

The Concept of Secularism

What is secularism? Secularism is Western concept. According to Western concept, secularism meant separation of state from religion. Individuals were free to practice any religion but state was neutral on religious matters. The concept developed during state and church controversy in 15th century in West. But in India, concept of secularism is different. India is a secular state. The word 'secularism' was added to our Preamble by 42nd amendment to our Constitution in 1976.

According to Indian view, secularism means that state is neither religious nor antireligious nor irreligious but respects all religions equally and also it is equidistant from all religions. Secularism means SARV DHARAM SAMBHAV. According to Article 25 of our Constitution, people have fundamental right to practice or propagate any religion. But in practice the reality is different. On various governmental ceremonies religious rituals are performed.

India is multireligious society. Various religions coexist in India, e.g., Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Sikhs and Jains. It is very difficult to separate religion from state in India contrary to what is practiced in West. A man practicing the basics or fundamentals of any religion cannot be communal because every religion preaches noble things. Gandhiji was a religious person but he was not communal at all. He stood for communal harmony. There is a common belief that too much of religiosity leads to communalism is not true. Modern outlook and scientific temper of West have led us to believe that secularism is negation of religion. Secularism has nothing to do with religions. But in India coexistence of religions has taught us to live in harmony with tolerance and compassion. Modernisation can teach us not to believe in superstitions attached to religions but if true tenets of religions are practiced even the politics can become morally sound.

In today's India several distortions and aberrations are found on the secular front. Our society is really secular. Several religions have lived and prospered together. We can see people from various communities participating and celebrating festivals together. They greet each other on Holi, Id and Christmas festivals with lot of enthusiasm. That is the culture of Indian society. But a divide was created between Hindus and Muslims by Britishers. As a result, partition took place which was really painful for both the communities on either side. Pakistan was born on religious identity. At the same time birth of Hindu Mahasabha and Rashtriya Swayam Sevak were inescapable. Since then politics of religion started playing its ugly and notorious role.

Since Independence Congress was the ruling party at Centre for majority of the time. Congress could not balance its policies. In order to gain the votes of Muslims, it fell prey to the policies of appeasement. Akali Dal in Punjab whose basis was religion was also on rise and started asserting. The issue of Ram Janam Bhumi and Babri Mosque remained unsolved. Congress could not remain neutral, and did not solve this problem impartially. Ram Janam Bhumi issue was well articulated and raised by RSS and VHP, and later on BJP encashed this issue in successive general elections. It paid rich dividends to BJP which became single largest party in 1996 election from mere 2 seats in 1984 election. BJP was charged by all other parties as a communal party spreading hatred and distrust in society. Similarly BJP counter charged other parties, especially Congress to be Pseudo Secular practicing the policies of appeasement for ensuring vote banks.

Today secularism has become the grinding principle for political alliances to keep away the BJP from power. It was practiced after 1996 general elections at Centre. Secular alliances are formed comprising of National Front, Congress and Communist Parties. But this trend is really spreading divisiveness and feeling of separatedness in society. Politics is influencing the society in its social behaviour and that is why we witness so many riots. Moradabad, Aligarh, Bhagalpur riots and recently Bombay riots are still in the memories of people. The politics of vote banks is playing havoc with the destiny of our nation.

India is a secular country. One religion can't be the basis of this country like Pakistan and Nepal. Justice for all should be the basis of governance and ruling. All the political parties should stop depending on unblock voting of different communities and castes because this infects the entire nation. BJP should do everything to get away the image of anti-Muslims and Congress, NF and Communists should at the same time see to it that no appeasement prevails. There should be a balance and all the candidates selected should be purely on the basis of merit and contribution to society. Only balanced and value-based politics can save the nation from hatred and violence, and help in maintaining secular nature of our society.