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## Chapter 8

### Secularism

#### ❖ Secularism and Religious Domination

- Secularism is first and foremost a doctrine that opposes all forms of institutionalised inter-religious domination.
- It also opposes intra-religious domination.

#### ❖ Secular State

- A state must **not** only refuse to be theocratic but also have **no** formal, legal alliance with any religion, to be truly secular.
- Though the separation of religion and state is necessary; however, it is **not** a sole ingredient of a secular state.
- A secular state must be committed to principles and goals that are at least partly derived from non-religious sources.
- These goals include peace, religious freedom and freedom from religiously grounded oppression, discrimination and exclusion, as also the existence of inter-religious and intra-religious equality.
- The state must be separated from organised religion and its institutions.

#### ❖ Western Model of Secularism

- The western model of secularism has a strict separation of the state from the church.
- This form of secularism has **no** place for the idea of state-supported religious reform.
- This feature follows directly from its understanding of separation of state from church, which entails a relationship of mutual exclusion.

#### ❖ The Indian Model of Secularism

- Indian secularism is fundamentally different from western secularism.



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- Indian secularism does **not** focus on church-state separation alone. The idea of inter-religious equality is crucial to the Indian conception.
  - Indian secularism also promotes intra-religious equality. For example, the abolition of untouchability and declaring its practice as an offence was a step to ensure equality within Hinduism.
  - Indian secularism allows principled state intervention in all religions.
  - Such intervention betrays disrespect to some aspects of every religion.
  - The secular state does **not** have to treat every aspect of every religion with equal respect.

#### ❖ Criticisms for Indian Secularism

- **Anti-religious**— It is often argued that Indian secularism is anti-religious and it threatens religious identity.
- **Western Import**— Secularism is linked to Christianity, that it is western and, therefore, unsuited to Indian conditions.
- **Minoritism**— People also argue that Indian secularism encourages minoritism.
- **Interventionist**— Secularism is coercive and that it interferes excessively with the religious freedom of communities.
- **Vote Bank Politics**— There is an argument that Indian secularism encourages the politics of vote banks.
- **Impossible Project**— Secularism **cannot** work because it tries to do too much to find a solution to an intractable problem.
- These criticisms may be valid to some extent. However, it **cannot** be denied that the Indian form of secularism is based upon the understanding of complex requirements of Indian society.
- Thus, it **cannot** be called a western or Christian concept as secularism is a universal value. Indian secularism also provides ample scope for religious freedom and display of religious symbols in public as long as it is **not** funded by the government.

