

**CBCS B.A. POLITICAL SCIENCE HONS**  
**SEM II CC4 : POLITICAL PROCESS IN INDIA**  
**TOPIC IV Religion and Politics Debates on Secularism – Minority and Majority Communalism**

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**INTRODUCTION :**

The Great Secularism Debate: Soon after independence, when our founding fathers set to work on the Constitution, they indeed had in mind to construct a secular state, except that – as will become clear shortly – their version of secularism was an Indianised one. They discussed robustly, whether or not to add the word SECULAR to our Constitution, but in the end vetoed the idea. Why would die-hard secularists like Nehru, Ambedkar, Patel, Radhakrishnan and countless others reject the insertion of this word?

Ambedkar was secular but religious, while Nehru was secular and atheist (who believed in horoscopes). Ambedkar saw religion first and foremost as a political entity. "Religion," he said, "like language is social for the reason that either is essential for social life and the individual has to have it because without it he cannot participate in the life of the society".

It cannot be over-emphasised that Ambedkar, himself a victim of religious ill-practices and caste dogma, had in him to reform Hinduism through decree rather than wait till its natural inherent force did the same. There are numerous articles in our Constitution, like for example 17 and 25, which bear witness to this fact. He was a secular but in wanting upliftment of the oppressed he knew nothing could bring this change faster than through constitutional means. Some historians have rightly argued that Ambedkar wanted an "interventionist secular state".

True, this was indeed in pursuit of equality and justice for those who had been denied both for centuries but it was not strictly secular – for the state to intervene in religion thus. It is the remarkable self-effacement of Ambedkar that he realised inserting the word SECULAR in the Preamble, after having made numerous interventionist changes, would be wrong and more importantly, not true to the principles of Secularism.

Nehru, too realised this, as is clear from the Constituent Assembly debates. He knew, of course, what Secularism meant, but he also knew that the Constitution drafted by them did not adhere to the principles of what was, in his words, dictionary Secularism.

Reservations, restrictions on freedom of religion, Anglo-Indian quota, banning centuries-old caste beliefs of Hinduism – were interventions both felt were required, and rightly so. They were also grand enough to realise that true Secularism would have disallowed those interventions. As historian Ian Copland in his authoritative book, A History of State and Religion in India writes, "Their reasoning appears to have been twofold. i) That, since 'Enlightenment Secularism', with its core principle of separation,

founded on the Protestant conception of religion as essentially a private concern with which states had no legitimate business, was never going to work in a country where rulers and religious publics had been interacting from time immemorial, it was better not to use the term at all, than to use it fraudulently; and (ii) that giving official recognition to the term might lead people to think that the new government had religion in its sights. Ambedkar felt sufficiently worried by this prospect to remind the Lok Sabha in 1951 that continued references in Parliament and the media to India being a secular state did not reflect what the Constitution was 'intended to mean'."

Reading the Constitutional debates, one astonishing fact emerges – that our founding fathers might not have inserted the word SECULAR in our Preamble but they drafted for us a secular Constitution, or as close to a secular Constitution they could get. Their minds lived and breathed secularism. They were convinced that the future for India lay in secularism. But it was not enlightened European secularism. It was a glorious Indianised version of it. Glorious because it took into account our history and civilisation and yet stayed true to the path of religious equality.

So why didn't these seculars insert the word SECULAR in the Preamble? Because they knew their draft intervened heavily in religious matters when a secular Constitution technically must not. The founding of Articles 15(4), 16(5), 17, 25, and 45 meant that our Constitution was laying down rules as to how certain practices within religions are unconstitutional, even criminal, while other practices that hurt a particular religious sentiment but are practiced by other religious groups – like cow slaughter – are to be banned. Additionally, the question of religious education – that entailed extraordinarily heated debates on how a secular state should conduct itself – made it obvious that the word SECULAR was now redundant in the Indian context.

And this here is the beauty of our Constitution – everyone who wrote it was pluralistic and secular and yet what they wrote does not have the word secular. They were all concerned with one thing – that India should not be a religious state or a theocracy. Time and again, in debate after debate, they declared India to be a secular state. Inserting the word SECULAR, as Ambedkar said, was therefore superfluous. It is apparent from reading the constitutional debates that, yet again, Ambedkar was correct.

Many legislators were confused as to what secularism was. Some thought it was the negation of all religion, while to others it meant an absolute separation of religion and state. Still others insisted the Constitution should advocate articles that govern aspects of a religion; a few said the state should not involve itself in matters of religious education; a tiny minority even felt that a truly secular Constitution should demand a uniform civil code. The result of all this was that, in the end, India got a secular Constitution but in which the word Secular was omitted. It wasn't a glaring typo or a faux pas; it was intentional. No point labelling it when you can recognise the fragrance. But then we are like that – we still don't understand what the word Secular actually means. As Wittgenstein said, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." Majority and minority communalism:

In a multi-religious society like India, the followers of all religions live and practice their faith. Periodically communalism is showing its ugly face in many manifestations. Communalism poses a serious threat to secularism and consequently, a danger to democracy, and peaceful, harmonious co-existence of Indians belonging to diverse religious faiths and belief systems. Communalism may be regarded as an ideological concept. It may take in its fold the social, economic and political aspects of the group of people.

All political parties, including secular one, indulge in this policy, to consolidate vote bank on communal lines. Communalism cannot be understood without understanding the concept of "Secularism". Secularism allows its citizens to profess and practice their respective faith freely and fearlessly. Secular state does not interfere with the religious and spiritual affairs of the people.

Post Nehru witnessed weakening of secular commitment and policies of opportunism, if not outright communalism. Instead of promoting secular and socialist ideology, the winning of elections became sole aim, though the rhetoric of socialism continued. The gradual de-ideologisation of politics further strengthened politics of communalism. The biggest example of majority communalism was demolition of Babri Mosque on 6th December 1992.

Majority communalist has long been hostile, primarily towards Muslims, but over the last several years, their offensive against Christians has grown intense as well. It should be understood that Communalism breeds terrorism and terrorism also gives incentives to communal-mongers to incite riots and carnage at the same time in retaliation. Majority communalism does not seem to impact territorial integrity of the nation and hence treated as relatively harmless.

On the other hand, few minority extremist groups dream of taking over the nation and hence easily identified as anti- national. Despite constitutional restrictions against polarizing votes on communal lines, none of the political party follows the constitutional mandate in letter and spirit and that undermines the very basis of democratic process. Leaders of post Nehru era are lacking in true commitment to the secularization of Indian society, not only in terms of developing non-religious outlook but also in terms of developing a rational and scientific temper. This failure of the leadership has thwarted the progressive separation of religion and politics in India. Communalism has major implications for the subcontinent as a whole, because this will undeniably lead to continuous tension.

The responsibility of undermining India's limited secularism falls upon the shoulders of the leaders of the post-Nehru era, many of whom are not intellectually liberated, because of their traditional background, to understand and to appreciate genuine secularism. Due to their neo-traditional orientation, these leaders are lacking in true commitment to the secularization of Indian society, not only in terms of developing non-religious outlook but also in terms of developing a rational and scientific temper. This failure of the leadership has thwarted the progressive separation of religion and politics in India.

What is happening in India, will have equal and opposite reactions with minorities living in their countries. So the implication of communalism is not only for India but for whole South-Asian subcontinent, from the point of view of development, peace and prosperity, because the attention of such States will obviously be based on, creating more antagonism.

A consensus must be evolved amongst political parties about their faithful commitment to secularism; only then the feeling of composite nationalism will foster amongst citizens. The process is arduous and lengthy but the beginning must be made now, only then “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas” will turn from rhetoric into reality.