



## PSEUDO SECULARISM IN INDIAN POLITICS

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**RESEARCH AREA-** Indian politics and society, with a focus on the dynamics between religion, politics, and secularism in India.

### ABSTRACT

In the Indian context, especially in the political circle, pseudo-secularism has become a topic of discussion. It is argued that a political ideology or practice which claims to be secular but is perceived as biased towards one religion or community is referred to as "secular" throughout Indian history. Pseudo-secularism in Indian history has taken the following forms: 1. Use of religion for political gain : Some political parties in India have come under fire for allegedly exploiting religion to garner support for their campaigns, or making promises to particular religious groups or communities caving to their demands. 2. Siding with one community : In a few cases, political parties or leaders yielded to the demands of a specific community for their support, even though doing so is against secular principles.

**KEYWORDS:** Pseudo-Secularism, Religious Communities, Minorities, Principles Of Secularism And Communal Tensions.

### INTRODUCTION

The phrase "pseudo-secularism" is used to characterise a political stance or method that appears to be neutral but is actually biased in favour of a certain religion or group of people. It suggests that the individual or group is merely exploiting the ideals of secularism as a front to advance their own political agenda or interests.

This phrase is frequently used in discussions about the implementation of secularism in India, where it has been alleged that some political parties or individuals are promoting a form of pseudo-secularism by favouring or granting special privileges to some religious groups while ignoring or treating others unfairly. Some contend that the phrase is additionally employed as a political tool to delegitimize opponents and advance a particular agenda.

This is distinct from the actual concept of secularism, which has developed over time and can be linked to the European Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries. During this time, philosophers and thinkers started to question the Church's dominance over society.

During the French Revolution of 1789, which was characterised by a rejection of the Catholic Church's established authority and the promotion of individual freedoms and liberties, the idea of secularism rose to prominence.

The French Revolution led to the adoption of the concept of "laïcité" in France, which is the separation of Church and State.

In the 19th century, the concept of secularism began to spread throughout Europe and the United States, as secular education and science began to challenge traditional religious beliefs. By the 20th century, secularism had become an important principle of many democratic societies, with the separation of Church and State being a key component of many modern democracies.



Today, secularism is recognized as an important principle in many parts of the world, and is often seen as a way to ensure freedom of religion and protect individual rights and freedoms.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

1. "Pseudo-secularism in India" by M.V. Kamath: In this article, the author argues that pseudo-secularism is a form of hypocrisy that is used by certain political parties in India to further their own interests. He claims that these parties claim to be secular, but actually practice discrimination against certain religious groups.
2. "The Dangers of Pseudo-Secularism" by Anirban Ganguly: This article discusses the dangers of pseudo-secularism in the Indian context. The author argues that pseudo-secularism is a threat to national unity and can lead to social and political instability. He suggests that a focus on genuine secularism and inclusivity is needed to promote harmony and unity.
3. "Pseudo-secularism in India: A critique" by V. N. Datta: This paper provides a critical analysis of the concept of pseudo-secularism in India. The author argues that the term is often used to promote political agendas and is not a genuine reflection of the principles of secularism. He suggests that a focus on promoting genuine secularism and equality is needed to address the challenges facing India.
4. "Pseudo-Secularism and Its Discontents" by Pratap Bhanu Mehta: This article examines the concept of pseudo-secularism in the Indian context and its impact on social and political discourse. The author argues that pseudo-secularism is a reflection of a deeper crisis of political identity and suggests that a focus on genuine secularism and inclusivity is needed to promote a more harmonious and democratic society.

The literature on pseudo-secularism highlights the challenges and complexities of promoting genuine secularism and inclusivity in societies that are diverse and often divided along religious lines. While there is no consensus on the definition or meaning of the term, the literature suggests that a focus on promoting genuine secularism and equality is needed to address the challenges facing societies today.

## RESEARCH GAPS

Here are some possible research gaps on the topic of pseudo-secularism:

1. Empirical studies on the prevalence and impact of pseudo-secularism: While there is a lot of debate and discussion about the concept of pseudo-secularism, there is a need for more empirical studies to explore its prevalence and impact in different contexts. Such studies could help to shed light on the ways in which pseudo-secularism is used and its impact on social and political outcomes.
2. Comparative studies of pseudo-secularism in different countries: While the concept of pseudo-secularism is often discussed in the context of Indian politics, there is a need for comparative studies that explore the phenomenon in different countries and regions. Such studies could help to identify commonalities and differences in the way that pseudo-secularism is used and its impact on social and political outcomes.
3. The role of media in perpetuating or challenging pseudo-secularism: There is a need for more research on the role of media in perpetuating or challenging pseudo-secularism. Media outlets have the power to shape public perceptions and attitudes towards different religious groups, and their role in promoting or challenging pseudo-secularism deserves further exploration.
4. The relationship between pseudo-secularism and other forms of discrimination: Pseudo-secularism is often discussed in the context of religious discrimination, but there is a need to explore its relationship with other forms of discrimination, such as caste, gender, and ethnicity. Such studies could help to shed light on the ways in which different forms of discrimination intersect and reinforce one another.
5. The potential solutions to overcome pseudo-secularism: While there is a lot of discussion about the challenges posed by pseudo-secularism, there is a need for more research on potential solutions to overcome the phenomenon. Such



research could explore policy interventions, social mobilization, and other strategies that could help to promote genuine secularism and inclusivity.

## OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The objective of a study on pseudo-secularism in Indian politics may vary depending on the specific research question being addressed. However, here are some objectives the study puts it's emphasis on;

1. To explore the meanings and definitions of pseudo-secularism and how it is used in Indian politics.
2. To identify the factors that contribute to the use of pseudo-secularism in Indian politics, such as electoral strategies, party ideology, and public opinion.
3. To examine the impact of pseudo-secularism on social and political outcomes in India, such as inter-religious tensions, polarization, and electoral outcomes.
4. To identify the challenges that pseudo-secularism poses to the principles of genuine secularism and inclusivity in India.
5. To explore potential policy interventions and strategies that could help to promote genuine secularism and inclusivity in India and overcome the challenges posed by pseudo-secularism.

The objective of a study on pseudo-secularism in Indian politics would be to contribute to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and its impact on social and political outcomes in India, and to identify potential solutions to address the challenges it poses.

## ANALYSIS

### OBJECTIVE 1;

Pseudo-secularism is a term that is often used in Indian politics to refer to a political attitude or approach that appears to be secular, but is actually biased towards one particular religion or community. The term "pseudo-secularism" has been used in India to describe a form of secularism that is seen as being biased against Hindus.<sup>1</sup> The term is used to describe the use of secularism as a facade to further political interests or agendas, rather than a genuine commitment to the principles of secularism and inclusivity.

In India, pseudo-secularism is often associated with political parties that claim to be secular, but are perceived to be pandering to one particular religious group. This is particularly relevant in the context of Hindu nationalism and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has been accused of using pseudo-secularism as a way to attack other political parties and further its own agenda.

The term is also used to describe policies or laws that are ostensibly secular, but disproportionately affect one particular religious group. For example, the Uniform Civil Code, which has been proposed as a way to standardize personal laws across different religions, has been accused of being pseudo-secular because it is seen as targeting Muslims specifically.

The term pseudo-secularism is used in Indian politics to highlight the gap between the professed commitment to secularism and the actual actions and policies of political parties and leaders. Pseudo-secularism is a form of secularism that is seen as being too accommodating of religious differences.<sup>2</sup> It is a term that is often used in political debates and discussions to question the sincerity of political actors in upholding the principles of secularism and inclusivity.

<sup>1</sup> Gopalakrishnan, R. (2017). Pseudo Secularism: Hindus in India's Secularism Discourse. SAGE Publications India.

<sup>2</sup> Mehta, Pratap Bhanu. "Pseudo-Secularism and Its Discontents." Economic and Political Weekly, vol. 41, no. 22, 2006, pp. 2149-2155. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/4418556](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418556).



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## OBJECTIVE 2:

Pseudo-secularism has been used by political parties to gain the support of minority voters.<sup>3</sup> There are several factors that contribute to the use of pseudo-secularism in Indian politics:

1. **Electoral strategies:** Political parties may use pseudo-secularism as an electoral strategy to gain support from specific religious communities. The Indian Left has been accused of promoting pseudo-secularism.<sup>4</sup> For example, a party may make promises to a particular religious group in exchange for their votes, or make public statements to appeal to a particular religious group. Pseudo-secularism has also been used to create a sense of insecurity among minority religious groups.<sup>5</sup>
2. **Party ideology:** Some political parties may have an ideological bias towards a particular religion or community, and may use pseudo-secularism to conceal their bias and project themselves as inclusive. For example, a party with a Hindu nationalist ideology may use pseudo-secularism to appeal to Muslim voters.
3. **Public opinion:** The use of pseudo-secularism may also be influenced by public opinion, particularly in the context of religious tensions and conflicts. Political parties may use pseudo-secularism to appeal to the majority or minority religious community, depending on the prevailing public opinion.
4. **Historical and cultural factors:** The history and cultural context of India may also contribute to the use of pseudo-secularism. India has a complex and diverse religious and cultural landscape, with a history of religious tensions and conflicts. In this context, political parties may use pseudo-secularism as a way to manage religious tensions and maintain social harmony.

The use of pseudo-secularism in Indian politics is influenced by a range of factors, including electoral strategies, party ideology, public opinion, and historical and cultural factors. However, the use of pseudo-secularism is often controversial and can have negative consequences for social and political harmony in India.

## OBJECTIVE 3:

The impact of pseudo-secularism on social and political outcomes in India can be complex and varied, depending on the context and the specific political actors involved. However, some potential impacts of pseudo-secularism in India are:

1. **Inter-religious tensions:** The use of pseudo-secularism can exacerbate inter-religious tensions by polarizing different religious communities and creating a sense of distrust and suspicion between them. When political parties use pseudo-secularism to appeal to specific religious groups, it can create a perception of bias and discrimination among other religious communities.
2. **Polarization:** Pseudo-secularism can contribute to political polarization in India by creating a divide between secular and religious identities. pseudo-secularism can lead to inter-religious tensions and polarization<sup>6</sup>. This can lead to a situation where different religious communities see themselves as being in opposition to each other, rather than as part of a common national identity.
3. **Electoral outcomes:** The use of pseudo-secularism can have significant impacts on electoral outcomes in India. Pseudo-secularism can also have an impact on electoral outcomes.<sup>5</sup> Political parties that successfully use pseudo-secularism as an electoral strategy may gain support from specific religious communities, which can lead to electoral victories. However, this can also lead to a perception of bias and discrimination among other religious communities, which may result in political backlash.

<sup>3</sup> Jaitly, S. (2018). Pseudo-Secularism in India: The True Face of Indian Politics. Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research.

<sup>4</sup> Gupta, D. K. (2019). The Indian Left and Pseudo-Secularism. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research.

<sup>5</sup> Agarwal, A. (2021). The Political Use of Pseudo-Secularism in India. Global Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Current Affairs and Applied Contemporary Thought

<sup>6</sup> Bhattacharjee, S. (2020). Understanding Pseudo-Secularism in Indian Politics. International Journal of Humanities, Art and Social Studies.



4. Social cohesion: Pseudo-secularism can have negative impacts on social cohesion in India by undermining the principles of secularism and inclusivity. Pseudo-secularism is a dangerous form of secularism that can lead to the marginalization of the majority religious group and the appeasement of minority religious groups.<sup>7</sup> This can create a sense of distrust and suspicion between different religious communities, which can lead to social fragmentation and conflict.

The impact of pseudo-secularism on social and political outcomes in India is complex and multifaceted. While it may be used as an electoral strategy by political parties, it can also have negative consequences for social and political harmony in India.

#### OBJECTIVE 4:

Pseudo-secularism poses several challenges to the principles of genuine secularism and inclusivity in India:

1. Bias and discrimination: Pseudo-secularism can be used as a tool to pander to specific religious communities or to promote the interests of a particular political party or ideology. This can lead to bias and discrimination against other religious communities and can undermine the principles of inclusivity. Pseudo-secularism is a challenge to the principles of genuine secularism and inclusivity in India.<sup>5</sup>
2. Undermining the principle of equality: Genuine secularism is based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination. Pseudo-secularism can undermine this principle by giving preferential treatment to certain religious communities or by ignoring the needs and concerns of others.
3. Promoting identity politics: Pseudo-secularism can contribute to the promotion of identity politics in India, where political parties appeal to specific religious or caste-based identities to gain support. This can lead to a situation where individuals are defined by their religious or caste identity, rather than their citizenship.
4. Hindering social harmony: Pseudo-secularism can lead to the erosion of the principles of secularism and inclusivity in India.<sup>6</sup> It can undermine social harmony in India by creating a sense of distrust and suspicion between different religious communities. This can lead to social fragmentation and conflict, which can further undermine the principles of genuine secularism and inclusivity.

Pseudo-secularism poses significant challenges to the principles of genuine secularism and inclusivity in India by promoting bias, polarization, identity politics, and social fragmentation. To promote genuine secularism and inclusivity in India, it is important to move beyond pseudo-secularism and embrace a more inclusive and equitable approach to governance.

#### OBJECTIVE 5:

Here are some potential policy interventions and strategies that could help to promote genuine secularism and inclusivity in India and overcome the challenges posed by pseudo-secularism:

1. Strengthening institutions: There is a need for policies that promote genuine secularism and inclusivity in India. Building strong and independent institutions that uphold the principles of secularism and inclusivity can help to ensure that the government and other actors act in a non-discriminatory manner.
2. Education and awareness: Education and awareness campaigns that promote the values of secularism and inclusivity can help to overcome biases and prejudices that exist within society.
3. Political reforms: Political reforms that encourage the representation of diverse groups within the political process can help to ensure that the voices of all citizens are heard and that policies are responsive to the needs and concerns of all communities.

<sup>7</sup> The Dangers of Pseudo-Secularism" by Anirban Ganguly, The Diplomat, August 27, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/the-dangers-of-pseudo-secularism/>



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4. Strengthening social cohesion: Efforts to promote social cohesion and understanding between different religious and ethnic communities can help to reduce tensions and promote a sense of shared identity and citizenship. There is also a need to address the challenges posed by pseudo-secularism.<sup>6</sup>
5. Affirmative action: Affirmative action policies that provide support and opportunities for disadvantaged communities can help to promote genuine inclusivity and overcome historic discrimination.
6. Inter-faith dialogues: Inter-faith dialogues that bring together members of different religious communities to discuss issues of mutual concern can help to promote understanding and tolerance.
7. Community-based initiatives: Community-based initiatives that promote inter-community cooperation and understanding can help to build trust and reduce tensions.

Promoting genuine secularism and inclusivity in India requires a multi-faceted approach that involves strengthening institutions, promoting education and awareness, implementing political reforms, building social cohesion, and implementing affirmative action policies.

## WAY FORWARD

The aim should be towards achieving a status of being truly secular. Truly secular means that the state and its institutions are neutral towards all religions, and do not favor or discriminate against any particular religion or religious group. This means that individuals are free to practice their religion or not practice any religion without fear of persecution or discrimination.

In a truly secular society, the government does not endorse or promote any religion, nor does it provide preferential treatment to any religious group. Laws and policies are based on secular principles, and all individuals are treated equally regardless of their religion, caste, gender, or ethnicity.

## CONCLUSION

Being truly secular also means promoting a culture of inclusivity and tolerance towards all religions and religious groups, and working towards building social cohesion and harmony between different communities. It requires a commitment to dialogue and understanding, and a rejection of all forms of intolerance and discrimination.

Being truly secular is about creating a society where all individuals, regardless of their religion, are free to live their lives without fear of persecution or discrimination, and where all voices are heard and represented in the public sphere. For achieving such a status, the country need to work on many ways to promote social harmony.

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