

## SECULARISM



Secularism in the multi-cultural, multi-lingual and plural society of India a significant role to play in reducing religious conflicts and persecution, upholding Human rights and on the whole building a 'strong' and 'unified' nation. Both the ideology and practice of secularism are, however, being questioned today by various streams of thought.

Sometimes it is said that Indian secularism is an imitation of western secularism. But a careful reading of our Constitution shows that this is not the case. Indian secularism is fundamentally different from Western secularism.



## NEHRU ON SECULARISM

“Equal protection by the State to all religions’. This is how Nehru responded when a student asked him to spell out what secularism meant in independent India. He wanted a secular state to be one that “protects all religions, but does not favour one at the expense of others and does not itself adopt any religion as the state religion”. Nehru was the philosopher of Indian secularism. Nehru did not practice any religion, nor did he believe in God. But for him secularism did not mean hostility to religion. In that sense Nehru was very different from Ataturk in Turkey. At the same time Nehru was not in favour of a complete separation between religion and state. A secular state can interfere in matters of religion to bring about social reform. Nehru himself played a key role in enacting laws abolishing caste discrimination, dowry and sati, and extending legal rights and social freedom to Indian women. While Nehru was prepared to be flexible on many counts, there was one thing on which he was always firm and uncompromising. Secularism for him meant a complete opposition to communalism of all kinds. Nehru was particularly severe in his criticism of the communalism of the majority community, which posed a threat to national unity. Secularism for him was not only a matter of principles, it was also the only guarantee of the unity and integrity of India.

## THE INDIAN MODEL OF SECULARISM

Indian secularism does not focus only on **church-state separation and the idea of inter-religious equality** is crucial to the Indian conception. There was **already a culture of inter-religious ‘tolerance’ in India**. However, we must not forget that tolerance is compatible with religious domination. It may allow some space to

everyone but such freedom is usually limited. Besides, tolerance allows you to put up with people whom you find deeply repugnant. This is a great virtue if a society is recovering from a major civil war but not in times of peace where people are struggling for equal dignity and respect.

Indian secularism deals not only with religious freedom of individuals but also with religious freedom of minority communities. Within it, an individual has the right to profess the religion of his or her choice. Likewise, religious minorities also have a right to exist and to maintain their own culture and educational institutions.

Since a secular state must be concerned equally with intra-religious domination, Indian secularism has made room for and is compatible with the idea of state-supported religious reform. Thus, the Indian constitution bans untouchability. The Indian state has enacted several laws abolishing child marriage and lifting the taboo on inter-caste marriage sanctioned by Hinduism

The Indian state may engage with religion negatively to oppose religious tyranny. This is reflected in such actions as the ban on untouchability. It may also choose a positive mode of engagement. Thus, the Indian Constitution grants all religious minorities the right to establish and maintain their own educational institutions which may receive assistance from the state. All these complex strategies can be adopted by the state to promote the **values of peace, freedom and equality.**

## SECULAR STATE

Perhaps one way of preventing religious discrimination is to work together for mutual enlightenment. Education is one way of helping to change the mindset of people. Individual examples of sharing and mutual help can also contribute towards reducing prejudice and suspicion between communities. It is always inspiring to read stories of Hindus saving Muslims or Muslims saving Hindus in the midst of a deadly communal riot. But it is unlikely that mere education or the goodness of some persons will eliminate religious discrimination. In modern societies, states have enormous public power. How they function is bound to make a crucial difference to the outcome of any struggle to create a society less ridden with inter-community conflict and religious discrimination. For this reason, we need to see what kind of state is needed to prevent religious conflict and to promote religious harmony.

- Secularism is a system of social organization and education which believes that religion has no part to play in the problems and events of everyday life.
- A culture is seen as secular when its acceptance is based on rational and utilitarian considerations rather than on reverence and veneration.
- A secular society is one that engenders in or elicits from its members readiness to change customary orientation towards or definition of values regarded as essential in that society.
- . Secularism on the part of the individual means a rational state of mind which refuses to recognize the arbitrary

authority of any individual or any book.

- In the context of 'state' or 'society', secularism means an endeavor on the part of state or society to modernize the societal values and thus a policy of not being Broadly speaking, secularism is a movement of thought, which aims to improve the temporal welfare of the people on rational and ethical grounds independently of religious considerations. The liberal ambiance of the nineteenth century Western Europe favored the emergence of this movement. In the course of time, this concept has been assimilated into many systems of philosophical thought and socio-political movements and assumed different value connotations.

### Meaning of the Term 'Secular' and 'Secularization'

"Secular" means "not connected with religious or spiritual matter" In this sense it is probably right to say that many of us live in secular states, in countries in which the origin and justification of the political power is totally secular state in which religion is present but, as charls Taylor point out, religion "occupies as different place in social life, compatible with the sense that all social action take in profane time". Put in another way, in our Secular societies, you can engage fully in politics without ever encountering God'

The English word 'secular' comes from the Latin 'saeculum', which means 'an age' or 'the spirit of an age'.

The Encyclopedia Britannica too, has attributed two meanings to the terms 'secular', first, as referring to that which lasts for a long period of time and secondly as that which is not concerned with

religious or spiritual matters.

The Oxford English Dictionary, states that **Secularism** is the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state.

### There few meta-themes or principles of secularism

- **Unity in Diversity**: it means the government would maintain distance from religion, but not violate people's fundamental right in the act. It would recognize people's diversity in terms of religion and take that into consideration.
- **Tolerance and pluralism**: an individual can follow any religion without any obligation from the state. Secular means pluralism, religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence of multiple religion. In case of a threat to an individual and collective religious practice, the government should protect them. it should not come in between social and political interaction.
- **Respect all religion and do not interfere**: respecting other religion while practicing own's religion. No religion is superior or inferior to one other. You can belong to any religion, ideology but still if you respect other religion and take consideration of other's sentiments you can be secular.
- **Equal representation**: secularism connotes "equal" representation of all social, religious groups and their interactions. It doesn't mean being indifferent but be sensitive to other religion and its follower without giving it

any hierarchical order.

- **Take care of emotions and sentiments:** disrespecting any religion should be acceptable legally and morally. Mocking and ridiculing any religion create an environment of tension and unrest which can be disastrous for masses.

### o Importance of Secularism

This is important for a country to function democratically. Almost all countries of the world will have more than one religious group living in them. Within these religious groups, there will most likely be one group that is in a majority. If this majority religious group has access to State power, then it could quite easily use this power and financial resources to discriminate against and persecute persons of other religions. This tyranny of the majority could result in the discrimination, coercion and at times even the killing of religious minorities. The majority could quite easily prevent minorities from practicing their religions. Any form of domination based on religion is in violation of the rights that a democratic society guarantees to each and every citizen irrespective of their religion. Therefore, the tyranny of the majority and the violation of Fundamental Rights that can result is one reason why it is important to separate the State and religion in democratic societies.

Another reason that it is important to separate religion from the State in democratic societies is because we also need to protect the freedom of individuals to exit from their religion, embrace another religion or have the freedom to interpret religious teachings differently. Secularism is a principle that involves two basic propositions. The first is the strict separation of the state from religious institutions. The second is that people of different religions and beliefs are equal before the law.

- **Secularism Protects Both Believers and non-Believers:** Secularism seeks to ensure and protect freedom of religious belief and practice for all citizens. Secularism is not about curtailing religious freedoms; it is about ensuring that the freedoms of thought and conscience apply equally to all believers and non-believers alike.
- **Religious Freedom:** Secularism seeks to defend the absolute freedom of religious and other belief, and protect the right to manifest religious belief insofar as it does not impinge disproportionately on the rights and freedoms of others. Secularism ensures that the right of individuals to freedom of religion is always balanced by the right to be free from religion.
- **Equal Access to Public Services:** We all share hospitals, schools, the police and the services of local authorities. It is essential that these public services are secular at the point of use so that no-one is disadvantaged or denied access on grounds of religious belief (or non-belief.) All state-funded schools should be non-religious in character, with children being educated together regardless of their parents' religion. When a public body grants a contract for the provision of services to an organization affiliated to a particular religion or belief, such services must be delivered in a neutral manner, with no attempt to promote the ideas of that faith group.
- **Secularism is not Atheism:** Atheism is a lack of belief in gods. Secularism simply provides a framework for a democratic society. Atheists have an obvious interest in supporting secularism, but secularism itself does not seek to challenge the tenets of any particular religion or belief, neither does it seek to impose atheism on anyone.

Secularism is simply a framework for ensuring equality throughout society – in politics, education, the law and elsewhere, for believers and non-believers alike.

- **Secularism Protects Free Speech and Expression:** Religious people have the right to express their beliefs publicly but so do those who oppose or question those beliefs. Religious beliefs, ideas and organizations must not enjoy privileged protection from the right to freedom of expression. In a democracy, all ideas and beliefs must be open to discussion. Individuals have rights, ideas do not. Secularism is the best chance we have to create a society in which people of all religions or none can live together fairly and peacefully
- **Secularism is about Democracy and Fairness:** In a secular democracy all citizens are equal before the law and parliament. No religious or political affiliation gives advantages or disadvantages and religious believers are citizens with the same rights and obligations as anyone else. Secularism champions human rights above discriminatory religious demands. It upholds equality laws that protect women, LGBT people and minorities. These equality laws ensure that non-believers have the same rights as those who identify with a religious or philosophical belief.
- Another reason that it is important to separate religion from the State in democratic societies is because we also need to protect the freedom of individuals to exit from their religion, embrace another religion or have the freedom to interpret religious teachings differently.

## What is the difference between secularism and secularization?

- Every **secular** country has a different version of **secularism**, and none of them has an absolute separation of church and state. ... **Secularization** is the transformation of a society from close identification with religious values and institutions toward nonreligious values and **secular** institutions.
- Secularism is a Doctrine of fundamental belief that is formally opposed to Theological beliefs and Secularization is the process by which the Doctrine is developed within itself.
- Secular Philosophy as Secularization is primary the Doctrine that recognises that all dialogue is the pursuit of Philosophical Concerns directed towards answering the fundamental questions, which are cause and the reason for cause or the purpose of causality.
- Whether Philosophy caused Theology or Theology caused Philosophy is irrelevant in terms of Secularism, which is best understood to be a Doctrine that assumes its starting point with Matter in a state of motionless existence and the dynamic of movement then somehow caused constant changes to occur in Material Substance and the relevance of it to itself, everything is material and always was.
- Whereas adverse to that, Secularization is best understood as the typical Idealistic interpretation that idea is an entity without existence but realizes itself within a reality of Space and Rudimentary Meaning as a Possibility without Association within that Possibility which began existence by Recognition and Association , so Secularization is a

developmental process of Secularism peculiar to  
Philosophy regarding absolute causality before material  
manifestation,

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