

Revisiting Secularism in India: An Indigenous Approach for Communal Harmony

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India is one of the developing nations of the world. It is declared as sovereign democratic country since last seven decades. During this period, India has been engaged in to various efforts to attain growth and development in various sectors. However, there are many areas, where Indian society still facing varieties of problems. Some of these problems have their roots in colonial past, while others are related to demographic changes, socio-political conditions and cultural processes. This paper will talk about social problems in contemporary Indian society.

Social Problems

According to Wales & Furfey Social problems can be defined as, “a deviation from social ideal; remediable by group efforts.” Merton & Nisbet (1971:184) stated social problems as “a way of behavior that is regarded by a substantial part of a social order as being in violation of one or more generally accepted or approved norms.”

Hence, in social problems, there are mainly three conditions: 1) a situation which is socially undesirable or abnormal; 2) cause dysfunction of society as whole; 3) and one which is remediable by group efforts.

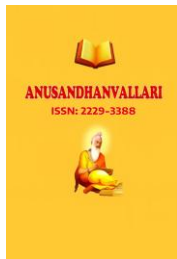
On such background, many social scientists and researches on social problems in India focus on various issues prevalent among Indian societies. Majority of these researches highlighted issues like poverty, unemployment, illiteracy etc. as social problems. It is well known that these are the traditional social problems, which is still facing by India.

As time passes, certain new problems are evolving and accompanying growth and development. In the era of globalization; mass production, tremendous scientific and technological advances, great ideological divides, shifting and novel forms of habitats, social relations and social institutions have undergone a complete metamorphosis during this period. (Goyal, 1999) On such background, certain problems are gradually evolving as social problems in India. These problems are very complex and sensitive in nature. Among these, one of the problems emerged in Indian society is communalism, which will lead to communal conflict, communal violence. It is gradually emerging over the years.

Concept of Communalism

Communalism as a concept needs to be analyzed and understand again and again in the context of changing global affairs; and in the reference to indigenous. In broader sense, communalism is enmity by one community or religion to another or each other.

“Communalism can be considered an ideology which states that society is divided into religious communities whose interests differ and are at times even opposed to each other. The antagonism practiced by members of one community against the people of other community and religion can be termed communalism. This



antagonism goes to the extent of falsely accusing, harming and deliberately insulting a particular community and extends to looting, burning down the homes and shops of the helpless and the weak, dishonoring women and even killing persons.”¹ To define simply “the opposition to each other’s of religious communities is commonly designated as communalism.”²

Basically, communalism is an ideology, which will extend to extreme level and take a form of communal violence and communal riots. “It is the communal ideology and politic, which the communal politicians and ideologues preach in a normal time. Which form the real basis on which communal tension and violence occur. In other words, communal ideology and politics are the diseases, communal violence only its external symptoms.” (Mohsin Iqbal Najar; 2014) Hence, communal violence is connected to communal ideology or communalism. Behind every communal riot, a strong communal mentality is there.

In India there are many religions and even it is sub divided among it. We can see that communalism or communal ideology in India is recently emerging issue, since 80 years. It is not very old phenomenon. If we trace roots of communalism in India, then it is found that it is very controversial problem. Though, we can find that this problem had emerged during colonial period and gradually evolved in post independence era. “According to some scholars the roots of communalism lay in failure of Hindu and Muslim to fuse their differences and constitute one society. However, exponent of this theory insist that the role of divisive forces in Indian society should not be exaggerated. India had powerful cohesive and unifying elements which often held various socio-cultural communities together.”³(Mohsin Iqbal Najar)

Solution of the problem of Communalism

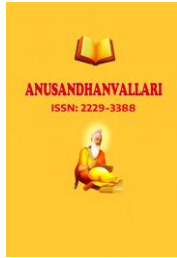
Communalism is result of particular situation (socio-cultural & political) of particular society. Hence very crucial step to overcome the problem of communalism is to understand socio- cultural situation of society and righting it. Second point, as mentioned above that communalism is an ideology and ideology cannot wipe out by force. According to Najar, “*If the communalism is an ideology, it cannot be suppressed by force. No ideology can be suppressed by force. Ideology has to be fought at the level of ideas.*”

Therefore, in 1976 with the 42nd amendment in Indian constitution; the notion of ‘secular state’ or ‘secularism’ came in to existence in India. India had adopted concept of secularism as a remedy to communalism. But, in Indian context this term needs to be more clarity and also proper analysis and interpretation in right manner. Like other concept, it is necessary to make it more indigenous. Hence, this paper proposed proper analysis and understanding of secularism in Indian context is crucial solution of communalism in India.

Secularism in Indian Context

In India, the term ‘secularism’ has been added in to constitution, with 42nd amendment in 1976. Constitutional council was agree that India is a ‘secular’ state and it should remain as ‘secular’, but all have different views on nature of secularism in Indian context or how secularism perceived in Indian society. Prof. K. T. Shah demanded separation of State from any religious activity. While, Prof. Kamath was arguing to understand and perceived ‘Dharma’ at broader level. On this background, this term has been added in constitution. After seven decades of independence, this term is not defined, this leads to confusion. There is no consensus on what is secularism? Therefore, everyone perceives secularism as their own way, which resulted to communal conflict.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Micropaedia volume 9 (1978) describes “secularism as a movement towards ecclesiastic from the non-ecclesiastic. It also says that secularism came into being as a reaction to the tendency of the mediaeval period to regard the activities of human life in this world as insignificant and to



devote all attention to God and the life beyond.” According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, the word secular means ‘related to or pertaining to this world Not to church.’ *The Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* defines ‘secular’ as ‘pertaining to the present world, or to things not spiritual, not concerned with religion, civil, not ecclesiastical.’

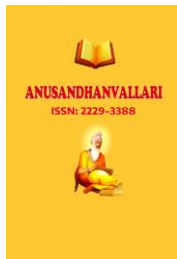
The origin of modern concept of secularism can be trace back in socio-political drama played in European countries, between Roman Catholic Church and Monarchy. Now so far as, India is concerned, there has been no question of supremacy of any political or temporal, religious authority. This nation (Rashtra) always maintained its balance because teaching of acharyas. We have had tradition of discipline, not rule by religious leader. Indian philosophy accepted rule of law or “niyam”, to maintained and regulate whole nation. “State has to function according to the law or ‘niyam’. These laws provide the foundation for the concept of Dharma. The moral and material well being of the people can be ensured by the State by acting according to Dharma.” (Vajpayee A.B)

We find that in Indian philosophy, ‘Dharma’ is understood in broader sense and different from religion. In Mahabharata Duryodhan said, “*janami dharmam na cha me pravrutthih janamyadharmam na cha me nivrutthih*” Which means, I know what is dharma (=righteousness), yet I cannot get myself to follow it! I know what adharma is, yet I cannot retire from it! It reflects very key aspect of Indian society. According to scholars Mahabharata is approximately five thousand years old. And Duryodhan used this term 'Dharma' 5000 years ago, while in Mahabharata they hadn't any mention about different religion. On this background Dhuryodhna used term 'Dharma'. So, here it is necessary to understand the meaning of term 'Dharma'.

According to Vedas, this universe is manifestation of that absolute power, which willed ‘*Ekoham Bahushyamaham*’; “I am one, let me become many!” Hence, according to this philosophy, every object in this universe has same element within them and all have same goal that is to amalgamate in that absolute power. Here we are talking about only human creature. So, in this reference, there are duties of an individual based on understanding of above philosophy towards every entity during this journey towards salvation; to fulfill these duties in all respect is ‘Dharma’ of an individual. Dharma is the assemble of the rules and regulations based on above mentioned divine philosophy, followed in various facets of human life of an individual and the society as a whole. While, to make this journey smoother and fast, after some years, human life had been changed. On this background some colossuses or sages propounded different 'paths' particularly suited to that time and place, based on their experiences, whom we broadly called as 'Gurus' or founder of various that particular religion. They compiled certain ‘niyams’ or 'laws' (which we called as Achar Padhhati) of that particular path, called as Holy Granthas. People started to follow various paths, according to their suitability and interest. These various 'Panthas' or 'Upasana Paddhti' in India called as religion or 'Sampradaya'. Therefore, in India it may possible that people follow different religion, but there 'Dharma' is same. Hence in larger sense we can conclude that in India ‘Dharma’ is a way of life.

Since thousands of years, in India many religions (Sampradaya) has been created but there is no conflict between them. In Indian philosophy it is said that, “*Ekam Sad Vipra bahudha Vadanti*” (Vedic Literature) which mean that the truth is one but sages speaks it differently. Bhartiya jivan Darshan understand this truth and hence there is no point of conflict between these different ‘samprdaya’ or religion. One of the best examples of ‘Sampradaya Sahishnuta’ (so called religion tolerance) of India is Jews, Parsis and Syrian Christians. They all came from outside and settled in various parts, and practicing their religion freely. Even swami Vivekananda said in the parliament of World Religion in 1893, “we go beyond tolerance and we accept all ways of worship to be true.” This concept reminds us of the ancient Indian tradition of liberalism and tolerance.

While, in western society there is only one religion that is Christianity. So, for them concept of secularism as described above [pertaining to the present world, or to things not spiritual, not concerned with religion, civil, not



ecclesiastical] might be suited to that society. As far as India is concerned, it is already imbibe in its nature. It is one of the significant characters of Indian society. Again in the context of constantly changing time, these thoughts or philosophy has been extinct. So, the best solution is to provide this vision to mankind. According to Vivekananda, "Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION which is oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best." (1971:416)

This analysis of secularism is best suited for India, as it is multi-religion and multi-cultural society since long back. This analysis and explanation of word 'secularism' in Indian context will provide a better vision to Indian politics and also to Indian society, which will lead to communal harmony.

Role of Civil Society

Communal conflict as explained above is a result of communalism, which is gradually emerging social problem in India. This paper suggests analysis of term 'secularism' in Indian context, as a solution. But the question is how to implement it and who will propagate this solution in entire society? Hence here comes the role of civil society. Civil society can work at macro and micro level both. As it works at grass root level as well as plays active role in policy making also for the betterment of people at large. Hence to resolve communal conflict, civil society should propagate above explained analysis of term secularism to entire society and political institution also and provide this vision to society. In addition to this, education system plays crucial role for the same. This analysis of term 'secularism' can be propagating by education system. As education curriculum should include clear and precise analysis of term 'Secularism' in context of India. These efforts will lead to communal harmony resulting in to development of community.

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