

# 2 Understanding Secularism

## Lesson at a Glance

- The term **secularism** refers to the separation between **the power of religion** and **the power of the State**. This is important for a country to function **democratically**.
- There are two chief reasons why the separation between religion and State is important.
  - The first is **to prevent the domination of one religion over another**.
  - The second is **to protect the freedom of individuals** to come out of their religion, embrace another religion or have the **freedom to interpret religious teachings differently**. We can give example of the practice of untouchability which allowed upper caste people to dominate lower caste people.
- Secularism's opposition to institutionalised religion means that it promotes freedom and equality between and within religions.
- Indian secularism does protect individual's religious freedom by maintaining a separation from religion.
- The Indian State is not ruled by a religious group. It also does not support any one religion.
- In India, government spaces such as law courts, police stations, government schools and offices are not supposed to demonstrate or promote any one religion.
- Indian secularism follows a strategy of **non-interference**. But at the some time it also intervenes in religion. Again we can give example of the practice of untouchability. The Indian Constitution bans this practice. In this instance the State is intervening in religion in order to end a social practice that it believes discriminates and excludes and that violates the fundamental rights of lower caste people.
- The intervention of the State can also be inform of support.
- Indian secularism is different from that of other democratic countries such as the United States of America. There is a strict separation between religion and the State in American secularism but in Indian secularism, as mentioned above, the State can intervene in religious affairs.

## TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED

### Let's Recall

- Q. 1.** List the different types of religious practice that you find in your neighbourhood. This could be different forms of prayer, worship of different gods, sacred sites, different kinds of religious music and singing etc. Does this indicate freedom of religious practice?

**Ans.** Different types of religious practice:

- (i) Jagran
- (ii) Kirtan
- (iii) Namaj
- (iv) Mass
- (v) Havan

Yes, this indicates freedom of religious practice.

- Q. 2.** Will the government intervene if some religious group says that their religion allows them to practice infanticide? Give reasons for your answer.

**Ans.** The government will surely intervene if some religious group says that their religion allows them to practice of infanticide. Needless to say that the practice of infanticide is a crime. Under this practice the life of a newly-born child is killed. The law does not allow anyone to kill a life.

- Q. 3.** Complete the following table:

Objective	Why is this important	Example of a violation of this objective
One religious community does not dominate another. The State does not enforce any particular religion nor take away the religious freedom of individuals. That some members do not dominate other members of the same religious community		

Ans.

Objective	Why is this important	Example of a violation of this objective
One religious community does not dominate another.	It is important for establishing harmony in society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Muslim family living among Hindu people in a locality is forbidden to offer namaz.</li> <li>• A Hindu religious procession is not allowed to cross along the road passing through a mosque.</li> </ul>
The State does not enforce any particular religion nor take away the religious freedom of individuals	It is essential in order to stabilise the ideals of the Indian Constitution.	Demolition of Babri Masjid
That some members do not dominate other members of the same religions	It is important in order to establish equality in the society.	Dalits are discouraged to enter a temple.

Q. 4. Look up the annual calendar of holidays of your school. How many of them pertain to different religions? what does this indicate?

Ans. Holidays in a school calendar for different religions:

Religions	Holidays
Hindu	Holi, Dussehra, Deepawali
Muslim	Id-ul-zoha, Id-ul-fitr, Muharram
Sikh	Lohri, Guru Gobind Singh Jayanti, Guru Parv
Christian	Christmas, Good Friday

Q. 5. Find out some examples of different views within the same religion.

Ans. Different views are followed even within the same religion. As for example, only in the Hindu religion we have hundreds of deities worshipped by different people. Similarly, in Muslim community there are Shiyas and Shunnis. In Jainas, there are Shwetambar and

Digambar sects. In Buddha Dharma, there are Hinayaans and Mahayaans.

Q. 6. The Indian State both keeps away from religion as well as intervenes in religion. This idea can be quite confusing. Discuss this once again in class using examples from the chapter as well as those that you might have come up with.

Ans. India is a land of complex ideas. It is difficult to understand what it really wants. There are many ideals in the Constitution but practices are quite different from them. In many cases we see laws explain a concept in a different way. But people interpret it differently. Law itself in some cases act differently. As for example, in a secular state law has nothing to say in any of the religions practices but when the dominance of upper castes in religion was brought to question the law took favour of the lower castes. This interference of the State creates confusion.

Q. 7. This poster alongside highlights the need for 'Peace'. It says, "Peace is a never-ending process....It cannot ignore our differences or overlook our common interests." Write in your own words what you think the above sentences are trying to convey? How does it relate to the need for religious tolerance?

This chapter had three drawings on religious tolerance made by students of your age. Design your own poster on religious tolerance for your peers.

Ans. This poster conveys a message for the establishment of peace in the society. The message explains that peace is a long-cherished process. But in this process we cannot ignore the differences or overlook our common interests. It means peace can be brought only after establishing a coordination between the common interests. Religious tolerance is the most sensitive issue in this sense.

Note: Students are suggested to design their own posters on religious tolerance.

