

2.1 Understanding Secular values

Secularism is to create a society in which people of all religions or people who don't belong to any religion can live together peacefully. No person should be subjected to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or person on grounds of religion or other beliefs.

- Secularism means separation of religion from political, economic, social and cultural aspects of life, religion being treated as a purely personal matter.
- It emphasized dissociation of the state from religion and full freedom to all religions and tolerance of all religions.
- It also stands for equal opportunities for followers of all religions, and no discrimination and partiality on grounds of religion.

Three popular beliefs of secularism are

- One religious community doesn't dominate another.
- Some members do not dominate other members of the same religious community.
- The State does not enforce any particular religion on any individual nor take away the religious freedom from them.

Secularism in the Preamble of the Constitution of India is described as “all the religions” i.e. Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Islam Christianity, etc. “are all equal”. India follows many religions. A person is said to be secular when his thinking is rational and based on science.

Benefits of secular values

Peaceful coexistence: By separating religion and state, secularism allows diverse communities to live together peacefully, respecting each other's beliefs.

Progress and innovation: When reason and evidence guide decisions, it lead to scientific advancement, technological innovation and progress in solving real-world problems.

Individual liberty: Secular values promote individual freedom of thought, express and action, within the framework of respecting others' rights.

The Indian State works in various ways to protect secularism

- It uses a strategy of distancing itself from religion. In India, government organizations like courts, police stations, government schools and offices are not supposed to display or promote any one religion.
- **A strategy of noninterference;** In order to respect the sentiments of all religions and noninterference with religious practices, the State makes certain exceptions for particular religious communities.
- **A strategy of intervention:** To ensure the laws relating to equal inheritance rights are respected, the State can intervene in the religion-based 'personal laws' of communities. The intervention of the State can also be in the form of support. For example, the Indian Constitution grants the right to religious communities to set up their own schools and colleges. It also gives them financial aid on a non-preferential basis.

Understanding secularism is important because

- They are the foundation of many modern societies.
- They shape the functioning of society and peaceful coexistence for diverse society.
- We can participate in civic discourse and engage in discussion about the role of religion in society.

Challenges of secular values:

Some argue that without religion, there's no objective moral in society. However, secular ethics focus on human well-being and minimizing harm. Balancing religious freedom with maintaining a secular state can be tricky. Debates arise about use of religious symbols in public spaces.

Atheism is the lack of belief in a God or Gods. A person can be secular and religious, or secular and atheist.

"Secularism in India: Concept and Practice" by Ram Puniyani

The understanding of secular values is deeply rooted in the Indian context, where the principle of secularism has significant implications for governance, society and individual rights.

- **Pluralistic society:** With diverse population comprising various religions, languages, cultures and traditions Indian secularism acknowledges and respects this pluralism, seeking to ensure equal treatment and opportunities for all religious communities.
- **Equal citizenship:** All citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs, are entitled to the same rights, protections and opportunities under the law.
- **State neutrality:** The separation of religion from the affairs of the state, ensure that government institutions remain impartial and do not favor or discriminate against any particular religious group.
- **Religious freedom:** Individuals have the right to practice, propagate and profess their religion freely.
- **Social justice:** It aims to address historical injustices, discrimination and inequalities based on religion, caste, gender or class, thereby promoting a more inclusive and democratic society.
- **Interfaith harmony:** It emphasizes the importance of fostering interfaith harmony and understanding among different religious communities.
- **Educational secularism:** It promote education system, that is free from religious teaching, promotes critical thinking, rational inquiry and intellectual freedom, for students to develop a broad understanding of diverse perspectives.