

Secularism in India

Introduction

India is a country of differences, and we are proud of it. We are a secular nation. The Government allows all people from all sections of the society to practice and propagate their religious beliefs. The constitution guarantees protection of rights of every citizen of the nation irrespective of religion, caste, creed, or place of origin. India is unlike few other nations like the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirate where the Islamic Sharia is upheld and all the people residing in those nations, irrespective of their religious beliefs will have to abide to the laws made in line with the Sharia.

What is secularism?

Secularism is defined as the practice of treating all religions equally and allowing them to co-exist peacefully without any fear, favour, affection, or ill will. The 42nd Amendment Act of the Constitution of India of 1976 provided for a Preamble which stated India as a secular country.

Pseudo-secularism

India is a country with multiple religious beliefs. However, the volumes of people who make up these religions are not equal. According to recent surveys, the Hindus are in majority, and then comes the Muslims and then the Christians, Jains and such other religions. As a result of this disparity in population of different religious groups, the political parties, in their efforts to win votes, propose and implement policies for the appeasement of a particular section in a particular place. Such practice amounts to Pseudo-secularism where one community is given more benefits and the other is not, purely because of the appeasement of a large vote bank. Because India is a secular nation, it allows the

formation of various religious groups who work towards upliftment of their own religion and followers. These religious groups are however, bound by the Constitutional laws and cannot practice any sort of illegal, fundamentalist, seditious or revolutionary, which in any form, may affect the people or the nation or their prestige. But sometimes, in order to take advantage of the prevailing socio-political sentiments, these groups and organizations, may undertake activities which are not on the lines of the constitution. This, many a times, has resulted in riots which have seen widespread manslaughter, but quenches the political agendas of the groups and these violent sentiments later reflect as precious vote banks.

For example, the Father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi was murdered by a Hindu religious fundamentalist group who inspired Nathuram Godse to undertake the horrific job. He was murdered because he was the face of the Congress party who had agreed to the partition of India, but did not, according to the fundamentalists, take effective steps to prevent the persecution of Hindu minorities in East and West Pakistan.

History

India, since time immemorial, has been a land of different cultural beliefs and they have existed peacefully. Even, during the medieval times, when Europe and the West were burning with religious wars and crusades, India, was the epitome of religious tolerance, under the Mughal rule at that time. If we dig more into history, we have instances like King Asoka who resorted to a life of tolerance and love for humanity. Although he preached and praised Buddhism, humanity, and its values were of paramount importance to him. King Harshavardhana was another such ruler whose benevolence transcended narrow religious differences and purist mindsets. However, there was a short

dip in these secular sentiments when India came under the rule of the several rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, few of whom were not at all warm to the other religions. However, this was not continued long. During the majority of the Mughal rule, India was a land of peaceful coexistence of all religions and it set an example to the world.

Seeds of religious intolerance

After the Battle of Plassey, in 1757, the British East India Company is said to have officially entered India and into its administration. However, it was difficult for them to take over the people of India to carry out their massive plans of establishment of colonial rule. The people of India were strong, both militarily as well as mentally. They had a unity between them which was their greatest strength. The British did not get any loopholes of the Indian society which they could exploit for their own advantage. However, later, they adopted a new game plan of hurting the religious sentiments of people and blaming it on the other one. This was the infamous policy of Divide and Rule. Our greatest strength, our unity, was broken and religions went against each other and massive riots followed. This fragmented the Indian soldiers as well as the kingdoms which became smaller, fragmented and as a result weaker and easier to exploit. After this, the British appeased certain religions and other ones in other regions creating a rift between the interests of the two which resulted in further distancing of the people. This sentiment of difference and aloofness between the Indian people was so deep, that finally, it was on religious basis that the nation had to be sliced among Muslims brothers and Hindu brothers. The result was bloodshed. Indiscriminate slaughter of neighbours killing neighbours, friends beheading friends, relationships splitting and morality was drained. These seeds of religious intolerance

planted by the British were so deep that even today, there is a major gap in the cohesion of the various religious groups that exists. Xenophobia is growing day by day, and the government is taking no steps to bond us together, instead they are playing cheap tricks and practicing vote bank politics.

Conclusion

India is, by all means a secular country. The people from all groups coexist here. But the situation is still far from ideal. The religious ghettos will have to be made free from the fear of the majorities. The majorities will have to be terror freed from xenophobia of fringe elements. We are living in the 21st century – in an age where science and technology is at its peak, when the world is coming closer and gaps are being bridged. People from different sections of society can get into any profession they like. Untouchability is history. In this age any religious belief that divides people is irrelevant and can do more harm than good. Secularism is a divine practice and its duty towards God. God made all man equal, it is man who divided himself. Only freedom of religion and a secular mindset can take the country to the pinnacle of prosperity in the future to come.