

HINDUTVA POLITICS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IS A THREAT TO SECULAR FABRIC OF INDIA: CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS

Harjinder Singh¹

Rohil²

Ravinder Kumar³

Abstract

Secularism is the core value of Indian constitution and is utmost important for democracy in India. However, the country has witnessed a long history of communalism and communal riots. Major political parties such as Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) and Congress Party use religion as a tool to garner vote and this is challenging the secular character of the country. The rise of Hindu nationalism is a major threat to the secular character of the country as the state has no religion of its own and it cannot discriminate on the basis of religion. In 2014, after the coming of BJP into power, there have been increased instances of the curtailment of right to freedom of speech and expression. Secularism became an issue of debate for many reasons like that of communal politics, religious militancy, coming into power by the pro Hindutva BJP party and its proclaimed notion of constructing one nation principle. The paper consists of four parts: first part deals with defining the concepts of secularism and Hindutva, second one deal with the development of secularism in India, the third part deals with rise of Hindu nationalism as threat to secular fabric of the country and in the last part conclusion is given – which is – secularism being the vital component of democracy is critical to its very survival, and hence state and civil society must perform its duty to safeguard and promote it so that India's peace, harmony, economic growth, democracy and sustainable development could be secured.

Keywords: Hindutva Politics, Secularism, Hindu Nationalism, Communalism.

¹ Research Scholar, Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive policy, Panjab University Chandigarh.

² Research Scholar, Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive policy, Panjab University Chandigarh.

³ Research Scholar, Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive policy, Panjab University Chandigarh.

Introduction

Secularism is the vital pillar of democracy in India, attack on secularism puts democracy in danger. A threat to secularism is a grave threat to democracy. The doctrine of Secularism opposes all forms of inter- religious domination. It faces challenges not merely inter-religious domination but intra-religious dominations as well. Secularism as a concept promotes freedom within religions and promotes equality between, as well as within religions. All secular states have one thing in common that is they are neither theocratic nor do they establish a state religion. Although India is a secular country and was not constructed on the basis of religion, therefore it cannot discriminate among its citizens on the basis of religion. But the reality is different; the major political parties use religion to garner vote and this is challenging the secular character of the country. Secularism became an issue of debate since its inception for many reasons like that of communal politics, religious militancy; however with Hindutva based BJP party coming into power it became a much burning issue of Indian politics since Hindutva ideology proclaimed notion of constructing one nation principle. The paper focused on the Hindutva politics of BJP and soft Hindutva politics of Congress Party as a major threat to Indian secularism and how the communal politics could be curbed.

Defining Secularism

The term 'secularism' is taken from the word 'secular' which is derived from classical expression 'saecularis'. It means not concerned with the religion, not sacred and not monastic. The term was first time used by British writer George Holyoake in 1851. It was used to distinguish the church from state. The word 'secularism' has been defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica as "non-spiritual, having no concern with religious or spiritual matter". It further adds "As the word implies, secularism is based solely on consideration of practical morality with a view to the physical, social and moral improvement of society". According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'secularism' 'is the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life to the exclusion of all considerations drawn on belief in God or in a future state. The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences says, "secularism in the philosophical sphere may be interpreted as a revolt against theological and universals. In the political sphere, it came to mean that a temporal entitled to exercise power in its own right (Amrutkar, 2011, p, 173-174). Achin Vanaik stated that secularism means a greater rationalism

of thought and behavior. He further holds that it is a multisided process involving the progressive decline of religious influence in the economic, political and social life of human being.

In Indian context, secularism means an equal status for all religions. Indian secularism was first defined by the Constituent Assembly on April 3, 1948 as "Whereas it is essential for the proper functioning of democracy and the growth of national unity and solidarity that communalism should be eliminated from Indian life, this assembly is of the opinion that no communal organization, which by its constitution or by the exercise of discretionary power vested in any of officers and organs, admits to, or excludes from, its membership persons on grounds of religion, race and caste or any of them, should be permitted to engage in any activities other than those essential for the bonafide religious, cultural, social and educational needs of the community and that all steps, legislative and administrative, necessary to prevent such activities should be taken (Amrutkar, 2011, p, 174). The above definitions of secularism set out three principles for a secular state, i.e.

- 1) Freedom of religion
- 2) Absence of discrimination on the ground of religion
- 3) Separation of state from religion.

Separation of state from religion means that state has no official religion, individual is free to profess, practice and propagate any religion. State will not promote any religion. But it does not mean that state is anti religion or irreligious. Sometimes we see that the state intervene in the religious matters like abolition of sati pratha and untouchability, interferences in personal laws of Muslims (Triple Talak Bill) and in Sabrimala temple issue. So, in reality the Indian state can interfere in the religious sphere also but only, when it considered it reasonable, for development of the society and to defend the rights of minority community. This characteristic of Indian model of secularism is differentiating it from western model because in western model there is no relation between state and religion and state can't interfere in religious sphere of individual.

Defining Hindutva and Communalism-

Hindutva term is a brainchild of V. D. Savarkar in 1923. According to him Hindutva means one nation, one culture and one religion. Hindutva is basically Hindu nationalism. K.B. Hedgewar

was concerned with the perceived weaknesses of the Hindu society against foreign domination. Historically, He met Savarkar in Ratnagiri in 1925 and discussed with him methods of organizing Hindu nation, since he found Savarkar's Hindutva inspirational. In September, 1925 he started Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh with its mission to establish Hindu Rashtra. It was also defined by Supreme Court in 1995 as a way of life. However, if one explores the facet of any religion – that comes out to be a way of life. But at current times Hindutva means to mobilize people on the name of Hindu religion. It believes in the supremacy of Hindu religion and considers the religion of others as subordinate or part of it. It is a political (term) movement advocating Hindu nationalism for the establishment of a Hindu state. Communalism refers to give more importance to one's own religion and spread the feeling of intolerance towards other religions. Consequently the conflicts occurred between different religious groups in India, e.g. Hindus and Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs etc. Communalism is a black scar and threat for Indian democracy. Hence in order to establish an egalitarian and democratic society people need to counter communalism at any cost.

Development of Secularism in India-

India has long history of communalism and communal riots. The Britishers ruled India through divide and rule policy which divided people on the basis of religion, caste and region etc. As a result, enmity increased between the two major communities of India that is Hindus and Muslims which finally led to partition of India and creation of a separate nation of Pakistan. The direct result of partition was the emergence of communal riots, huge loss of life and property and displacement of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in different parts of the country. The founding fathers of Constitution knew past history well, especially Jawahar Lal Nehru and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who were very much concerned about it. Therefore religious freedom was provided to every citizen. A series of articles in the Constitution underline the percepts of secularism in India. These include Article 14 - equality before law; article 15 - Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth; Article 16 - equality of opportunity in matters of public employment which lays down that no citizen shall, on grounds of religion, race, caste etc. shall be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of employment or office under the state; Article 19-protection of certain rights regarding freedom of speech and expression, to assemble peacefully and without arms, to form association or unions, to move

freely throughout the territory of India, to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India and to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business. Article 25 of the Indian constitution guarantees every citizen to freely profess, practice and propagate any religion subject to public order, morality and health. Article 26 provides freedom to manage religious affairs. Article 27 provides freedom to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion. Article 28 deals with freedom to attend religious instructions or religious worship in certain educational institutions. Article 29 provided protection of interests of minority and Article 30 talks about rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. However before 1976 the word “Secular” was nowhere used in the constitution of India. It was only in 1976 with the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act that the word ‘secular’ was inserted in the preamble and later it was declared as the basic structure of constitution by the Supreme Court of India. All these provisions of the constitution and many judgments of the Supreme Court shaped the secular character of Indian state.

Hindutva Politics of BJP and Soft Hindutva politics of Congress as a threat to Secularism in India

Many provisions incorporated in the constitution of India that expressed the secular character of India. After the achievement of independence Pt. Nehru aspired to shape the secular character of the country as he was very much in favour of secularism. He strictly condemned both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism. Dr. Ambedkar was a true believer in secularism, he vehemently opposed the unholy nexus of religion and politics and advocated inclusion of minority rights in the Indian constitution. Secularism was the only way of development in a society like ours. After the death of Pt. Nehru the fundamental forces raised their heads in the country. However during his time, the **Partition of India, 1947** occurred in which millions of people were forced to migrate from both sides of the border. An environment of hatred and violence everywhere, engulfed Hindus in Pakistan and Muslims in India who were killed in masses, women were raped, and many children lost their parents.

Till 1967 Congress dominated the politics of India. After that many regional parties also started participating in the politics of country. Some of these political parties were having communal support base and Bharatiya Janta Party was considered as the extreme rightist political party, the

political wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The BJP officially adopted Hindutva as a political ideology in its 'Palampur resolution' in 1989. It started using religion (Hindu) as a tool to mobilise the people and increase its support base among the Hindu community. The Hindutva politics of RSS and BJP is a threat to Indian secularism. There were many incidents in history which induced us to think whether India is really a secular country? The ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Hindu Pundits in 1989, led to mass killing by the Extremist Islamic terrorists and large scale exodus of Kashmiri Pundits from the valley to the various parts of the India, giving them the status of refugee in their own country. The most infamous incident was demolition of Babri Masjid on 6th December, 1992 which resulted in communal riots in different parts of India. Bombay was worst affected area, over 1500 Muslims were killed and properties were looted. The official machinery acted as a silent spectator and sometimes supported the Hindu extremists (**Hussein, Saddam, 2017, p.2**). Narshima Rao (the then Prime Minister) decision of "rebuilding the mosque", immediately after its demolition on 6 December, 1992 has remained on papers. The judicial commission of inquiry under the chairmanship of Justice M. Liberhan, set up within a week of the demolition of the mosque, created a world record by taking 17 years to complete the inquiry and effectively found no one guilty (**Godbole, 2016**). Anti Sikh riots of 1984 is another flaw to the secularism of the country. The Godhra riots strictly hit the secular character of Indian state because it was a state sponsored and planned violence against minorities (**Godbole, 2016; Gupta, 2002, p. 4665**). Other than these, many other communal riots occurred in different parts of the country.

The Supreme Court of India observed in the Bommai case that if religion is not separate from the politics, religion of the ruling party tends to become the state religion. This is true for the present BJP government. For the BJP, patronisation of the Hindu religion (not in totality), its practices and to ignore the religious practices of minority communities presents a clear picture of Hindutva politics of BJP. In some states such as Gujarat, the government has introduced a law that makes cow slaughter punishable with life imprisonment. In May 2017, Environment Ministry imposed a ban on the sale and purchase of cattle for slaughter at animal markets across India, under Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act while there are no such restrictions on trade of goat or sheep. However, the ban was later suspended by the Supreme Court in July the same year. Emboldened by such state support, pro Hindutva or right wing groups are unleashing

violence by targeting Muslims in the name of *gau raksha* or cow protection. Different incidents of violence took place as in September 28, 2015 Mohammad Akhlaq was dragged out of his house in Dadri and killed on suspicion of keeping beef and consuming it. On June 22, 2017, fifteen year old Junaid was stabbed to death by mob that attacked him and his brother, the mob hurled religious insults and called the brothers “beef eaters” and “anti-nationals” before killing Junaid. In June 29, 2017, a mob beat up and killed Asgar Ansari, a 45 year old Muslim trader in the eastern state of Jharkhand, for allegedly carrying beef in his car. Three days earlier, a Muslim dairy owner, Usman Ansari was beaten up and his house was set on fire because a cow carcass was reportedly found near his house but no one found guilty so far. What all these incidences indicate, it clearly shows that marginalization of one religion at the behest of people in power.

‘Love jihad’ is one of the tools used in the religious warfare propagated by the BJP ministers openly. In the wake of the Hadiya case, Uttar Pradesh’s Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had referred to love jihad as a ‘dangerous trend’ but had raked up the issue during Kerala visit. In another instance, BJP workers along with the police had crashed wedding of a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy in Ghaziabad, the workers, accompanied by other Hindutva organisations such as Shiv Sena, RSS and Bajrang Dal created ruckus at the wedding. At this point, the BJP is simply pandering to the needs of the pro-Hindutva groups in the hopes of building a Hindu *rashtra*.

In spite of all these, statements of BJP leaders have shown their anti minority and pro-Hindutva mind set. Even they ignore the fundamental duty of the constitution which told about to develop scientific temper as the duty of every citizen of India. The statements of BJP ministers to follow Hinduism or otherwise go to Pakistan question the secular character of Indian nation as the party in power is an in-charge of Indian affairs. Although one could argue that ideology of party in power is Yogi Aditya Nath compared Sha Rukh Khan, a bollywood actor, with Pakistani terrorist Hafiz Saeed and asked him to go to Pakistan. *Ghar vapsi* movement of BJP has also weakened the secularism.

In 2016, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student group affiliated to the RSS, instigated violence and assaulted students and teachers in Delhi University's Ramjas College in protest of an invitation to Umar Khalid, a student of Jawaharlal Nehru University accused of

being “anti-national”. In the current scenario one who express an opposite view to that of pro Hindutva is seen as “anti-national”, the media role in the whole scenario has become highly objectionable and .

The Congress party also indulged in ‘Soft Hindutva’ politics to seek votes from Hindu voters. Historically, congress party supported secularism but some of the incidents like Anti-Sikh riots in 1984 and infamous Babri Masjid incident that occurred during Congress regime questioned the secular character of the party. After BJP came into power in 2014, it started accusing Congress as pro-Muslim party. So the Congress party leadership started to adopt ‘Soft Hindutva’ politics which includes visits of Rahul Gandhi to temples, projection of him as “Shiv Bhakt” during his visit to Bhopal on September 17, 2018, calling Rahul Gandhi as ‘*Janeu Dhari*’ (one who wears Brahminical thread) by congress spokesperson, Visit of Rahul Gandhi as many as 27 temples during his Gujarat campaign, pro-Hindutva role played by Madhya Pradesh Congress government, decisions of Madhya Pradesh governments to open cowsheds in all 23,000 village Panchayats and constructing mythical path where lord Rama was believed to have traversed, in Kerala Congress openly supported the protest against beef ban. These incidents show pro Hindutva face of Congress Party.

This Hindutva politics of major political parties especially by BJP created atmosphere of fear and intolerance among minority communities which is very harmful for secularism and democracy in India. This type of politics to use religion as a tool and to spread the feeling of communalism has resulted in the loss of thousands of lives in India. History shows that the numerical strength of dying people in communal riots remain always greater than those dying out of natural calamities such a floods, earthquakes and droughts etc. (Singh, 2018, p, 597). The above incidents lamented that the Hindutva politics of major political parties is a gigantic challenge for secularism.

Steps to promote secularism and curb communalism

Curbing secularism and promoting secularism is something which need all round approach. Both the top down and bottom up approach are equally important and necessary to counter the menace the communalism. The governmental efforts to check the growth of communalism is surmount

but if the government formed by a political party which employee communal polarisation as a strategy, then it becomes immensely important for the other organs of the state, especially the constitutional bodies like the Election commission of India, High Courts and Supreme Court, to check the activities of the government. A brief strategy to counter communalism and to expand secularism is: both the Central and States Government must take following initiatives - launching aggressive media campaign through TV, Radio, newspapers and social media by involving famous personalities against communalism and promoting secularism; celebrating communal harmony day/week/month by organizing program and seminars in schools, colleges, universities and governmental offices; distributing communal harmony awards for promoting harmony and peace in India; inserting adequate information on necessity of secular society in school curriculum and organising activity works so that secularism roots spreads at the very early age; promotion of diverse culture of minorities; introducing special course books highlighting the real life stories of communal harmony in the schools; ensuring schools and colleges regularly hold programs like painting, debate and essay writing to promote secularism and harmony among different religious groups in India; taking strong action against those who publish, store and distribute information based on hate propaganda about any religion in media; enlightening society about the evil of communalism and advantage of having secularism or peace and communal harmony in the country; educating citizens that the discrimination on the basis of religion is a crime; developing the monitoring, reporting and jurisprudence system to eliminate the incidences of communal nature at the earliest and perpetrators are held guilty that could produce deterrence. At community level, people should cultivate secular mindset that mere different religious belief and worship style could not be used a ground to discriminate, exploit and inflict violence on any person. They must realise that ultimately they all are human beings and humanity shall prevail over the orthodox religious traditions and belief system. The enlightened civil society has uphill task to educate the masses regarding the benefits of secular character of India viz. protection and promotion of democracy, peace and harmony in the nation, economic growth and prosperity and development of all whereas its antithesis i.e. communalism brings anti products which are against the national interests as well as against humanity. Once this spirit of safeguard and promotion of secularism is generated from the very beginning, Indian state secular character becomes rock solid that no one can even shake it.

Conclusion

Secularism is the fundamental principle of democracy. The founding fathers of the constitution gave the India's constitution a secular character and later the word 'secularism' was inserted into the preamble of the constitution by the 42nd constitutional amendment which is later on declared by the supreme court of India as the one of the feature of the basic structure of the constitution. But the communal forces raised their heads time to time and hit this secular character of India. The political parties use religion as a tool to garner votes which has a potential to destroy the secular nature of the country. The Hindutva politics of BJP is one of the major threats to secularism. The various incidents discussed in this paper, shows that the politics of BJP is sustained by the promotion of Hindutva ideology. But in the long run, for the nation as a whole the use of religion by the political parties for power politics especially the Hindutva politics of BJP will be very dangerous to the secular character of the country. The soft Hindutva politics started by the Congress party also questions the Indian secularism. Therefore, the Election Commission of India should take necessary steps to curtail the use of religion as a tool to vote bank by the political parties. All the political parties and governments both central as well as state should embrace the strategies which recognize the religious and cultural rights of minority communities. The parties should abolish the feeling of fear and separatism among Muslims and other minority communities. If the country follows the principle suggested by the members of Constituent Assembly especially by Nehru then India will become an abode of peace and harmony among different communities.

References-

- Acevedo, D. D. (2013). Secularism in the Indian context. *Law & Social Inquiry*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 138-167.
- Assayag, Jackie (2003). Spectral Secularism religion, politics and democracy in India. *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 325-357.
- Baber, Zaheer (1996). After Ayodhya: Politics, religion and the emerging culture of academic anti Secularism in India. *Springer*, vol. 21, no. 3/4, pp. 317-343.

- Chishti, S. M. A. W. (2004). Secularism in India: An overview. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 65, no. 2, Pp. 183-198.
- Godbole, Madhav (2016). Is India a Secular Nation? *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, issue no. 15.
- Gupta, Dipankar (2002). Limits of tolerance: Prospects of Secularism in India after Gujarat. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 37, no. 46, pp. 4615-4620.
- Hiro, Dilip (1995). A correction: Indian social scientists and Critique of Secularism. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 30, no. 18/19, p. 986.
- Hussein, Saddam (2017). The myth of Secular India. *The Diplomat*.
- Javeed, Alam (2007). Ethically speaking, what should be the meaning of Separation for Secularism in India? *Social Scientist*, vol. 35, no. ¾, pp. 3-18.
- Patnaik, Arun K. (2010). Unorthodox Elite Secularism. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 45, no. 52.
- Prasad, Ganesh & Anand Kumar (2006). The Concept, constraints and prospect of Secularism in India. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 67, no. 4, pp.793-808.
- Rajasekharian, A. M. (1987). Jwaharlal Nehru's Contribution to Secularism in India-An Estimate. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 48, no. 2, Pp. 212-224.
- Rao, Badrinath (2006). The variant meanings of Secularism in India: Notes toward conceptual clarifications. *Oxford University Press*, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 47-81.
- Rizvi, Md. Mahtab Alam (2005). Secularism in India: Retrospect and Prospects. *Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 66, no. 4, pp. 901-914.
- Rover, J. D., Claerhout, S. & Balagangadhara (2011). Liberal political theory and the cultural migration of ideas: The case of Secularism in India. *Sage Publications, Inc.*, vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 571-599.
- Singh, Ranbir & Karamvir Singh (2008). Secularism in India: Challenges and its future. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 69, no. 3, pp. 597-607.
- Srinivasan, Janki (2016). The Persuasions of Intolerance. *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 17.