

*Religion, Spirituality
&
Secularity in
Multi-Religious India
Visions & Experiments*

*Editor
Israel Selvanayagam*

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Union Biblical Seminary

PUNE 411037 / MAHARASHTRA

hid3_mithra@rediffmail.com

Phone: 09421200718

&

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Religion and Secular Spirituality in India

An Islamic Perspective

Mohd Fahim Akhtar

India has always been a land of different religions. One can experience a small world in India. Several religions were born here, and from here they spread to different parts of the world. Major world religions have been in India, and their followers exist in a large number in this country. Thus, India is a special country having its unique identity in matters of religion. Additionally, of course, it is India's strength, beauty and pride.

Diversity of Religions

India has a long history of religious diversity. The reason behind this is its secular nature. A secular spirit has always existed very deep inside this land. India cannot be imagined without its secular characteristics. It is very clear from its history that India was a preferred place to where nation after nation migrated in the past. Different religions came and settled here. None of them was forced to exile completely. Judaism came here and to the present day its followers have cohabited in this land. Christianity is welcomed here and a sizeable population of Christian people lives in different parts of this country. It is the same with Zoroastrianism.

As far as Islam is concerned, this religion reached this land as early as it came into existence in sixth century AD, along the costal parts of India, with the traders who had been coming to India for a long period before that time. And soon Islam spread amongst the native people and they embraced this religion. It is very important to note that in early thirteen century CE, when Muslim rule was established here with its capital at Delhi, this Delhi Sultanate ruled over the width and breadth of this country for more than three centuries, followed by the Mughal rule of almost same length of time. In these six hundred and fifty years of rule from 1206 to 1857, Islam remained a minority religion among a huge majority of non-Muslims. All major and well-known religions which are here today were also present at that time. And no major incident of religious persecution occurred