OPINION

Deliberately Distorting Secularism

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It appears quite intriguing as to why the term 'secularism' was translated as "*Ladeeniat*" after the creation of Pakistan and by whom. Perhaps those who invented the Urdu equivalent wanted to transform Pakistan into an Islamist/Jihadist state. Dominating sections of Urdu-speaking Mohajirs were the forerunners of this *intellectual feat*. They considered themselves educated vis-à-vis the original inhabitants of the lands which constituted Pakistan. For them Punjabis, Bengalis, Sindhis, Balochs and Pakhtoons were all ill-mannered, less educated and least patriotic. They came to Pakistan following the footsteps of Liaqat Ali Khan as if they had conquered Pakistan.

To take charge of the administration and get hold of the resources, it was imperative to delink the locals' natural affinity with the soil to which they belonged. Hence abstract and artificial crutches were invented to install national unity. One language and one religion were declared as the foundations of national cohesion. To achieve this end, the so-called educated Mohajir class, feudal lords and civil/military bureaucracy joined hands.

In theory and in practice it was not possible to convert Pakistan into an Islamist state until the term secularism was metamorphosed with repulsive connotations. In the "*Qaumi English Urdu Dictionary*" published by "The National Language Authority" a state-run institution, the term "secularism" has been translated as "Ladeeninat." On the basis of such distortions, rampant in our texts, the Urdu press has associated the term "Secularism" with being anti-religious and

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atheistic. Despite such a glaring intellectual dishonesty of far-reaching consequences the editor of the book Dr. Jamil Jalibi, himself a Mohajir, wrote in its preface: "This National Urdu-English dictionary of ours fulfills all requirements of the present age and encompasses meanings of words both ancient and most modern."

This is a stark example of "*linguistic deceit*" perpetrated by our scholars of which we as a nation have been a victim. The act of distorting the meaning of the term triumphed and its fallout proliferated.

To be honest, secularism is neither the opposition nor the negation of religion. On the contrary it acknowledges every human beings' right to adhere to his or her religious belief. It also promotes mutual respect for all faith-based systems. In simple words it says, let me practice what my faith says and feel free to practice what your faith demands. And let us not question each other's faith. Consequently in matters of state and society, faith systems cannot be held controversial. Whose faith is right and who is in the wrong cannot be decided objectively. The only impact of such a debate is friction and violence in the society. Civilized cultures, therefore, have found a way out. "Respect each other's faith" as it is purely a personal matter and has

nothing to do with logic and reasoning. We generally hold on to our beliefs first and then invent arguments in support thereof. This is precisely the reason why nobody wins in religious debates. So much blood has been shed in human history in the name of religion, yet people hold on to their beliefs. However, people do embrace other religions due to personal or historical reasons; particularly when the "invaded" convert to the faith exercised by the invaders. In some cases conversions are also forced upon in our holy land particularly in Sindh province, by hook or by crook.

As humans matured intellectually and adopted scientific means to achieve economic self-sufficiency, a new social contract and a different value system came into being with the core value of "live and let live." The new value system also regarded religion and faith as one's personal matter and nobody was granted the right to force anybody or target someone else's faith. It also advocated that matters of this world be handled rationally in accordance with the spirit of the times. Jingoism and militancy in the name of religion was considered an uncivilized and inhuman act causing nothing but large scale bloodshed.

And if we believe that Muslims in a majority maybe allowed exercising

the right to target minorities, the same practice should also be granted to all those nations where Muslims are in a minority. Nonetheless the authoritarian Muslims stick to a strange logic. They demand every conceivable right for themselves but are never prepared to sanction the same privileges to followers of other religions. This is sheer fascism.

The fact remains that in today's civilized world the Muslims cannot have the cake and eat it too, especially when they are completely dependent on the "non-believers." Today's world is a global village where Muslims are in a minority while followers of other religions constitute the majority, and any one-sided act of violence against the technologically superior nations is nothing but madness.

It is unfortunate that matters of faith can only be decided through application of violence and armed conflict. They have nothing to do with logic and reasoning. A war fought for the sake of one's faith has no substance and leads to nothing but mutual death and destruction. The common man must understand that all previous wars in history, ironically, were fought for economic and political dominance *in the name of faith.*

By rejecting secularism the majority of Muslims have become part of an unending conflict with the West. Pakistan, known to be a country where Muslims constitute more than 95% of the population is now-a-days desperately vying for internal peace. Most sects and sub-sects are engaged in a tug of war firmly holding the belief that their faith is the true faith.

The aim of life is to *live* and not to kill and get killed. Secularism ensures mutual coexistence, peace and a civilized way of life. The earlier the Muslims learn this basic principle the better it is for them and their future generations. ■

[Courtesy: **The View Point (online magazine) Lahore**]