Jawaharlal Nehru as a Secular Humanist

4. Jawaharlal Nehru as a Secular Humanist

The word 'Secularism' is derived from Latin word 'Saeculum' which means 'of this age ....... ' 'related to this world' etc. In the Encyclopedia Americana it is defined as an ethical system founded on the principles of natural morality and independent of revealed religion or supernaturalism. It arose and developed at a period when the relations of science and religion were beginning to be regarded as directly opposed to one another. Secularism held that its principles could be established and sustained by the intellect. It deals with the known world interpreted by experience and neither offers nor forbids any opinion regarding another world. Thus secularism and religion were defined in mutually exclusive terms.

In the West the concept of secularism had its genesis in the conflict between the church and the State in the Middle Ages. This friction was intensified after Martin Luther revolted against Roman Catholicism. Consequently, secularism became popular as a new socio-economic and political ideology in the West. In due course, the goal of secularism as a philosophy became complete separation of the Church from the State. Thus the Western concept of secularism imply an anti-religious attitude. With the Age of Reason, Industrial Revolution and the Creed of Marxism, several national
polities have freed themselves from the theological control and taken road to secularism.

The concept of secularism was not planted in India from the West. The Western concept of secularism implying anti-religious ideology cannot be applied to India because ours is a multi-religious and multi-racial society. Secularism in India does not exclude religion. On the contrary, it promotes peaceful co-existence of all religions. The attitude of 'live and let live' became characteristic of India's ethos and that is responsible for the popularity of all those religious cults and movements in India.

In India, secularism was woven into the fabric of her ancient society. From the dawn of her history, India has given to the world the message of brotherly love and universal compassion. It is because of this ethos of tolerance and culture of secularism that centuries ago, Christians, Jews and Parsis found no difficulty in finding a home in India. The tradition of tolerance was thus found to be existing in India since time immemorial. This is clearly pointed out by Sri Radhey Mohan when he wrote, "India, has never been a theocratic state. In ancient India, the concept of a just state was where the ruler did not discriminate among his subjects following different religious faiths and allowed them complete freedom to lead the kind of life they opted for - religious,
cultural, or any other, with one single provision, that their life style wouldn't impinge on other peoples' way of living." 

The spirit of India has been one of assimilation of various elements that came into this country. As a result of the historical process, India evolved a composite culture which meant the blending of separate elements into a single whole. Though the fount head of our culture and heritage have been Vedas and Upanishads, they have been further enriched by Sufi and Bhakti Movements. These movements were led by such leaders as Baba Farid, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Tukaram and Mirabai and they gave a tremendous impetus to the bringing of the people of various communities closer. As L.M. Singhvi points out, "The great poets, philosophers, mystics, savants, saints and writers from our hoary past to our own age have together woven, thread by thread, and stitch by stitch, the secularist motifs of responsive tolerance and universal humanism in the tapestry of Indian life and thought. The strength of these motifs is in real sense, the strength of secularism in India..... In these teachings lie the spiritual mainsprings of our secularism as well as social and ideological validation of our secular constitutional arrangements." 

It is because of this connection of

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secularism with ancient spiritualistic tradition of India, that Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and many other thinkers regarded secularism in India as a religious and spiritual doctrine.

With the possible exception of Aurangazeb, the Mughals, who entered and settled in India also adopted secularism as a principle of State policy. During the Mughal period there was an intermingling of Hindu and Islamic civilizations which resulted in a rich cultural fusion. Our composite culture thus represents a vibrant combination of various strands. Secularism, therefore, blossomed out of a composite culture and the people of India are rightly proud of it.

Although the spirit of secularism was undermined during the British rule, it could not be totally defeated, and it found powerful revival during the struggle for independence. During the freedom movement, secularism reappeared and it united the followers of different religious traditions in their fight against the foreign domination. The focus there was on a policy which neither favoured nor discriminated against any religion, but gave all of them full opportunity to develop. The Indian National Movement under the leadership of Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and many others and under the cultural inspiration of men like Rabindra Nath Tagore and Subramanya Bharati inspired the people. A new consciousness of cultural synthesis and respect for all religions emerged as result
of this. Gandhiji believed that by according an equality of status to all religions, and structuring secular politics on this premise, it would be possible to lay the basis for a cohesive nationhood within Indian society.

Much before independence, Nehru played a heroic role in the development of a secular basis for the Indian polity. As a firm believer in the secular character of the State, he repeatedly affirmed that it must be religiously neutral. He drafted the Karachi Congress Resolution in 1931 which declared that "state shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions."3 It was in this resolution that Nehru's secularism found expression for the first time. According to him, the equality of religions needed to be confined to the private domain and the political domain could best be regulated on the basis of distributive justice wholly unrelated to the religious sensibility of man. Thus the spirit of secularism was enriched during the days of our long freedom movement. The legacy of national movement was to transform India from an ancient civilization to a modern State and its leaders adopted different ways and means to achieve this objective.

It was mainly due to Jawaharlal Nehru's efforts that India emerged as a Secular State. For him, secularism was essentially a social ideal to be promoted

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3 Jawaharlal Nehru. 'The Unity of India' (New York: Johnday & Co., 1948), p.466.
in the interest of national unity and progress. Nehru favoured a strong secular base for the state primarily for the maintenance of social stability and religious harmony among diverse groups. It was his firm conviction that a secular state alone could serve a community with diverse religious creeds and faiths. Secularism has been the most effective cementing force in the context of meeting the demands of multi-religious, multi culture, and a multi-lingual society like India. The concept of secularism is also relevant in the process of nation building. Without secularism as a binding force, uniting the citizens of India, we cannot imagine to construct the polity of India in the right perspective.

**Secularism as an aspect of modernization**

Secularism beside being a pre-requisite to the presentation of the new Nation's integrity is also a necessary aspect of modernization. It was Jawaharlal Nehru's scientific and humanistic outlook that was manifested in his articulation of secularism. He regarded secularism to be essential for making India a modern and democratic society. He believed that this was the only way to make the country stable, strong and united. He was vehemently opposed to the idea of theocratic state, which in his view, was both medieval and anti-democratic in character. "It was given up by the world some centuries ago and
has no place in the mind of modern man."\(^4\) As far as modern India was concerned, it was impossible to go back to that conception which the world had outlived and that which was completely out of tune with modern outlook. The necessity of the secular state arouse also from certain practical considerations. The Government of a country like India with its plurality of religions can function satisfactorily in the modern age only on a secular basis. The progress of a state depends on national unity and solidarity. If special status was given to one particular religion, it would create a feeling of suspicion among the adherents of other faiths and it will inevitably lead to friction and conflicts. Thus, secularism in India was the need of the society and country as a whole. It was essential for peace, unity, integrity and progress.

**Jawaharlal Nehru's concept of secularism**

Jawaharlal Nehru may be regarded as the architect of Indian Secularism. According to him, a secular state means a state in which the state protect all religions, but does not itself adopt any religion as state religion. It does not mean that the people should give up their religion. So secularism in India is not anti-religions but it gives equal respect for all religions, i.e., not mere tolerance but positive respect. Nehru declared, "we are building a free secular state where

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every religion and belief has full freedom. This form of secularism which respected the religion of all individuals was designed to ensure the emergence of a strong and cohesive polity in India.

Secularism, for Nehru, stands for the broad, liberal and humanistic outlook which makes it possible for man to rise himself above religion. It is opposed not to religion, but to communalism, fundamentalism and fanaticism. It does not deny religion, but disapproves the tendency of thinking in terms of my religion and your religion. This idea becomes clear in Nehru's statement that "it (secularism) does not obviously mean a state where religion is discouraged. It means freedom of religions and conscience, including freedom of those who have no religion, subject only to their not interfering with each other or with the basic conception of our state........... The word 'secular', however conveys much more to me although that might not be its dictionary meaning. it conveys the idea of social and political equality." In simple words, Indian secularism means a protection and equal treatment of all religions and absence of State religion. It does not stand for the abolition of religion, but only for the separation of state and religion.

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Secularism is a philosophy of life and its ideal is progress in human life in the present world irrespective of man's religion, sect, caste, colour and creed. It does not accept anything which makes difference between man and man. Humanism based on reason and not on religious dogmas is the salient feature of secularism. Pt. Nehru's secularism was rooted in his concept of democratic humanism. He subscribed to a secular view of life. Secularism, according to him, was not only a political doctrine but a social one of revolutionary character embracing all religious and communities in India. It contained spiritual elements as well. He stated "...... secular philosophy itself must have some background, some objective other than merely material well-being. It must essentially have a spiritual value and certain standards of behaviour."\(^7\)

The ideal of secular state implies a social structure in which the individual is not subject to the social inequalities imposed by religious sanctions. Religious attitudes may hamper the growth of a free atmosphere, necessary for the building up of a democratic and secular state. So Jawaharlal Nehru was opposed to a theocratic state. He wanted to establish a secular state and society based on justice and equality. He defined it as a state which "protects all religions, but does not favour one at the expense of others and does not itself

adopt any religion as the state religion."\textsuperscript{8} What he envisaged was an Indian brotherhood in which the practise of religion should be a personal matter, where a difference of religion would not raise a barrier between man and man. Religion was not debarred from public life but it was dissociated from the state. The spirit of religious tolerance was thus combined with strict neutrality of state to all religions and a clear demarcation of religious and secular spheres with an autonomy of the latter. Thus, Indian secularism as framed by Nehru does not exclude religion, but it promotes peaceful co-existence of all religions.

Nehru was secular to the core of his heart and he stood firmly for it. He constantly worked for its dissemination in the society. He emphasized that no religion should have any privilege and no community should be deprived of its legitimate rights on the basis of religion. Broadcasting from New Delhi on 14th February 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru said "India is a common home to all those who live here, to whatever religion they may belong - they have equal rights and obligations. Ours is a composite nation."\textsuperscript{9} Again on October 22nd 1948, he made it clear that "we are building a free secular state where every religion and belief has full freedom and equal honour, whose every citizen has equal liberty


and equal opportunity."\textsuperscript{10} Thus Nehru wanted each Indian citizen to be recognized by his citizenship rather than by his religious identity. This spirit is evident in the constitution itself since its emphasis is on individual citizenship rather than religious affiliation.

**His attitude towards Religion**

Nehru was by no means against religion as such, but he was deeply conscious of the harm which it had done to India. According to him religions might cause obstacles in the moral and spiritual progress of a nation. A new India could not be built upon the watery foundations of supernaturalism and orthodoxy, which were the consequences of faith in religion, according to Nehru. Hence he was inclined to establish a secular society based on justice and equality inspite of an intensely religious atmosphere of India. He was hardly attracted by religion except as a cultural force and heritage. He says, "But the usual religious outlook does not concern itself with this world. It seems to me to be the enemy of clear thought, for it is based not only on the acceptance without demur of certain fixed and unalterable theories and dogmas, but also sentiment and emotion and passion. It is far removed from what I consider spiritually and things of the spirit, and it deliberately or unconsciously

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. p.40.
shuts its eyes to reality ......

"He was definitely against organised religion, since according to him, "organised religion invariably becomes a vested interest and thus inevitably a reactionary force opposing change and progress." It was his considered view that people's involvement with organised religion was the main stumbling block in the way of India's progress.

Nehru opined that religion often comes into conflict with reason. Religion as practised, either deals with matters unrelated to our normal lives and thus adopts an ivory tower attitude, or is allied to certain social usages, which do not fit in with the present age. To him religion seemed "to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation, and the preservation of vested interests."

Focussing light on some of the negative aspects of religion, Nehru pointed out that "religion as I saw it practised, and accepted even by thinking minds, whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science. There was

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12 Ibid.

an element of magic about it, an uncritical, credulousness and a reliance on the supernatural.\textsuperscript{14}

As essentially a man interested in the present world, Nehru felt that organised religion did not help and even hindered the moral and spiritual progress of people. In Discovery of India, he wrote "even if God exists, it may be desirable not to look upto Him or to rely upon Him. Too much dependence on supernatural factors may lead, and has often led, to a loss of self reliance in man and to blunting of his capacity and creative ability."\textsuperscript{15} Among the men of religion, Nehru finds "Few of them are interested in trying to make the world a better, a brighter place."\textsuperscript{16} He was of opinion that religion, thinking in terms of other world had little conception of human values and social justice. His attitude to religion is thus expressed in his autobiography, "usually religion becomes an a social quest for God or the Absolute and the religious man is concerned for more with his own salvation than with the good of society."\textsuperscript{17}

In Nehru's Autobiography, we find him lamenting, India is supposed to be

\begin{itemize}
\item Jawaharlal Nehru. 'The Discovery of India' (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1982), p.26.
\item \textit{Ibid.}
\item Jawaharlal Nehru. 'An Autobiography' (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1982), p.374.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p.377.
\end{itemize}
a religious country above everything else and Hindu, Moslem, Sikh and others take pride in their faiths and testify to their truths by breaking heads. The spectacle of what is called religion or at any rate organised religion, in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clear sweep of it."\textsuperscript{18} He found in religion proconceived notions, because of which he thought, it deliberately shut its eyes to reality for the fear that reality might not fit in with its notions. In a letter to Dr. Syed Mohammed he wrote, "Religion as practised in India has become 'the old man of the sea' for us and it has not only broken our backs but stifled and almost killed all originality of thought and mind."\textsuperscript{19}

Jawaharlal Nehru, however, was not altogether anti-religious. He did not believe in the dogmas and rituals in it and opposed the role of religion as a diverersive force. His attitude is made clear in a passage in \textit{Discovery of India} thus, "..... they (religions) have also tried to imprison truth in set forms and dogmas and encouraged ceremonials and practices which soon lose all their original meaning and become a mere routine. While impressing upon man the awe and mystery of the unknown that surrounds him on all sides, they have discouraged him from trying to understand not only unknown but what might

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.} p.374.

come in the way of social effort. Instead of encouraging curiosity and thought, they have preached a philosophy of submission to nature, to established church, to the prevailing social order, and to everything that is ... Religion, though it has undoubtedly brought comfort to innumerable human beings and stabilised society by its values, has checked the tendency to change and progress inherent in human society." 20

Though Nehru attacked the prevailing practices and dogmas of religion, he did not consider religion as a socially debilating false ideology. Nehru did realise the immense value of the inner meaning and significance of religion. It was obvious to him that religion had supplied some deeply felt inner need of human nature, and the vast majority of people all over the world could not do without some form of religious belief. It is stated in Discovery of India that "Religions have helped greatly in the development of humanity. They have laid down values and standards and have pointed out principles for the guidance of human life." 21 For Nehru, the essence of religion was truthfulness, love and not hatred towards others. Religion, according to him, must be an effective medium for human brotherhood and not social alienation. He thus wanted to uphold and humanize the religious values of oneness, fellowship and toleration.

20 Jawaharlal Nehru, 'The Discovery of India' (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1982), p.622.

21 Ibid.
Nehru considered religion as the remedy to the particular unrest felt by man even when he is fully equipped with all the best in his life. There is something beyond the scientific positive knowledge of the day, and no thinking person can ignore it. Since Nehru's academic training was in science, his understanding of scientific method and spirit was first hand and thorough, and there is nothing he loved more than to bring this spirit to the Indian people. This happy synthesis of the essentially scientific with the essentially religious temper is the unique quality of Nehru's secular humanism. It is, therefore, not hostile to religion. He regarded that religion can be accommodated within a secular society. It demands a marginalisation of religion in social and political life and restrict it to one's private life.

An unequivocal acceptance of the fact that all religions are different paths leading to the same goal forms the true foundation for an enlightened secularism. Religion can become a great unifying force in a world torn by suspicion and hatred. Secularism in India, therefore, does not mean that people should forsake their religious heritage. Since India is a mosaic of different religions, cultures and beliefs, it only means that Government of India will not associate itself directly with any religious faith.
Secularism made an aspect of our constitution

In building up of our country, Nehru's main emphasis was on the freeing of our minds from the obsessions of dogmatic religion. Organised religion was found to be challenge to the idea of world community. So Nehru tried to meet this challenge of religion through the force of secularism which he accepted as an article of faith just as it is in the constitution of India. Man being his central concern, Nehru insisted that everyone had freedom of conscience and so, a secular perspective, treating all faiths as eligible for fair survival was imperative. The Indian state is secular in the sense that its constitution guarantees full religious liberty to all individuals and groups and forbids discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, caste etc. In our constitutional system, all the members of the Indian family are equal citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. All citizens are also bound by the same duty of loyalty to India, and the same obligations of service to nation. Thus, people in India have a constitutional right to be treated equally and impartially before law and to equal benefit in the state's scheme of development policies.

Evolution of secular tradition in the Indian Constitution may be regarded as Nehru's greatest contribution. Secularism, in the positive sense, is the cornerstone of an egalitarian and forward looking society which our constitution purports to establish. It exalts secularism as one of its basic objectives and set
out it in its Preamble. The secular ideal is given due position in Part III of the constitution. The right to freedom of religion in its various aspects is charted in Articles 25 to 28.

Article 25 provides for the right to freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion. To profess a religion means to choose freely and openly one’s faith and belief. To practice religion is to perform prescribed religious duties, rites, rituals etc. And to propagate it means to spread and publicise one’s religious views for the edification of others. Article 26 provides for every religion freedom to manage its own affairs, establish its own religious as well as educational institutions for imparting religious instruction. Article 27 protects individuals from paying any tax, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion. Article 28 prohibits the giving of religious instruction in any educational institutions wholly maintained out of state funds. Article 16, 17 and 29 ensure equal opportunity in matters of employment and protection against discrimination. So divorce from religion, absence of state religion, tolerance of all religions and equality of rights of citizens can be called as the characteristics of secularism in India. In such a society, the individual would be free to pursue his own cherished values.
Politics and Religion

Secularism, as the Indian constitution envisages it, is an expression of the recognition of the basic freedom of individuals. It excludes the state’s interference in the matters of personal faith and philosophy. The tendency to treat communities rather than individuals as the basic unit in socio-political discourse also has to be given up in a secular society. Secularism is thus, a system of social ethics based upon a doctrine that ethical standards and conducts should be determined exclusively with reference to the present life and social well-being, without reference to religion. As noted by Sri Adhi. H. Doctor, "Secularism makes sense only when it is understood as a modernizing principle that seeks to replace religious ethic by contemporary, rational, humanistic ethic. Obviously, implicit in such an understanding of secularism is the separation of religion from politics."\textsuperscript{22}

Nehru was also against mixing religion with politics. Politicisation of religion was considered by him as a danger to modern secular society. He appealed for unity and said that no amount of economic policies and development project will be of use if the people were divided on religious

grounds. He was also opposed to the principle of communal electorates which had prevailed before independence. Separate electorates were abolished when our constitution was framed. Communal civil codes, differing widely on many points, posed another problem for the secular state. Jawaharlal Nehru urged the eventual creation of uniform civil code, whereby Hindus, Muslims, Christians and all others would be governed by the same marriage, inheritance and guardianship laws. Political liberty, equality and progress through peaceful means formed Pt. Nehru’s basic democratic ideals, as they all aimed at building a free society in which there would be freedom and equal opportunities for all without any consideration of caste, creed and religion.

Comparitive Account of Gandhiji's View Point

Nehru's purely secular approach to politics was in conflict with Gandhiji's religious attitude. Gandhiji was essentially a man of religion. According to him, religion and morality are intimately related. His emphasis upon the role of morality in explaining religion made Gandhiji follow an ethical religion. He looked upon politics as inseperable from ethics and religion. Gandhiji emphasized the importance of service in religion. He could not find any higher way of worshipping God than serving the poor. Thus his conception of religion had nothing to do with dogma, custom or ritual.
Jawaharlal Nehru knew that though Gandhiji's religion was not dogmatic it certainly implied a religious outlook. He felt that, at times Gandhiji's political teachings gave a religious fervour which was against his own idea of not mixing too much religion with politics. On the contrary, Mahatma Gandhi could never think of politics divorced from religion. Again, Nehru did not take religion seriously and did not consider it as indispensable for man. On the other hand, Gandhiji held that no man can live without religion. Jawaharlal Nehru was attracted to the ethical sense that Gandhiji attached to religion and firmly believed that this moral aspect of religion will raise politics to a higher level. But he was not interested in the mystical and metaphysical reasons which Gandhiji often advanced, particularly in favour of his decisions regarding fasts, suspension of civil disobedience movement etc. Thus, though there was a deep personal bond and spiritual unity between Gandhi and Nehru, we cannot ignore the vital ideological differences in their approach to religion.

Four aspects of secularism

Nehru's concept of secularism had four aspects:

1) **Religious freedom:** It means granting equal status to all religions in India. No religion should be given any special privilege. No community should be deprived of its legitimate rights on the basis of religion. Nehru
remarked, "we are building a free secular state where every religion and belief has full freedom and equal honour, whose every citizen has equal liberty and equal opportunity." 23

2) Neutrality of the state in religious matters: A secular state means a state not tied to any religion. Nehru wanted the state to follow a policy that promotes the co-existence of religions. The state should not try to infringe upon religious freedom.

3) Secularism in social life: Nehru regarded secularism as the indespensible feature of modern democratic society. He recognised that Hinduism and Islam had deeply penetrated into Indian social life. At the same time, he also realized that existence of different set of laws governing different religious communities was inconsistent with the ideal of secular society. Hence he tried to devise a uniform civil code for the entire Indian Community. He strongly objected to the intervention of religion in social and political life.

4) An attitude of mind: Secularism, according to Nehru, meant a certain mental attitude on the part of various communities. India is in dire

necessity of such an attitude because it alone can bring about harmony and develop a feeling of fraternity among various religions. He did not want any religion to challenge the basic conception of the State. Nehru regarded that the realization of the secular ideal largely depended upon the friendly attitude of the majority community towards minorities. He expected minorities also to be tolerant. He thus exhorted both to cultivate broad outlook and not to adopt attitudes which were wrong and detrimental to the integrity and unity of the Nation.

These ideals were in no way new, but Nehru pleaded for their unrestricted growth. He wanted India to have what he termed 'the fullest democracy.' Our Constituent Assembly opted for the secular state, in order to strengthen the foundations of democracy. India is the home of a number of religions of the world. Religious pluralism is the keynote of Indian culture and religious tolerance is the bedrock of Indian secularism. It is based on the belief that all religions are equally good and efficacious pathways leading to perfection or God-realisation.

**Secularism and Democracy**

The concept of a secular state cannot be separated from its integral relation to a socialist and democratic set up. There is no way to establish a
secular state which is not democratic and socialist at the same time. Secularism is, as Dr. S. Radhakrishnan puts it, an extension of the principle of democracy to religion. In India, we not only have a democratic socio-political set up, but also a democratic approach to religiosity. Secularism and democracy are values accepted and adopted by modern India because both these concepts are based on the principle of equality of every human being, irrespective of caste, colour, creed, religion, race and language.

Challenges to India Secularism

Indian Secularism is confronted with many challenges such as communalism, casteism, regionalism, linguism etc. The opposite category of our secularism is communalism rather than religion. Communalism in our body politic has played a reactionary and disruptive role all along. During the British rule, it disrupted the freedom struggle and today it seeks to undermine all that is the basis of our national life - secularism, democracy and socialism. In the final analysis, communalism is a political reaction that obstructs socio-economic change and progress.

Nehru, as a soldier fighting in the freedom struggle to liberate the country from foreign rule and as the first Prime Minister of independent India who was engaged in an endeavour to reconstruct and transform the socio-economic
structure of the Indian society, fought relentlessly against communalism. He considered it as diametrically opposed to democracy. He believed that communalism could not only weaken the very fabric of a society, but also threaten its very existence. So he made use of each and every single opportunity to make the people aware of its dangers. Nehru considered communalism as probably more dangerous for future India than an attack from a foreign country. We can meet the attack of a foreign country with all our strength. But the attack of communalism is vicious because it creeps into our mind without our understanding its full consequences. So he condemned the communal organisations which were trying to confuse the peoples’ mind in the name of religion and culture.

There can be no compromise on the issue of communalism as it is a threat to Indian nationalism. The declaration of India as a secular state was the best weapon to fight against communalism. It was essential for fostering the ties between the people of different communities in India. The answer to the challenges to Indian secularism and the inconsistencies in it can be found in building up a society based on secular values of life and making social life and institution in the society free from the hold of religion and communalism.

Caste system also constitutes a formidable obstacle to the realization of the ideal of secular state. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, caste has been largely
responsible for weakening India's civilization throughout her long history. The caste system in the early centuries had a certain flexibility. But later "along with the growth of rigidity in the caste system, grew rigidity of mind and the creative energy faded away",\textsuperscript{24} says Nehru. So he vehemently revolted against caste behaviour patterns. Thus Panditji observed, "In the context of society today, the caste system and much that goes with it are wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive and barriers to progress. There can be no equality in status and opportunity within its framework, nor can there be political democracy and much less, economic democracy".\textsuperscript{25} He condemned caste system as anti-humanist practice, for it suppressed people's dynamism and initiative. He stood against the practice of untouchability because it was against the philosophy of humanism. The constitution which had strong impact of the ideas of Jawaharlal, therefore marks a great step forward with the abolition of untouchability.

It must be noted that secularism in India is a basic aspect of democratic state and its success depends upon the strength and weakness of democracy in India. The challenges to the secularism in India can be eradicated only by building up a fully 'democratic' and 'secular' society. It was assumed by Nehru

\textsuperscript{24} Jawaharlal Nehru, 'The Discovery of India' (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1982), p.98.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p.257.
that the spread of science and technology and economic development would result in greater secularisation of Indian society. Indian identity should be developed through public education for the protection and promotion of secularism. Its ignorance about the essentials of religion causes sectarian narrowness and religious tensions. Hence education on the fundamentals of all religions is a necessity. It will help us to weld together all Indians into a single unit. This will bring about religious harmony, which is the essence of our secularism. Nehru firmly believed and very often stated that progress can be achieved only by keeping our political and public processes free from religious considerations.

To Jawaharlal Nehru, secularism was a part of his democratic creed, and his broad and liberal humanism and a facet of his socialist faith. The Nehruvian model of secularism may have come under serious strain in the complex process of politico-economic developments, but it has not failed. As Sri. P.N. Haksar has remarked, “if, despite Indian poverty, democratic institutions, and democratic processes continue to survive in India and show extraordinary strength even in the midst of extraordinary difficulties through which we pass from time to time, and we are certainly passing today, it is because of Nehru’s insistence on secularism as a guiding principle, not merely of state policy, but of
our thought processes and behaviour patterns". Thus we may see that India, inspite of its pluralism, still remains as the largest democratic country in the world because of the great vision of Nehruji who made constant efforts to build up the nation based upon the principles of a sound secular humanism.