# Secularism: An Option for Pakistan

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Introduction

Religious Extremism and Exclusivity are on the rise in Pakistan. Religion triggered violence has claimed over three thousands lives in the last two decades and disrupted thousands more and continues to haunt the lives of people in Pakistan (see the table no.1) Religious minorities have become a threatened entity. This phenomenon is not limited to Non-Muslim religious entities like Hindus, Christians, Ahmedis and others which only constitute about three percent of the population. It also impacts Shia'ites who are targeted and killed on a regular basis and make up about 20 percent of the population. Even within the majority Sunni Sect (77 Percent) there are several sub sects who follow different methodologies and practices and consider others deficient and flawed (see the chart below). Religious occasions and festivals like *Muhram* and *Rabi-ul-Awal* and even the *Eids* are marred by violence or threats of violence. Religion in Pakistan has become a source of conflict and insecurity. May be it is time to reevaluate the role of religion in the lives of the citizens of Pakistan and its hold on the apparatus of the state.
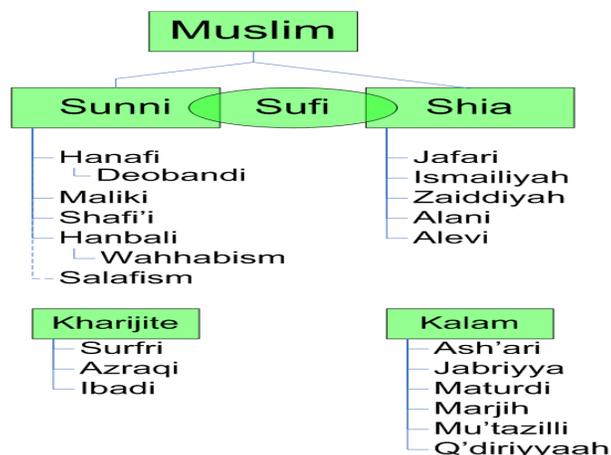
Source: http://www.infobarrel.com/Islam (Last accessed on Nov. 25, 2010)

Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: 1989-2010

Prior to 1980 there was a tendency to down play the force of religion in politics. It proved counter-productive especially because the sweeping political changes of 1980, witnesses most states of the world succumbing to calls of so far sub-merged identities. This consciousness is present in New Europe, Central Asian States the Middle East, Southeast Asia and now even on the continents of America and Australia.[1] This also impacted South Asia with a new vigor, a greater upsurge of regional religions was seen. The number of religious organizations had increased, religious practices have become more pronounced, extremism and intolerance are on the rise and the use of religious card for political game a pronounced South Asian reality. The alternatives to state whether political, social or legal have religious under tones. The spread and growth of these alternatives is a source of conflict both at the state level and societal level. These minority lobbies have become so powerful that they hold the silent majority hostage.

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[1] Eric Margolis, "India's powder keg ready", *The Ottawa Sun* reprinted in *The Muslim* (Islamabad), 6 January 1993.

Year	Incidents	Killed	Injured
1989	67	18	102
1990	274	32	328
1991	180	47	263
1992	135	58	261
1993	90	39	247
1994	162	73	326
1995	88	59	189
1996	80	86	168
1997	103	193	219
1998	188	157	231
1999	103	86	189
2000	109	149	NA
2001	154	261	495
2002	63	121	257
2003	22	102	103
2004	19	187	619
2005	62	160	354
2006	38	201	349
2007	341	441	630
2008	97	306	505
2009	106	190	398
2010*	50	458	1087
Total	2531	3424	7320

Table # 01. Source: Figures are compiled from news reports and are provisional
http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/sect-killing.htm
(Last Accessed on December 8, 2010)

Religion remains an important component of the constitution of Pakistan by the virtue of the objective resolution passed in 1949 and resulted in the omission of the word *freely* from the preamble of the constitution in the context of practicing religion, which became the basis for intolerance and religio-political violence. However the real damage was done by the General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization in the 80's which had a distinct tilt towards *Wahibi*sm (Dominant Sunni sub-Sect). General Zia's Nizam-e-Mustafa (Islamic System) was a 180-degree turn from Pakistan's predominantly Common Law. It included ordinances like Hudood and the Blasphemy Law. These laws to this day are controversial and under fire by human rights organizations all over the world and have been questioned by Liberals and Moderates in Pakistan as well. The US Assistant Secretary of state, Robin Raphel, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations sub-committee, on March 7, 1996, said that the United States recognize that the religious parties in Pakistan have "street power" and not "ballot power".[2] This is further strengthened by the fact that 18th amendment to the constitution passed by a democratically elected liberal government basically aimed at rectifying anomalies of the constitution and restoring it to the 1973 form did not touched any laws on women and blasphemy because it feared public backlash triggered by the opposition mounted by the religious rightist parties and lobbies. The association between conflict and religion is now a global reality. The use of religion for political capital gains, for consolidation of power and perpetuation of structural violence is becoming part of our new global reality. In regions like South Asia its even more profound. It does not allow the region to progress towards integration or even modernization. The extremist tendencies and intolerance is actually threatening the existence of countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan and challenging the norms and values of democracy in countries like India and Sri Lanka.

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[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zia-ul-Haq%27s_Islamization (Last Accessed on December 07, 2010)

Roots of Sectarianism

The domestic and internal security threats come to the fore mainly in the name of sectarianism, which acts as the first step towards religious extremism and exclusivity. The present wave of sectarian violence in Pakistan can be traced back to the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and rising Shiites influence in the region leading to Iranian-Saudi rivalry spreading in the Gulf region and also unfolding on Pakistan's land. The war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan further aggravated the situation in Pakistan. A large number of Islamist groups and Madrassahs popped up inside Pakistan with the basic aim to produce recruits for the "Jihad" funded by Saudi Arabia with the United States blessing. The government of Pakistan at that time failed to realize the consequences of this trend. In fact it encouraged it, again seeing them as supportive of their aim in Afghanistan and Kashmir.The disenfranchisement of Ahmedis and criminalization of their religious practices can be seen as an attempt to commit Pakistan to an exclusive religious identity. It meant that only a Muslim is entitled to full rights of Pakistani citizenship. The implementation of Sunni taxes and purging the curriculum of text books in the Zia era can also be seen as an attempt to carve a narrower definition of a Muslim, and thus a Pakistani. These developments did not sit well with the Shia'ites minority in Pakistan which looks towards Iran for leadership. This insecurity on part of minorities gives rise to militancy and counter militancy. As of today sectarian militancy is a commonplace practice in the Pakistani society. As enrollment to these Madrassahs—headed by clerics— increased because of their charitable façade, the clout of their administrators also increased manifold. Once the teachers became leaders of the society, the element of money and arms also got involved. Hence with the power of the barrel and dominance of the psyche of the masses in the name of the religion few could hold on to sanity. This trend also allowed external forces to interact with the locals at the grassroots level. As a result, various acts of sectarian violence—caused by both the external and internal influences—increased noticeably. Each act of sectarian killing provoked a cycle of revenge killings and the civilian governments failed to curb this menace. And their failure in turn allowed the religious militants to flourish and grow in strength.

The international events and globalization also contribute to religious extremism is South Asia. The naked aggression and unilateralism practiced by the only super power in the world, especially against the Muslims, has reinforced the concept of the clash of civilizations. There is a conceptual shift in the definition of sovereignty. The powerful are coercing sovereign states to tailor domestic policies to conform to their ideals of freedom, economic liberalism, tolerance, and democracy. Those who do not comply, face the threats of sanctions, engineered regime change, social upheavals, and even naked aggression in the form of invasions and drone attacks all in the name of the American neo cons doctrine of freedom and democracy, and the anticipated right to self-defense. This has further strengthened the hands of the rightist in South Asian societies where religious radicalism and Nationalism are becoming one, making it increasingly difficult for sitting governments to fight extremism. It also places the liberals on the back foot not being able to defend these acts of atrocities where killing women and children is called collateral damage. The West's lack of understanding of the ground realities and the trust and intellectual deficit that mars their relationship with these states and societies sabotage indigenous efforts towards curtailing extremist tendencies. This is applicable to the present situation in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Palestine and Syria. Development Modernization progress all are considered to be an agenda of the West. It has strengthened the stance of the Extremist Islamists and in the process and it has weakened the stance of the moderates.

What is the way forward?

The only way forward is to rethink and re-evaluate the role of religion in our lives and Politics. The selective use of religion by the power brokers of South Asia for vested interest and consolidation of power can only stop if the peoples of South Asia reject this. This will happen if out of the box thinking takes place. One dimension can be rethinking and reevaluate the concept of Secularism in South Asian context.

The term Secularism which is a 19th century import from Europe is under scrutiny. The European concept of Secularism states *"Secularism may assert the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, and the right to freedom from governmental imposition of religion upon the people within a state that is neutral on matters of belief. In another sense, it refers to the view that human activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be based on evidence and fact unbiased by religious influence"* [3]

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[3] Kosmin, Barry A. "Contemporary Secularity and Secularism." **Secularism & Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives**. Ed. Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar. Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture (ISSSC), 2007.

Barry Kosmin of the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture breaks modern secularism into two types: hard and soft secularism. According to Kosmin, "the hard secularist considers religious propositions to be epistemologically illegitimate, warranted by neither reason nor experience." However, in the view of soft secularism, "the attainment of absolute truth was impossible and therefore skepticism and tolerance should be the principle and overriding values in the discussion of science and religion.[4] In South Asia only soft secularism may become an option largely because Although India has adopted it through the 42nd amendment of the Indian Constitution in 1976[5]. It is under consistent threat and is flouted everyday with Muslims and Christians facing the wrath of Hindu extremists. This is largely because the Sanskrit word that is commonly used for "secularism" in India is dharmanirapekshata and which means "indifference towards religion" The usage itself denotes the understanding of secularism as more a policy of political practice than a philosophy in itself.

The other Sanskrit word that is used for it is dharmanirapekshavada where the suffix vada is the same as ism and denotes the philosophical aspect of secularism. However, the plurality of religions, religious pluralism (the view that all religions are equally valid), and cultural (and communal) concerns greatly influence the various ways in which secularism has developed and is looked at on in India. In India, secularism is more a subject of politics than of metaphysics or even values. The other philosophical viewpoint that can be confused with secularism is religious pluralism, or the view that all religions are valid ways of religious expression or salvation.

Even so, India recognizes laws based on religion. Hindus, Muslims, and Christians are governed by their own religious laws. Thus, India does not really fit into any text book definition of Secularism. It has, in fact, created its own brand of Secularism. Indeed, Supreme Court of India observed the same thing in the case of Aruna Roy vs. Union of India (SC AIR 2002), when it said Indian Secularism means "sarva dhrama samabhav" and not "sarva dharma abhav" (meaning, "equal feeling for all religions" and not "no feeling for any religion").[6] In Pakistan and Afghanistan the task is even more difficult for here the term is translated as Without Religion (La-Deeniat). Which gives the extremist all the place in the world to exploit it to their advantage. Mere mention of the word is considered blasphemous by some and does not allow any discussion or debate on the subject thus preventing alternative thinking.

The non western view of Secularism propagated

The non-western view of Secularism is what needs to be adopted in Pakistan which encompasses along with respect for the religion the concept of tolerance, co-existence and protection for religious minorities. This also coincides with the Jinnah's vision of Muslim majority secular state rather than theocratic state.[7] Moreover the results of all the free elections held in Pakistan prove beyond doubt peoples' commitment to a moderate state which encourages tolerance, non-violence pluralism and inclusivism.The secular sate here encourages tolerance, religious pluralism and religious co-existence not because of its neutrality on the matters of religious but rather because of assumed religious orientation towards truth, tolerance and reality. There are various movements towards Islamization especially in Pakistan with efforts directed towards introducing Sharia'ah (Islamic Law) as the law of the land. The lure for Sharia'ah and Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan has risen as an alternative political phenomenon. It has both local and international dimension as discussed earlier. It is a reactionary, non-scientific movement geared at returning society to fourteen Hundred years old social setups. It stands strengthen and has its roots in the backwardness of society social and economic deprivation and illiteracy and ignorance.

The innocent people are often convinced of its utility after being abandoned by the state and its corrupt apparatus. The rightists and religious political parties also use the lure of implementing Shari'ah to gain political capital. The only problem here is that as a nation we have no consensus over the interpretation of Shari'ah and the people need to be educated about this.

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4 Kosmin, Barry A. "Hard and soft secularists and hard and soft secularism: An intellectual and research challenge."

[5] http://www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/ct.htm (Last accessed on December 04, 2010)

[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularism_in_India (Last accessed on December 01, 2010)

[7] On Aug 11 1947, the future legislator was told: "the first duty of a government is to maintain law and order, so that the life property and religious beliefs of its subject are fully protected by the state". Six months after Jinnah died, in March 1949 Objective Resolution was brought in, which negated all he stood for. The Objective Resolution provide inter alia: where sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone and the authority which he has delegated to the state of Pakistan through its people for being exercised within the limits prescribed by him is a sacred trust. Wherein the principle of democracy, equality, tolerance and social justice are enunciated by Islam, shall be fully observed and the Muslims shall be enabled to order their life in the independent and collective sphere in accord, with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and *Sunnah* (Traditions of Holy Prophet P-B-U-H).

The promise of imposition of Islamic Laws actually gets translated into selective use of religion to impose traditions and believes which are not necessarily derived from Islam. It becomes a tool in the hands of hate mongers who believe that followers of a sect of Islam other than their own are worthy of death, indulging in orgies of death and destruction. The aim is their to impose their interpretation of Islam, their values and believe system. This in essence is fundamentalism, which assumes that my interpretation is the ultimate truth. The westerner like Richard Dawkins has used the term to characterize religious advocates as clinging to a stubborn, entrenched position that defies reasoned argument or contradictory evidence.[8] Others in turn, such as Christian theologian Alistair McGrath, have used the term fundamentalism to characterize atheism as dogmatic.[9] Islamic fundamentalism is similar to Christian fundamentalism in the United States, Orthodox Judaism in Israel, and Hindu fundamentalism in India, as all these fundamentalist groups see themselves as the only true defenders of God against secular modernism.

Fundamentalist ideas, religious or not, are dangerous because the people, who are in favor of them, do not want to submit themselves to human laws, because they think they only have to obey a higher force. The concept that people's behavior should be determined by a higher plan is a sort of slant towards transcendence, which is common to both the Vatican and the conservative Muslims, in spite of their enormous cultural and political differences. The focus is on surpassing people and making people submit to and thus subjugating the individual, and the primacy of humans and human laws.

South Asia is a region where people strongly believe in religion and it plays a defining role in their lives. It is nearly impossible for any political party or individual to be completely out of the influence of religion. However, a conscious effort has to be made to prevent the use of religion to further political ends. The real solution lies in the separation of state and religion. This would prevent the negative use of religion from controlling politics and religious sentiments from influencing relations between different communities. In order to maintain peace and cooperation in South Asia, it is desirable to rethink and reevaluate the concept of secularism. However to bring objectivity to the discussion it must be understood that moderates and anti secularists who reject exclusivist religious-nationalist development, do not see the alternative as a modern, westernized secular state. In their view, political-religious conflict involving intolerance and violence are also perpetuated by the so called modern secular national state. To them, religion per se is not a source of conflict but its politicization that trigger conflict. In the South Asian context, this is proven beyond doubt for both secular and non secular state has witnessed religion triggered conflicts and its politicization by the ruling elite. Therefore, the adoption of secular values alone will not resolve the religious chasm in the region. The approaches emphasized upon and applicable should include tolerance, non-violence, pluralism, and inclusivism. Secularism in Pakistan in spite of this ground reality does offer a chance to political viability through secular sharing of Power. In state of religious, ethnic derivations the only viable option for Pakistan is a secular form of government. It may sound like a tall order but, Support for strict separation between religion and government has grown steadily over the past five years according to the U.S survey. Majorities in 47 countries surveyed by the Washington based PEW institute for public opinion agree to religion and politics not to mix. Pakistanis who believed that religion and government should remain separate were only 33 percent of the population in 2002. Five years later the size grew to 48 per cent a 15 per cent increase.[10]

A lot of factors are responsible for this change of attitude in Pakistan. The media exposure of the tactics of the Tehreek Taliban of Pakistan (TTP) specially their attitude towards women and the security establishment of Pakistan contributed towards it. The tide turned after media footage of a 17-year old girl child's public flogging in Swat on April 02, 2009 of was flashed across the media and the spokesman of TTP Haji Muslim Khan confirmed that it happened and will do more of the same if need be. The security establishment of Pakistan has been consistently targeted by TTP in all the major cities of Pakistan including Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi in October 2009.

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[8] Dawkins, Richard (2006-10-02). *The God Delusion*. London: Bantam Press. ISBN 978-0593055489.

[9] Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), February 15, 2007, ISBN 978-0-281-05927-0

[10] Daily Dawn Karachi October 08, 2007

In 2007, 1,503 terrorist attacks and clashes, including suicide attacks, killings, and assassinations, resulted in 3,448 casualties and 5,353 injuries, according to the PIPS security report. These casualties figure 128% and 491% higher as compared with 2006 and 2005, respectively. The report states that Pakistan faced 60 suicide attacks (mostly targeted at security forces) during 2007, which killed at least 770, besides injuring another 1,574 people. [11] Post 2003 Pakistan became a victim of rising religious and nationalist fundamentalism and the resultant religion triggered vigorous the suicide bombing which had the support of 47 percent people of being a justified methodology of revenge in 2004 went down to 08 percent in 2010.[12] The rising number of civilian casualties and the total callousness of attitude on the striker's part became a contributing factor. It became apparent that the aim and objective was instilling fear among the masses and challenging the writ of the state anywhere and everywhere. Working against the interest and people of Pakistan and cloaking it under religion.

Table 2: Fatalities in Suicide Attacks: 2007- 2009

	Total Number of Suicide Attacks	Civilians	SFs	Militants	Total
2007	58	552	177	58	787
2008	59	712	140	65	917
2009	80	735	196	87	1018

Source: http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/

Table 3: Annual Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan, 2003- 2009

	Civilians	Security Forces (SFs)	Terrorists	Total
2003	140	24	25	189
2004	435	184	244	863
2005	430	81	137	648
2006	608	325	538	1471
2007	1523	597	1479	3599
2008	2155	654	3906	6715
2009	2307	1011	8267	11585
Total	7598	2876	14596	25070

Source: http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/

Support and liking for personalities like Osama Bin Laden, who is associated with these tactics and religious fundamentalism went down from 52 percent in 2005 to 18 percent in 2010. [13] However it should be completely understood that when people of Pakistan call for separation of government and religion they are actually giving a negative sanction to politicization of religion and its use for power brokerage. Pakistan like rest of South Asia remains a emotionally religious state looking for options that does not divorce religion but live with it in peace.

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[11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_terrorist_incidents_in_Pakistan_since_2001 (Last accessed on December 10, 2010)

[12] http://pewglobal.org/database/custom-analysis/?indicator=19 (Last accessed on December 08, 2010)

[13] http://pewglobal.org/database/?indicator=19&custom=166 (Last accessed on December 08, 2010)