

## General Studies-1; Topic – Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.

### Secularism in India

#### 1) Introduction

- Secularism has been discussed in India primarily as a state policy towards religious groups.
- The debate on secularism began by pointing to the difference of the Indian variation to its Western counterpart, either by pointing to an idea of a 'principled distance' or samadharma samabhava, where all religions are treated as equal.
- Our Constitution acquire its secular character from the words in the Preamble, collective reading of many of its provisions, particularly the various fundamental rights.

#### 2) Importance of Secularism

- Secularism and Democracy are two remarkable achievements of independent India.
- Secularism in India refers to the equal status and treatment of all religions.
- 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 can only be effective with secularism as a foundational value.
- India's survival as a multireligious, multilingual, multiracial, multicultural society will depend on how successful it is in working its secularism.

#### 3) Constitutional Precepts

- Article 14--equality before law; article 15--prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth
- Discrimination in public employment on grounds of religion is prohibited by Article 16.
- The provisions relating to "Right of Freedom of Religion" of the Articles 25 to 28 make India a secular state.
- The 42nd amendment of the constitution inserted the term "secular" in the preamble of the constitution.
- 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.
- 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) Re-imagining Secularism

- In focusing on the question of distance between religion and state, the idea that secularism essentially promoted a social philosophy of life got sidelined.
- Secularism is not merely about how religious groups are treated by the state.
- What it meant is to forge positive and proactive solidarity between religious groups in their everyday social and cultural life.
- The role of the state has to be to forge ties between different cultural groups, not merely religious but also caste, ethnic, regional, linguistic, among others.

- All of these ties concern secularism as a social philosophy.
- So India Needs to Rethink How It Looks at Secularism.

## 5) Secularism during Colonial period

- Initially, the East India Company (EIC) was involved in the administration of religious institutions.
- Temple employees were appointed by government officials.
- Under the orders of the public officer of the district, a religious offering was made at temples for a good monsoon.
- Laws were enacted for superintendence of all lands granted for the mosques and Hindu temples with the colonial government.
- All this annoyed Christian missionaries and members of the clergy in England.
- Consequently, in 1833, the Court of Directors of the EIC sent instructions to the colonial government.
- The Directors wrote that the interference of British Functionaries in the interior management of native temples, in the customs, habits and religious proceedings shall cease.
- It was in this manner that the seeds of secularism were sown in India.
- The colonial government was directed to disentangle itself from Indian religious institutions.
- The wall of separation between temple and colonial state in India was achieved in 1863, when a law was enacted in this regard.
- However, this colonial vision of secularism was rejected by India's founding fathers.
- Indian leaders felt that government entanglement in religious institutions was essential, even in a secular state.

## 6) Concerns / Challenges

- **Uniform Civil Code:**
  - a. No progress has been made in the evolution of a uniform Civil Code.
  - b. There are deep religious sentiments prevailing among different religious communities.
  - c. It limits the path to a truly secular society in India.
- **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. During the time of elections most of the political parties completely forget the noble ideal of secularism and woo the voters 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 is a setback to secularism.
- **Cultural Symbols and Secularism:**
  - a. Many public rituals like bhoomi puja, breaking of coconuts on inaugural occasions, performing of 'aarti' and applying '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.
- Schools today have become havens of social isolation where children of similar economic and social backgrounds are unaware of the kind of social diversity that exists outside their little worlds.

## 7) Way Forward

- Since secularism has been declared as a part of the basic structure of the Constitution, governments must be made accountable for implementing it.
- 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 time for India to adopt true secularism.

