

Postsecular Dynamics in South Asia

Ziaul Haque Sheikh

Ph.D. Fellow, Department of International Relations, South Asian University, New Delhi

Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic History and Culture, Jagannath University, Dhaka

Despite ongoing debate and growing interest in the binary relationship between religion and secularism in upholding state identity and framing the constitution around the world, the comparative and theoretical study of settling religious issues in constitution making and state building in South Asia have remained surprisingly limited, with even secularists' scholars in South Asia tending to be somewhat reluctant about this rather unappealing subject. This intellectual skepticism about secularism is not confined to those actively engaged in politics. Indeed, eloquent expressions of this skepticism can also be found in the high theory of South Asian culture and Society (Sen, Amartya: 294). In South Asia, left oriented intellectuals, political parties and leaders focus on the normative aspects of the religion-state relationship on the basis of western secular literature, defining secularism from western perspectives as a complete absence or equal-distance from all religion. This means that the process by which religious institutions, actions will be separated from any sort of state patronage, but this group seldom has influence in state power structure except Nepal and partly in Bangladesh and India. Right oriented political leaders view secularization as a process by which the state gradually becomes atheist. They strongly oppose secularization by saying that religions have a deep-rooted influence on South Asian society. Their arguments are that according to the theory of secularization, religious institutions, practices and consciousness generally lose their social significance, but South Asian religious institutions and practices have been more influential in national politics for the centuries. These groups are dominant in Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Maldives and partly in Sri Lanka and Bhutan. Between these intellectual dichotomies, other scholars define secularism from a South Asian perspective. Their view is that South Asian secularization means religious tolerance by which all religions are equal before state patronage. They are moderate groups, whose position is based on two ideas: that secularization does not essentially lead to the declining of religious influence and that the increase in religious importance does not endanger the process of secularization. Jurgen Habermas, a German sociologist regards the third trend in the religion-state relationship as the reflection of post secular society termed postsecularism. Based on this background, this study will explore the postsecular dynamics in South Asia.

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