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Secular Attitude among Higher Secondary School Students in Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract:

India is a religiously heterogeneous country; hence, to maintain peace and harmony among people, secularism is extremely important. Developing a secular attitude in the minds of students is vital, as they are the future citizens of the country. The bright and harmonious future of society is in their hands. Arunachal Pradesh is a tribally populated state that is located in the North-Eastern part of India. The indigenous population of the state has followed animism since time immemorial. However, rapid intrusions by people from other states in recent years have led people to embrace other belief systems like Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Every religion preaches love, compassion, brotherhood, peace, and tranquility, but often this religiously pluralistic nature poses the danger of communal rioting. Communal incidents bring disharmony, disturb the course of life of citizens, hurt the economy, and mar development. As youths of the state play a very significant role in determining the decisions of the government in the state, it is very important that youths possess a secular attitude towards all religious groups. Therefore, the present study examined the secular attitude among higher secondary school students in Arunachal Pradesh. The findings of the study revealed that higher secondary school students possess an average secular attitude; higher secondary school students significantly differ in their level of secular attitude with respect to gender and settlement.

Keywords: Secular Attitude, Higher Secondary School Students, Arunachal Pradesh.

Introduction: India is a religiously pluralistic country. Besides Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Christianity, there are several other indigenous religions. Being a

secular country, children, since their primary stage of education, have been taught to appreciate religious diversity. It means developing a secular attitude towards religion. “Evidence suggests that secular people tend to be more individualistic than religious people in their social attitudes, behaviors, and institutional involvement. This does not mean they are necessarily less sociable than the religious, but that they prefer greater autonomy and personal choice in their beliefs, worldviews, lifestyles, social relationships, and organizational participation. They also tend to be more cautious or skeptical about mass group behavior (Zuckerman et al., 2016).”

Every religion preaches love, compassion, brotherhood, peace, and tranquility, but often this religiously pluralistic nature poses the danger of communal rioting. Communal incidents bring disharmony, disturb the course of life of citizens, hurt the economy, and mar development. Religious tension decreases secular attitudes among people. Though secular traditions are very deeply rooted in the history of India, constitutionally, the country was declared a secular country through the 42nd Amendment Act in 1976. This amendment act emphasized that India is a secular country that has no state religion. And that the state shall recognize and accept all religions, not favor or patronize any particular religion. In addition, the following articles of the Indian Constitution clearly show the incorporation of all the basic principles of secularism into various provisions of the country’s constitution:

- Article 14: The article grants equality before the law and equal protection of the law to all.
- Article 15: The article prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
- Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters of public employment and reiterates that there would be no discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, or residence.
- Article 25: The Article 25 provides freedom of conscience, that is, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion.
- Article 26: The Article 26 provides that every religious group or individual has the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes and to manage its own affairs in matters of religion.
- Article 27: The article states that the state shall not compel any citizen to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious institution.
- Article 28: Article 28 allows educational institutions maintained by different religious groups to impart religious instruction.
- Article 29 and Article 30: These articles provide cultural and educational rights to minorities.
- Article 51A: Article 51A obliges all the citizens to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood and to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.

The idea of secularism can be traced back to 1648, with the transfer of church properties to the exclusive control of the princes at the end of the thirty-year war in Europe. However, George Jack Holyoaked coined the term 'Secularism' for the first time in the year 1851. The idea of secularism in India is essentially distinct from the same idea in the West. The state and religion have their own distinct domains, and neither one may meddle in the other's business, according to the secularism of the West. Therefore, the secularism of the West emphasizes the total separation of church and state; in India, on the other hand, there is no wall separating religion and the state, either in law or in reality. Within the bounds defined by law and established by the judiciary, state and religion are able to interact and frequently do so in India. Put differently, Indian secularism does not call for the complete exclusion of religion from public life.

Arunachal Pradesh, despite being home to dozens of tribes of different cultures, had hardly faced any incidence of communal violence for long. But recent two incidences, such as the burning of a symbol of a tribal goddess in Seppa in East Kameng district and a chunk of indigenous people seeking cancellation of the scheduled tribe (ST) certificates issued to those who converted to other religions, show that communal strife is boundaryless. The indigenous population of the state has followed animism since time immemorial. But, due to rapid intrusions of people from other states in recent years and many other factors like technological advancement, improved communication facilities, and so on, people have embraced other belief systems like Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Presently, the majority of the state's population has adopted Christianity (30.2%), followed by Hinduism (29.4%), mostly Donyi-Polo (26.2%), Buddhism (11.7%), Islam (1.9%), Sikhism (0.1%), and Jainism (0.1%).

As youths of the state play a very significant role in determining the decisions of the government in the state, it is very important that youths possess a secular attitude towards all religious groups. Second, instances of some of the previous studies on secular attitude conducted by Ashrafil and Govil (2013), Ali and Kishore (2014), Singh and Singh (2015), Kamble (2016), Shukla (2021), and Pimpalkar (2022) revealed that a study on secular attitude of higher secondary school students in Arunachal Pradesh has not been studied yet. Therefore, the present paper examines the secular attitude among higher secondary school students in the East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

Objectives of the study: The study was carried out to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To study the level of secular attitude among higher secondary school students.
2. To study the difference in the level of secular attitude between male and female higher secondary school students.
3. To study the difference in the level of secular attitude between rural and urban higher secondary school students.

Hypotheses of the study: With respect to the objective 2 and objective 3, following are the hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the level of secular attitude between male and female higher secondary school students.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the level of secular attitude between rural and urban higher secondary school students.

Methodology: A descriptive research method was adopted to complete this study. A total of 128 class eleven students enrolled during the academic session 2022–23 in the four sample government higher secondary schools (two rural and two urban) made up the sample of the present study. The sample for the study was selected using the quota-cum-convenience sampling technique. The secular attitude scale developed by Dr. Anshu Mehra and Prof. Durgananda Sinha was used to collect the data. The collected data was analyzed using the mean, standard deviation, and t-test.

Delimitations: The study was delimited to:

1. East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. Two rural and two urban higher secondary schools.
3. 128 class XI students.
4. Variables; secular attitude, gender, and settlement.

Results and Interpretations: The section is segmented objective wise, which are as follows:

Objective -1: To study the level of secular attitude among higher secondary school students.

Table-1

Displaying the Higher Secondary School Students' Secular Attitudes Mean Score

N	Mean	SD
128	107.78	8.71

Note: Data was collected during a field visit conducted in the month of November 2022. The table 1 indicates that the calculated mean score for secular attitude of higher secondary school students came out as 107.78. According to the Secular Attitude Scale (SAS) developed by Dr. Anshu Mehra and Durganand Sinha, the resulted mean score, i.e., 107.78, falls under Grade 'D', which is interpreted as average secular attitude. It means higher secondary school students possess an average secular attitude. Further, the calculated standard deviation of 8.71 also shows substantial variation in the sample students' secular attitude scores from the mean score.

Objective-2: To study the difference in the level of secular attitude between male and female higher secondary school students.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the level of secular attitude between male and female higher secondary school students.

Table-2

Showing the Difference in the Level of Secular Attitude Between Male And Female Higher Secondary School Students

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE _D	df	t-value	Remark
Female	72	109.53	6.59	1.58	126	8.70	Significant at 0.05 level of significance
Male	56	104.96	10.36				

Note: Data was collected during a field visit conducted in the month of November 2022. The table 2 shows that the calculated t-value for the difference in the level of secular attitude between male and female higher secondary school students came out as 8.70, which is more than the critical t-value of 1.98 at the 0.05 level of significance for 126 *df*. Hence, the null hypothesis—there is no significant difference in the level of secular attitude between male and female higher secondary school students—gets rejected. It means there is a significant difference in the level of secular attitude between male and female higher secondary school students.

Objective-3: To study the difference in the level of secular attitude between rural and urban higher secondary school students.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the level of secular attitude between rural and urban higher secondary school students.

Table-3

Showing the Difference in the Level of Secular Attitude Between Rural and Urban Higher Secondary School Students

Settlement	N	Mean	SD	SE _D	df	t-value	Remark
Rural	64	112.37	9.26	1.60	126	0.70	Not significant at 0.05 level of significance
Urban	64	111.23	8.97				

Note: Data was collected during a field visit conducted in the month of November 2022. The table 3 shows that the calculated t-value for the difference in the level of secular attitude between rural and urban higher secondary school students came out as 0.70, which is less than the critical t-value of 1.98 at the 0.05 level of significance for 126 *df*. Hence, the null hypothesis—there is no significant difference in the level of secular attitude between rural and urban higher secondary school students—gets accepted. It means rural and urban higher secondary school students do not significantly differ in their level of secular attitude.

Findings: The study found that:

1. Higher secondary school students possess an average secular attitude.
2. Male and female secondary school students significantly differ in their level of secular attitude.
3. Rural and urban secondary school students do not significantly differ in their level of secular attitude.

Conclusion: Religion significantly influences how people behave. Being a multi-religious country, one of the key challenges that the country always faces is maintaining its secular

values. And the only way to stop communal unrest in a nation like India is for the populace to adopt a strong secular outlook. However, the development of a secular attitude is a long process. A person passes through various situations in life that influence him or her in different ways; hence, there is no fixed mantra that ensures the inculcation of a secular attitude among people. However, time and again, it is seen that through education, people can be made aware of secular values and their importance for peaceful coexistence. And thereby develop a secular attitude among people. But, sadly, the current study found that students in higher secondary schools in the study area had an average level of secular attitude. Further, male and female sample higher secondary school students differ in their level of secular attitude, even if there is no significant difference between rural and urban higher secondary school students in the study area. In Arunachal Pradesh, secondary schools are run by different management bodies, like the state government, the central government, NGOs, and private bodies. The present study is primarily based on the data gathered from the students studied in the state government-run schools; therefore, it is proposed that a study may be conducted with a sample of students from various state and central government, private, and semi-government schools in order to verify the present study's findings.

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