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A Synoptic View Of Secularism In Indian Political Thought

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Abstract: Secularism, in a broader sense, essentially means that religion is kept firmly in its place if not discarded altogether from public life. Secularism, as a concept has evolved through ages In order to study the evolution of secularism, the present paper examines the history of Indian Political thought to find out what, if any, was the role and nature of secularism in India, In Ancient India the role of religion was immense. Most of the Hindu scriptures show that the king in ancient India was strongly tied to religion. Secularism as a concept never existed in India. It is of Western origin. The present paper is an attempt to understand various facets of secularism along with the role of state in its promotion .

Key words: Constitution, Harmony Secularism, Multi-cultural &Tolerance.

INTRODUCTION :

Secularism, as a concept has evolved through ages In order to study the evolution of secularism, we shall examine the history of Indian Political thought to find out what, if any, was the role and nature of secularism in India, In Ancient India the role of religion was immense. The religion has a prominent place in society and state from a long time has been continued as a theocratic. But , from time to time some of the rulers have attempted to maintain a respect for the religion of others. Their intention behind such respectfulness may be hidden (other than secularism) or manifest.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

A passage in Arthashastra indicates that positive law began to be differentiated from religious rituals and traditional customs. However during the times of Kautilya, all religions, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, flourished alike. The Mauryas favoured the heterodox sects, though they never attacked Brahmanism seriously.[2] Ashoka laid maximum stress on religious toleration of people themselves and also or their beliefs and ideas. [3] Religious toleration continued during the Gupta period in the conduct of religious affairs of the society as a whole. Buddhism received Royal patronage. But other religions, too, prevailed without interference by the State. Rawlinson points out: Harsha and his family had strong leanings towards Buddhism, and Buddhist establishments were generally endowed. But for reasons of state, the Emperor was eclectic in his religion and paid equal respect to Siva, the Sun (Surya), and Buddha.[4]

A change from the earlier practice of religious toleration can be witnessed from the tenth century onwards. With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, we find far-reaching changes in the entire panorama of Indian life. The state was ruled according to the Quranic laws. The Sultans followed the basic laws of Islam.

The Uleisas (Muslim theologians) became a political voice which could not be disregarded or disobeyed. The Sultan had to show respect for Islamic institutions, and to the Ulemas. Islam was the dominant religion of the kings. However, they allowed other religions also to co-exist. This period gave rise to the Bhakti movement. It sought to free Hinduism from the domination of caste. Similarly, Sufi movement among Muslims helped in bringing the Islamic culture nearer to the Hindu society. A phase of intermixing between the two religions started. Akbar promulgated a new religion, the Divine faith (Din-i-Ilahi), a new religion questing for peace and harmony among religions. He ordered the translation of important Hindu scriptures. The successors of Akbar, his also followed his policy in matters of religion. However, it was Dara Shikoh (1615-1659), the eldest son of Shahjahan, who took exceptional interest in the study of Hindu philosophy and mystical practices of Hinduism. The Orthodox Muslims even did say that Dara threatened the religious integrity of Islam. Aurangzeb (1658—1707), reversed Akbar's policy of religious toleration and ordered the destruction of the Somnath Temple and a number of other temples were also destroyed. Example of Aurangzeb's communal policy was the reimposition of Jizyah. He was determined to convert India into a land of Dar-ul-Islam. It is true that a large number of his nobility was constituted by the Hindus. The Mughal Empire was on the verge of its disintegration. It was Shah Wali—Ullah of Delhi (1703—1762) who rose and talked of flexibility and religious toleration as the two pr-conditions for the survival of Islam in India.

It was the officials of the East India Company, who brought with them the Western ideas and notions of secularism to India. The British started questioning Indian religious ideas, customs and practices and making

distinction between Human Law and Divine Law, and they learnt the distinction between loyalty to their religion and loyalty towards the state. Secularism came to India in three different ways. Those Indians who went to England or other European countries came in contact with the secular thought of the Western intellectuals and brought the ideas of secularism with them into India. Secondly British educated Indians came in contact with the" Secular Ideas of Benthamite radicals and other writings of the secular thinkers of the West. Thirdly, secularism was introduced in India, by the British officials who were followers of Bentham and other secular thinkers of the West.The mutiny of 1857 was a great set-back to the process of secularization in India. Those who dominated the British thinking on the Indian scene were the British tradionalists. After the mutiny, secularism was replaced by policy of religious toleration.

The Early Modern Indian School of Thought
In the early nineteenth century, there were two Indian responses to secularism. One was the response of the conservatives and the other was of those who accepted Western reformism as the desired goal for modern India. The conservatives can be variously described as orthodox or revivalists. The other group of Western reformists can he described as liberals, progressives or even radicals, Impact of the Western ideas and of Christianity was very profound.
These reformers attacked blind faith, religious rituals and superstitious practices and sought social reforms. They also pleaded for secular education instead of religious instructions. The central figure of the Hindu Renaissance of the nineteenth century was Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He has been regarded as the father of all progressive movements in India. He founded the Brahma Samaj in Calcutta. Raja Ram Mohan Roy pleaded for the introduction of Western education in India. He pleaded that secular education was more important for the Indians than pure religious instruction.
The Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayanand. It was also a reform movement. Dayanand was not against the introduction of Western science and secular education in India, he rather pleaded for it. After Swami Dayanand the DAVS (Dayanand Anglo-Vedic) institutions played a very significant role in providing secular education to the Hindus in addition to religious instructions.

The Moderate school of Thought
Dadabhai Naoroji was the first founder of secular nationalism in India. He wanted that religion and politics must be separated. He went even further than this and asserted that religion must be subordinated to politics. It was because of this type of secular nationalism that Dadabhai attained a very high place in the hearts of the Indian people. He firmly believed that Indian could get Swaraj (self-rule) only after its people had realized that a thorough political union of all the Indian people belonging to various creeds and classes was absolutely necessary. In his words; "All the people in their political position are in one boat. They must sink or swim together. Without this union all efforts will be vain."[5] Dadabhai Naoroji tried to create loyalty to the nation on non-religious grounds. One important reason why he admired the British rule in India was that it had brought with it the notions of nationalism and secularism. His idea of secularization implied and represented nationalism, anti-imperialism and anti-communalism. His protest against the British rule in India was not based on religious grounds, but on material and moral grounds. To him, the principal cause of India's degradation was the employment of the aliens in the Government of the country and the consequent material loss to and the drain from the country. He calculated the economic consequences of the British rule in India as follows: They could not rise; they could not develop their capacity for higher government, because they had no opportunity; the result was, of course, that their facilities must be stunted. Lastly, every European displaces an Indian who should fill that post. In short the evil of the foreign rule involved the triple loss of wealth, wisdom and work.[6]
But Surendra Nath Bannerjee said that the Indians should forget their differences and realize that they have a common destiny. Like the other moderates, he wanted that Indians of all creeds should be loyal to their country, irrespective of their affiliation to a particular religion or community. Dadabhai Naoroji wanted to build nationalism only on the basis of secular consideration and sought a complete divorce between religion and politics.
The most important dimension of Ranade's secularism was that he tried to secularize Indian politics, by pleading for secular nationalism and particularly for Hindu Muslim unity. In his view, the great virtue of Akbar was that he had realized that the Hindus and the Muslims had common interests. It was in the interest of both the communities to bring about a fusion in the thoughts and feelings between them. He said: No progress is possible unless both Hindus and Mohamedans join hands together, and are determined to follow the lead of the men who flourished in Akbar's time and were his chief advisers and councilors, and scrupulously avoid the mistakes which were committed by his great grandson Aurangzeb. Joint action from a sense of common interest, and a common desire to bring about the fusion of the thoughts and feelings of men so as to tolerate small differences and bring about concord. These were the chief aims kept in view by Akbar which formed the principle of the new divine faith formulated in the Din—i—Illahi.[7]
Ranade admired the British rule in India mainly because it gave secular education, secular culture and secular values. Another significant contribution of Ranade in the field of secularism was that he strongly pleaded for an expansion of the powers and functions of the state. According to him :The state is now more recognized as the national organ for taking care of national needs in all matters in which individual and co-operative efforts are not likely to be effective. This is the correct view, to take true function of the state.8
Like other Moderate leaders, Gokhale divorced religion from politics. He did not want to use religion in the process of creating sentiments of nationalism in India. In the preamble of the constitution of his society "Servants of India", Gokhle had pointed out that: The growth, during the last fifty years, of feeling of common nationality based upon common tradition, common disability and common hopes

and aspirations, has been most striking.[9]

The Indian moderates were the first nationalists of India. They were the first to preach the idea of secular nationalism. They stood for the unity of India through cooperation between different religious communities and pleaded for secular education instead of religious instruction.

The Extremist School of Thought

The extremist school led by the famous trio of Nationalist leaders, Bal, Pal, Lal- introduced religion in their political action in arousing nationalism among the Indian people. The whole attempt of extremists was to transform the Indian National Congress in a popular mass movement. For this purpose, they appealed to three principal ties common to all Indians which are language, religion and history.

As against the Western reformism of the Moderates, they talked of revivalism. They reminded Indians of their glorious past. They described the revolt of 1857 as the first war of Indian Independence. In the words of Bipinchander Pal: The Hindus constitute a distinct people. The regulative idea in the evolution of Hindu character, the idea which has given a particular shape and colouring to the entire history of the race, is their innate consciousness of the spiritual and the eternal [10]

The extremists expressed their nationalism in religious terms. Aurobindo, the militant nationalist, identified his concept of nation with Dharma itself. India of his conception was: The Hindu nation was born with the Sanatan Dharma. With it, it moves and with it, it grows. When the Sanatana Dharma declines then the nation declines and if the Sanatana Dharma were capable of perishing with the nation it would perish. The Sanatana Dharma that is nationalism.[11]

To Lala Lajpat Rai, nationalism means: One common name, a common ancestry, a common history, a common religion, a common language and a common future.[12]

From the point of view of the extremist leaders, the problem with the concept of secularism was that even if it was a desirable objective in the Indian condition, it had limited applicability in the modern social context. The extremists had realized that in order to spread nationalism among the masses it was necessary to make use of religious symbols for political purpose.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was the first Bengali Hindu who employed the triple appeal of language, history and religion to built Hindu Nationalism at the mass level. His national song "Bande—Matram" mixed religion and politics in a very effective emotional manner.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak has been hailed as the prophet of mass nationalism in India. Lajpat Rai, like all other extremist leaders employed the triple appeals of language, history and religion to recreate Hindu nationalism at the mass level. He believed in religious toleration and was in favour of Hindu-Muslim co-operation. He argued that the clash of creeds among the Hindus and Muslims was the main cause of Indian's continued bondage. He insisted that Hindu-Muslim unity in the political field was a pre condition to India's freedom.

Bipin Chandra Pal was very clear in his mind that the concept of nationalism as had arrived from the West was never developed and existed in ancient India. In fact, he repudiated the idea of separation of politics and religion. He brought about an identity between nationalism and religion. In his own words: It is something very tangible, something very concrete. It is both word and thought, both on idea and is symbol and manifestation- it is both abstract and concrete - It concrete elements are place and persons sanctified by noble historic association.[13]

Like Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurbindo believed in the idea of the spiritual nationalism. He argued that nationalism is religion by which we are trying to recognize the presence of God in the nation and in our fellow countrymen. In his own words: Here everything that claims popular attentions must have the sanction of religion. Neither does religion concern and other subjects intimately as possible.[14]

Pro-British and Nationalist Muslim School

The extremists, promoted the growth of nationalism in India. But in the process of doing also, they also retarded the growth of secularism in the country. Sir Syed Ahmad had full faith in Hindu-Muslim unity. However, he was opposed to the establishment of the Indian National Congress. He was opposed to the establishment of the Indian National Congress. He advised the Indian Muslims not to join it Badruddin Tyabji represented another viewpoint among the Indian Muslims. He supported the Indian National Movement and the Indian National Congress. Badruddin Tyabji was among the secular Muslim Nationalists.

Mohammad Iqbal raised religion to a status much higher than the state or the nation and pleaded for Hindu-Muslim unity and talked of composite Indian nationality. He was totally opposed to the idea of secular nationalism and he pleaded for Muslim Regionalism and Pan-Islamism.

Social Eaton- Before the Advent of Gandhi

Ram Mohan Rai was the first person to rise above the most distressing and depressing social anarchy in Indian history at the beginning of nineteenth century and kindle the light of reform. Ram Mohan Rai was prepared to start a crusade against the prevalent religious, social vices and injustices. He used four methods for this: establishment of religious associations; publication of books and tracts and, holding discussions and debates and removing ignorance by setting up educational institutions. He had already formed a religious association, the Atmiya Sabha and published the book, Vedanta Sutra. He did not want to introduce any new religion He only wanted to get back Hinduism in its pristine form and purity. Among the early reformers of Bengal, in the 19th century Ram Mohan Roy alone had a clear idea of the evils of the caste system. He categorically asserted that the distinction of caste introducing innumerable divisions and sub divisions among Hindus has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling and the multitude of religious rites[15]

Ram Mohan mentioned in an issue of the political dissension among the Hindus which in turn had brought about their subjection of foreign powers for centuries[16] Ram Mohan Roy stood for all that was best in the Western civilization. His agitation was a movement for the complete

emancipation of mankind; He wanted to free men of India from all religious and social prejudices. It has rightly been observed that all modern reform movements — educational, social, political have started from him and his chief purpose was to reform Hinduism and to promote social reform. He opposed idolater, untouchability, prohibition, widow-remarriage and the restrictions of caste system.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824—1853) rejected Western ideas and sought to revive the ancient religion of the Aryans. However, he was not an orthodox Hindu nor was he revivalist. He fearlessly denounced the evils of post-Vedic Hinduism. It is because he was an aggressive social reformer that is why he has been called, the father of India. He and the Arya Samaj, which he founded, also helped in the process of secularization in modern India.

In the field of social reforms the Arya Samaj had the policy of converting persons from other religions to Hinduism,[17] of course, of their own volition. Swami Dayanand introduced the spirit of enquiry and rationality. More than a religious reformer, he was a radical social reformer who wanted social reforms to be carried out through reinterpretation of Hindu religious texts and traditions.

Vivekananda interpreted ancient practices in a way that brought them into harmony with the Western ideals of social and religious equality. His interest in the poor and the down trodden masses was a role which can be considered as a part of the process of radical social reform. The Ramakrishna Mission accepted the caste system but condemned the inequalities associated with it. In this manner their social reform activities have been as aggressive against religious obscuration as that of the Western reformists.

Ranade was actively associated throughout his life with numerous public bodies including the Indian National Congress. Ranade was a social reformer and it is throughout his social reforms that he made his greatest contribution in the process of secularization of Indian politics. He fully realized that Hindus had talked of the spiritual progress but had ignored secular well being.Ranade admired the British rule in India mainly because it has secular education, secular culture and secular values. The distinction of Ranade's secularism was that he introduced rationality and the spirit of injury in the field of religion. He wanted the state to help in the sphere of social reforms and in bringing about capitalist growth in India.

According to Vivekananda in the 19th century India had to face two obstacles. One was Indian orthodoxy and the other materialism of the West[18]Vivekananda condemned the practice of untouchability and caste restrictions in no uncertain terms. He said that he was neither a caste breaker nor a social reformer in the sense in which it was understood then. He had nothing to do directly with caste or with Indian social reformers "Live in any caste, he said, "but that is no reason why you should hate another men or another caste. It is love and love alone that I preach and I base my teachings on the great Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the soul of the universe."[19]

In India the social reformers from Ram Mohan Roy to Ranade attempted to interpret and quote from scriptures to justify the social change they contemplated. They had to find some parallels in the religious texts to gain the confidence and support of the common masses for social reform. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Vivekananda and Dayananda were convinced that mere official enactments and ceremonial breaking of existing local customs would not bring about social change. In assessing the progress of social reform in India the importance of the Christian missionaries cannot be minimized. They withered the educated Indians to have a re-look at their society and its evil that brought about a social ferment and was the source of the social reform movement in the 19th century.

Present Aspects-Comstitutionalism

In the present era, the ideals of secularism have clearly been embodied under the Indian Constitution in its preamble and in fundamental rights. The state is duty bound to ensure secularism and the provisions are being implemented in substantial measure. But the circumstances after independence have posed a challenge before secularism of India for a number of times. Sometimes it is also alleged that by Uniform Civil Code, the existence of minorities in India is in danger or it is an assault on the identity of minorities. However, the efforts have been initiated to have a peaceful co-existence of all in a multicultural and multi-ethnic society.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the facts stated above it may be concluded that the term secularism has no fixed or definite meaning as varies from person to person and place to place. From ancient to modern era there have been some evidences of secularism in Indian society because Indian society is a melting pot of various cultures and civilizations and in a multi- cultural society, the dominance of secularism values is a pre conditions otherwise there will be chaotic situation which further will affect the stability of state also. In modern times, under the scheme of Indian constitution in its preamble the secularism has been embodied as a cherished goal to be achieved by the state and under its part-III the concept of secularism has been formally introduced as a fundamental right.

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