularism is not limited to the principle of separation between religion and politics. It strongly upholds the thesis of equal respect of all religions i.e. "Sarva Dharma Sambhava". It also advocates respect and tolerance among all religions. Due to the diverse nature of the Indian state in terms of religion, language, tribes, culture etc. at many times, it faces challenges to its secular identity that diluted the composite culture of the state. Though steps have been taken by the Indian Constitution in order to secure secularism in the country through various means, yet there are seen several major challenges towards secularism which are sought to be analyzed in this paper.

II. Methodology:

The method used in preparing this paper is based upon qualitative explanation. Uses of secondary resources like books, magazine, research papers, newspapers, internal sources, archives etc. has been used in data and information collection.

Objectives:

The main objectives in writing this paper is to-

- 1) Understand the notion of secularism from Indian perspective.
- 2) Analyzing the challenges towards secularism and identifying its possible remedies.

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Defining Indian notion of Secularism:

“We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic...”_ this is the preface of the Preamble of the Indian Constitution which well expressed the fundamentality of secular notion. Besides, various articles under the constitution of India talks about secular notion like, Article 14 which talks about Equality for all irrespective of one’s religion. Likewise, Articles 25-28 covers the fundamental right to freedom of religion. By Article 29 and 30 talks about the cultural and educational rights of the minorities. Above all the secular culture of Indian constitution is expressed also through guaranteeing universal adult franchise to all the people of the nation and following a system of merit for recruitment in jobs. Thus, we can say that the consequent governments in India have focused widely on preserving the social fabric intact by preserving the secular identity.

A vital fact of Indian secularism is that the State does not interfere in the religious affairs of the people. India as a secular state has no state religion. However, along with it the State has the power to regulate matters connected with religion for introducing social reforms as well as for protecting public order, health, morality and peace. The Constituent Assembly headed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar also implied a clear distinction between religion and the state. It is because it promotes tolerance among the people of all religions. Hence it is Sarva Dharma Sambhava which act as the base of Indian notion of secularism.

Challenges towards Secularism in India:

Though the idea of secularism is well imprinted in the Indian Constitution and efforts have been taken by government of India to tackle the issues that shook the composite fabric of the land, yet some challenges lies beneath. Some of such challenges towards secularism in India are as follows,

- **Communalization of Society:** India is widely diverse in terms of religion, language, culture, customs and values etc. Several communities are developed on the ground of these factors which holds different sets of rules and norms. Various communal riots have been taking place due to these differences which leads to the destruction or violation of not only the fundamental rights of the people but also endangered the dignity and belief of the people. People are divided in terms of religion and one religion always tries to have priority over another which leads to conflicts and riots. The instances like 2002 Godhra riot etc.

- **Rise of Religious Fundamentalism:** The rise of religious fundamentalist groups also posed a greater threat towards secularism in India. Hindu fundamentalist groups along with certain Muslim fundamentalist groups like Laskar-e-Taiba, Indian Mujaheddin etc. always worked for the supremacy of their own religion only over others. They never hesitate to become hostile to others to secure their orthodox and narrow views and ideas.

- **Politicization of Religion:** One of the fundamental aims of secularism is the separation of politics from that of religion. Yet in reality we can see the massive influence of religion upon politics. Various political parties tried to mold their agenda keeping in mind the religious factor. For the promotion of their political interests several political parties and groups like BJP, Shiv Sena, RSS, AIMIM etc. left no stone unturned to influence the general public which directly hamper the secular value of the nation.

- **Intolerance in the name of Religion:** Religion being the crucial force behind every move of the Indian people. It plays a significant role in the socio-political life of the people. All people or groups wanted to secure their own interests. Yet tolerance on the ground of religion is unexpected if any clash or argument took place.

- **Ideological and Cultural Differences:** Ideological and Cultural differences also act as a challenge towards secularism in India. Every religion possesses different sets of ideologies and values. The cultural and religious norms followed by that of the Hindus are different from those of the Muslims, Sikhs, Jains etc. So often a clash arises among the people of different religions which threaten the national solidarity and unity.

- **State led Violence:** It is often seen that besides the other forces like communalism, fundamentalism etc., sometimes some acts done by the State also lead to violence and pose a challenge towards secularism. As for instance in 1984, the State of India came to be seen as complicit in the genocidal attacks on the Sikhs which turned them to become more violent and ultimately led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Besides in 1992, the demolition of the Babri mosque took place and the State comparatively played an inactive role which also can be termed as a neglect towards the idea of secularism.

- **Religious Biasness of the Indian People:** It is also often assumed that the people of India think more in terms of religion. They are comparatively more religiously biased to their respective religions. This religious biasness never led them to follow the secular values in true sense. Many criticize the idea of secularism as a western thought and thus not suitable for the State of India. This also acts as a challenge towards secularism in India.

- **Minority Groups' Perception:** In India the Hindus formed the majority population followed by the Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains etc. so there is always a feeling on the part of the minority groups that their voices will be dominated by the majority and they will be deprived of their basic rights and liberties. So, these minority groups constantly engage in agitations and violence which also threatens the secular values.

- **Role of Media:** Sometime media or press also hampers the idea of secularism in the country. It is through media and press news are circulated to and from different regions among the people. Hence, a news having communal flavor may incite violence among people belonging to different faiths. As for example the Muzaffar Nagar case in UP on 27th August, 2013, where a minor traffic accident turned into a communal riot. Sometimes wrong information and reporting telecast by the media and press may incite violence among the people which ultimately dilutes the composite fabric of the society.

Along with the above mention challenges some others like the absence of a Uniform civil Code, absence of a just economic order, a defective education system, distortion of constitutional and democratic institutions etc. are some the basic challenges towards secularism in India.

III. Remedies and Conclusion:

Looking at the various challenges we can say that they not only pose a threat to democratic set-up of the country but also deprived the people of the nation to lead a healthy and progressive life. The Constitution of India though emphasized for a secular state, yet the basic principles of secularism could not be achieved unless and until these challenges will be eradicated. The orthodox or conservative religious mind set of the people should not come in the way of national integration. So possible steps must be adopted by the government and it should also work for the proper working of the existing initiatives made by the State itself. As for example, proper investigation of the working the National Commission for the Minorities should be made to make it more effective. Besides, the role of print and social media should also be strong, vibrant and neutral while dealing with sensitive news. They should work for the unification and not destruction of the sentiments of the people.

Along with Government, it is also the duty of the people of the nation also to work for the achievement of the secular values and ideals. Rather being religiously bounded, they should come for the unification of their national identity by keeping aside their religious sentiments. Thus, we can conclude that for the attainment of secular ideas, a group effort both by the State and by the people should be made. Then only India can be termed as a secular state as it lies in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution.

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