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Pluralism in Indian context

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Abstract

From the dawn of history, the spiritual came to India seeking wisdom, others came in search of either glory through conquest or wealth through commerce or both. For more than a thousand years, India was at the heart of an intricate trading system in the Indian Ocean. Persians, Uzbeks and Tajiks were followed by the Arabs and Afghans, and finally came the European seafarers. Columbus sought India and died in the belief that he had found in. Vasco Di Gama got his bearings a little more accurately and the. European inflow culminated in the British Raj. We celebrate diversity and pluralism. There are not many countries where a Muslim head of state, a Sikh head of government a Christian leader of the largest political party or a majority representative heading the armed forces would be so taken for granted as to barely cause comment. That is because we have a genuinely pluralistic culture, one when all faiths are equally respected.

Keywords: Pluralism, Arabs and Afghans

Introduction

In general terms, pluralism means the affirmation and acceptance of diversity. The concept is used in wide range of issues like religion, philosophy, science politics, etc. Pluralists think that representative democracy works as well in practice as in theory. They are convinced that public policy emerges from competition among groups. The concept of pluralism originated in the last quarter of 19th century. It was further developed by the German jurist Otto Von Guericke. It shows the importance of social organizations in a state. It not only includes government and law but also social relation between humans and multi-sided human beings. Also, it show that the interest of its Parts. Pluralism stresses the needs of decentralization of power.

Hinduism had been present in India for over a thousand years before the Buddha founded Buddhism in the 6th century BCE. In the 3rd century BCE Emperor Ashoka was moved to embrace Buddhism. From the 8th century ACE onwards the Muslims started down to rule. Guru Nanak (1469-1539) founded Sikhism which sought to integrate Hinduism and Islam. In the 20th Century came Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) who sought to promote integration between the various religious groups in India. The partition of India in 1947 was driven by the demands for two states on the basis of theory that Hindus and Muslims constituted separate nations; while the creation of Pakistan was affirmation of this idea, India remained committed to the recognition of cultural diversity and the possibility of plurality despite a large Hindu majority. Thus, religious pluralism is a proven fact of life in India. Our founding fathers took cognizance of an existing reality. Ours is a plural society and a culture imbued with, considerable doses of syncretism. Our population of 1.3 billion comprises of over 4635 communities, 78% of whom are only linguistic and cultural but social categories. Religious minorities constitute 19.4% of the total. It is this plurality that the constitution endowed with democratic polity and a secular state structure. Thus, religious pluralism is a proven fact of life in India and the framers of our constitution established a secular state by treating all religion equally and having no religion of its own.

India is multi-cultural and a diverse nation with a flourishing history of religious beliefs. Through visits to important sacred rites and exhibitions, and interactions, I learned about the history, practices and contemporary issues related to different religions in India. The time spent in the capital city of New Delhi allowed me to understand the importance of diversity as a founding principal of Indian democracy. From delving into the growth of ancient religion like Islam and Sufi culture, Sikhism, as well as being introduced to the inception of the newer Baha'i faith in India, I steadily acquainted myself with the plural nature of co-existence as well as its challenges in India.

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There was a time as Indians, when we were proud of our values of pluralism and tolerance. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue but it does not require religions to know anything about one another. It is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference. In the world which we live in today, our ignorance of one another will be costly. The whole concept of pluralism and tolerance is under attack along with academic freedom of expression. I would further elaborate this with examples.

- a. The Indian Picasso MF Hussein, the great painter went into a self-imposed exile after threats from Hindu fundamentalists angry at his paintings of nude gods. He died in 2011 with an unfulfilled wish to come back to his home country, even if it was just for one afternoon.
- b. In December 2014, a documentary film, Ram Ke Naam, was supposed to screen at the Indian law society college in Pune. The film was about the politics of religion that drove the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. However, the screening was called off after the college received threats. History is filled with such cases where one can clearly see the tolerance level reducing to zero. Communal violence is quite quotidian for Indians. The Right to freedom is one of the fundamental rights given by the Constitution of India that also includes the freedom of speech and expression. This means, in Principle, that there is creative freedom. But the lives are blurred as to whether Indians have the privilege to use religion as a context, resource or reference point in their creative outputs.

Personally, I believe that being Indian means being confident in our roots. This is not just about what language you speak or religion you practice, but the entire social and cultural set up. My family comes from Bihar, also, I was born here, so the first language I spoke was Hindi and English became the second language. I was born into a Hindu family and as I grew older, I made friends with people having their faith in Islam, Christianity and Sikhism as well. Being a Hindu, I am trying to understand the anomaly of the majority status and having friends from other religions, I'm trying to understand the insecurities they have in their mind. It is quite paradoxical that in this age and era, we stop to think logically when it comes to religion. Indians are happy to borrow, buy or develop progressive ideas in order to grow the economy faster. Modernity is slowly moving in but when it comes to freedom to speak about religion, reasons has taken a back seat. Narendra Modi's election was seen, sadly, a green light by some Hindu extremists to make India more Hindu and to put India's large Muslim minority firmly in their place. Under congress, discrimination against Sikh was direct and brutal. Congress government was responsible for the killing of thousands of Sikh men, women, children and infants in 1984. Most recently former British Prime Minister David Cameron described it as a stain on the post-independence history of India. Here, I am not providing examples of incidents which I have heard or read; rather I would provide part of my conversation to a friend about politics in India. The friend is a Bharatiya Janta Party's blindfolded supporter. On asking "Why do you give your support to the BJP? Friend promptly replied, "quki aapka dharma surakshit hai," which was in itself scary.

The philosophical foundations of the Indian concept of secularism lie in the concept of Dharma which is generally

confused with religion. The word Dharma has various meaning. Dharma is universal. It is a code of conduct for all human beings, for all times to come. The literal meaning of the word Dharma is a foundation, which holds all persons together on which all relationships are based, personal and social. On the other hand, the meaning of religion is quite different from what the concept of Dharma connotes. Religion means belief in divine or superhuman power to be obeyed and worshipped as the creator to the Universe. In this way it is clear that Dharma is not Religion and Religion is not Dharma. The current hindi word Dharma Nirpeksha used as an equivalent of the English word 'Secular' is not correct term because it equates Dharma with Religion which are two distinctly different concepts.

Conclusion

Religion is heavily weighted in favour of the life after death, but Dharma is concerned more with the life in this world than with the other world after the death. Hence, it would be wrong to equate Dharma with religion. The two words are not really synonymous. Therefore the Indian concept of secularism cannot be termed as Dharma-Nirpekshavaad. It would be preferable to call it Dharma Sambhavavaad.

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