

Chapter 8

Secularism

Question 1:

Which of the following do you feel are compatible with the idea of secularism? Give reasons.

- (a) Absence of domination of one religious group by another.**
- (b) Recognition of a state religion.**
- (c) Equal state support to all religions.**
- (d) Mandatory prayers in schools.**
- (e) Allowing separate educational institutions for any minority community.**
- (f) Appointment of temple management bodies by the government.**
- (g) Intervention of state to ensure entry of *Dalits* in temples.**

ANSWER:

Any answer supported with argument or explanation would solve the purpose. It is strongly recommended that you prepare the solution on your own. However, a sample solution has been provided for your reference:

- (a) Absence of domination of one religious group over another is compatible with the idea of secularism as it allows freedom to all religious groups.
- (c) Equal state support to all religions is compatible with the idea of secularism as it provides a chance to every religion to preserve its traditions and flourish.
- (e) Allowing separate educational institutions for any minority is compatible with the idea of secularism as this will provide right to the minority to maintain its cultural identity and a chance to develop.
- (g) Intervention of state to ensure entry of *Dalits* in temples is compatible with the idea of secularism as it prevents discrimination and provides equal rights to every social group.

Question 2:

Some of the key characteristics of western and Indian model of secularism have got mixed up. Separate them and make a new table.

ANSWER:

Western Secularism	Indian Secularism
Strict non-interference of religion and state in each other's affairs	State supported religious reforms allowed
Less attention to community based rights	Attention to minority rights
Equality between different sects of a religion is emphasised	Equality between different religious groups is a key concern
Individual and his rights at the centre	Rights of both individual and religious community protected

Question 3:

What do you understand by secularism? Can it be equated with religious tolerance?

ANSWER:

- Secularism is a doctrine that opposes any form of religious and intra-religious domination. It does **not** oppose religion itself.
- Secularism **cannot** be equated with religious tolerance as tolerance may be compatible with religious domination by one group.
- However, religious tolerance is one of the components of secularism.

Question 4:

Do you agree with the following statements? Give reasons for supporting or opposing any of them.

- (a) Secularism does not allow us to have a religious identity.
- (b) Secularism is against inequality within a religious group or between different religious groups.
- (c) Secularism has a western-Christian origin. It is not suitable for India.

ANSWER:

Any answer supported with argument or explanation would solve the purpose. It is strongly recommended that you prepare the solution on your own. However, a sample solution has been provided for your reference:

(a) Secularism allows us to have a religious identity. In India, a citizen can have a religious identity, so that he/she can represent his/her religious institution whenever required in order to preserve and develop it.

(b) Secularism is against inequality both within a religious group and between different religious groups. The Indian government tries to maintain equality within religious groups to prevent discrimination and eradicate practices that are derogatory to human dignity.

(c) Secularism may have a western-Christian origin but it is suitable for India. This is due to the fact that India is a multi-cultural and religious society. Thus, it is necessary to ensure equal treatment to all groups both within and between different religions to maintain harmony and integrate the country.

Question 5:

Indian secularism focuses on more than the religion-state separation. Explain.

ANSWER:

- Indian secularism does not focus on the religion-state separation alone; it is also concerned with maintaining harmony between different religions and reforming religious practices to protect the social and civil rights of its citizens.
- Indian secularism allows every religion to flourish and develop.
- The Indian state allows the promotion of all religions and treats each of them equally.
- Therefore state does **not** interfere in religious matters but it checks the influence of religion in public life.

Question 6:

Explain the concept of principled distance.

ANSWER:

- According to the concept of principled distance, a secular state may keep a principled distance from religion to promote peace between communities and it may also intervene to protect the rights of specific communities.
- The state gives equal preference to every religion and respects them all equally. However, the state may interfere if religious groups try to exercise their power on the political and social life of the people.

This balanced distance of state from religious groups is called principled distance.