

State of Indian Minorities: Effects on Domestic Politics and Status Abroad the Country

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ABSTRACT

The Indian society's theological, cultural, and ethnic diversity poses both challenges and opportunities for the state's democratic structure. India has used the secularism avant-garde to celebrate the plurality. However, its perceptions of metamorphosis have created a controversy between secular philosophy and the rights of minorities. The presence of religious personal laws; the association of political parties with fundamentalist religious organizations; and the rallying behind the ideology of Hindutva of a large proportion of the Hindu Diaspora are symbolic of the dispute. The purpose of this study is to address the condition of minorities in India and its interface with domestic politics and the position of the country abroad. A sampling look at the Indian experience becomes important in this context due to its ambitions for regional leadership. The paper argues that the security of minority groups in India especially attracts the attention of the world community because of its complicated social fabric that is marked by caste, ethnicity and religious social ostracism.

1. INTRODUCTION

India is proclaimed as a country celebrating 'unity-in-diversity': multi-religious composition and racial and cultural heterogeneity, glued in a common historical and political sense. To celebrate this plurality it has used the vanguard of secularism. For around four decades, the inter-relationship between plurality and secularism has been central to the political architecture of India. However, a tension between secular philosophy and the rights of minorities has been created by its metamorphosing interpretations. The precarious condition of Indian religious minority groups, in particular the violence directed against Muslims in 2002 and Christians in 2013, are signs of this plight in the ties between state, society and religion. Furthermore, the presence of personal religion-specific legislation, the affiliation of political parties with conservative religious groups, and the rallying behind Hindutva philosophy of a large proportion of the Hindu Diaspora are also symbolic of the possible conflict. Whether the state can settle disputes and alleviate tension or is itself part of the issue is a political and political matter. The paper argues that, because of its complex social fabric, which is defined by social ostracism on the basis of caste, ethnicity and religion, the security of minority groups in India especially attracts the attention of the world community.

Minorities in India, and secularism

In principle, secularism distinguishes the state and religion. But, although establishing India as a secular state, the Indian constitution hints at minority rights without explicitly defining the word 'minority' itself. The *sin quo non* for deciphering its impact on the Indian status at home and abroad is a thorough study of the Indian understanding of minorities and secularism.

A window regarding architecture of a minority

Indian society's multicultural life is evident from the fact that it is home to a vast array of ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. The Indian society's composite structure can be divided into "6 main ethnic groups, 52 major tribes, 6 major religions, 6400 castes and sub-castes and 18 major languages along with 1600 minor languages and dialects."

It can therefore rightly be defined as a minority community, but it is overwhelmingly Hindu. Despite the great importance of attaching importance, the word minority lacks a legally recognized meaning. In a non-dominant position, Francesco Capotorti defines a minority as 'numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, whose members, being citizens of the State, have racial, religious and linguistic characteristics that vary from the rest of the population and display, if only indirectly, a sense of solidarity aimed at preserving their culture, traditions, ties. The Indian constitution grants minorities certain rights on caste and language bases and not on religious grounds.

In Articles 29 to 30 and 350A to 350B, the Indian constitution used the word minorities, but refrained from an unambiguous description of the term minority groups within the Indian context. Article 29 of the Constitution describes the minority as 'any segment of people with a distinct script and culture of the language.' But this produces a vague image when a whole majority population, may be considered a minority because of their distinct culture or language, or a majority group may claim the status as well. In particular, Article 30 applies to religious and linguistic minorities in the sense of their right to create institutions of education.

As far as the reservation of seats in the parliament and jobs in the public sector is concerned, it is not based on religion or language or minority status but is based on the disadvantaged position of the scheduled tribe (ST), scheduled caste (SC) or other backward classes (OBCs). Arguably, different aspects of the legitimate rights of minority groups are

discussed in the Constitution of India. In this regard, for each and every citizen of India, Section III of the Indian Constitution guarantees those fundamental rights. Such general rights have a major effect on the security of minorities. In numerical terms, Muslims make up 13.4% of the population, Christians 2.3%, Sikhs 1.6%, Buddhists 0.8%, Jains 0.3% and Parsis a few thousand.

A geographical distribution analysis indicates that four Indian states are home to most of the Muslim population: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Assam. Christians are concentrated mainly in Kerala, the four southern Indian states and the northeastern states, more than 60 percent of the Sikh population in the Punjab, while the big Buddhist concentration is in the state of Maharashtra and Parsis resides mainly in Mumbai. More than 1500 languages are spoken in India with regard to the linguistic framework, while 91 percent of the Indians speak 18 major languages. According to the 2001 Indian census, 16 percent of India's total population consisted of the projected castes that included 'Dalits' also known as Harijans, or 'Untouchables.'

The tribal schedule population makes up 8.2 percent of the total population. It lists 461 groups recognized as tribes, while the number of tribes residing in India is estimated at 635.8. Among the tribal groups, the six largest tribes make up almost half of the tribal population of India. These tribes are: Central India Gonds; West India Bhils; Bihar Santals and West Bengal; Bihar and West Bengal Oraons; Rajasthan Minas; and Bihar Mundas. Some tribes, though considerably smaller, make up the majority of the areas they live in: the Nagas, Khasis and Garos, for example in northeast India.

An Anthology of Indian Secularism

The widely agreed concept of 'secularism' describes it as 'a democratic mode of governance founded on two main principles, fair respect and freedom of faith — and on two operational modes — segregation of church and state, and state neutrality towards religion.' In the Indian sense, the word has a specific meaning as it is typically used in relation to the notion of a secular state. In the preamble of the Indian Constitution, the word secularism was embodied only in 1976 for political purposes by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. However, a precise meaning of the word was missing. There have been different approaches to religion in Indian social history that have been essential to the concept's composition and development.

The developmental phases of Indian secularism can be divided into the following three periods: the initial period of romanticism, the age of pragmatism, and the emergence of "Hindutva." Initially, the romantic underpinnings of secularism in the Indian society flourished with the exposure of Indian intellectuals in the colonial era to Western liberal political thinking. Since the late nineteenth century, Indian political and intellectual thinkers have faced the fundamental problem of discovering or conceiving some universal norms, coherent principles, and common commitments that could bind and hold together the diverse Indian society. Initially, the solution to this question was found in socialist nationalism.

This approach to non-religious secular ideology is primarily identified with early 'liberal rationalist' Nehru and 'dialectical materialist' E.M. Nampoothiripad: Sankaran. They did not see secularism separating religion from politics, but instead retained state neutrality in personal religious choice and interfered by codifying the Hindu Personal Law to protect

the family affairs of the individual. An age of pragmatism begins with the second understanding of secularism, by proponents of Gandhism and other philosophies of 'modern Hinduism' such as Radhakrishnan. It declares the concept of Indian secularism to be an expression of tolerance founded on the conventional Hindu doctrine of religious equality.

Indeed, Gandhi's opposition to the Muslim League's two-nation theory focused on the religious differences between Hinduism and Islam and the country's division resulting from it was religious. Gandhi said: "Partition implies a strong lie." All my soul protests against the belief that Hinduism and Islam represent two ideologies and doctrines antagonistic to each other. For me, agreeing to such a doctrine is a denial of God ... we are all God's children, no matter what name it designates. Therefore, public adherence to post-independence India's policy of establishing secular democracy was described as the provision of only respect to all religions rather than the segregation of religion and state. The 'Great Indian Consensus' was thus formed within a short time, thereby forming a religious-secular India rather than a secular republic.

The third stage heralds the time of the emergence of 'Indian Fascism' or Hindutva ideology. Originally, it began as a nationalist movement under the RSS to overturn Keshav Baliram Hedgewar's 1925 British imperialism and Muslim separatism. Hindutva's ideology was officially resurrected with the advent of BJP in 1980, a period notorious for fostering communal politics. Because of the contradictory existence of their 'civilizing missions,' the developmental stages of secularism led to the creation of a noticeable divide between the Indian nationalist project and the secularized constitution. The former sought to free the newly born nation from Western pressures and ultimately cultural minorities, while the latter sought to accept religious and cultural diversity through secularized constitution and sharing of religion and state.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has some of the main objectives which are illustrated below:

- The aim of this study is to discuss the state of minorities in India.
- This study articulates about the safeguard of minority groups.

3. STATE OF INDIAN MINORITIES

Socio-economic disparities

The Indian constitution aims to protect ethnic groups and other groups that are socially disadvantaged. Under this umbrella, efforts have proven inadequate in the redress of grievances between various groups. The laws do not extend ipso facto to minorities based on religion, a broader reality in the Indian scenario. Reserving quotas in government jobs has proven unsuccessful in stimulating the process of minority social mobility upward. A pertinent example of economic inequality is the Jenukuruba tribe in Karnataka. It lacks a single degree holder and are still residing on the trees despite being 60,000 population. The tribal minorities' general concerns concerned their desire for autonomous status and their below-average socio-economic conditions. The community is orphaned and unable to cope with its complaints and therefore suffer a slow death.

Political representation of Minorities

Indian state secular identity removes the possibility of seat reservation in the electoral process based on religion. Secular identity assumes that, in the multicultural mosaic, Muslims, for example, are a group (not a minority in the classical sense). The Muslim representation, despite being the largest minority, is at the lowest ebb as compared with the results of the 15th and 16th Lok Sabha elections. There are only 23 seats, which means only 4% representation for a demographic that makes up 14% of the population. The number of Muslim MPs had always remained between 20 and 30 except when it was the highest 51 Muslim MPs in 1980 and 48 in 1984. During the period 1984-89, the highest it soared was in Parliament when it stood at 8.4 percent and at one point it dropped to 2.9 percent. At one point, the number of Muslims in the Indian Parliament reached 48.

4. ISSUES OF PERSONAL LAWS

The Hindu majority and the Muslims, Christians and Parsis minority have their own laws of their own. Under Hindu law other religious communities such as Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and tribal and scheduled castes are subsumed. Despite the Sikh's attempts to declare themselves as distinct religions, Jains and Buddhists see them as the offshoots of Hinduism in the Indian constitution. Section 494 of the Indian Penal Code declares bigamy unconstitutional, thereby rendering the person contracting a second marriage guilty of the crime while the first is intact. Cow sacrifice was ruled non-compulsory for the Muslims in the case of Hanif Qureshi vs. State of Bihar, a decision upheld by the state. And on grounds of gender equity, state decisions on the nullification of Christian inheritance laws.

The presence of anti-conversion laws in five Indian states: Gujarat, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh operates under the pretext of protecting marginalised groups from powerful conversions. These laws endanger religious freedom, as it not only limits people's choice or option to change their beliefs, but practically impossible to conversion. The ultimate goal of secularism, which focuses on prohibiting the state from legislation confining its citizens' religious freedom, in violation of the constitutional rights guaranteed by the Indian constitution.

Indian Minorities: Impact on Domestic Politics

The issue of minorities in India has been extensively reviewed with specific regard to three elements: socio-economic inequalities, community abuse, low minority representation in the administrative and political institutions of the country, and a dichotomy of personal laws based on religion. The dismal socio-economic and political conditions of minorities in general, and the Muslim community in particular, in essence contradict India's secular pretensions. In comparison to Western nationalism, the problem with Indian nationalism lies in its traditionally ethnic nature, which has successfully achieved a certain degree of harmony in its society. It is because secularism is specified in majority (Hindu) terms in India that minorities should be characterized by the so-called Indian culture and community, which is basically Hindu, writes Ravi Agrawal. In keeping with the convenience of different political powers, the word secularism remains a matter of varying interpretation.

The Indian political scene has become synonymous, in the midst of the current domestic scenario, with the two divergent

conceptions of secularism as expressed in the political agendas of competing political powers. Second, the conventional mainstream parties, Nehru and Gandhi's secular politics, which have a focus on equitable treatment of minorities. Second, the Hindu nationalists aligned with the rise of Hindutva and BJP is synonymous with the Theodoric character of encouraging community riots.

The impressive BJP victory in the recent 16th Lok Sabha elections: winning 282 out of 543 seats, is marked by the lowest Muslim representation that has remained the largest minority community group ever since independence. The Muslim representation is only 23 seats compared to the results of the 15th and 16th Lok Sabha elections, which means just 4 percent representations for a minority that constitutes 14 percent of the population.

The number of Muslim MP Shads always remained between 20 and 30 except in 1980 when it was the top 51 Muslim MPs and the number was 48.41 in 1984. Conversely, in the 16th Lok Sabha election, there were hardly two Muslim MPs. The lack of political representation of the largest Muslim minority, with an impressive 14 percent of the total population, reduces their say in the legislative process of the country. Furthermore, with its tainted track record, the rise of the BJP to power will place the country in a difficult situation by making the largest minority group feel insecure. Essentially, Indian social life's domestic problems would take their toll by developing a negative outward-world picture for India, hampering India's progress towards realizing its regional ambitions. Gaging the impact of minority issues on India's global status becomes important for study in this context.

5. CONCLUSION

To summarize, secularism acts as a cohesive force in a diverse society like India. It is called upon to fulfill different purposes in a conflicting and variable way as it negotiates between ethnic nationalism, minority rights, liberal individual rights, and identity politics within a very narrow range of choices. In India, in the form of protests, civil wars and genocide, its own socio-political fallacies, as well as the unleashing of religious bigotry, have triggered a great deal of bloodshed. On the contrary, one does not foresee an outcome as the Indian state has engaged minorities as legal minorities, not as citizens. In Indian culture, invoking secularism is rather formal, but what it is in concrete terms has yet to be clarified.

Minority issues are increasingly taking centre stage in Indian politics today, whether in the form of demands for increased political representation or calls to protect multiple religions and cultures in the country. In the future, however, India seems to remain compartmentalized because this division benefits the interests of the leaders of the country who control the state apparatus. Subsequently, the elite and their interests make the state party to the marginalization of the country's minorities. The growth of fundamentalism in India has become another troubling feature in the last few years. Religious bias has been gradually threatening the future communal relationships in the country through the rise of Hindutva. At present, the ruling BJP seems to follow the soft ideology of Hindutva, but there is a very thin line that can be easily crossed towards hard or radical Hindutva.

Instead of pursuing soft or hard Hindutva, India and the BJP will be in support of getting the minorities into the fold by allowing them to preserve their distinct identities. Thus the challenge for India and its newly established government will

be to put processes in place and set up a process that addresses minority groups' concerns. This, in turn, would lead to much-needed peace at home and strengthened reputation abroad. In short, the period of growing interdependence demands

weeding out of parochial thought and adopting an attitude of recognition of the differences from which a country is made up. This successful interweaving of diversity will elevate the country to the exalted throne of a regional or global force.

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