

Secularism

Mains: GS1 - Salient features of Indian Society | Secularism

GS2 - Indian Constitution-features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure | Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

Why in the news?

Secularism is seen frequently in news due to debates over its interpretations and implementation of Universal civil code (UCC).

What is secularism?

- **Secularism** - It is the principle where the **state remain distant, maintains neutrality towards all religions**, ensuring no official state religion and equal treatment of all citizens regardless of faith.
- **Origin** - The word secular is derived from the **Latin term saeculum**, meaning “a generation,” “a human lifetime,” “an era of time,” or “a century.”
- **Usage** - Initially, it is used to denote **worldly or temporal matters**, as opposed to religious or spiritual ones.
- In the middle ages, it was used by Christians to refer to matters not related to the church or religious life.
- The term in its modern sense was coined by the British writer George Jacob Holyoake in 1851.
 - Secularism seen as a product of modernity and rational thought.
- **Importance** - It guarantees **freedom of religion, non-discrimination**, and separation of religious institutions from state affairs.

What are the various models of secularism practiced?

John Locke

- State exists for civil interests, not spiritual salvation.

Roger Williams

- He advocated separation to protect religion from state interference.

- **England** - Anglican Church is official, but equal rights and religious freedom are protected.
- **Ireland** - Preamble references Christianity, but state cannot favor or discriminate based on religion.
- **Greece** - Orthodox Church is dominant, but equality and freedom of religion are constitutionally guaranteed.
- **Pakistan** - Islam is state religion, minorities have rights to practice and cultural development, with provisions for representation.
- **Sri Lanka** - Buddhism given foremost place, but freedom to adopt any religion is protected, and minorities follow personal laws.
- **India** - It emphasizes on *no official state religion*, equal respect for all faiths, reflecting the country's diverse and multi-religious context.

Indian model	Western model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It embodies <i>positive concept</i> advocates for positive intervention into religious affairs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It embodies <i>negative concept</i>, by strict separation from the religion. • For example, <i>US and France</i>.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a <i>model of "principled distance,"</i> where the state may engage with or intervene in religious matters. • It is to ensure equality, reform, and protection of minority rights. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a <i>strict separation between religion and state</i>, often excluding religion from public affairs.

How the concept of secularism evolved in India?

- **Historical roots** - *Ashoka's influence over religion* through his edicts promoted religious tolerance and coexistence.
 - **Rock Edict 7** - All religions should reside everywhere, promoting self-control and purity of heart.
 - **Rock Edict 12** - Prohibited glorification of one's religion and condemnation of others.
- **Freedom struggle** - Secularism was a guiding principle during India's independence movement.
 - **1928 Motilal Nehru Committee** - It proposed no state religion, no preference or disability based on religion.
 - **1931 Karachi Resolution** - It emphasised state neutrality in religious matters.
 - **1944 Hindu Mahasabha Draft** - It explicitly declared no state religion.
- **Supreme Court** - In the *Kesavananda Bharati case (1973)*, it had held that ***secularism is a basic structure*** of Indian Constitution.
- **Constitutional amendment** - The word *secular was added through 42nd constitutional amendment act in 1976*.

In 1976, the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi justified the **inclusion of the word 'secular'** that it would reinforce India's commitment to social justice and religious equality.

What are the contemporary challenges?

- **Political misuse** - Rise in communal politics and attempts to reinterpret secularism for political gain.
- **Hate speech** - It increase in religious intolerance and hate speech against minorities.
- **Misconceptions** - Some people believe that secularism grants special privileges to minorities.
 - In reality, it prevents state domination over religion and promotes autonomy for all.

***Theocratic state** is relating to or denoting a system of government in which priests rule in the name of God or a god. In theocratic states, there is excessive state control over religion, which undermines religious autonomy.*

- **Dissent over its inclusion in Constitution** - There are ongoing discussions on the inclusion of 'secular' in the Preamble.
 - Organization like RSS calls for review of secularism provisions.

What lies ahead?

- **Reaffirming neutrality** - State may remain neutral and not endorse any religion to ensure safeguard of all religions.
- **Promoting tolerance** - Emphasizing coexistence and respect for all faiths, as rooted in Ashokan and constitutional ideals can be helpful to maintain harmony over various religions.
- **Positive secularism** - The state may encourage a model that respects all religions without state interference or favoritism.

Reference

[The Hindu| Secularism](#)