Secularism and its Impact on Religious Practices: A Philosophical Inquiry

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Abstract: Secularism is a principle of philosophy and politics that calls for the separation of religion from state affairs while keeping matters of religion neutral in public spaces. This research looks at secularism's effect on the practice of religion by examining its impact on legal structures, the practice of religion in public, religious bodies, and relations among faiths. Secularism, in promoting tolerance and freedom, compels one to worry over the limitation of religious expression, state interference in religion, and the upsurge of religious fundamentalism opposing secularism's policies. In practice, secularism has developed out of Enlightenment thinking, revolutionary movements, and modernity, which informs current discussions concerning the function of religion in public life. While having contributed fundamentally to pluralism and coexistence, the lack of consistency in secularism's application across different cultures and political systems contributes to friction between the religious and secular, which is often problematic. This paper argues that secularism does not eliminate religion; it merely suggests a new position for it in the contemporary world. There will always be an imbalance between the degree of religious freedom enjoyed by citizens and the level of secularism provided by the government. Primarily and politically, secularism is being exercised as a logical principle, perhaps more than any other principle, which has fundamentally modified religious practices. Inasmuch as it advocates the autonomy of an individual, it also poses a danger to religious traditions and identities. The consequences brought about by secularism in religious practices are not the same but depend on the particular legal system, the culture, and traditions, as well as the history of the people. Even as societies develop, the equilibrium of secularism and religion is still a very contested territory which has to be preserved with delicate contrasts between the idols of secularism and the true presence of multi-religiosity.
Keywords: Secularism (SS), Religious Practices (RP), Philosophical Inquiry (PI)

1. INTRODUCTION

The term secularism can be defined as the main concept that separates religion from the state. In other words, we can say that this concept promotes the neutral and impartial nature of institutions. There should be no exceptions related to any religion in society. Here we are going to understand a few important principles of secularism. The first important principle is the aspect of separation of religion and state. Secularism insists that there should be a distinction between religious institutions and state institutions and there should be no dependence between these two

dynamics. For better observation of democracy in any state, it is mandatory to keep religion aside for running that state(Van Der Veer, 2008). Neutrality is also considered an important principle for secularism because it focuses that the state should be neutral towards all the different religions of that state. There should be unbiased treatment of each religion by state. There should be no coercion in adopting any religion. The other important principle related to secularism is that it promotes freedom of religion. There is no interference of the state or majority on practicing of religion by a minority(Mahmood, 2009). Every individual must have the right to practice his religion without any pressure or fear. There should also be no discrimination related to any religious aspects in a secular state. Equality is considered as most important component of secularism. It means that there should be equal treatment for all the individuals of a secular state. In this regard, there should be equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of religion, origin, color, or creed. There are some important types of secularism. These important types of secularism are called hard secularism, soft secularism, and liberal secularism. In hard secularism, it is said that there is no role of religion in normal public life so there should be strict laws related to the separation of religion and state. In soft secularism, it is considered that there may be some interaction of religion with the state but it is better to limit this interaction(Bader, 1999). It is mostly pertinent to have a separation between religion and state. In liberal secularism, it has been seen that there is a promotion of a neutral state having no interaction with religion. This type of secularism focuses on the autonomy of each individual of the State because it is believed that when there is freedom of individuals in any state, there will be a better role of citizens for the progress of that state as well. Some important benefits of secularism need to be discussed here. The first and foremost benefit is that it promotes religious freedom. In most cases, we have seen that in a pluralistic society, there are people of different religions(Kitcher, 2011). If these people are not given freedom of their religion, it will be disrespectful to their religion and will instigate people against the state at the same time. But when a state becomes a secular state and offers proper freedom of religion, there will be religious freedom in that state which will automatically lead to a prosperous state. The second most important benefit of secularism is that it enhances social cohesion (Kitcher, 2014). For better cohesion among individuals in any society, there is a stringent need for fair and equal treatment. When in a secular state, every citizen will be treated equally, so there will be better and enhanced social cohesion as a result. Recent studies have shown that the most important benefit of secularism is the aspect of critical thinking.

Usually, people respect other religions very well but it is also encouraged to question some beliefs. In this regard, secularism will promote critical thinking and this critical thinking will lead to challenges for previous beliefs. People will start trusting more in evidence instead of only beliefs (Nixon, 2009). As we know some important human rights should be given without any discrimination of religion or any other factor. Secularism mostly supports these human Rights in different ways. In this way, there will be fostering of a sense of freedom and protection in citizens of that secular state. Now we are going to discuss the impact of secularism on religious practices in a secular state. The most obvious impact that has been seen is that there is the separation of religion and state so religions do not affect state affairs now. Secularism has also led to the privatization of religion where no one can question about religious practices of others(Gordon, 2003). It has provided a sense of freedom in these individuals so that they have no fear of discrimination. The other obvious impact of secularism on religious practices can be described in terms of challenge to traditional authority. If we look back a few years, we may come to know that there was the authority of religious groups on affairs of state and it has affected the state in various ways. But with the help of secularism, individuals have become freer and more autonomous so challenged these traditional authorities of religious groups. There are some supporters of this notion that secularism has positive impacts on religious practices but there are some considerations that are related to critiques of secularism (Kosmin & Keysar, 2007). These critics argue that it is a useless argument that religion will hinder modification in society. It states that religion will not impede any threat to modernized society. It is also considered that secularism has made the aspect of religion a personal matter. In this regard, it has silenced many important religious voices which may result in marginalization of any particular community. Recent studies have shown that there were aspects of multiculturalism and diversification because of the variety of religions. Those people belonging to different religions used to relate religious practices with culture but secularism has ended up this aspect of multiculturalism. It also raises some important philosophical implications which will result in some questions. For example, there is a question of if religion is a personal matter what is the role of religion in the community (Dressler & Mandair, 2011). The concept of secularism stems from the Enlightenment and has played an important role in the creation of modern societies in which there is a separation between the influence of religion and the state. At the core of secularism is the principle of creating a public sphere without the influence of religion's beliefs on politics. This

principle, however, raises considerable issues when it comes to religious devotion and practice, such as the balance between personal liberties, cultural identity, and government control within faith-based practices. As we say religion provides a way for living but where we are using religious practices for the betterment of common life. It has also surpassed the important relationship of faith with reason so we are unable to conclude to which extent religious beliefs are proved by scientific inquiries and critical thinking. These important questions need to be answered to understand the importance of secularism (AbdulRahim, 2010).

1.1 Research Objective

The main objective of this research is to understand the concept of secularism and its Impacts on religious practices in a secular state. These studies have convinced us that secularism in various states has raised some important questions related to the importance of religion for community and individual life.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers claim that the concept of liberalism has evolved with time. Classical liberalism was based on promoting the concept of freedom. Freedom to follow religion and Islamic concepts according to one's will and choice. While the post- liberalism era promotes the freedom of equality and social practices. Both the liberalism approaches play their role in shaping the ideology of society. Secular universities play a major role in promoting religious-based practices among people in society(Anderson, 2024). Studies suggest that there are two worlds, one natural and the other one in the supernatural world This idea about the world is new. The understanding of the idea of two worlds in secular society is influenced by our belief system (Harrison, 2024). Studies concluded that the concept of secular society in Finland promotes equality and freedom of choice among people. In a secularist society, the government's role is critical in allowing people to preach the religion of their own choice. This secularist society therefore shapes the political policy-making ability of society (Heikki, 2024). Studies claim that humans are trying to build a future where secular and non-secular activities are preached without any restriction. The establishment of a society promoting both secular and non-secular activities is the ideal society for humans(Krüger, 2024). Studies reveal that Muslim philosophers and scholars in the past have used various

harmonizing reasons and statements to reveal Islamic ideas Knowledge from different sources has been organized by Islamic philosophers to provide people with an in-depth understanding of Islamic teachings (Malik et al., 2024). Studies explain that some philosophers showed positive responses toward the development of a secular state. These philosophers claim that the secular state in Kazakhstan positively allows people to enjoy religious freedom and at the same time allows them to participate in social practices (Mazhiyev et al., 2024). Studies claim that in Bangladesh the authoritarian society took over the secular society. The authoritarian society establishment resulted in a state where religious ideas are used for political purposes (Mostofa, 2024). Studies declare that in the secular community, the relationship of religious activities with secular activities is of a complex type. However in diverse communities secularism acts as a force to promote religious practices (Odimegwu, 2024). Studies suggest that in the Nepalian state, a secular state faces complexity in allowing religious freedom. Due to the presence of a large number of religions in Nepal for centuries, this secular state faces problems in allowing Islamic freedom (Pant, 2024). Studies explain that in Western areas the beliefs of people are influenced by a radical secularization approach. people's understanding of spirituality and religious values has been shifted by the radical secularized approach (Penttinen, 2024). Studies suggest that students of universities have a different way of looking at religious practices. The historical background of any nation is a factor that influences the concept of secularism and religion of students of such nations Students' cultural background and their own beliefs help in defining their religious aspect. in a diverse community, the ideologies of students are shaped by secularization(Purnomo & Kurniawan, 2024). Studies explain that in the present era, the way people perceive Jewish ideas is way very critical procedure. People who are into Jewish religion draw the attention of people who do not belong to any religion towards the Jewish religion. The Jewish people interact with different people in society to attract them towards their religion using different tactics. These tactics of Jewish helped in making religious people religious individuals (Rashkover, 2024). Studies show there is a Deep connection between belief systems and Christianity. To some extent, Jewish people's rules are the same as religious practices while to some extent there are differences between Jewish practices and religious practices but the introduction of secular approaches in society has changed how Christian values are presented around the world. In the field of ethics, the values of Christianity have been influenced through a secularized approach(Sanchez, 2024). Studies show that religion in the

present era is influenced by technology. Also, religious belief shapes the developmental process of modern technology systems. There is a connection between technology and religion as religious practices play a major part in technological development on the other hand technology impacts how people respond (Silalahi et al., 2024). Studies have claimed that implementation of secularism in India has changed the religious context of the Indian state. The introduction of the secularized concept into the Indian cultural perspective is a critical process and requires modifications secularization approach in Indian culture to promote social harmonization among people (Singh, 2024). Studies suggest that the EU framework helps in determining the association between Islamic activities and secularized practices. EU allows people to adopt their religious practices freely. The EU framework is implemented based on Islamic principles in a secular state to allow Muslims to have freedom in practicing their religious activities. In European states making the Islamic framework work in a secularized state requires a lot of effort both by the government and religious parties (Tavkhelidze, 2024). Studies predict that Kierkegaard theory predicts the implementation of religious practice sin a fully secularized society. Kierkegaard ideology guides people to stick to their religious practices in a world that is more inclined towards secularized concept. Secularized state development has allowed people to focus on their ways of living to stay connect to their religion. Technology and other social factors of the modern world play a dominating role in changing people perception of religion.

To stop secularized modern world changes to alter the religious values of people Kierkegaard's theology plays an important role. The term dancing in GOD is especially used by philosophers to define people's devotion towards religious practice permanently despite the secularized authorities' dominancy(Thompson, 2024). Studies explain that different philosophers are used to develop religious values in students through educational purposes. Different philosopher has played a prominent role in influencing people religious activities through educational teaching platforms. teacher and students' good relations help teachers to develop a new sense of religious aspects in students Modern teachers are using philosopher principles in their teaching methods to promote understanding of religious aspects among people(Yuldashevna, 2024). Studies claim that secular universities are increasing the education of secular concept among young generation. But the Islamic teaching practices are also given in universities to overcome the concept of fully secularized university development (Zaman, 2024). Studies explain that

French philosophers have revolutionized how religion is studied. French philosophers work to understand the personal and social value that defines religion. Rather than just studying religion French philosophers focus more on understanding how people see their religious experience (Zgórecki, 2024).

Figure 1: Secularism on Religion and its Practices

This research analyses the philosophical origins, historical development, and multifaceted effects of secularism on religion and its practices (Figure 1).

3. THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SECULARISM

Secularism is a multifaceted and complex idea in itself, with deep roots in rationalism, liberalism, and humanism. John Locke, Voltaire, and Immanuel Kant are commonly known for proposing the idea of public reason secularism – that is, reason should replace divine rule in politics. The most basic and fundamental philosophical notions of secularism are:

1. Autonomy of the Individual - Freedom of personal choice enables an individual to not only select a belief but also face no religious or political imposition on their will.

2. Rationalism and Empiricism - Beliefs and ideologies should be based on logic and on practical experience instead of on unfounded religious propositions.

3. Liberalism and Pluralism - A non-theocratic society welcomes different religions and protects its citizens from any dominative discrimination against non-favored ideologies in the medley of public life and state affairs.

4. Ethical Autonomy - Here, morality is independent from religion and is often based on human rights and universal ethical principles. These principles, for instance, help secular societies mediate the religious practices

of individuals and groups' freedoms.

Figure 2: Historical Evolution of Secularism

3.1 Historical Evolution of Secularism

Religiosity has evolved differently in various cultures and has been influenced by politics (Figure 2). This development may be analyzed through prominent historical periods. 1. The Enlightenment (17th-18th Century) - Voltaire and Rousseau spearheaded a campaign against religious power by stressing reason and the separation of religion from government. 2. The American and French Revolutions (18th Century) - The US Constitution granted the people the freedom of practicing any religion or none at all; the French Revolution advanced secularism at the expense of the Catholic Church. 3. 19th and 20th Century Modernization - The industrial revolution and science brought a decline of religion's role in governance. 4. Post-colonial and contemporary secularism - In parts of the world where former colonies gained independence, secularism was employed to build national identity (Turkey, India) but often poured over into political strife. This development gives insight into the current controversies regarding secularism and its effect on the practice of religion around the world.
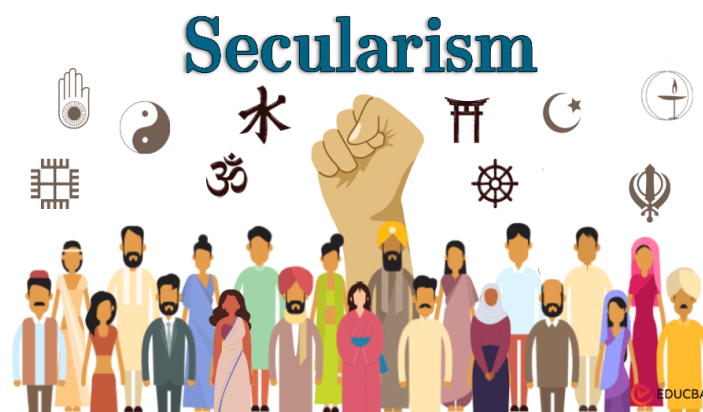

Figure 3: The Effects of Secularism on Religion

4. THE EFFECTS OF SECULARISM ON RELIGION

The severance of religion from government activities is termed secularism, and it has had profound consequences on the religious attitude, rituals, and activities of institutions (Figure 3). The secularization of religion is one of the most important aspects of social modernization. It facilitates a religiously neutral and pluralistic environment while simultaneously undermining the authority, influence, and faith of religion. The effects of secularism on religion manifest themselves in several ways, such as the decreasing involvement of religion in politics, the lack of interest in religious activities, the changing of the teachings of religion, and the growing presence of other religions outside Christianity.

4.1 Diminished Control of Religion over Political Affairs

One impact of secularism that touches the lives of people the most is the reduction of the impact of religion on politics and the system of law. Most societies were governed with religious authority, mainly from the custodians of various religions. Apparently, secularism starts from the assumption that laws and policies should reflect logic, democracy, and human rights rather than religion. The United States and France serve as examples; in these countries, secularism prevents the application of religion to politics. This has resulted in changes in laws pertaining to women, gays, and freedom of speech, which runs counter to traditional conservative religion.

4.2 Decrease in Religious Activity and Faith

Participation in religious practices has decreased significantly because of secularism. This is especially prevalent among people in the Western world. Cultured living supported by new scientific development and rationalized ways of thinking has made many people abandon organized religion. Church attendance in Europe and North America is said to be at its lowest in history. Moreover, more people are beginning to identify themselves as atheists, agnostics, or simply "spiritual but not religious." Countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands, and Japan have experienced a dramatic drop in religious identification, which showcases how secularism seems to pull religious people farther and farther away from religion.

4.3 Changes in Religion and Modernization of Religious Practices

Traditionally secular nations seem to be shifting more and more towards

religious adaptation. Many religious institutions have changed their traditional ways of interpreting scriptures to fit with modern-day values. The Catholic Church, for example, has become more accepting of extreme climatic changes, economic disparity, and interfaith relations and dialogues under the leadership of Pope Francis. Parts of Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism have had to change some of their teachings to include basic rights for women, scientific thought, and democracy in politics.

4.4 The Rise of Diverging Credos

The emergence of secularism has facilitated the growth of secular movements like Humanism and other new age spiritual movements. With the relative decline of traditional religions, the quest of people for values and meaning is no longer directed towards religion but towards philosophy, psychology, and self-spirituality. Non-religious self-growth tools like mindfulness, meditation, and ethical humanism are on the rise. The increase in acceptance of secular ethics undermines the notion that religion is the only institution that provides ethical boundaries.

4.5 The Conflict of Traditional and Modern Beliefs

The advancement of secularism has not come without problems within and between certain religious groups, and non-theistic governments. Some religious sectors report feelings of alienation when their sectarian beliefs come into conflict with secular laws on abortion, marriage, and educational processes. In certain countries with very strict secular policies like France and its prohibition of wearing religious symbols in public places and institutions, religious minorities feel marginalized. This brings about the issue of the extent to which the freedom of religion and secularism should clash. Secularism has fundamentally changed religion by minimizing its role in politics, lowering attendance rates, modernizing teachings, and promoting other belief systems. Secularism has done a commendable job of promoting pluralism, latitude, and liberty; however, it poses challenges for religious traditions that are trying to remain relevant. The interaction between secularism and religion is complex, and it affects the spiritual reality of contemporary societies. There are a few of the effects that stand out:

4.6 Politics and Law Based Consequences on Religion

Most secular states have laws which control religious practices so that they do not disrupt the social order. These include:

• Veil Controversy in France (2004) – The French government bans the use of ostentatious religious symbols in public schools, which has repercussions for Muslim women who cover their heads with a veil.

• China and Its Control of Religious Bodies – The Chinese authority controls religious activities to ensure alignment with Bolshevist ideology.

• Turkey and Its Skeptical Reforms (1920-1930s) – While Atatürk was the president, all religious schools came under government sponsorship and control, which minimized the active participation of Islam in the government. Though meant to foster dispassionate attitudes, such laws result in discrimination towards the exercise of religion.

4.7 Public Religion and Secular Expression Separation

The public manifestation of some religious practices may be restricted due to the secularization of society. For example:

• The Use of Prayer or Religious Activities in Teaching (including schools) – In pluralistic societies, state-funded public schools often refrain from offering religious prayers so as not to favor any particular religion.

• Other Public Fetes and Religious Public Festivals – A number of countries have done away with more religious holidays in favor of either non-religious or multicultural celebratory holidays.

• Public Spaces Domesticating Religion – Some countries have foregone religious structures to promote non-religious principles. These changes might create conflicts among different religious groups and the secular government.

4.8 Modernization of Religion

Religious institutions frequently have to adjust their activities to fit into non-religious environments. This is evident in:

• Softening of Religious Traditions – Several clergies have adopted feminist ideologies, the acceptance of homosexuals, and modern scientific development for them to cope with secularization.

• Religious Participation in Politics – A number of religious groups undertake actions to "politicize" issues they deem to be moral and, in so doing, go against secular values.

• Loss of Power to Dictate Religious Practices – Religious rulers in non-religious countries tend to lose control of the government and therefore, guidance becomes less authoritative.

This adaptation may enable some religious groups to exist in a secular society, but this gives rise to questions of the genuineness of faith-based

customs.

4.9 Restoration of Traditional Religion as a Reaction to Secularism

Fundamentalism of any sect is obtained by the very nature of secularism. Certain religious groups attempt to fight for their core religious beliefs and practices when secular ideals are becoming more accepting. For example:

• Shift Towards Conservative Islamic Practices in Response to Integration of Western Values – Certain Islamic groups call for the enforcement of Sharia law as an attempt to oppose secular rule.

• Christian Evangelicalism in the U.S. – Particular American Christian groups are opposed to secular movements concerning abortion, LGBTQ+ engagement, and education.

• Hindu Nationalism in India – In the case of India, some Hindu fundamentalist groups have opposed secular policies even though the Indian constitution characteristically is secular.

This response of fundamentalism goes to show how, especially in the case of America, secularism can exacerbate religious identity instead of neutralizing them.

Figure 4: Interfaith Relations and Religious Tolerance

4.10 Interfaith Relations and Religious Tolerance

One of the notable positives secularisms has brought is interreligious dialogue and tolerance (Figure 4). Secularism - by not letting any single religion take supremacy - also helps in:

• Religious Tolerance – In secular democracies, religions have an equally free scope without favor from the state.

• Pluralism and Inclusivity – Secular policies create space for an array of different religions to function.

• Reduction of Sectarian Conflicts – From political secularism emerges the non-influence of a particular religion which has stimulated violence.

While secularism does not make homogenous religious conflicts, it allows the possibility of different religions co-existing peacefully.

5. CONCLUSION

Secularism has profoundly transformed the manner in which religious customs are performed and practiced in modern times. Secularism's attempt to separate religion from the affairs of state enables people to exercise their beliefs without interference from politics or religion. But as is the case with everything else, secularism is not without its contradictions. The manner in which secularism affects religious activities is very intricate and multifaceted, often simultaneously fostering autonomy in practicing religion and imposing limits on how religious free expressions are exercised based on the enactment of secular policies. One of the primary impacts of secularism is the change in the diversity of religion in public life. In most of the advanced secular nations, religious symbols, prayers, and doctrine are now excluded from public institutions such as schools, colleges, and government offices. While these measures are intended to create a level playing field for people of diverse cultures, faiths, and beliefs, these do not go without controversies especially among parts of the religious communities that feel that such measures are a violation of their policies of traditions and customs. In certain instances, the imposition of stringent secular policies, for example France's prohibition of public display of religious symbols in schools, has been viewed as exerting undue bias towards certain groups which raises ethical issues concerning secularism and pluralism. Simultaneously, secular ideology has had an impact on the religious institutions themselves leading to their transformation to modern multi-ethnic societies. A number of social religious bodies have changed their policies on social and scientific issues like gender equality and have fallen within the contemporary sociological paradigms. This change enabled the religious groups to operate within the context of increasingly secular societies. However, it has also led to disputes regarding the integrity of religious traditions and some believers contend that religious teachings are better off unaltered and devoid of secular impact. One of the well-recognized reactions to secularism is the growth of religious fundamentalism. The belief in a God or the practice of preparing for the arrival of God has prompted certain religious people to seek after what they believe is an abandonment of deeper religious values within a politically secular environment. This has been particularly prevalent in

groups supporting the return of governing of the state by fundamentalist Islamic law in parts of the Middle East or by Christian evangelical activism in the USA. These reactions modern fundamentalism in the sense pluralism adopts make it clear that secularism does not get rid of religion but instead alters the identity of different forms of religion, and perhaps makes it more protective and stricter. Regardless of the challenges, secularism has undeniably facilitated the cultivation of both religious tolerance and interfaith harmony. Secularism has ensured that no religion is preferred over any other in political or public arenas, which has resulted in a system of pluralism that allows religions to coexist peacefully. In multicultural societies, secular policies are especially useful in preventing religious strife, as the religions are free and the state is neutral. The difficulty, however, is how to implement secularism while granting religious and non-religious individuals the freedoms that enable them to practice religion without permitting the secular state to infringe upon religious identities. To summarize, there is no single secularism; its influence in the case of religion and public practices is differently felt depending on history, culture, or politics. And while secularism has contributed to the advancement of individual freedoms and pluralism, it has also created conflict regarding the inclusion of religion in public areas. It remains the work of societies to resolve secularism's dual mandates of upholding the state's religious neutrality, while at the same time not pushing aside faith-based traditions. The discussion of secularism and the practice of religion, like the development of global societies, will be an important part of philosophical and political discussions as secularism and religion remains ever-changing.

6. CRITICISMS AND CHALLENGES OF SECULARISM

As much as it may prove beneficial, secularism comes with its own set of contradictions and challenges. Some of the core problems include:

1. Perceived Anti-Religious Bias: Some members of religious communities feel freedom of religious expression is limited in the concept of secularism.

2. Western-centric model: Secularism with all its forms of rigidness is often viewed as a western phenomenon and is assumed to be completely out of place in the context of non-western cultures.

3. Intervention of State Power into Religion: Some governments that are secular manage to control religion so much as to actually infringe on religious freedom.

4. Loss of morality from religion in society: Critics argue that there is too much power given to secularism in ethos, to the extent of altering and deteriorating systematized codes of morality within society.

5. Problems in Multicultural Societies: In multi-ethnic societies, it is difficult to implement secular policies consistently without offending some religious groups. These criticisms summarize the multifaceted nature of applying secularism in different cultural and political settings

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