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| **from:** | **Faizan Mustafa <mustafa.faizan@gmail.com>** |
| **date:** | **20 February 2015 at 17:16** |
| **subject:** | **Re: Is America Secular? Please Think Straight, Shri Faizan Mustafa** |

**Dear Nath Saheb,**

This was the piece. I am for complete wall of separation between Church and State.

faizan

**How secular is Secular India?**

**Faizan Mustafa, Feb 10, 2015:**

Some Constituent Assembly members wanted to begin the Constitution preamble by invoking God.

India is a secular country with religion occupying the central stage. It is said that political structure of secularism is irrelevant and out of place in societies like India where religions are ‘totalising’ in nature. India’s failure in erecting United States’ like wall of separation between religion and state was the first blunder of our republic. The Republic Day advertisement of original preamble and subsequent statement by the Shiv Sena have revived the secularism debate in India. The controversy gives us an opportunity to critically examine state of our so called secular polity. India was far more secular without word secular in our preamble as with every passing year it is becoming less and less secular after the formal declaration in 1976. 

Secularism is understood to be at the core of modernity. The narrative of secularisation is typically recounted as a story of progress and gradual emancipation from religion through the exercise of reason in the wake of the destructive and terrible sectarian wars that overtook Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. The doctrine of secularism got institutionalised with the historic separation of Church and State by 19th century and eventually became a global norm through colonialism.

We adopted secularism but our state is just overtly religion-neutral and equally promotes all religions. Some members in the Constituent Assembly indeed wanted to begin the preamble of the Constitution by invoking God with the phrase “in the name of God”. Finally the matter was put to vote and strangely God lost in religious India. But though God is not there in the Constitution, God is everywhere. It is disgusting to note that modern, democratic and secular Indian state and its leaders have been trying their best to revive the old traditions of state- temple/mosque relationship. As a result, secular Indian state is fast becoming true defender of faith. If there was any doubt in it, extreme right’s rhetorics of last eight months give ample indications that Hinduism may soon become the de facto religion of the state.

Moreover, even in the Constitution, by not viewing religion as purely private matter, framers had themselves placed it in the public domain and now our state is expected to remain involved in variety of ways with religion. Serious concerns have been expressed about the rising importance/revival of religion in the public space in India. The failure of our experiment with secularism will be the greatest tragedy of the 21st century. The economic prosperity of post liberalised economy is bringing with it what may be called as ‘rush hour of Gods’ as we are helplessly observing the proliferation of new expressions of religiosity. 

The level of religiosity in the country has gone up at least by 30 per cent. One major indicator of rising religiosity is the unprecedented rise in pilgrimages. Pilgrimages today account for more than 50 per cent of all package tours. Minimum 200 to 300 million Indians of various religious persuasions go for pilgrimages to various holy places every year. Even the Supreme Court did not see any wrong if some small amount is spent by the government in giving subsidy to Indian Muslims going for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. 

State is today spending huge amounts on pilgrimage. The Union government spent about Rs 100 million for the infrastructure development for the Amaranath Yatra route. With huge Central government grants, states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Punjab, and Jammu and Kashmir are setting up new ‘pilgrimage circuits.’ The number of registered religious buildings in cosmopolitan Delhi grew from a mere 560 in 1980 to 2500 in 2013, with similar trends reported from other parts of the country. India has more than three million places of worship.

*Rising tide of religiosity*

One may not be against this rising tide of religiosity. But what really frustrates is the resurgence which is taking place not against the grain of secularism but because of our secularism. Indian state has completely forgotten the true meaning of secularism and wants to have very close alliance with religions. No exact figures are available as to the exact amount of funds allocated every year by the various states of secular India. 

The BJP government of Rajasthan in its last tenure gave Rs 260 million for temple renovations and training of Hindu priests. The Congress government of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh was not far behind as it allocated Rs 600 million for the welfare of priests. The Tamil Nadu government had enhanced temple renovation grants from Rs 5 million to Rs 30 million. The Gujarat government under Narendra Modi could not be far behind and therefore no one should be surprised to know that Hindu priests are on the payroll of the state. Muslims have also got huge financial support from the state and similar salary packages are given to imams. The BJP government in Madhya Pradesh is also paying salaries of imams and priests and sponsors old people’s trips to Ajmer and other religious sites.

The Supreme Court also contributed to this state of affairs as it did not consider the Shiv Sena’s promise of “establishing first Hindu state in Maharashtra” an appeal in name of religion. Secularism is truly based on the idea of distinct religious and worldly affairs, it indeed constitutes these two distinct spheres along the lines of the public and private distinction that has been so central to modernity, with religion being consigned to the “private” affair. Ideally, this clear cut differentiation should lead to eventual emancipation from, and therefore, the decline of religion. Will this happen at least at the level of state?

*(The writer is Vice-Chancellor, NALSAR University of Law,Hyderabad)*