

**SECULARISM AND INDIAN POLITY:
A STUDY OF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND ARTICULATION IN POST
INDIRA GANDHI ERA**

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Much has been said and opined upon secularism by many. The debates and actual conflicts of opinions are still on. Some people told me that it is a very controversial issue, when I started to work on this. Frankly speaking I feel any issue related to us as a nation on the whole is controversial as well as of utmost importance.

Today we need to discuss secularism in context with the extreme influence of religion on politics. There is definitely tremendous amount of unrest visible in the society related to religion, though more in those parts of the society where education and knowledge, either do not exist or are at very low levels.

Whether this unrest is due to economic reasons or ignorance is debatable. But it is clear that this unnecessary religious intolerance is rusting, the beauty, of the art of, peaceful and happy living of common people.

In India secularism has been the very essence of the ancient society. This is the country, to which, people like Christians, Jews, Parsis and many more, could make their homeland, with out any difficulty. Indian culture accommodated all, and that was the culture of true secularism. Almost all major religions of the world flourished in India and their followers have lived in harmony for ages.

The most brilliant period in the history of India was that of the Mughals, who patronized art, music, painting, poetry and architecture. They set their roots in India and mixed with the ancient culture of secularism,, and introduced a new historical culture of India. That was the period of cultural renaissance which produced many Hindu writers, saints and scholars such as Tulsidas, Meerabai, Tansen and many more to name.

It was during the British reigns that this historical culture was threatened and somewhat damaged. The British were truly administrators and they somehow could not accept the well fabricated society of India. In order to rule their way and secure ultimate profits it suited them to inject the poison of separatism in the name of religion. They succeeded, and ruled for 200 years, but still the ancient stronghold of secularism only, paved the way for the freedom struggle.

A look into the constituent assembly's debates clearly reveals that the general understanding amongst members of the assembly was that India was to be a secular

state. They have emphasized the secular foundation of the Indian state. They also declare that secularism as adopted in the Indian constitution is not an anti-religious concept, rather it prevents discrimination against the citizens on the basis of religion.

According to H V Kamath, "When I say that a state should not identify itself with any particular religion, I do not mean that a state should be anti-religious or irreligious. India would be a secular state but according to me a secular state is neither a godless state nor an irreligious nor an anti-religious state."

The fact is that no particular religion would receive state patronage or determine the affairs of the state. The secularism in India did not have an anti-religious thrust or involve the elimination of religion from social or political fields, but rather stood for equal respect for all religions or *Serva Dharm Sambhav* concept.

According to K N Pannikar, "emphasizing the common features of all religions, universalism seeks to establish that all religions are essentially true but pursue different paths for the realization of god."

Swami Vivekanand argued that different religions of the world are neither contradictory nor antagonistic. According to him, "there never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion, there never existed many national religions, there is only one--of universal brotherhood. We must respect all religions."

Although the secular character of our constitution has been emphasized by many, in its original form the constitution did not declare India as a secular state. It was however only with 42d amendment that the words 'socialist' and 'secular' were adopted in the preamble. These terms are further not defused as required, yet one thing is clear that the application of secularism should not be selective,' that is one form for one believer and the other form for the other believer.

We Indians in general believe in the concept of one nation, one people (the best examples of this theory are the cricket matches and the war time psychology) and regard India as our motherland with a common history and common culture. Whether we worship in a temple, a church, a mosque, we all belong to one nation that is Bharat that is India,, and our identity is Bhartiye, that is Indian, irrespective of what religion we believe in.

The various wild and provocative ways of de-linking secularism with its very original soul are been adopted in recent years by various political parties. Visiting religious places by the political leaders, before and after the elections, performing religious rituals, wearing particular religion related attires, sporting tilaks and consulting gurus and other religious leaders, are some of them.

Secularism was never as endangered a concept as it is now.

The so called secular parties are playing the communal card in disguise, thus damaging the very basic idea of a secular politics, and a secular society, country. They do not want

to accept that secularism is a concept, complete in itself, there is no scope of communalism, with or against secularism.

According to A B Shah, "one of the main culprits in this game of communal division is (congress party) the so called most and only secular party of the country, which is secular by profession, obsessed,' firstly, with a desire to project its own image as a protector of the minorities and subsequently with the need to capture bulk votes of the Muslims and Christians, the party and its governments have systematically whittled down the meaning of secularism in India."

Those who talk about or raise the questions of communalism are themselves not secular. They are the true communalist. Those who try to appease a certain section of the society in the name of minorities,, are communalist. They are the real defaulters of secular image of the state and they are the ones whom we need to be beware of.

We are secular because we give equal regard to all the religions but when are we communal? We are communal when we differentiate between the citizens of India. For being secular, we should only be Indians. Before pronouncing punishment to a murderer our courts do not consider the religion of the accused. A murderer is a murderer. If our judiciary can practice secular ways, why can't our politicians?

Most of the political parties have tried to convert religious communities into political communities. Secularism is been used by them as a political safeguard and a vote seekers most effective net to catch the **fish,'** the voter.

Secularism is no more a concept, belief or faith for these political parties. It has become a toy for them, with which, they are playing with,' or say, controlling the masses. It is a pity that these parties are deeply concerned about secularism, communalism, minorities and human rights, but no body is concerned about the economic condition of the country, unemployment and population growth, the illiteracy and education system, and the very serious problem of brain drain. The contemporary issues are being neglected openly and are choking under the pressure of secularism and communalism game plan. Whether it is communal riots or secular- communal debate, it is the common citizen of this country who is suffering.

We need to work harder towards such politics, before it completely kills the very soul of this ancient concept. We need to rise above this sick and ruptured pattern of governance. Secularisation must be promoted at the political level. The use of religion for political gains constitutes the biggest challenge to secularism. The political parties must absolutely be committed to the Constitutional definition of secularism and practice it respectfully. The reform of the electoral process is required so that there is a shift from vote bank politics and politics of communal mobilization to mobilization on the basis of socio-economic issues. We must realise that in the ultimate analysis a strong and secular state can flourish only in a vibrant secular society.