

Reconceptualizing Secularism in the Backdrop of Fethullah Gulen Movement: The Case of Pakistan

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Abstract

In the 21st century, globalization is continuously reshaping and changing the world. Clear demarcations are blurring due to neoliberal market economies, modern technologies and social media. Contrary to the assumptions, modernity and globalization are witnessing a comeback of religion from private to public sphere. Political economy of media and culture are using religion as a currency of their trade. Clash of civilization thesis proposes a disagreement between tradition and modern; secular and religious. Secularism has been conceptualized differently in different parts of the world. The traditional concept of secularism is being contested. Secularism is not the opposite of religion as generally perceived. Secularism serves as a seedbed to nourish the innate nature of human beings that recognizes God since 'Ehad-e-Alst' and inclined to do good. Surah Shams, chapter , verse states, Fa'alhamaha fajuraha wa taqwaha.' All sections of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights bear this fact.

Quaid-e-Azam, the founder of Pakistan, is always debated and wrongly perceived for 'secularism.' He wanted to establish Pakistan as a welfare state for all its inhabitants irrespective of their religious affiliations. But religion has been badly treated in almost all domains in Pakistan since 1947. Exploitations in the name of religion have been quite frequent in the spheres of politics, economy, culture, military, education etc. The so-called religious leaders are branding religion according to their own heart. This research analyses the misuse of Islam as permeating into all spheres of life in Pakistan. The concept of passive secularism is evaluated in the backdrop of Pakistan that is promoted and defended by Gulen movement.

Keywords: Secularism, Religion, Education, Fethullah Gullen, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah

1. Introduction

Globalization is reshaping and changing the structures and functions of different institutions and domains. Neoliberalism is paving the way of increased interconnections and eroding restrictions for economic ends. As a result, demarcations and boundaries are blurring and effecting upon all facets of life including religion. The International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences explains the term 'secularization' as the transfer of persons, things, meanings, etc., from ecclesiastical or religious to civil or lay use, possession, or control. Western European scholars generally refer to this concept and it is particularly applicable in their historical context. However, the concept is not applicable on other societies.

Secularism is conceptualized differently in different societies. In European societies, to secularize means 'to make worldly' or to transfer from ecclesiastical to civil use. Secularism in Europe is denoted as 'assertive secularism' as compared to US where it is indicated as 'passive secularism' (Kuru, 2007, p. 140). In American society, secularism means decline in religious beliefs and practices. This paper maintains that religion has permeated into all aspects of life therefore it has become intrinsic to society. However, secularism is not the opposite of religion as generally perceived. This research analyses the concept of passive secularism in the backdrop of Pakistan that is also promoted and defended by Gulen movement.

1.1 Literature Review

As a theological definition, religion has to do with the beliefs of people to find the meaning of life from within themselves or from outside, spiritually, intellectually, morally and/or ethically. The praxis of religion deals with the actions, patterns, and practices that are exhibited as a result of individual beliefs. In this way, religion becomes the most powerful force in many people's lives and they find no more decisive element in life than religion. Secularism is not the opposite of religion as generally perceived. Secularism serves as a seedbed to nourish the innate nature of

human beings that recognizes God

The concept of secularization in the modern state system denotes that as societies modernize and rationalize, religion starts withering and loses its authority and agency in social life (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). Westphalia treaty is considered to be the first document that laid foundation of the secular politics and modern state system which established peace in Europe. However Berger's contention is quite contrary to this causal relationship of secularization and modernization. Berger (1999) maintains that modern societies in general are more religious today than in the past. It means secularization is not mandatory to be modern.

According to Casanova (2006), the concept of secularization may be addressed through three different connotations; secularization as the decline of religious beliefs and practices; secularization as the privatization of religion; and differentiation of the secular spheres from religious standards and institutions. Casanova maintains that American sociologists apply the term 'secularization' for the 'decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals' (2006, p. 9). He suggests that the European model of secularization is different from US and cannot be applied elsewhere due to its historical perspective. In the light of European model Casanova implies that the process of societal development takes place under secularization. He maintains "practically every progressive European social movement from the time of the French Revolution to the present was informed by secularism" (Casanova, 2006, p. 12).

In the historical process, 'secular' is contested by theologians while in the contemporary world 'religious' is defined by secular political and scientific discourses. As compared to Casanova, Tocqueville (1965) observed "not only do the Americans practice their religion out of self-interest, but they often even place in this world the interest which they have in practicing it." Therefore, "religion itself as a historical category and as a universal globalized concept emerges as a construction of Western secular modernity" (Asad, 2003, p. 192).

Contrary to the doctrine of the Church of Rome, Rousseau argues that man is essentially good. Church of Rome believes in the sinful nature of man therefore he needs to be controlled by external authority and should not be allowed to have his own way. According to Iqbal (1909), 'this means priesthood in religion and autocracy in politics.' Iqbal contends, "The Middle Ages in the history of Europe drove this dogma of Romanism to its political and religious consequences, and the result was a form of society which required terrible revolutions to destroy it and to upset the basic pre-suppositions of its structure. Luther, the enemy of despotism in religion, and Rousseau, the enemy of despotism in politics, must always be regarded as the emancipators of European humanity from the heavy fetters of Popedom and absolutism, and their religious and political thought must be understood as a virtual denial of the Church dogma of human depravity." Islam believes in the natural goodness of human beings which is also proposed by rational modern European civilization.

Maguire and Weatherby (1998) challenge religiosity by saying that competing information systems, cultures and technologies have eroded devotion thereby secularization and modernity are at increase and compatible. Similar to Maguire and Weatherby's proposition, Pollack and Olson (2008, cited in Keskin, 2009, p.31) maintain, "with the diffusion of modern life forms, including urbanization, industrialization, rationalization, and pluralization, the social relevance of religion and church would decrease, and religious worldviews would gradually be replaced by a scientific, rationalized, and secular interpretation of the world."

Contrary to this, Mazur and McCarthy (2001) maintain that "religion is everywhere" (p. 2). New media is introducing religion in new formats and styles. Stout (2012) quotes Mormons of Las Vegas for devising strategies to remain devout to their religion. Meyer and Moors (2006) argue that in various cultures religion is becoming more public. The traditional concept of secularization is being contested. Stout (2012) maintains "Secularization is hard to sort out in an age of numinous media and broad definitions of religion. Something like religion occurs in every sector of society; the sacred-secular distinction is increasingly difficult to discern. An individual may leave a particular church only to discover the numinous through the media of popular culture" (pp. 12-13).

However, Asad's contention regarding secular is quite different from European and US models of secularization. He comments that secular society "should not be thought of as the space in which real human life gradually emancipates itself from the controlling power of 'religion' and thus achieves the latter's relocation" (Asad, 2003, p. 191). Asad (2003, p. 5) views secularism as a political doctrine which is redefining, transcending, and differentiating political medium (representation of citizenship) of the self, articulated through class, gender, and religion. He makes a paradoxical claim that the secular continuously produces the religious (p. 193). In this manner, the discourses of secularism will assume new concepts of political economy, religion, and ethics.

1.1.1 Secularism and Fethullah Gullen's Approach in the Perspective of Islam

Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish scholar, claims to represent a moderate man of Islam, compatible with modern world. The Gulen movement is a transnational movement that concentrates on education and interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Gulen emphasizes to break the barriers of mosque and state through the pursuit of science. According to Gulen (2004, p. 122) 'If humanity is the vicegerent of God on Earth, the favorite of all His creation, the essence and substance of existence in its entirety and the brightest mirror of the Creator- and there is no doubt that this is so- then the Divine Being that has sent humanity to this realm will have given us the right, permission, and ability to discover the mysteries imbedded in the soul of the universe, to uncover the hidden power, might and potential, to use everything to its purpose, and to be the representatives of characteristics that belong to Him, such as knowledge will and might.'

Secular society, as perceived and idealized by the west cannot be an ultimate dream of humanity and panacea to all problems. Muslims perceive human beings as the vicegerent of God on Earth. "The task of the vicegerent is not simply to believe in God or to worship but also to understand the mysteries within things and the cause of natural phenomena, and therefore to be able to interfere in nature" (Gulen 2004, 122). According to Gulen "only a few people seem to realize that social harmony and peace with nature, between people, and within the individual only can come about when the material and spiritual realms are reconciled."¹

One of the instincts of human beings is the knowledge of the Source (God). As Quran says, "And [remember], when your Lord took from the children of Adam, their children behind them, and made them testify over their own selves, [saying to them], 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yea.'" [Qur'an, 7:172]. This is referred to as 'Ehad-e-Alst.' Therefore, Hazrat Mohammad (may peace be upon him) focused more upon 'Shirk' (associating others with God) than informing about the existence of God. Every new born is indebted to this pledge which is 'Fitrah.' Holy Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (may peace be upon him) said, "Every child is born on the nature of Islam. It happens later that the parents make them Jews, Christians, or Magians." (Bukhari). Quran says, "*God's fitrah upon which He originated mankind. There is no changing God's creation. That is the right Din, but most men know it not*" (30:30). It means each human being has the knowledge of the Creator at subliminal level; therefore religion cannot be rooted out from the subconscious. The implementation should not be through force rather with a free will. Agai (2004) notes Gulen's approach regarding contemporary Muslim world as, 'present-day Muslims are confronted with entirely different problems than the question of whether or not to introduce the shari'a.'²

Secularism as a political doctrine has a different connotation. Kuru (2007, p. 141) defines secular states by two characteristics; one, "their legal and judicial processes are out of institutional religious control; two, they constitutionally lack official religions." He claims that Turkey, as a Muslim majority society, is the first secular state. Turkey as a modern secular state can serve as a case study for other Muslim countries who are struggling to resolve religious-secular issues. He concludes in his in-depth study on the dynamics of political secularization and democratization that Islamic groups in Turkey are not hostile to secularism and democracy. Democratic process rather facilitates the moderation of extreme Islamic discourses.

Gulen's speech in the Parliament of World's Religions indicates a strategy for the peaceful coexistence. He says, "It is my conviction that in the future years, the new millennium will witness unprecedented religious blooming and the followers of world religions, such as Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and others, will walk hand in hand to build a promised bright future of the world" (Gulen, 1999).³ Gulen's approach is deterrence to the 'clash of civilization' perspective. The clash of civilizations perspective, by contrast, emphasizes the essential continuity between tradition and modernity. Gulen purports to be modern by mastering the scientific studies and exploring the universe on the one hand and serving humanity with sincerity (Ikhlas) and as a religious obligation (Ibadat).

The strength of Muslims and the miracle of Islam is the single version of Quran throughout the Muslim world. There is a general agreement that not a single word of Quran is changed in its entire history. So, the tradition is quite strong and Muslims can hold fast the 'rope of Allah' to continue the tradition. Now the time demands from Muslims to be modern, receptive and equip themselves with science and technology. That's how they will be able to do 'Ijtihad.'

¹ <http://rumiforum.blogspot.com/p/quotes-by-fethullah-gulen.html#ixzz22ftogAUR>

² http://gulenlibrary.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7:peaceful-movements-in-the-muslim-world&catid=5:book-excerpts&Itemid=97

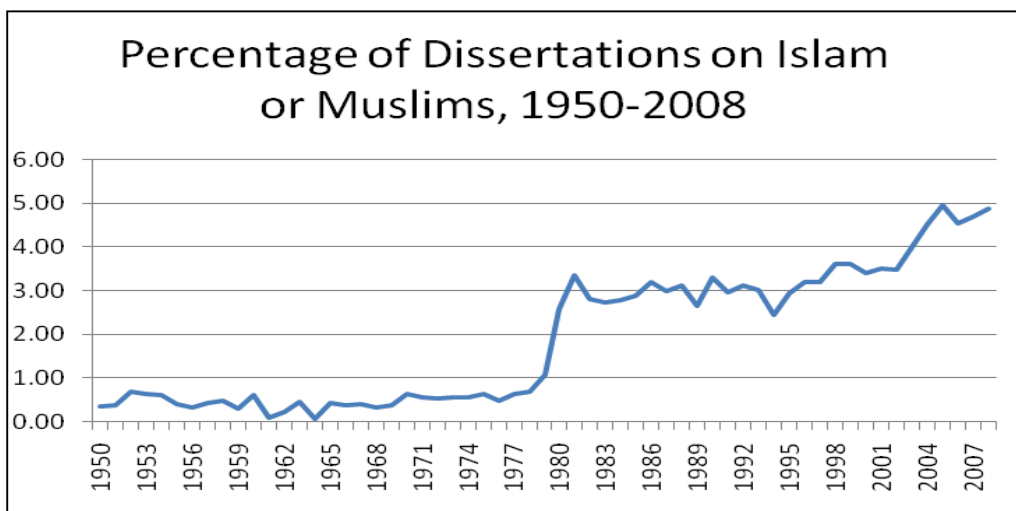
³ http://gulenlibrary.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7:peaceful-movements-in-the-muslim-world&catid=5:book-excerpts&Itemid=97

1.1.2. Religion and Secularism in the Contemporary World

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, transnational communities on the basis of religion emerged. The dominant communities started dictating their own terms and condition that resulted in polarization and conflict on the basis of religion e.g. Danish cartoon controversy, criticism of Pope John Paul II, or Van Theo Gogh’s murder. In the contemporary world, culture of conflict is escalating on the basis of religions. The prevailing circumstances at international level demand a peaceful strategy for the conflict management particularly from weak religious communities.

Media and culture are affected by each other and affect upon social, political, economic, and religious domains. Global media coverage of the incident of 9/11 that depicted the terrorists as Muslims motivated both Muslims and non-Muslims to conduct studies on Islam. On the one hand it triggered the non-Muslims to inquire about Islam; on the other hand it motivated Muslims to study Islam thoroughly in order to clarify the misconceptions regarding Jihad. This inquiry has been proving a blessing in disguise, opening up new vistas of inter-faith dialogue.

The societies which are perceived to be secular became more concerned about religion and especially Islam. However the non-Muslims’ study of Islam after 9/11 caused a rapid growth in conversion rate especially in Europe and US (Awan 2011; Kurzman & Ernst 2009; Beck 2007; Reuters 2007; Haddad *et al.*, 2006). Centre for American Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported that in ten years, “34,000 Americans have converted to Islam following the events of September 11, and this is the highest rate reached in the U.S. since Islam arrived here.”⁴ Kurzman and Ernst (2009) conducted a research to discover the trends of Islamic studies in the Universities of US. They noted two points during 1950 to 2008 that served as spring board and motivated researches on Islam. Quoted from Kurzman and Ernst findings, the graph below elaborates the point.



Source: Charles Kurzman & Carl W Ernst (2009). *Islamic Studies in US Universities*

Iranian revolution took place in 1979 that heightened the concerns of Western world regarding Islam and motivated academic circles to study Islam. The second point is after 9/11 that accelerates the trend. Kurzman and Ernst also noted research publications on Islam and Muslims in significant research Journals before and after 9/11. The table below elaborates the findings.

Period	Percentage of articles in each journal that focus on Islam or Muslims, before and after 9/11							
	AA	AER	AHR	AJPH	AP	APSR	ASR	JAAR
1959-2001	4.7	0.7	2.2	1.3	0.3	2.2	0.9	4.7
2002-2008	15.1	0.9	8.8	0.6	1.3	3.8	3.2	10.4

⁴ Nihad Awad, chairman of CAIR, quoted in *Al-Ayyam* (London), 12/11/2011

The figures show that discourses of religion not only emerge but accelerate at times in acclaimed secular societies.

1.1.3 The Case of Pakistan

In Pakistan, Islam is generally followed as a ritual at many places. People do not know Arabic and use to read Quran without contemplation, offer prayers without knowing the meanings, and perform many a things as sacrament. That is why there is an increased cognitive dissonance among them. Their beliefs are contrary to their practices and most often their religious behaviors are imitations. Since literacy rate is very pathetic, education system is disintegrated and wretched, dialogic approach is rare especially in religious matters; the result is disruption in the structure and system. Ijtihad is non-existent. The number of mosques is increasing day by day, but the level of understanding Islam is not improving with the pace of modernization. The segregation and separation of religious studies from other scholarships have resulted in divorcing the modern sciences and technology by theologians.

In Pakistan, there are about one hundred and twenty thousand registered mosques with an equal number of unregistered ones.⁵ There is no strong check by the government on the building of mosques in Pakistan while in other Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, etc. the government has a strong control and decides all the matters regarding constructing a new mosque, appointing prayer leader (Imam), other staff, and the Friday sermons. There is a continuous increase in the building of mosques and madrassas since the establishment of Pakistan. Paradoxically good Muslims are diminishing day by day. One can hardly find Muslim role models around. Contrary to this one can easily find extremists, usurpers, victimizers, bigots, liars, oppressors, impolite Muslims around. The following table gives a clear picture of the increasing number of Madrassas in Pakistan.

Sect-Wise Increase in the Number of Madrassas⁶											
Deobandi		Barelvi		Ahl-i-Hadith		Shia		Jamati-Islami		Total	
1988	2002	1988	2002	1988	2002	1988	2002	1988	2002	1988	2002
1779	7000	717	1585	161	376	47	419	97*	500	2801	9880

Pakistan emerged on the world map as an ideological Islamic state to materialize the principles of Islam. Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan in his inaugural speech to the Constituent Assembly on 11th August, 1947 said,

“You are free; you are free to go to your temples...mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed - that has nothing to do with the business of the State...Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.”⁷

Quaid’s statement echoes the principle of Quran, “La Ikraha fid Din.” Gulen’s focus is not on the implementation of Sharia rather he recommends that Sharia is not the main issue of Muslim world. Pakistani public are entangled and continuously engaged with the discourses of implementing Sharia since 1947. Jinnah wanted to see Pakistan as a progressive, modern and liberal state where people can practice religion with their free will. So, the first priority is to make Pakistan a progressive, liberal and modern state that demands the rectification of economic system. The perceptions of equality among citizens can lead them to be ‘participants’ rather ‘subjects’ and take pride to belong to the country. Equality is another cherished principle of Islam that is also idealized by the West. The western secularism culminated its intellect in the form of UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights which corresponds to the principles of Islam. It means western secularist approach ultimately idealizes the principles of Islam which have been bestowed upon humanity 1400 years ago.

Unfortunately, Pakistan has been facing crisis from its inception. The crisis are multiple and escalating day by day. General public has been exploited in the name of religion by internal as well as external stakeholders and actors.

⁵ http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_many_mosques_are_there_in_Pakistan#ixzz22jupGFL7

⁶ Rahman, T. (2004). The Madrassa and the State of Pakistan. In Himal South Asian. Retrieved on August 12, 2012 from <http://www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/1712-the-madrassa-and-the-state-of-pakistan.html>

⁷ Jinnah, M. A. (1947) Speech at the Constituent Assembly. Retrieved on September 20, 2009. From: website <http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/Quaid/speech03.htm>

May it be referendum by Zia-ul-Haq in the name of Islam or constitutional development, Islam has been used for peculiar purposes and not for the betterment and social welfare of the citizens. During the invasion of Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Madrissa students have been trained in the name of Jihad and Pakistan fought a proxy war for US. After the disintegration of USSR, Pakistan has been blamed for supporting Taliban. Educational policies have been dictated and revised to remove certain Quranic verses from the text. Sovereignty of Pakistan is challenged by conducting drone attacks. American citizens like Raymond Davis can kill innocent Pakistanis and get escape. Incidents like trial of Dr. Afia Siddiqui, bloodshed in the Red Mosque, and disappearance of scores of Pakistani citizens in the name of extremism and terrorism are happening frequently. Blasphemy issues are at increase and people react hastily, imprudently and injudiciously on religious matters. 21st century has witnessed the murder of two politicians on blasphemy issue in Pakistan including the Governor of Punjab Mr. Salman Taseer and the Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti. Pakistani masses destroyed their own state property and protested in an irresponsible manner regarding the case of Danish cartoon controversy.

Secularism means freedom of religion and not freedom from religion. In Pakistan secularism means paving the way to rational approach. This rationalism will help people to be ideal human beings and ultimately become good Muslims. As the problem is not with Islam but the way people perceive it. Majority of the population behaves irrationally when it comes about religion. Contrary to this Quran emphasizes on contemplation, meditation, and deliberation. This mismatch between people's behavior and Quranic teachings is due to idiosyncratic factors and copycat behaviors. Azam (2010) conducted a research on the impact of religious behaviors on social development in Pakistan. He maintains, "The majority of the people tend to behave religiously when the issue at hand does not affect their own interest. If an issue or thing is deemed as depriving them of something, then religion takes a backseat. People violate religious teachings but want to be viewed as not behaving irreligiously. It is a kind of duality existing in society as a whole." He concludes that religious behaviors in Pakistan 'have caused hiccups in the development process.' Religious behaviors and social development in Pakistan are negatively linked because of the distorted interpretations of Islam and ignorance to the humanitarian aspect of the religion.

Modernization theorists contend that a more articulate, coherent, liberal, broadminded, and tolerant public are inevitable for successful economic development. 'Poverty' is considered as 'Um-ul-Khabais' and Pakistan is a poverty stricken country. Daily Times (Friday, January 13, 2012) reports the poverty issue in Pakistan. The newspaper quotes Tahira Abdullah, a human rights activist, "About 75% of the population in Pakistan lives below the poverty line."⁸ Therefore, poverty reduction should be the first priority. Marginalized communities are struggling for their survival. It is quite easy for politicians and so-called religious clerics to emotionally charge them in the name of religion. History tells us that politicians have been exploiting masses in the name of religion in Pakistan. Illiterate, unskilled, poverty stricken masses cannot understand and decide on religious matters. It is only the groomed behavior through education, financial stability and congenial environment that can facilitate them to be ideal human beings and ultimately good Muslims.

Conclusion

- In Pakistan, Islam has been used by political demagogues and so-called religious scholars for peculiar purposes and not for the betterment and social welfare.
- Pakistan is achieved in the name of Islam, to practice Islam. The western brand of secularism means an annihilation of our very existence. Therefore reconceptualized secularism provides us a space to initiate a rational debate and to improve as a community and as a society
- Reconceptualized secularism entails freedom of religion and not freedom from religion as the problem is not with Islam but the way people perceive it.
- In Pakistan secularism means paving the way to rational approach and counter the exploitations that take place on the basis of religion.
- Illiterate, unskilled, poverty stricken masses cannot understand and decide on religious matters. About 75% of the population in Pakistan lives below the poverty line and it is quite easy for politicians and so-called religious clerics to emotionally charge them in the name of religion. Therefore Pakistan needs informed, well-educated and rational masses so as to register itself as a nation among nations.

⁸ http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2012\01\13\story_13-1-2012_pg5_14

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