

An Overview of Secularism and Religious Freedom in India

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Abstract : Secularism, understood in the western sense, is the rigorous separation of church and state. The situation in India is very different from that in the West in that religion plays a major part in people's personal life. There is no distinction made between any faith and others in India. In India, discrimination based on religion is illegal and religious freedom is a basic right. In addition to the religious freedom guaranteed by the Indian constitution, this study attempts to examine several conceptions of secularism in India. Moreover, it provides an overview of the significance of both secularism and religious freedom in India. Our country's founding fathers ensured religious freedom as a basic right in the Indian constitution. The Indian constitution is well-equipped with a secular character, prohibiting discrimination based on religion, even though it did not contain any secular words when it was adopted. Furthermore, Nehru and Gandhi's concepts of Dharm Nirpekshata and Sarva Dharma Sambhava, respectively, have been a route towards realizing and comprehending the ideas of secularism in India. Various scholars have offered differing perspectives on the type of secularism that would be appropriate in the Indian setting. As a result, this essay emphasizes and provides a summary of religious freedom and secularism in the Indian setting.

Keywords: India, ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts, communal harmony, identity politics, economic disparities, conflict resolution, national unity, diversity, interfaith dialogue.

Introduction - India has always been a multicultural melting pot due to its diverse range of cultures, languages, and faiths. But this variety has also caused friction, which has resulted in a number of clashes between different ethnic and religious groups (Kofi, 2021). With an emphasis on the origins, effects on society, and historical evolution of these wars, this article seeks to offer a thorough examination of them. India, a country well-known for its diverse range of cultures, languages, and faiths, provides evidence of how well variety can coexist. However, underneath this beautiful tapestry is a past tainted by religious and ethnic tensions that have occasionally threatened to tear apart the country's fundamental fabric. The present research essay undertakes a thorough investigation of these disputes, revealing the complex dynamics that underlie their genesis, continuation, and influence on Indian society (Kazmi, 2023). The partition of British India in 1947 and the brushstrokes of colonial authority are visible on the canvas of India's past; these events carved out sharp religious divisions. The aftermath of this division, which was marked by millions of people migrating and the establishment of Pakistan and India (Rajan & Kumar, 2020), prepared the ground for more conflicts stemming from religious identity. Studying the past

reveals how these early earthquakes continue to influence tensions now, emphasizing how important it is to comprehend the historical roots of India's ethnic and religious conflicts. Sociopolitical intricacies are at the core of many conflicts, amplifying already-existing differences and creating new ones. The emergence of identity politics, driven by rivalry for resources and electoral dynamics, has created an environment that is conducive to manipulating public opinion. Ethnic and religious affinities are being used as political weapons in a climate created by the discourse of difference and the falsification of historical accounts (Maoz & Henderson, 2020). Given this, it is critical to analyze the socio-political processes that intensify conflict and obstruct efforts to promote national unity. The shadow of economic inequality, a powerful instigator of discontent, covers the edges of these confrontations. Ethnic and religious identities are intricately intertwined with economic inequities and unequal access to healthcare, education, and opportunities. This junction feeds the flames of strife by adding to the feeling of unfairness and exclusion. Upon scrutinizing these economic fault lines in detail, it becomes evident how crucial fair development is to promoting social peace (Bulajic, 2023). We traverse the tumultuous seas of India's historical

conflicts by closely examining notable case studies, such as the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the Gujarat riots. These case studies provide a prism through which to examine each conflict's actors, outcomes, and underlying reasons. By examining the connections between these occurrences, we can uncover important information about the processes that lead to conflict escalation. But these confrontations have effects that go beyond the short-term instability they cause. They erode the fundamental pillars that support the structure of a prosperous society, casting a lengthy shadow over the monument of national unity. Community violence leaves profound wounds that erode trust and collaboration amongst various populations (Yoder, 2020). We are compelled to look for comprehensive solutions that heal the divisions and open the door for an inclusive and unified India as we consider how these disputes will affect the course of the country. The media, education, and civil society play a crucial role in providing optimism in the face of these obstacles (Natil, 2022). The goal of concord is greatly aided by initiatives that support interfaith communication, dispel prejudices, and increase understanding. A model for constructing bridges over problematic waterways may be found in grassroots initiatives that unite disparate communities and allow them to work together and coexist. We set out on a voyage of reflection and investigation as we negotiate the maze of ethnic and religious strife in India. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical legacies, socio-political dynamics, and economic underpinnings, this essay aims to elucidate the intricacies that characterize India's trajectory towards a future that is both peaceful and inclusive (Natil, 2022).

India is described as a secular, democratic, socialist nation that upholds equality and human dignity in the preamble of the Indian Constitution (Palathinadiyil, 2020). Even though most people in India are Hindu, the country was not religiously affiliated. Additionally, theocratic republics such as Islamic Pakistan on the east and west, Hindu Nepal in the north, and Buddhist Sri Lanka in the south surrounded the country. Regarding the preservation of religious plurality, the Indian Constitution's founders were extremely clear. India has no official state religion, despite the fact that the word "secular" was not used once in the original constitution (Srivastava, 2022). India provides equal freedom to all religions and respects them all. The founders of the Constitution envisioned a multi-cultural society with religious pluralism that went beyond simple tolerance to include the peaceful coexistence of all religions as well as the freedom of religion as a basic right (Singh & Saxena, 2021).

India is a fascinating mosaic of variety, an old continent where many different cultures, languages, and beliefs coexist (Babb, 2020). However, underneath this colorful tapestry, there is a continuous undercurrent of religious and ethnic tensions that has occasionally endangered the

nation's unity. This academic paper takes readers on a fascinating journey into the core of these disputes, revealing the many threads that together create this complicated web of strife within the Indian setting. India's history is laced with periods of extreme change and turmoil, leaving behind lingering shadows that influence the nature of modern conflicts. Colonialism's aftereffects and the seismic partition events of 1947 continue to resonate, leaving an enduring mark of communal conflicts on the national psyche (Vinod, 2023).

One of the first foreign religions to reach India was Judaism. Despite being a minority in India, Jews did not face any anti-Semitic incidents from the majority population. Thomas the Apostle brought Christianity, the third most popular religion in India, to the country when he traveled to Kerala in 52 AD. There is a widespread assumption that Christianity originated in India around the sixth century AD, yet the exact origins of Christianity in India are still unknown.

The nation's pre-existing religious plurality and diversity suffered greatly under British control. They used communal politics and a "divide and rule" strategy, which finally resulted in the establishment of a separate country for Muslims (Khan et al., 2022). Despite the creation of Pakistan, many Muslims chose to stay in India and acknowledged it as their motherland. The writers of the Constitution chose a secular state over a theocratic Hindu state to respect the religious plurality of the nation. The liberal-democratic state established by the constitution is challenged by the society's ingrained medieval institutions and customs, which undermine the upholding of human rights.

The freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Indian constitution and largely characterizes Indian secularism (Modood & Sealy, 2021). The Indian constitution addresses religious freedom in two ways: directly and indirectly. Articles 15 and 16 implicitly guarantee religious freedom. The state is declared to be neutral toward any one religion or any belief by virtue of the two Articles, which address the rights to equality and nondiscrimination. Articles 25, 26, 27, and 28 specifically address everyone's right to practice their own or group religion. An individual is entitled to the freedom of religion because of concern for his or her "liberty" and "well-being." The person comes before and above religion, as well as the values of tolerance and equality. It is possible that this is the reason why Article 25 and other constraints on this freedom are the most heavily weighted.

Thinkers with sober minds drafted the Constitution. They established the groundwork for a liberal democratic state in the future. The constitution's several articles explicitly address the essence of religious freedom, encompassing both its societal and personal dimensions. The constitution guarantees religious freedom in a constructive and favorable manner. Although it has certain fair limitations to make it practical and realistic, it is not absolute.

The majority of Indians are ignorant about the precise nature of their constitutionally protected freedom of religion, as well as the legitimate limitations placed on that freedom (Henrico, 2023). It is a significant determinant of public space and life as well as a role in social connections. Since there is no wall between the public and private spheres, religion serves as one of the organizing principles for social, political, and personal institutions as well as individual lives. It establishes relationships both inside and across communities, and unfortunately, religion as an institution has done more to undermine or impede the realization of human rights in India (Marshall, 2022).

The first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Nehru, had believed that as education and development increased, religion's position and influence in public life would naturally decline. Sadly, vote-bank politics led to community politics and the politicization of religion, so that did not occur.

Result and Discussion - The study explores ethnic and religious conflicts in India, revealing their historical, socio-political, and economic roots. It highlights the impact of colonial rule, partition of British India, identity politics, electoral considerations, and communal rhetoric on conflict. Economic disparities, limited access to education and healthcare, and systemic marginalization contribute to conflict escalation. Case studies like the Babri Masjid demolition and Gujarat riots show how religious and ethnic tensions can be manipulated by political actors, media, and social dynamics. The study emphasizes the importance of leadership and responsible media in mitigating or exacerbating conflicts (Marshall, 2022).

The study highlights the complex relationship between ethnic and religious conflicts in India, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the country's cultural diversity and historical sensitivities. It suggests that a long-term vision, involving political leaders, civil society, and citizens, is crucial for fostering harmony. The study also highlights the role of economic development in mitigating conflicts, highlighting the need for targeted policies, inclusive growth, and job creation. Education can also play a crucial role in conflict prevention, promoting tolerance and empathy. The study concludes that overcoming resistance from vested interests, countering misinformation, and managing competing narratives can lead to a more harmonious future in India.

The discussion emphasizes the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, including government, civil society, religious leaders, media, and citizens, to resolve ethnic and religious conflicts in India (Kapoor et al., 2022). It suggests a vision of a unified India, embracing pluralism, acknowledging historical truths, and promoting interfaith dialogue. By recognizing challenges and learning from global experiences, India can foster a transformative journey towards peacebuilding.

Conclusion - The study of ethnic and religious conflicts in India reveals a complex tapestry influenced by historical

legacies, socio-political dynamics, economic disparities, and cultural diversity. These conflicts have a profound impact on social cohesion, economic progress, and India's global standing. Acknowledging and addressing historical wounds is crucial for healing and reconciliation. Socio-political factors, such as identity politics and manipulation of communal sentiments for electoral gains, have exacerbated divisions. However, responsible leadership, unbiased media, and informed citizenry can guide the nation towards unity. Economic disparities and unequal access to resources and opportunities are catalysts for conflict, necessitating equitable development and investment in education and healthcare. In-depth case studies highlight the importance of fostering tolerance, respect, and understanding among communities. The implications of these conflicts for national unity are far-reaching, affecting social cohesion, economic progress, and India's global standing. Conflict resolution strategies, including inclusive governance, interfaith dialogue, responsible media, education reform, and youth engagement, have emerged as key pathways to healing the past and forging a shared future. The journey towards unity requires sustained commitment, introspection, and a willingness to transcend differences in pursuit of a shared vision.

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