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Opinion

Want to preserve secularism in India? Well, preserve the Hindu ethos first

Secularism in the Indian context would mean maintaining equidistance from all religions. Unfortunately, that equidistance never happened.

ASHWIN SANGHI   9 August, 2020 2:47 pm IST

August 5, 2020 marked the *bhoomi pujan* of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. I have noticed that many have been genuinely anguished by this event. Some have been bemoaning it as the death of secularism in India.

I consider myself to be secular, so why do I do not see it that way?

What does the term 'secular' mean?

Strictly speaking, secularism means separation in entirety of church and state.

In a secular nation, the government must stay away from anything religious. But isn't it odd that the word 'secular' was not part of the preamble to the Indian constitution when it was originally adopted?

Why was such an important word left out? As I see it, the omission was deliberate. What is even more surprising is that the two people who guided the drafting of the preamble of the Constitution were BR Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru, whose secular credentials were unimpeachable.

To be secular in the truest sense of the word, the Indian state would have to stay out of the religious ambit completely. And this was almost impossible.

How could Indian courts recognise Sharia-based Muslim Personal Law while claiming to be secular? How could Central and State governments take over the management of Hindu temples if they were secular? How could a secular government provide financial assistance to educational institutions run by religious organisations? How could a secular government codify and modify Hindu personal law? How would the government extend the existing caste-based reservations to minority religions if it were secular?

These and many more such actions would clearly fall outside the remit of a secular nation. The writers of the preamble realised that it was better not to use the term rather than to use it dishonestly.