

## India-Turkey: A Comparative Study of Secularism

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### ABSTRACT

This comparative study examines the concepts and practices of secularism in India and Turkey. Both countries have experienced a long history of state and religion interplay, with India being predominantly Hindu and Turkey being predominantly Muslim. Despite their different religious and cultural backgrounds, both India and Turkey have embraced secularism as a foundational principle of their modern state-building process. This paper analyzes the various factors that have influenced the development of secularism in these two countries, including their respective histories, political ideologies and legal frameworks. It also examines the similarities and differences in the implementation of secularism in India and Turkey, including the role of the state, the relationship between religion and politics and the protection of religious minorities. The study finds that while India and Turkey have both sought to embrace secularism as a means of promoting diversity and pluralism, the practical implementation of secularism has been challenged by various social, political, and religious factors. The study concludes that a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of secularism in India and Turkey can provide insights into the challenges and opportunities facing secular democracies in diverse societies.

**Keywords:** Secularism; Religion; Minorities; Pluralism and political ideologies

### INTRODUCTION

Secularism refers to a foundational principle of the modern state-building process, which aims to separate state affairs from religious influence. In other words, it is a political ideology that promotes a neutral stance of the state towards religion and seeks to protect the freedom of individuals to practice their own religion or belief system without interference from the state. India and Turkey are two diverse countries with a long history of state and religion interplay. Both countries have embraced secularism as a foundational principle of their modern state-building process, which has had significant implications for their respective societies and political systems. Therefore, studying secularism in these two countries can provide insights into the challenges and opportunities facing secular democracies in diverse societies [1].

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Secularism in India and Turkey has been implemented in different ways, with varying degrees of success. Therefore,

comparing the concepts and practices of secularism in these two countries can help us understand the factors that have influenced the development and implementation of secularism, as well as the impact of secularism on their societies and political systems. The study of secularism in India and Turkey has broader implications for the understanding of secularism as a political ideology. The principles of secularism are increasingly relevant in many countries around the world, where religious diversity and pluralism have become more prominent. Therefore, studying secularism in India and Turkey can contribute to the broader debate on the role of the state in managing religious diversity and promoting pluralism.

### Objectives of study

This comparative study on India and Turkey's secularism covers various aspects related to the concepts and practices of secularism in both countries. The paper covers:

- The historical context and state-religion relationship in the past in both countries.

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- The emergence of secularism as a principle and how it was influenced by different political ideologies in India and Turkey.
- Comparison of the legal frameworks in both countries and their impact on secularism.
- The relationship between religion and politics and the protection of religious minorities in India and Turkey.
- Comparison of the practical implementation of secularism in both countries, including the challenges posed by social, political and religious factors.
- Opportunities for promoting secularism in diverse societies through legal reforms, interfaith dialogue, grassroots activism, media and policymaking.

## Historical background

India has a rich cultural heritage that dates back to the Indus Valley civilization, which existed from around 2500 BCE to 1900 BCE. In the centuries that followed, India was ruled by various kingdoms and empires, including the Mauryan Empire, the Gupta Empire and the Mughal Empire. In 1947, India gained independence from British colonial rule and became a secular democratic republic. Turkey, on the other hand, has a history that spans thousands of years. The region that is now Turkey was home to various ancient civilizations, including the Hittites, the Phrygians and the Lydians. In the centuries that followed, the region was ruled by various empires, including the Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire emerged as a dominant force in the region. After the collapse of the Ottoman empire following world war I, Turkey became a republic in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who implemented a series of reforms to modernize and secularize the country [2].

## State and religion relationship in the past

In India's past, the relationship between state and religion has been complex and varied. In ancient India, religion played a significant role in the governance of the state, with Hinduism being the dominant religion. The Mauryan empire, for example, was known for its policy of religious tolerance and non-interference in matters of faith. During the Mughal period, Islam became a significant force in India, and the Mughal emperors promoted a policy of religious tolerance and syncretism. However, towards the end of the Mughal empire, religious conflict became more prevalent, particularly between Hindus and Muslims. In modern India, the constitution of India, adopted in 1950, enshrined the principle of secularism, which requires the state to remain neutral in matters of religion and to protect the religious freedom of all citizens. However, in practice, religious tensions continue to be a significant challenge in India.

In Turkey's past, the relationship between state and religion has also been complex. The Ottoman empire was a Muslim state, and the Ottoman sultans were regarded as the protectors of the faith. However, the Ottoman empire was also known for its religious tolerance and diversity. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey underwent a series of reforms aimed at modernizing and secularizing the country. These

reforms included the adoption of a new civil code based on European models, the abolition of the caliphate and the promotion of Turkish nationalism over Islamic identity. However, despite these reforms, Islam continues to be a significant force in Turkey and the relationship between state and religion remains a contested issue.

## Emergence of secularism as a principle in India and Turkey

In India, the emergence of secularism as a principle can be traced back to the Indian independence movement, which was led by Mahatma Gandhi and other nationalist leaders. Gandhi believed that a secular state was necessary for the country's political and social development and advocated for the equal treatment of all religions. After independence, the constitution of India, adopted in 1950, enshrined the principle of secularism as a fundamental principle of the Indian state. The constitution mandates that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion and that all citizens are free to practice and propagate any religion of their choice [3].

In Turkey, the emergence of secularism as a principle can be traced back to the reforms implemented by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Atatürk believed that the Ottoman empire's religious identity was holding back the country's progress and that the only way to modernize and strengthen the country was to adopt a secular system. Under Atatürk's leadership, Turkey underwent a series of reforms aimed at modernizing and secularizing the country. These reforms included the adoption of a new civil code based on European models, the introduction of compulsory education and the promotion of Turkish nationalism over Islamic identity. The principle of secularism was enshrined in the Turkish constitution, which was adopted in 1924, and has remained a fundamental principle of the Turkish state ever since. However, in recent years, the relationship between religion and politics in Turkey has become increasingly contentious, with some politicians seeking to promote a more explicitly Islamic identity for the country.

## Different political ideologies in India and Turkey

India and Turkey have distinct political ideologies that have shaped the development of secularism in their respective countries. In India, the dominant political ideology has been democratic socialism, which emphasizes the importance of social justice, equality and the welfare state. The Indian national congress, which played a leading role in the country's independence movement, was founded on democratic socialist principles and has been the dominant political party in India for much of the country's history [4].

In recent years, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist party, has emerged as a significant political force in India. The BJP's ideology emphasizes the importance of Hindu identity and has been accused of promoting policies that discriminate against religious minorities. In Turkey, the dominant political ideology has been Kemalism, which emphasizes the importance of secularism, nationalism, and modernization. The Republican People's Party (CHP), founded

by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, has been the dominant political party in Turkey for much of the country's history.

In recent years, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), an Islamist party, has emerged as a significant political force in Turkey. The AKP's ideology emphasizes the importance of Islamic identity and has been accused of promoting policies that undermine secularism and the rights of religious minorities. The different political ideologies in India and Turkey have played a significant role in shaping the development of secularism in these countries, with the dominant political parties often promoting different interpretations of secularism and religious identity.

In India, the dominant ideology of democratic socialism has emphasized the importance of social justice, equality, and the welfare state in shaping the concept of secularism. This has led to an emphasis on protecting the rights of religious minorities and promoting a secular state that accommodates diversity and pluralism. The emergence of the Hindu nationalist BJP has challenged this interpretation of secularism and has sought to promote a more explicitly Hindu identity for the country. This has led to accusations of discrimination against religious minorities, particularly Muslims, and has raised concerns about the erosion of secularism in India.

In Turkey, the dominant ideology of Kemalism has emphasized the importance of secularism, nationalism, and modernization in shaping the concept of secularism. This has led to an emphasis on promoting a secular state that separates religion from politics and promotes Turkish nationalism over Islamic identity. The emergence of the Islamist AKP has challenged this interpretation of secularism and has sought to promote a more explicitly Islamic identity for the country. This has led to accusations of undermining secularism and the rights of religious minorities, particularly the country's large Kurdish minority. The different political ideologies in India and Turkey have influenced the interpretation and implementation of secularism in these countries, reflecting the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political factors that shape the concept of secularism in diverse societies.

## Comparison of legal frameworks in India and Turkey

India and Turkey have different legal frameworks that reflect the unique historical, cultural, and political contexts of these countries. In India, the constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and provides for a secular state that accommodates diversity and pluralism. The Indian constitution also provides for the protection of religious minorities and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. The judiciary has played a significant role in upholding these constitutional guarantees and has often intervened to protect the rights of religious minorities. However, there have been concerns about the effective implementation of these constitutional guarantees, particularly in cases where religious minorities have faced discrimination or violence. Some critics have argued that the judiciary has not always been effective in protecting the rights of

religious minorities and that political pressures have influenced the interpretation and application of constitutional guarantees.

In Turkey, the Constitution also provides for a secular state that separates religion from politics and promotes Turkish nationalism over Islamic identity. The constitution also provides for the protection of religious minorities and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. However, there have been concerns about the effective implementation of these constitutional guarantees, particularly in cases where the rights of religious minorities have been violated. In recent years, there have been significant changes to the legal framework in Turkey, including constitutional reforms that have strengthened the powers of the executive and reduced the independence of the judiciary. These changes have raised concerns about the erosion of democratic and secular values in Turkey and have led to accusations that the government is seeking to undermine the constitutional protections for religious minorities and other marginalized groups.

The legal frameworks in India and Turkey reflect the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political factors that shape the concept of secularism in these countries. While both countries have constitutional guarantees for the protection of religious minorities and the promotion of a secular state, there have been challenges in the effective implementation of these guarantees, reflecting the ongoing struggles to balance competing political and social interests.

## Role of the state in promoting secularism in India and Turkey

The state plays a crucial role in promoting secularism in India and Turkey. Both countries have adopted secularism as a foundational principle in their constitution, and the state is responsible for ensuring that this principle is upheld in all aspects of governance. In India, the constitution mandates that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion. The state is also required to remain neutral in matters of religion and is responsible for protecting the rights of all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. The Indian state has created institutions such as the national commission for minorities to protect the rights of religious minorities and promote communal harmony.

Similarly, in Turkey, the state is responsible for promoting secularism and ensuring that the government remains neutral in matters of religion. The Turkish constitution mandates that the state shall not discriminate on the grounds of religion, and the government is responsible for protecting the rights of all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation. The Turkish state has also created institutions such as the directorate of religious affairs to regulate religious practices and promote the secularization of society [5].

However, despite the state's efforts to promote secularism, there are several challenges to the implementation of secularism in both India and Turkey. Political and religious ideologies often interfere with the state's attempts to remain neutral and the protection of religious minorities remains a challenge in both countries. The role of the state in promoting secularism in India

and Turkey is crucial. While the state has created institutions and frameworks to promote secularism, there is a need for continued efforts to address the challenges posed by political and religious ideologies and to protect the rights of all citizens.

### Relationship between religion and politics

In both India and Turkey, the relationship between religion and politics has been complex and contentious, reflecting the unique historical, cultural and political contexts of these countries. In India, the relationship between religion and politics has been shaped by the country's diverse religious and cultural traditions. While the constitution provides for a secular state that separates religion from politics, religion continues to play an important role in Indian politics, particularly in the context of the country's Hindu-Muslim divide. The rise of the Hindu nationalist BJP in recent years has further complicated the relationship between religion and politics in India. The BJP's emphasis on a Hindu identity for the country has raised concerns about the marginalization of religious minorities, particularly Muslims and has led to accusations of undermining the country's secular traditions [5].

In Turkey, the relationship between religion and politics has also been shaped by the country's unique historical and cultural context. While the constitution provides for a secular state that separates religion from politics, religion has played an important role in Turkish politics, particularly in the context of the country's Islamic traditions. The rise of the Islamist AKP in recent years has further complicated the relationship between religion and politics in Turkey. The AKP's emphasis on promoting Islamic values and traditions has raised concerns about the erosion of secularism in the country and has led to accusations of discriminating against religious minorities, particularly the country's large Kurdish minority. The relationship between religion and politics in India and Turkey reflects the complex interplay of historical, cultural and political factors that shape the concept of secularism in these countries. While both countries have sought to promote a secular state that separates religion from politics, the practical implementation of this principle has been challenged by various social, political and religious factors [6].

### Protection of religious minorities

The protection of religious minorities has been a key component of secularism in both India and Turkey, reflecting the countries' diverse religious and cultural traditions. In India, the constitution provides for the protection of religious minorities and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. The constitution also provides for the freedom of religion and allows for the practice, propagation and promotion of any religion. However, there have been concerns about the effective implementation of these constitutional guarantees, particularly in cases where religious minorities have faced discrimination or violence. Religious minorities in India, particularly Muslims, have often faced discrimination and violence, including communal riots and attacks by Hindu nationalist groups. There have also been concerns about the use of anti-conversion laws, which restrict the ability of individuals to convert to other

religions. While the judiciary has played an important role in upholding the constitutional protections for religious minorities, there have been concerns about political interference and the slow pace of justice [7].

In Turkey, the constitution also provides for the protection of religious minorities and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. However, there have been concerns about the effective implementation of these constitutional guarantees, particularly in cases where the rights of religious minorities have been violated. Religious minorities in Turkey, particularly the country's Christian and Kurdish minorities have faced discrimination and persecution, including restrictions on the use of their religious symbols and language. There have also been concerns about the use of anti-terrorism laws to target members of religious minorities and other marginalized groups. The protection of religious minorities in India and Turkey reflects the ongoing struggle to balance competing political and social interests, and the challenges of promoting a secular state that accommodates diversity and pluralism [8].

### Comparison of the practical implementation of secularism in India and Turkey

While both India and Turkey have embraced secularism as a foundational principle of their modern state-building process, the practical implementation of secularism in these countries has been challenged by various social, political and religious factors. In India, the practical implementation of secularism has been complicated by the country's diverse religious and cultural traditions, as well as by the ongoing Hindu-Muslim divide. While the constitution provides for a secular state that separates religion from politics, religion continues to play an important role in Indian politics, particularly in the context of the country's Hindu nationalist movement. The rise of the BJP in recent years has raised concerns about the marginalization of religious minorities, particularly Muslims, and has led to accusations of undermining the country's secular traditions. There have also been concerns about the use of anti-conversion laws and the slow pace of justice in cases where religious minorities have faced discrimination or violence [9].

## DISCUSSION

In Turkey, the practical implementation of secularism has been challenged by the country's unique historical and cultural context, as well as by the rise of the Islamist AKP in recent years. While the Constitution provides for a secular state that separates religion from politics, religion has played an important role in Turkish politics, particularly in the context of the country's Islamic traditions. The AKP's emphasis on promoting Islamic values and traditions has raised concerns about the erosion of secularism in the country and has led to accusations of discriminating against religious minorities, particularly the country's large Kurdish minority. There have also been concerns about the use of anti-terrorism laws to target members of religious minorities and other marginalized groups [10].

The practical implementation of secularism in India and Turkey reflects the ongoing struggle to balance competing political and

social interests and the challenges of promoting a secular state that accommodates diversity and pluralism. While both countries have sought to embrace secularism as a means of promoting diversity and pluralism, the practical implementation of secularism has been complicated by various social, political and religious factors [11].

### **Social, political and religious factors that challenge the implementation of secularism**

There are several social, political and religious factors that challenge the implementation of secularism in both India and Turkey. In both countries, religious identity and communalism have played a significant role in the political discourse. The politicization of religious identity and the rise of communalism have led to the marginalization of religious minorities, particularly Muslims in India and Kurds in Turkey. India and Turkey have a long history of state and religion interplay, which has shaped their cultural and social traditions. The persistence of these traditions has made it difficult to fully embrace secularism as a principle of statecraft. In both countries, political polarization has hindered the implementation of secularism. In India, the rise of Hindu nationalism has led to the marginalization of religious minorities, while in Turkey, the AKP's emphasis on Islamic values has led to accusations of undermining the country's secular traditions [12].

The legal framework for secularism in both countries has been challenged by various legal issues. In India, there have been concerns about the slow pace of justice in cases of discrimination and violence against religious minorities, while in Turkey, there have been concerns about the use of anti-terrorism laws to target members of religious minorities and other marginalized groups. The international community has played a significant role in shaping the implementation of secularism in both countries. In India, international criticism of the treatment of religious minorities has led to pressure on the government to uphold secular values, while in Turkey, pressure from the European Union has led to some reforms to strengthen secularism [13].

### **Opportunities for promoting secularism in diverse societies**

While promoting secularism in diverse societies is a complex challenge, there are several opportunities that can be leveraged to enhance its implementation. Some of these opportunities are: Education can play a vital role in promoting secularism in diverse societies. By promoting interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange programs, and inclusiveness in the curriculum, educational institutions can foster a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity. Grassroots activism by civil society groups can create a groundswell of support for secular values. These groups can work to promote secularism through advocacy, community engagement and public awareness campaigns. Legal reforms can be implemented to strengthen the legal framework for secularism. This can include the revision of discriminatory laws, the establishment of independent oversight bodies to monitor the implementation of secularism, and the

strengthening of constitutional protections for religious minorities.

The media can play a crucial role in promoting secularism by highlighting the benefits of diversity and pluralism, and by providing a platform for diverse voices to be heard. Finally, political will is essential for promoting secularism in diverse societies. Political leaders must prioritize secular values in policymaking and work to ensure that the state upholds the rights of all citizens regardless of their religious identity. In short, promoting secularism in diverse societies requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses social, cultural, and political challenges. By leveraging opportunities such as education, grassroots activism, legal reforms, media and political will, secular democracies can create inclusive societies that respect diversity and promote the common good [14].

## **CONCLUSION**

This comparative study highlights the historical, political, and legal factors that have shaped the concept and implementation of secularism in India and Turkey. While both countries have embraced secularism as a foundational principle of their modern state-building process, the practical implementation of secularism has been challenged by various social, political and religious factors. Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for promoting secularism in diverse societies. Education, grassroots activism, legal reforms, media and political will can be leveraged to foster a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity. However, promoting secularism in diverse societies requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses social, cultural and political challenges. The paper concludes that promoting secularism in diverse societies requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses social, cultural and political challenges. It recommends strengthening legal frameworks, promoting interfaith dialogue and inclusiveness in the curriculum, encouraging grassroots activism, increasing media coverage on the benefits of diversity and pluralism, and prioritizing secular values in policymaking. By implementing these recommendations, secular democracies can create inclusive societies that respect diversity and promote the common good. Based on the findings of this study, we make the following recommendations:

- Strengthen legal frameworks to protect the rights of religious minorities and promote secular values.
- Promote interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange programs and inclusiveness in the curriculum to foster a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity.
- Encourage grassroots activism by civil society groups to create a groundswell of support for secular values.
- Increase media coverage on the benefits of diversity and pluralism and provide a platform for diverse voices to be heard.
- Prioritize secular values in policymaking and work to ensure that the state upholds the rights of all citizens regardless of their religious identity. By implementing these recommendations, secular democracies can create inclusive societies that respect diversity and promote the common good.

## FINDINGS

Implications for future research and policy making. This comparative study on secularism in India and Turkey has important implications for future research and policy-making. Firstly, there is a need for further research to understand the complexities of secularism in diverse societies. More research can help to identify and address the challenges faced by secular democracies in promoting inclusiveness and respect for diversity. Secondly, the findings of this study suggest that legal frameworks play a crucial role in promoting secular values and protecting the rights of religious minorities. Future policy-making should prioritize the strengthening of legal frameworks to promote secularism and protect the rights of all citizens. Thirdly, the study highlights the importance of grassroots activism and interfaith dialogue in promoting secularism. Policymakers can leverage the power of civil society groups to promote secular values and encourage interfaith dialogue to foster a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity.

Fourthly, the study suggests that media coverage on the benefits of diversity and pluralism can be leveraged to promote secularism. Policymakers can work with media outlets to increase coverage on issues related to secularism and provide a platform for diverse voices to be heard. Generally, this study suggests that promoting secularism in diverse societies requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses social, cultural, and political challenges. Future research and policy-making should prioritize strategies that foster a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity, promote inclusiveness and protect the rights of all citizens.

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