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# Sustainable Secularism and Its Impediments for Progressive India

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## Abstract

India has a long history of secularism. India is the nation with unity in diversity. A just and fair state that both does justice and is also seen to have done justice towards the grievances of any of its religious communities, the best guarantee for a peaceful and cohesive society. The people have been following secularism, the recent data published by the government says that the secularism is under threat because of intolerance and communal violence. India is a land of diversity, so the current problem in India is how to keep unity along with diversity. The present paper focuses on secularism which is under threat with communal incidents and at last, certain remedies to be taken to maintain a sustainable secularism in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** Communalism, Religious Hatredness, Violence, Ethnic Violence, Literacy, Society

## Introduction

The term secularism was first used by the British writer George Jacob Holyoke in 1851, according to him secularism means promoting a social order separate from religion, without relatively dismissing or criticizing religious belief[8]. The constitution of India includes all the features of a secular state. Article 27 which rules out the public funding of religion and Article 28 (1) under which no religious instruction is to be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds. Article 25, 27 and 28 guarantees religious liberty. Article 14, 15 (1) and 29 (2) of the Indian constitution gives equality of citizenship. Article 16 (1) and (2) of the Indian constitution affirm an equal opportunity for all citizens in matter relating to employment or appointments of any office under the state.

The clause of universal franchise as well as Article 325 that declares a general electoral role for all constituencies and states that no one shall be ineligible for inclusion in this role or claim to be included in it on grounds only of religion.

## Origin and Emergence of Secularism in India

In the year 97s, the word "secular" along with "socialist" was inserted in the constitution of India by the government headed by

the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. The intention to create a secular state goes back to the debates during the constituent assembly in the aftermath of India's partition; the framers of the constitution adopted a concept of secularism that was different from the wall of separation thesis adopted in Western countries. In the Indian case, the political and religion where could not be easily differentiated so there was no agreement about what a secular state implied. But there was a commitment to public life not steered by religious doctrines or institutions. Could the postcolonial state be reinvigorated by forms of Western ice mularis could such a secular state respond to communal tensions and caste-based discriminations? Keeping these questions in mind, it was debated during the discussion on the preamble of the Indian constitution whether to include secularism in order to promote the values of religious tolerance and cultural coexistence amongst the different communities in India. Separating religion from the state was a daunting task in the project for the democratization of Indian future polity Leaders of the national movement had to clarify whether the Indian nation-state was to be based on religion of the majority community or based on a disassociation from religion. The constitutional draft of the Nehru Report[13] best captured the nature of right later embodied in the Indian constitution, as It recognized the rights of minorities to their



religion and culture. Under the guidance of Mohandas Gandhi, the Congress party was keen to allay the fears of the religious minorities in a majoritarian India and granted to all religious communities the right to their language script culture, and religious practice. The report hesitated in accepting the institutionalization of separate electorates, "even though the right to freedom of conscience and to the free profession and practice of religion" was included explicitly prevent one community domineering to another" In short, It recognized the importance of liberty of religion and cultural autonomy[3]. Similar assumptions and commitments were affirmed in the Indian national congress at Its Karachi session in 1931. It resolved that the idea of religious liberty and adequate protection to the minorities should be observed by the future state. During the Second session of the Round Table Conference, a memorandum was presented before the minorities committee demanding that a new constitution must include a guarantee for the protection of their cultures, languages, scripts, education, profession, and practice of religion and personal laws. It also demanded a proportionate share in the legislature for all communities through joint electorate along with a protection of minority interests in the central and provincial cabinets[12]. Later the Sapru Committee report recommended full religious tolerance, non-interference in religious beliefs, practices and institutions, and protection to language and cultures of all communities[2]. The constituent assembly was ready to accommodate these promises in the draft of the constitution. However, minority rights became a contentious issue during constitutional debates preceding Indian independence in 1947 They were increasingly perceived as infringing upon individual rights and the homogenizing ideology of the nation state, while powerful events such as the violent partition of Pakistan from India, inhibited acceptance of the protection of minorities and group rights. These changes were reflected in deliberations on representation of religious minorities through separate electorates and through the adoption of a majority-minority framework. This displays the ambivalence in the constitutional process that stressed minority rights but hesitated to encourage community based identities. Safeguards for minorities in the political domain were perceived as remnants of a system of communal representation encouraged by the British colonial administrators since 1909 and hence a hindrance to the development of a nation-state. The opposition to and eventual retraction of group preferential policies for religious minorities initiated a legitimate vocabulary for a national identity on a secular basis. This step was taken in order to refute the widespread notion spread by colonial policy that Indian was a conglomeration of communities rather than a nation. But a second viewpoint emerged to argue that minorities must have a right to their culture and religion, safeguarded by the constitution, considering the inherently plural composition and deep diversity of India where people adhered to multiple faiths with each religion internally differentiated into confessions, denominations, and sects[15].

India is a fast growing economy with a huge demographic dividend. The predominantly youthful population of India has rising aspirations of a bright future. Though India has progressed manifold since independence, it is beset with some serious challenges. Because of the colonial past, India faces the challenges of communalism. The nature of competitive politics has aided the spread of divisive communal forces in independent India. The model of secularism that India adopted was unique because it did not ask for complete separation of religion from state but advocated equal treatment of all religious by the state. India adopted the democratic principles of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice-social, economic, political. Such democratic ethos has been the anchors during episodes of communal violence that have erupted in India sporadically. Most often, there have been political reasons behind instigation of communal violence, for e.g., Muzafarnagar in Uttar Pradesh was rocked by a series of incidents of communal violence before the 2014 General Elections. The secular nature of the state is sometimes perceived as compromised during incidents of communal violence. The state machinery has to be totally non-partisan

and provide complete security of life to all its citizens, regardless of their religion.

## Secularism in the West versus Secularism in India

Even if India was not secular in the western sense; it had imbibed the spirit of secularism in its moral fabric and social life. The West had gone through a different course of history. The West embraced renaissance and enlightenment many centuries ahead of India. Scientific temper entered the ethos of life with scientific inventions and discoveries, Europeans felt more in control of themselves. This led to process of secularization, which led to a shrinking of the sacred space. Because of secularisation, more and more areas of human life got detached from the influence of religious ideas, religious institutions (like Church) and religious authorities (like priests). So, there was an organic development of a secular state in which, state was strictly divided from religion. India, on the other hand, had a different history. India is proud to have one of the most ancient urban civilizations of the world, i.e., Indus civilization. The archaeological remains of Indus civilization suggest the existence of a priest king, which may imply the fusion of State and religious power. With the second phase of urbanization by about 6th century BCE, 16 "Mahajanpadas" emerged. Some of them had republican form of government where people directly participated in governance while some other like Magadha were ruled by kings who also claimed divine blessings. So, we are a conjunction of state and religion because the king was also the protector of the religion. With the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism, there was a movement towards deeper understanding of the nature of human existence which was free from the dogmatic prescriptions of the Hindu religious texts like Vedas. Religions like Buddhism and Jainism stressed on humanism and aimed at furthering welfare of all human kind and not of any one sector of community. They spread the universal values of love, compassion and a sense of service towards other sentient beings. The legacy of such tolerant religions built a strong foundation of religious tolerance in India[19].

India has had a history of tolerant kings starting from Asoka who spread the message of 'dharma' (literally means to hold together) to keep people united. The Gupta period saw a golden period of development of intellectual thoughts in the form of art and literature. Even though, the themes or motifs have been taken from Indian mythologies, Indian art and sculpture give a sublime message of universal brotherhood. All the six systems of Indian philosophy promote the spirit of inquiry and reasoning to understand the ultimate truth of life. Even with the advent of Muslim rulers into India, the secular and tolerant nature of the Indian society was not altered much. The Muslim rulers came and assimilated into the Indian culture. This fusion of different cultures created a more rich composite culture. The Bhakti and the Sufi saints played a sterling role in spreading messages of tolerance and love. Sufi saints and their "mazars" were not only revered by Muslims but also by devout Hindus (Singh D, 2016)[19].

## Review of Literature

Chakraborty, J.-L. A. (2013)[18] in their study explains the causes of ethnic violence in India with evidence from Hindu-Muslim riots in India find out some reasons for communal riots which were – political competition and the presence of right wing Hindu nationalist parties in a given state have a positive and statistically significant impact on the number of communal riots. Presence of either a coalition government or regional or left wing parties in the state legislative assembly has exactly the opposite effect. The greater the proportion of Muslims in the population, the higher in the likelihood of occurrence of communal riots. The past events seem to have a positive and significant recurring effect on current riots.

Sachar Committee (2005)[5] its recommendations are that the government should focus on school education of Muslims which is more desirable. Free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 is

the responsibility of the state and the fulfillment of their obligation is critical for the improvements in the educational conditions of Muslims. Committee is stressed more on improvement of Muslims literacy ratio, the illiterate people won't think and act rationally, this leads to violence.

Bhargava, R. (2006)[14] discussed Indian secularism is facing internal threat not external threat, the mere institutional separation of the religion must be outside the purview of the state and in this sense, it must be privatized. Finally he concluded that Indian constitution completely opposes state intervention in religion matter and state should focus more on building strong and religious harmony.

Amartya Sen (1993, 1996)[4] explained why practical implementation of Strong Secularism is not possible in India? He further stated that in India Hindus and Hinduism are majoritarian. Hindus think that they have old tradition which is older and superior than Islam. At the same time population of Muslims in India also increasing rapidly and this population increasing factor becoming major blockade in the minds of Hindus to achieve Secularism in India .so in India majoritarian playing i.e. Hindus main role in all aspects ( election , privileges , constitutional rights etc.) whereas minorities i.e. Muslims or Non-Hindus depriving from these privileges.

### Is Secularism Really Under Threat?

The word secularism has been defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica as "non spiritual, having no concern with religious matter"[16].

India's theme is Unity in Diversity". All Indians are abiding this rule with wholeheartedly. In India all religions have equal status – no matter how much population a religion contains. India is a land of diversity. So the current problem in India is how to keep unity along with diversity. As far as India is concerned we are divided by religion and united by patriotism. Why are we divided by religion? In India major religion are viz Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jainism, and Buddhism. Hindu Muslim and Christian are major religion. Now the topic of discussion is maintaining peace among these religions. Usually communal riots happen in between Hindu and Muslims. So the need of the hour is True Secularism.

What is Secularism? According to oxford dictionary it means "the principles of separation of the state from religious institutions", means no discrimination against anybody in the name of religion. Secularism is not against religion. It opposes institutionalized religion domination. Secularism in India means equal treatment of all religious by state. It is incorporated in Indian constitution by 42nd amendment of the constitution of India in 1976. The preamble of the Indian constitution also asserted that India is a secular nation; secularism is a divisive, politically changed topic in India.

In the west word 'secular' implies three things, freedom of religion, equal citizenship to each citizen of religion, equal citizenship to the each citizen regardless of his or her religion and the separation of religion and state. In contrast, in India, the word secularism does not imply separation of religion and state; it means equal treatment of all religions. India was ranked fourth in the world in 2015 after Syria, Nigeria and Iraq for the highest social hostilities involving religion[17].

As many as 7484 communal incidents have been reported over the last decade between 2008 and 2017 and 2017 or two every day killing over 1100 people, according to data released to the lok sabha (Lower house of parliament)[1]. Communal violence rose by 28% from 2014 to 2017 but 2008 data shows the highest religious violence i.e., 943 around 167 people killing.

### Number of communal incidents

The government finds different reports, the National Crime Records Bureau collects police registered communal riots cases (FIRs) from state and there could be multiple FIRs in a single incident of communal violence and hence NCRB data may be different compared to MHA data which is communal incidents based but not FIR based[10]. According to Home Ministry, a "major" communal incident is one that results in more than five deaths or leaves over 10 people in-

**Table 1.** Showing the Number of communal incident, number of persons killed or injured (MHA report) during 2010 to 2017 (Up to May)

Year	Incidents	Killed	Injured
2010	701	116	2138
2011	580	91	1899
2012	668	94	2117
2013	823	133	2269
2014	644	95	1921
2015	751	97	2264
2016	703	86	2321
2017 (Upto May)	296	44	892

Sources: MHA report

jured. An incident that results in one death or 10 injured is termed as "important or significant"[10].

As many as 2,920 "communal incidents" were reported in India over four years ending 2017, in which 389 people were killed and 8,890 injured, according to the home ministry's reply to the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) on 6 February, 2018 and 7 February, 2017 (FactChecker, 2018)[9].

Uttara Pradesh the most populous state in the country reported most incidents 1488 over the last decade. Communal incidents in UP have increased 47% from 133 in 2014 to 195 in 2017. The year 2013 saw the most incidents in UP 247 also the most by any state over the last decade. The Western UP is considered the communal hotbed, divided on religious lines, and is home to Muzaffarnagara that witnessed communal riots in August and September 2013. These riots claimed 60 lives and more than 40000 people were displaced[1]. In 2014 UP reported highest number deaths i.e., 133 related to communal riots, the second is Maharashtra, the highest number of persons injured viz-a-viz communal in UP (374) and Bihar (294). In the year 2015 again UP and Bihar reported the highest number of injured persons related to communal riots respectively 419 and 282 and again UP and Maharastra reported highest number of communal incidents respectively 155 and 105 and even Karnataka also reported 105 incidents which is equal to Maharastra. In the year 2016 India's communal incidents was less compare to 2015 but persons injured due to communal riots increased drastically to 2321, In this year UP (488), Karnataka (248) Maharastra (234) and Bihar (230) reported highest number of persons injured because of communal matter as per available data for the year 2017 (upto May) just in 5 months 296 communal incidents took place and 44 persons killed and totally 892 persons injured and UP, Maharastra, Bihar and Karnataka showing again same upward trend.

"The incidents are reported to be attributed to religious factors, land and property disputes, gender-related offences, social media related issues and other miscellaneous issues," another reply to the Rajya Sabha (parliament's upper house) on 14 March, 2018[6].

### Why these Four states reporting highest number of communal incidents in India?

UP is having nearly 80% of Hindus and 19% of Muslims, Literacy rate among Hindus is nearly 70% and among Muslims is 59% the total literacy rate is 67.88%. In Bihar also according to the 2011 census, 82.7% of Bihar population practiced Hinduism and while 17% followed Islam and the Literacy rate is just 63.82%.

In UP & Bihar literacy rate is very low compare to over all India's literacy rate (74%). So we could say that communal cases happening because people are not educated. Maharastra state contains 79.8% Hindus and 11.8% Islam and the literacy rate is 83.2% of literacy rate is among Hindus is 81.8% and among Muslims is 83.6% (State Economic Survey of Maharastra 2015-16)

According to 2011 Census of India, Karnataka's total population is 6.10 crore out of this 84% belongs to Hinduism and nearly 13% were Muslim and literacy rate is 75.36%. Both Hindus and Muslims are well educated but still communal incidents are happening.

**Table 2.** Showing the Number of Communal incidents, persons killed and injured during the Year 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 (Upto May)

Year	Uttar Pradesh			Bihar			Karnataka			Maharastra		
	Incidents	Killed	Injured	Incidents	Killed	Injured	Incidents	Killed	Injured	Incidents	Killed	Injured
2014	133	26	374	61	5	294	73	6	177	97	12	198
2015	155	22	419	71	20	282	105	8	337	105	14	323
2016	162	29	488	65	4	230	101	12	248	68	6	234
2017 (Upto May)	60	16	151	23	2	103	36	3	93	20	0	82

Source: MHA report 2017 (Upto May)

Now the question is education is really playing a major role in communal harmony? Then why Maharastra and Karanataka reporting highest number of communal cases, even though these two states having highest literates. What could be the reason for it? Are we lacking moral ethics and value based education.

### Finding remedy to maintain Sustainable secularism

Rajendra Sachar Committee (2005) reports revealed that status of Muslims in India is abysmal. An issue highlighted in the report was that while Muslims constitute 14% of the Indian population. They only comprise 2.5% of the Indian bureaucracy. The Sachar committee even concluded that the conditions facing Indian muslims was below of that of Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes[5].

The state with the highest percentage of muslims are Jammu and Kashmir (67%), Assam (30.9%), West Bengal (25.2%) and kerala (24.7%) not facing any communal problems, because except Assam state all other states literacy rate is more than national average rate. So there is direct correlation between illiteracy and communal riots.

According to 2011 census of India 42.7% of muslims in India are illiterate muslims are the only community have an illiteracy rate higher than the national rate among all communities[7]. For Hindhus, the figure stands at 36.3% the second highest proportion of illiterate people and Third highest is Sikh i.e., (32.49%)[21].

**Table 3.** Percentage of illiterate people, by religious community

Si No	Religious Community	Percentage
1	All religious community	36.93%
2	Hindu	36.39%
3	Muslim	42.72%
4	Sikh	32.49%
5	Christian	25.65%
6	Buddhist	28.16%
7	Jains	13.57%
8	Others	49.65%

Sources: Census Data 2011.

Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs share major part of illiterate persons in India. Communal riots are happening mainly in between these religious. Mainly in Uttar Pradesh, Maharastra, Karnataka and Bihar Hindhu and Muslims fightings are common, so there is a direct relationship between illiteracy and communal riots. Hence, the government needs to focus on the remedial measures to create communal harmony among all the religious.

### What the government needs to do:

- Increasing the literacy rate of minorities.
- More participation of minorities in bureaucracy.
- Government should provide constitutional safeguards to all minorities.
- Nonintervention of state in religious matters, i.e., being equidistant from all religions.
- Practice of religious tolerance.
- Providing value-based education and inculcating ethics in public life.

- Government shouldn't see minorities just as a vote bank, but must work for a sustainable India where all religions promote, cherish, and develop evenly.
- Government must focus on creating religious harmony among all religions.
- The true meaning of "VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM" should be put into practice.

There should be active coordination between centre and state government creates communal harmony. It's only through combined efforts of citizens, agencies and government by which we can create a secular nation.

### Conclusion

Though India has progressed manifold since independence, it is beset with some serious challenges. The Indian secularism is facing heavy strains in recent times because of the growing incidence of communal conflicts in various parts of the country. Communal incidents bring religious disharmony, disturb the course of life of citizens, hurts the economy and drives away investors from the country. In order to hold together a diverse nation as India, which is a democracy, there is no alternative but to further nurture and strengthen the principles of secularism, tolerance, empathy and compassion. Because India has an onerous responsibility of constantly progressing on the path of development to enable the eradication of poverty and malnutrition that affects a considerable section of the population. Hence, greater public awareness and vibrant, impartial civil society participation is needed to strengthen the secularism in the 21st century.

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