



The many shades of religious intolerance in India

Context:

The Pew Research Center launched its report 'Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation'.

Relevance:

GS-I: Indian Society (Demography, Social Issues, and Developments in Indian Society), GS-II: Polity and Governance (Constitutional Provisions, Fundamental Rights)

Mains Questions:

Does the concept of religious tolerance require the mixing of religious communities? Discuss. (10 marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

1. Religious Diversity in India
2. Secularism in India
3. Pew Research Centre's 'Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation' report
4. Geographical Factor of Religious Tolerance: Pew Research Centre's report
5. Has India been historically tolerant?
6. Conclusion

Religious Diversity in India



- India is one of the most diverse nations in terms of religion, it being the birthplace of four major world religions: Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.
- Even though Hindus form close to 80 percent of the population, India also has region-specific religious practices: for instance, Jammu and Kashmir has a Muslim majority, Punjab has a Sikh majority, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram have Christian majorities and the Indian Himalayan States such as Sikkim and Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh and the state of Maharashtra and the Darjeeling District of West Bengal have large concentrations of Buddhist population.
- The country has significant Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain and Zoroastrian populations.
- Islam is the largest minority religion in India, and the Indian Muslims form the third largest Muslim population in the world, accounting for over 14 percent of the nation's population.

Secularism in India

- Secularism is a principle that advocates separation of religion from civic affairs and the state.
- The term means that all the religions in India get equal respect protection and support from the state.

INDIAN SECULARISM

Equal protection by the state to all religions. It reflects certain meanings. First secular state to be one that protects all religions, but does not favour one at the cost of others and does not adopt any religion as the state religion.

In the Indian context, secularism has been interpreted as the state maintaining an "arm's length distance" from ALL religions.

WESTERN SECULARISM

Separation of state and religion as mutual exclusion means both are mutually exclusive in their own spheres of operation.

Western secularism can be seen as the state refusing to interact with any form of religious affairs.

Pew Research Centre's 'Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation' report

- The report found that 91% of Hindus felt they have religious freedom, while 85% of them believed that respecting all religions was very important 'to being truly Indian'.



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- Also, for most Hindus, religious tolerance was not just a civic virtue but also a religious value, with 80% of them stating that respecting other religions was an integral aspect of 'being Hindu'.
 - Other religions showed similar numbers for freedom of religion and religious tolerance. While 89% of Muslims and Christians said they felt free to practice their religion, the comparative figures for Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains were 82%, 93%, and 85% respectively.
 - On the question of religious tolerance, 78% of Muslims felt it was an essential aspect of being Indian, while 79% deemed it a part of their religious identity as Muslims. Other religious denominations scored similarly high on religious tolerance.
 - The survey also revealed a number of shared beliefs that cut across religious barriers. For example, while 77% of Hindus said they believed in karma, an identical percentage of Muslims said so as well.
 - Despite shared values and a high regard for religious tolerance, the majority in all the faiths scored poorly on the metrics for religious segregation: composition of friends' circle, views on stopping inter-religious marriage, and willingness to accept people of other religions as neighbors.
 - On the question of inter-religious marriage, most Hindus (67%), Muslims (80%), Sikhs (59%), and Jains (66%) felt it was 'very important' to stop the women in their community from marrying outside their religion (similar rates of opposition to men marrying outside religion). But considerably fewer Christians (37%) and Buddhists (46%) felt this way.
 - The majorities in all the religious groups were, hypothetically, willing to accept members of other religious groups as neighbours, but a significant number had reservations. About 78% of Muslims said they would be willing to have a Hindu as a neighbour. Buddhists were most likely to voice acceptance of other religious groups as neighbours, with roughly 80% of them willing to accept a Muslim, Christian, Sikh or Jain as a neighbour, and even more (89%) ready to accept a Hindu neighbour.



Free to choose

More than 80% of adults across all major religions in India said that they were free to practice their religion in the country

Religion	% of Indian adults who said...		
	They are very free to practice their religion	Respecting all religions is very important to being truly Indian	Respecting other religions is a very important part of their religious identity
Hindus	91	85	80
Muslims	89	78	79
Christians	89	78	78
Sikhs	82	81	75
Buddhists	93	84	86
Jains	85	83	73
General population	91	84	80

Geographical Factor of Religious Tolerance: Pew Research Centre's report

- Geography was a key factor in determining attitudes, with people in the south of India more religiously integrated and less opposed to inter-religious marriages.
- People in the South “are less likely than those in other regions to say all their close friends share their religion (29%),” noted the report.
- Also, Hindu nationalist sentiments were less prevalent in the South. Among Hindus, those in the South (42%) were far less likely than those in Central states (83%) or the North (69%) to say that being Hindu was very important to being truly Indian.
- Also, people in the South were somewhat less religious than those in other regions: 69% said religion was very important to their lives, while 92% in Central India held the same view.
- Religious identity and nationalism
- The survey also found that Hindus tend to see their religious identity and Indian national identity as closely intertwined, with 64% saying that it was ‘very important’ to be Hindu to be “truly” Indian.
- Most Hindus (59%) also linked Indian identity with being able to speak Hindi. And



among Hindus who believed it was very important to be Hindu in order to be truly Indian, a full 80% also believed it was very important to speak Hindi to be truly Indian.

Has India been historically tolerant?

- The survey endorses that India has historically been a tolerant country and is now increasingly turning into an intolerant one. It states that, since Indians were tolerant in the past, they must remain so now and in future.
- However, untouchability has been practised for ages in India and remains widespread in both urban and rural areas. And untouchability is an act of extreme intolerance.
- But the ideas of caste and intolerance are empirically, conceptually and historically deeply entwined.
- Society has been following intolerance against Dalits in an organised way as a custom.

Conclusion

- Various articles surfacing after the Pew Research Center launched its report 'Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation' suggest that: while the survey presents comparative data pertaining to four other major religions: Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism, its conclusion broadly confirms the growing influence of Hindutva politics on India's social fabric.
- According to the report, India's concept of religious tolerance does not necessarily involve the mixing of religious communities. However, examining the conceptual foundations on which the report is premised could lead to a vastly different understanding of tolerance in India.
- The issue of tolerance is not seen in connection with caste and is argued exclusively in the context of inter-religious communities. In discussions on prejudices or violence between Hindus and Muslims, the word 'tolerance' seems to have increasingly replaced the word 'communal'.

-Source: The Hindu