

Secularism in India

1) Introduction

- Secularism in India refers to the equal status and treatment of all religions.
- Impartiality or non-interference by the Government of the country in matters of religion.
- One of India's guiding principles in impartiality in religious matters.
- Proclaimed in the amended Preamble to the Constitution of our country. It reads as follow: "We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic", etc.

2) Importance of Secularism

- Secularism and Democracy are two remarkable achievements of independent India.
- These two achievements have stood the test of time and set the goal of the nation on religious and political fronts.
- The State, remaining free from religious obligations, can take a tolerant attitude towards every religion and can pursue the ideal of achieving the well-being of the people, irrespective of caste, creed, religion etc.
- Secularism in India is a positive, revolutionary and comprehensive concept which takes within its sweep all the communities in India following several religions.
- Indian secularism recognizes the importance of religion in human life.
- Diversity as a political project can only be effective with secularism as a working foundational value
- India's survival as a multireligious, multilingual, multiracial, multicultural society will depend on how successful it is in working its secularism.
- There are many advantages of secularism in the present age of Globalization.
- We are marching fairly rapidly to the goal of universal brotherhood. In this age of universal fraternity the narrow concept of theocracy has absolutely no place.

3) Secularism-- Constitutional Precepts

- Article 14--equality before law; article 15--prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth
- The provisions relating to "Right of Freedom of Religion" of the Articles 25 & 28 of the Constitution of India make India a secular state.
- To make assurance doubly sure, the 42nd amendment of the constitution inserts the term "secular" in the preamble of the constitution.
- Article 25 of Indian Constitution grants freedom to every citizen of India to profess, practice and propagate his own religion.

- The constitution, in the preamble professes to secure to all its citizen's liberty of belief, faith and worship.
- Caste system or untouchability cannot be practised in the case of entry into public Hindu temples.
- Discrimination in public employment on grounds of religion is prohibited by Article 16.
- Article 29 of the Indian constitution assures that the state shall not impose on a minority community any culture other than its own.
- Art. 30 grant the minority community, the right to establish and administer their own educational institution.

4) Challenges / Concerns

- **Problem of Uniform Civil Code:**
 - a) 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.
 - b) Minority community compelled the Government to enact legislation closer to its Personal Law and, therefore, religiously more acceptable.
 - c) The vulnerable point in India is the deep religious sentiment prevailing among its different religious communities.
 - d) Such limitations indicate that the path leading to a truly secular society in India is strewn with numerous hurdles.
- **Politics and Religion:**
 - a) The Supreme Court had observed in the Bommai case that if religion is not separated from politics, the religion of the ruling party tends to become the state religion.
 - b) It is very often seen that in the time of elections most of the political parties completely forget this noble ideal of secularism and woo the voters even on communal or cast lines.
- **Failure of the Government in Evolving a Just Economic Order:**
 - a) The failure of the government to evolve a just economic order and eliminate poverty also gave a serious setback to secularism.
- **Cultural Symbols and Secularism:**
 - a) Many public rituals and ceremonials like bhoomi puja, breaking of coconuts on inaugural occasions, performing of 'aarti' and applying to 'tilak' are perceived by Hindus as cultural or nationalistic expressions, but to non-Hindus these are manifestations of Hindu culture.
 - b) Such rituals are performed even on state functions and therefore, create unnecessary misgivings about the neutrality of the State.

- propagation of religion and large-scale conversions, particularly in the tribal areas and of persons below the poverty line
- **serious doubts about how secular India is**
 - a) demolition of the Babri Masjid, anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and other places in 1984
 - b) horrific riots in Mumbai in December 1992 and January 1993
 - c) atrocities in riots in Godhra and other cities in Gujarat 2002
 - d) Banning of cow slaughter leading to curtailment of freedom of persons about what to eat and restricting their freedom to carry on any profession and trade.
- The fundamental right of persons to practise any profession contained in article 19 (1) (g) of the Constitution has been over-ridden by article 48.

5) Need for further action

- Since secularism has been declared as a part of the basic structure of the Constitution, governments must be made accountable for implementing it.
- Define the word “minority”. The concept of secularism is based on recognition and protection of minorities. The two cannot be separated.
- Setting up of a commission on secularism for ensuring adherence to the constitutional mandate on secularism.
- Separation of religion from politics. It is of such urgency that no time should be wasted in bringing this about.
- It is the duty of the secular and democratic forces to rally behind those political forces that really profess and practice secularism.
- In a secular state, religion is expected to be a purely personal and private matter and is not supposed to have anything to do with the governance of the country.
- **Two basic electoral reforms are imperative if secularism is to be strengthened.**
 - a) The first is making voting compulsory.
 - b) Unless all eligible voters participate in the elections, the accountability of the political parties cannot be established fully.
 - c) The second is making 50 per cent plus one vote necessary to win.
 - d) The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) has also invited attention to this matter
 - e) The Election Commission has also favoured this suggestion and has said that it sees no difficulty in its implementation.

6) Conclusion

- A great deal remains to be done if secularism is to become a way of life in India.
- This will be possible only if there is a real political, social and intellectual commitment to it



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