

The Concept of Secularism

“There is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it.”

— G.B. Shaw

India is a great country full of diversities of several types. People profession different religions and having different modes of worship, speaking different languages, wearing different dressed and having different eating habits live in it. But in spite of this mind-boggling diversity, there certainly runs through them a definite thread of unity. This unity in diversity is apparent to any intelligent observer in every nook and corner of the country.

When India became independent, our leaders decided to stick to the concept of secularism as enshrined in the traditions of the true Indian culture. Secularism means non-interference in the religious affairs of any community and an equal respect for all religions. Under the Constitution of India, everybody is free to practice the religion of his or her choice. Nobody is allowed to hurt the religious feelings of any of his fellow beings. All religions are equal in the eyes of laws. Religious minorities enjoy a special protection in the country. No majority group is allowed to brow-beat or bully any minority group.

With the passage of time, some political parties and groups started exploiting religion for their vested interests. They started instigating one group against the other. These enemies of the country were actively abetted and aided by some foreign powers who wanted to weaken India. They engineered riots and clashes at various times in various parts of the country in the name of religion. Religious places became centres of political activity and political leaders entered into a new race for creating vote banks amongst the religious groups. While some parties tried to appease and win over the minorities, form in course of time. It was some such situation that made Jonathan Swift write: “We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.”

The entire politics of the country today stands badly polluted. The bogey of religion in danger makes people go berserk and behave like animals. They do not hesitate from killing innocent citizens, elements make hay while communalism rules the roost. The demon of communalism has now grown to a threatening size and the future of the country appears to be doomed.

All this make it incumbent on the people of India to rise to the occasion and see the writing on the wall. Pseudo-secularism propagated by vested

interests must make way for true secularism. The government must be totally impartial. It has not only to be honest but also to be above doubt. All communal parties, without exception should be banned. Nobody should be allowed to exploit the residences or the religious places only. Police and law enforcing agencies should be permitted to freely enter religious places to ensure that these are not misused by anti- social or anti national elements for political purposes. Religious places should not be allowed to put up fort-like high boundary walls. Everybody should have a free access to the sanctum sanctorum. Religious processions should be banned for a period of at least ten years. No speaker should be allowed to make political speeches at religious gatherings. All holidays relating to religious faiths be declared restricted holidays and their number may be specified once and for all. The entire media, radio, television, and the press, should be so geared that they project and propagate only the true concept of secularism. No religious preaching be allowed, directly or indirectly in schools, colleges, universities or other public institutions.

Some of these may appear to be drastic remedies. But serious problems do need drastic steps only. It is the question of the very survival of the country. No group, however strong, can be allowed to hold the country to ransom. The interests of the country, the unity and integrity of India, must take precedence over everything else. We must either act now or perish forever.