

Secularism in India

Since BJP rose into power in 2014, there has been a surge of “Hindu” nationalism and a significant rise in Hindutva politics. This leads us to a significant question - is India a secular nation? Before diving into that question let us define what secularism is. In the west, secularism is defined by three things : freedom of religion, equal citizenship to each citizen regardless of his or her religion, and the separation of religion and state. However, according to Donald Smith, in India there is no thorough separation of religion and state. Secularism in India can be considered as equal treatment of all religions. It would be better to term it as religious tolerance rather than secularism.

The current rise of fall in secularism is mainly because of majoritarian politics. Nehru’s India was supposed to be multicultural, diverse and “secular”. However, the current government’s vision for India is a “Hind Rashtra”. A few major decisions, that were taken to appease the Hindu majority, are banning of beef, CAA, and the ever popular “mandir yahi banega”. BJP (and RSS) follow the footsteps of Golwalkar and Savarkar. These decisions have been applauded by the hard right as a step towards the “right direction”. However, these decisions are destroying the idea of a secular nation.

I wish to look at influential leaders like Nehru’s and Gandhi’s idea on secularism. While forming the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar had opposed insertion of the words “secularism” and “socialism” on the basis that they were superfluous and redundant. He also felt that adding these terms would just limit the choice of the people. However, these terms were later on added in the 42nd Amendment to the Indian Constitution. This incident had led to a lot of controversy as it tried to reduce the power of the Supreme Court and the High Court.

I also intend to look at Savarkar and Golwalkar on secularism. One of their main points was to build a “Hind Rashtra” and induce the “nationalist” feeling in India. I’d like to reflect how they came upon this idea and their reason for the opposition of a secular nation. A lot of BJP supporters criticize Nehru’s idea of a secular nation and understanding those emotions would be a key to understanding the fall of secularism.

Another thing to look upon is the controversies that took place on adding the word secular (shah bano case), the Uniform Civil Code that Ambedkar wanted, and a lot of different political leaders' opinions on secularism. Finally, I wish to comment on the current implementation of secularism (or “pseudo-secularism” as it might be).

References:

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