

CBSE Notes Class 8 Social Science Civics

Chapter 2 - Understanding Secularism

Members of one religious community either persecute or discriminate against members of other religious communities. These acts of discrimination take place more easily when one religion is given official recognition by the State at the expense of other religions. All forms of domination related to religion should end. This is the essence of secularism. In CBSE Notes Class 8 Social Science Civics Chapter 2, you will read more about what Secularism means in the Indian context.

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What is Secularism?

India adopted a strategy of separating the power of religion and the power of the State. **Secularism** refers to this separation of religion from the State. The Indian Constitution allows individuals the freedom to live by their religious beliefs and practice it.

Why is it Important to Separate Religion from the State?

The separation of the State and religion in democratic societies is important because of the following reasons:

1. It helps a country to function democratically.
2. The tyranny of the majority and the violation of Fundamental Rights can be very harmful to the people belonging to the minority. So, it protects people from any type of religious violence.
3. It protects the freedom of individuals to exit from their religion, embrace another religion. It gave people the freedom to interpret religious teachings differently.

What is Indian Secularism?

The Indian Constitution mandates that the Indian State be secular. Only a secular State can realise its objectives to ensure the following:

- One religious community does not dominate another.
- Some members do not dominate other members of the same religious community.
- The State does not enforce any particular religion nor does it take away the religious freedom of individuals.

Steps were taken by Indian State to Protect Secularism in India

The Indian State works in various ways:

1. It uses a strategy of distancing itself from religion. In India, government spaces like law courts, police stations, government schools and offices are not supposed to display or promote any one religion.
2. A strategy of non-interference. This means that in order to respect the sentiments of all religions and not interfere with religious practices, the State makes certain exceptions for particular religious communities.
3. A strategy of intervention. This means that to ensure the laws relating to equal inheritance rights are respected, the State can intervene in the religion-based 'personal laws' of communities.
4. 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.

In what way is Indian secularism different from that of other democratic countries?

There is one significant way in which Indian secularism differs from the dominant understanding of secularism as practised in the United States of America. In American secularism, there is a strict separation between religion and the State. Whereas in Indian secularism, the State can intervene in religious affairs.