

Secularism

- The term “Secular” means being "separate" from religion, or having no religious basis.
- Secularism means separation of religion from political, economic, social and cultural aspects of life, religion being treated as a purely personal matter.
- It also stands for equal opportunities for followers of all religions, and no discrimination and partiality on grounds of religion.

Indian Secularism

"I do not expect India of my dreams to develop one religion, i.e., to be wholly Hindu or wholly Christian or wholly Mussalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another." Mahatma Gandhi.

- This model of secularism is adopted by western societies where the government is totally separate from religion (i.e. separation of church and state).
- **Indian philosophy of secularism is related to “Sarva Dharma Sambhava”** (literally it means that destination of the paths followed by all religions is the same, though the paths themselves may be different) which means equal respect to all religions.
- India does not have an official state religion. However, different personal laws - on matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, alimony varies with an individual's religion.
- Indian secularism is not an end in itself but a **means to address religious plurality** and sought to achieve peaceful coexistence of different religions.

Indian Constitution and Secularism

India has been declared a secular state by its written constitution and it is every Indians duty to stand by and believe in this declaration.

- There is a clear incorporation of all the basic principles of secularism into various provisions of constitution.
- The term ‘Secular’ was added to the preamble by the **forty-second constitution Amendment Act of 1976**, (India is a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, republic).

- It emphasizes the fact that constitutionally, India is a secular country which has no State religion. And that the state shall recognize and accept all religions, not favor or patronize any particular religion.
- **Article 14** grants equality before the law and equal protection of the laws to all, **Article 15** enlarges the concept of secularism to the widest possible extent by prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- **Article 16 (1)** guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters of public employment and reiterates that there would be no discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth and residence.
- **Article 25** provides 'Freedom of Conscience', that is, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion.
- **Article 26**, every religious group or individual has the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes and to manage its own affairs in matters of religion.
- As per **Article 27**, the state shall not compel any citizen to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious institution.
- **Article 28** allows educational institutions maintained by different religious groups to impart religious instruction.
- **Article 29** and **Article 30** provides cultural and educational rights to the minorities.
- **Article 51A** i.e. Fundamental Duties obliges all the citizens to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood and to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.

Indian and Western Model of Secularism

Over the years, India has developed its own unique concept of secularism that is fundamentally different from the parallel western concept of secularism in the following ways:

- As per the western model of secularism, the "State" and the "religion" have their own separate spheres and neither the state nor the religion shall intervene in each other's affairs.
- Thus, the western concept of secularism requires complete separation of religion and state.
- However, in India, neither in law nor in practice any 'wall of separation' between religion and the State exists.
- As per the western model, the state cannot give any financial support to educational institutions run by religious communities.

- In India, the state provides all religious minorities the right to establish and maintain their own educational institutions which may receive assistance from state.
- In the western model, State does not intervene in the affairs of religion till the time religion is working within the limits of the law.
- On the other hand, in Indian secularism, state shall interfere in religion so as to remove evils in it.

Threats to Secularism

- **Communal politics** operates through communalization of social space, by spreading myths and stereotypes against minorities, through attack on rational values and by practicing a divisive ideological propaganda and politics.
- Politicisation of any one religious group leads to the **competitive politicisation** of other groups, thereby resulting in inter-religious conflict.
- One of the manifestations of communalism is **communal riots**. In recent past also, communalism has proved to be a great threat to the secular fabric of Indian polity.
- Rise of Hindu Nationalism in recent years have resulted into mob lynching on mere suspicion of slaughtering cows and consuming beef.
- In addition with this, forced closure of slaughterhouses, campaigns against 'love jihad', reconversion or ghar- wapsi (Muslims being forced to convert to Hinduism), etc. reinforces communal tendencies in society.
- Islamic fundamentalism or revivalism pushes for establishing Islamic State based on sharia law which directly comes into conflict with conceptions of the secular and democratic state.
- In recent years there have been stray incidences of Muslim youth being inspired and radicalized by groups like ISIS which is very unfortunate for both India and world.