SECULARISM

Secularism refers to being **separate from religion**, meaning a person or the state does not owe moral values to any religion. It promotes the **dissociation of the state from religion** and ensures full freedom and tolerance for all religions, promoting equality and non-discrimination on religious grounds.

History of Secularism in India

1. Ancient India:

- **Sanatan Dharma (Hinduism):** Emphasized integration of various spiritual traditions into mainstream Hinduism.

- **Indus Valley Civilization (IVC):** Secularism in India dates back to the IVC, where urban civilizations in Mesopotamia and Harappa were not ruled by priests.

- **Religious Plurality:** The four Vedas and various interpretations of the Upanishads and Puranas reflect the religious plurality of Hinduism.

- **Religious Freedom:** People in ancient India were allowed to follow any religion freely.

  o Example: **Ellora caves** represent religious coexistence, with temples for different faiths built next to each other between the 5th and 10th centuries.

- **Mauryan Period:** Emperor **Ashoka** was a key figure in promoting religious tolerance through his 12th Rock Edict, calling for respect and tolerance for all religions.

2. Medieval India:

- **Sufi and Bhakti Movements:** These movements emphasized **love, peace, and unity** among people of different communities.

  o Example: Key figures include Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, Baba Farid, Sant Kabir Das, and Guru Nanak Dev.

- **Mughal Period:** Akbar promoted religious tolerance by including Hindus in his administration, banning forcible conversions, and abolishing the **Jizya** tax.

  o Example: Akbar initiated the **Din-i-Ilahi** (Divine Faith), which promoted religious debates among Hindus, Muslims, Jains, and Zoroastrians.

3. Modern India:

- **British Policy of Divide and Rule:** The British colonial policy promoted communal divisions, especially among religious groups.

  o Example: The **Partition of Bengal in 1905** was along religious lines and contributed to communal discord.

4. Secular Tradition of Indian Freedom Movement:

- **Secular Leaders:** Early Indian freedom movement leaders like **Sir Feroz Shah Mehta**, **Govind Ranade**, and **Gopal Krishna Gokhale** embraced a secular approach to politics.

- **Nehru Report (1928):** Pandit **Moti Lal Nehru** drafted a report recommending secular principles, such as no state religion for the Commonwealth of India.

- **Gandhiji's Secularism: Mahatma Gandhi** advocated for the **brotherhood of religious communities** based on mutual respect.

    o Example: **Sarva Dharma Sambhava** (equal respect for all religions).

1. **Post-Independent India:**

- **Constitutional Secularism:** The **Indian Constitution** embraces secularism by separating religion from the functions of the state. This became central to Indian political philosophy.

- **Jawaharlal Nehru's Secularism:** Nehru emphasized **scientific humanism**, blending progressive views with historical changes.

- **Secular Republic:** The 42nd Amendment (1976) to the Constitution officially incorporated the word "Secular" into the **Preamble**.

Philosophy of Indian Secularism

1. Cultural Aspect:

- **Vedic Concept:** Indian secularism aligns with the Vedic concept of **Dharma Nirapekshata** (indifference of the state to religion), advocating for a separation between the government and religion.

- **Positive Secularism:** This philosophy reflects **Sarva Dharma Sambhava**, meaning **equal respect for all religions**.

- **Religious Plurality:** Secularism is a tool to ensure peaceful coexistence and diversity among various religious communities, rather than an end in itself.

- **Cultural Heritage:** Indian secularism is rooted in the country's rich cultural history, protecting traditions and ensuring citizens' religious freedoms.

2. Political Aspect:

- **No Official Religion:** India does not recognize any religion as official and owes no allegiance to any particular faith.

- **Religious Neutrality:** The Indian government does not interfere in religious affairs, treating all religions equally.

- **Not Anti-Religion:** Indian secularism is not atheistic; it acknowledges the existence of all religions and supports freedom of worship.

- **Freedom of Faith:** Secularism ensures that citizens can freely practice any religion, with the right to choose and adhere to their beliefs.

3. Constitutional:

- **Governance in India:** Religious institutions have a minimal role in Indian governance. Political parties in India do not align themselves with any specific religion.

- **Strategy of Principle Distance:** The state does not interfere with religious customs or beliefs but may intervene to reform outdated, biased, or gender-discriminatory practices.

- **Supremacy of Law:** Indian administration functions based on the **Constitution and Parliament-made laws**, not on religious doctrines.

- **Sovereign State:** No religious institution (temple, church, or madrasa) holds power above the state.

- **Fundamental Rights:** Secularism is constitutionally protected, and religious freedom is safeguarded and enforced by the judiciary.

4. Rational:

- **Scientific Education:** India's education system is scientific, rooted in Western principles, and not driven by religious ideologies.

- **Humanism:** Indian secularism is humane and considers people as citizens, not defined by their religion.

- **Universal Faith:** India's secular ideals are a blend of both Eastern and Western values.

- **Means of Modernization:** Secularism in India promotes modern values, progressive thoughts, and scientific perspectives, rather than orthodox or narrow beliefs.

Secularism in the Indian Constitution:

- **Secular Nation:** The Constitution defines India as a secular country, recognizing and accepting all religions without favoring any specific one.

- **Preamble:** The term "secular" was added to the **Preamble** of the Indian Constitution in the **42nd Amendment Act of 1976**.

- **Article 15:** Prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.

- **Article 16(1):** Guarantees equality of opportunity in public employment without discrimination based on religion, race, caste, etc.

- **Article 25:** Ensures freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice, and propagate any religion.

- **Article 26:** Allows religious groups to establish and manage religious institutions and manage their affairs.

- **Article 27:** The state cannot compel any citizen to pay taxes for the promotion or maintenance of a particular religion.

- **Article 28:** Permits religious education in institutions maintained by different religious groups.

- **Articles 29 and 30:** Protect cultural and educational rights of minorities.

- **Article 51A:** Encourages citizens to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood among all people of India.

The Indian and Western Models of Secularism

Secularism in India	Secularism in the West
Indian citizens are given the fundamental right to religion, but this is subject to public order, morality, and health.	In the West, especially in the USA, state and religion are separated and do not interfere in each other's affairs.
No religion dominates Indian society; citizens are free to practice, profess, and propagate any religion.	Christianity is the most reformed, caste-neutral, and dominant religion in the state.
India focuses on intra-religious aspects, attempting to remove any stigma associated with religion in society.	The West does not focus on intra-religious issues, allowing religion to act on society as it is.
Due to the presence of multiple religions, the government has to intervene to maintain peace and harmony.	Since Christianity is dominant, there are fewer inter-religious conflicts.
The government focuses on both religious and linguistic minorities. Article 29 grants protection to these groups.	The West focuses more on equality and harmony among people of the same religion.
The role of religious bodies is further enhanced in Indian politics.	The role of religious bodies is very small in Western politics.
Indian states can provide aid to religious institutions and educational institutions run by religious communities.	The state cannot provide financial support to religious institutions in the West.
The state intervenes to remove religious evils like sati, dowry, animal and bird sacrifices, and child marriage.	The state does not interfere with religion unless it breaks the law.

Secularism in India	Secularism in the West
The state sets up departments for religious endowments and appoints trustees to religious boards.	Religion is relegated to the private sphere and plays no role in public life.

Advantages of Being a Secular State

1. **Cultural Enrichment:** Secularism helped erase the communal strain in Indian society created by medieval theocratic regimes and the British divide-and-rule policy.

2. **Excelling Democracy:** Secularism has supported Indian democracy, leading to its growth, inclusivity, and maturity over seven decades.

3. **Peace and Stability:** Secularism promotes tolerance and respect for other religions, fostering peace and understanding in society.

Challenges of Indian Secularism

1. **Structural Challenges:**

   o **Religious Society:** While the Indian Constitution declares the state to be neutral towards all religions, society remains emotionally and culturally steeped in religious beliefs.

   o **Defective Educational System:** The education system has failed to instill secular values effectively in students. This gap contributes to a lack of understanding and practice of secularism.

   o **Practice of Pseudo-Secularism:** There is an inconsistency in how secularism is implemented. For example, political parties may avoid implementing the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) due to fear of losing votes from certain religious communities.

     ▪ Example: The reluctance to abolish the regressive Triple Talaq system.

2. **External Challenges:**

   o **Growing Radicalisation:** In recent years, there has been a rise in radicalization, particularly among Muslim youth, influenced by groups like ISIS. This radicalization affects both India and the world, creating security concerns.

3. **Political Challenges:**

   o **Exclusion of Minorities:** Religious minorities often struggle to participate meaningfully in Indian politics, receiving fewer opportunities or representation in comparison to their population size.

- *Example:* Though Muslims make up 14% of India's population, they occupy only 2.5% of positions in the bureaucracy, as noted by the Sachar Committee.

- **Discriminatory State Intervention:** Governments often regulate religious customs to retain vote banks, showing bias and contributing to inequality.

  - *Example:* Polygamy is prohibited under Hindu law but allowed in Islam, leading to ambiguous legal standings and contradictions.

- **Constitutional Contradiction:** Some constitutional provisions meant to support secularism contain loopholes that result in discrimination.

  - *Example:* Article 48 prohibits cow slaughter but enforces religious sentiments in different ways for different communities, leading to conflicts.

- **Non-Separation of Religion from Politics:** Political parties and unions are often formed along religious lines, resulting in polarization and violence.

  - *Examples:* Demolition of Babri Masjid, anti-Sikh riots in 1984, and riots in 1992 and 2002 (Mumbai and Godhra riots).

4. **Religious Challenges:**

   - **Forced Conversion:** Christian missionaries have been accused of exploiting the lower social status of Dalits to convert them. In response, right-wing groups initiated movements like Ghar Wapsi to bring converts back to Hinduism.

   - **Growing Fundamentalism:** Fundamentalism manifests as rigid adherence to one particular religious belief or tradition. This hinders modernism and pluralism and fuels conservative, orthodox ideologies andsingularity as against democratic norms of modernism and plurality.

     - **Example**: Push for establishing Islamic State based on sharia law due to state-sponsored terrorism by external agents.

     - **Example**: Mob lynching on mere suspicion of slaughtering cows.

   - **Inter-religious conflict**: It has been argued by some that secularism threatens religious identity. The politicization of any one religious group leads to the competitive politicization of other groups, thereby resulting in inter-religious conflict.

   - **Communal riots**: In recent past also, communalism has proved to be a great threat to the secular fabric of Indian polity.

     - **Example**: Delhi riot 2020, UP riot 2015, etc.

Religious Pluralism

- **Nature in India**: Indian society is composed of diverse cultures, peoples, languages, and religions. Since ancient times, India has been a land of diverse cultural groups professing many faiths. The Indian subcontinent is the birthplace of four world religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism.

- **Indian constitution**: The Indian Constitution has rightly reflected the idea of multi-religions. It states that "every citizen has a right to freely practice, preach, profess, and propagate any religion or faith."

Role of Pluralism in Indian Secularism

- **Diversity in culture**: India has a varied culture from north to south and east to west, but pluralism accepted it and led to independence among the cultures.

  - **Examples**: Cultural features of North & South vary, but they are treated equally by the Indian society, the state.

- **Acceptance of diversity**: Diversity exists in all spheres of life, but the Indian state treats everyone with equality and equal separation.

  - **Examples**: Hindu festivals of Diwali are celebrated by all people, and Christmas is celebrated by all children irrespective of faiths.

- **Unity in diversity**: India, being a subcontinent, has developed the idea of unity in diversity.

  - **Example**: India is multi-religious; Zoroastrianism is still evident in India, although it has lost its place elsewhere.

- **Equal respect to all faiths**: The pre-constitution era has followed the principles of equal and mutual respect, which has been present since ancient times.

  - **Examples**: Ancient literature calls for Sanathana dharma to be followed.

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Multiculturalism and Pluralism

- **Multicultural society that believes in pluralism**: India is an inherently multi-cultural society that believes in plurality of ideas, belief and faith. It enriches Indian culture and adds to our diversity.

- **Blended community**: We have vibrant communities of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis etc. that have blended well and enhanced the progress of India.

Pluralism vs Multiculturalism

Pluralism	Multiculturalism
Individuals in a neutral public sphere are treated as equals.	The public sphere is not neutral but an arena for cultural negotiation.
Different cultures are allowed in their spheres, but society is not obligated to support alternative forms.	Different cultures are encouraged. Individuals are part of collectivities that provide meaning.
Dominant principles: Equality of opportunity, freedom of association.	Dominant principles: Affiliation, cultural recognition.
Pluralism in Indian Perspective: Describes cultural diversity, integrates different groupings without imposing a uniform status.	**Multiculturalism in Indian Perspective:** Encourages respect and tolerance for other cultures. Ensures minority values are equally important as majority values. The Constitution protects this by giving rights to different identities.

Majoritarian vs. Pluralist

Majoritarian	Pluralist
Dominant religion/culture should be more powerful.	Equal tolerance to all without a dominant discourse.
Secularism is threatened as dominant religions set the agenda.	Secularism is upheld as all religions have equal status.
Can cause societal conflict and imbalance due to clashes.	Peace and cooperation, as respect is given to all views.
Example: Communal riots where minorities feel insecure or dominated.	**Example:** Coexistence of all religions peacefully without conflict.

Role of Assimilation in Indian Secularism:

- **India as a melting pot:** Indian society has integrated various cultures and religions over time, promoting unity in diversity.

  - **Example:** Ancient, medieval, and British rulers contributed to the fusion of different cultural elements into Indian society.

- **Acculturation:** India exemplifies assimilation through acculturation, where new cultures blend seamlessly with the existing ones.

  - **Example:** Social reforms like the abolition of sati and promoting equality.

- **Peaceful integration process:** Peaceful assimilation led to the blending of various cultural elements, promoting secularism.

  - **Example:** The inclusion of Christian deities in Hindu temple sculptures, reflecting shared cultural practices.

- **No state religion:** India accepts all faiths and ensures the protection of minority rights under **Articles 29 and 30** of the Constitution.

  - There is no official state religion.

- **Amalgamation:** India developed secularism through the fusion of various religions and cultures, creating a unique societal blend.

  - **Example:** The Urdu language, which combines Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hindi elements, is a product of assimilation.

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- **Constitutional:**

  - **Defining the republic:** Abolition of separate electorates and the introduction of universal adult franchise immediately after independence (Article 326).

  - **42nd Amendment Act (1976):** Formally establishing India as a secular state with constitutional securities.

  - **Ministry of Minority Affairs:** Established in 2006 to oversee minority issues and promote justice and empowerment.

  - **National Integration Council (NIC):** Formed in 1962 to combat communalism and ensure national unity.

- **Judicial: Judicial interventions:** Opening all religious institutions to people from all social classes.

  - **Example:** Sabarimala Temple entry case.

- **Committees: Fact-finding missions:** The **Sachar Committee (2005-2006)** and the **Ranganath Misra Commission (2004-2007)** were created to address the socio-economic conditions and status of religious and linguistic minorities.

- **Government interventions: Multi-sectoral development programme:** Focused on improving the socio-economic conditions of minorities by providing essential services and reducing imbalances in regions with significant minority populations.

- **Abolition of separate electorate after independence:** Immediately after independence, separate electorates were abolished, and universal adult franchise was introduced (Article 326).

- **42nd CAA (Constitutional Amendment Act) 1976:** This act officially established India as a secular state with various constitutional protections.

- **National Integration Council (NIC):** Formed in 1962, the NIC was created to combat communalism and maintain unity and integrity.

- **National Minorities Development & Finance Corporation (NMDFC):** Established in 1994 to support economic activities among minorities by offering financial aid and discounts for self-employment activities.

  - Programs include **Nai Udaan** (financial support for minority students), **Nai Roshni** (leadership development for minority women), and **Seekho aur Kamao** (skill development).

- **Ministry of Minority Affairs:** Formed in 2006 to focus on the empowerment and justice of minority groups.

- **Sachar Committee (2005-2006):** The committee was appointed to examine the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in India.

- **Ranganath Misra Commission (2004-2007):** This commission was established to assess the status of religious and linguistic minorities in India.

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- **Wakf Board:** Regularized and computerized to ensure transparency in the administration of Wakf properties.

Ways Forward

- **Ensure value-education:** Educate younger generations to respect not only their own religious traditions but also those of other religions in India.

- **Uniform civil code:** Implement a uniform civil code to promote social reform and create a conducive environment for a strong socio-political consensus.

- **Promote secular politics:** End communal politics and encourage secular, principle-based political discussions.

- **Amend the constitution:** Recalibrate contradictions in the constitution and laws to ensure conformity with secular values.

- **Multi-Sectoral Development Programme:** Aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of minorities and providing basic amenities in areas with high minority populations.

- **Recommendations of 2nd ARC (Administrative Reforms Commission):** Provide governance that handles communal clashes effectively and offers a secular administration.

- **Prime Minister's New 15-point Programme for minorities:** Focus on equitable access to services such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for minority communities.

Measures for Improvement

- Improving access to school education.

- Greater resources for teaching Urdu.

- Modernizing Madrasa education.

- Scholarships for meritorious students from minority communities.

- Improving educational infrastructure through the Maulana Azad Education Foundation.

- Self-employment and wage employment for the poor.

- Upgradation of skills through technical training.

- Enhanced credit support for economic activities.

- Recruitment to State and Central services.

- Equitable share in rural housing schemes.

- Improvement in the condition of slums inhabited by minority communities.

- Prevention of communal incidents.

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- Prosecution for communal offenses.

- Rehabilitation of victims of communal riots.

Conclusion

The text emphasizes the importance of secularism in overcoming religious divisions and ensuring that no single religion dominates the state. It stresses the need for intra-religious and inter-religious equality, freedom, and pluralism in India. The goal is to create a harmonious society that embodies principles such as "Unity in Diversity" and multiculturalism.