

# Failure of Secularism In India

Secularism is the philosophy or idea that dictates the separation of religion from the political system of a state. The nature and understanding of secularism vary from state to state but it has a unique connotation in the case of India. When Nehru and Ambedkar wished to imbibe the qualities of secularism in the constitution, they were met with dissenting voices who argued that secularism was a western project of modernization and that in India, the people could not be expected to divorce religion from the public sphere. However, such an idea was necessary due to the socio-economic disparities that existed within the Indian community. It was essential to separate religion from the state as both had the power to influence the masses on a large scale. The overlapping of the two institutions would create a situation where one institution would undermine the autonomy of the other and thus undermine the democratic fabric of the country. A union between the two would also mean that there would be a concentration of power in any one religious' community, sheerly due to it being the majority numerically.

## The Imagined Idea of Secularism for India

According to Rajeev Bhargava, the Indian idea of secularism does not always demand a total exclusion of religion from state institutions. A principal distance must exist between the state and numerous religions in order to foster an environment of communal harmony. This principled distance is not the same as equidistance. In line with the idea of principled distance, the state intervenes or refrains from intervening depending on the situation and which mode of action will better promote religious liberty and equality of citizens. The main motive of secularism is not only to maintain intercommunal solidarity but to also protect the dignity and structure of one's ordinary life. In the case of India, there exist group specific rights and no uniform civil court thus, differentiated citizenship. This only because the Indian constitution recognizes the need to treat members of each group differently in order to bring equality amongst communities that have existed with huge disparities amongst them for years. For example, allowing the entry of Dalits in to temples is an attempt to bring a group that had been discriminated against for the longest time, to a similar plateau as the others.

## Why Secularism Failed in India?

The main area secularism falters in India is its inability to be internalized as an ideal by the Indian people and in its implementation. The people of India, in the year 2019 are still divided based on religion and caste. The idea of a secular and pluralistic India has been under constant attack since the 1990's. On the religious side, the demolition of the Babri masjid and on the caste lines, the middle, upper middle and upper-class outrage over the policy of reservation. Instead of the Indian public becoming more understanding towards their fellow groups, there seems to be an increase in hatred and violence against the "other". Political parties have been exploiting this civic unrest in order to garner votes. Even though the election commission's model code of conduct prohibits the use of caste and religion during election campaigns, politicians do not hesitate to use such issues in order to aggravate communal tensions and to polarize groups. Election candidates are chosen accordingly as per the caste and religion of the majority of that specific area.

Even though the idea of Indian secularism stresses upon the principled distance of the state on issues of religion, the main reason this principle fails is due to the inability of the state to maintain its neutral secular nature. In a country where politicians mostly demand votes on the basis of caste and religion and where the majority has historically been oppressive towards the minority communities,

it is obvious that the chances of the state being secular are next to impossible. For example, the Bharatya Janata Party giving tickets to individuals with a clear communal and anti-secular past, people who have advocated violence against minority groups and face charges of terrorism, shows the inability of the state when it comes to the protection of the idea of secularism. Also, the affiliation of the BJP with the RSS, a Hindutva organization wishing to declare India as a Hindu-Rashtra. Party members have been guilty of supporting the same in many public rallies and speeches. There have been many instances in the past where members of the BJP have passed statements against secularism asking for the term 'secular' to be removed from the preamble of the constitution.

## Present Situation and Future Action

The state has been unable to restrict the entry of politicians who wish to destroy the secular fabric of India and establish the dominance of a certain religious group with an inbuilt oppressive hierarchy. The attack against secularism by this group is not just a silent attempt to just infiltrate the state, but also an outward public attack as they denounce secularism due to it being a concept not applicable to India.

There are safeguards in the constitution which prevent Indian from descending into a country of one religious' majority. However, due to the majority of the Indian population voting for those who wish to remove the safeguards, India is looking at an uncertain future where its identity as the world's largest democracy is threatened. It is up to the opposition and the persecuted minorities of India to unite, criticise and dissent whenever the majority party tries to implement anything undemocratic and salvage the idea of India as seen by our forefathers.

It is time to think of an alternative to secularism, a principle that pertains to the current socio-political situation of India and will help in countering the dominant Hindutva ideology and pacifying the rising persecution of minorities



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