

Can Pakistan be a Secular State?

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ABSTRACT

The question as to whether Pakistan should be a religious or a secular state has been an academic debate for decades. Particularly during and after the ‘Islamization Programme of General Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 to 1988, it became a most concerning issue within and outside the country for Human Rights activists and minorities in Pakistan. This discourse critically addresses this question in comparison to the secularism of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is studied as a model state as she is one of the most developed secular countries and has some commonalities with Pakistan. The theological, historical, and empirical factors behind British secularism are discussed and their possible applicability in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan examined.

KEY WORDS: Secularization, Islamization, Christianity, Islam, Pakistan, United Kingdom.

Introduction

Text books in schools and universities of Pakistan teach country an ideological state created for Islam. The peculiar statement of Muhammad Ali Jinnah – the founder, is quoted that Pakistan is liberated to become a laboratory of Islam. Besides, the Objective Resolution making Islam as the religion of state passed by the Constituent Assembly asserts the ideological basis of the state¹. On the contrary liberals quote the address of Mr Jinnah made on September 11, 1947 on the inauguration of the Constituent Assembly. This speech is advocated as a principal de jure policy statement of Jinnah made on the pertinent occasion. Aitzaz Ahsan names it a ‘Magna Carta’ of Pakistan declared by Jinnah who was most eminently qualified authority to spell out the *raison d’être* of Pakistan. (Ahsan A. 1998: 57,60) This speech hints at the separation of state and religion, one of the fundamental principles of secularism. Jinnah, after declaring freedom of worship for all religions and equality of all the subjects irrespective of their beliefs in the country, envisaged;

“Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find in course of time 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 the individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state” (Bolitho 1954:197).

In the history of earlier three decades of Pakistan, this liberal religious controversy had not been the major subject of national debates. It surfaced with the Islamization era of General Zia ul-Haq. A number of legislations including the Blasphemy Laws towards Islamization of laws and society brought back the disputed question of the nature of state. These were major points of concern for non-Muslim minorities and were particularly rejected by liberals (Bouma 1981). Although the National Assembly has revisited the amendments implemented in the Zia’s regime, the changes in the blasphemy law seems to be a hardest nut to crack, particularly in contemporary terroristic-laden scenario of the country.

Pakistan’s blasphemy law has been criticized as too broad, and many legal experts say it has been badly misused since its introduction in the 1980s. Recently, opponents of the law in government, Mr Salman Taseer, governor of Punjab, and Mr Shahbaz Bhatti, federal minister of Minority Affairs were murdered in January and March 2011 respectively. Both of the murdered men were advocates of liberty and reform of Pakistan’s blasphemy law, which carries a death sentence for those who insult Islam².

This circumstance has been a point of concern for human rights activists, within and outside of the country. Particularly in the Western world, where publication of *The Satanic Verses* and painting caricatures of the person of the Prophet are seen as part of the literary achievements, it is considered to be barbaric to kill someone who has just hinted to disregard sacred persons or things. It is against the fundamental right of expression of opinion as well. I. A. Rehman advocated, “It is retrogressive piece of legislation, inconsistent with the spirit of the age, which calls for toleration, accommodation, and free inquiry as well as a mechanism for silencing dissent” (Rehman I.A. 1998: 196-204).

Can a traditional orthodox society like Pakistan progress to the extent to accommodate freedom of expression at the level of the West? This becomes relevant in the context of the amendment in Hudud Laws regarding Zina in President Musharaf’s regime³. If Qur’anic injunctions have been diluted as ‘Islamists’ claim then will it be theologically feasible to repeal the Blasphemy law, based on juristic interpretation, according to some scholars?⁴

If religion, as a matter of fact became more and more defensive and self-protective in Britain, against the pace of modernization, what are the chances of the disappearance of the Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan? It requires comparative analysis of historical experiences and cultural developments of both societies. Although France is more entrenched in secularism to portrait but there are a number of underpinnings to make Britain a model to compare the ‘religiosity’ of Pakistan and ‘secularity’ of Britain. For example, both countries have a common period of relationship in history. Although that relationship was of a master and a slave type, no other Western secular country has this common

historical legacy with Pakistan. Islam is the religion of 97% of the people of Pakistan and the second largest religion of Britain⁵. Similarly, the largest ethnic group in British Muslims come from Pakistan. Blasphemy law, although nominal, in the British Constitution speaks for a sign of commonality with Pakistan and invites one to examine British 'religiosity verses secularity' in detail. Reactions and demonstrations of British Muslims on the occasion of 'Rushdie Affair' and the response of Anglican British government is also a moot point to reflect upon. England is one of the established tolerant countries. She had gone through a pertinent process of accommodating Catholics, Radical Sects and Dissenting Churches since the 17th century. It has earned herself a significant fame in the history of religious tolerance. Can this be dreamed for in Pakistan?

Britain as a secular Country

Elaboration of the essence of British secularism needs to answer the following questions: What is secularism and how is it different from religionism? When did the process of secularism start? Why and how did it come about?

What is secularism?

Secularization was used more widely to denote the marginalization of religion in modern western societies. Hugh McLeod opines that although the concept of secularization was introduced by W. E. H. Lecky in 1865 and Robert and Helen Lund in 1929, two books played a decisive role in popularizing the concept: *The Secular City* (1965) by Harvey Cox and *Religion in Secular Society* (1966) by Bryan Wilson. (McLeod 2000a: 653) Harvey Cox observes "secularization as a process and a field of human exploration and endeavour from which the gods have fled. The world has become man's task and man's responsibility. Contemporary man has become cosmopolitan. The world has become his city and his city has reached out to include the world and this is secularization".(Cox H. 1990: 1-2) Cox says, "It is the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of life, the dispelling of all closed worldviews, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols. Secularization occurs when man turns his attention away from worlds beyond and toward this world and this time (saeculum = 'this present age'). It is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1944 called 'man's coming of age'" (Cox H. 1990: 1-2). Similarly Bryan Wilson's main contention is that although religion may not have disappeared it had become irrelevant: Secularization is a process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance (McLeod H. 2000: 653). Giulio Ercolessi and Ingemund Hägg stated that secularisation is indeed a historical, social and cultural phenomenon, related to the process of 'disenchantment of the world' that gave birth to the modern Western society. So the secularisation is the social process of

weakening and decline of religious beliefs and practices (Ercolessi G. and Hägg I. 2008:6). In a nutshell, secularism divorces religion from all aspects of man's life and society.

When did the process of secularism start in Britain?

A good number of sociologists and historians concur on the decline of British Christianity. The only question has been the date of the beginning of the process. Did it start from the Enlightenment period or from the emergence of the industrial revolution? Is it the gift of modernism or the fruit of postmodernism? Callum Brown and Michael Snape state that "Historians and sociologists agree that this was a long term process, one that had certainly gotten under way in the eighteenth century and accelerated further in the nineteenth century for it to constitute the major century of secularisation" (Brown C. & Snape M. 2010: 4-5). Gilbert names the Enlightenment and the coming eras as the post-Christian world' (Gilbert A. 1980: 20-28) Likewise Hugh McLeod grouped the main approaches to answering the questions of secularization under the headings of 'The march of science', 'Modernisation', 'Postmodernity' and 'Selling of God' (McLeod H. 2000: 3-12).

Enlightenment

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment emerged as a milestone of the European journey towards secularisation. The hegemony of the clergy and Christian teachings upon the human mind started to crumble. Science surfaced to replace the old patterns of thinking and it rose as a dominant way of understanding the world. The ground was prepared by scientists like Copernicus, Galileo and Newton and philosophers such as Descartes, Lock and Hume. Alan Gilbert presenting scientism as an argument of this 'march of science' elaborated that "the impact of science on popular consciousness certainly had been one of the central themes in its evolution" (Gilbert A. 1980: 36). Similarly, Yves Lambert deliberates that "if on the one hand, the exercise of reason led to the contesting of primacy of revelation and religious authority, on the other hand, the development of science and technology revolutionised the ways of seeing and living" (McLeod H. 2004: 67).

Modernisation

Modernisation is the epitome of industrialization; it highlights secularisation in social milieu rather than the intellectual sphere. The industrialization resulted in the demographic influx from rural to urban/ industrial settings. This migration was the natural end of this new development. This rural urban move exposed people

not only to new avenues of earning, new rules of labour and new ethics of work but to a new individuality and new identity. They found their uniqueness and distinctiveness. They more or less got rid of the slavery of the traditional system of landlord ship. As peasants they were totally dependent on the landlord. The landlords of past had their pertinent exploitive culture – the Bourgeoisie thinking. It was all on his wish and whim to give or not to give the agreed or otherwise share from the seasonal/annual yields. Even after hard work of the whole cropping season the farmer was not sure to have expected yield. They had to pray to G/gods to keep the weather friendly and conducive for the proper returns of their hard work. While coming to urban centres and getting employment in mills and factories, their fatalistic nature changed into a realistic tone. They got the wages as was agreed between the owner of the mill and the worker. It gave them a new self. They even did not need G/god's interference for getting their wages. God practically became irrelevant. Britain has a privilege that the major winner in the war of science and religion was born here in the middle of the nineteenth century. Charles Darwin laid the basis for a radically new way of looking at humanity and declared that human kind is a product of physical and historical process rather than being made in the image of God, and is subject to the same laws as the rest of nature. In this 'the march of science' era, not only metaphysical but societal phenomenon became subject of scientific enquiry. Similarly, philosophers of the century like Herbert Spencer and August Comte delineated the evolutionary thinking patterns of human beings. They advocated that the scale of human thought has become positive leaving behind the spiritual and metaphysical patterns in the dust of history.

Postmodernity

Postmodernity is the major theme of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century and that ends on long sixties – when the real secularization took place. It perpetuated the traditional centrality of religion and churches although there had been a considerable decline in church attendance in this period. People still continued to marry in the churches, their children baptised and they sent their children to Sunday schools for catechism classes. Along with that moral influence of the Christian churches was great on the people. Dictates of the ethical and moral teachings was eminent in the general behaviour of people although many people did not practise these standards very strictly. Callum Brown says, "Particularly, the years between the two world wars, reemphasised moral conservatives disconnecting from the liberalisation of Victorian religious Puritanism. The British people in the later stages of the Second World War started to show signs of responsiveness to a renewed conservatism in morality. The war undoubtedly put pressure on sexual purity, strained abstinence from alcohol and undermined some values of the early twentieth century Britain. Austerity became the watchdog of the age, defining a period when in the economy, in leisure, in family and in

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personal life, people's behaviour was characterised by restraint and duty" (Brown C. 2006: 177-179). Michael Snape insists that "even in decline of religious practice should not blind us to the fact that, even at this later date, British society was still identifiably and self-consciously Christian" (Snaps M. 2005: 20).

Long Sixties

Nineteen sixties have been treated as a hallmark of the irreligiosity when the decline of religious practice had been much more rapid in Britain. Callum Brown determines these long sixties revolution in years of 1956-1973 (Brown C. 2006: 224-227). He wrote these are the years when "religion started to stop mattering in the 1960s British society as compare to the 1950s and the pre-fifties when it mattered significantly and deeply" (Brown C. 2001: 7). Main indicators of secularization were churches in crises, non sacralisation of rites de passage and ascendancy of impiety. Callum Brown narrated, "The crisis in the church was reflected in the fact that Church membership remained only 33% of the total populace. By the year 2000 less than 8% of people attended Sunday worship in any week and not as much of a tenth of children attended Sunday school". (Brown C. 2001: 3) He further wrote that Churches were in short of recruits to be priests and ministers and it resulted in the prediction of the demise of the Church of Scotland by 2033 due to loss of membership. Similarly fewer than half of couples get married in the Church and statistics display that if 72% of the marriages took place in the Church of England in 1957 it decreased to 55% in 1997. About 20% (228 of 1000) of the children were baptised in the Church in 1997 as compared to 60% (602 out of 1000) in 1956. Cohabitation of about one third of couples without marriage pronounces the degree of moral decay and impiety in the society of the year 2000 (Brown C. 2001:3-7). Pertinent legislation during the 1960s reflects this pace of change towards drifting from conservative religious teachings prevalent in the society. The years 1959-1969 witnessed these moves beginning with the Obscene Publication Act of 1959 which protected scientific and literary work from prosecution. Restrictions on gambling were relaxed in 1960 and on drinking in 1961. Male homosexuality was decriminalized in 1967. Theatre censorship was abolished in 1968 and in 1969 divorce law was liberalized. This all extended the sphere of individual freedom. Hugh McLeod is of the opinion that the trends established in the 'long 1960s' set the pattern for the rest of the century (McLeod H. 2007: 218).

Why and how did it come about?

The question as to, why and how can appropriately be gleaned from the behaviour of the clergy that held the pulpit and had been the guardian and beneficiary of Christendom for centuries. McLeod addressing the question narrates that, "since

the French Revolution, Christian thought has been powerfully influenced by the sense of the strength of the secularizing forces in the world and most theologians and church leaders have been aware of the need to respond to this threat. Four characteristic strategies, so far, have been witnessed. Firstly, partial acceptance of contemporary critiques of Christianity and the church, and restatement of the faith or of the church's agenda in terms likely to make them better understood by critics. Secondly, total rejection of these criticisms and attempts at a wholesale 'rechristianization' of the society. The third approach was welcoming of secularization as facilitating the removal of harmful aspects of Christian belief and practice and a purification of the faith. The fourth feature had been accepting the fact of secularization, together with the attempt to establish a Christian subculture within which at least a substantial minority of the population can be protected from harmful influences. This is reflected in the social services like; establishing schools, publishing newspapers, provision of leisure facilities by Catholics and Protestants Evangelicalism" (McLeod H. 2000a: 654). Alan Gilbert also records both resistive and accommodative reaction of Christian leaders along with the note that secularization, in short' threatened either to marginalize religion or subvert it (Gilbert A. 1994: 505-506).

Empirical Evidences

The colonial enterprise since 16th/17th century, contributed to the economic growth of Britain. The Empire controlled over one-quarter of the world's population and almost a quarter of the total land area of the earth by early nineteen twenties. Riches of the world filled the treasuries of the country earned through so called trade. This economic wellbeing and prosperity had direct impact on the rising living standards of people and it changed family life. The luxuries and comforts played a major role in the decline of church attendance. According to 'Harris Poll' commissioned by the Daily Express in April 1970, too many distractions – television, bingo, and motor cars, emerged as major counter-religious attractions (Gilbert A. 1980: 96). The domestic luxuries like television in 96 percent, refrigerator in 85 percent, and washing machine in 70 percent and telephone in 52 percent of British homes were available by 1975. By the same year 53 per cent of the citizens lived in their own homes (McLeod H. 2007: 102). Motor car as an easy and swift mode of mobility popularized the trend of country side dwelling among the upper and higher middle classes of the society.

Similarly a revolution happened in the field of medical sciences. It changed the traditional view of health and medicines. Medical revolution of the second half of the Nineteenth century made it thoroughly professional and primitive superstitious ways of treatment almost died out for ever. The phenomenon of faith and spiritual healing became obsolete in common life. Reason of ailment and disease was no more mystery to require supernatural blessings for its treatment. There were unparallel improvements in nutrition, in the prevention and treatment

of diseases and quality of infant and child care. Span of life increased. Life expectancy at the birth of the average male was reported to be 69.3 and of female was 75.5 in 1975; compared with the 29.6 years of infant born into aristocracy about 300 years ago, similarly mortality ratio came down to 16 per 1000 in 1974 as compared to 30 per thousand in 1950 (Gilbert A. 1980: 52-53).

Sexual revolution is a significant characteristic of change. It got a new impetus by the arrival of the oral contraceptive pill. Although it was adopted for the artificial birth control, in the beginning of sixties more single teenagers began to have sex outside marriage. Interestingly, the attitude of the clergy towards this immoral change was not belligerent. Rather the Church of England and Scotland and many Protestant clergy welcomed the arrival of the oral contraceptive pill in 1960-1. However, Pope Paul VI banned all artificial contraception as morally wrong for the world's Catholics in July 1968. Resultantly, in the Anglican world, although sex without marriage was underway in the early and mid-1960s there was rapid increase in the 1970s. In 1964, only 15 per cent of 16/17 years old girls claimed to have had sexual intercourse. By 1974-5 these figures had leapt to 58 per cent. Same ratio of increase among boys of equal age was reported from 40 per cent to 52 per cent in respective years as narrated by Callum Brown (Callum B. 2006: 242-246).

Secular inherence in Christianity

Apart from the 'religious outsiders', narrated above, one can easily search out 'religious insiders' within the very form and formation of Christianity. Historically speaking, it can be traced from the pre Christian era as well as in the very formation of the Christian religion. Harvey Cox in the words of Hugh McLeod "trying to find more meaningful ways of writing about God" (McLeod H. 2007: 11) has excavated the seedbed of secularization in the Bible. H. Cox advocated that we must learn, as Bonhoeffer said, "to speak of God in secular fashion and find nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts" (Cox H. 1990:3). Harvey Cox further emphasized his argument with reference to a German theologian Friedrich Gogarten's understanding that "secularization is the legitimate consequence of biblical faith on history" (Cox H. 1990: 3). He describes that there are three pivotal elements in biblical faith which have each given rise to one aspect of secularization. Thus, the *disenchantment of nature* begins with creation, the *desacralization of politics* with Exodus, and *deconsecration of values* with the Sinai covenant, especially with the prohibition of idols. He concludes as the secularization is historically very Christian, so it should not be opposed rather be nourished and advocated (Cox H. 1990: 15).

Allan Gilbert on the same lines of argument expounded that "the seeds of secularization were implanted at the very genesis of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Christianity inherited the radical theological and cosmological insights of ancient Semitic people, a people with grand yet precarious vision of a monotheistic

universe. Monotheism was a potent, creative cultural force, but its impact on religious consciousness was two-sided. The sublime religiosity it produced, enriched first Hebrew and later Christian consciousness; but by setting up a dichotomy between sacred and profane aspects of reality it established an intellectual frame work within which secularization was almost bound to occur. A dialectical tension between religious and secular modes of thought became a fundamental principle of Judaism and, through it, of Christianity. For, in discovering the transcendent majesty of Yahweh – in accepting Him alone as truly divine – the Hebrews gained the power gradually to extricate themselves from the hegemony of ‘false gods’ and the mystification of paganism. The natural world, a product of divine creativity but not itself divine could now be regarded in mundane, matter-of-facts terms” (Gilbert A. 1980: 17-18).

Akin to that is the concept of the Papal infallibility, an evidence of desacralization of divinity and transferring it to man. It started from the Apostle Peter, who was accorded both by Jesus and the early church a position of exceptional authority. When pope, particularly in Catholic dogma, as the successor of Peter speaks *ex cathedra*, he possesses the infallibility that Christ bestowed upon his church. In reality, papal infallibility remains a subject about which there is no Christian consensus. This article of Christian theological faith is hardly proved to be found in the very foundation of the Holy See in Peter’s life. J.M.R. Tillard writes that a serious study of the New Testament thus shows Peter as formally commissioned by Christ to take the lead when fundamental issues concerning the church are at stake. But this commission is always inseparable from that of the whole group of apostles or disciples. It is also inseparable from repeated insistence on Peter’s personal weakness, his enduring fallibility, and his capacity actually to provide false witness. Even nothing is explicitly said, in the New Testament, of a journey of Peter to Rome and his martyrdom in this city. But there is, both in the earliest tradition and in archaeological evidence, overwhelming support for his presence and death there. The crucial question remains: was Peter supposed to have a successor? Here again the New Testament is silent (Tillard 2000). The doctrine of papal infallibility was first developed by Franciscan theologians in the early fourteenth century. Held by some theologians, rejected by others, it became the touchstone of ultramontanism (Paul A. 2000). Apart from the controversy of the person of Peter and his infallibility, the crux of the matter is that the whole paradigm of Catholic theology establishes desacralization of the divinity to man, after all Peter was a human being not God.

Protestant’s position on the subject of the process of secularization is not entirely different. Fundamentals of Protestant religion seem to be standing on secular foundations. Godly authority of man’s salvation endowed to pope and priest as deputies of God in the Catholic faith, was rejected by Martin Luther. He said if mastery of the Scriptures could bestow on the pope a position to issue a decree on ordinary Christian’s destiny then qualifies him to seek expiation himself from his sins through Scriptures. He translated the Bible into the German language

for this purpose. Following the Lutheran tradition, William Tynedale, produced an English translation of the Bible in the 1530s. Although he was martyred on this heresy, the question of a vernacular Bible was indicative of change in Britain. Soon after that, by 1537, a translation had appeared which gained royal approval, and the royal injunctions of the following years required a copy to be placed in every parish church (Sheils W.J. 1994: 152).

It is beyond doubt that the spread of Protestantism validated the arguments/questions raised by Martin Luther. This movement as a logical result impregnated a number of streams of free thinking. Thousands of contemporary denominations in Protestant Christianity have become salient feature of western countries. Reason and logic became the currency of the day. David Palin wrote that, “in disputed cases, reference can then be made to something or someone which is (or ought to be) agreed by the parties to be unquestionably authoritative. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reflective people in England increasingly looked to reason for such a final authority in matters of religious belief. This adoption of the way to reason emerged to control fanaticism and bigotry, to face the challenge of scepticism and unbelief and to restore the confidence of traditional authorities against religious controversies begun in sixteenth century” (Palin D. 1994: 210-213) For example, the interpretation of the verses of the Bible became controversial. In practice each sect assumed the authority to interpret and use the Bible and to declare the fundamentals of Christianity. As a result, in the words of John Locke, “the scripture serves but, like nose of wax, to be turned and bent, just as may fit the contrary orthodoxies of different societies”⁶. Whatever the justification is given whole movement of Protestant religion in fact stands for the blunt ‘profanization’ of spirituality and a brave step towards secularization.

In Britain a popular secularist tradition developed in the wake of Tom Pain’s *Rights of Man* (1791-2) and *Age of Reason* (1794-5). It developed an extreme form of artisan radicalism which looked forward to a democratic state in which authority would be de-mystified and powers of organized religion broken forever. Now it looks that the way leading to secularism was determined. One of the major travelers on this tract was Robert Owen (1771-1858). He saw himself as the ‘prophet’ of the new age – an age in which the divisiveness of religion would be swept away to permit a rational reordering of human society as narrated by Edward Royle (Royle E. 1994: 408). Second in line was Charles Southwell (1814-1860), who started a periodical, titled the *Oracle of Reason*. In his paper he wrote an article titled ‘*The Jew Book*’ and stated that the Bible was not the product of God but the outpouring of some devil and was prosecuted resultantly for this blasphemous denunciation of the Bible. (Nash D. 1999: 92-93) George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) in the pursuit of reason and rationality ultimately founded Secularism. Slowly, in the 1850s, he began to make headway and Secularism caught the public imagination. His public debates with congregational ministers earned him fame. Sale of his paper, *Reasoner*, rose from under one thousand to

over five thousand. Secularism as a movement had become a fact of some significance in the life of Victorian Britain (Royle E. 1994: 406-411). Charles Bradlaugh (1833 – 1891) is placed in a very significant and peculiar place in the parliamentary history of Britain. He was time and again elected from Northampton but was not allowed to become a member of the House of Commons. In fact he refused to take the oath as it had no meaning for him. It gave him a status of national celebrity, the personification of radicalism and symbol of popular democratic rights (Royle E. 1994: 414-415). George William Foote (1850 - 1915) follower of the secular thinking began a periodical *Freethinker*. It was known to be a scurrilous publication which attacked Christianity with barbed wit and savage humor. Joss Mash ostensibly argues that Foote sought to ‘desacrilize’ the Bible through the use of literary weapons of sarcasm, satire and profane image. This is painted as a project – part libertarian, part literary – to reduce the Bible merely to the status of a text (Nash D. 1999: 108).

Long sixty’s; the hallmark of secularization in Britain produced a most controversial book of liberal theology by John Robinson, the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich. *Honest to God* published in 1963 placed God within humans, not outside of them or their world, with Christianity to be understood in the form of a ‘naturalism’ rather than a ‘supernaturalism’. This heretical book, as some saw, described the notion of heaven ‘as the greatest obstacle to an intelligent faith’ and emphasized God in our loving and ethical actions rather than in the next world and its promises. Dr Michael Ramsey, the Archbishop of Canterbury commented on Robinson’s imagery of God as ‘utterly wrong’ and wrote ‘strange, difficult and revolutionary’ in his pamphlet *Image Old and New* (Brown C. 2006: 232-233).

Britain is a Religious Country

Having said all about the secularization of Britain, explicit in the decline of Church membership and people’s distancing from the practice of religious rituals in life cycle, it is not out of place to say that many symptoms and indicators still depict the ‘survivability’ of Christianity in England. Religious pluralism and the coming of Eastern religions discourage one to proclaim the loosing significance of belief in social life of people. It is also true of Christian’s parts of Christendom who are settled here especially from Africa. Even the debate on the ‘dynamics of implicit religion’ is opening new avenues to sense the existence of religion in British culture. Lewis Christopher writes that Edward Bailey, one of the main conceiver of the idea of implicit religion, in his article “Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society”, 1997 and the book *Implicit Religion: An Introduction* 1998 refers to ‘implicit religion’ as those aspects of ordinary life, which seem to contain an inherently religious element within them, whether or not they are expressed in ways that are traditionally described as ‘religious’. Bailey defines it in three ways, as ‘commitment’; ‘integrating foci’; and ‘intensive concerns with extensive effects’ (Bailey E. 2005). Similarly Grace Davie pleads that “religion is

not only attendance and membership of a church but there is, however, another way of looking at things. If we widen the definition of religion to include the questions about the meaning of life, the purpose of mankind's existence, the future of the planet and a human being's responsibilities to his fellow human being and to the earth itself, we may find a very different pattern of religious behavior among the young. The evidence remains largely impressionistic but it seems likely that the 18-24 age-group may respond to these profound ecological, moral, ethical (and surely religious) issues much more positively than they do to traditional religious instruction. Bearing this in mind, we might suggest the following rather tentative conclusion: religion and religious values are not so much disappearing among young people as being redirected. This redirection is, nonetheless, altering (very profoundly) the relationship between popular belief and the institutional churches that is - surely - the relationship between believing and belonging. And it characterizes what might be termed the 'implicit religion' of British people in the last decades of the 20th century" (Davie G. 1990).

Talal Asad's enquiry looks to be revealing raising the question as to whether anthropology as such contributes anything to the clarification of questions about secularism. He explains that, "most anthropologists are taught that their discipline is essentially defined by research technique (participant observation) carried out in a circumscribed field, and that as such it deals with particularly - with what Clifford Geertz, following the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, called 'thick description'" (Asad T. 2003:16). Clifford Geertz states that, "in anthropology, what the practioners do is ethnography. The actual nature of ethnography is to do 'thick descriptions' that can be said to provide context and meaning to observed actions, rather than simply recording the occurrence of an event in isolation. It is more about recording the *story of* a fact, rather than the fact itself. It is the kind of intellectual effort, an elaborate venture in 'thick description' of culture. Culture is a self-contained 'super-organic' reality with forces and purposes of its own; that is, to reify it" (Geertz C. 1973: 5-11). Referring to Ward Goodenough, Geertz writes that Culture (is located) in the minds and hearts of men (Ibid). Akin to that Norman Denzin perceives 'thick description' consisting of four features: first the 'thick description' gives the context of an act; second, states the intentions and meanings that organizes the action; third, traces the evolution and development of the act and fourth, presents the action as a text that can then be interpreted. A 'thin description' however, simply reports facts, independent of intentions or the circumstances that surround an action (1989). In his article, "Religion as a Cultural System", Clifford Geertz defines religion, "as (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz C. 1973: 90).

It is not arguable that human to human relationship is no more normative but is based on commercial terms due to "the depersonalization of urban life as an

anonymous shape of secular city in the West” (Cox H.: 1990: 34-43). Similarly, human being generally has manipulated nature to the extent of its misuse and has made it an impending threat for his own life and the life of the globe by disrupting the ozone layer. But can it be refuted that Jesus is still automatically rather intrinsically uttered by common Christian on the moments of fear and urgency? “So also is the Cross, talked about, visualized, shaped worriedly in air or fondly fingered at the neck. They are symbolic or at least symbolic elements, because they are tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings or beliefs” (Geertz C.: 1973:91). Besides the fact, all the religious rituals practised in significant events of life cycle are no more commonly being witnessed in British society but funerals and burials are a different story. Blacks, Irish, Catholics predominantly and Anglicans mostly if not all of them, are very particular to have religious service on death. It is burial or cremation something from the religion either reciting from the Bible, or hymns, or prayer by the minister/priest are usually essential part of the ceremony. This is perhaps the deepest rooted religious element in the social fabric of the society. Religion in Victorian Britain was so significant that England’s most famous agnostic, Charles Darwin, was given a Christian burial in the Westminster Abbey (McLeod H. 2000:262). Are these modes and motivations not looking askance on the survivability of religion in the lives of ordinary English people? In Britain, there is total separation in politics and religion; and it is the fact that laws are not made under religious injunctions but is the permanent membership of 14 Anglican Bishops in the House of Lords not enough to conceive a symbolic significance of national religious disposition? The very presence of blasphemy law in the constitution, although only for the protection of the Anglican Church, not sufficient to pronounce official position of the religiousness of the state and society? The recent Royal Wedding of Prince William held on April 29, 2011, explicitly speaks for the religiosity of the ceremony. Enormous part of the time of the ceremony consumed by Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London in their sermons and prayers signify the remains of religion in royal life events. Last but not least, although they are becoming gradually nonfunctional for religious service but buildings of 47,000 Churches⁷ on the landscape of Britain portrait the irrefutable legacy of religious historicity.

Another element of religious survivability is found in the general reading habits of people. If someone visits a big book store in the city centre (down town), he can easily find that the section of books on religion i.e. Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism or Islam displays a few books as compare to the books on ‘Mind, Body and Spirit’. Book Stores are not missions to sell religion. They sell what is read by their customers, the demand of the readers. Particularly books on magic, superstitions and spirituality are on sale in abundance. Similarly a page on horoscope is one of the most favorite readable items in each and every newspaper. People find their destiny in stars. Is it not the human quest to depend on something

beyond; a supernatural phenomenon, an ultimate reality? The fact of the matter is that people still do believe in God “even the ordinary one” (Davie G. 1994:1). The non-institutional dimensions of religiosity have emerged in a number of terms; privatized religion, invisible religion, implicit religion, popular religion, common religion, customary religion, folk religion, civic or civil religion to support the argument of the positivity of religion in Britain (Ibid). And it establishes the fact that God has not really been completely divorced from life and religious thinking certainly is not dead amongst British people in the true sense.

Can Pakistan be Secular a State?

As discussed above, the empirical and historical underpinnings of British secularity and theological reasons of religiosity provide an interesting logical framework to examine the possibility of Pakistan’s secularity. We take these dimensions to explore the question of Pakistan becoming a secular country. Our reference and understanding for secularity will be ‘death of god’ and ‘insignificance of religious thinking’ in socio-cultural context as well as the question of man’s authority in religious matters.

Historical Dimension

Pakistan is a non-developed country. She has not witnessed the phases of Modernity or Postmodernity. There had never been an Industrial Revolution. Enlightenment is an alien phenomenon for Pakistani society. As to the question of the prevalence of liberalism, the phenomenon of Human Rights and its practical recognition is still a dream for the people. Democracy is practised in its muddled form. People are asked to just cast their vote, and this ratio of casting vote had never been more than around 30%, but the results had never been fair and free due to the interventions of national and international stakeholders in the geo-strategic location of the state. People are not aware of their rights and they are kept ignorant of it. There had never emerged an indigenous national zeal and movement to have freedom in its true sense. Majority is still living in the clutches of landlords, Pirs and Moulvis. History teaches that freedom is not usually freely granted but it is snatched from all kinds of those in power. A state of antithesis is mandatory to grab it. Asian people and society have never gone through the struggle that is the salient feature of Western civilization, i.e. French Revolution. As Asians have not experienced it so they have not found their identity, their freedom to speak boldly, to question authorities, to criticize religions. Human beings disenchant when they disobey and rebel. Western history of renaissance, reformation and enlightenment is the story of gradual human liberty. Pakistanis do have their history; the history of Mughal monarchs, British colonialism, Martial Laws and corrupt democracies. All the phases are full of virtual oppression and people have not been exposed to

the atmosphere of real freedom in thinking and action. Is it not fantasy to demand people to challenge religion if they cannot stand against the local landlord for their just share in the yields? It is too far to think of from an almost 70% of illiterate people of Pakistan to dream of a British socio-political structure where no one is above the law and even the Prime Minister is interrogated on his questionable deeds.

Empirical Realities

Western states and particularly Britain is a welfare state *par excellence*. The government is responsible to provide basic needs to their citizens' i.e. health, education and housing. Can it be compared to the socio-political milieu of Pakistan where there is only the chanting of the slogan of *Roti, Kapra and Makan* (Bread, Clothing and Housing) since decades? Almost 32% of Pakistani's live below the poverty line⁸. Hunger has made people to commit suicide. Poverty and economic hardship are the chief causes of the increasing number of suicide cases in Pakistan as 222 people committed suicide in 2006 compared to 167 in 2005, according to official figures⁹. If it happens in one year it means almost every day a Pakistani kills himself due to hunger/poverty. It cannot be refuted that Governments of Pakistan have been allocating not more than 2% for the health and education in the annual budgets of the state. This year (2011-2012) out of the proposed 2.767 Trillion rupees annual budget, only 40 Billion rupees have been allocated for health and education¹⁰. It cannot be compared to the 40% committed of the total annual expenditure of England's allocation on health (18%) and education (12%) out of 702 Billion Pound Sterling by UK Central Government in 2012¹¹. Although the UK government has recently increased tuition fee in universities, elementary education is still free for every child. The point here to ponder upon is a secular scenario in Pakistan to make it 'consistent with the spirit of the age' like Britain. Not the Britain, but the heinous crimes committed by secular regimes in the Muslim world can be quoted as a contextual reference here. "When General Ali Haider of Syria, under the orders of secular president Hafiz al-Asad, massacred 30,000 to 40,000 civilians in the rebellious town of Hama in 1982 he did not invoke the Quran – nor did the secularist Saddam Hussain when he gassed thousands of Kurds and butchered the Shi'a population in Southern Iraq. Ariel Sharon in his indiscriminate killing and terrorizing of Palestinian civilians did not – so far as in publicly known – invoke passage of the Torah, such as Jashua's destruction of every living thing in Jericho". (Talal .A. 2003:10) The persecution of Christians in Pakistan stated in earlier pages of this article in the disguise of Blasphemy Laws are not the only reason of socio-economic and political backwardness of Pakistan. The point here to ponder upon is a secular scenario in Pakistan to make it 'consistent with the spirit of the age' (Rehman I.A. 1998: 196) like Britain. It is logical to consider that will only the revoking of Zia regime's amendments bring the desired change instantly? Is the secularism only

answer and viable solution? Does it not need total revisiting the society and bringing a revolution of thinking at the top and socio-economic change at the grass root level?

Theological Aspect

Islam is religion of 97% people of Pakistan. Islam is a monolithic religion. Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a human being¹² and was not the part of God like Jesus being part of the Trinity. He was not divine. Rightly guided Caliphs, from Abu Bakr to Ali were successors of Muhammad (pbuh) in the socio-political sense. They were not infallible and did not exercise the authority to hear confession and grant expiation to people from their sins. There is no papacy in Islam. Divine authority is not a shared phenomenon in Islam like in the Christianity. Naquib Al-Attas narrating the nature of authority in Islam states, "Islam indeed desacrilized politics, but not to the extent they mean, for Islam itself is based on Divine Authority and on the sacred authority of the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace), which is no less than the reflection of God's Authority, and on the authority of those who emulate his example. Thus every Muslim individually, and collectively as a society and nation as a Community (*ummah*) all deny to anyone, to any government and state, sacral legitimacy unless the person or the government or the state conforms with the practice of the Holy Prophet (may God bless and give him Peace) and follow the injunctions of the Sacred Law revealed by God. Indeed, the Muslim in fact does not owe real allegiance and loyalty even to legitimate king and country and state; his real allegiance and fealty and loyalty is to God and to His Prophet to the exclusion of all else" (Attas N. 1993: 32). The history of Islam has no chapter of Protestantism. Resultantly there is no secularism in Islam. There is no division of religion and state in *din al-Islam* (Ibid). Islam is ideally always relevant in every sphere of the follower's life. Islam is a complete code of life and its ubiquity is reflected in the model Madinian state established by the Prophet of Islam and carried out by earlier four Caliphs till 661AD. The Quran and traditions of the Prophet are the primary criteria for seeking guidance in all the affairs of life for every Muslim. Earlier jurists of Islam i.e., Malik, Ja'afar, Ibn Hanbal, Abu Hanifa and Shafa'i, by interpreting the teachings of the Quran and the Traditions have provided a viable blueprint - *Fiqh* and *Shariah* - for Muslims to act upon and bear a religious life. It does not mean that Islam is only what was perceived and interpreted twelve to ten centuries earlier. Scholars of Islam are obliged to do *Ijtihad*¹³ keeping Islam a universal religion viable beyond time and space. *Ijtihad* is a continuing practice; a qualified believer can do it for the welfare of the whole community of the believers. It has been enjoined on Muslim scholars by the Prophet to resolve everyday problems of Muslims by doing a sincere effort of *Ijtihad*. A scholar/jurist arriving at a wrong conclusion is even rewarded¹⁴. There can be difference of opinion of different Muslim scholars on a specific matter but the verdict of

majority will prevail on the issue. This rule is named *Ijma* – the consensus. All the scholars do not go beyond vividly declared limits of the principles of *Shariah*. This limitation clearly restricts it in the bounds of Islam and does not make it ‘desacralized’ as Harvey Cox discussed about the Judeo –Christian teachings. Then, there is not a permanently designated ‘Council’ or a specific clergy to decide on religious matters. A qualified scholar/jurist of Islam living in any part of the world, Muslim or non-Muslim country is religiously obliged to do *Ijtihad* and then it is not necessary for all Muslims to accept it. This is evident in the decisions of the ‘*Fiqh Academy of India*’ and devising *Fiqh* for Muslims living in minority by Taha Jabir Al-Alwani and other scholars of Islam. In this way the verdicts of the Muslim scholars do not occupy a divine status like the decisions of the Pope in the Vatican – The Holy See. It substantiates that the ultimate authority is divine not human in Islam.

In a nutshell, there is no room of discovering any iota of inherent secularism in the teachings and history of Islam so there is least chance of germinating of the seeds of secularism albeit the fact, any Muslim country had gone through same historical experience of Europe. Turkey has so far been an exception but it looks like the future shall spell that contemporary conscious efforts of de-secularization by the present regime is emerging as a popular sentiment. Although it is not a declared policy of the government the Islamic background of the ruling Justice and Development Party is above board. Its third victory in recent elections of 12 June 2011 portrays the trend of about 43 Million voters of Turkey. Almost 50% of the voters cast their votes for the party where the total turn out of the votes was 86.7% in the elections¹⁵. Pakistan is clearly disqualified for Secularism from all of the deliberated aspects. Religion is the elementary identity of each and every citizen. It is almost impossible to find ten to twenty people claiming not to be Muslim in the 97 % Muslims of about 180 Million people. The very title of the state as an ‘Islamic Republic’ is first to Islamic Republic of Iran. The Constitution does not allow National or Provincial Assemblies to legislate contrary to the injunctions of Islamic *Shariah* or courts to decide against it as the *Preamble* of the constitution clearly forbids doing it. The Council of Islamic Ideology, a constitutional advisory body plays a big role in the legislative process. Besides all such legal bindings, the general temperament and psychological makeup of a Pakistani is of a believer. Religious educational institutions in Pakistan are major manufacturers of the popular Islamic culture of the society. The number of Madrassas in Pakistan according to the 2008 estimate was over 40,000¹⁶. These institutions working at the grass root level are torch bearers of religiosity of the state. Belief is so much deep rooted that one can easily present even one’s own life in sacrifice for Islam. It is reflected in the death of hundreds of people in the *Nizam - e - Mustafa Movement* in 1977. It was a political campaign against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then Prime Minister. People participated in demonstrations throughout the country to oust the government. These political demonstrations soon became violent and the death toll on the first day, April 9, 1977 only in Lahore was claimed to be 8 –

37 and 5 in Karachi¹⁷. Opposing political parties smartly named it a movement for the restoration of the Islamic System because they knew that such a popular leader ever produced in Pakistan can only be replaced on the slogan of Islam. Recent phenomenon of suicide bombing is another illustration of the depth of religiosity. People blow themselves to kill so-called infidels, agents of the enemies of Islam to reach directly to Heaven as they are taught. Statistics show that 20150 persons have killed themselves through suicide attacks in only eight years from 2003 to Feb. 2011¹⁸. A good proportion of them are likely to be Pakistani. So looking from historical, theological and empirical perspective, it is hard to profess the secularization of the society and state of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The above comparison between post-Christian Britain and Muslim Pakistan can genuinely lead to a pertinent fact. It is about the practical applicability of both the religions in human life. Muhammad (pbuh) lived a complete life and actualized Islam in the state and society of Medina. His legacy was truly continued by his earlier four caliphs till 40 A.H. Islam manifested in each and every aspect of individual and community. That is why Islam is not called a religion but *Din*. *Din* literally means a way of life – a complete code of life. Comparatively Jesus lived only for around thirty years. He was a perfect model for individual spiritual excellence but one can hardly find his teachings as guide to other spheres of life. If secularism entered into the body of Christianity and earlier theologians were influenced from Greek thought, they seem not to be in genuine and blameworthy but the question is why the Muslims gave up the ideal to follow. Historically speaking Muslim world has lost the tract clearly paved for her. The institution of Caliphate changed into monarchism¹⁹ that is still prevalent in number of Muslim countries and the remaining live under military regimes or pseudo democracies. In economic terms dominant majority of Muslim individuals and states including Pakistan are openly warring against Allah (swt) by dealing in financial system based on *Riba* (usury) as interest is meant waging war against God according to the Quran²⁰. The dilemma of Pakistan is professing one thing else and acting upon entirely something else. There seems to be some evidence of secularist values in Pakistan where teachings of Islam have been shunned and life has become pragmatic to the extent of disappearance of religion. One can cite examples from some aspects of the financial operations within the country and general social values of top political personnel. Incidentally same was professed by the prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He was known to have said that pure Islamic polity will remain prevalent only thirty years after him²¹. The other fact in the history of Islam is emerging revival movements, almost in each and every century to reconnect Muslim community to the early forty years of Islam in intellectual and practical way. All these efforts of revivalists bore fruit and made Muslims never to rebel against Islam and disgrace the name of the Prophet and the Quran as it is commonly seen in western world. The situation, if on the one hand can be stated of a weak religiosity but not the death of Islam among Muslims of Pakistan, on the

other hands, it leads to explore the revival movements in Christianity and their role to keep Christians religious as Muslims are and if not why ?

I conclude on the meaningful illustration of secularism by Eric S. Waterhouse. He wrote, "Secular knowledge is founded upon the experience of life and can be maintained and tested by reason at work in experience. It deals with the known world interpreted by experience and neither offers nor forbids any opinion regarding another life. Neither theism nor atheism enters into the secular scheme because it is provable by experience. In so far as Christianity is moral, secularism has common ground with it, but it offers a basis for morality wholly independent of Christian belief. The attempt to ignore rather than deny religion is impractical, because religion embraces both secular and spiritual concerns. Religion denies the secular conception of life, and that conception cannot establish itself without defeating the claim of religion to control life. It is an impossible proposition to maintain that there may be a God, but that He does not concern material existence. It is for this reason that a secularism which does not include a definitely anti-religious theory is bound to fail. That is why it does not seem apparent that secularism is destined to survive as a theory of life and conduct, and it must be regarded as a movement arising out of, and passing with, the conditions of its time. Whilst its ethical aims were honorable, it lacked an adequate basis upon which to establish itself as a permanent feature of human thought" (1908).

Notes

1. *Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates*, vol 5, 1949, 1-7
2. "A Martyr for Religious Liberty", *The Times*, Thursday March 3, 2011
3. The Federal Cabinet approved the *Huduud Ordinance* for amendments on August 2nd 2006
4. Usmani, Muhammad Taqi, "Islamization of Laws in Pakistan: The Case of *Huduud* Ordinances", accessed on July 27, 2011, <http://www.muftitaqiusmani.com/images/stories/downloads/pdf/hudoodordinances.pdf>,
5. Accessed on July 27, 2011, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>, National Statistics Online – Religion,
6. Locke: III, 190
7. Gledhill, Ruth, "Thousands of Churches face closure in Ten Years", accessed on July 27, 2011, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article1362709.ece>
8. Accessed on July 27, 2011, <http://charitable-giving.org/poverty-line/below-the-poverty-line.htm>
9. "Poverty behind increasing suicide cases in country". *Daily Time* dated. February 19, 2007. accessed on July 27, 2011, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5C02%5C19%5Cstory_19-2-2007_pg7_7
10. *Pakistan Budget 2011-2012: Health Care 'Criminology Ignored'*, *South Punjab News*, accessed on July 27,

- 2011, <http://southpunjabnews.blogspot.com/2011/06/pakistan-budget-2011-12-health-sector.html>,
11. <http://www.ukpublicspending.co.uk/> 27 July 2011
 12. *Al-Quran*, 6: 8-9 and 17: 94-5
 13. See for details on Ijtihad and *Ijma* Ahmad Hassan. *The Early Development of Islamic Jurisprudence* Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, nd
 14. *Sahih al Bukhari, Kitab al-Aitiam bil-Kitab wa al-Sunnah*, Hadith no: 6919
 15. *Opinion Polling for Turkish General Elections*, accessed on July 27, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_general_election,_2011,
 16. *The News International*, 25-9-2008
 17. "Rise and Fall of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan", San Jose State University, accessed on July 27, 2011, <http://www.applet-magic.com/bhutto.htm>,
 18. *Pakistan Assessment 2011*, accessed on July 27, 2011, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/>
 19. See Mawdudi, Abu al-A'ala, *Khilafat-o-Malukiat*, Lahore: Idara Tarjaman al-Quran, 2006 for details.
 20. 2/180
 21. *Masnad al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, Hadith no 21928, (Beruit: Moasasah al-Risala, 1999), pp: 36 & 256

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