**Question: Discuss the concept of Secularism.**

**Answer:** The term Secularism refers in general to the "indifference to, or rejection or exclusion of, religion and religious considerations." In different contexts the word can refer to the desire to exclude religion from social activities or civic affairs, banishment of religious symbols from the public sphere, state neutrality toward religion, the separation of religion from state, or the separation of church and state. Secularism is most often associated with the Age of Enlightenment in Europe and it plays a major role in Western society. With the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution of India enacted in 1976, the Preamble to the Constitution asserted that India is a secular nation.

In political terms, secularism is the principle of the separation of government institutions and representatives from [religious institution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_organization)s and [religious dignitaries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clergy). It means that governments should remain neutral on the matter of religion and should not enforce nor prohibit the free exercise of religion, leaving religious choice to the [liberty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty) of the people. One form of secularism is asserting the right to be free from the imposition by government of religion or religious practices upon its people. Another form of secularism is the view that public activities and decisions, especially [political](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics) ones, should be uninfluenced by religious beliefs or practices. There exist distinct traditions of secularism in the West (e.g., French and Anglo-American) and beyond (e.g., in India).

In the West, the word secular implies three things: freedom of religion, equal citizenship to each citizen regardless of his or her religion, and the separation of religion and state. One of the core principles in the constitution of Western democracies has been this separation, with the state asserting its political authority in matters of law, while accepting every individual's right to pursue his or her own religion. Everyone is equal under law, and subject to the same laws irrespective of his or her religion, in the West.

In contrast, in India, the word secular does not imply separation of religion and state. It means equal treatment of all religions. Religion in India continues to assert its political authority in matters of personal law. The applicable personal laws differ if an individual's religion is Christianity, or Hindu. Secularism in India also differs from the French concept for secularism. While the French concept demands absence of governmental institutions in religion, as well as absence of religion in governmental institutions and schools; the Indian concept, in contrast, provides financial support to religious schools and accepts religious law over governmental institutions. The Indian structure has created incentives for various religious orders to start and maintain schools, impart religious education, and receive partial but significant financial support from the Indian government. Similarly, Indian government financially supports, regulates and administers the historic Hindu temples, Buddhist monasteries, and certain Christian religious institutions; this direct Indian government involvement in various religions is markedly different from Western secularism.

To conclude, secularism can be understood as one or more of the following:

1. Separation of religious institutions from state institutions and a public sphere where religion may participate, but not dominate.

2. Freedom to practice one's faith or belief without harming others, or to change it or not have one, according to one's own conscience.

3. Equality so that our religious beliefs or lack of them doesn't put any of us at an advantage or a disadvantage.