

Religious Resurgence and Its Complexities in the Face of a Secular Discourse in a Globalised World

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Abstract— Globalization since the 1980s has sparked extensive social science discourse, with religion at its core. Despite its economic focus, globalization has reshaped religion globally, breaking down barriers of nation, ethnicity, and creed through technological advances. Religion's resurgence challenges traditional views of modernity and secularization, advocating for societal restructuring based on religious principles. This global religious resurgence reflects its enduring relevance and adaptability. Understanding its dynamics within globalization demands a nuanced approach, acknowledging its implications for social, political, and economic development.

I. INTRODUCTION

- The role of Globalisation in the resurgence of religion

Globalization, as a process has evoked many a discussion in the social sciences since the 1980s. Religion has been considered as a driving factor in the process of globalization (Herrington, 2013). Much confusion however exists around the concept of globalization as unlike religion, globalization is a concept that is largely centred around an economic process. The United Nations for Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia describes globalization as an economic phenomenon responsible for reducing barriers to the flow of goods, capital services and the movement of labour (2003). Thomas Friedman, defines globalization as an international system driven by capitalism, free trade, the spread of technology and information, and the “inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before” (2000). Kevin H. O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson see globalization as “the integration of international commodity markets” (2002). However, according to Anthony McGrew, globalisation is the multiplicity of linkage and interconnection that transcends the nation state which make up for most of the modern world system. It refers

to “a process through which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe” (2000). The era of globalization brought about a transformation in the nature and role of religion, the world over. Globalization removed the barriers based on nation, ethnicity and religion through increased interactions of people, no longer cut short by time and space, through the advancements made by science and technology. As Manuel Castells had very aptly stated that “globalisation is not an ideology but rather an objective structuring process of the whole of the economy, societies, institutions and cultures” (2010: 90).

As much there has been an evidential resurgence of religion, there is no real agreement on when this resurgence actually occurred. It is assumed that the rise of the religious right in the US and the Iranian revolution of 1979 that led to religious conflicts that brought about this resurgence (Bill, 1982). Some scholars argue that religious resurgence can be traced back to even before the 1970s but gained momentum with the rise of Islamic nationalism in the Islamic world, Evangelical Protestantism in North and South America, Africa, and parts of East Asia and “engaged Buddhism” in Asia (Philpott, 2009: 190–191; Toft et al., 2011: 4–7). Philpott (2009: 190) argues that “if the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was the inaugural ball for the peak period of secularization, the [1967] Six Day War between Israel and Egypt signified the beginning of religion’s global resurgence . . . It both awakened religious conscience among Israeli Jews and crippled the prestige of secular nationalism among Arab Muslims.” The rise of the Hindu Nationalist parties in India in the 1980s-90s complemented these events that were taking place in the global scenario. As much as there is no agreement on the exact reasons and

a specific time to mark this religious resurgence, assuming that it had declined in the first place, it must be noted that religion is a potent social, political and economic factor that cannot be ignored and has had serious implications for the dominance of the secularization as well as the development of thought on religion and politics (Fox, pg. 23, 2013).

- Post cold war realities

At the end of the Second World War; from 1945 to 1989, the Iron Curtain restricted the flourishing of religion especially in countries that were under the hegemony of the Soviet Union. But the end of the Cold War ushered in a new unipolar world order based on essentially secular values of individual freedom, value-pluralism and liberal democratic capitalism (Lerman: 2009). It is largely perceived that religious identity in most parts of Europe holds minimal importance especially in matters of the state. Manuel Castells argues that many European intellectuals despised religious identity because they were ignorant that religion forms a fundamental identity in many parts of the world beginning with the USA (Castells: 2010). In fact many scholars in the 1960s and 1970s saw the forces of globalisation – urbanisation, modernisation, technological advancement, democratisation, would in turn be accompanied by secularisation. Unfortunately what was witnessed in pre-revolutionary Iran was quite the contrary. Globalisation of secularism became a chief source of anti-American and anti-Western sentiment (Herrington, 2013). The rise of religious fundamentalism was thus interpreted as an inevitable reaction against the triumphalist arrogance of the ‘Secular West’ (Pabst: 2009). Reza Aslan argues in his book *How to win a cosmic war* that jihadists such as those found in Al Qaeda are largely contending against one form of globalisation viz. Westernisation, although they are also the products of this phenomenon (2009).

- Rationale for Global Religious resurgence

Religion, a fundamental aspect of contemporary society has been affected by globalisation in multiple ways. As much as it was assumed that the influence of religion on an individual and societal level was on the decline, contrary to what was predicted, the resurgence of religion has been observed on the global scale. According to Peter Berger, adherence to religious

beliefs and practices have continued to persist in the global society which has further complicated the relation between religion and modernity (2001). He states that while most religious communities perceive modern ideas and values to be foreign and contrasting to what is prescribed in their religious texts, they have altered modern ideas and values to serve their own interest and purpose in order to survive and thrive in a secularised world (pg.,4).

The global resurgence of religion implies a revival of religious traditions opposed to secular ideals. Religious revivalism is not confined to any one particular religion but is driven by believers of many faiths – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and others, who through their specific beliefs, aim to restructure society on the basis of their respective belief and practice from an inerrant text. This resurgence is vehemently opposed to values and principles associated to a modern secular society. It also draws support from organised and at times militant groups that are characterised as radically different based on their defense of certain religious traditions that are not practiced by their mainstream religious counterparts. This form of resurgence has a tendency to create sharp boundaries that require other groups to either be with them or against them. At times, it works around charismatic and authoritarian leaders who enforce codes of conduct that cannot be broken or overlooked. Forms of extremism and violence are also seen as manifestations of this revivalism. Perpetuating religious prejudices will have long-lasting implications on modernisation, urbanisation, people’s participation, economic development and political stability.

Jonathan Fox (pg.15-17, 2013) states that while the arguments vary as to the causes of this resurgence on a global scale, he places them into five categories which are as follows:

First, the arguments of secularization theory identify real processes which, in fact, do undermine and threaten traditional religion. However, secularization theorists did not take into account the fact that religion is a dynamic social force that is capable of evolving. Under the pressure of modernity, this is exactly what has happened. Religion evolved and transformed in order to revitalize itself and remain socially and politically relevant. Much of the literature on religious

fundamentalism attributes the rise of religious fundamentalism to exactly this sort of process, depicting fundamentalism as a reaction against modernity. In fact, religious groups are adapting to modernity and using its tools to further their aims. Contemporary organizational, communication, and media tools succinctly capture this line of thinking by highlighting that religion's political impact has not only been rejuvenated but has, in fact, surged with the support, rather than the resistance, of the very forces that secularization theorists believed would lead to its decline: democracy and open discourse, advancements in communication technology, and the unparalleled movement of people, ideas, and commerce worldwide. Secondly, according to Fox, secular modernity has failed, especially in the developing world where Governments espoused secular ideologies but have failed to produce economic prosperity and social justice. These secular ideologies, and the governments founded upon them, are also perceived as foreign, illegitimate, corrupt, and perhaps the continuation of colonialism by proxy. This crisis of legitimacy has created a power vacuum that religion is filling. It is perceived as legitimate, uncorrupted, and indigenous. Secular ideologies emerged with the aim of supplanting religion by assuming the social functions traditionally fulfilled by religious institutions.

Thirdly, Fox states that secularisation has always been an elite-based process that never was fully accepted by the general population. As individuals gained greater political significance, they actively advocated for the reintegration of religion into the public sphere.

Fourthly, Samuel Huntington's highly controversial theory about the clash of the civilizations had stated that religion became a paradigm changing international force by the end of the Cold War. The Cold War had brought about a clash between secular Western ideologies by the post-Cold war became the basis for international conflict and politics primarily because of religion.

Fifthly, religion was never completely obliterated. It has always been a potent political and social force. The secularization theory evolved into an ideology that obscured academics from recognizing the actual ground realities of emerging trends. Religion, like every other social institution has undergone changes

and over a time has evolved meeting the challenges it continues to face. Various parts of the religious economy decline while others emerged stronger and more influential.

Size and Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups

	2010 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2010	PROJECTED 2050 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2050	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2050
Christians	2,168,330,000	31.4%	2,918,070,000	31.4%	749,740,000
Muslims	1,599,700,000	23.2	2,761,480,000	29.7	1,161,780,000
Unaffiliated	1,131,150,000	16.4	1,230,340,000	13.2	99,190,000
Hindus	1,032,210,000	15.0	1,384,360,000	14.9	352,140,000
Buddhists	487,760,000	7.1	486,270,000	5.2	-1,490,000
Folk Religions	404,690,000	5.9	449,140,000	4.8	44,450,000
Other Religions	58,150,000	0.8	61,450,000	0.7	3,300,000
Jews	13,860,000	0.2	16,090,000	0.2	2,230,000
World total	6,895,850,000	100.0	9,307,190,000	100.0	2,411,340,000

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050
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While religion is seen as a unifying factor in society, what is increasingly palpable is the contentious role it assumes especially in shaping ideologies, influencing public policy, enforcing norms and even resorting to militancy in order to supersede other institutions that hold society and state together. In Protestant Christianity, for instance the rise of Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism in the United States (Martin, 1999) essentially reject teachings that are seen as contradictory to the Bible and advocate a patriarchal society. These conservative religious movements are seen to be on the rise even in other world religions such as Hinduism and Islam. In a world that embraces different "truths" and where people are obligated to live with each other in mutual respect and harmony, the belligerent and aggressive insistence on one religion's ultimate truth being superior than the other is rightly perceived to be problematic. According to Berger, conservative religious movements will find it hard to maintain their present religious attitude towards modernity without changing strategies (2001).

This form and practice of religion is perceived as extremism and pejoratively termed as fundamentalism which works as a deterrent to modernity. And while religious extremism is antagonistic to modernity, some societies perceive modernity as a domination of Western political, economic and cultural ideas in order to disrupt the existing traditional social fabric.

According to Rajeev Bhargava, liberal democratisation and secularisation of many European

states has helped citizens irrespective of their religious belief to acquire most of their civil and political rights. However, such a scheme of rights neither embodies a regime of inter-religious equality nor does it effectively prevent discrimination and exclusion based on religion, as it serves to mask majoritarian, ethno-religious biases (Bhargava: 2011).

As much as scholars are uncomfortable with this strange relationship, religion and globalization at most times have worked in tandem. Religion and globalization share a paradoxical and yet a mutually enforcing relationship (Herrington, 2013). With the onset of globalization in a modernized and secularized state, the power and presence exercised by religion was believed to experience an inexorable decline. Instead, what is being observed is the global resurgence of religion. And while globalization is believed to have produced many a negative outcome in terms of economic oppression and devaluation and homogenization of prevalent cultures, theologically oriented believers believe that religions can provide for the creation of a positive global ethic. Hans Küng's Global Ethic Project points to general features of how those contributions to the globalization debate that do not ignore religion have sought to understand its role in the process: as an important dimension of globalization that exhibits the characteristic dynamic tension between global and local, between homogeneity and heterogeneity, between the universal and the particular (Küng, Hans, 1998).

In conclusion, scholars attribute globalisation to be the main cause for the vehement resurgence of religion. And this resurgence in religion is also perceived as an urban phenomenon as it has attracted people from all walks of life, breaking all barriers of class and education but are overwhelmingly those who have been residents of urban areas (AlSayyad, 2011). It is seen as a phenomenon that invokes beliefs and practices to resist the *evils* of modernisation in the globalised and post-industrial world while at the same time does not reject modernity in its entirety especially that related to technology, making full use of its benefits in spreading its power and control over people.

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