

# Communal Harmony for Bright Future of India: A Study of Attitude of Hindus and Muslims towards Religiosity and Secularism in Bihar

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*The present study is to find out the religious and secular attitude among Hindus and Muslims of different social and cultural background to know whether the religious and secular behavior of the people is influenced by their social and cultural background. For this purpose, 300 adult persons-150 Hindus and 150 Muslims were purposively selected as a sample from different areas of Patna Municipal Corporation of Patna district in Bihar. "The Secular Attitude Scale" by Mehra, and Sinha, (1992), "The Religious Attitude Scale" by Rajamanickam (1988), and Self-constructed interview schedule was prepared and applied to the respondents for data collection. The obtained data were statistically analyzed with suitable statistical techniques. The obtained results revealed that; (i) secularism and religiosity was positively correlated, meaning that these variables tend to increase together (high religious attitude is associate with high secular attitude), (ii) The respondents belonging in Hindus community have more secular attitude comparatively respondents belonging to Muslims community, and (iii) The respondents belonging in Muslims community have more religious attitude comparatively respondents belonging to Hindus community.*

**Key words:** Religious Attitude, Secular Attitude and Communal Harmony.

**Introduction-**India is a multi-religious country. To keep all religious communities cohesive into one national fabric and developing a secular attitude is very important in this country. If all Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians develop a secular attitude towards each other then it can be

possible to develop a mindset which can contribute to build a secular nation. Muslims and Hindus stem from varying family backgrounds. Their religious teachings, culture, thinking etc. are also varying. In adulthood they are instilled with different religious ideologies which sometimes contradict with secular ideologies. In addition to this, in the same religious community all members are not equally secular or non-secular.

Secularism and religiosity can go together. Why there is a need of becoming secular? Is it religion or strong religiosity which forces an individual or group to become secular or is it an inherent characteristic of a person which makes him/her secular or is it the early childhood socialization in opposite cultures and opposite societies which shapes a person to become religious, communal or secular?

What is the meaning of secularism and what its implication to individual or a group are important to understand? Why a person or group becomes religious or communal or anti-secular is also important to understand. In what ways the communalism could be reduced?

Religion is referred to as a system of belief, practices and values concerned with sacred. It is related to supernatural entities and power which are considered as the ultimate concern of mundane existence among human groups (Sinha, 1994). According to Engineer (1989) secularism means liberation of politics from the hegemony of religion.

The term religiosity refers to religious faith. According to Way (1956), religiosity means faith in a power beyond himself whereby he seeks to satisfy emotional need and gain stability of life, and which he expresses in acts of worship and service.

The terms religiosity and secularism are not contrasting each other. The relationship of religiosity and secularism is very vital to any society and it is determined by the way in which religion is understood in that society. When religion is understood in a narrow sense, then it breeds superstitions, fanaticism and fundamentalism. In this sense, religion is an enemy of secularism. But if religion is understood in a broad sense, then it stands for tolerance, peace and unity. In that sense religion is not the opponent of secularism rather it is the complements of secularism.

After analyzing secularism and religiosity; it is important to understand another related term generally used as communalism. Communalism appears as a loose and ambiguous concept like secularism. The term 'community' and 'communal' have been used in India with

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meanings much different from what is commonly understood in the western countries. The word community has a positive connotation in the West, and it is used to express fellowship of relations or feelings, common character, agreement and sharing. In that sense communalism means an expression of community feeling. The term communalism is derived from community and communal. Chandra (1989) has defined in Indian context “Communalism is the belief that, because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political and economic interest”. He further explains the differences between communalism and secularism. He says, “communalism in India asserts first that the secular interests of a group are coterminous with its religious identity; and secondly, these secular interests are dissimilar and divergent; and finally, that they are mutually antagonistic, exclusive and incompatible”.

There is dearth of empirical studies on religiosity, secularism and communalism in the field of Psychology in India. Some studies are found related to modernization, social distance, liberalism, ethnocentrism, conservatism, etc. which are directly or indirectly reflecting some light on secularism. Sinha (forth coming) points out the *Upanisadic* dictum of *sarva dharma samabhava* (equal respect to all religions) laid the foundation for a multi-religious secularism. Felty and Poloma (1991) explored the effect of gender differences and religiosity on 584 adult respondents. Findings reveal that gender differences in religiosity are not supported for most of the dimensions of religiosity. It means gender is not related to religiosity.

Secular attitude among Indians can be developed if they are trained to think rationally and come into close interactions with each other particularly on religious occasion such as Eid, Bakraid, Muharram, of Muslims and Holi, Dussehra, Diwali of Hindus. This requires a change in the mindset of the people and for those lots of effort is required. Why there are communal feelings and hatred among Indian people of various faiths? Human beings by nature want to live in peace and harmony. Secularism is required to counter communalism.

Thus, researcher had decided to work on secularism and religiosity empirically.

**Aims and Objectives of the study:** Aim of the study, to understand the religious and secular attitude among Hindus and Muslims and to achieve communal harmony for bright future of India. The objective of

this study is to find out the religious attitude and secular attitude of the Hindus and Muslims of different social and cultural background, and to know whether the religious and secular behavior of the people is influenced by their social and cultural background.

### Hypothesis

- I. The Hindu group will be significantly higher than the Muslim group on attitude towards religiosity.
- II. The Hindu group will be significantly higher than the Muslim group on attitude towards secularism,
- III. There will be positive correlation between religiosity and secularism of respondents.

### Methodology

#### I. Universe and Sample

The geographical area of the study was Patna Municipal area and the universe of the study was all the adult Hindus and Muslims of 18 years and above. The sample size of the study was 300 adult persons—150 Hindus and 150-Muslims. The subjects were selected purposively those who were easily available from different area of Patna Municipal Corporation of Patna district in Bihar.

#### II. Research Design

The present study has followed a descriptive research design where the researcher seeks to measure the variables like religious attitude and secular attitude of Muslims and Hindus.

**Thus, it was a simple design as following:**

Respondents	Hindus	Muslims	Total
Adults (18 years and above)	150	150	300

#### III. Tools

The following tools were used for data collection.

I. To measure the secular attitude “*The Secular Attitude Scale*” (Hindi version) by Mehra, and Sinha, (1992) was used. This scale consists of 35 items and it is based on Likert scale technique. This is a five-point scale and the subjects were asked to underline any of the five alternatives which came nearest to their own views.

II. For measuring religiosity “*The Religious Attitude Scale*” by Raja Manickam (1989) was used. This religious attitude scale consists of 60 items having ten groups and six statements in each group namely (1) The nature of God, (2) Future life, (3) Priests, (4) The spirit world,

(5) Personal religion and (6) Formal religion. It is based on Likert scale technique also. This is a five-point scale and the subjects were asked to underline any of the five alternatives which came nearest to their own views. This is found very appropriate, suitable, valid and reliable for measuring the attitude of religiosity in Indian-cultural context and

II. Self-constructed Interview schedule was preparing and applied to the respondents.

III. **Technique of data collection**-The data were collected from the respondents through establishing a comfortable rapport and face-to-face interaction. The researcher has contacted the subjects at their homes or place of work as per their convenience. Prior to administration of tools on the subjects, the purpose of the study was explained, and a verbal consent was taken from the respondents. Only after their consents and giving proper instructions the tools was administered upon them. Those who were not willing to participate in this research they were excluded from the sample and according new respondents were included. Subjects were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and would be used only for research purposes. It was noted that the Subject generally took 1-hour time to complete all the three tools. First Interview was done using the interview schedule; thereafter other two scales were administered.

**Analysis of Data**-Analysis of the collected and codified data after transcription was done with both basic and advanced statistical procedures. The data collected with the help of the interview-schedule were of both qualitative and quantitative nature. The statistical tools and techniques used included SAS (Statistical Analysis System), SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), and Excel software application. These data were analyzed by simple mean, Dispersion (Standard Deviation) and correlation to arrive at the meaningful conclusions.

**Results**-The 1<sup>st</sup> hypothesis was that the Hindu group will be significantly higher than the Muslim group on attitude towards religiosity.

**Table-01**

**Religious attitude among Hindus and Muslims based on Religion**

Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-Value	Sig.(2-tailed)
Hindu	150	161.7	20.62	5.98	<.0001*
Muslim	150	147.8	19.85		

\* significant at <0.01 level of confidence

From the analysis of the above table, it is inferred that mean (161.7) of Hindus respondents come under neutral category in religious attitude but mean of Muslims respondents (147.8) come under moderately pro-religious category in religious attitude. The result it is clear show that Hindus respondents with religious attitude obtained high mean (161.7), and SD (20.62) comparatively Muslims respondents with religious attitude obtained less mean (147.8), and SD (19.85) score on religious attitude measure. As the obtained t-value (5.98) is statistically significant at <.01 level of confidence (<.0001). So, we can say that low religious attitude of Hindus respondents comparatively Muslims respondents based on religion. It means first hypothesis is not accepted.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> hypothesis was that the Hindu group will be significantly higher than the Muslim group on attitude towards secularism.

Out of the total sample of 300 subjects there were 150 Hindus and 150 Muslims adult persons. The mean, Std. deviation, and t-value of secular attitude score of the both groups based on religion are presented in table-2.

**Table-02**

**Secular attitude among Hindus and Muslims based on Religion**

Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Hindu	150	112.00	10.80	3.50	0.0005*
Muslim	150	107.3	12.35		

From the analysis of the table-2, it is inferred that both Hindus (112.00) and Muslims (107.3) come under neutral category in secular attitude. The result it is clear show that Hindus respondents with secular attitude obtained high mean (112.00) comparatively Muslims respondents with secular attitude obtained less mean (107.3) score on secular attitude measure. As the obtained t-value (3.50) is statistically significant at <0.05 level of confidence (0.0005). Hence, it is inferred that religion influences secular attitude among Hindus and Muslims. So, we can say that less secular attitude of Muslims respondents comparatively Hindus respondents based on religion. It means 2<sup>nd</sup> hypothesis is accepted.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> hypothesis was that there will be positive correlation between religiosity and secularism of respondents.

The bivariate Pearson Correlation produces a sample correlation coefficient, *r*, which measures the strength and direction of linear relationships between pairs of continuous variables. By extension, the

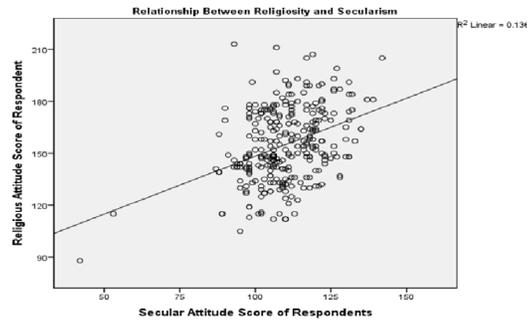
Pearson Correlation evaluates whether there is statistical evidence for a linear relationship among the same pairs of variables in the population, represented by a population correlation coefficient,  $\rho$  ("rho"). The Pearson Correlation is a parametric measure.

In the sample data, I have used two variables: "Religiosity" and "Secularism." The variable "Religiosity" is a continuous measure of Religiosity in numerical value and exhibits a range of values from 88 to 213 (Table-3). The variable "Secularism" is a continuous measure of Secularism in numerical value also and exhibits a range of values from 42 to 142.

**Table-3****Descriptive analysis of religious and secular attitude**

Responses	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Religious Attitude Score	300	88	213	154.76	21.385
Secular Attitude Score	300	42	142	109.65	11.821

Before I look at the Pearson correlations, I should look at the scatter plots of our variables to get an idea of what to expect. We need to determine if it's reasonable to assume that our variables have linear relationships.

**Table-4****Correlation between Secularism and Religiosity**

Correlations			
Responses		Total Religious Attitude Score of Respondent	Total Secular Attitude Score of Respondents
Total Religious Attitude Score of Respondent	Pearson Correlation	1	.369**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	300	300
Total Secular Attitude Score of Respondents	Pearson Correlation	.369**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	300	300

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Out of the total sample of 300 subjects there were 150 Hindus and 150 Muslims adult persons. The mean, Std. deviation, and t-value of religious attitude score of the both groups based on religion are presented in table-1.

Correlation of Religious Attitude and Secularism with itself ( $r=1$ ), and the number of observations for Both Attitude ( $n=300$ ). Correlation of Religious Attitude and Secularism ( $r=.369$ ), based on  $n=300$  observations. we can see that the Pearson correlation coefficient for Religious Attitude and Secularism is .369, which is significant ( $p < .001$  for a two-tailed test), based on 300 complete observations (Table-4). Finally, we can say that Secularism and Religiosity have a statistically significant linear relationship ( $p < .001$ ). The direction of the relationship is positive (i.e., Secularism and Religiosity are positively correlated), meaning that these variables tend to increase together (i.e., High religious attitude is associated with High Secular Attitude). The magnitude, or strength, of the association is approximately moderate ( $.3 < |r| < .5$ ). It means 3rd hypothesis is accepted.

**Conclusion**

To conclude it may be saying that:

- I. Religion influences the religious attitude among Hindus and Muslims. Muslims respondents are having more religious attitude than Hindus respondents.
- II. Religion influences the secular attitude among the both communities. Both Hindus (112.00) and Muslims (107.3) come under neutral category in secular attitude but Hindus respondents are having more secular attitude than Muslims respondents and
- III. Secularism and Religiosity have a statistically significant linear relationship ( $p < .001$ ). The direction of the relationship is positive, meaning that these variables tend to increase together (High religious attitude is associated with High Secular Attitude). The magnitude, or strength, of the association is approximately moderate ( $.3 < |r| < .5$ ). This result supported by Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad showed convincingly that being religious does not mean being communal. Both were profoundly religious and yet as much secular. Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad rooted secularism in indigenous religio-cultural practices. Mahatma Gandhi proudly described himself as being a sanatani Hindu and yet he remained secular. I know no defence except a quote a line from Iqbal's famous song:

*majhab nahin sikhata apasmen bair rakhana,*

Meaning, religion does not teach us to bear ill-will towards one another.

**Suggestion-**

India is a multi-religious country. Hinduism is the largest religion in India, with 79.8% of the population identifying themselves as Hindus, that accounts for 966 million Hindus in India as of 2011 Census of India, while 14.2% of the population follow Islam and the remaining 6% belong to other religions. Muslims and Hindus stem from varying family backgrounds. Their religious teachings, culture, thinking etc. are also varying. Here, Individuals of different religious faith reside. To keep all religious communities cohesive into one national fabric and developing a secular attitude is very important. Secular attitude among Indians can be developed if they are trained to think rationally and come into close interactions with each other particularly on religious occasions such as Eid, Bakraid, Muharram, of Muslims and Holi, Dussehra, Diwali of Hindus. This requires a change in the mindset of the people and for those lots of effort is required. Human beings by nature want to live in peace and harmony.

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