
**WHETHER THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION STRIKES A BALANCE
BETWEEN SECULARISM AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS**

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Article Received: 27 February 2026 *Corresponding Author: G. Raja Kumari

Article Revised: 17 March 2026 LL.M (Constitutional Law)

Published on: 07 April 2026 DOI: <https://doi-org/101555/ijrpa.4150>

ABSTRACT

The Indian Constitution is sometimes praised as a singular example of secularism because it strikes a balance between the ideal of official neutrality in religious matters and the right to religious freedom. The effectiveness of the Indian constitutional framework in preserving this equilibrium is critically examined in this essay. The paper examines the intricate relationship between secularism and religious freedom by carefully examining constitutional provisions like Articles 25 to 30, judicial interpretations in significant cases like *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973) and *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), and the state's role in regulating religious practices. The Indian Constitution, which reflects the nation's rich cultural and religious diversity, is frequently praised for its distinctive stance on secularism and religious freedom. In contrast to the rigid separation of church and state advocated by Western secularism, Indian secularism is founded on the idea of "equal respect for all religions." This unique concept aims to strike a compromise between the state's need to uphold social harmony and religious neutrality and the individual's right to religious freedom. Practical issues including political exploitation of religion, inconsistent judicial decisions, and growing intercommunal conflicts have put strain on the "principled distance" model that the Constitution envisions, in which the state respects all religions equally without favoring any one of them. The study makes the case that, in spite of a well-written constitution, India's secular fabric is in danger due to the rise of majoritarian politics and religious extremism. It comes to the conclusion that maintaining India's delicate balance between secularism and religious freedom requires strong protection of minority rights, consistency in judicial interpretation, and political neutrality.

KEYWORDS: Secularism, religious freedoms, constitutional provisions, individual rights, etc.

INTRODUCTION:

As a secular country, India's Constitution protects the right to freedom of religion, but it also makes sure that this freedom doesn't lead to discrimination or disrupt public order. But in reality, striking a balance between these liberties and secularist ideals remains difficult. Religion frequently causes conflict and division, causing rifts in society. However, these disputes can be lessened and peace and harmony can be fostered by accepting pluralism and promoting diversity. India has a long history of handling various cultures and faiths, despite the fact that ideas about diversity have only lately gained hold in the West. It is important that this rich tradition be maintained and kept current. The Indian judiciary has always maintained this unifying principle, highlighting the right to study and express one's opinions as guaranteed by the Constitution. India has long been a place that accepts all religions and offers a secure environment for peaceful coexistence between followers of all faiths. These faiths impacted one another and even the nation's governance over time. This made sense since it is hard to be unaffected by profound philosophical concepts when they are all around a culture. Consequently, India changed from being a totally secular or atheistic state to a theistic one. Members of the Constituent Assembly discussed whether or not to start the Constitution with the words "In the name of God" during its drafting. Some were in favor of the notion, while others were against it, claiming that religion and the state should be kept apart. Even when the plan was ultimately turned down, there was still disagreement over what constitutes secularism in India. The Assembly decided that India needed to be secular in order for democracy to flourish, but figuring out what this secularism would be was a difficult task.

The word "secular" was only legally inserted to the Preamble by the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution. India's secularism, however, is not the same as the American model, which upholds a rigid division between religion and the state. India, on the other hand, has a more balanced and inclusive stance, with the state maintaining its neutrality and respecting all religions without endorsing or disapproving any. In India, secularism guarantees all religions the same standing and impartial treatment. The phrase was not incorporated into the Preamble until the 42nd Amendment Act of 1976, notwithstanding the framers' support for secularism. India is a secular nation that guarantees equal protection for all religions by not endorsing any

state religion. Because it avoids religious conflicts and permits people to freely practice their views, secularism is essential to democracy. The fundamental tenet is that religious freedom ought to be complemented by protection, guaranteeing that every place of worship is treated equally.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The historical and social environment of India had a significant impact on the acceptance of secularism in the Indian Constitution. Numerous religious traditions have called India home, including Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Jainism. India has seen both times of religious concord and communal conflict throughout its history. Therefore, the framers of the Constitution understood the necessity of establishing a political structure that would guarantee religious harmony while averting societal divisions. Secularism is India's cornerstone. Secularism's development and expansion, with all of its successes and conflicts as an idea and an ideology, is an intriguing subject to research and a significant period in Indian history. There are differences between the Indian and Western conceptions of secularism. Indian secularism embraces and respects all religions, in contrast to Western secularism, which opposes all religious systems. Similarly, in the Indian model, the mind governs the affairs, enhancing both the concept of nation-hood and the quality of life, whereas western secularism stands for bettering the material conditions of human beings. Indian culture has endured due to its adaptability, tenacity, and ability to evolve, absorb, embrace, and revitalize. Prof. A. L. Basham asserts that "India has the longest cultural continuity of any land on earth." He states in his seminal work "A Cultural History of India" that "China, India, Greece, and Italy are the four main cradles of civilization from which the elements of culture have spread to other parts of the world.

The Indus Valley Civilization, a secular and highly developed civilization that predates India's history, resembles a modern society with all of its artistic splendor and modern conveniences. Rabindranath Tagore asserts that the first cultured Indian was a secular person who coexisted peacefully with others. Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Ropar, Lothal, Kalibangan, and a hundred other Saraswati locations' inhabitants. The fundamental idea of the 16th-century religious groups, including the Bhakti Movement of Ramananda, Kabir, and Nanak, as well as 19th-century social movements like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Theosophical Society, was freedom from all religious biases¹.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularism_in_India

People were encouraged by both revolutions to feel united and supportive of India as a whole. Nonetheless, the Constitution has always included the citizens' fundamental rights, which are upheld in court and are what define India as a secular state. Every Indian citizen is entitled to religious freedom as a fundamental right, as stated in Articles 25–28. "Freedom of Conscience" is guaranteed by Article 25, which means that everyone has an equal right to freely profess, practice, and spread their faith. According to Article 26, each Areligious organization or individual is entitled to create and run institutions for religious and philanthropic purposes as well as to run its own religious affairs. According to Article 27, the government is not allowed to force any citizen to pay taxes in order to support or uphold a specific religion or religious organization. In a same vein, educational institutions run by various religious groups are permitted to offer religious instruction under Article 28. "To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood among all people of India transcending religious, linguistic, regional or sectoral diversities, to value and preserve the rich heritage of our common culture," is another fundamental duty enshrined in Article 51A of the Constitution. Religious and linguistic minorities' rights to culture and education are safeguarded by Articles 29 and 30. Article 30 stipulates that all minorities, regardless of religion or language, shall have the freedom to create and run educational institutions of their choosing, whereas Article 29 forbids discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, language, or any combination of these. It is clear from the aforementioned analysis that secularism in India is not only a part of our history and currently required by the constitution, but also a cultural requirement, a social obligation, and a stepping stone to advancement.

IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE IN A DIVERSE, MULTI-RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

A society where individuals of different religions live in harmony and respect is said to be multi-religious. Seeing people from different religious backgrounds in our communities is becoming more frequent in today's world due to globalization and growing diversity.² There are a lot of advantages to living in a multi-religious community, despite the fact that some people would view this as a cause of strife or division. Interfaith understanding and communication is one of the main advantages of living in a multi-religious society. People of various faiths have the opportunity to understand and value each other's beliefs and practices when they engage with one another. Increased tolerance, empathy, and appreciation for

² https://edukemy.com/blog/religious-pluralism-and-multi-culturalism-upsc-indian-society-notes/#3_Why_is_religious_pluralism_important_in_a_diverse_society

variety may result from this. People can dispel prejudices and misunderstandings and promote a more accepting and peaceful community by having discussions and doing activities with people of diverse religious backgrounds. The possibility of cooperation and collaboration amongst many religious organizations is another advantage of a multi-religious society. When people from different religious backgrounds come together, they may solve problems and cooperate toward shared objectives. Partnerships in fields including social justice, humanitarian relief, environmental preservation, and peace building may result from this. It is possible to solve societal concerns and encourage good change more effectively by combining the resources and knowledge of different faith communities.

Living in a multi-religious community can also help people better understand their own faith traditions and enhance their spiritual life. Persons can learn new insights on their own ideas and behaviors by interacting with persons from diverse religious backgrounds. They could have a deeper understanding of the variety of human spiritual experiences by learning about the parallels and discrepancies among other religions. Personal development, spiritual enrichment, and a deeper comprehension of the complexities of religious practices and beliefs might result from this. Furthermore, a multi-religious society can support the advancement of tolerance and religious freedom. The peaceful coexistence of people of various religions conveys a strong message that variety is recognized and valued. By doing this, intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination based on religious differences may be lessened. A multi-religious community can foster better respect for human rights and dignity by fostering an atmosphere in which individuals can freely practice their faith without worrying about discrimination or abuse.³ Lastly, in a world where religious conflict frequently tears people apart, a multi-religious society can act as an example for harmonious cohabitation and conflict resolution.

A multi-religious community might encourage others to strive for peace and reconciliation by exemplifying how individuals of various faiths can coexist peacefully and respectfully. Conflicts arising from religious differences can be resolved amicably via communication, collaboration, and understanding, which would increase harmony and togetherness among various communities. Living in a multi-religious culture has numerous advantages. A multi-religious society provides many chances for social change, societal development, and personal improvement, from encouraging interfaith communication and understanding to encouraging cooperation and teamwork among various religious groups. A more inclusive,

³ <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2014/06/19/the-challenges-of-religious-diversity>

tolerant, and peaceful society can be achieved by valuing variety and appreciating the multiplicity of religions.

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF SECULARISM AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

CONCEPT OF SECULARISM IN THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION: Our nation's founders ensured religious freedom as a fundamental right in the constitution. They have effectively supplied the Indian constitution with a reflection of secular nature, where there shall be no discrimination based on religion, without incorporating any secular words into the document at the time of adoption. Furthermore, Nehru and Gandhi's concepts of Dharm Nirpekshita and Sarva Dharma Sambhava, respectively, have served as a means of realizing and comprehending the ideas of secularism in India. Many scholars have offered varying opinions about what kind of secularism will work best in India. As a result, this essay emphasizes and provides a summary of religious freedom and secularism in the Indian setting.

Right to Equality (Article 14): The idea of equality before the law is embodied in Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. It guarantees that everyone is treated equally before the law and is subject to the same laws, regardless of their religious affiliations. This idea serves as the cornerstone of an equitable and just judicial system. The court stressed the use of Article 14 in relation to educational institutions in *State of Bombay v. Bombay Education Society*¹². The ruling reaffirmed the idea of equality before the law and emphasized the significance of offering equal educational opportunities free from religious prejudice.

Article 16 (1) It guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters of public employment and reiterates that there would be no discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, and residence: With numerous religions, castes, and communities living side by side under the same national framework, India's social and political fabric is marked by great diversity. Promoting social justice and national cohesion in such a diversified society requires guaranteeing equitable employment opportunities and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, color, sex, or place of birth. The Indian Constitution's Article 16 expressly forbids discrimination on a number of grounds, including religion, and ensures equality of opportunity in public employment. The breadth, importance, and judicial interpretation of Article 16 are critically examined in this essay, with an emphasis on how it protects religious equality in the workplace and fosters an inclusive, merit-based workforce.

Freedom of Religion (Article 25): It reflects the foundational principles of individual autonomy and freedom of conscience. It recognizes that the practice of religion is a deeply personal and intrinsic aspect of an individual's identity. The provision not only acknowledges the diversity of religious beliefs within the country but also emphasizes the importance of ensuring that individuals can freely choose, practice, and propagate their faith without fear of coercion or discrimination. The freedom to practice one's religion in private as well as in public is guaranteed by Article 25. People have the right to participate in the rites, ceremonies, and traditions connected to their faith in addition to having the freedom to publicly express their religious views. Religious practices can be publicly expressed in society and are not restricted to private areas because to this dual element of freedom. Although the freedom of religion is guaranteed by Article 25, this right is not unqualified or absolute. The Constitution's authors understood that in some situations, limitations would be required to preserve morals, public health, or public order. This acknowledgment shows harmony between the rights of the individual and the larger interests of society, which the state must protect.

Article 26 Every religious group or individual has the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes and to manage its own affairs in matters of religion: However, there are no such limitations in Article 26, which is restricted to matters of public health, morality, and order. Over time, there has been insufficient discussion on how much weight should be given to this distinction, which has resulted in the complex issue of how the right to religious freedom interacts with other fundamental rights. Due to the fact that it is currently one of the issues that the Supreme Court is considering in the reference it made in the review petition against its ruling in *Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala* [the "Sabarimala case"].

Article 27 It provides that the state shall not compel any citizen to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious institution: Article 27 of the Indian Constitution states: "*No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.*" Article 27 of the Indian Constitution guarantees that no one is required to pay taxes expressly for the upkeep or promotion of any religion or religious denomination, in keeping with this secular framework. The constitutional need that the state keep a principled distance from religious matters and refrain from using public funds to encourage or promote any specific religion is reflected in

this clause. The neutrality of the state in religious matters is protected by Article 27, which incorporates the larger constitutional ideal of secularism and guarantees that public funds are not directed toward religious activities.

Article 28 It allows educational institutions maintained by different religious groups to impart religious instruction: Part III of the Indian Constitution, which protects fundamental rights, includes Article 28. Article 28(1): No school that receives all of its funding from the state may offer religious instruction. Article 28(2): An educational institution run by the state but founded under an endowment or trust that mandates the teaching of religious instruction in such an institution is exempt from the provisions of clause (1). Article 28(3): Unless the individual (or, in the case of a minor, their guardian) has given their consent, no one attending a state-recognized educational institution or receiving aid from state funds shall be forced to participate in any religious instruction or worship that may be held there or in any facilities connected to such an institution. The regulation of religious instruction in state-funded educational institutions is covered by Article 28. No one attending a state-funded school may be forced to take part in religious instruction or worship, according to Article 28. This clause upholds the secularism concept and safeguards individual freedom of conscience by reflecting the constitutional requirement that state-funded education be free from religious influence.

Articles 29 and 30 They provide cultural and educational rights to minorities: Secularism is a fundamental feature of the Indian Constitution, ensuring that the state remains neutral in religious matters and treats all religions equally. While secularism in India guarantees freedom of religion to individuals and groups, it also protects the rights of religious and cultural minorities. Article 29 of the Indian Constitution states: Article 29(1): Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script, or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. Article 29(2): No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language, or any of them. The Indian Constitution's Article 30 declares: Article 30(1): All minorities, regardless of their language or religion, are entitled to create and run the educational institutions of their choosing. Article 30(2): When providing help to educational institutions, the State is prohibited from treating any institution differently because it is run by a minority, regardless of the minority's language or religion. Article 29 and Article 30 of the Indian Constitution are crucial in this context as they safeguard the cultural and

educational rights of minorities, reinforcing the secular fabric of the nation. Article 29 protects the rights of citizens to conserve their distinct language, script, or culture, while Article 30 grants religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. These provisions ensure that India's diverse religious and cultural communities can preserve their identity without interference from the state, thereby promoting harmony and coexistence in a multi-religious society.

Article 51A Fundamental Duties It obliges all the citizens to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood and to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture: In order to foster a sense of responsibility among its citizens, the Indian Constitution imposes certain basic duties in addition to fundamental rights. The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 established Article 51A, which lists the basic responsibilities of Indian citizens. These responsibilities are a reflection of people's moral commitments to preserve the nation's unity, integrity, and sovereignty. Promoting concord and the spirit of fraternity among all residents, notwithstanding differences in religion, language, geography, and social class, is one of the most important responsibilities outlined in Article 51A. Additionally, it requires that the rich legacy of India's composite culture be valued and preserved. The inclusion of these responsibilities emphasizes how crucial it is to preserve social harmony, promote national unity, and safeguard the cultural diversity that makes India unique.

42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 **The word secular was inserted in the Preamble. It stated that 'secular' means a republic in which there is equal respect for all religions:** The word "secular" was explicitly added to the Preamble, one of the many significant modifications the amendment brought about to the Constitution. By reaffirming the state's commitment to upholding religious neutrality and treating all religions equally, this amendment reinforced the constitutional basis for secularism. The 42nd Amendment Act, which guaranteed equal protection and respect for all religions and affirmed the separation of religion from governmental matters, was crucial in forming India's identity as a secular state. During the 1975–1977 Emergency, which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi proclaimed after the Allahabad High Court ruled that her 1971 election was unconstitutional, the 42nd Amendment was implemented. Due to strong political opposition and instability, the government changed the constitution to strengthen its hold on power. The governing administration sought to: Increase the central government's authority. Limit the judiciary's authority. Strengthen the state's secular and socialist nature.

JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION OF SECULARISM

Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala, ⁴

Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala is a landmark case in Indian constitutional law that deals with the issue of freedom of religion and expression. The case involves three students who refused to sing the national anthem of India on religious grounds. The incident took place in 1985 when the students, who were studying in a government school in Kerala, remained silent when the national anthem was being played in their school. This led to disciplinary action against them, including expulsion from the school. The students and their parents argued that their religion prohibited them from singing the national anthem and that their right to freedom of religion and expression was being violated.

The Ahmedabad St. Xaviers College vs State of Gujarat, (1974)⁵ In this case, St. Xavier's College challenged state legislation encroaching upon the right of minority educational institutions to autonomy. The crux of the matter was the autonomy of educational institutions and the limits of governmental interference, especially in the matters of appointment and dismissal of teachers as well as admission of students of the minority community. The petitioners challenged sections of the Gujarat University Act, 1972, which required: University nominees in the governing and selection bodies of all colleges Conversion of all affiliated colleges to constituent colleges, Approval of Vice Chancellor for disciplinary action against members of teaching staff, and Arbitration of dispute between the staff and management left to the Vice Chancellor After both sides had made their arguments, the Supreme Court rightly pointed out, The Court held that object behind the enactment of Articles 25 to 30 was the securing and preserving the rights of the religious and linguistic minorities. The Court further held that as long as the Constitution stands in place as it is today, then there could be countenance as to the tampering of those rights. And any act doing so, would tantamount to breach of faith and would be liable to be struck down by the Courts.

Shafin Jahan v. Ashokan K.M. & Ors.⁶

This case concerned the marriage of Hadiya Jahan, a 24-year-old medical student who converted to Islam and married Shafin Jahan. Hadiya's father, K.M. Ashokan, filed a writ of *habeas corpus* before the High Court of Kerala, alleging forceful conversion. The High Court annulled the marriage, claiming that Hadiya was vulnerable and capable of being exploited,

⁴ **1987 AIR 748**

⁵ **AIR (SC) 1389**

⁶ **2018 SCC Online SC 201**

and exercised the *parens patriae* jurisdiction to ensure her welfare. The Supreme Court held that the High Court erred in annulling the marriage as it was beyond the scope of the writ of *habeas corpus*. The Supreme Court also held that the *parens patriae* jurisdiction must be exercised only for the benefit of the person in need of protection and not for the benefit of others. The right to marry a person of one's choice is integral to Article 21 (Protection of Life and Personal Liberty), and the Constitution recognizes personal autonomy and liberty. "Religion is a matter of faith, and not of logic. It is not open to a court to accept an egalitarian approach, over a practice which constitutes an integral part of religion. The Constitution allows the followers of every religion, to follow their beliefs and religious traditions. The Constitution assures believers of all faiths, that their way of life, is guaranteed, and would not be subjected to any challenge, even though they may seem to others (and even rationalists, practicing the same faith) unacceptable, in today's world and age. The Constitution extends this guarantee, because faith constitutes the religious consciousness, of the followers. It is this religious consciousness, which binds believers into separate entities. The Constitution endeavours to protect and preserve, the beliefs of each of the separate entities, under Article 25."

Rev. Stainislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh,⁷

The case of Rev. Stainislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh began with the arrest of Reverend Stainislaus, a Roman Catholic priest, in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India. He was accused of violating the provisions of the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhiniyam (Freedom of Religion Act), 1968, which prohibited forced religious conversions. Reverend Stainislaus challenged the Constitutionality of the Act in the Madhya Pradesh High Court, which rejected his petition. He then appealed to the Supreme Court of India, arguing that the Act violated his Fundamental Right to freedom of religion under Article 25 of the Indian Constitution. The case was heard by a bench comprising Chief Justice A.N. Ray, Justice M.H. Beg, Justice P.N. Bhagwati, Justice Y.V. Chandrachud, and Justice S.M. Fazal Ali. The Court ultimately ruled in favour of Rev. Stainislaus, stating that the state law was unconstitutional because it violated the Fundamental Right to freedom of religion enshrined in the Indian Constitution. In the judgment of Rev. Stainislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh, the Supreme Court of India made several important observations regarding religious freedom. The Court affirmed that the right to propagate one's religion is a fundamental right under Article 25 of the Indian

⁷ 1977) 1 S.C.C. 677

Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion subject to public order, morality, and health. The case has also had a significant impact on the legal landscape of India, especially with regard to anti-conversion laws.

TENSION BETWEEN SECULARISM AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The conflict between religious freedom and secularism is a complicated and frequently divisive topic. The ideal definition of secularism is the disentanglement of religion from politics and public life, which guarantees that religious convictions have no bearing on judicial or political decisions. The right of people and organizations to freely practice, profess, and spread their religion without interference from the government is known as religious freedom.

Secularism: When Europe's thirty-year conflict came to an end in 1648, the term "secularization" was first employed. The concept of development was infused with the idea of secularization. Secularization has remained a positive consolation, despite being nothing more than a disjointed and unfinished process. According to D.E. Smith, a secular state is one that upholds the freedom of religion for both individuals and corporations, treats all citizens equally regardless of their faith, is not constitutionally associated with any one religion, and neither seeks to advance nor obstruct it.. When it comes to defining the parameters of citizenship, religion becomes completely irrelevant; one's personal religious convictions have no bearing on one's rights or obligations.

Religious Freedom: Religious freedom is the ability of an individual to think about and debate with others the relative claims of other religions and make his own decisions free from state intervention. This relationship does not include the state. A person cannot be forced to follow a specific religion or have his religious views dictated to him by the state. It cannot compel him to pay taxes or make other financial contributions in order to support a religion. Therefore, there are only certain situations in which a secular state can rightfully control religious expression for the sake of public safety, health, or morality. Freedom of association for religious purposes is protected in a secular state with the same vigilance as individual freedom of conscience. Every religious group has the freedom to set up and run their own religious affairs. It can also buy real estate. Additionally, it has the ability to create and run philanthropic and educational organizations.

1. Citizenship - In a secular state, an individual is considered to be a citizen and not as a member of a particular religious group. Religion becomes entirely irrelevant in defining the terms of citizenship.

2. Separation of State and Religion - Religion and state operations must be viewed as essentially distinct domains of human endeavor. A secular state has no business encouraging, controlling, directing, or meddling in religious matters of any kind. All religions are, in a limited sense, subservient to and distinct from the state under a secular state, which is a voluntary union of private persons. Religious organizations must properly fulfill their civil obligations and are subject to the general laws of the state. The state views religions in this way, just like it does other voluntary organizations founded on shared social, cultural, or economic objectives. A secular state requires its citizens to refrain from discriminating against any other citizen on the basis of their fundamental rights based on caste, sex, religion, etc. In accordance with public order, morality, and health, it also permits freedom of conscience as well as the profession, practice, and spread of religion. In the interest of public decency and peace, a secular state may simultaneously reserve the power to enact legislation restricting religious practices or to provide for the advancement of any socially underdeveloped population. Therefore, it is possible to list the following as the primary characteristics of a secular state.

One of the nations where the state-religion relationship is disputed is India. Indian secularism differs from that of France, which maintains a clear separation between religion and the state, as well as other European nations where one religion is prioritized over others. The American secularism model is the one that most closely resembles the Indian one. Various scholars have expressed their opinions about Indian secularism. Without comprehending the larger process of the political control of collective life, it is difficult to comprehend religious freedom.

Regarding secularism in India, different academics hold varying opinions. Some supported the adoption of secularism in India. Given how deeply religious Indian society is, some fear that it will spell disaster. So, for a multi-religious, multicultural nation like India, this is the conclusion. To solve the issues that are now plaguing society, a parameter must be created and chosen. It is necessary to eradicate the issue of human rights being compromised in the name of religious freedom. Overall, Rajeev Bhargava referred to the vague and conflicting clauses pertaining to religion-state interactions in the Indian constitution as "political secularism" or "contextual secularism."

Here are some crucial areas where conflicts might occur:

1. Comparing Religious Expression with State Neutrality

A certain amount of state neutrality toward religion is required by secularism. This implies that laws and government policies are not intended to be influenced by religion, guaranteeing that no specific religion is given preference. Individuals or religious organizations, however, may contend that secularism occasionally restricts their freedom to exercise or proclaim their views, especially in public settings. For example, under the name of secularism, it may be illegal to wear religious symbols (such as crosses or hijabs) at places of employment or education, which would go against religious freedom.

2. Religious Activities in Public Life :

In order to preserve an impartial public domain, secular societies may restrict religious activities in public life. The prohibition of religiously driven practices in the workplace or disputes over religious symbols in schools are examples of this. Religious organizations, however, might see these limitations as infringements on their freedom of expression. Maintaining a secular public place while honoring religious customs requires striking a balance.

3. Laws of the Government versus Religious Teachings

Laws that may be in opposition to the doctrines of specific religions are passed in some nations. For instance, religious groups may view laws pertaining to gender equality, marriage, reproductive rights, or LGBTQ+ rights as being in opposition to their moral or theological convictions. Some religious communities may disagree with secularism, which supports laws based on human rights and reason, since they believe that these laws violate their right to practice their religion.

4. Secular Curriculum and Religious Education :

While religious organizations may contend that their children should have access to education that is consistent with their religious beliefs, religious instruction in public schools is restricted or prohibited in certain secular states. Arguments about the teaching of subjects like evolution, sex education, or religious literature in schools frequently display this conflict. While religious organizations may contend that this limits their ability to teach their values to their children, secularists may counter that a secular curriculum guarantees that all kids, regardless of faith, receive an education free from religious bias.

5. Speech Freedom vs. Hate Speech :

Freedom of expression is frequently safeguarded in secular societies, yet it occasionally clashes with religious freedom. For instance, secular advocates may argue that free speech rights include the ability to criticize or ridicule religious behaviors or beliefs that are frequently considered objectionable by followers of those religions. Religious organizations, however, can see such attacks as a denial of their dignity and a violation of their religious freedom.

6. Religion's Place in Governance :

In some situations, religious organizations could want to play a more active role in politics by promoting legislation or regulations that are grounded in their beliefs. However, this can be seen by secularists as incompatible with the idea of a government that is impartial on religious issues. Secular and religious viewpoints may diverge over what is considered acceptable or moral in discussions over legislation pertaining to topics like abortion, euthanasia, or religion instruction.

7. Secular Societies' Religious Minorities :

While secularism guarantees that no religion is in charge, if it is not inclusive, it may inadvertently disadvantage religious minority. Minority religious groups occasionally may feel that their beliefs are not respected or accommodated to the same extent as the secular or mainstream beliefs of the majority. Ideally, secularism should also ensure that religious minorities are protected and accommodated, enabling them to freely practice their faith without imposing it on others.

ROLE OF THE STATE IN RELIGIOUS MATTERS

In India, a nation renowned for its religious tolerance and variety, religion plays a vital role in the social and cultural fabric. The fundamental right to freedom of religion is protected under Articles 25 to 28 of the Indian Constitution. The state may, however, impose restrictions on religious activities in order to preserve morality, public health, and order as well as to make sure that religious activities do not conflict with the equality and justice tenets of the constitution. To preserve a secular, peaceful society while preserving individual religious freedom, the state must play a crucial role in regulating religious activities. A secular state asserts that it does not give any of its inhabitants special treatment because of their religious affiliation, beliefs, or lack thereof, and that it treats all of its residents equally regardless of

their religious affiliation. No state should be governed by the leaders of a specific religion. A state that can avoid religious strife and foster religious concord is required for this. It gives the government the authority to remain impartial when it comes to religious issues. No state has the legal authority to support or oppose a certain religion in a secular nation. Nonetheless, citizens of a nation are free to practice and adhere to any religion they so choose. Throughout history, religion has had a significant impact on the development of communities and cultures.

The state's supervision of religious rituals is a delicate and complicated matter in India, a country with a wide and deeply ingrained religious variety. The Indian Constitution protects religious freedom while giving the government the authority to control religious activities for the sake of morality, public health, equality, and social justice, among other constitutional ideals. The goal of the state's involvement in religious affairs is to guarantee that religious liberties do not infringe upon fundamental rights or threaten the country's secular foundation. The delicate balance between preserving social cohesion and defending individual religious freedom is reflected in state control of religious activities. India is a land of immense religious diversity, with people practicing Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and several other faiths. The right to religious freedom is one of the cornerstones of the Indian Constitution, reflecting the country's commitment to secularism and pluralism. Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees every individual the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate their religion. However, this right is not absolute and is subject to reasonable restrictions concerning public order, morality, and health. The framers of the Constitution recognized that while religious freedom is fundamental to individual liberty, it must be exercised within the framework of social harmony and constitutional values. Therefore, Article 25(2) empowers the state to regulate religious practices to maintain public order, uphold moral standards, protect public health, and promote social welfare and reform. India has a rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and faiths, making it a pluralistic and diverse country. Because of this diversity, preserving social harmony and guaranteeing equality depend heavily on the protection of minority rights. Minorities' interests and unique cultural, religious, and educational identities must be protected, according to the Indian Constitution. Minorities' rights to preserve their culture, language, and script as well as to create and run the educational institutions of their choosing are expressly protected by Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution. India's dedication to social justice, equality, and secularism is shown in the protection of minorities under Articles 29 and 30. The constitutional tenet that a fully

democratic and just society must guarantee that minority communities are neither absorbed or marginalized but are instead given the authority to maintain their unique identity is the foundation of these laws.

In India, politics and religion have always been closely related. The nation's social structure, political climate, and legal system have all been impacted by the state-religion interaction. The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) controversy is one of the most divisive topics in Indian politics and constitutional discourse. According to the UCC, a single body of rules governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other civil matters for all citizens, regardless of their faith, would take the place of individual laws based on religious texts and customs. The conflict between secularism and religious freedom—two fundamental principles—is reflected in the UCC discussion. The UCC has been attacked as an assault on the cultural identity of religious minorities, especially Muslims, even though it is viewed as a step toward national integration and gender equity. The issue has become even more complex as a result of political parties exploiting religion in the UCC discussion to divide communities, build vote banks, and influence political narratives.

CHALLENGES AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Religious and ethnic minorities exist because most nations in the world have inhabitants with a wide range of religious and ethnic backgrounds. These communities are frequently unified under a single political authority by modern governments. These minorities, however, frequently oppose such initiatives out of concern that their unique identities may be jeopardized by political assimilation. When these regulations are enforced with force, it usually sparks opposition and perhaps violence.

In a similar vein, Indian culture is nevertheless firmly anchored in religious customs even if the Constitution maintains total religious neutrality. Therefore, serious obstacles still pose a threat to India's secularism's survival. Enshrined in the Constitution, secularism is a fundamental value in India that aims to guarantee that the state does not favor any one religion and that all individuals are treated equally regardless of their faith. However, given India's variety, religious pluralism, and political dynamics, secularism has encountered a number of difficulties and current problems.

Communal Politics: Using religion as a foundation for political mobilization, frequently at the expense of other groups, is known as communal politics. With several political parties and organizations attempting to organize voters along religious lines, communal politics in India have posed a serious threat to secularism. While some regional parties have attempted

to rally Muslim supporters by appealing to their Islamic identity, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been accused of pursuing a Hindu nationalist agenda.

Forced Conversion: The practice of forcing people or groups to convert to a different religion is known as "forced conversion." Forced conversion has been a controversial topic in India, as some groups claim that others have used violence or other tactics to convert others to their faith. For instance, some Muslim organizations have been charged with forcing non-Muslims to convert to Islam, while other Hindu nationalist organizations have accused Christian missionaries of employing coercion or inducements to convert Hindus.

Pseudo – Secularism: The practice of professing to embrace secularism while favoring one religion over another is known as pseudo-secularism. Political parties and leaders that claim to be secular but are perceived as favoring one religion community are frequently accused of this in India. The Indian National Congress party, for instance, has been accused by certain detractors of engaging in pseudo-secularism by giving preference to Muslims over Hindus in its policies and initiatives.

Growing Fundamentalism: Growing fundamentalism is the term used to describe the emergence of extreme religious viewpoints that oppose secularism and advance a limited, exclusive social vision. Growing fundamentalism among various religious groups, especially among some Hindu nationalist movements, has raised worries in India. Certain Hindu nationalist organizations, for instance, have come under fire for spreading a limited interpretation of Hinduism that disregards other faiths and encourages animosity toward minorities.

Failure of The Fundamental Values: This is the breakdown of secularism and other fundamental values, like freedom of religion and equality. With certain political figures and organizations publicly opposing the notion of a secular state, there have been worries in India in recent years about the degradation of these ideals. For instance, some leaders have publicly supported a Hindu state, while others have urged for the establishment of a unified civil code that would supersede individual laws based on religious customs.

Minority Seclusion: Minority seclusion is the practice of minority groups withdrawing from society at large, frequently out of mistrust or fear. Minority seclusion among various religious communities, especially Muslims, has been an issue in India. Certain Muslim communities or regions, for instance, have been perceived as isolated enclaves that are isolated from the wider world and might be more vulnerable to radicalization.

Growing Radicalism: Growing radicalism is the term used to describe the emergence of extreme ideologies that advocate violence or other extreme kinds of extremism while rejecting conventional values. Growing radicalism among various religious groups, especially among some Islamist groups, has raised worries in India. Certain Islamist organizations, for instance, have been charged with spreading violent ideas and conducting terrorist acts against members of the public or government targets.

The following are some of the main obstacles:

Religious Politics: The emergence of religiously driven political parties and individuals in India is one of the biggest threats to secularism. In order to acquire votes, some political parties—particularly those with close ties to religious beliefs—frequently play on religious feelings, which widens the gulf between various populations. The idea of a secular state has been undermined by the politics of religion, where religious identification frequently takes precedence over national identity. For instance, there are worries that India's secular fabric is being undermined by the emergence of Hindu nationalism, which is especially linked to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The secularism guaranteed by the Constitution is challenged by policies and declarations that highlight India's Hindu identity.

Religious Laws and Personal Law System: Personal laws for different religious communities, including Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Parsi laws, are accommodated in India's legal system. India's pluralistic society is reflected in this, yet it conflicts with the secular notion of uniform rules. Different personal laws might result in citizens being treated differently because of their religion, especially when it comes to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. For instance: One important topic is the controversy around the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). While opponents see it as an encroachment on the religious rights of minorities, especially Muslims, who have their own personal law, supporters contend that a standard code would guarantee equality for all citizens, regardless of faith.

Religious Discrimination and Intolerance: In India, discrimination based on religion is still a major problem. Even though the Constitution is secular, there are many instances of religious intolerance, including riots in communities, lynchings by mobs, and discrimination in the workplace and in schools. These tensions frequently arise when interreligious conflicts intensify or when one religious community feels unfairly treated. For instance, the state's failure to safeguard minorities' religious freedom has come under scrutiny due to the violence against Muslims in different parts of the nation, including the riots in Gujarat in 2002, the

Delhi riots in 2020, and the continuous discrimination against Muslims in the form of hate crimes and mob violence.

State Funding of Religious Activities: In India, the question of government intervention in religious affairs is a contentious one. Some contend that it is against secularism for the state to support religious organizations or activities. Nonetheless, the government has historically funded religious organizations and pilgrimages (such as the Haj subsidy for Muslims). Tensions arise because detractors claim that this money amounts to the state's covert support of religion. For instance, the government's Haj subsidy, which supported Muslim pilgrims going to Mecca, was recently phased out after it was criticized for allocating public funds to a religious endeavor in violation of the secular concept. The state does, however, occasionally support Hindu temples and customs, which breeds inequality.

Religious Symbolism in Public Life: The secular notion of a neutral public sphere is challenged by the growing presence of religious symbols and activities in public areas, particularly in government buildings, schools, and political rallies. The presence of religious symbols in state-run establishments may be interpreted as favoring one religion over another, even though people are free to practice any faith they choose. Example: The state occasionally openly supports or celebrates religious holidays or rites, such as Diwali, Eid, or Christmas, which may give the impression that the government is favoring some religions over others.

Religious Conversion and Anti-Conversion Laws : Religious conversion is a controversial topic, particularly when it comes to conversion from Hinduism to Christianity or Islam. Several states have called for anti-conversion legislation because some religious groups believe that conversions are being carried out through coercion or inducements. However, these regulations frequently give rise to worries that they violate the secular ideal of religious freedom by limiting a person's ability to select their religion. For instance, anti-conversion laws have been passed in states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. Proponents of these laws maintain that they are required to stop forced conversions, while opponents claim that they are frequently used to target religious minorities, especially Christians and Muslims.

Religious Minorities' Rights and Security: In India, safeguarding religious minorities is a crucial concern. The safety and liberties of religious minorities, especially Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Dalits, are a source of worry notwithstanding constitutional protections. Fears of persecution and marginalization of these communities are frequently

sparked by the growth of majoritarianism. For instance, protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) were based on concerns that the law discriminates against Muslims by granting citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from nearby nations, which many see as an assault on religious equality and secularism.

Freedom of Expression and Religious Sensitivities: The conflict between religious sensibilities and freedom of expression occasionally poses a threat to secularism in India. Even though the right to free expression is protected by the Constitution, satirical depictions or attacks of religion or religious leaders frequently elicit significant reactions. In certain cases, people who violate religious beliefs have been subject to violence or legal action. The challenge of striking a balance between free expression and consideration for religious sensibilities is exemplified by the debate over the movie "Padmavat," which was opposed by some Hindu groups, and the response against cartoons or movies that criticize religious rituals.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH OTHER SECULAR DEMOCRACIES

Concept Of Secularism In Different Jurisdictions: A fixed period, or "saeculum" in Latin, is where the word "secular" had its start around a century ago. The Romance languages created the term "century" from this. In Christian Latin, secularism served as a helpful idea for distinguishing between God's eternally divine sphere and this earthly era. Rather than theological matters, a variety of "secular" matters are involved. "Belonging to the world and its affairs as distinct from the church and religion; civil, lay, temporal" is one definition of "secular" that the Oxford English Dictionary has. The term "secular" gradually gained more meaning as a result of the explanation and debate by the intellectuals who identified an increasing number of potential and conceivable topics that ought to be distinct and independent from the categorization and control of religion. During the 17th and 18th centuries, two prominent instances are the gradual disintegration of the capitalist economy and democratic politics due to religious beliefs. The secular came to be seen as something that has phases, starts in degrees, and occasionally develops gradually. People view it as a system. During the 19th century, more academics and secularists envisioned a society that could become completely secular.

United States Of America a change was passed by the US Congress on September 25, 1789, and it was subsequently approved by the Congress on December 15, 1791. The amendment states that Congress has no authority to enact any legislation pertaining to religion or its underlying principles. Additionally, it forbids Congress from enacting any legislation relevant

to the freedom of speech, religion, or expression. The essential change that the US made is a fantastic remedy for the partisan wars that were so destructive. It also made it easier to convey the various concerns of religious communities who had migrated to America from Europe to flee persecution by their governments. Many people now believe that America is a Christian country, and the inequality that results from the assumption of religion would have been a serious issue. Do Christians make up the majority of the population? However, that is unquestionably the reason why it was crucial to create legislation that would clarify the legal system in the US and ensure that people who practice various religions in the nation are protected.

In France, secularism is defined by the term *Laïcité* translates to "conventional quality." France is one of the most important Western nations to request this idea. This idea has been supported since 1905, when a statute was created with the goal of advancing more rights. This idea was crucial in France for shielding children from social constraints and for keeping a safe distance from any disputes between children expressing their religious affiliation. A minor must be able to comprehend and take into account the various decisions made by others. A minor must be able to comprehend and take into account the various decisions made by others. There is a greater degree of social diversity in France today than there was in the past, which is why the country needs secularism now more than ever because it gives all citizens the freedom to live as they see fit, regardless of their philosophical or religious beliefs. They also get a small speech, the opportunity to practice or not practice a religion, the opportunity to measure up to rights and responsibilities, and a Republican club. Secularism, among other things, is the opportunity to have an end or an analysis rather than an idea. Therefore, secularism is neither superior nor inimical to religion.

The idea of secularism plays a crucial role in India. In India, secularism is a broad, liberal, open-minded, and hopeful idea that incorporates a few other religions within its many networks. Secularism as it is practiced in India is neither hostile nor adverse to God. Indian secularism views religious belief as vital to human existence. It believes that no religion possesses the limited metaphysical information architecture that enables all religions to express themselves authentically. In the unlikely event that people need to worship their god, Indian secularism recognizes the necessity of such love and prayer. It does not prescribe the actions of a particular faith. The full capacity of faith is enshrined in our Indian Constitution. The Indian Constitution guarantees, before the law, equality of all religions. Our constitution

is purely based on a secular principle in that regard. The basic rights to religious freedom are protected in our constitution.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SECULARISM

Secularism is one of the foundational pillars of the Indian Constitution. The framers of the Constitution envisioned a secular state where the state would maintain a neutral stance toward all religions while protecting the rights of religious communities to practice and propagate their faith. India's secularism is unique in that it does not promote the separation of religion and state entirely but allows the state to regulate and reform religious practices to ensure equality, social justice, and harmony. The constitutional framework of secularism is enshrined in various provisions, including the Preamble, Fundamental Rights (Articles 14, 15, 16, 25–28), Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 44), and the Fundamental Duties (Article 51A). Over the years, India's constitutional framework has played a crucial role in maintaining secularism, ensuring religious freedom, and preventing communal discord. Despite the challenges posed by political, social, and religious conflicts, the constitutional provisions and the judiciary's role in interpreting them have strengthened India's secular fabric. However, despite constitutional guarantees and judicial oversight, religious fundamentalism and the political misuse of religion have emerged as persistent challenges to India's secular fabric. Religious fundamentalism refers to the rigid and extreme interpretation of religious doctrines, often leading to intolerance, social division, and violence. Political misuse of religion involves exploiting religious identities and sentiments to consolidate political power, polarize communities, and influence electoral outcomes.

While the Indian Constitution provides robust safeguards against religious discrimination and political exploitation of religion, the increasing intersection of religion and politics has exposed the limitations of the state's ability to regulate religious extremism and political opportunism. Religious fundamentalism has increased in India despite constitutional safeguards. Religious groups have become more assertive in imposing their interpretations of faith on society. Intolerance toward other religious communities has escalated, leading to violence and social unrest. Example: The rise of Hindu fundamentalist groups such as the Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has contributed to growing religious polarization. The 2015 Dadri lynching involved a Muslim man being killed on the suspicion of consuming beef — a direct outcome of religious extremism. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism has also been evident in the radicalization of youth and incidents of communal clashes. India's secular fabric and the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom

are seriously threatened by the emergence of majoritarianism, a political and social phenomena in which the interests of the majority community dominate societal norms and governmental policy.

In India, majoritarianism frequently takes the form of the Hindu majority's control over religious minorities, which causes the Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and other populations to be marginalized. This domination threatens to turn India from a secular republic into a majoritarian state where social norms and governmental policies mirror the values and beliefs of the majority religion, undermining the constitutional guarantees of equality and non discrimination. The state's secular character has been undermined by the judiciary's uneven interpretation of constitutional provisions and the growing importance of religious identities in politics. The protection of secularism and minority rights is unclear due to inconsistent judicial interpretations and politically motivated decisions, even though the Indian Constitution expressly guarantees religious freedom under Articles 25–28 and equality and non discrimination under Articles 14–16. The balance between religious freedom and governmental neutrality has been weakened by political meddling in religious affairs and uneven judicial rulings. As a result, laws have been applied selectively, religious communities have been treated unfairly, and religious matters have become politicized. Political neutrality and a consistent, principled judiciary are crucial for preserving India's secular and democratic identity.

RECOMMENDATION:

The increasing politicization of religion, inconsistent judicial interpretations, and selective enforcement of secular principles have weakened the constitutional commitment to secularism. Strengthening the judiciary's role in upholding constitutional secularism is essential to prevent the rise of religious fundamentalism, protect minority rights, and ensure equal treatment of all religious communities. The judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, is the ultimate interpreter of the Constitution and plays a critical role in protecting secularism. The power of judicial review allows the courts to strike down laws and executive actions that violate constitutional principles of secularism and equality. This right is subject to public order, morality, and health. The Supreme Court of India has often used the "essential religious practices" (ERP) test to determine which religious practices are constitutionally protected. This test seeks to distinguish between genuine religious practices and secular or social customs that are not integral to the faith. Over time, the judiciary's interpretation of the

ERP test has been inconsistent, leading to confusion and conflict between religious communities and the state. This inconsistency stems from the lack of clear guidelines for defining "essential religious practices." Establishing well-defined and consistent guidelines will help the judiciary strike a balance between religious freedom and constitutional values of equality, secularism, and social justice.

CONCLUSION:

The current course has revealed a dynamic nexus where religious practices and secular ideals constantly interact. This dynamic is dynamic; it changes in reaction to the wider socio-political environment, societal changes, and legal interpretations. Persistent difficulties are contrasted with the promise of advancement. The politicization of religious narratives, growing inter communal tensions, and legal disputes are all woven into the fabric of India's secular values. Although they provide obstacles, these difficulties also offer chances for reflection and development. India's real strength is its embrace of variety, which extends beyond the legal and social spheres. This is an active celebration of diversity rather than just a passive acceptance; it acknowledges that the nation's diverse religious traditions enhance it and add to its distinct character. Navigating recent changes in India's secularism and religious liberty is ultimately a deep journey. It calls for more than simply changes to laws; it calls for a cultural revolution—a shared dedication to creating an inclusive society in which all people, regardless of their religious background, experience equality as well as a sense of harmony and belonging. The ongoing report of secularism in India is a dynamic one that is influenced by the people's goals, conversations, and behaviors.

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