

Promoting and Propagating Secularism through Gorakh Sutras

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Abstract

Now-a-days secularism is one of the most used words in India. Secularism in India means equal treatment of all religions by the State. With the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution of India enacted in 1976, the preamble to the constitution asserted that India is a secular nation. Secularism is one of the remarkable achievements of independent India. But from last many years, the secular fabric of our society is weakened by divisive forces. The vulnerable factor in India is the deep religious sentiments prevailing among its different religious communities. In such turbulent times, Gorakhsutras propagated by Gorakh Nath Ji, can show us the path of secularism.

Introduction

Secularism in India refers to the equal status and treatment of all religions.

The dictionary meaning of the word 'secularism' is skepticism in matters of religion. But we, in India, use the work in a broader sense. We use the word to mean impartiality or non-interference by the Government of the country in matters of religion. Independent India is one of the largest states in the world of today with a population of nearly 120 crores. This vast population is made up of people professing different religions like Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism Christianity, Zorastrianism etc. and practicing different religious rites. One of India's guiding principles is impartiality in religious matters. India wants her citizens to cling to any religion they like without any government interference. And this noble decision of the Indian Government is unequivocally proclaimed in the amended Preamble to the Constitution of our country which reads as follow:

"We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic", etc.

Background

Secularism and Democracy are two remarkable achievements of independent India. These two achievements have stood the test of time and set the goal of the nation on religious and political fronts. The State, remaining free from religious obligations, can take a tolerant attitude towards every religion and can pursue the ideal of achieving the well-being of the people, irrespective of caste, creed, religion etc.

Recent Challenges and Threats to Secularism in India:

Secularism is, no doubt, an ideal principle. But in practice it is not so easy to follow. The vulnerable point in India is the deep religious sentiments prevailing among its different religious communities. Both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists in India are whipping up this sentiment of the staunch adherents of these religions, most of whom are either illiterate or semi-literate. This is a threat to the Secular principles of India.

India, moreover, has failed to fulfill some of the important conditions laid in the Constitution. Education has not been given the priority that it deserves. The condition of backwardness (3

Ps) poverty, population explosion and pollution (mental and environmental) pollution – prevails in the country in alarming proportions. The fundamentalists fish in this troubled water.

The secular parties, too, cannot exonerate themselves from their share of blame. They cannot ignore the existence of fanaticism in the body politic. It is very often seen that in the time of elections most of the political parties completely forget this noble ideal of secularism and woo the voters even on communal or cast lines. These acts are not done out of ignorance, but are due to compromise of convenience. It is the duty of the secular and democratic forces to rally behind those political forces that really profess and practice secularism. India does not have an official state religion. In matters of law in modern India, however, the applicable code of law is unequal, and India's personal laws - on matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, alimony - varies with an individual's religion. Muslim Indians have Sharia-based Muslim Personal Law, while Hindus, Christians, Sikhs Muslim Indians live under common law. The attempt to respect unequal, religious law has created a number of issues in India such as acceptability of child marriage, polygamy, unequal inheritance rights, extrajudicial unilateral divorce rights favorable to some males, and conflicting interpretations of religious books.

Secularism as practiced in India, with its marked differences with Western practice of secularism, is a controversial topic in India. Supporters of the Indian concept of secularism claim it respects a Muslim person's religious rights and recognises that they are culturally different from Indians of other religions. Supporters of this form of secularism claim that any attempt to introduce a uniform civil code, that is equal laws for every citizen irrespective of his or her religion, would impose majoritarian Hindu sensibilities and ideals, something that is unacceptable to Muslim Indians. Opponents argue that India's acceptance of Sharia and religious laws violates the principle of equal human rights, discriminates against Muslim women, allows unelected religious personalities to interpret religious laws, and creates plurality of unequal citizenship; they suggest India should move towards separating religion and state.

Secularism is a divisive, politically charged topic in India.

Comparison with Western Secularism

In the West, the word secular implies three things: freedom of religion, equal citizenship to each citizen regardless of his or her religion, and the separation of religion and state. One of the core principles in the constitution of Western democracies has been this separation, with the state asserting its political authority in matters of law, while accepting every individual's right to pursue his or her own religion and the right of religion to shape its own concepts of spirituality. Everyone is equal under law, and subject to the same laws irrespective of his or her religion, in the West.

In contrast, in India, the word secular does not imply separation of religion and state. It means equal treatment of all religions. Religion in India continues to assert its political authority in matters of personal law. The applicable personal law differ if an individual's religion is Islam, Christianity, or Hindu. The term secularism in India also differs from the French concept for secularity, namely *laicite*. While the French concept demands absence of governmental institutions in religion, as well as absence of religion in governmental institutions and schools; the Indian concept, in contrast, provides financial support to religious schools and accepts religious law over governmental institutions. The Indian structure has created incentives for various religious denominations to start and maintain schools, impart religious education, and receive partial but significant financial support from the Indian government. Similarly, Indian government financially supports, regulates and administers the Wakf council (Islam), historic Hindu temples, Buddhist monasteries, and certain Christian religious institutions; this direct Indian government involvement in various religions is markedly different from Western secularism.

Issues

Indian concept of secularism, where religious laws supersede state laws and the state is expected to even-handedly involve itself in religion, is a controversial subject. Any attempts and demand by Indian Hindus to a uniform civil code is considered a threat to their right to religious personal laws by Indian Muslims.

Various Views

Writing in the Wall Street Journal, Sadanand Dhume criticises Indian "Secularism" as a fraud and a failure, since it isn't really "secularism" as it is understood in the western world (as separation of religion and state) but more along the lines of religious appeasement. He writes that the flawed understanding of secularism among India's left wing intelligentsia has led Indian politicians to pander to religious leaders and preachers including Zakir Naik and has led India to take a soft stand against Islamic terrorism, religious militancy and communal disharmony in general.

Historian Ronald Inden writes: He writes

"Nehru's India was supposed to be committed to 'secularism'. The idea here in its weaker publicly reiterated form was that the government would not interfere in 'personal' religious matters and would create circumstances in which people of all religions could live in harmony. The idea in its stronger, unofficially stated form was that in order to modernise, India would have to set aside centuries of traditional religious ignorance and superstition and eventually eliminate Hinduism and Islam from people's lives altogether. After Independence, governments implemented secularism mostly by refusing to recognise the religious pasts of Indian nationalism, whether Hindu or Muslim, and at the same time (inconsistently) by retaining Muslim 'personal law'."

Amartya Sen, the Indian Nobel Laureate, suggests that secularism in the political – as opposed to ecclesiastical – sense requires the separation of the state from any particular religious order. This, claims Sen, can be interpreted in at least two different ways: The first view argues the state be equidistant from all religions – refusing to take sides and having a neutral attitude towards them. The second view insists that the state must not have any relation at all with any religion. In both interpretations, secularism goes against giving any religion a privileged position in the activities of the state. Sen argues that the first form is more suited to India, where there is no demand that the state stay clear of any association with any religious matter whatsoever. Rather what is needed is to make sure that in so far as the state has to deal with different religions and members of different religious communities, there must be a basic symmetry of treatment. Sen does not claim that modern India is symmetric in its treatment or offer any views of whether acceptance of sharia in matters such as child marriage is equivalent to having a neutral attitude towards a religion. Critics of Sen claim that secularism as practised in India is not the secularism of first or second variety Sen enumerates.

Author Taslima Nasreen sees Indian secularists as pseudo secularist, accusing them of being biased towards Muslims saying, "Most secular people are pro-Muslims and anti-Hindu. They protest against the acts of Hindu fundamentalists and defend the heinous acts of Muslim fundamentalists". She also said that most Indian politicians appease Muslims which leads to anger among Hindus.

Pakistani columnist Farman Nawaz in his article "Why Indian Muslim Ullema are not popular in Pakistan?" states, "Maulana Arshad Madani stated that seventy years ago the cause of division of India was sectarianism and if today again the same temptation will raise its head then results will be the same. Maulana Arshad Madani considers secularism inevitable for the unity of India". Maulana Arshad Madani is a staunch critic of sectarianism in India. He is of

the opinion that India was divided in 1947 because of sectarianism. He suggests that secularism is inevitable for the solidarity and integrity of India.

Description of Gorakhsutras

Gorakhshnath was a saint during the Bhakti movement and was founder of Nath sect and propagator of Hath Yoga. His sermons compiled as Gorakhvani have sutras which are advising the mankind to be secular as this study identifies:

हिंदू ध्यावे देहुरा, मुसलमान मसीत,

जोगी ध्यावे परम पद, जहां देहुरा न मसीत

Yogi does not pay attention to the temple-mosque. He meditates on the ultimate position. What is the ultimate post, where is it? This ultimate post is within you. The Hindu goes to the temple and thinks that the temple has gone, meditated on the divine, took a bell, worshiped it, put it down, offered two flowers on the statue kept in the temple, bowed his head - the work was completed. Is it so cheap to explain religion? Does such a life change somewhere?

Playing the temple bells will change life? Will the life change instead of bowing in front of statues of stones? If so, it would have been so easy that the whole earth would have been heaven, and that would have been heaven! How many times have you gone to the temple and returned empty! How many times have you gone to the mosque? And how long will this continue?

Then what does Yogi do? Then what is the path of yoga? Thousands of people in temples, thousands of people in the cathedrals, thousands of people in mosques, but some lights do not show up anywhere. Temple-mosques fight inversion; they have become places of politics.

There does not seem to be any glimpse of any peace, nor any joyful feeling is born, nor a festival is celebrated. Nothing moves in the feet; That is what life was like. Therefore, Yogi ignores the temple-mosque, meditates on the ultimate post. What is the ultimate position? Where is the ultimate post? The temple is also outside, the mosque is also out; The ultimate post is within you. God sits within you. And where are you searching out? And as long as you keep searching for it, you will never find it.

Hindu worship “Rama”, Muslims worship “Khuda”

हिंदू आषे राम कौ मुसलमान षुदाइ।

Yogi calls it “Alakh”- that is not even caught in eye

जोगी आषे अलख कौ तहां राम अछे न षुदाइ।।

Call him Rama- he will be small and call him Khuda he will be small

Hindu worship Ram, Muslims worship Lord Khuda. Yogi worship whom? Look up Neither to Ram, nor to God. He does not have any name - no Ram, no God. All names are given by man. That is adjective-zero. That is poker. It is formless. Alkh - that is, not even caught in the eye! Do not listen to ears. Do not touch your hands! Is inexplicable. Call him Rama, then he will be small. Say it to God, it will become smaller. Give him the word, then it will be untrue.

Conclusion

Secularism is the most sought after word in the recent past. People have defined and described it in various forms depending upon the advantages and suitability to them. One can safely say that it is not the most used but most abused word. Keeping in view the recent intolerant and impatient atmosphere in India, the present study has been done to find out whether some wisdom is contained in the Gorakhsutras for promotion and propagation of

secularism. The authors did find such sutras. These sutras if propagated can definitely help in promotion of secularism, which is under threat. The study is only a peep in the deep ocean of Indian wisdom.

Further studies may be required to bring this wisdom to forefront in the present turbulent times. Only such wisdom can curtail the boiling atmosphere in India which is pushing the country to the brink of civil-war. May the secular wisdom prevail!

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