
Extended Abstract

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**The Impact of Urbanization on the Fall of the Secularization Hypothesis: Psychosocial
Factors that affect the Rise in Religiosity in the Urban Context of Sri Lanka (Revised)**

M.D.RavinduSachintha

Department of Social Sciences

Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka sachinthamdr@gmail.com

1. Abstract

The place that the religious institutions had within the traditional society was taken over by science and with the progress of the society. Along with this progress, the emergence of secularization within the society can be observed.

Secularization was easily identifiable in the urban context and it was also considered as a by-product of urbanization. It was easily observed that the societal structure of the urban environment leads to secularization in the urban context.

However in the present urban context, an increase in the number of people drawn towards religious practices can be observed. And according to the researcher, this transformation of religiosity in the urban environment is due to the nature of the urban societal structure.

Hence the urban environment which once, theoretically was a cause of secularization has now become a factor making the man more religious instead.

This happens due to the unavoidable social conditions that happen in the urban environment such as individualism, organic solidarity, class division and so on. As a consequence of these social conditions there will be several negative psychological impacts and ultimately it will lead to the negative psychological state.

This condition of

“fear” will lead the urban man towards religion searching for salvation. Therefore religion will always have an important place in the society.

According to many theorists of sociology, secularization is an inevitable social condition that comes with the progress of the society. With the emergence of scientific thought during the renaissance, the slow religion had begun. People started to believe in science which was rational to them in comparison to religion which was rather superficial.

But it won't remain the same. Because as everything in the society, religion will also be subjected to change and it will undergo many changes because of that. This transformation of religion can be clearly seen in the urban context because it is considered to be the pinnacle of modernization.

This paper is focused on the theoretical argument of the secularization hypothesis and how it did not turn out as reality as expected. It further focused on the psychosocial factors that were created with the modernization which became the causes of the fall of the secularization hypothesis and how modernization has affected the urban context in Sri Lanka.

2. Introduction and research problem/issue

This is clearly explained through the theory, "law of three stages" by Auguste Comte. In that he explained that society has progressed from theological stage to metaphysical stage and then from metaphysical stage to scientific stage, when the society let go of the religious beliefs and gave its place to intellect.

The urban man was considered as pragmatic and profane. Hence he is identified as a secular man. The transformation was clearly seen in the urban environment. Therefore it can be considered that secularization is a byproduct of urbanization. The accuracy of this statement is unquestioned because the urban environment where intellect is given a more significant place when compared to the rural environment where beliefs and religious beliefs are given that place.

According to the researcher, in the present context, it is observed that the above stated

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conditions are gradually changing. The urban environment which once, theoretically was a cause of secularization has now become cause of making the man more religious instead.

As for the researcher's perspective, the urban environment which once was a cause of secularization become a cause of rise of religiosity in people. Consequently, the researcher will address the following questions;

1. How can urbanization affect the fall of secularization hypothesis?
2. What are the psychosocial factors that affect the rise of religiosity in the urban context?
3. Is this theoretical base in par with the present Sri Lankan urban context?

3. Research Methodology

The research takes an overall form of a qualitative research. The research is mainly divided into two parts. The first part of the research is dedicated to answering the first two research questions. These questions were mainly from a theoretical perspective. Therefore, document analysis of relevant literature was used as a data collection tool in answering these two questions.

The second part of the research is dedicated to answering the third research question. For this, the researcher used structured interviews and observations as data collection methods.

The "Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monetary" was used as a case study for the research and 32 structured interviews with its followers, who were selected as the sample of the research, were carried out. This sample consisted of participants from ages 18 to 85 and with the backgrounds of Students, lecturers, Bankers, Teachers, Housewives and Pensioners.

4. Results and findings

According to the researcher, in the present context, it is observed that the above stated conditions are gradually changing. The urban environment which once, theoretically was a cause of secularization has now become a cause of making the man more religious instead.

This is mainly due to the social conditions that arise in the urban environment. The urbanized environment is stressful and the social relationships are organic as Durkheim suggested in his theory of “solidarity person in the urban context feels more individualistic than collective. Further, the urban individual in the society psychologically due to the complexity of his context. According to the researcher’s this situation can create several negative psychological effects in an individual.

All of these negative psychological outcomes lead to one psychological condition called “fear”. And this fear then becomes the driving force of man and leads him to a path of salvation. Hence religion is salvation.

Marx suggests in his philosophical views that “religion is the opium that dulls the pain of the man” emphasized religion as a negative component that will hinder the social progress. The researcher agrees to the extent that religion dulls the pain of the man but disagrees that religion hinders the social progress because religion is a must for the social progress because social progress itself is painful and religion should dull the pain of the social progress. Hence without religion social progress is unachievable.

Religion fills the vacuum of people’s lives created due to stressful conditions of urbanization and it helps people to make them move forward in stressful conditions of urbanity. Most importantly it avoids the death of the man.

These theoretical arguments were tested from the structured interviews that were conducted with 32 people. All these arguments became positive based on the analysis of responses through the interviews. Based on the researcher’s case study of “Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery” the following findings were made.

Religion as an institution won’t disappear as the secularization hypothesis suggests but it will definitely undergo many changes. This is because religion is not shielded from modernization. But to protect the existence it will adapt according to modernity.

As Darwin suggests in his theory of evolutionism, species won’t survive if they did not adopt appropriate changes of their environment. Similarly religion changes accordingly in order to survive in a modernized world. If you breakdown religion institution into pieces you can see many changes within the institution itself. Some components of the religion that have been vanished, those that have

been modified, and other new components with new ideologies within the institute of religion as well changes are also being aligned with needs and wants of the modern man. It can be seen as sort of a demand supply relationship. And religion itself is being shaped by the demands and wants of the man who has been through modernization.

This phenomenon is common to every religion in the world. Sri Lankan Buddhism has also undergone changes within the contemporary society. As a result, new forms of religiosities and religious institutions are observed among contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists. This can be further thought of as an extension of Obesekere's "Popular Buddhism" concept. There may be a lot of social factors behind this modification of Sri Lankan Buddhist followers yet in this research the researcher has focused only on the psychosocial factors behind this phenomenon.

5. Conclusions, implications and significance

According to the researcher's perspective, modernization as predicted has not made the religion extinct in society. What it has done is modify the religious institution and the religiosity of people. As the researcher has considered the definition of the modernized society; the above phenomenon can be clearly observed within the modernized society. The researcher has been able to justify this argument through his case study of "Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery". Hence it can be concluded that the secularization hypothesis as suggested by classical sociological theory does not stand against the present context of the society. Instead of secularization what could be seen in the present context is the rise of religiosity which can be subjected to many changes.

6. References (Selected)

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*Corresponding Author, Tel:+94719495068

E-mail Address: sachinhamdr@gmail.com