

Understanding Secularism

Q1. State True (T) or False (F).

- i. In Indian secularism the State is not strictly separate from religion. _____
- ii. Wearing a pagri (turban) is central to a Sikh's religious practice. _____
- iii. Government schools can promote any one religion. _____
- iv. In Indian secularism, the State cannot intervene in religion. _____
- v. History provides us with many examples of discrimination, exclusion and persecution on the grounds of religion. _____

Q2. Fill in the blanks.

- i. In the United States of America, most children in government schools have to begin their school day reciting the 'Pledge of _____
- ii. The most important aspect of secularism is its separation of _____ from State power.
- iii. In India, government spaces like law courts, police stations, government schools and offices are not supposed to display or promote any one _____.
- iv. The Indian State is not ruled by a religious _____ and nor does it support any one _____.
- v. Jewish State of Israel treats its own _____ and _____ quite badly.

Q3. What do you mean by 'freedom to interpret'?

Ans. 'Freedom to interpret' means an individual's liberty to develop his own understanding and meaning of the religious teachings.

Q4. Explain the concept of „principled distance“.

Ans. This means that any interference in religion by the State has to be based on the ideals laid out in the Constitution.

Q2. How are non-Muslims treated in Saudi Arabia?

Ans. In Saudi Arabia, non-Muslims are not allowed to build a temple, church etc., and nor can they gather in a public place for prayers.

Q3. What is meant by the word „establishment“?

Ans. The word „establishment“ means that the legislature cannot declare any religion as the official religion. Nor can they give preference to one religion.

Q4. What is the most important aspect of secularism? State its importance.

Ans. The most important aspect of secularism is its separation of religion from State power. This is important for a country to function democratically.

Q5. “The government cannot force Sikhs to wear a helmet while driving two wheelers.” Give reason.

Ans. This is because the Indian State recognises that wearing a pagri (turban) is central to a Sikh’s religious practice and in order not to interfere with this, allows an exception in the law.

Q6. What provision has been made by the government to follow religious equality in government spaces, schools and offices?

Ans. In India, government spaces like law courts, police stations, government schools and offices are not supposed to display or promote any one religion. Government schools cannot promote any one religion either in their morning prayers or through religious celebrations.

Q7. When was law passed by French government banning religious symbols in school? What was its impact?

Ans. In February 2004, France passed a law banning students from wearing any conspicuous religious or political signs or symbols such as the Islamic

headscarf, the Jewish skullcap, or large Christian crosses. This law has encountered a lot of resistance from immigrants who are mainly from the former French colonies of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

Q8. What are the three objectives of a secular State?

Ans. The three objectives of a secular State are:

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

Q9. Why is it important to separate religion from the State?

Ans. It is important to separate religion from the State because of the following reasons:

- i. To prevent the domination of one religion over another.
- ii. To protect the freedom of individuals to exit from their religion, embrace another religion or have the freedom to interpret religious teachings differently.

Q10. Site some historical examples of discrimination.

Ans. Historical examples of discrimination are:

- i. Jews were persecuted in Hitler's Germany.
- ii. Jewish State of Israel treats its own Muslim and Christian minorities quite badly.
- iii. In Saudi Arabia, non-Muslims are not allowed to build a temple, church etc., and nor can they gather in a public place for prayers

Q11. Give one example to prove that the Indian secular state can intervene to prevent the religious domination concerning different groups of the same religion.

Ans. We can prove this fact with following example:

Where members of the same religion ('upper-caste' Hindus) dominate other members (some 'lower castes') within it. In order to prevent this religion-based exclusion and discrimination of 'lowercastes', the Indian Constitution banned untouchability. 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 castes' who are citizens of this country.

Fill in the blanks:

Ans : i. Allegiance'. ii. Religion iii. religion. iv. group, religion. v. Muslim and Christian