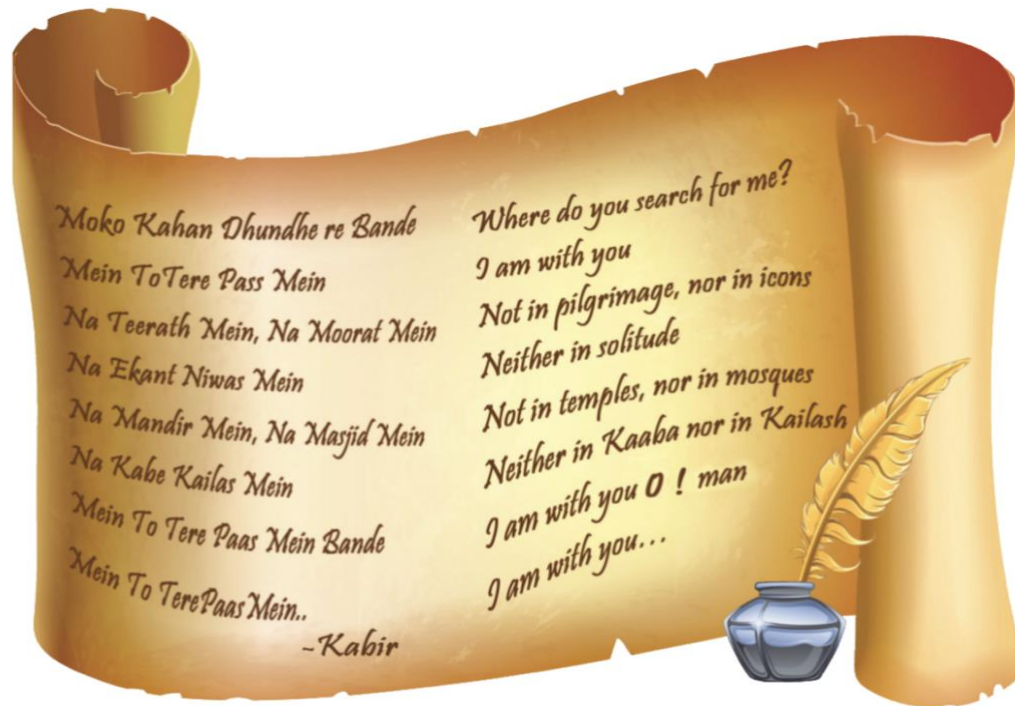


8th Social Science Lesson 15 Notes in English

15. Understanding Secularism



India will be a land of many faiths, equally honoured and respected, but of one national outlook. -
Jawaharlal Nehru



Introduction

- India is a **land of multi-religious faith and multi-cultural beliefs**.
- It is the birth place of four major religions; **Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism**.
- In our country people of diverse religions and beliefs have been living peacefully for a long time.

- Modern nation states are multi-religious states, hence there is a need for tolerance of all religions.
- The concept of secularism is aimed at creating a society in which people of religious beliefs or people who do not belong to any religion can live together in harmony and peace.
- **Rajaram Mohan Roy, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar** were some of the noted individuals held high in public regards who contributed towards the spread of secularism in the various spheres of Indian society.
- Secularism is invaluable for a society like India which is characterised by religious diversity.

What does Secularism mean?

- Secularism means an **attitude of tolerance** towards other religions and peaceful co-existence of citizens belonging to different faiths.
- It is a policy of neutrality and equality by the states towards all religious communities.
- Secularism is the principle of separation of state and religion or more broadly no interference of the state in the matters of religion and vice-versa.
- This means that every citizen is free to propagate, practice, and profess their faith, change it or not have one, according to their conscience.

Objectives of Secularism

- One religious group does not dominate another.
- Some members don't dominate other members of the same religious community.
- The state does not enforce any specific religion nor take away the religious freedom of individuals.
- A simple statement by poet Iqbal illustrates the secular view **"Religion does not teach us animosity; We are Indians and India is our home!"**

The Characteristic Features of a Secular State:

Principle of Liberty – the state permits the practice of any religion.

Principle of Equality – the state does not give preference to any religion over another.

Principle of Neutrality – the state remains neutral in religious matter.

- A secular state is the one in which the state does not officially promote any one religion as the country's official religion and every religion is treated equally.
- It gives to every citizen not only the equal right to freedom of conscience but also the **right to profess, practice and propagate any faith of their own choice**. The state observes an attitude of neutrality and impartiality towards all religions.

- In a secular state no one is given preferential treatment and the State does not discriminate any person on the basis of their religious practices and beliefs.
- All citizens are eligible to enter government service irrespective of their faith.
- There should be absolutely no religious instructions in educational institutions and no taxes to support any particular religion.

Importance of Secularism

- The concept of secularism evolved in India as equal treatment of all religions.
- We need secular state to maintain peace and harmony between people of various religious ideologies. It is a part of democracy, which grants equal rights.

Constitution and Secularism

- **Secularism is the part of Indian Constitution.** The makers of the Indian Constitution were aware that a strong and united nation could be built only when all sections of people had the freedom to practice their religion.
- So secularism was accepted as one of the fundamental tenets for the development of democracy in India.
- The word secularism was not mentioned in our Constitution when it was adopted in 1950.
- Later on in 1976, the word secular was incorporated in the Preamble through the 42nd Amendment of the Indian Constitution. **(India is a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic)** The basic aim of our Constitution is to promote unity and integrity of the nation along with individual dignity.
- There is no state religion in India. The state will neither establish a religion of its own nor confer any special patronage upon any particular religion.
- The freedom of religion guaranteed under the Indian Constitution is not confined to its citizen alone but extends to aliens also.
- This was pointed out by the **Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case Ratilal Panchand V State of Bombay in 1954.**

The Constitution of India has the following distinguishing features:

- The state will not identify itself with or be controlled by any religion
- The state guarantees to everyone the right to profess any religion of their own.
- The state will not accord any preferential treatment any of them.
- No discrimination will be shown by the state against any person on account of his religious faith.
- It creates fraternity of the Indian people and gives assurance the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation.

Mosaic of Constitutional Provisions

Article 15 – prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, caste, sex or place of birth etc.

Article 16 – equality of opportunity in public employment.

Article 25(1) – guarantees the freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice and propagate religion individually.

Article 26 – Freedom to manage religious affairs.

Article 27 – The state shall not compel any citizen to pay any taxes for the promotion of any particular religion.

Article 28 – on religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institution.

Article 29 (2) – A ban on discrimination in state-aided educational institution .

Why do we need secular education?

Secularism in education means making public education free from any religious dominance.

Children as future citizens must get education which should aim at their development of character and moral behavior irrespective of religious affiliation. Secular education is needed

- to remove narrow mindedness and makes dynamic and enlightened view
- to develop moral and humanistic outlook
- to train the youth to be good citizen
- to strengthen democratic values like liberty, equality, and fraternity and co-operative living
- to give wider vision towards life
- to develop an attitude of appreciation and understanding of others point of view
- to develop the spirit of love, tolerance, co-operation, equality and sympathy
- to synthesise materialism and spiritualism.

Conclusion

- The Indian State is secular and works in various ways to prevent religious domination.
- Secularism undoubtedly helps and aspires to enable every citizen to enjoy fully blessings of life, liberty and happiness.
- The Indian Constitution guarantees **fundamental rights that are based on secular principles**.
- It is one of the glowing achievement on Indian democracy. Secularism allows us to live in civility.
- It compels people to respect other religion. It grants equal rights to the people in respect of their religious faith. It is desirable for a country like India.

More to Know:

1. Akbar's instruction for his mausoleum was that it would incorporate elements from different religions including **Islam and Hinduism**
2. A 19th century Hindu temple in **Khajuraho**, India incorporates a Hindu spire, a **Jain cupola**, a **Buddhist stupa** and **Muslim style dome** in place of usual shikara.



3. The secular Indian state declares public holidays to mark the festivals of all religions.

4. 12th Rock Edict, Ashoka



- Emperor Ashoka was the first great emperor to announce as early as **3rd century BC (BCE)** that the state would not prosecute any religious sect.
 - In his 12th Rock Edict, Ashoka made an appeal not only for the tolerance of all religious sects but also to develop a spirit of great respect towards them.
5. The Mughal emperor Akbar followed the policy of religious toleration. His propagation of **Din-i-Illahi (Divine Faith)** and **Sulh-e-Kul (Peace and harmony among religions)** were advocated for religious toleration.

6. **Atheism** - is a lack of belief in god and gods.
7. **Secularism** - is non – interference of the state in religious affairs and vice-versa.
8. The term secularism is derived from **the Latin word 'saeculum' meaning 'an age' or 'the spirit of an age'.**
9. George Jacob Holyoake a British newspaper editor coined the term secularism.