Understanding Secularism and Secularisation: A Case Study of India

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the separation of secularisation and secularism from a conceptual lense embedded in the theoretical frameworks presented by contemporary literature. It provides a timely contribution into the understanding contemporary manifestations of religiosity better, in a more holistic manner. The first section of the paper broadly defines the terms secularism, secularisation, manifestation and religiosity. Separation of these two terms, secularism and secularisation, are extremely important as they are often used interchangeably in academic and non-academic literature alike. However, it is not only important to conceptually separate them but also understand the historical processes behind them. Building on these definitions, the paper then offers an analysis of secularism as a concept and its importance in furthering the understanding of religiosity. Furthermore, the paper approaches secularisation in a way to distinguish it as a separate conceptual construction from secularism. Finally, it introduces the case study of contemporary India to further the thesis presented and concludes by summarizing the overall arguments. This paper provides a unique approach to understanding religion in the contemporary world and furthering the debate on religiosity in modern life across both the global south and north.

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Secularisation as a "historical process" underwent a unique form of "ideological inversion" (Asad 2003, p.192). "The secular" was once part of a "theological discourse" and stemmed from religion itself rather than politics and science (ibid.). In contemporary times – with the inversion of the relationship – the secular discourses constitute "the religious' and religion emerges as a 'construction of the Western secular modernity" (Casanova 2008, p.111). Secularism and secularisation are surprisingly complex and intertwined but are critical to the understanding of manifestations of religiosity. This essay unpacks and analyses their construction as separate concepts using a contemporary case study to support the argument.

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30 The first section of the essay will broadly define the terms secularism, secularisation and
31 manifestation of religiosity. Building on the definitions, the second section will analyse
32 secularism as a concept and its importance in furthering the understanding of religiosity. In
33 the third section, the essay will approach secularisation in a way to distinguish it as a separate
34 conceptual construct from secularism. The fourth section will introduce a case study of
35 contemporary India to further the argument presented. Lastly, the essay will conclude
36 summarizing the arguments presented.

37

38 Secularism – in broad and over-simplified terms – is a political project, doctrine and ideology
39 that manifests separation between religion and other aspects of the society. Asad (2003) has
40 argued that it is much more than that as it "presupposes new concepts" and "new
41 imperatives" in context of religion, politics and ethics (p.2). Philpott (2009) argues secularism
42 is an ideology that marginalises religion from other spheres of society (p.185). Others such as
43 Hallward (2008) maintain that it describes a 'quasi-religious ideology' that contends with
44 religion (pp.2-3). Secularisation – the process and social construct – focuses on the decline of
45 religion in the contemporary world.

46

47 The shift of religion and its practice from the public to the private sphere is critical to the
48 understanding of secularisation (Fox 2013, p.22). Asad (2003) describes secularisation as a
49 "process" rather than an ideology. It manifests the privatisation of religion and the increase
50 or decrease in religiosity in the public sphere (Iqtidar 2012, p.54). Secularism and
51 secularisation are complex concepts with multiple and varied meanings. Within this
52 complexity, as Asad (2003) has argued, we must anchor in and relate to religion to understand
53 both these concepts. It is useful to consider manifestations of religiosity as a term rather than
54 two separate concepts. There is no consensus on a specific meaning for the term as there is no
55 single definition of religion that is applicable universally (ibid., p.29). It reflects distinct yet

56 overlapping experiences, belief systems and values associated with spirituality,

57 transcendence and the divine (Berdyaev 1939, Elkins et al. 1988, Mattis 2000; 2002, Potts 1991).

58 Broadly, it reflects the manifestation of religious practices in both public and private sphere

59 and their impact on socio-political structures.

60

61 Understanding secularism, the political project and ideology, as a distinct concept from

62 secularisation is critical in unpacking the practice of religion around the world. Manifestations

63 of secularism, on the other hand, are often seen as an alternative to religion and in direct

64 competition with it (Philpott 2009, pp.185-186). Thinking of secularism as an opposing force

65 to religion or something that replaces religion is a popular strand of thought (Juergensmeyer

66 1993; 2008, Philpott 2009, Stark 1999, Taylor 2007). Secularism as a political doctrine that

67 allows public discourse in a manner that is neutral and non-religious emerged out of religious

68 conflicts by providing some form of lowest common denominator to the over-arching socio-

69 political system (Taylor 1998, pp.2-3). This position is somewhat paradoxical, as Asad (1993,

70 2003) argues, since we cannot think about what secular constitutes without referring to

71 religion. The tendency to regard religion as alien to secular ideals and practices is self-

72 contradictory (Asad 2003, p.193). Over centuries, secular beliefs paved the way for the rise of

73 mysticism and "oppressive religion", while in more contemporary times it is secularism that

74 helps more moderate manifestations of religiosity to take shape (ibid., p.193). The process

75 works like a feedback mechanism, where the definitions of secular, secularism and

76 secularisation depend on how we define religion and vice versa.

77

78 Secularism is not merely the separation of the religion from the state; rather it is the

79 'continuous management' of religion by the state (Iqtidar 2012, p.54; Asad 2003, pp.190-191).

80 Contemporary manifestations of religiosity including practice and beliefs are increasingly

81 under state management. A Eurocentric illustration is the gradual erosion of the power of the

82 Catholic Church and its eventual displacement as the centre of power in Europe. The

83 Reformation and the dissolution of Western Christendom reduced the role of papacy as the

84   leader of a global Christian monarchy embodied in the Holy Roman Empire (Casanova 2008,

85   p.107). Before Reformation, the Catholic Church exercised control of national churches,

86   owned vast amounts of land, provided social services, education and health facilities to people

87   through the Treaty of Westphalia 1648. The treaty excluded papacy from European and

88   national affairs of the states (ibid., p.107). Nation states replaced the historic functions that the

89   Church had monopolised for centuries signifying a separation of religion from the state. In

90   modern Europe, Catholic groups such as Opus Dei – a personal prelature of the Pope – still

91   represent and model the historic nature of the work of the Vatican by running schools,

92   universities, social security schemes, and homes for old and orphans (Tourneau 1987, pp.9-

93   23). The difference is that today organisations like Opus Dei function within state laws and

94   constitutions and not under Vatican laws. Through the example of Opus Dei it can be argued

95   that secularism is identifiable as a concept distinct from secularisation and it is useful to think

96   of it as the management of religiosity.

97

98   The dual use and interchange of secularisation and secularism is very common but a

99   conspicuous misconception. Charles Taylor (2007) contends that secularism is an ideology

100   that constitutes secularisation. Secularisation is the "move from a society where a belief in

101   God is unchallenged . . . to one in which it is understood to be one option among others"

102   (Taylor 2007, p.3). This is a 'profoundly wrong' position because secularism, the project, does

103   not simply constitute secularisation (Fox 2013, p.30). Secularisation is the quantitative increase

104   or decrease in manifestations of religiosity in the modern era. People who have less belief in

105   religion or are not religious at all have always been present in society. The fact that these

106   groups can now identify with an ideology – secularism – does not mean that there is an

107   empirical decline (Stark 1999, pp.249-273). A large body of work in secularisation theory

108   (Dobbelaere 1999, Haden 1987, Philpott 2009 and Stark, 1999) concentrates on the empirical

109   decline in religion focusing on quantity. The emphasis on qualitative aspects in decline or rise

110   in religiosity is under-appreciated (Iqtidar 2012, p.54). In the conceptual unpacking of

111   secularism, emphasis on both quantitative and qualitative aspects of secularisation is

112   important as the latter can help explain empirical trends witnessed in various religions.

113

114   An understanding of the distinction between the public and the private is critical to building

115   an understanding of what constitutes secular. Secularisation theorists such as Chaves 1994,

116   Dobbeleare 1999, Philpott 2009 and Wilson 1982 among many others predict declining

117   religious influence in the public sphere. Religion and its practice are gradually moving from

118   the public sphere into the private (Fox 2013, p.22). Although on the decline, religion may

119   remain an integral part of people's private life and individual beliefs. Secularisation process

120   involves an increase in the autonomy of secular institutions and an increase in the conformity

121   of religious ones to the broader secular world (Wilson 1982, p.149). This privatisation of

122   religion forms a core part of the secularisation theory that furthers understanding of

123   religiosity. The three basic processes in classical secularisation theory are (1) differentiation of

124   religion from the secular sphere, (2) decline and (3) privatisation of religion (Casanova 1986,

125   pp.1-7). Casanova (1986) using empirical evidence and case studies argues that religions went

126   'public and deprivatised' through resurgence and that privatisation is not a rule among

127   secularisation thesis (p.3). Differentiation of religion from state, market forces and political

128   power structures forms the "defensible core" of the secularisation theory (ibid., p.7). Asad's

129   (2003) contention that deprivatisation unravels this defensible core of differentiation is very

130   convincing, since both the conceptions are intrinsically connected and not mutually exclusive

131   from each other. Through the ideas discussed above, we can conceptualise identify

132   secularisation separately from secularism.

133

134   The case study of India illustrates secularism and secularisation a separate concept that help

135   understand not just religiosity but also the socio-political environment. India is historically

136   not a single nation but rather collection of communities practicing their own faiths, traditions

137   and customs. Nehru envisaged the newly independent India as a secular state with a vision

138   of taking the country towards modernity (Khilnani 2006, pp.100-103). Under the Congress

139   Party, India worked its way towards achieving modernity through secularism. India's

140   political leadership believed that to modernize, the country would have to move away from

141   traditional religious practices and superstitious beliefs. Nehru's ideas about secularism

142   shaped the approach that the Indian National Congress - and especially, Indira Gandhi - used

143   in the 1960s and 1970s. The Indian Constitution is secular in its outlook and provisions in

144   Articles 13 to 17, 19, 23 and 25 to 30 lay down the fundamental rights explicitly allowing for

145   freedoms for all religions in an equal manner (Madan 2010, pp.249-248). Article 44 that forms

146   part of the Directive Principles declares that "the State shall endeavour to secure for the

147   citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India" (ibid., p.249). In 1976, the 42nd

148   amendment introduced the word 'secular' in the Indian constitution's preamble for the first

149   time and this represented the point when India adopted secularism as a state project (Sen

150   2006, p.371).

151

152   Secularism in India is distinct from secularisation and this separation helps us understand

153   manifestations of religiosity in the country's diverse Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain and other

154   groups in much better light. It is not only distinct but also very unique from the classical

155   Western conception of secularism both in its nature and implementation. Amartya Sen (2005)

156   explains that there are two forms of secularism, one where there is complete separation of

157   state and religion and the other where the state maintains all religions at an equal standing

158   (Sen 2005, pp.16-33). India, as Sen argues, has a form of secularism that treats all religions in

159   an equal and fair manner, or at least, that is the state policy. Given Indian subcontinent's

160   diverse cultural history and plethora of religious practices, the policy is both pragmatic and

161   problematic. This closely relates to Asad's (2003) view on secularism as the state management

162   of religiosity among its populations. The Indian state manages its diverse religious groups

163   both politically and socially through especially through funding and provision of places for

164   worship. When the state project of management comes in direct conflict with certain

165   manifestations of religiosity – e.g., Sikhism in 1980s – the state forces the religion to comply

166   (Madan 2010, pp.101-105).

167

168   Indian society, or one should say societies, never managed to adopt secularisation. Religiosity

169   increased in India in the years after the independence especially in the political sense.

170   Communal riots between the Hindu majority and the other minorities occur regularly despite

171   the fact the constitution is secular and India is a great triumph of Western liberal democratic

172   model (Asad 2003, p.8). The rise of Hindu nationalist parties in the 1960s and 1970s with

173   movements such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh signified an increase in the

174   manifestation of religiosity among the Hindus (Noorani 2000). Conflicts with other religious

175   minorities, such as the anti-Sikh riots (1984), Babri Masjid demolition (1992) and Gujrat

176   violence (2002) illustrate the rising religious tensions within India (Rajagopal 2006, pp.209-

177   212). This reflects that religiosity is on the rise in a secular India, not just on part of Hindus,

178   but also among other religious communities. Indian Muslims, following their own laws, are

179   at odds with the majority Hindu population which often reflects in the voting patterns at the

180   time of the general elections. The recent projection of the Hindu nationalist Bhartaya Janta

181   Party to the central government in the 2014 election laid many of the religious cleavages bare

182   when Hindu nationalist groups started asserting their influence.

183

184   The underlying cause of these tensions and religious conflict is the failure of the Indian society

185   to embrace secularisation despite the presence of state secularism. Conceptual separation of

186   secularism and secularisation helps clarify the case of India. Religions are part India's culture

187   and social life since ancient times and deeply rooted within socio-political structures. A Hindu

188   majority in nation with many other religious minorities further undermines secularisation

189   process in the country (Thapar 2006, p.193). Jawarhal Nehru explained the dilemma of Indian

190   secularisation aptly; the "Constitution lays down that we are a secular state, but it must be

191   admitted that this is not wholly reflected in our mass living and thinking" (Gopal 1980,

192   pp.330–1). Secularism exists in India as a state project and political ideology, but secularisation

193   never took hold in the society. Casanova (1986) did not focus on India in his seminal work on

194   public religions, though contemporary India shows the rise of religiosity and de-privatisation

195   of religion.

196

197   Investigation into the causes of the secularisation failure in the Indian case leads us back to

198   Taylor's (1998) arguments. Secularism stemmed from the problems in Western society

199   managed by the Church and is applicable to all non-Western societies (Taylor 1998). Classical

200   secularism as we know it is a Eurocentric construct. Scholars like Asad (2003) rightly point

201   out that secularisation preceded secularism in Europe and not the other way around. In non-

202   Western societies like India, states want to usher in a process of secularisation through

203   secularism. The Indian case does prove to some extent that this is not always a success.

204   Structured and well-informed scholarship into the conceptual separation of the two concepts

205   can help us understand the manifestations of religiosity around the world in much more

206   depth and detail.

207

208   We can further the understanding of religiosity by drawing the distinction between

209   secularism and secularism in many other nations as well. The Iranian Revolution (1979)

210   marked the drift of a secular state under the Shah towards a religious theocracy under the

211   Ayatollahs. The secularism adopted by Reza Shah in 1924 not only separated religion from

212   the state but also subdued and repressed all forms of religious expression particularly Shiite

213   Islam (Ashtiani 1994, pp.66-70). It was this repression of dissent and suppression of religiosity

214   that paved the way for the Revolution in 1979, which Foucalt described as the "first post-

215   modern revolution of our time" (ibid., p.51). Modern France with its state led secularism bans

216   the burqa and other manifestations of religiosity. The French society in particular its Muslim

217   and Jewish communities failed to secularise despite the state being secular. Recent attacks

218   such as the one on *Charlie Hebdo* represent the differences between secularism and

219   secularisation in France.

220

221 This essay unpacked both secularism and secularisation as separate concepts using insights
222 and arguments from a range of theorists working in the field. Often these two concepts are
223 inter-changed and used synonymously. Seminal work in secularisation theory such as that of
224 Taylor (1998, 2007) revolves around secularism and secularisation being mutually inclusive
225 to some extent. Arguments from the likes of Asad (2003) refute this position by providing
226 insights into secularism as a political project and secularisation as a process in the social
227 structures. The case study example of India sheds light on the usefulness of separating these
228 concepts to understand religiosity around the world. It also illustrates that the Indian
229 secularism model is distinct from our classical Eurocentric construction of secularism. In
230 conclusion, this conceptualisation is not only useful but also crucial in analysing and
231 furthering the understanding of religiosity.

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Reviews for 'Understanding Secularism and Secularisation: A Case Study of India' by Muhammad Bakht Jamshaid Baryar (STAAR 8 - 2018)

Reviewer 1 - Raghav Srivastava – Reject

1. Is the subject matter of the article suitable for an interdisciplinary audience?: Yes, the manifestations of religiosity and secularisation are relevant topics for an interdisciplinary readership.

2. Does the title reflect the subject matter of the article?: Yes

3. Does the article make a contribution to the discussion in its field?: I do not believe so. To begin with, it is unclear what problem with the secularism/secularisation dichotomy the author sets out to resolve. There is no original argument offered, instead various opinions are collated on secularism and secularisation - with little or no analysis and value addition from the author himself. The case study is also extremely superficially dealt with and certain conclusions which have been drawn have rather shaky foundations (such as the increasing religiosity in India as inferred from the riots in 1984, 1992 and 2002). The ultimate objective and contribution of the author to the discourse on secularism and secularisation are unclear.

4. Is the article clearly written?: No. The language in some places, it seems, has been used to deliberately obfuscate and distract from the less-than-clear objectives of this paper. Even within sections/paragraphs, the writing is disjoint and often not conveying an idea or argument consistently. In places, questions regarding the relationship between secularism and secularisation are raised and left unanswered (e.g. lines 109-110 raise the questions of what qualitiative aspects of religiosity are and what the author's opinion of these aspects is).

5. Is the article well structured?: The structure is simple, but not helpful or valuable intellectually. The arguments and actual structure do not achieve all that is promised in lines 30-36.

6. Are the references relevant and satisfactory?: Yes, the referencing is consistent and relevant.

7. Do you feel the article appropriately uses figures, tables and appendices?: No. More figures could have been used to buttress certain arguments better (such as figures to indicate the empirical decline/increase of religiosity in the case of India).

8. What is your recommendation?: Reject

1. Is the subject matter of the article suitable for an interdisciplinary audience?: The subject matter of the article is suitable for an interdisciplinary audience. The subject matter traces out the contemporary concepts of secularism, secularization and religiosity and opens doors for further research in this area by explaining the difference between these significant terms.

2. Does the title reflect the subject matter of the article?: The title very aptly summaries the concepts described in the article. The gist of the article revolves around an attempt to differentiate between the concepts of secularism, secularisation and religiosity. Further, these concepts are illustrated through a contemporary case study of India. All of these concepts are reflected through the title.

3. Does the article make a contribution to the discussion in its field?: The article explores the debate around the concepts of secularism and secularisation and how these concepts are distinct and stem from the concept of religiosity. The article opens the door for further research around these concepts by studying case studies related to different Asian, Central Asian and Middle Eastren countries in order to dissect the role of religion, repression and dissent in emergence of conflict. The article is an excellent contribution to the discussion in its field.

4. Is the article clearly written?: The article is clearly written with sound arguments, coherency and connectivity between different paragraphs. Moreover; the arguments are backed by sufficient references.

5. Is the article well structured?: The article is well structured and well written.

6. Are the references relevant and satisfactory?: The references are relevant and satifsfactory.

7. Do you feel the article appropriately uses figures, tables and appendices?: There are no figures, tables and appendices. The subject matter of the article is not of quantitative nature which makes necessary for the writer to add tables. The article, in my opinion, doesn't require tables. The figures such as the relevant articles of the Indian Constitution, historical events are well-referenced,making this article a fine piece of contribution to the research field.

8. What is your recommendation?: Accept

Review 3 – Sibgha Ajaz - Accept

1. Is the subject matter of the article suitable for an interdisciplinary audience?: The article invokes interest of an interdisciplinary audience by exploring a subject matter that cuts across various themes. Religiosity is explored in a holistic manner as it is viewed from a conceptual lens offered by contemporary literature as well as from a historical lens with the help of India's case study.

2. Does the title reflect the subject matter of the article?: The title of the article is precise, catchy and gives a clear indication of what the article entails.

3. Does the article make a contribution to the discussion in its field?: The article offers a unique approach to understanding religiosity and offers clarification regarding various concepts. The case study presented in the article helps the readers better understand the debate on religiosity in a historical as well modern context.

4. Is the article clearly written?: The article is well articulated, easily understandable by a diverse audience and logically discusses the author's research.

5. Is the article well structured?: The article is coherently structured and effectively explores the research area mentioned in the introduction. Moreover, it firstly sets context in which the key terms are used and then builds the main arguments. This allows the author to engage effectively with an interdisciplinary audience.

6. Are the references relevant and satisfactory?: All the references used by the author are highly relevant and satisfactory. For example, the author has thoroughly explored the writings of Talal Asad who has made extensive theoretical contributions to the phenomenon of religion and secularism.

7. Do you feel the article appropriately uses figures, tables and appendices?: N/A

8. What is your recommendation?: Accept

1. Is the subject matter of the article suitable for an interdisciplinary audience?: A very well-placed article connects people across borders and tries to approach religiosity from a different perspective.

2. Does the title reflect the subject matter of the article?: Yes, identifies the case study in the article.

3. Does the article make a contribution to the discussion in its field?: Yes, it tries to offer a different approach to the western conception of secularism and how it can be a different, varied concept in the global south.

4. Is the article clearly written?: Yes, to a large extent clear and concise.

5. Is the article well structured?: Relatively well structured identifies each area/section in the start clearly.

6. Are the references relevant and satisfactory?: Yes, they point out the major literature in the field, however, more depth into literature from Africa and Latin America could have added more breadth.

7. Do you feel the article appropriately uses figures, tables and appendices?: Non used, no need for such a topic.

8. What is your recommendation?: Accept

Reviewer's comments to the author: Well written, thoroughly traces the development of secularism in South Asia and helps us grasp how European conceptions can end becoming localised in various other countries.