

**WHAT IS SECULARISM: -**

Secularism is a word which originated in western states and is related to the separation of the church from the state, giving the state a position of neutrality between different religions, while at same time guaranteeing all citizens the right to profess any of the religions. The word Secularism was given by Machiavelli in 15<sup>th</sup> century, when he propagated separation of religion from politics.

According to Dr. Radha Krishnam, “Secularism does not mean in religion or atheism or even stress on material comforts. It proclaims that it lays stress on the universality of Spiritual values which may be attained by a variety of ways”.

According to Indira Gandhi. “Secularism is neither a religion nor indifference to religion, but equal respect for all religion, nor mere tolerance but positive respect-without it there is no future of a nation.

Harvey Cox writes. “Secularism does not exclude religion. But it breeds religious peaceful co-existence. The essential element of Secularism is that the state has nothing to do with religion”.

**WHICH DOMAIN OF LIFE DOES SECULARISM RELATE TO: -**

Secularism is not an exotic concept planted in India from the west. Its domain is related to religion and grew out of thoughts and feelings which emerge gradually from the intermingling of different groups and communities in consequence of the impetus given to it by changes in social, economics & political life.

Secularism in relation to religions enjoys special states in India. As India is the vast country with number of religion like Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and Parsis etc. So to maintain co-existence between so many religions resulted in secular philosophy prevailing in India. The state gives full religious liberty to people in matters of faith, following of religious scriptures and maintenance of religious institutions.

In India, concept of Secularism has been portrayed in terms of religion. But in reality the term Secularism is much wider than religion. The alternative to word Secularism is cult. The Bhakti & sufi Movement in India gave a tremendous impetus for bringing people of a various communities together to strengthen spirit of Secularism, Pandith Moti Lal Nehru said, “There shall be no state religion for the common wealth of India, Or for any province in the common wealth, nor shall state either directly or indirectly, endow any religion or given any religion any preference or impose any disability on account of religious belief or status” [1928].

The domain of Secularism, therefore include certain fundamental principles and duties which provide freedom of religion, end of discrimination on the basis of religion, non-interference of state in religious affairs, promotion of co-existence &

harmony among various religions, mutual respect for each other's religion, ban on organizations promoting hatred on religious grounds (Communalism) and promotion of the spirit of tolerance and national solidarity.

**WHAT IS A SECULAR STATE: -**

The challenges of casteism, communalism and religious fundamentalism, involving separation and violence in India, are the major threats to our secular polity. They weaken the working and stability of our democratic, secular, federal system and militate against the basic principles governing our national life and providing meaning to our new identity.

Inter communal and inter-caste tensions and violence over the year have disturbed national peace and order. In recent years there have been recurrent and increasing numbers of communal riots, caste carnages and linguistic animosities. This disruptive element should be suppressed with firm step if India is to emerge as a democratic secular polity.

In India, there are two main nations, which are considered to be binary opposites. They are Secularism and Communalism. Secularism is a sign of modernity, plurality, co-existence, rationalism and developing with a fast growing multicultural society. Communalism, which some consider as being based on love of one's community, has come to acquire the derogatory meaning of an attitude that is narrow, based on prejudices about the other and almost based on hatred and violence.

Indian constitution laid down following features to maintain Secular democracy in India;

- i. The state will not identify itself with or be controlled by any religion.
- ii. State should guarantee to all its citizens right to profess any religion including atheists, but should not accord any preferential treatment to any of them.
- iii. No discrimination will be shown by the state against any person on account of his religion and faith.
- iv. That the right of every citizen, subject to any general condition to enter any office under the state will be equal to that of his fellow citizen. Political equality which entitles any Indian citizen to seek the highest office under state as opposed to what is found in theocratic state is the heart and soul of secularism as envisaged by the constitution.

A Secular state is not an anti-religious state but a state without a religion. It involves the concept of religious freedom for all faith living within the state. Secularism is not only a characteristic of the state but involves the

concept of religious co-existence and the concept of equal citizenship rights. It also characterizes an attitude of mind which must be shared by the minority and majority religious communities living within the state.

K. N Panikkar lays down three characteristics, necessary for India to be a secular state.

- i. The secular state postulates that political institutions must be based on the economic and social interest of the entire community, without reference to religion, race, sex, caste etc. and all must enjoy equal right and no privileges should be granted to any one on based of religion.
- ii. It eliminates from the body politic ideas of division between individual and group on the basis of their faith & racial origin.
- iii. All the communities must have power, as they must share the duties and responsibilities of being citizens.

#### **NEED OF SECULAR STATE IN MODERN TIMES: -**

Secularism is essential for democracy, even though in its ideal form, it may not exist anywhere in the world. In case of state like India, Secularism is extremely important. The need of Secularism in modern times can be explained in following points.

- i. To save a state from irrationality like communalism which will result either in separatism or fascism, the only solution is secular policy.
- ii. The increasing religious riots which are destroying society can be controlled through Secularism.
- iii. Secularism is helpful in maintaining peace in a country, and peaceful co-existence leads to national prosperity.
- iv. **Supports morality: -**

Secularism is based on the concept of co-existence. Morally Secularism supports the brotherhood. Speaking morally, Secularism helps to develop the personality of its citizens spiritually. Secularism therefore, morally promotes welfare which is essential for every democratic state.

- v. **Freedom of Religion: -**

A Secular state does not discriminate between its citizens in the name of religion. Likewise, the state gives freedom of religion to its citizens. All religious communities have the freedom to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. It is based on the principle of co-existence of all religions which is quite essential for any modern democratic state.

**vi. Opposed to dictatorship: -**

Secularism allows people to profess, practice and preach their religion. All religions get an opportunity to enjoy full liberty of religion and conserve their language script and culture. It restricts the absolute power of state and is therefore opposed to dictatorship.

**vii. Supports democracy: -**

Modern age is the age of democratic states. Secularism by providing freedom of belief and worship establishes foundations of a strong and modern democratic state.

**viii. Separates religion from politics: -**

Secularism supports the belief that religious faith is a personal matter of an individual. The state or politics should segregate itself from religion. It was this belief which had given rise to the concept of Secularism in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the modern democratic states seclude politics from religion. Politics separates itself from religion while on the other hand it even preserves the religious freedom of people.

**ix. Promotes global unity and universal brotherhood: -**

Today is the age of internationalism. Due to the development of science and technology, mode of transport and communication the world has become a global village. People of different cults and religions migrate from one place to another. This process has intensified due to the rapid rise of social, economic and technical collaboration among the developed and developing state. Such a situation has led to the settlement of multi-religious communities in every part of the globe. No one would like to depart from his personal faith. Most modern nations, therefore, adopt Secularism to promote global peace and universal harmony among all religions based on co-existence and cooperation.

**IS SECULARISM SUITABLE FOR INDIA: -**

When Jawahar Lal Nehru framed the objective resolution of the constitution, secularism was figured as an important aspect of it. As India is multi-nation state so to build real nationalism, Secularism is necessary.

The narrow religious grouping, building or loyalties must exclude many sections of the population, and only create Hindu, Muslim and Christian nationality and not Indian nationality. For India, Secularism is very much suitable and Indian constitution explained Secular nature of India in following articles

- i. **Preamble:** - Through the 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment Act, word 'Secular' was introduced in preamble of Indian constitution declaring India a Secular nation
- ii. **No state Religion:** - In India there will be no state religion. The state will neither establish a religion of its own nor confer any special privilege upon any particular religion. Under Article 27, the state will not compel any citizen to pay any tax for the promotion of any particular religion. No religion instruction shall be provided in educational institutions run by state. But in private run schools, religious instructions are not banned but it should not be imposed upon people of other religions without their consent (Article 28).
- iii. **Freedom of conscience:** - Every person is guaranteed the freedom of Conscience and the freedom to profess, practice and propagate his own religion, only subject to;
  - a) Restrictions imposed by state on the interest of public order, morality and health, so that freedom of religion may not be abused to commit crimes or anti-social acts etc
  - b) Under article 25, every citizen of India is free to profess any religion, and to preach his views to other.
- iv. **Freedom to manage religious affairs:** - There is not only the freedom of individual to profess, practice and propagate his religion, there is also the right guaranteed to every group like;
  - a) To establish and maintain institution for religions and charitable proposes.
  - b) To manage its own affairs in matters of religion.
  - c) To own and acquire movable and immovable property and,
  - d) To administer such property in accordance with law.[Article26]
- v. **Equality before law:** - Article 14 granted equality before law and equal protection by the laws to all. Article 15, enlarge the concept of Secularism to the widest possible extent prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religions, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- vi. **Cultural and educational rights:** - Under article 29 and 30 certain cultural and educational rights are guaranteed. Article 29, guarantees the right of any section of the citizens residing in any part of the country having a distinct language, script or culture of its own and conserve the same.

Article 30, provides that all the minorities whether based on religion or language, shall have a right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

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