

A Revisit to Indian Secularism in the Contemporary Indian Society

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Secularism is a way of life, a social goal and a state policy. Secularism has contradictory meanings to different people living in different periods. The philosophical basis of Indian secularism lies in Dharma, which is generally confused with religion. The Paradox of the theory and practice of secularism poses several problems. Even though the Indian constitution provides for a secular state, caste and sectarian politics continue to dominate in our nation and thus endangering all of the secular ideals of the constitution makers. The Indian philosophy of secularism is well reflected in various provisions of the Indian Constitution. The Supreme Court has also upheld the secular character of India in its various judgments. Since 2000, India is witnessing the militant rise of majority communalism. The ideology and practice of secularism has been severely criticized by Hindu nationalists. The BJP and its allies advocate a Hindu Rashtra, which is the only answer to the crisis facing Indian society. Several practices in our national life often violate the basic principle of secularism. In this context, the paper analyses the theoretical and historical background of secularism and the Hindu nationalists' anti-secular agenda, which remains its core identity today. This paper is based on secondary data. The paper concludes by stating that secularism is desirable for India in a multi-cultural and multi-religious nation. Therefore protecting Indian secularism is a collective effort from the part of the judiciary, media, civil society, and an active citizenry.

Keywords: Secularism, Cultural Nationalism, Religion, Hindutva, multi-culturalism

Secularism: Evolution and Theoretical Framework

The term 'secular' was derived from the Latin 'saeculum' and 'saecularis ', which originally denoted "an age or generation", the times or the world. The term 'secular' indicates a state of being not connected with and separated from religion." A secular state is "a state which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion is not constitutionally linked to a specific religion nor does it seeks either to promote or interfere with religion"(Smith, 1963). It was G. J. Holyoake, who framed the concept of secularism in his book Principles of Secularism (1859) in its modern form and attempted to define it as "which promotes the developments of the moral and intellectual nature of man to the highest possible point, as the

immediate duty of life"(Holyoake,1859). Alberico Gentili, the Italian law professor (1587–1608), was the first to separate secularism from canon law and Roman Catholic theology. Secularism has sometimes been associated with anti-religion, atheism and materialism. For Marxists, materialism has come to represent atheism, which is necessary for any sustained social reform. According to Umakant Saxena, "Secularism certainly means a doctrine having been religious morality, tolerance and reasonable margin for freedom of worship and faith to each and all citizens of a country irrespective of their colour, caste, sex, sect, religion, faith, nationality and other conditions of birth"(Saxena,1971). Secularism is generally seen in the west simply in the context of separating temporal and spiritual affairs. Thus the separation of state and religion is the most commonly recognised component of secularism, the underlying assumption being that each limits itself to its sphere. This implies that the state shall not undertake religious functions and vice versa, nor will it impose any religion upon its subjects. Nevertheless, this does not suggest that secularism is anti-religion. The two spheres are distinct, and their relations are defined as "mutually exclusive rather than antagonistic"(Waterhouse, 1967).

Modern secularism as a notion dates back to the 13th century in Europe, although its philosophical roots can be found in the writings of Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. As D. E. Smith mentions, "The secular state is, in origin, a western and not an Asian conception, but certain elements of the secular state have a strong tradition in Asia"(Smith, 1963). The rise of Christianity produced a new relationship between the state and religion. Their teaching led to the doctrine "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's". Ultimately, it meant separating the sphere of society from the State (Barker, 1976). In the fifth century A. D. Pope Gelasius I expounded the 'Doctrine of Two Swords'. His theory emphasized the dual organisation of human society — the church to uphold spiritual values and mediate eternal salvation and the state to uphold peace, order, and justice in temporal affairs. Similarly, St. Augustine's work "City of God" illustrated the theory of the 'Two Cities'. He defended Christianity against those who charged it with the responsibility for Rome's demise (Sabine. 1964).

The Modern Age began with Renaissance and the Reformation. Renaissance was a cultural revolution that replaced outdated attitudes, values and spirits with new ones. It replaced spiritualism with materialism and religion with reason. The spirit of the Renaissance is fully reflected in the writings of Niccolo Machiavelli. Machiavelli contributed substantially to the notion of secularism and the secular state. Regarding the separation of religion and politics, in

John Locke's *A Letter on Toleration* (Locke, 1968), he stated, "I regard it as necessary above all to distinguish between the business of civil government and that of religion and to mark the true bounds between the church and the commonwealth" (Locke, 1968). French Revolution (1789) was another significant turning point in the direction of secular state. It brought comprehensive change and a new concept of mutual brotherhood prevailed amongst the middle and proletariat classes. It introduced the idea of enlightenment in Europe. Montesquieu (1689-1755)'s work *'The Spirit of the Laws'* vehemently attacked Papal authority in the church. He gave more importance to individual liberty and rationality. He acknowledged the existence of multiple religions in a state.

The US Constitution, for the first time, declared secularism as a philosophy of a constitution. The First Amendment of the US Constitution (1791) stated, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." It was felt that with the incorporation of this amendment in the US Constitution, the first Secular State had come into existence. James Madison described it as a 'separation between Religion and Government'. Utilitarian philosophers like Bentham and Mill advocated religious freedom and tolerance. Karl Marx also propounded the view that 'Religious suffering is, at the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people (Marx,). Neo-liberalism is a derivative of modern liberalism which involves the financialization of capitalism. Neo-liberalism, Post secularism, and the End of Religion by Clayton Crockett pointed out that, Neo-liberalism indicates a breaking down of both modern secularism and religion, which is why it correlates with a trend of post-secularism. It is felt that the end of modern religion serves to free up some of the political-spiritual energies that were suppressed under modernity. This return is sometimes described in terms of new animism, new materialism, and agential realism (Crockett, 2021).

Post-secularism refers to the epistemological distance from the fundamental principles of secularism. In recent years, scholars have focused on the resurgence of non-liberal forms of religion, frequently referred to as fundamentalism. Jose Casanova (1994) rightly mentions that the "return of religion" is not a return but rather a "deprivatization" of religion. According to Habermas, post-secular denotes the opening up of liberalism and the liberal state to incorporate religious rationality and discourse (Habermas, 2002). We have seen how secular and religious elements co-exist in contemporary liberalism. In this context, we may

look at the historical background of secularism in India in order to comprehend the present scenario.

The Concept and History Secularism: An Indian Scenario

India is the largest democracy in the world, with a rich tradition of secular diversity. Its estimated population is 1.417 billion (2022): 79.8 per cent Hindu, 14.2 per cent Muslim, 2.3 per cent Christian, and 1.7 per cent Sikh. Smaller religious groups include Buddhists, Jains, Baha'is, Jews, Zoroastrians (Parsis), and nonreligious persons (Census, 2011). At the same time, the country is home to several indigenous faiths and tribal religions, which have survived the influence of significant religions for centuries and are holding the ground firmly. India has one of the most ancient civilizations in the world. The ancient Indian state was marked by a complex interplay of religion and politics and tolerance and religious freedom. As far as the institutional separation of state and religion is concerned, it was not existing in ancient India, which was dominated by a strong religious orientation. Active promotion and encouragement of religion were its essential functions. Dharma served as the foundation of the state, and the Brahmins were highly influential and played a considerable role in the political system (Panikkar, 1991). In Romila Thapar's analysis, this period also witnessed religious tensions on a large scale, particularly between Shaivites and the Buddhists. During the Mauryan Period, the relationship between the state and religion persisted and got stronger. During this era, it is believed that the Mauryan Empire was established with a single administrative framework, and Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism co-existed peacefully. One of the fundamental tenets of Indian secularism is the legacy of religious toleration, which was established during the Mauryan empire. Nonetheless, religion was also employed for political purposes. The method taken by Kautilya exemplified this tendency. He treated politics independently of religion, although religious considerations were not absent in his state (Varma, 1959).

The Guptas promoted the policy of religious toleration. They patronised all religions, including Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Buddhism and Jainism. It was seen that the Hindu State never attempted to impose any particular religion upon its people. The state adhered to the principle of religious tolerance. The people of different religions were allowed to practice and disseminate their religious ideologies. However, the ancient Indian state cannot be called a secular state in the modern sense of the term, as the state was not wholly detached from religion. Freedom of conscience has existed since ancient times. Smith notes, "Various

schools of thought propounded the concept of agnosticism, atheism, and materialism. Jainism, Buddhism and later Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam were allowed to propagate their teachings, build their places of worship, and establish their respective ways of life." Therefore, despite no institutional separation of religion and the state, the ancient Indian state was undoubtedly and explicitly characterised by freedom of religion and toleration, the critical elements of secularism (Sharma, 1990). During the period of the Delhi Sultanate, the state was Islamic in the sense that no open violation of Islamic law was allowed. Alauddin Khilji opined that "policy and Government are one thing, and rules and decrees of Islamic law are another. Royal commands belong to the Sultan, Islamic legal rulings rest upon the judgement of the Qazis and Muftis"(Ghouse, 1973). The Hindus were allowed to practice their religion openly in times of peace but not in times of war. Other religions continued to exist and even prosper. During this period, we saw the rise of the Sufi and Bhakti movements.

The religious policies of the medieval Indian state spanned from tolerance to fanaticism. Religious tolerance and freedom of worship marked the state during Akbar. "Din-i-Ilahi" was the most prominent testimony (Shakir, 1970). Kamal critically pointed out that "Akbar secularised his administration to secure the loyalty of his Hindu subjects" (Kamal, 1977). Even in the Middle Ages, the state's policies were not governed by religion. Political and economic factors also played significant roles in this. Romila Thapar and Harbans Mukhia have maintained that temples were pillaged not because the rulers were "religious iconoclasts" but for their excessive wealth, which also holds for Hindu rulers demolishing temples. Therefore, the construction and demolition of temples and mosques built under the state's patronage must be viewed in a political context (Thapar). According to Romila Thapar, the conflicts between the Hindus and Muslims were not between two monolithic communities but between sects of these communities. On the whole, the medieval Indian state could be considered a state that subordinated religion to politics rather than politics to religion.

The fundamental idea of secularism, distinct from the toleration of the previous period, came into India with the Britishers. One of the most significant moments in Indian history was the advent of the Europeans, which brought about numerous revolutionary changes to Indian polity and society. Several British officers attended the religious festivals of Indian people and patronised the Indian religious institutions, and they followed the policy of supporting the Christian missionaries. The British Government introduced various social and religious reforms in India. The British government's policy and the missionaries' activities made

apprehension in the minds of the ordinary people that the British Ruler intended to convert the Indian people to Christianity. This was one of the reasons that caused the Revolt of 1857.

The 'divide and rule' policy played an important role in perpetuating communalism and separatism (partition of Bengal). The British did not create communal issues; they did exploit them for their purposes from time to time. In the sphere of religion, the British Government, by and large, adopted the policy of neutrality. However, it was not perfect neutrality because the British Government passed various Acts which impacted the religious life of the Indian masses. Religious neutrality meant that no preference for any particular religion should be given. Therefore, historians remarked, "The British policy of religious neutrality constitutes one of the key historical bases of modern India's secular state" (Gupta, 1970). On the one hand, British rule established the institutional foundation for secularism, but on the other, contributed to religious divisions and disunity through their policies which aimed at perpetuating their power through the aggravation of communal tension. Indian nationalism is a by-product of British rule, which was much influenced by the impact of this rule.

Along with indigenous tradition, there were a number of factors that contributed to the development of Indian nationalism. Western education, liberalism, intellectual renaissance, various social and religious movements, development of communication and industries, the emergence of the new middle class, discontent and dissatisfaction against the British rule etc., also prepared the ground for the political movement in India. Indian Nationalism had both an element of response and challenge. It challenged British rule over India and was a response in so far as India derived her inspiration from western learning and liberalism (Prasad, 1973).

There is evidence that the national movement leaders used religious sentiments to further their political objectives throughout the nationalist movement. During this period, Muslims and Hindus emphasized their distinct identities and interests. In parallel, community organizations that practised competitive communalism rose to prominence. This promoted the development of separatist and communal tendencies, which the British utilized and emphasized to retain their dominance. Despite the fundamental secular doctrine of the national movement, these forces grew stronger, and the leaders of national movements failed to combat them. This secular attitude practised by the Indian National Congress was mainly because its early leaders were inspired by western liberal tradition and were convinced that such an attitude alone would muster the strength for their organisation in a multi-religious community in India. The moderate leaders believed in nationalism, secularism,

constitutionalism and liberalism. But later we witnessed the conflict between the moderates and the extremists, with both showing different approaches to the ideology of secularism as the foundation of nationalism. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Ananda Math re-established the concept of nationalism based on Indian civilization, religion and culture (Appadorai, 1971).

The relationship between religion and politics transformed in 1920 when Gandhi became the leader of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi combined politics with religion and believed that "those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means." His concept of religion was rooted in the truth and unity of all religions. Thus, "Gandhi's leadership of the Indian National Congress gave it a somewhat Hinduized appearance, but his persistent emphasis on the religious, social and political unity of various communities helped to lay the foundation of a secular state." During 1934-1947, the Indian National Movement underwent numerous changes. Some leaders of the Indian National Congress were influenced by socialism and secularism and lost faith in Gandhism. This led to the development of socialist forces in Congress and the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. Jawaharlal Nehru was influenced by the socialist idea but subscribed to a secular view of life. He wanted to establish a secular state and society based on justice and equality. According to Nehru, secularism was not only a political doctrine but also a means for uniting all religions and communities in India (Massey, 1991). He regarded secularism as the essential feature of a modern democratic society. M N Roy, an Indian Marxist, believed that the essence of secularism was not to allow every citizen an option to choose which religion they want to follow but freedom to reject all forms of bondage.

At the beginning of his political career, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was a liberal, secular advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity and the concept of one nation. Later he referred to Hindus and Muslims as two nations. Separatism and religious nationalism also found expression in the writings of Mohammad Iqbal. Although he started his public career as an Indian nationalist, he subsequently became a Muslim leader and promoted religious nationalism based on Islam. In All Parties Muslim Conference, 1929, Iqbal stated, "I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Similarly, Jinnah initially supported Hindu-Muslim unity and had faith in secularism. He emphasized that people should learn to separate politics from religion. Later he opined that the Muslim League was the only organisation in India representing Muslims. In 1940, Jinnah propounded 'Two-Nation Theory' which was opposed by many nationalist leaders like Gandhi, Nehru,

Maulana Azad and others (Shakir, 1980). He started asserting that the Muslim League was the only representative body of the Muslims in India. As against this, Azad criticized the policies of the Muslim League and opposed the 'Two-Nation Theory.' He opposed the idea of partition and the creation of Pakistan and remarked that the creation of Pakistan had solved no problems (Azad, 1964). At that time, Hindu nationalism and separatism were also widespread in India. It should be noted that with the emergence of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1907 and the Muslim League in 1906, separatism and communalism among the Hindus and Muslims had become a feature of Indian society. Similarly, Savarkar developed 'Hindutva' ideology and defined Hindu, "A Hindu means a person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the Seas, as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland, that is the cradle land of his religion."

The Nehru Report contained a section on Fundamental Rights and provided that freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion are, subject to public order or morality, guaranteed to every person. It also provided that there would be no state religion, and the state would not endow any religion, nor would it give preference to any person on religious considerations. Similarly, the Indian National Congress adopted a resolution on fundamental rights at the Karachi Session in 1931, which included the right to freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, religious neutrality of the state etc. At the Bombay Session in 1932, the Congress expressed its commitment to protecting minority rights, including their culture, script and language. So it is clear that Indian National Congress could not move over and above religion even before the independence.

The Constituent Assembly worked through a number of Committees. The Constituent Assembly of India, in its Second Session on 22nd January 1947, adopted the Objective Resolution, which set forth the basic aim of the Constituent Assembly in drafting the constitution. The Preamble of the Indian Constitution reflects the ideal embodied in Objective Resolution. However, it must be noted that neither "secularism" nor "secular state" were mentioned in the Objective Resolution from the viewpoint of the secularism concept. When the Draft Constitution was under discussion in the Constituent Assembly, there were divergences of opinion among members regarding the nature of Indian secularism. One was in favour of the 'Hindu State, and the other was in favour of the 'Secular State' (Constituent Assembly Debates). K. M. Munshi also regarded that "a secular State is not a Godless State. It is not a State which is pledged to eradicate or ignore religion. It is not a State which refuses to take notice of religious belief in this country." Brajeshwar Prasad from Bihar moved that

the first sentence of the Preamble begins as follows: "WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having resolved to constitute India into a SECULAR COOPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH to establish SOCIALIST ORDER and to secure to all its citizens. He also pointed out that the word 'secular' was dear to India's national leaders, and its inclusion in the Preamble would tone up the morale of minorities as well as prevent disorderly activities. Therefore, secularism was considered necessary and desirable for India. Similarly, in a country like India, with its religious diversity, it was also difficult to choose a particular religion as the state religion. So, secularism was considered as a pragmatic solution to the problems of religious diversity and religious minorities (Smith, 1964). It should be noted here that though the Constituent Assembly of India opted for the secular state, the term 'Secular' did not appear in the original constitution. Therefore, the question remains as to why was the omission of the term 'Secular'. Ambedkar was a true supporter of secularism. In the Constituent Assembly debate in 1948, Ambedkar felt that since secularism was embedded in the structure of the Constitution, mentioning it in the preamble would be superfluous. V. P. Luthera has explained that the term secular was omitted because the constitution makers did not intend India to be a secular state in the proper sense of the term (Luthera, 1964).

Though the secular character of the constitution was emphasized in the Constituent Assembly, yet the Constitution of India, in its original form, did not expressly declare India as a secular state. Only with the enactment of the Forty-Second Amendment to the Constitution of India in 1976 the Preamble was amended to incorporate the words 'Socialist' and 'Secular', along with 'Integration'. The 42nd Constitution Amendment Act, which Parliament passed in November 1976 for the first time, speaks of India as a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic." With the 42nd Amendment Act, secularism has become an integral part of the basic structure of the constitution. Therefore, secularism, in the Indian context, has two connotations. The first and the most common concept is 'equal regard for all religions, and the other is religious neutrality. According to Jawhar Sircar, India had two alternatives regarding the secular ethos: Gandhi's version, which was deeply ingrained in religion and was indeed plural, and Nehru's version, which was hostile to religion in general.

Constitutional Framework on Secularism

In India, religion plays a significant role in the day-to-day life of the people. Many people of different religions adopt religious means and ends to solve daily issues. Political unrest arises when people of different faith try to exhibit their superiority over others. In the historical

context of partition and the on-going religious conflicts, it became inevitable for India to have a secular constitution. India embraced the concept of secularism as one of its basic governance principles. The word "secularism" appears in the preamble of the Constitution is expressed in provisions contained in Articles 25 to 30, and Part IVA added to the Constitution. Articles 25-28, 29 -30, 14, 15, 16, and 17, as well as article 44 and 51A contemplated the secular nature of India. The key provisions are provided in articles 25 and 26, which deal with individual and corporate freedom of religion. The right to freedom of religion is well documented in Articles 25, 26, 27 and 28 of the Indian constitution (GoI, 2021).

Article 25: Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.—(1) Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion. (2) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the state from making any law— (a) regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice; (b) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus. Explanation I.—The wearing and carrying of kirpans shall be deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion. Explanation II.—In sub-clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly.

Article 26: Freedom to manage religious affairs.—Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right— (a) to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes; (b) to manage its affairs in matters of religion; (c) to own and acquire movable and immovable property, and (d) to administer such property following the law.

Article 27: Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion.—No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.

Article 28: Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions.—(1) No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational

institution wholly maintained out of State funds. (2) Nothing in clause (1) shall apply to an educational institution which is administered by the state but has been established under any endowment or trust which requires that religious instruction shall be imparted in such institution. (3) No person attending any educational institution recognised by the state or receiving aid out of State funds shall be required to take part in any religious instruction that may be imparted in such institution or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution or in any premises attached thereto unless such person or, if such person is a minor, his guardian has given his consent thereto.

Nehru being the architect of modern India, his life and work reveal his commitment to secularism. Being an active member of Congress, he opposed the then-dominant communal parties. The works *The Glimpses of World History*, *An Autobiography* *Discovery of India* and *Unity of India* provided various facets of Indian secularism. In his *Autobiography*, Nehru defines religion as "probably consists of the inner development of the individual, the evolution of his consciousness in a positive direction. What the direction it will again be a matter of debate. However, as far as I understand it, religion emphasises this internal transformation and considers outward change as but the projection of this inner development." According to G. Parthasarthy, "Secularism denotes a national identity which transcends but does not negate religious identity. It, therefore, implies the separation of the rights and duties of a citizen in his public life from adherence in his private life, to the beliefs and practices of his religion" (Parthasarthy, 1987).

It is, as Panikkar describes, "the Indian State, by becoming Secular, has not become irreligious" (Panikkar, 1963). Thus, the constitutional provisions related to Freedom of Religion reveal the fact that secularism and religion can co-exist, and Indian secularism is not anti-religion; instead, it respects all religions. The non-enactment of the uniform civil code indicates that all citizens are not subjected to the same laws irrespective of religious beliefs. Hence, there is discrimination even within the same religious community. In a sense, the diversity of Personal Laws in India is against the spirit of the constitution that guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the Law.

Judicial Interventions on Secularism

The terms "religion" and "matters of religion" are not defined explicitly in the Indian Constitution. It is the duty of the Supreme Court to determine the judicial interpretation of such concepts in accordance with the provisions of Article 32 of the Constitution, which

guarantees the right to constitutional remedies. In *Sardar Taheruddin Syedna Saheb v. State of Bombay* (1962) case the Supreme Court for first time, explained the concept of secularism and the court held that "Articles 25 and 26 exemplify the principle of religious toleration that has been the essential feature of Indian civilization from the start of history. The Supreme Court of India had also declared secularism as a part of the basic structure of the constitution in the *Keshavananda Bharti V. State of Kerala*, 1973 case. This was reaffirmed in the *S. R. Bommai v. Union of India*, 1994 case in which the meaning and content of secularism were dealt with at length by the Supreme Court. Religious tolerance, equal treatment of all religious groups and protection of their life and property and of their worship places have been held to be essential parts of secularism enshrined in our constitution. Later in several judgements like *Aruna Roy v. Union of India*, 2002, *M. Ismail Faruqui v. Union of India*, 1994, *Dr. Pravin Togadia vs State of Karnataka*, 2004, *Rajesh Himatlal Solnki vs Union of India*, 2011, *Abhiram Singh vs. C D Commachem* (2017) the Court upheld the secular nature of Indian constitution. The Court ruled that secularism is the basic structure of the Constitution and hence cannot be amended.

Revisiting Indian Secularism in the contemporary Indian Society

Theoretically, secularism is a vital part of the constitutional framework of India. The concept of secularism is firmly rooted in the Constitution of India. However, at the same time, many discrepancies are also found within and outside the constitution. These contradictions have undoubtedly weakened the very basis of Indian secularism and posed several challenges. Today, the secular nature of the Indian democracy is considered to be in trouble. As I already mentioned, Secularism in Indian context was never precisely defined by either our founding fathers or political ideology. Therefore there are several problems in defining secularism in the Indian context. During the colonial and post-colonial periods, the Indian society was a traditional society dominated by various customs and traditions with a strong religious orientation. Since the 1980s, Indian secularism has come under more severe strain. Indian secularism suffered significant damage as a result of the Congress Party's opportunistic appeal to some religious communities. When we look into an analysis of the nature of Indian culture, there are two divergent views prevail. One view propounded by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies equates Indian culture with Hinduism; they argued for the omission of non-Hindu elements, and another view by secularists.

The theory and practice of secularism has been most severely attacked by Hindu fundamentalists. They criticize secularism as the guiding principle behind the appeasement of minorities, particularly Muslims. They further allege that the Constitution is anti-Hindu, and should be amended. In 1992, the 'Sant Samiti's meeting constituted a committee to redraft the Constitution. Their critique of the Constitution was published, which argues that the present Constitution is based on British laws and is unrepresentative of Indian culture. Similarly, the communal forces in the form of various organizations doing politics in the name of religion have become dominant. It operates through the communalization of social space, by propagating myths and prejudices against minorities, and by practising polarising ideological propaganda and politics.

Since the 1980s, India has been witnessing the rise of majority communalism. Achin Vanaik rightly mentions the danger of Hindu fundamentalism by stating, "India cannot become an Islamic state; it can certainly become a Hindu state." (Vanaik, 1997). The BJP and its allies reject Indian secularism as mere pseudo-secularism. They advocate a Hindu Rashtra, which is the only solution to the problem afflicting Indian society and the only means to attain true secularism. Golwalkar states that, "the foreign nationalities in Hindustan must either adopt Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea other than the glorification of the Hindu religion and culture, or they may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights (Sharma, 2002). Hasan Suroor (2022) has given diverging notions of secularism and tried to explore the idea of a secular Hindu state in his book *Unmasking Indian Secularism: Why We Need a New Hindu-Muslim Deal*.

The Hindu nationalists envisioned India as a majoritarian state, not a multi-cultural one and believed that Indian identity was embodied in Hinduism because Hindus formed the country's majority populace. In Jocelyne Cesari's *We God's People: Christianity, Islam and Hinduism in the World of Nations* (2021), Cesari demonstrates how nationalist movements construct secularism as a political ideology that governs the relationship between religion and politics. With the rise of Hindu nationalism and its influence on the Indian state, the melding between political and religious identity has been reinforced by and for the Hindu majority. However, it has become a complex challenge for religious minorities in India. Ali Zaheer's (2016), *Secularism Under Siege: Revisiting the Indian Secular State* clearly depicted the recent trends and challenges of Indian secularism. We have observed how the government now utilizes

textbooks and institutions as its core political medium of communication. Once Gramsci stated that education is a tool to fabricate intellectuals from socially marginalised groups capable of challenging and altering the prevailing social order through critical thinking. When it comes to the present Indian context, the government has been using textbooks as a medium of political communication to re-contextualize the discourse of citizenship. These political measures are the violation of the secular foundations underlying the Indian constitution.

Since 2014, vigilante groups have been targeting Muslims and other marginalized communities. In many states, minorities have felt threatened because of the slayings of Muslims accused of victimizing cows and, to some extent, the harassment of Christian priests or nuns. The current regime is making legislative, administrative and cultural changes that seek to transform India from a secular democratic republic to a Hindu majoritarian state. The BJP's pursuit of a Hindu nationalist agenda has offended religious minorities, particularly Muslims. We have a number of references to cite, like Abrogation of Article 370, CAA, and Hijab. India is home to diverse cultures where people of different faiths and groups have lived harmoniously. Ram Puniyani's (2016) *Indian Nationalism versus Hindu Nationalism* illustrated the agenda of Hindutva and analysed its impact on the rights of the marginalized sections of Indian society.

The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) report 2020 revealed that the violence in New Delhi following the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) resulted from a "feeling of discrimination" among the Muslim community. Throughout the year, we saw several attacks on members of religious minority communities appear in the form of murders, assaults, and intimidation. According to USCIRF Annual Report 2022, religious freedom in India has significantly deteriorated. The Indian government escalated its promotion and enactment of laws promoting Hindu-nationalist agenda that negatively affect Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and other religious minorities. In 2021, the Indian government silenced critical voices, particularly those of religious minorities, through harassment, investigation, imprisonment, and prosecution under laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the Sedition Law. The ongoing violations led to increasing suppression of religious freedom and a growing hostility and violence toward religious minorities, human rights advocates, academicians, journalists and others speaking out against such violations.

Conclusion

Secularism as a doctrine emerged during the time of the renaissance and has been very widely accepted in the twentieth century. India adopted the concept of secularism as one of its basic governance principles. The fundamental part of freedom of religion is freedom of thought and conscience, i.e. the right of every man to think for himself, which further involves the right to express the difference of opinion on all issues. In the Indian context, there are several problems in defining secularism. Though the Constitution of India has adopted the principle of secularism and provided for a secular polity, secularism in India is confronted with several serious. The concept of secularism has been severely criticized by the Hindu nationalists. They prounded Hindu Rashtra, the only solution to the crisis facing Indian society. Hindu vigilantism has manifested in numerous forms. Discrimination on the grounds of religion violates the basic tenets of democracy: freedom, equality and justice. In this multi-religious world, tolerance of all religions is inevitable. In India, secularism cannot be safeguarded by governments alone. It requires collective commitment from an impartial judiciary, vigilant media, civil society activists, and an active citizenry.

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