Of State and secularism (Pakistan Observer)

Shams uz Zaman, Mr.
The term Secularism was first formally used by George Holyoake in his famous work “The Origin and Nature of Secularism”. It is not clear to what extent Ibn Rushd (Averroes, considered as to be the first proponent of modern secularism) influenced Holyoake’s thoughts. However, it is quite evident to what extent the unruly rule of Papacy had played a role in shaping up the argument for philosophers in favour of secularism.

The march towards secularism started in the “Age of Reason” with Kant’s critique and was refined by Hegel’s dialectal reasoning of “thesis, antithesis and synthesis”. Voltaire, despite being proponent of separation of religion from state did anticipate the moral cost of this phenomenon and argued that even if there is no god we need to create a one. But it was finally Friedrich Nietzsche who proclaimed the death of god and that god has no place in our social life, a principle on which the foundation of the modern state rests in the western world today with a high moral cost. The concept of secularism which originally inspired from the idea that the state legislation should not be based on the divine source but rather collective wisdom of society has now become synonymous with the intolerance for religion and religious practices. According to an article published in “The National Interest”, the religion and religious symbols in Europe has become a taboo and despite that the concept of “freedom of thought and liberty” is still not completely dead, the intolerance towards religion is becoming profound. This indeed is a natural consequence of secular thoughts which initially starts from the idea of throwing god out of our social life and ends with abuse and hatred for religion and god.

This western ungodly model of state has also inspired some Muslims to preach the concept without much understanding about the moral and social costs like gay issues, un-martial relations, drugs, liquor and obligations towards parents etc. A secular state for Muslims would mean that the status of Quran and hadith, which forms the source of Islamic jurisprudence, would be no better than historical story books without any practical significance at all. Another profound misconception about an Islamic state/society is that an Islamic state would be extremely intolerant towards other
religious communities, which is based on extreme misconception. Historically other religious communities have flourished within Islamic states with few exceptions as Islam provides complete protection to other religious communities except for indulging in immoral acts and businesses like prostitution, liquor and usury. This tolerance towards other religious communities is based on the concept of pluralism and not secularism, which was displayed by Prophet in Medina once he established the first Islamic state, chartered on divine injunctions.

The foremost purpose of an Islamic state is to lead a life according to divine commandments in state of a perpetual peace for purifying oneself and creating opportunities for others, so as to achieve a successful status in the hereafter. An Islamic state is primarily founded on four fundamental pillars, Equality, Justice, Community Welfare and legislative code required to deal with any kind of infringements of these principles. Unfortunately, some of the malpractices witnessed in states under Muslims like violence against communities of other religions or burning/beating to death on desecration charges etc are attributed to the religious intolerance which is not true as such acts display of religious ignorance and are in violation to established Islamic principles.

These societies, rather as a whole are desecrating divine injunctions for acting in such a brutal manner thus paving the way for the religious clergy to establish its hegemony and also by not doing enough to establish a society on the basis of divine order rather than theocracy. Therefore, in Islam there is neither any place for secularism nor religious theocracy. What Islam bolster is establishment of divine order in which every community could harmoniously live side-by-side respecting each other’s practices and rituals.

— The writer is an MPhil research fellow at NDU.

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