



THE SPIRIT OF SECULARISM AND JAWAHARLAL NEHRU'S VIEWS ON SECULARISM

R. DEVAIAH

Head, Dept. of History, J.K.C College, Guntur.

The aim of this paper is to bring a discussion on secularism and how it is sustaining in our sub-continent where hundreds of languages and many more castes and sub-castes people are living together amicably, and Nehru's vision building India as a secular state. At the time the constitution of India was framed, it did not contain the word 'secular'. This word was introduced in the preamble to the constitution by 42 amendment in 1976. Despite the fact that the word 'Secular' found no express mention in the constitution as initially drafted, there can be no doubt that our founding fathers intended to give our polity a secular character. They inserted a member of provisions in the constitution for the protection of the minorities. Articles 25 to 30 which were enacted for this purpose reflect the concern which the founding fathers had for the protection of the interests of the minorities. India is the second most populous country of the world. The people inhabiting this vast land profess different religions and speak different languages despite the diversity of religion and language, there runs through the fabric of the nation the golden thread of a basic innate unity. It is a mosaic of different religions, languages and cultures. Each of them has made a mark on the Indian polity and India today represent a syntheses of them all. The closing years of the British rule were marked by communal riots and dissensions there was also a feeling of distrust and the demand was by a section of the Muslims for a separate homeland. This ultimately resulted in the partition of the country. Those who led the fight for Independence in India always laid great stress on communal amity and accord. They wanted the establishment of a secular state wherein people belonging to different religions.

H. R. Khanna said in that Judgment, no mysticism in the secular character of state. Secularism is neither anti-god nor pro-God. It treats a like the devout, the agnostic and the atheist. It eliminates God from the matter of the state and ensures that no one shall be discriminated against on the ground of religion. The constitution at the same time expressly guaranteed freedom of conscience and the right to profess and propagate religion. The constitution makers were conscious of the deep attachment the vast masses of our country had towards religion, the way it had on their minds and the significant role.

We used to take pride in the fact that catholicity of outlook, freedom of thought and a broad spirit of tolerance have been the tradition of India since ancient times and that in few other countries has there been such fusion of different schools of thought, religious beliefs and cultural streams such boost would have ring of hollowness unless we can put an end to these riots and banish animosities based on religion. Only thus can we prove worthy inheritors of the legacy be queathed to us



by Gandhi. For that legacy ordains upon us all not to learn religion, which is essentially meant for spiritual uplift of men, into a divisive force. It is up to each one of us to give strength and sustenance to the Historic fusion. History of India tells us that its brightest chapter has always synchronized with high degree of Catholicity of outlook and spirit of tolerance.

To day we find fissiparous and secessionist forces raising their ugly head and threatening the unity and integrity of the country. This is a grave matter and we must all join together to meet and overcome the threat passed by such forces. It is and should be as much the concern of the minorities as of the majority to towards this threat. The response to such a threat has to be not in terms of being members of this but as Indians of this country as such.

Secularism is not anti thesis of religious devoutness we have to dispel the impression that if a person is a devotee Hindu or devotee Muslim he ceases to be secular. Vivekananda and Gandhi were the greatest Hindus yet their entire and teachings embody the essence of secularism. True religion does not teach one to hate those professing other faiths. Bigotry is not religion nor can narrow minded fanaticism be taken to be an index of one's loyalty to his religion.

India possesses a most valuable reservoir and store house of cultural heritage. It has been shaped by people of all religions and ethnic origin living in different regions of our country. Each one of them has made its contribution towards it and added to its richness. It thus represents today a happy blend, syntheses and mosaic of them this both its strength and glory. The spirit of India has been one of assimilation of the various elements that came into our country. When she failed to abide by that spirit, she herself declined. When Mahatma Gandhi asked us to open our doors to all the winds, but not get swept off our feet, he was essentially articulating and stressing the tradition of India. India, as pointed out by Dr. Radhakrishnan, strove throughout her history for the freedom of spirit and the union of hearts. She did not destroy difference, but discovered their underlying affinities.

We find that concept of being Indian is being smothered and crucified by the Indians themselves. The ties that bind us together, as constituents of one nation are being smothered and put under a stage of siege by forces of communalism, linguism, regionalism, casteism and parochialism, one of our costly failures has been our inability to build a strong national identity and give it such a pride of place that it cannot be vanquished by other identities.

The fact that different religions, communities are all part of one nation is both its strength and glory and should not in any way, detract from national unity. The fount head of our culture and heritage have been the Vedas and Upanishads. They have been further enriched by sufi saints and poets, by Kabir and Nanak and other luminous souls in the course of centuries.



Jawaharlal Nehru's Views on Secularism:

Nehru's conception of secularism was as much a product of the Indian situation as of his understanding of the history of the west. It was intimately linked with the idea of the good society he visualized for India. Too often it is assumed to signify nothing more than the absence of an official religion and the assurance of security to minority religious groups. This however is a limited and though important in contrast with Pakistan, a rather jejune view. There are many countries in the world, both advanced and developing, which have for long been secular in this sense. Unlike the communists, they do not persecute religion and unlike Pakistan, they do not practice religious discrimination. If they have an official religion it does not influence state Policy and is, like the British crown, a legacy from more violent times and a symbol for public ritual. What distinguishes Nehru's secularism his effort to develop it both as an element and as an instrument of Indian Democracy. This fact endows it s meaning with two more dimensions which are absent from its generally accepted connotation. And in this he differs as much from the liberal position as from the Marxist.

Nehru was concerned with secularism because he was convinced that organized religion and even the religious outlook were opposed to democracy. According to Nehru "organized religions invariably become a vested interest and thus inevitably a reactionary force opposing change and progress". The religious outlook, he believed was the enemy of clear thought, for it is based not only on the acceptance without demur of certain fixed and unalterable theories and dogmas but also on sentiment and passion ... it is narrow and intolerant of other opinions and ideas.

The problem of secularism in India led Nehru to initiate measures, like the codification of Hindu personal law where ever he felt that the climate was suitable for them. He would have been happy and Human rights a little more meaningful to Muslim women, if the Muslim community in India had been ready for a modernization of its personal law. This would have been possible if there had been a vigorous movement for social reform among the Muslims of India as there had been one among the Hindus in the nineteenth century. Nor is there yet a sufficiently large educated middle class among the Muslims of the sub – continent which by the very nature of its being would have been the precursor of a renaissance in Muslim society. Those who represented Muslims in the national movement perhaps that was why Nehru did not press for a reform of Muslim law, though it has already been modified in certain important respects in some Muslim majority countries, including even Pakistan. Being a democrat, Nehru did not wish to force reform till the necessary ground was prepared by the spread of education among the Muslims of India, only then will a new leadership with a modern orientation arise among them and the process of the modernization of Muslim society and its participation in India's National life will be possible. Already there are signs of such development.



However, others too have a responsibility in this respect the few educated and modern Muslims that are there in India suffer from a peculiar handicap. They are too few yet to make an impact on their society and are therefore in a sense alienated from it. At the same time, the Hindus have not done much to draw them out and make them feel at home in the larger culture that is developing in India consequently, most of them feel isolated and in capable of contributing to our national life either through direct participation in it or indirectly through promoting the social and cultural progress of their own community. It is for the Hindus to ensure that their talents and idealism do not go waste because of the tradition of insularism rooted in caste. That is the only way of keeping alive the idea of secularism that Jawaharlal Nehru stood for.

References:

- Jawaharlal Nehru, 1946, Discovery of India.
- B. L. Grover and Alka Mehta, 2008, Modern Indian History.
- M. M. Sankhdher, 1992, Secularism in India Dilemmas and Challenges.
- V. K. Sinha, 1968, Secularism in India.
- A. B. Shah, 1968, Jawaharlal Nehru and Secularism.