

The Resilience of Secularism in India

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Abstract

An essential principle of India's democratic culture, secularism is inscribed in the country's Constitution. Secularism has been remarkably resilient in Indian society, despite several obstacles such as political polarisation, religious fanaticism, and communal strife. This study looks at how institutional frameworks, historical background, and current events have shaped secularism's longevity in India. Drawing from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, such as political science, sociology, and history, the paper explores the elements that make secularism resilient, examines how it manifests itself in different areas of Indian society and suggests ways to strengthen it in the face of changing circumstances.

Introduction

In India, secularism serves as both a fundamental constitutional value and the foundation for the pluralistic society that exists there. India has made an effort to maintain secular values in the face of many religious, cultural, and linguistic identities since gaining its independence. But the path to secularism has not been without its difficulties, including tense times, violent crimes within communities, and political expediency. Secularism has endured as a cornerstone principle in Indian politics and society despite these obstacles. This article examines the historical foundations, current expressions, and prospects of secularism in India to determine how resilient it is.

India's secularism has faced difficulties over the years. India is a republican country that is secular. The idea that religious beliefs should be kept apart from public affairs is known as secularism. The preamble of the Indian Constitution was amended to incorporate the statement that India is a secular republic in the year 1976 when the 42nd amendment was passed. It was passed with the good of the country in mind.

Historical Context

India's secularism began during the freedom movement when patriotic leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi promoted an inclusive and pluralistic national vision. Secularism was a guiding principle adopted by the Indian Constitution's founders to create a society in which people of all faiths may live in harmony.

However, the 1947 Indian partition and the ensuing communal violence presented serious obstacles to secular principles and sparked discussions about the place of religion in public life. Though to differing degrees of success, India's commitment to secularism has been renewed by succeeding governments despite these obstacles.

Institutional Framework

The Indian Constitution offers a strong foundation for secular governance, as well as guarantees for religious freedom, equality before the law, and the separation of church and state. With historic rulings to defend religious minorities and keep secularism safe from intrusions by the government or religious organisations, the judiciary has been instrumental in maintaining secular values. In addition, organisations like the Indian Election Commission have made efforts to guarantee fair competition for political parties, avoiding the manipulation of religious feelings to win over voters.

Contemporary Dynamics

India has experienced increased intercommunal conflict and division in recent times, driven by religious fanaticism, identity politics, and echo chambers on social media. Secularism faces significant threats from the emergence of majoritarian ideologies and targeted violence against religious minorities, which has led to worries about the deterioration of democratic ideals and social cohesiveness. Nonetheless, progressive voices, grassroots groups, and civil society organisations keep pushing for pluralism and secularism to garner support for inclusive laws and interfaith communication.

Manifestations of Secularism

In India, secularism may be seen in many areas of society, such as politics, education, and cultural customs. Through the emphasis on inclusivity and religious tolerance in textbooks, the Indian education system supports secular principles. Furthermore, marginalised communities are frequently given priority in government measures intended to promote socioeconomic development, regardless of their religious affiliations. Literary, musical, and visual arts are examples of cultural manifestations that mirror the eclectic culture of Indian civilization and promote mutual respect and understanding among different cultures.

Challenges and Prospects

Although secularism has proven resilient in India, authoritarian tendencies, religious polarisation, and communal violence remain significant obstacles. Secularism and pluralism face existential threats from the growth of Hindu nationalist ideology and attempts to reinterpret Indian identity along religious lines. Together, we must fight religious fanaticism, advance interfaith cooperation, and fortify democratic institutions to protect secularism. Grassroots activism, media attention, and civil society involvement will be crucial in shaping an inclusive and tolerant future for India.

A thorough examination of the country's history reveals that even the greatest rulers adhered to the principles of inclusion and religious tolerance. The 12th rock edict issued by Emperor Ashoka emphasised respect for all religions and called for their tolerance. Consequently, he became the first known Indian Emperor to keep religion and politics apart. Emperor Ashoka, one of ancient India's most renowned rulers, left behind a legacy of governance marked by tolerance, compassion, and ethical leadership. The 12th Rock Edict, one of his many decrees, is particularly noteworthy as a moving illustration of his dedication to religious plurality and tolerance for other religious beliefs. Celebrated his conversion to Buddhism and his subsequent endeavours to spread dharma (righteousness) and advance the welfare of his subjects, the Mauryan Empire (3rd century BCE).

The idea of religious tolerance was fundamental to Ashoka's conception of government, as was demonstrated by the rock edicts he issued across his empire. The 12th Rock Edict is particularly significant among these decrees because it expresses Ashoka's dedication to upholding religious tolerance and concord amongst various religious sects.

India was a religiously diverse country under Ashoka's rule, with followers of indigenous faiths, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism living side by side. Having seen the horrors of battle, Ashoka himself became a Buddhist, but he also acknowledged the validity of other religious traditions practised by his subjects. In the context of a shattered society emerging from the devastation of war, Ashoka adopted religious pluralism to advance social cohesiveness and moral leadership.

Key Themes of the 12th Rock Edict

The 12th Rock Edict, which is engraved in many places around the Mauryan Empire, highlights several important ideas regarding moral behaviour and religious tolerance. Ashoka calls on his officials and people to treat all religious sects with dignity, abstaining from violence motivated by sectarianism and insulting the beliefs of others. He emphasises the value of religious liberty and exhorts people to follow their beliefs without worrying about prejudice or retaliation. In addition, Ashoka highlights the need of tolerance, compassion, and non-violence as fundamental values that should direct both individual behaviour and governmental action.

Contemporary Relevance

The ideals outlined in Ashoka's 12th Rock Edict are still very relevant in today's world, as societal harmony and peace are still seriously threatened by religious intolerance, sectarian bloodshed, and intercommunal conflict. Respect and understanding amongst religious communities are more important than ever in an era of globalisation and interconnection. Regardless of one's faith or beliefs, Ashoka's message of religious tolerance is a timeless reminder of the need to respect variety and value each person for who they are.

The 12th Rock Edict of Emperor Ashoka is a timeless example of the virtues of compassion, tolerance, and religious plurality. Ashoka's system of government inspires hope in a society too often riddled with religious conflict and bloodshed. Societies can work to create a more inclusive and peaceful future for everybody by learning from the past and adopting the values of respect and understanding for one another.

Akbar's Din-i-ilahi

The following historical instance occurs during Akbar's reign. A syncretic attempt was made to combine parts of many religions in Akbar's Din-i-ilahi. This attempted to provide individuals of various faiths with a shared moral and ethical framework. But everyone has the right to practise their religion freely.

Emperor Akbar founded the distinctive and syncretic Din-i-Ilahi, or the "Religion of God," in India during the Mughal dynasty. This article explores the Din-i-Ilahi's historical background, tenets, practices, and role in forming mediaeval India's religious landscape. It delves into the reasons behind Akbar's creation of this diverse religion, its theological foundations, how his contemporaries saw it, and its significance in Indian history.

Amid Mughal India's multiplicity of cultures and religions, Emperor Akbar undertook a risky endeavour to forge a faith that would unite people regardless of sectarian differences. Viewed as a combination of several religious traditions, Din-i-Ilahi aimed to encourage moral behaviour, harmony, and tolerance among his followers. The purpose of this essay is to examine the principles, history, and effects of Din-i-Ilahi on the mediaeval Indian socio-religious landscape.

Akbar oversaw an era of religious plurality and cultural revival inside the Mughal Empire. Acknowledgeable for his liberal attitude and administrative skills, Akbar embraced a variety of faiths, including Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism, to promote religious tolerance. To overcome religious differences and strengthen his imperial power, Akbar founded the Din-i-Ilahi movement in response to political pressures and a diverse range of religious beliefs.

Din-i-Ilahi was distinguished by a system of moral precepts and customs meant to foster moral behaviour, communal harmony, and spiritual enlightenment. Fundamentally, Din-i-Ilahi advocated for monotheistic belief, moral behaviour, and respect for all living things. A council of intellectuals and mystics, comprising well-known Sufi saints and Hindu theologians, was created by Akbar to codify the principles of Din-i-Ilahi and supervise its application. Prayers, fasting, and almsgiving were among the rituals that were recommended to cultivate piety and devotion among followers.

Akbar tried his hardest, but Din-i-Ilahi was never widely accepted outside of the Mughal court and aristocratic circles. It was met with mistrust by many who saw it as an imperial propaganda tool or an attempt to challenge long-standing religious traditions. Furthermore, Akbar's successors were unable to maintain the Din-i-Ilahi movement's momentum because they lacked his visionary leadership. Din-i-Ilahi, however, made a lasting impression on Indian history and is a reminder of Akbar's eclectic outlook as well as his attempts to promote religious understanding and tolerance.

The legacy of Din-i-Ilahi serves as a heartbreaking reminder of the possibilities for interfaith discussion, mutual respect, and cultural synthesis in an era characterised by religious intolerance and sectarian warfare. Akbar's support of religious plurality and inclusive government provides important insights for promoting harmony and cohabitation in contemporary heterogeneous countries.

A daring and innovative attempt to bridge religious divides and create a syncretic faith that welcomed the diversity of India's religious landscape can be seen in Emperor Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi. Even though its influence was maybe limited at the time, its legacy lives on as a reminder of the persistent efforts to promote harmony, understanding, and tolerance in the face of religious disagreement and diversity.

The next stage of the Arab invasion demonstrated the Indians' devout mindset. When the Arab kings humiliated their subjects and made them embrace Islam, they would sooner die than give up their faith. Thus, it is clear that India has historically been a home of many different religions. The early mediaeval Arab invasion of the Indian subcontinent was characterised by several elements, including military might, economic aspirations, and religious zeal. The Arab invaders' religious policies in India are largely to blame for the invasion's difficulties and failures, even though it began with major gains and the creation of Islamic sovereignty in some areas.

Religious Intolerance

Their strict religious policy, which was marked by intolerance for native religions like Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, was one of the main reasons behind the Arab invasion's failures in India. Arab conquerors frequently treated non-Muslims unfairly, forcing them to convert to Islam, demolishing their temples, and imposing jizya (a tax on non-Muslims) as a form of discrimination. This strategy increased opposition to Arab authority and alienated significant portions of the Indian populace.

Social Cohesion

Additionally undermining attempts to create social cohesiveness and integrate varied communities into the newly captured regions were the religious policies of the Arab conquerors. They sowed discord and animosity amongst various religious and cultural groups by enforcing Islamic laws and

customs without taking into account regional customs and traditions. This exclusionary attitude impeded the development of sound political systems and fueled internal strife and uprising

Economic and Exploitation

The religious policies of the Arab invaders frequently put economic exploitation ahead of the well-being of the native populace. Their repressive tax laws and discriminatory treatment of non-Muslims hindered economic growth and development even as they built trade networks and took resources from conquered areas. This strategy increased unhappiness among the native populace and threatened the long-term viability of Arab authority in India.

Resistance and Revolts

The religious policies of the Arab invaders sparked considerable resistance and uprisings among the Indian population, especially in areas where the Buddhist and Hindu faiths were well-established. The stability and authority of Arab monarchs were put to the test by multiple upheavals and rebellions that were ignited by the imposition of Islamic orthodoxy and the suppression of indigenous religious practices. Driven by a strong feeling of religious and cultural identity, these resistance groups eventually reduced the influence of the Arabs in many regions of India.

Fragmentation and Decline

The Arab conquest of India eventually caused their territories to become divided and their influence in the region to wane. The unity and might of the Arab rulers were undermined by their inability to adapt to the religious and cultural variety of India, as well as by internal conflicts and outside influences. The gradual fall of Arab control in India and the rise of indigenous dynasties were made possible by this fragmentation.

Though India has a large population following Hinduism, other religions are also given equal importance. Secularism promotes the equality of religions. The people are provided the freedom to follow any religion as their fundamental right. It is notable that only due to secularism, the laws framed and posed by the government are common to all subjects irrespective of their religion.

In the guise of jihad, Pakistan, an Islamic country, carried out numerous terrorist strikes against India. However, India has always offered assistance to Pakistani refugees and has not harmed the local Muslim population. Additionally, all religious holidays have been designated by the government. India therefore stands out as exceptional in the global arena for being a secular nation. However, recent events have demonstrated that secularism is under attack within India. Religious fanaticism is a major tool used by certain political parties to sway voters.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the strict and intolerable religious policies of the Arab invasion, which harmed social cohesiveness and economic development while alienating the native populace, can be partly blamed for the invasion's failures in India. In the end, the Arab conquerors played a role in their demise in the subcontinent by ignoring the rich religious and cultural variety of India and imposing their religious orthodoxy. India's democratic spirit is still based on secularism, which reflects the country's dedication to social justice, diversity, and pluralism. Based on India's rich cultural legacy and constitutional values, secularism has demonstrated extraordinary resilience in the face of many obstacles. India can sustain democracy and pluralism for future generations and reaffirm its commitment to secularism by establishing inclusive institutions, encouraging interfaith discussion, and encouraging civic involvement.

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