

India's National Integration and the Politics of Secularism

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Abstract: *“The events here are secular, but the public is not yet secular-and if it cannot become secular, no greater misfortune can exist.” This early warning by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari remains crucial today. India must consciously embrace secular principles-at home, in schools, and in public spaces-instilling them in the next generation. Every faith embodies core values like compassion, peace, love, fraternity, coexistence, nonviolence, and sacrifice. Spiritual leaders-pandits, mullahs, swamis-should nourish these ideals among followers. Politics must remain separate from religion to support true secularism. The responsibility lies not just with the national education system and teachers but also with family elders. From childhood, children should be nurtured through literature, plays, films, and TV. Friendships and neighbourly bonds across religions must be strengthened, and communities should share each other's festivals and sorrows. Interfaith gatherings, cultural programs, and friendly meetings should be encouraged.*

Keywords: nationalism, secularism, politics, critique, Indian culture, identity.

1. Introduction

India is home to many castes and religions. Hindus form the majority, Muslims are the largest minority, while other religions represent a smaller population without significant political leverage. Muslims, however, do exert decisive political influence due to their numbers.

British rule introduced caste, community, linguistic, and religious identities into politics through reforms like Morley - Minto and Montagu - Chelmsford. Post - independence adult suffrage accelerated this process. Political parties leverage caste and religious blocs for votes, nurturing divisiveness through envy and hierarchy. Religious leaders often politicize faith-e. g., gurdwara committees shape politics; pilgrimage sites like the Golden Temple, Jama Masjid, and Ram Temple become political hubs.

Indian Culture as a Composite Culture

Despite recent political emphasis on “Hindu culture,” Indian culture is inherently composite, shaped by tribals, nomads, and minorities. India cannot be defined by any single religion. Historical events-like the demolition of Babri Masjid triggering riots and polarization-have accentuated Hindu - Muslim divisions. Meanwhile, international incidents involving Muslim leaders are exploited to portray Muslims as regressive and threatening. Fundamentalist fatwas are exaggerated as evidence of Islam's intolerant nature. Yet domestic anti - Muslim violence-such as in Surat, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai in January 1993-received little protest from Hindu nationalists.

Article 44 of the Constitution promised a uniform civil code, but successive governments and parties have avoided enacting it, preferring to prolong identity politics. While the BJP campaigns for a uniform civil code, its ideological mentor RSS historically opposed it.

Erosion of Faith in Religion

Religious scriptures must be critically examined; blind reverence should be challenged. Organizations like the Hindu

Mahasabha have framed nation - building around religious doctrine, forcing non - Hindu faiths to accept Hindu cultural boundaries. Savarkar excluded Muslims, Christians, and Jews from his vision of nationalism. Islamic thinkers like Iqbal and Mauduit reject nationalism, seeing the Muslim community (Ummah) as incompatible with national loyalty and advise Muslims against joining wars fought by non - Muslim nations. Both hardline Hindu and Muslim nationalism threaten India's unity. A uniform civil code would dismantle these divisive identity blocs, but opposition from both camps continues to reinforce their respective agendas.

Secularism

The word “secularism” is overused and misunderstood. It represents the only philosophy powerful enough to counter communalism. Hindu nationalist groups label secularism negatively and misinterpret it for petty politics. True secularism-as envisioned by the Constitution-means a modern, integrated Indian society: separation of state from religion, freedom of faith for individuals, institutional neutrality, and prohibition of religious influence in politics. All religious groups must accept each other's existence. No community can enforce its practices or beliefs on others. Secularism is foundational to national unity; in today's climate of communal tensions and attempts to corrupt Hindu nationalism, embracing secularism is more vital than ever.

2. Conclusion

National unity requires both **social integration** (structural harmony across caste, religion, language, region) and **emotional integration** (shared sentiment among people). Every group that integrates with the nation should contribute to communal unity. Unity must extend across political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Political unity alone-without economic equity-is hollow. Secularism is wrongly equated with Westernization, but that's mistaken. The state must clearly separate from religious institutions and not privilege any single religion. The state should intervene in religious matters only if public order or rights are threatened. Electoral rules should bar candidates who promote any

religion politically or disparage others. Religious organizations aiming at conversion should be banned. Religious belief or conversion must remain personal. Only on the foundation of genuine secularism can we build a truly integrated Indian nation.

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