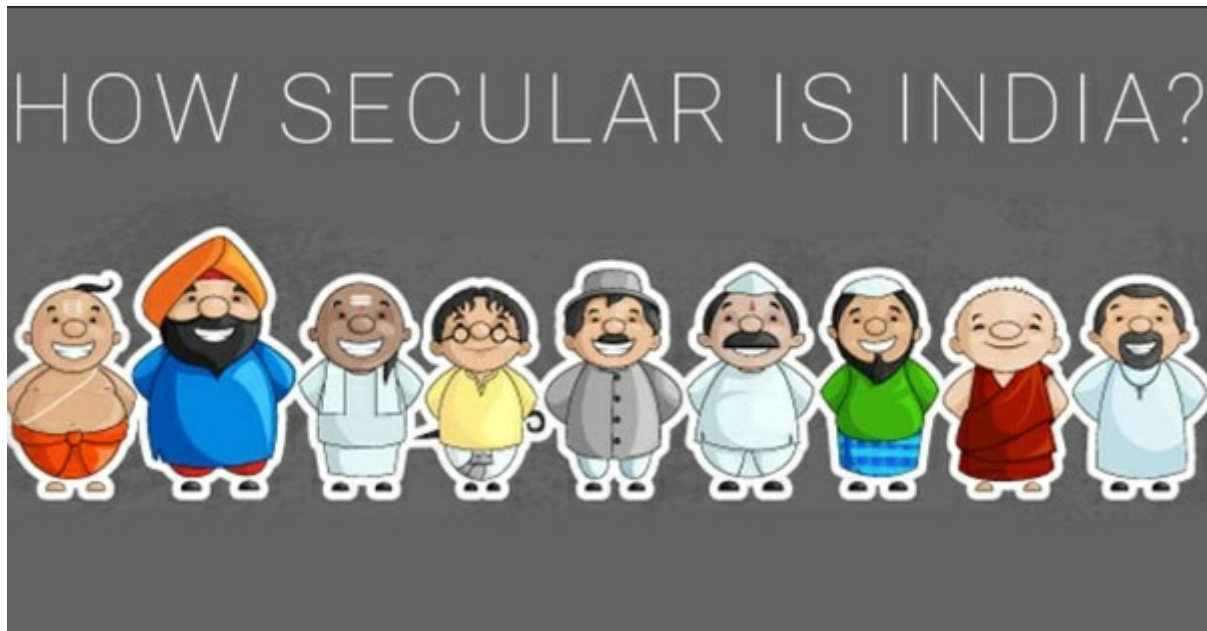




Problems of Secularism in India

Secularism in India, thus, does not mean the separation of religion from state. Instead, secularism in India means a state that supports or participates in a neutral manner in the affairs of all religious groups. No doubt we are moving from religiosity to secular way of life. However, evidences show that religious beliefs have not fully declined in our society. Communalism, fundamentalism and Sikhism in India suggest that no necessary connection exists between modernization and secularization. The Preamble of Indian Constitution aims to constitute India a Sovereign, Socialist, Democratic Republic. The terms Socialist and Secular were added to it by the 42nd amendment. The whole constitution is summarized in the preamble. It is the mirror to the spirit of the constitution. The arrangement of the words in the preamble is also very significant. Indian society is a multi – religious society, it is having different caste, religion along with

several religion diversification. So, all these are the divisive factor in some way or the other and if not handled carefully then can cause a threat to the unity and integrity of the nation.



India is a land of diversity where different religions, castes and cultures are thriving for thousands of years. The idea of secularism was always in the spirit of India, even before introducing the “SECULAR” word in preamble with the 42nd amendment of the Constitution of India in 1976.

Features of Indian secularism are:

Equal respect and recognition for all religions by the state.

No discrimination by the state on the basis of religion.

Non-interference in the functioning of any religion by the state.

No official religion in India.

An individual has the right to practice, propagate and profess any religion.

Problems of Secularism in India

- **Problem of Uniform Civil Code:** A problem of uniform civil code is essential in the direction of bringing about national identity and the integration of members of all religious communities into one bond of common citizenship. Following independence, it was hoped that this step would be taken to usher in secular society. But unfortunately till now no progress has been made in the evolution of a uniform Civil Code and today its adoption appears to be more problematic than it was at the time when the Constitution was framed. Thus, the Muslim minority compelled the Government, in 1986, to enact legislation concerning maintenance of divorced women which it felt was closer to its Personal Law and, therefore, religiously more acceptable. Modern secular considerations, and the opinion of those Muslims who took a secular position, were given no cognizance by the Government. Similarly, other minorities like Christians and

Sikhs, too, have given some indications that would render the formulation and enforcement of a uniform Civil Code impossibility. Such limitations indicate that the path leading to a truly secular society in India is strewn with numerous hurdles.

- **Politics and Religion:** The political parties in India have tended to use religion and caste factors for the promotion of their political interests and thus greatly undermined the secular values. The growing communalism has also greatly hampered the growth of genuine secularism in India. Despite abandonment of communal electorates and a ban on the use of religion for soliciting votes, the various political parties and groups have frequently made use of communal factors to get into power. In this regard both the minorities as well as the majority communities are equally to blame. Unless this feeling of communalism is shunned, secularism cannot take firm roots in the Indian soil. The responsibility of undermining India's limited secularism falls upon the shoulders of the leaders of the post-Nehru era, many of whom are not intellectually liberated, because of their traditional background, to understand and appreciate genuine secularism. Due to their neo-traditional orientation, these leaders are

lacking in true commitment to the secularisation of Indian society, not only in terms of developing non-religious outlook but also in terms of developing a rational and scientific temper. This failure of the leadership has thwarted the progressive separation of religion and politics in India.

- **Failure of the Government in Evolving a Just Economic Order:** The failure of the government to evolve a just economic order and eliminate poverty also gave a serious set-back to secularism. The common masses suffering from deprivation and grinding poverty could not develop any faith in the polity which failed to provide them basic necessities and consequently did not attach much importance to secular values.
- **Cultural Symbols and Secularism:** Many public rituals and ceremonials like **bhoomi puja**, **breaking of coconuts on inaugural or auspicious occasions**, performing of 'aarti' and applying to 'tilak' to distinguished guests are perceived by Hindus as cultural or nationalistic expressions, but to non-Hindus these are manifestations of Hindu culture. Such rituals are performed even on state functions and therefore, create unnecessary misgivings about the neutrality of the State. The confusion between "Hindu" and "Indian"

has largely arisen in the last forty years. The cultural dimension of secularism has been totally neglected, and we have, therefore, neither attempted to develop a composite Indian culture based on a true amalgam of all religious sub-cultures, nor have we developed a new culture based on secular values, with emphasis on secular symbols. Of course, this was not an easy task but efforts to have been lacking.

- **Minority Group Perceptions:** Apart from education and jobs, prejudice and discrimination are perceived as operating in the matter of intergroup violence and conflict. There is now ample evidence to show that at times the administrative machinery of the State does not operate impartially at the time of communal riots; those responsible for ensuring law and order act in a non-secular way and tend to victimise members of minority groups. The minorities are in fear of the giant majority, which has the brute strength to overpower them and divests them of their distinctive characteristics. Furthermore, loyalties continue to be particularistic rather than universalistic.
- **The Defective Educational System:** The defective educational system which has

encouraged the people to think in terms of groups and communities, has also failed to inculcate secular ideas in the minds of young students and promote feeling of mutual give and take.

- **The Distortion of the Constitutional and Democratic Institutions:** The distortion of the Constitutional and democratic institutions has also greatly contributed to the weakening of the secularism in India. The Constitution and the political institutions have not worked the way they were envisaged by the framers of the Constitution. For example, though use of religion is not permitted for soliciting votes, yet certain religious political parties have made free use of factors like religion, caste etc. to secure votes. All this has hampered the growth of a true secular polity in the country.



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