



In the Context of Receding Constitutional Secularism, Analyze the Dichotomy Between Constitutional Secularism and ‘Party-Political Secularism’, that Has Challenged the Future of Secularism in India. (250 Words / 15 M) (GS-1 Secularism)

Approach:

1. Intro on Indian secularism and its abuse.
2. Explain Constitutional secularism.
3. Explain party-political secularism.
4. State what can be done to even out this dichotomy.
5. Conclusion.

Indian brand of secularism means **equidistance from every religion** and that there is **no state religion**. The notion of secularism has bear the brunt for being at the center of public & political discourse – it has been persistently **misused & abused** by vested interests. **Distinguishing it from constitutional political secularism**, scholars have called this abused version as **‘party-political secularism’**.

Constitutional secularism: this is marked by two features –

- **Respect for all religions:** Unlike the secularisms of predominantly single religious societies, ours does **not blindly support any one religion**, rather, it respects all religions. However, given the virtual difficulty of distinguishing religious from the social, **BR Ambedkar** opined that **every aspect of religious doctrine cannot be respected, which must be accompanied by critique**. It follows that state can **intervene** whenever religious groups promote **communal disharmony** or are **unable to protect their members from perpetuated oppressions**.
- **No strict separation:** the Indian state abandons strict separation but keeps a **principled distance from all religions**. Thus, it constantly decides when to engage or disengage, help or hinder religion depending on how these enhances constitutional commitment to **freedom, equality and fraternity**.

Constitutional secularism cannot be sustained by governments alone and requires **collective commitment** from the judiciary, scrupulous media, civil society and aware citizenry.

Opportunistic secularism : ‘Party-political secularism’ born almost 4 decades ago, is a nefarious doctrine practiced by almost all political parties. This secularism has **eroded all values** and replaced them with **opportunism. Opportunistic disengagement or opportunistic alliance** with religious communities for **immediate electoral benefit** is its hallmark feature. It has **removed the ‘critical’ aspect** by bizarrely making **deals with aggressive or orthodox sections** of religious groups. This has ignited **communal violence** in many parts.



In a more recent trend, few **majoritarian parties** have started to directly **appease the majority religion** by demonizing others. This has **eliminated the 'principled distance'** of state from religion. This is **uncontrolled majoritarianism** under the garb of secularism – one that **opposes 'pseudo-secularism'** without examining its own unethical practices.

Today, **Indian Constitutional secularism is being eclipsed by this party-political secularism**. This has raised a question on the **future of secularism in India**.

What needs to be done ?:

- A **shift of focus from a politically-driven project to socially-led movement** for justice. When two religious communities view each other as enemies, they get trapped in **majority-minority syndrome**, spiraling into political conflict & social alienation. The **political project arose because religious toleration no longer worked**. So, **new forms of socio-religious reciprocity** and **novel ways of reducing political alienation** are needed to bridge the democratic deficit.
- A **shift of emphasis from inter-religious to intra-religious issues**. By **muzzling dissent** within the community, much needed **internal reforms are stalled**. Thus a much **deeper introspection** must be allowed through **multiple dissenting voices**, creating conditions to **eradicate intra-religious injustices** and make members **free & equal**.

Indian secularism is **thwarted** by as much **party-politics** as by **religious orthodoxy and dogmas**. Hence, a **critique of religion from within** is needed; a critique from outside will not work. Additionally, the **popular-democratic struggles** need **support from intelligentsia**. But it to be effective, these intellectuals should have learnt from a **wide variety of cultural traditions**, outside their immediate ambit.