Polity & Governance · GS - II

Discuss India as a secular state and compare with the secular principles of the US constitution.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2024	GS - II	Polity & Governance

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Indian secularism, US secularism, Preamble, Articles 25–28, religious freedom, equal treatment, separation of Church and State, positive secularism, principled distance

Model Answer

Introduction

Secularism seeks to ensure that the State does not discriminate on the basis of religion and that citizens enjoy freedom of conscience. India and the United States both protect religious liberty, but their constitutional approaches differ substantially.

Indian Model

India is constitutionally a **secular republic**. The Supreme Court has recognised secularism as a basic feature of the Constitution.

Its principal features include:

- **Article 25:** freedom of conscience and religion, subject to public order, morality and health.
- **Articles 26–28:** protection of religious denominations, limits on religious instruction and related freedoms.
- **Articles 14–16:** equality and non-discrimination.
- The State may regulate secular activities associated with religious practices and undertake social-reform measures.

Thus, Indian secularism generally follows a model of **principled engagement rather than complete separation**.

US Model

The US Constitution contains the **Establishment Clause**, which restricts government establishment of religion, and the **Free Exercise Clause**, which protects religious practice. The First Amendment therefore establishes a stronger constitutional principle of separation between government and religious establishment.

Comparison

India permits greater State intervention for **social reform, equality and public welfare**, whereas the American framework places stronger emphasis on preventing governmental establishment of religion.

India's approach emerged from a deeply plural society and therefore seeks equal respect and protection for multiple faiths.

Conclusion

Both systems protect religious freedom, but India follows a more **accommodative and interventionist model**, while the US traditionally emphasises institutional separation between religion and government. Both ultimately seek to protect individual religious liberty and constitutional equality.

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