



## Secularism: A necessary adhesive

Dr. B.V.V. Bala Krishna, Assistant Professor & Course Coordinator, Dept of Political Science, Adikavi Nannaya University, Rajahmohendravaram, AP-533296.

**Abstract:** *Secularism is the principle of the separation of government institutions and persons mandated to represent the state from religious institutions and religious dignitaries. One manifestation of secularism is asserting the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, or, in a state declared to be neutral on matters of belief, from the imposition by government of religion or religious practices upon its people. Another manifestation of secularism is the view that public activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be uninfluenced by religious beliefs and/or practices. With the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution of India enacted in 1976, the Preamble to the Constitution asserted that India is a secular nation. However, neither India's constitution nor its laws define the relationship between religion and state. The laws implicitly require the state and its institutions to recognise and accept all religions, enforce parliamentary laws instead of religious laws, and respect pluralism. India does not have an official state religion.*

**Keywords:** *Secularism, religion, Constitution, pluralism, civic rights, nationalism*

### Introduction:

With the partition of the country on religious lines in 1947 the idea of Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congressmen of his way of thinking that religion had no place in politics suffered a serious defeat. Memories of the migrations and the communal massacres could not be easily forgotten. To start a new chapter in line with India's heritage setting aside the recent events was not going to be easy. The crowning tragedy was the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic. If India was to turn away from a steep descent into savage barbarism sound principles of national cohesion had to be asserted. Indian nationalism was obviously brittle and free India had to pick up the broken pieces to put together the jigsaw of nation building in a fresh context.

The concept of secularism provided the sole answer as the binding

cement of Indian society. So Nehru and his colleagues started a slow at times faltering but steady effort seeking to divorce religion from public life and to assure the religious minorities that the faiths they professed would have no bearing on their civic rights. The large number of Muslims who preferred to remain in India to moving to Pakistan were down and out and had to be protected by the government which rejected the two nation theory. The logical attitude of getting rid of religion altogether was favoured by Nehru in the early years but by the Forties he realised that it was too utopian a solution for Indian society where many religions were deeply entrenched. The more practical answer was not opposition to religion but the removal of religion from public affairs, the separation of the State from all faiths, the insistence on religion as a personal matter for the individual citizen and freedom for the profession of diverse forms of religious worship provided there



was no conflict among them. Only a secularism of this type not defined in any dictionary or in accordance with the Western experience but adapted to the Indian context could be the cornerstone of an egalitarian forward looking society with religious pluralism, full civil liberties and equal opportunities. It is the only possible social cement for a modern community with religious feelings and the only way of making certain that one's religion does not lead automatically to one being treated as a second-class citizen. The 50 years of India's independence have not seen the establishment of the secular mood on rock-like foundations. Many factors are responsible for this; the vacillation of Nehru the proximity of Pakistan and its belligerent attitude especially towards Kashmir and the pusillanimity of various political parties. The Bharatiya Janata Party the formidable force of the Hindu resurgence has consequently improved its position. Even in Nehru's time there were ominous signs of its growth. The Hindu revivalism which followed Partition and the subsequent religious conflict could not be wished away by a paper commitment to divorce religion from politics. "All of us", wrote Nehru sadly "seem to be getting inflicted with the refugee mentality or worse still the RSS mentality. That is a curious finale to our careers." Combating communal feeling became Nehru's prime task throughout his prime ministership and in this he had the support of Vallabhshai Patel. Patel's main concern was national unity. On the night of December 22-23 1949 some images of deities were found in the mosque at Ayodhya proclaiming to be Rama manifesting Himself. This was done with the knowledge of the district official who was a known sympathiser of the Hindutva doctrine. Both Nehru and

Patel urged the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Gobind Ballabh Pant to take a personal interest in the matter for they realised that it was a dangerous precedent. But nothing happened and Pant dissuaded Nehru from proceeding to Ayodhya. Finding Pant immune to his arguments the Prime Minister turned to the State Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. Still nothing happened. Nehru's weakness in ordering his colleagues in the provinces to do the right thing was accentuated by his own hesitancy in other matters. The resolution of the Constituent Assembly in 1948 calling for the ban of communal political parties was not enforced due to legal difficulties. He, like Gandhiji, was opposed to the banning of cow-slaughter but allowed it to be included in the Directive Principles of State Policy, thereby ensuring that nothing came of it in practice. Above all in his desire to appease the Muslims who remained in India after Partition, Nehru failed to promulgate a common civil law providing equality before the law to all Indian women. But there is no room in a so-called secular society for inequalities which claim religious sanction. The result has been despite Nehru's stand, a gradual strengthening of the communal feeling on the part of both Hindus and Muslims. Purushottamdas Tandon who believed that the Muslims in India should adopt the Hindu culture, was elected Congress president in 1950. Nehru forced Tandon's resignation and compelled the reluctant political party to adopt a secular policy. The next year the President of India, Rajendra Prasad, despite Nehru's opposition inaugurated the rebuilding of the Somnath temple which had been destroyed centuries earlier by Muslim freebooters. Many years later in December 1992 long after Nehru's death, with the silent connivance as we now



know of the then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, the Babri Masjid mosque was demolished by hooligans supported by the BJP. That party has been gaining steadily in the elections to the Lok Sabha has even formed a Central Government for about a fortnight and in the next parliamentary election due in the near future, is widely expected to have an overall majority.

Secularism in free India therefore may well be in its last throes. The efforts to promote it not in accordance with Western Ideas but on the basis of India's past has not been a success. The right vision and the correct approach have not proved adequate and vigorous enough in the face of entrenched communalism and the proximate and continuous belligerence of Pakistan. Communal rioting broke out during the fifties and increased in the Sixties and Nehru confessed to-wards the end of his life that a sense of darkness was creeping over him. That crisis has become even more pronounced since then. The Hindus have no use for modern ideologies and the Muslims who have remained in India oblivious of the fact that they were responsible for the tragedy of Partition, claim more rights for themselves and even once again there is talk of separate electorates. Secularism the sole hope of the future can survive in free India only if both the communities conduct themselves in a civilised manner.

#### References:

1. "The Constitution (Forty-Second Amendment) Act, 1976". Government of India. Retrieved 1 December 2010.
2. "'A skewed secularism?' by Christophe Jaffrelot". Retrieved 27 July 2012.
3. Rajagopalan (2002), "Secularism in India", in Editor: William Safran, The Secular and the Sacred - Nation, Religion and Politics, Chapter 13, ISBN 978-0714683010
4. Muslim groups want minimum marital age scrapped M.G. Radhakrishnan, India Today (22 September 2013)
5. Gerald James Larson (2001), Religion and Personal Law in Secular India: A Call to Judgment, Indiana University Press, ISBN 0-253-33990-1.