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Q5

Discuss each adjective attached to the word 'Republic' in the 'Preamble'. Are they defensible in the present circumstances?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS II · 12 marks · Governance and Policy

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss each adjective attached to the word 'Republic' in the Preamble. Are they defensible in the present circumstances?
- Take Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic as the adjectives of the Republic, and test each against present constitutional practice

Revision summary

The Preamble's adjectives of the Republic are Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic.

Sovereign remains sound despite treaties, because [Article 368](#) and domestic law stay Indian.

Socialist, added by the 42nd Amendment, is defensible as welfare and equality, not as a closed economy.

Secularism is basic structure after Bommai, and is tested by equal enforcement of [Articles 14, 15 and 25](#).

Democratic form survives through elections and responsible government, even when money and criminality weaken its quality.

Introduction

The Preamble describes India as a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. Those four adjectives qualify the Republic: the head of State is not a monarch, and the Republic is meant to be independent, socially just, religiously even-handed, and based on popular mandate. Each word is still defensible in law, even where daily practice is imperfect.

Body**Sovereign**

- Sovereignty means the Republic is not a colony or a dominion; the Constitution is the highest law, and external affairs sit with the Union under [Article 246](#) and the Union List.
- Membership of the United Nations, the WTO, and treaty regimes under [Article 253](#) does not surrender the power to make or unmake those commitments; it is pooled sovereignty by consent.
- Present stresses - cross-border terrorism, economic interdependence, and extra-territorial data or tax disputes - test capacity, not the legal fact of sovereignty.
- The adjective remains defensible because no external authority can repeal an Indian statute or an amendment under [Article 368](#).

Socialist

- "Socialist" was inserted by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, and read with the Directive Principles in Part IV, especially [Articles 38, 39 and 43](#).
- It does not mean a command economy. After 1991 liberalisation, the Supreme Court in cases such as Excel Wear and later economic judgments treated socialism as a commitment to reduce inequality and to keep a welfare floor, not as a ban on private industry.
- MGNREGA under the [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005](#), the [National Food Security Act, 2013](#), and rights-based schemes show a welfare Republic, even as markets allocate most capital.
- The adjective is defensible if socialism is read as social and economic justice, not as 1970s licence raj; it is weaker if judged as public ownership of the means of production.

Secular

- "Secular" was also inserted by the 42nd Amendment, but the Court in Kesavananda Bharati and S.R. Bommai had already treated secularism as part of basic structure, based on [Articles 25 to 28](#) and the equality clauses.
- Indian secularism is equal respect and reform of religion, not a wall that ignores faith; personal laws, minority educational rights under [Article 30](#), and the Uniform Civil Code direction in [Article 44](#) live in tension.
- Present controversies over hate speech, place-of-worship politics, and selective enforcement test the adjective hard.
- It remains defensible in the constitutional text and in Bommai's dismissal-on-secularism logic; it is only as strong as equal application of [Articles 14, 15, 21 and 25](#) by governments and courts.

Democratic

- **Democracy here is representative:** adult suffrage, periodic elections under [Article 324](#), and responsible government under [Articles 75 and 164](#).
- The [Representation of the People Act, 1951](#), the 73rd and 74th Amendments, and the Right to Information Act, 2005, thicken democracy beyond a five-year vote.
- Present stresses include money power, criminal candidates, delayed local elections, and pressure on dissent; they injure quality, they do not repeal the democratic form.
- The adjective is defensible because governments still fall on the floor of the House and on the ballot, which is the minimum meaning of a democratic Republic.

Taken together

- A Republic without those adjectives would still have an elected President under [Articles 52 to 62](#) instead of a hereditary king; the adjectives tell us what kind of Republic the Preamble wants.
- They are defensible as constitutional promises and as basic-structure values. They are not self-executing slogans, and present circumstances require statute, scheme and court to keep them honest.

Flow diagram

Republic -> Sovereign
Republic -> Socialist
Republic -> Secular
Republic -> Democratic
Sovereign -> Constitution as highest law
Socialist -> Part IV welfare
Secular -> Arts 25 to 28
Democratic -> Art 324 elections

Conclusion

Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic still describe the Indian Republic in the Preamble and in basic-structure doctrine. Sovereignty and the democratic form are the easiest to defend in present law. Socialist and secular content is defensible as justice and equal citizenship, and is strained wherever inequality or unequal religious treatment becomes official practice.

Facts & figures

Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976

Inserted "Socialist" and "Secular" into the Preamble, and also "integrity", during the Emergency-era overhaul of the text.

S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994)

Held secularism to be part of basic structure and allowed [Article 356](#) scrutiny where a State government acts against that principle.

Articles 25 to 28

Freedom of religion, including the State's power of social reform, which is the textual base of Indian secularism even before the Preamble word.

National Food Security Act, 2013

Statutory food entitlement that illustrates a socialist-welfare reading of the Republic after liberalisation.

Article 324

Places elections in the [Election Commission](#), a structural support for the democratic adjective of the Republic.