



Redefining the meaning and practices of secularism in Indian democratic System: A new policy pattern for social change

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Abstract:

The term 'secular' did not occur in the original text of the Indian Constitution but was added in connection with an amendment during the emergency in 1976, without any clear definition of the term and still the word is interpreted as SARVADHARMA SAMBHAVA-'equal respect for all religions' but there is a dire need to rethink the meaning and practice of secularism as SARVADHARMA ABHAV in term of state and religion and SARVADHARMA SADBHAVA in term of religion and individual as well as to implement these model at grass root level which is perquisites for the realization of secularism in real sense .

Keyword: Secular. Democracy. India, Sarvadharm-Sadbhavva. Sarvadharm Abhava

Introduction

The word secular in dictionary¹ refers to things, which are not religious or spiritual. Secularism has its origin in the western countries, in fact was first used in Europe². In India secularism basically connotes treatment of all religions on a footing of equality and ruling out any discrimination. The term 'secular' did not occur in the original text of the Constitution but was added in connection with an amendment³ during the emergency in 1976, without any definition of the term. The basic outlines of secularism are listed in the following provisions of the constitution:

Secularism in the preamble⁴ of constitution means equality of all religion. There shall be no 'state religion'⁵. Indian constitution guarantees the right of religious freedom-article 25⁶ granted the right to propagate and disseminate religious belief, article 26⁷ provided a religious institution the right

to manage its own affairs, and article 29 and 30 provide cultural and educational rights.⁸ Under the article 15⁹, 16¹⁰ and 19¹¹ of the Indian constitution discrimination on the ground of religion is prohibited and all citizens are granted the right to equal treatment before the law and the right to equal protection of the laws.

Complicated nature of relationships at these two levels poses the challenges before secularism in Indian context. In India the secularism is an instrument for-social change and political transformation. But our interpretation of secular as SARVADHARMA-SAMABHAV¹² (in the context of relationship between state and religion on one hand and religion and individual on the other hand) protecting every religion and their diverse mode of belief structure, their social and civil code, varied customs, faiths and even education system is not conducive in building an integrated society or human identity. To remedy the situation and



evolve, a-democratic culture and organization from the grass root level the movement for the empowerment of the people is must. Primarily it is necessary to *rethink the meaning and practice of secularism*.

In the context of above understanding, objective of paper are:

- To explore the correct meaning of secularism in term of relationship between state -religion and religion - individual.
- Suggestion for realization of secularism in India:
 - Separation of religion -politics obnoxious mix (*SARVADHARMA-ABHAVA*).
 - Emphasis on the development of positive virtue of tolerance in the individuals (*SARVADHARA4A-SADBHAVA*)

In this way the major objective of the paper is to defend secularism and emphasizing the process of rethinking secular practice, particularly by the political classes and by individual. Accordingly, some viable suggestions for strengthening the secular framework are presented.

Concept of religion-state separation in Indian context: A model of *sarvadharmabhava*

The secular state is a state which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion nor does it seek either to promote or interfere with religion.¹³ This definition of secularism emphasizes, among other

things, the necessity of the separation of religion and state and the non-religious character of the state apparatus.

Religion Politics Obnoxious Mix- A Major Threat to Indian Secularism

➤ *Communalism* - Communalism¹⁴ is the largest threat to the secular ideals that enriched in our Constitution. Communal violence¹⁵ has been increasingly taking place in India for last several decades. Communalism is something related to religious community, not to religion itself. Religion is used as a powerful instrument to achieve political, economic and social purposes for its powerful mobiligatory power. Communal violence is more politically motivated than fuelled by religion.

➤ *The dilemma of diversity-potential of power politics*-The pluralist society of India is composed of Hindu as majority, Muslim, the Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsees, and Jews add further richness to India's religious diversity. The geographic regions of India are linguistically and culturally distinct. This diversity poses a fundamental challenge to India as a secular state. Different religious and linguistic groups and particularly religious groups began to compete with each other for share in political power and government jobs. This reflect in various ways:

- *Policy promotion to maintain secular identity*-In a secular society the leaders and followers of various religions communities are expected not to use their religion for political use. Politician used religion as an instrument and make policies, which can help to get vote.



▪ *The organization of states on a linguistic basis-A threat to cultural minorities*-Ethnically or religiously based parties serve as vehicles of regional identity within a united India, but can also threaten cultural minorities by wielding nativist appeals to local "sons of the soil" whose interests are supposedly being endangered by migrants from other parts of India or indigenous religious and linguistic minorities.

▪ *Constitutional safeguard to minorities -a challenge for majority*-The Indian Constitution, ensures rights to minorities through articles from 25 to 30. However, the communal and majoritarian forces call enactment of such provisions in the constitutions as 'appeasement' of minorities and try to incite religious feelings of the majority community and makes minorities feel quite insecure. This generates the complication in the relationship of majority and minorities.

▪ *Caste Reservations-A controversy between majority and minority*- The policy of reservation has reinforced caste identities. The government instituted a programme of compensatory discrimination¹⁶ to overcome the past discrimination. Though the system has been controversial, and many higher-caste Hindus, feel that they have been victims of reverse discrimination. Moreover, the dilemma is manifest in that all untouchables do not benefit equally. Reservations go disproportionately to the more "advanced" among the untouchables, while those most in need remain effectively excluded.

▪ *Failure of administration and police department in context of communal riots*- Legal and official failure to deal

adequately with intra-group and inter-group conflict and with local disturbance in some places as a practical matter has presented a major challenge to secular nature of Indian democracy.

The above discussion leads to the conclusion that religion became a source of identity for political mobilization in democratic system like India and hence became a source of conflict.

Meaning of Secularism in Terms of Relationship between Individual and Religion as the Model of SARVADHARMA SADBHAVVA:

Secularism is considered as a best framework to provide the religious freedom. Religious freedom as a basic human right is guaranteed through the Constitution in India but in democracy there should be conducive climate in which religious freedom can be affirmed among multi religious group. Main essence of secularism lies in the acceptance of right of an individual. In India Secularism basically connotes treatment of all religions on a footing of equality and gives freedom to every individual to profess his religion. Law gives rights of religious freedom but what requires is development of positive virtue of tolerance in an individual.

In order to eliminate religiously motivated conflict what is needed is change in the ideology. It is better to adopt that meaning of religious tolerance, which is practically applicable. In my opinion religious need to stress appropriate behaviors towards persons of diffident faith and to those who are not affiliate with religious traditions. We have to change the definition of religious tolerance on the lines describe above.



Major policy pattern for the promotion of *sarvadharmabhava* and *sarvadharmasadbhava*:

Secularism in India was not merely a political doctrine. It is a comprehensive, forward looking, dynamic programme. Our constitution elaborates the provisions for secular state. These constitutional provisions might entitle one to claim that ours was largely a secular state, but merely law could not create a truly secular state. While the constitutional provisions represented a significant advance towards the ideal of a secular state, a good deal had yet to be done before the ideal could be achieved. Along with Constitutional provision, follow-up actions are essential to achieve the desired objectives of secularism. Then alone the pace of change in society would be rapid and secularism would take firm roots in India. State is the most effective instrument of Social Change. Hence steps should be taken to create a new society based on secularism and equality. All branches of government should take effective steps to achieve secularism in all spheres of life. This can be attained by making the policies based on neutral approach towards religion or in other words we need to stress on the concept of *SARVADHARMA ABHAVA*.

Promotion of Secularism through Model of *SARVADHARMA ABHAVA*

Long-term Strategies

- Empowerment of the people from the grass root level is must to attain the ideal of secularism in country.
- Initiating the process of de-communalizing the people at all level, by bringing home to them that

communal assumptions are false, by explaining them the socioeconomic and political roots of communalism and by telling them that what the communalist project as the problem are not the real problems and what they suggest are not the real remedies.

- Political parties have to work in the right perspective; instead of falsely harping on secular communal agenda they should try and rise above pseudo-secularism.
- People should throw away their myopic lenses and look far ahead for actual development, which brings out a strong and secular India.
- The state has to promote secular administration, plan and use new strategies in dealing with incidence of communal violence and treat the extremist communal outfit as its immediate target and curbs their capacity to disrupt law and order.
- Reworking the training programme of police officer and enabling them to acquire a new outlook and making them responsible for their failure. An efficient police organization, enlighten policeman, well-equipped and specially trained police wing are bound to yield positive result.¹⁷
- The government has to take measure for removing the feeling of discrimination and deprivation in the minorities, which do not actually exist. (Role of minorities commission set up in 1978, was recognized as statutory body in may 1992-is a effective tool to tackling the situation and welfare of minorities)



- Particularly explaining the value oriented education both in schools and colleges is important in building the feeling of secularism Education based on traditional cultural ideologies can protect the young people from the philosophies of hate Particularly in Indian context
- The reservation policy has to be reconsidered.
- Understand who are the real secularists and vote accordingly
- Communal interpretation of history, especially of medieval period forms the bedrock of communal ideology in India ' Teaching of history along with scientific lines in educational institution has to a basic element in any ideological struggle against communalism.

Immediate Strategies

- Stopping communal mind politician and debarring them from contesting election
- Giving detent punishment to religious fundamentalist
- Government does conduct constant orientation programme and training program to equip the government and public sector employees constantly with the idea of secular, socialist and democratic ideals.¹⁸
- Adopting corrective major like keeping the police department free from the politician control
- Gearing the police administration to be more sensitive
- Posting of secular minded district and police officials in riot -pone areas.
- Setting up of special trial court for communal violence
- Removal of references to caste and religion in the application forms of educational institution and other government departments would be a step further in creating congenial atmosphere for the healthy development of society on secular lines.¹⁹
- There should be no special laws for specific community and no special status for any state.
- Promote a sense of castelessness - through inter-caste and inter-religion marriages²⁰
- Prepare suitable text books to propagate secular ideas by laying emphasis on fundamental duties enshrined in the Constitution:
- Communal press can be banned and legal action can be taken against communal writers.
- Peace comities can be set up in which individual belonging to different religious can work together to spread good will and fellow felling and remove the felling of fear and haired in the rots -affected areas.

Suggestion for the Implementation of Model of SARVADHARMA SADBHAVA

Democracy is compared with a game, which can be played only when the players respect the rule of the game.' hence democracy will be successful if the citizens are of democratic mind and have desire to respect the principle of democracy. Intolerance in the society is the sum total of the intolerance of its individual members. Individuals should aware of the link between their behavior and the vicious cycle of violence in society. Then only we will be able to find



out the solution of the problem. In this context Religion needs to teach that:

- All people should enjoy fundamental human right including freedom of religion.
- Once neighbor include fellow behavior, follower of other religion and follower of no religion. Followers of all religion are of equal worth. The value of the life of fellow believer is equal to the value of every non-believer.
- Religious leaders need to speak out forcefully when they see others oppress people religious freedom - whether the victim are from there own faith group, another religion or from a another secular group.
- Religious leader need to encourage in more interfaith ecumenical activities with non-believer and secularists.
- Modify the educational programs to teach comparative religion so that their members will have a basic understanding of other faith group.

This will enable each individual, whatever his or her religion to view other religion with due respect. This perspective fosters tolerance among people of various beliefs, despite the differences that may exist in their outward religions. So it is better to adopt the *Sarva dharma Sadbhav*, in term of the relationship between religion and individual a practical solution of the problem.

Conclusion

Traditionally secularism as a state ideology has surfaced in many different ways, in education policies, in political rhetoric, in public relations and in personal projections and preferences of many Indians. On a theoretical level framer of the constitution has adopted the model of secularism but in its application it seemed to have failed to

cultivate secular values in Indian society at large. By drafting a secular constitution the nation was not going to become secular by itself. The masses were neither educated nor exposed to the processes that could lead to their secularization. There is a need to practice secularism as *SARVADHARMA ABHAV* in term of state and religion and *SARVADHARMA SADBHAVA* in term of religion and individual, then only we will be able to retain the ideal of secularism in Indian democratic system.

NOTES

¹ Oxford English Dictionary (OED Vol.IX 1978), states that 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.

² As a concept, secularism was the product of Renaissance in Europe though the word secularism was not then used. Secular attitude arose as a reaction to the tendency displayed during the medieval ages to despise human affairs and to meditate upon God.

³ The 42nd Constitution Amendment Act simply inserted the word "secular" in the Preamble to the Constitution designating India a 'secular state'.

⁴It is true that the word 'secular' did not occur firstly 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 is a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic".



⁵ 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); In short, while religious instruction is totally banned in state owned educational 'institutions, in other denominational institutions it is not totally prohibited but it must not be imposed upon people of other religions without their consent. (Article 28)

⁶Article 25:Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion, (i) Freedom of conscience and (ii) freedom to profess, practice and propagate religion

⁷ Article 26: Freedom to manage religious affairs.

⁸ Under Article 29 and 30, certain cultural and educational rights are guaranteed. Article 29 guarantees the right of any section of the citizens residing in any part of the country having a distinct language, script or culture of its own, and to conserve the same. Article 30, provides that "all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice".

⁹ Article 15: Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

¹⁰ Article- 16- Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.

¹¹ Article 10- Protection of rights regarding freedom of speech.

^{xii} In 1978, the Constitution (45th Amendment) Bill sought to define 'secular' to mean 'equal respect for all religions'. The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha however voted down in the Rajya Sabha, and the term remains undefined in the Constitution. But despite this fact, it is clear that term 'Secular' is still interpreted as SARVADHARMA SAMBHAVA-'equal respect for all religions.

¹³Retrieved February. 24,2013 from <www.ncte-in.org/pub/human/chap9.htm>

¹⁴ Communalism is an ideology, which states that society is divided into religious communities whose interest differ and are, at times even opposed to each other. The antagonism practiced by the people of one community against the people of other community and religion termed as communalism".

¹⁵ The pluralistic society of India is composed of religious groups such as Hindus (82%) Muslims (12%) Christian (2%) Sikhs (1.94%) Buddhist (0.69%) Jains (0.44%) and so on. But these groups are further divided in various sub groups.

¹⁶ 22.5 percent of all central government jobs are reserved for members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Comparable reservations were provided for state-level employment, and



reservations were extended to college and university admissions.

¹⁷ For example strong police intervention in Mumbai 1994. when the entire social elements realize that government is impartial and the police are serious in putting down communal violence , they immediately withdraw from spreading communal violence.

¹⁸ A policy pattern introduced by, Mrs. Vidya M.P. in Lok Sabah, a Private Member Bill for " The Promotion of casteless and religion less society on July 9, 1982.

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