



DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

THE HINDU

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Topic: GS1 - Secularism



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The irrelevance of secularism

Context:-

- A debate has flared up, especially after the **Supreme Court's Sabarimala judgment**, on whether the state should leave religion alone.
- In the Indian context, it is more pertinent to ask whether religion can leave the state alone.
- The relevance of this question is underscored by the **unique definition of secularism** espoused by the founding fathers of the Constitution, namely that the Indian *state must be equidistant from all religions while allowing religions equal space in the public sphere.*

Complexity and Confusion in Definition:-

- First, the formulation was impractical, given the **huge numerical disparity in the religious composition** of the Indian nation.
 - This **demographic inequality** paved the way for the **intrusion**, and **now proliferation**, of majoritarian religious symbols, idioms and practices in the state's domain.
- Second, given the **congenitally religious nature of Indian society** and the consequent political import of identity based on religion, political parties, almost without exception, found it convenient to use religious sectarianism to advance their fortunes.

Religion and Politics in India:-

- The appeal to religious identity, always a part of India's political landscape, has now become much more blatant. For Eg:
 - In pre independence period, the success of the **Muslim League** in hiving off Muslim majority areas from the rest of the country in 1947 on the basis of a religio-sectarian agenda gave a major fillip to Hindu nationalist organisations, such as the **Hindu Mahasabha** and the **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)**.
 - After the **plagiarization of democracy** and breakdown of one party system in 1970s, the ideology of **composite nationalism** take a backseat and caste and religion played prominent role in party politics in all domain. For eg:
 - **policy of dual appeasement** in 1980s: first getting Parliament to overturn the Supreme Court's ruling in the **Shah Bano case** and then by **opening the Babri Masjid**, which had remained closed since 1949, to allow Hindu religious rites to be conducted in its premises.
 - Which culminated in the **demolition of the Babri Masjid** in 1992 followed by **Mumbai riots** followed by **Gujarat massacre of 2002**.

- The intrusion of religion into the state's arena in the form of donning of religious garb by state functionaries while carrying out state duties and participation in religious rites while acting in their official capacity has now become common. The proliferation of cow vigilantism and the anti-Muslim rhetoric of some of the prominent leaders provide further evidence of this trend.
- All party are using majoritarian religion Hindu nationalist agenda in electoral process, they just **differ in degree** as some embracing **soft Hindutva** while other **hard Hindutva**.
- One cannot blame politicians of either party for taking recourse to majoritarian nationalism for this is what currently sells in the **electoral market**.

Why the Framers of the Constitution Adopted This kind of Secularism:-

- Politics is just a reflection of **socio-economic condition** of the country.
- The innate religious nature of Indian society and the after-effects of Partition on religious grounds, at that time complete separation of state with religion was not a good idea.
- All the progressive leaders of that time knows that without **secularisation** of society, western model of secularism won't work in India.
- So India's model of secularism is influenced by **Gandhi's belief of "Sarva Dharma Sambhav"** (religious harmony), **Nehru's modern vision of separation of religion from state** and **Ambedkar idea of protection of minority**.

- The leader of the constituent assembly believed that once, there will be **socio-economic advancement of Indian society**, rationalism will take front seat and supernatural belief automatically will take backseat.
- However development of Indian society was not happen at that level in which **rationality, scientific temper, critical thinking become an unbreachable firewall between state and religion** that would clearly **prevent the intrusion of religious idioms, practices and agendas into the political arena** and **insulate the state from the religious sphere**.

Conclusion:-

- The formula that the state must remain equidistant from all religions, the unique Indian definition of secularism, is unworkable without modernisation or secularisation of Indian society in present situation where democracy is reduced to just electoral process.
- The sooner we realise this reality the easier it will be for all concerned to come to terms with the current trajectory of Indian politics.