Globalization and Religion: Some Implications

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Abstract

In the present era, globalization is said to be the height of internationalization of human activities speeded up by technical instruments and it has transcended all barriers-territorial, ideological, economic, social, political, ethnic, racial and religious. It can be labeled as one sign among others of a changing civilization in the forms of modifying cultures and habits, reshuffling cards of power, intelligence and capacity for initiative and demanding the use of wholly new mental patterns, particularly ones that refers to social organization. Religion is one of the main support systems of society since attitude of man toward nature at large, establishment of ideals for the individual and communal life as well as mutual human relationship are the concerns of religion. Religion tires to attain these ideals by exerting an educational influence on tradition and through the development and promulgation of certain easily accessible thoughts and narratives which are apt to influence evaluation and action along the lines of accepted ideals. In this article, the author focuses on globalization an its concept, religion, interface between globalization and religion, more or less secularization of societies and resurgence of religion.

Keywords - Globalization, Religion, Interface, Resurgence.

The emergence of post-industrial society has brought myriad changes in all the domains of life and subsystems of society which can be noticed from the script of life to the organization of economy and discourse of politics, a vast restructuring is taking place (Bell:1973;Block:1987). Economic restructuring has led to the 'industrialization of America', political restructuring has led to the breakdown of consensus regarding welfare state and social democracy and rise to new forms of work arrangements has broken down stability of individual life based on occupation and employment (Buchman:1989; Giri:1993).

Globalization

It has been claimed that globalization has been occurring throughout history, only its form has changed over different historical periods such as:

I. In the pre-modern period (pre 1500 C.E.), it was seen as inter-regional and inter-civilization encounters; and political as well as military empires, world religions as well as migratory movements of nomadic groups, the steppe people and of farming societies were key agents of globalization.

II. In the early modern period (1500-1800 C.E.), rise of west, which included the historical process producing the emergence and development of the key institutions of European modernity, the acquisition of technologies and power resources that had exceeded to those available to any other civilization and the subsequent creation of European global empires was regarded as key agents of globalization.

III. In the modern period (Circa 1850-1945), global networks and flows have accelerated tremendously in its earlier phase which provided enough opportunity to western powers to exploit these innovations and establish western global empires resulting into making globalization extensive, intensive and socially significant.

IV. In the contemporary period (from 1950 onwards), globalization was shaped profoundly by structural consequences of second world war and emergence of a world-wise system

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of nation-states, overlaid by multilateral, regional and global systems of regulation and governance and this era also experienced extra-ordinary innovations in the infrastructure of transport and communication and unparallel density of global governance and regulation (Held et al 1999: 414-30).

In the present era, globalization (including the globalization of the economy) is said to be the height of internationalization of human activities speeded up by technical instruments and it has transcended all barriers-territorial, ideological, economic, social, political, ethnic, racial and religious. It can be labeled as one sign among others of a changing civilization in the forms of modifying cultures and habits, reshuffling cards of power, intelligence and capacity for initiative and demanding the use of wholly new mental patterns, particularly ones that refers to social organization (Brunsvick and Danzin: 1998:99).

The Concept of Globalization

The concept of globalization is being frequently used but its clear-cut meaning is rarely available. However, the Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology (1995) described globalization as a 'process in which social life within societies is increasingly affected by international influences based on everything from political and trade ties to shared music, clothing styles and mass media'.

Some writers also try to explain the meaning this concept. According to them, globalization refers to 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which links distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa (Giddens: 1990); involve a situation in which peoples, cultures, societies and civilizations previously more or less isolated from one another are now in regular and almost unavoidable contact (Beyer: 1994); flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas across borders (Knight and De-wit: 1997:10); 'simply the intensification of global inter connectedness which implies that goods, capital, social-institutional relationships, technological developments, ideas readily flowed across territorial boundaries' (McGrew quoted in Tomlinson: 1999:20); the transfer, adoption and development of values, knowledge, technology and behavioral norms across countries and societies in the different parts of world (Cheng: 2000:156); both to the comparison of the world and intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson: 1998:8).

Summarizing multiplicity of meanings of globalization available in the literature, Asie Kacwicz (1999: 3) concluded that globalization is (i) the intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across the border; (ii) the historical period (or historical epoch) launched since the end of cold war; (iii) the transformation of world economy epitomized by anarchy (literally defined) of financial markets; (iv) the triumph of US values through the combined agenda of neo-liberalism in economic and political democracy; (v) an ideology and on orthodoxy about the logical and inevitable culmination of the powerful tendencies of market at work; (vi) a technology revolution with social implications; (vii) the inability of the nation-states to open with global problems that require global solutions such as demography, ecology human rights and nuclear proliferation.

Operationally, globalization in the present context refers to:

(a) International flow of goods, capital, labour, services and information;

(b) Globalized production, marketing, technological as well as information networks,

(c) Economic interdependence through mutual cooperation and collaboration between countries specially in the areas of trade, technology, labour and internal capital flows;

(d) Multi-cultural integration and use of international standards and benchmarks leading to universal homogenization of ideas, culture, values and even lifestyles; and

(e) deterritoriazation and villagization of the world.

Religion

Religion is one of the main support systems of society since attitude of man toward nature at large, establishment of ideals for the individual and communal life as well as mutual human relationship are the concerns of religion. Religion tires to attain these ideals by exerting an educational influence on tradition and through the development and promulgation of certain easily accessible thoughts and narratives (epics and myths) which are apt to influence evaluation and action along the lines of accepted ideals.

In this way, religion is being considered as a system of belief and practices found in every culture, which mainly formulates the conception of relation with his environment. The various ceremonies, rituals and observances are used as a via media with the supernatural forces. This aspect brings the group's members closer to each other almost to condition of solidarity. Further, from religion emanates authority since religion enables man to differentiate right from wrong. However, the spiritual aspect of it is related with intellect and religion because it is said that religion is a matter of faith and intellect, since faith sciezes only that which is first grasped by intellect. Religion is not wholly imperceptible or abstract but also visible and concrete in its manifestations. Thus, in practice, a religion is a particular system or a set of systems, in which doctrines, myths, rituals, sentiments, institutions and other similar elements are interconnected (Britannica & 15th Edition: 1997:509)..

Broadly speaking, The functions of religion are:

i. serving directly to manage emotions of man such as fear, anger, awe uncertainty etc. as in Malinowski's theory that religion is 'great anxiety reliever' (1965:71). For instance, the prayer provides a feeling of security.

ii. Helping to reduce anxiety over unjust situations as well as regulating the allocation of moral responsibility between self and others.

iii. Expressing and maintaining the sentiments or values of society which makes social life possible because religion acts as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community (Emile Durkheim: 1912, Trans. Swain, J.W. 1915).

iv. Explaining the unexplainable such as belief in witchcraft provides an explanation of misfortunes as well as belief in Evil Eye (essentially the belief in the power of the eye to harm) probably one of the oldest religions constructs which offers ready explanation for the causation of mental illness, disease, crisis, famine and death.

v. Standing for the uplift of human character, for the sense of decency and shame for righteous conduct, for the conceptions of duty, for the promotion of unity among people, for the feelings of peacefulness, for hope and joy and last but not least it represents the voice of human conscience.

To conclude, it can be maintained that the nexus between religion and society has been very close with wide, complex, intricate and elaborate ramifications and the main function of religion is to celebrate and sustain the norms upon which the integration of society depends (Emile Durkheim endorsed by English Anthropologist Redcliffe Brown) (Gesrtz: 1968: 402).

Globalization and Religion: Interface

Religion has been one of the bases for social transformation both at the level of people's everyday lives and at the national level and it is as the most fundamental means of organizing human life, consequently the seeds of globalization could be found in religion itself and some scholars have suggested that the idea of globalization was put forward by the 'hyper-globalization' of some religions such as catholic church that supported the idea of the world as one place (Hopkins et al: 2001: 1 and 4).

It may be further argued that both Christianity and Islam which were derivatives of the Abrahamic faith, became universalizing religions and most effective globalizes because of their claims that the world was created by single God and that humanity was a common force of existence in relation to that God (D'souza, Leela: 2003:64-65). To conclude, it can be said that both the process of globalization and religion have affected each other because introduction of commercialization as well as capitalism change the nature of religion and local custom and tradition also affected nature of business of western corporations. The interface between globalization and religion has brought forward various kinds of debate in social science literature.

Secularization of Societies: More or less

There is debate whether, due to the process of globalization societies became more secularized or less secularized. Explaining secularization, Jose Cosnova mentioned three of its aspects (i) secularization as differentiation which means that it takes place when non-religious spheres of life (such as the state and economy) become separate from and indendant of religion; (ii) secularization as a decline of religious beliefs and practices which take place when fewer individuals take part in religious activities or hold religious beliefs; and (iii) secularization as privatization in which religion stops playing any part in public life and does not even try to influence how politicians make decisions or individuals in society in general choose to live their lives (Haradamlios and Holborn:2000:493).

Proponents of more secularization of societies put forth the following arguments:

1. Secularization in the modern world to mean that traditional religion was now primarily the concern of the individual and has therefore lost much of its public relevance (Parsons: 1966:139; Berger: 1973:133; Luckman: 1967:103; and Bellah:1970:43).
2. The prime characteristics of modern societies are institutional differentiation and pluralistic individual identities. Secularization was the consequence of the relative independence of these initial subsystems of society from religious norms, values and justifications i.e. religion now has a limited legitimizing role in a highly differentiated society (Beyer: 1999:373-374).
3. Global society is characterized by a clash between particularism involving an emphasis on distinctive characteristics of particular group and universalism involving an emphasis on similarity between people or societies or values which result from their common humanity. Here, as subsystem of global society religion has no role to play since without global role, religion tends to be left merely to deal with personal questions.

4. The modern man with his vast scientific knowledge and control over physical nature tends to view religion as a matter of his personal beliefs about the relation with an unseen power or powers so as to guide his inner life spirit and mind. He shares with primitive man his psychological need for religion as a prop and source of strength in times of stress and strain and in moments of emotional crisis such as those of deaths and disaster. But his religion is not the basis of social or political organisation. The sources of his laws are secular. His science, economics and aesthetics are controlled by factors outside the religion.
5. Disintegration of traditional social fabrics and shared norms resulting into altering of power relations including religion due to the rise of consumerism, cyber culture, new fangled religions etc.
6. Unification of religions since free flow of trade under the process of globalization enhances religious tolerance.
7. The process of globalization speeded up migration of people from one place to another forcing them to take an adaptanist view towards the tradition and culture of host place.

Arguments in favour of less secularization or non-secularization of modern societies have been:

1. The subsystems of globalization and modernity such as global economy, global science and global political system offer little in the way of identity for individuals and groups resulting into the creation of some problems which can be solved with the help of religion since individuals and social groups can use religion to give them a central source of identity.
2. According to the thesis of Niklas Luhmann, globalization of society while structurally favoring privatization of religion, also provided fertile ground for the renewed public influence of religion i.e. religion not only retreated from important aspects of local life, it also developed an institutionally specialized system of its own. By public influence he meant that one or more religions could become the source of collective commitment, and collective action in specific religious norms now became legitimate (Beyer: 1999:373).
3. Popular images of "globalization" stress its economic and political character, specially the global reach of transnational corporations that are shifting power away from states- and thus from citizens- efforts to control their own fates. In these images, religious organisations respond to globalization, sometimes by supporting anti-global movements (e.g. anti-WTO, neo-fundamentalism, etc.) (Jim Spickard:2001).
4. Disintegration of various social support systems such as family, neighborhood, friend circle etc. due to the fast changes introduced in the social fabric forced individuals to fall back upon for moral and social support on religious activities.

The Resurgence of Religion

The public insurgence of religion is most advanced societies has taken place inspite of the predictions of the prophets of modernity that with the march of time religion would lose its significance, and if at all it persists, it will only be as residue individual lives, as an aspect of personal faith (Giri: 2004:323). Peter Beyer (1999) also concluded that globalization will not lead to the demise of religion. Samuel P. Huntington also sees greater role for religion in modern world. According to him, "the world is becoming a smaller place. The interactions between peoples of different civilizations are increasing, these increasing interactions intensify civilization consciousness" (1993). In this theory, the groups are civilizations rather than nation-states or religions as such. However, there are often close relationships between

religions and civilizations. Huntington believes that there will increasingly be clashes between civilizations because as people define their identity in ethnic and religions terms, they are, likely to see an "us" vs. "them" relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity or religion. Geographical closeness increases the likelihood of clashes to try to mobilize support. He declared that most of the conflict in the world can now be related to religious division rather than political ones.

Anthony Giddens, while expressing view regarding high modernity and religious revival, said that religious symbols and practices are not only residues from the past a revival of religion or more broadly, spiritual concerns seems fairly wide spread in modern societies. Zygmunt Buamann also supported Giddens when he said that there is increased inflexivity in the contemporary world and this poses problems for individuals. Furthermore, he argued that there is religious revival due to the problems faced by individuals in modern societies.

To conclude, it can be said that globalization not only accelerated the process of emergence of new religious movements and the awareness that the religion could not be abolished, it also led to religion taking on a new character i.e. movements of both religious revival and religious activitism (Mondieta: 2001: (46). Following arguments are given for the religious revival and religious activitism.

1. Enhancement in the significance of religion because developed countries have been using the major religions of the world as purveyors of their globalization agenda with unprecedented flow of funds, specially in developing countries (Radhakrishanan: 2004:1403).
2. Increase in migration of people which has religious implications in the forms of expansion and establishment of religious faiths from one place to another place leading to pluralization of religions and desire to maintain religious identity ignites this process because religious identity is being used as a protective shield against the onslaught of globalization, which was marked by entry of integrated market systems and which came along with a variety of commodities, values, beliefs and styles of being.
3. Alteration in traditional religions and belief systems in order to achieve global identity of religion.
4. Conversion of conventional religion into computerised religion in which philosophy and ideals of a particular religion can be expanded through internet, television etc. and rituals can also be performed from far flung places with the help of internet.
5. Religious saints are being attracted for becoming global guru (teacher)/preacher by involving themselves in conducting social service activities such as building homes for poor, establishing hospitals, educational institutions etc.
6. Augmenting wealth and resources of religious centers by providing an opportunity to expand their activities from local to national as well as international level i.e. beyond the place of worship.
7. Increasing the number of people in the society who choose these religious centers for getting moral and social support in their day-to-day lives.
8. Transmogrification of traditional religions and belief systems due to the process of globalization sometimes evokes religious protests against global movement resulting into extremism, fanaticism, fundamentalism and even terrorism.

9. Expansion of religious activities beyond the place of worship has resulted into mushroom growth of religious centers as well as self styled super godmen, priests, saints etc. making sacred religious activities as business and commercialized activities.
10. Introduction of information technology in the field of religious activities and opportunity to earn money from these activities have resulted into unhealthy competitions in terms of religious rivalry and conflict and giving an opportunity for exploitation of religions for implementing the global agenda by some countries.
11. Destablising governance specially in developing countries by spreading dissent and rebell by flowing funds through religious channels.
12. Strengthening religion in the country, in that contact with businesses and entrepreneurs of different backgrounds and faiths can only help to loosen the country's restriction on practice of faith.

To conclude, it can be maintained that resurgence of religion is one of the forms (regionalism, linguistic and cultural assertion, tribal and ethnic loyalties, attachment to local community) of political response to economic globalization.

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