

Secularity as a tool for religious indoctrination and identity formation: a case of semi-urban community in Nepal

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Abstract: This article presents the complexity of a secularization process that goes on in a state where Hinduism is culturally embedded and dominant. The term 'secular' is meant to indicate the state's 'dis-involvement' in religious issues. However, Nepal faces a complex and ambivalent process of secularization. On the one hand, the state itself has encouraged diverse cultural communities to bring religious schools into practice. On the other, people of diverse communities are increasingly motivated to seek their identities via religious practices. Amid this confrontation, this ethnographic study, conducted in a single territory with diverse religious communities, organizations and schools, challenges the very dis-involvement of the state, community and individual in religious matters. In the process of practicing religious rights and constructing religious identities, religious communities have come into a competition for public support and resources. This competition not only divides the communities into indigenous versus non-indigenous forms but also compels the indigenous religions to go into redefinition and revival in order to resist the non-indigenous religions.

Keywords: Secularity, religious indoctrination, religious identity, Nepal.

1. Introduction

From pre-historic time Hinduism has been the dominant religion in Nepal. Hindu texts suggest that a state is impossible without a king, and therefore Hinduism not only became royal religion but also got protection from the state and thus achieved a dominant position. Under the dominance of Hinduism as the state religion, practicing non-indigenous religion was almost impossible because practicing non-traditional religion was considered religious conversion and was later banned. In 1990, as Nepal went into political change from Royal totalitarianism to constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy, the state adopted religious pluralism, i.e. allowed freedom to practice all religions. Such plurality was declared in the constitution as "every religion has right to maintain its independent existence and for this purpose to manage and protect its religious places and trust". With another political change in April 2006, Nepal was declared a republic and secular state in 2008 (in Interim Constitution), and the same spirit flourished in the Constitution of Nepal 2015 where "the state is secular" has been written in the preamble. This brief but comprehensive description made in this paragraph indicates that religious policy in Nepal amalgamates with politics.

Since 1990, religious communities have been establishing religious organizational institutions, social spaces, schools, etc. in their own effort and with government funding. Moreover, since 2004, the government has funded the cost of running religious schools and introduced government courses to such schools. The Government has allocated millions of rupees to construct and repair Gumbas, Madarasas and travelling costs for Hajj every year. Rituals with Hindu and Buddhist motives continue to be financed as state affairs, and the president of secular Nepal seems to have adopted the king's ritual role in Hindu festivals. Likewise, political leaders have participated in religious celebrations and festivals such as Muslim, Christian and so on. Similarly, religious festivals of ethnic minorities have been addressed with public holidays. It suggests that the Hindu-dominant state has paradoxically contended both open-minded and close-minded status in regard to religious matters. Secularization in Nepal has been described by external scholars e.g. Chiara Letizia (2017: 110), as "It was not a move to banish religion from public life, but rather a call for non-Hindus to be treated equally with Hindus".

To look further into those complexities and based on an ethnographic approach, this study provides a close look at the micro-process of major religion-cultural shifts brought by secular policy in particular territories (society) in terms of perception, motivation and practice of diverse religious communities, and argues that secularity is used as a tool for religious indoctrination. The study also responds with a local lens to national and international lenses by presenting a life of practice of religious rights and equality in communities. A model of secularization proposed by Karel Dobbelaere (2004) has been used for analysing the ethnographic information collected in religious communities. Dobbelaere (2004) claims that the impact of religion is being reduced at three levels: first, societal secularization i.e. the functional differentiation of the economy, the family and politics from religion; second, organizational secularization i.e. secularization or religious hospitals, religious schools and third, individual secularization: decline of religious practice, decline of religious beliefs and non-acceptance of religious morals.

The secularization process of Nepal is quite complex. It stands in contrast to Dobbelaere's model. Instead of functional differentiation, concentrating on political representation, religious preservation and reproduction through religious organizations, hospitals and schools, has been practised. Diverse communities are motivated to practise religious rights and constructing religious identity. In the process of expanding religious faiths, religious communities have ferocious competition in accumulating public resources, and presenting self as superior. Secularization, thus, interfaces tensions and conflicts among indigenous dominant and non-indigenous minority religions. The classical conception of secularization that "state's relation to religion is dis-involvement" is no longer effectual in Eastern Hindu country of the 21st century, and moreover seems complex and contradictory too. Therefore, understanding the very secularization processes of Nepal demands multiple views.

2. Contesting views of secularization

The very concept of secularization, developed as a by-product of modernization in Christian Europe (Oviedo 2007: 478), has produced different views across time and space. Therefore, to present the unintelligible and complex phenomenon of secularity, a brief discussion is needed.

2.1 Secularism a modernity view: separation of religion and state

The concept of secularism emerged with modernity in Europe. As science began to demystify the mysteries of the universe, the belief in God withered gradually. Meanwhile, the power of religion (church) over state, community and individual has diminished in every generation (Swatos & Christiano 1999: 212). Moreover, with modernity, religious reproduction through habit formation and indoctrination has been declining (Chaves 1994: 751, 754). Every child of a new generation gets less opportunity than the older in participating in religious ceremonies and activities. Meanwhile, children are taught modern secular subjects rather than religious doctrines because parents and state give less priority to religious education and religiosity. Karel Dobbelaere (2004) claims that the influence of religion in society (state policy), organizational and individual levels is diminishing. As an impact of religion diminishes, a state becomes secular in the level of giving individuals religious liberty. Religious liberty is that individuals are free not only to criticize the religion into which they are born, but at the very extreme, to reject it and further, given ideal conditions of deliberation, to freely embrace another religion or to remain without one (Bhargava 2006: 35). He presents the example of Indian constitution for religious liberty and right to its citizen: "no person is compelled to pay any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination" (Article 27), and "no person attending any educational institution.... shall be required to take part in any religious instruction or to attend any religious worship that

may be conducted in such institution” (Article 28 (3)). Thus, this discussion suggests that states and societies have, on the one hand, not given higher value to religion so as to indoctrinate or impose over individuals, and on the other, have regarded religion as an absolutely personal affair and up to an individual whether to practice or not.

2.2 Secularism a political view: state neutrality

As people migrate, their rituals, beliefs and religions disperse too. Beside migration, religion is expanded along with missionary religious conversion in the state. Sometimes, tribal and indigenous communities too rise up with their religious faiths, practices, rituals, rights and identities. Hence, regardless of the number of followers, more than one religious group is found in a state. Hence, the trend of development of religion in a society is shifting from single-religious to multi-religious. This trend has been highlighted by Rajeev Bhargava (2006: 25) as: “[...] secularism in the single-religion societies of the west is beginning to be challenged not only from religious believers within, but also from recently emigrated believers of other religions. This new multi-religiosity is threatening to throw western secularism into turmoil”. For him (2006: 25), a separation type of secularism in a multi-religious society, acceptable to the dominant religious majority, is not automatically endorsed by religious minorities. Secularism, for individuals is their conceived liberty and equality, and state policy on neutrality in religion. A neutral state is not anti-religious but it makes the provision that “no one is compelled to pay tax for religious purposes or to receive religious instruction, and no automatic grants to religious institutions are available” (2006: 33-34). Hence, secularity is, in another form, a process of establishment of religion. Thus, a conception of secularity as ‘state neutrality’ is contradictory to ideas of ‘separation’.

Bhargava (2006) stressed that secularity in a multi-religious nation rests on religious liberty, rights and equality of the people where individual practices are affiliated with a religious community. A secular state thus adopts the policy of equal-distance to diverse communities in intervention or abstention or combining both. Therefore, a secular state must not only distribute resources to all religious communities equally, but the communities must also realize this; otherwise, religion becomes a weapon in political conflicts wherever people start using religious rhetoric in political arguments and other differences of opinion (e.g. Casanova 2010: 8). This implies that in the context of Nepal that was briefly presented in the opening paragraph, secularization is always associated to political movements. On the one hand, religion provides cultural resources to political actors and they use the power of religious rhetoric and religious symbols; on the other, politics (government or state) is responsible for creating a religiously tolerant situation in pluralistic communities so that individual rights and liberties, religious diversity, societal integration and independence of institutional domains are achieved (Schuh 2012: 358).

This discussion suggests that the state or politics both encourages and at the same time hinders religious communities of a multi-religious society in realizing equality. Since, a state adopts a policy of neutrality to dispirit the ethno-religious antagonism and conflict.

2.3 Secularism a sociological view: rebirth and revival of religion

Religious markets and competition are the sources of revival and birth of religions (Introvigne & Stark 2005). As religious organizations begin to compete for public support, the participation in organized faiths rise up, and religious beliefs become more clearly defined and widely held. This phenomenon creates inter-religious debate, criticism, antagonism and conflict to some extent. At the same time, religious communities tend to correct their malpractices for the defending. Stark & Brainbridge (1985: 19) claimed that any religious community revolting against the common belief and practice of their religion, try to redefine and make innovation in practice. This process brings

either the emergence of a new religion or a sect or the revival of an old one. However, such redefinition and rebirth of religion can take place only within the framework of a general recognition of basic rights of the actors themselves whereas a process of interreligious and intercultural consensus building through the recognition of basic political values is a must. This view sees secularism in two waves: first, secularism as religious liberty, rights and equality; second, formation of religious organizations (cults). However, a degree of inter-religious harmony or antagonism in religious practices depends on the awareness of politicians and the public.

An important aspect of religious organization is religious identity. Religious identity refers specifically to religious group membership whereas religiousness and religiosity refers to religious activity or participation. However, the value of religious identity is correlated to the religiosity of a person. Religious identity is understood better with three dimensions (Kuznecoviene 2004): a communal dimension including social and symbolic markers which define the boundary among religious groups and allows people to distinguish 'those who are in' and 'those who are out'. People show their identity via formal and practical belonging; an ethical dimension that includes the peoples' acceptance of the values of particular religious tradition and an emotional dimension that includes the emotional experience, i.e. feeling of merging, as 'us' and hence, the experience of belonging becomes established that makes group cohesion. Due to the very group formation they have a sense of self and othering (e.g. Jensen 2009: 7) in religious identity.

This discussion suggests that religious communities in a multi-religious society negotiate for identity formation and compete for public support and resources. In this process, political prudence and awareness of religious members are crucial to hinder competition leading to antagonism and conflict.

The three views presented here can be viewed as a chain with a uni-linear structure. Modernity demystified the religious power hence brought separation of state and religion. Then the state could not favour any one religion but must adopt neutrality to all religions. As a consequence, many religions not only had to compete for public support and resource accumulation, but also for redefinition and revival. As a result, religion has become vivid in the social arena. This is a theoretical complexity and ambivalence of the very original concept of secularization, which modernity advances day by day. This ethnographic study presents the complexity of secularity where these three views interface.

3. Methods and Data

To observe secularization via religious practice of people in daily lives, I selected a field of about 2 km of radius in Mid-Terai of Nepal where four religious communities, their formal organizations, and their religious indoctrination centres are located. Both field and respondents were selected purposefully based on information richness, accessibility and convenience (Tongco 2007). The phenomena of the study were: perception of and motivation for secular policy, development of religious organizations and institutions of indoctrination, individuals' practice of religion, and the process of religious indoctrination in four religious communities of Nepal. I observed these phenomena using ethnographic design (Creswell 2012: 209). I talked with leaders and members of each religious community. Then, I confined my talking to a leading person of each of the four religious organizations. I conducted narrative interviews mostly listening to account on how religious organizations, land and buildings were developed, how obstacles were overcome. I also observed their religious practice, ceremonies, and functions. The process of constituting religious organizations of each community has been described in the data section. However, information on perceptions and motivation for the secularization process of Nepal has been incorporated into the analysis section directly. I selected the students of each religious organization to generate information regarding religious indoctrination. Hence, I selected four students from each religion,

who were seen as the most learned and motivated among their colleagues. I asked them how and why they come in such schools. I observed their kitchen, dormitory and out of class activities, such as participation in religious activities. I generated information through talking to their teachers. Except for Iqbal, I talked to parents too. The information was generated during July-November, 2013.

4. Analysis

The section below presents the portraits of four religious organizations and four students of religious education and schools, focusing on motivation, ideologies, standpoints, attitudes, feelings and practices. This is done by conceptualizing secularization on three dimensions: perception toward state, religious practice of community and members, and religious indoctrination. The portraits have been prepared with highly selective and purposive information as half-baked data (Kouritzin 2002).

4.1 Buddhism

The foundation of 'Nepal Non-violence Buddhism World Peace Cycle Association' began with the interaction of Buddhist people of this community with other religious communities. Buddhist people of this community realized a need of combining their identity with religious place (spot) in formal group activities like all other religious groups. Therefore, they decided to construct a Gumba, for both religious (spiritual) and social purposes in 1993. Some of the leading members of the community constituted a committee as an NGO, collected funds through donations and government grants for constructing a Gumba. The committee is inspired and guided by Buddhist Lama, Jnanasagar Guru Rinpoche to follow non-killing and vegetarian practice of Buddhism. Rinpoche frequently encourages(d) to follow the true path of Buddha where more than 20 people are the regular members of the Sangha. The Gumba is an agent of preserving and promoting the non-violence message of Buddha where worship and pray to Lord Buddha (sculpture) on certain Buddhist days. This comprises *ksheur* (religious ceremony for a son to make man/malehood around the age of 7-12 years), and *ghewa* (a shamanic practice for demised soul). Their religious patrons (Lamas) frequently come in Gumba and preach them the right practice of Buddha dharma, and interested people gather in Gumba to listen to dharma. The chairperson believed it is their duty to preserve and promote Buddha dharma, but it is now in crisis, both internally and externally. Internally, Buddhist priests are miss-practicing and miss-interpreting the truth of Buddha dharma e.g. Buddha never allowed meat by killing animals and drinking alcohol, but now many Buddhist people perform their rituals with animal slaughtering and alcohol. Externally, there is encroachment in Buddhism from foreign religion. For the last six years they have been doing *neuni brat* (i.e. three days long fasting and silence during Dashain festivals), in Gumba. These two penances were one way of requesting Buddha, first for release of the soul of those animals who were slaughtered in Dashain (Hindu festival, where animals are scarified to please deities), and second for forgiveness to all people who committed sin ignorantly. This movement was organized at 30 Gumbas of the nation.

4.1.1 Mina

Among the 25 participants of *neunu brat* in Dashain 2012, Mina was a girl of 18 years and a university student. She has known the ideal of Gumba for the last eight years and celebrated *neuni brat* four times. She came to participate along with her mother and neighbours. Her brother, aged 16 years, also was expected to come but he preferred playing with friends. Meat is not allowed in her home, since her brother eats either in hotels or in friends' homes, and she has no desire when she understood this ideology. In around 25 households there are only 15 in her hamlet, who follow

this cult of Buddhism, and most of them are girls and their mothers. And mothers too expect their daughters to follow this ideal but not sons, because it is impractical to sons/male. Mina shared this ideal with some of her friends who are Buddhists. She says there is a need of such Buddhism for youngsters, who are now falling into different evil deeds. Moreover, she believes that *neuni brat* is one way of earning merit for this and the next life. She participated in many sessions of preaching and follows five precepts of Buddhism. She likes Buddhism for its ideal of social equality and justice. She expresses dissatisfaction with Hindus, as “we are this much serious here about non-violence inside the compound of Gumba, but outside people are slaughtering animals”. Therefore, she hopes for such a man as husband who consumes neither meat nor alcohol; at least he will not oppose her religious practice.

4.2 Christianity

Before restoration of a multiparty system in Nepal in 1990, Christian people were not allowed to be organized and to show their religious identity. With the dawn of the multiparty system, some Christians realized a need of a church for their religious activities. The secret practitioners of Christianity were organized and constituted a seven-member church management committee. They bought land and constructed a building funded by an international Christian mission and established the ‘Nipani Church’ (name by place) in 1992. The aim of the church is to organize followers and to expand Christian ideology. Now there are more than 300 members, who frequently gather in Church; however, some people, still caricature them as *dharmachhada* (selling the dharma for money). But Christian people claim that though they receive money for subsistence, they follow Christianity for religious faith. Moreover, they complain that some government officials too, see Christians as an inferior race, and even the state has already gone into secularism. They demand to constitute a ‘Christian Commission’, to celebrate religious equality and secular policy. With the secular policy, everyday numbers of newly converted members are growing, and the old members are working for religious expansion. Followers gather in Church every Saturday, talk in religious matters, sing psalms about Jesus, collect grains and donate to Church. They talk even about their personal problems and search ways of solution. Some of them read some lines from the Bible and teach to some followers to read the Bible. They discuss Christian ethics, e.g. helping the helpless, donating to the poor, not to tell lies, not to steal, not to kill, and not to commit adultery. They (try to) persuade people not to drink and gamble; for such ruined persons, the Church works as rehabilitation centre. The Church teaches children, adolescents and adults separately. Adolescents join in *sangati* (musical psalm to Jesus). For children Christianity is taught for two hours every Saturday; they are given homework and individual feedback. Textbooks, copies and pens are provided free of cost. Christian children and adolescents are taken frequently from here to there for inter-church competition, seminars and socialization.

4.2.1 Nikita

Nikita was born a daughter of a pastor: she reads in grade nine, in English medium private school. Nikita enjoys the Saturday: she engages in the morning in rehearsal as a member of *sangati* (music band), and from 10-12 a.m. she engages in contents of the Bible and in singing psalms: from 12-2 p.m. she teaches younger children, and from 2 p.m. she engages in inter-church adolescent program. Hence, she devotes a whole day for the Lord. She criticizes Hinduism for being an unethical religion presenting the evidences of myths e.g. God Shiva consumes hashish marijuana and God Krishna adopts polygamy and infuses lust in thousands of ladies. She believes that Jesus is far superior to any God of Hinduism. Lots of poor (in terms of economic, socio-cultural, and health) people come in Church for refuge, and most of them are female. Nikita listens to the life stories of such women, and silently requests God to help. Everybody who comes in Church for

Saturday prayers donates whatever and how much they can; Nikita collects the donations and helps followers who request with this collection. The church has kept some orphan children, and Nikita engages in teaching them by saving her study time. Once, Nikita and her friend performed a music concert in a nearby town to collect funds to keep these orphan children. Nikita and her colleagues are taken for tours and camping, and they have organized and participated in inter-church competitions in different events. Those friends who are unable to bear the personnel costs are supported by the church. She likes such a helpful system as the church. Like her grandparents, uncles and aunts and her parents, brothers and sisters she wants to be a good Christian activist in future.

4.3 Hinduism

Brahmin people of this community realized that most of the Indo-Aryans were (are) not correctly practicing the *dharma* of their ancestor; therefore there was a need of an organization to share the Vedic knowledge and practice accordingly. They established an organization 'Vedic Wisdom Academy' in 1992, began to share the Vedic knowledge for preserving and promoting Veda, practicing the *dharma* correctly and performing the rituals as per intent of Veda. They conceived it as their responsibility to advocate the truth of Veda, and to pull the people into the right track of *dharma*. For that mission, they attracted other people too, and made the law that 'any person who is committed for Vedic ideal and can pay NRS1000 for registration, and donate a fistful of grains from each meal, can be a life member of the Academy'. In this system, more than 600 life members are committed there. Moreover, they managed to produce priests and scholars accordingly and later established a religious school named 'Vedic Sanskrit Gurukulum' in 2007, as a non-profit making private institute. They captured public land, collected some funds at the local level, and obtained some money as a government grant that helped them to construct a building of two flats. The ground floor has been used for religious purposes for both Gurukulum and Academy, and the first floor by Gurukulum. There are 28 students from grade one to eight studying in the academic session 2012/13. All are residential students living with their four residential teachers. Founders of the Gurukulum hope that graduates from the Gurukulum not only defend Veda as the best knowledge for practical virtues, but also present a role model in their lives accordingly. Therefore, the children in the Gurukulum strictly follow the five precepts; non-killing, no sexual-adulteration, no stealing, no lying, and *satvikbhojan* (the right way of feeding with only vegetables and very pure things). In Gurukulum students and teachers are living in a single family; sharing a single kitchen, performing rituals and sleeping together. Gurukulum teaches both mainstream school courses and religious subjects, so that students after completing courses can precede either stream in higher education, or if they drop out, they can adopt a pristine occupation. The first floor of a building has been utilized as classroom, students' hostel, teachers' quarter, kitchen, etc., and the ground floor as a hall where at one wall there is a statue of Rama and Sita (ideal king and queen in Hindu Epic). Every evening, devotees around the Gurukulum gather there for worship and for singing psalms, and perform their rituals at least for one hour. The number of participants varies from three or four old widows to hundreds of all ages and of both genders. At least once a week, teachers perform rituals and students work as apprentices.

4.3.1 Subas

Subas is a seventeen-year-old boy studying in grade eight in Gurukulum. He studied grades 1-4 in English medium private school, but then his father could not sustain family costs and Subas was admitted in Gurukulum. He has got lodging, food and educational opportunity free of cost. Gradually, he got a chance to participate in different rituals as an assistant priest and earn a little money. He can handle alone the *Durgapooja* (worshiping a goddess of energy) in *Dashain* and

earn both fame and money. Villagers too expect that he will be a good priest in future. In Gurukulum he performs different tasks e.g. getting up at 5 a.m., taking bath every morning and worship, working in the kitchen in turn and collecting alms. He practices religious practice of daily life even he is at home during vacation, as in Gurukulum. He does not eat meat and other foodstuff even at home that are not allowed in Gurukulum. He hopes to complete school education from this religious school, and to be a *pandit* (a priest who can perform all rituals). For him, being a *pandit* has two benefits: self-employment and collecting merit for this and the next life.

4.4 Islamism

Nabi Hasan, the chairperson of Aljamiyatula Islamiya Madarasa, had migrated in 1956 from Birgunj to this community with his parents. In his childhood there were only three Muslim families and he used to study with Hindu friends; however, he was very strict on Muslim manners. The Muslim population gradually increased by migration and indoctrination and now reached more than 400 families. From the beginning they used to gather in certain places each Friday for namaz, and over time they collected money and constructed a mosque in 1991 by capturing public land. Now Muslim people are organized under ‘Muslim Service Committee (MSC)’ a supreme body of Muslim people, under which three different organizations, the Madarasa Management Committee, the Mosques Management Committee and the Graveyard Management Committee, are functioning. MSC is the highest body to organize all Muslims around this locality. It is an elected body of 11 members, registered in District Administration Office in 2001. Madarasa is the place for formal education and indoctrination of Islamic ideology to children whereas the Mosque is more responsible for making people more committed, strict and show faith in Allah. Maulabis care after mosques where young boys go to learn Urdu/Arabi language and to read Quran. For more systematic indoctrination, they established a separate institution; hence the Madarasa was established in 2001. Via Madarasa they can inculcate intellectual virtues to their children so that they can claim that the Quran offers the best knowledge and practical virtues so that they can present their life as role models of Quran practice. With the mainstreaming policy of government they introduced government courses too, in Madarasa. The Madarasa has another function too in that those youngsters who were educated in English medium school by living in hostels also learn Urdu/Arabic language, to be able to read the Quran, and some basic Muslim manners. Muslim people focus on whether a person is educated from Madarasa or other places, but s/he should always follow the same basic Muslim virtues. This community has barely managed the Madarasa of grade 1-5 with five teachers that are all Muslim by birth, training and practice. Besides the collection of money from donations, they have accepted government funds so that they can buy land, construct school buildings and manage school running costs. They argue that “this is a secular state, government should support Muslims because their population is increasing day by day, not only in Nepal but all over the world”.

4.4.1 Iqbal

Iqbal, a 13-year old boy, studies in grade five. All of his siblings are studying in different Madrasas but not in government school. Iqbal aims to be a good Mullaha, and for higher studies, he wants to join an Indian Madarasa. To get admission there, memorizing the Quran is mandatory; one must be able to recall 400 pages for the entrance exam, and he is doing his best. He wants to go to Mekka for Umara, the holiest place; water is brought from there during Hajj and used as medicine to cure sick people. He believes the Quran is a holy text, “while he sought me the Quran and I extended my hands to hold it, but immediately took away and said you are not allowed to touch because you are not pure to touch”. He believes and follows the teaching of his parents and teacher, e.g. not to do any *haram* (precept according to the Quran) such as eating blood, touching dogs or pigs, or

believing in any other Gods except Allah. He follows the rule of Islam commenting that he “took bath when he was touched by a dog”. He wants to reach in *jannat* (heaven) and he knows the way i.e. reading *namaz*, giving *jakat* (donation) and making Allah happy. Iqbal said there is only one God, Allah: if more than one there will be a problem in decision-making e.g. whether making a day sunny or rainy? He claimed co-education is *haram*, it spoils the mind, moreover singing and dancing with girls leads one to hell.

5. Discussion of findings

Karel Dobbelaere (2004) suggested that the influence of religion diminishes at three levels. First, societal secularization, the functional differentiation of the economy, the family, politics and religion, second, organizational secularization, the secularization of religious hospitals, religious schools, and third, individual secularization understood as a decline of religious practice, decline of religious beliefs and non-acceptance of religious morals. However, these three dimensions are interrelated and influence each other (e.g. the government policy and laws control the running of religious organizations). This study discusses how the secularization policy influences ‘organizational secularization’. The status of ‘organizational secularization’ is observed at community level in terms of how it influences secular policy in community. Dobbelaere (2004) assumes that communities are getting less religious, and that secular policy influences community members to be less active in developing ‘religious organizations’ and establishing ‘religious schools’ or ‘religious hospitals’. Along with institutional disinvolvement, people are found less interested in involving in religious activities individually.

The ethnography presented above is viewed through Dobbelaere’s model and suggests the following themes:

5.1 State support to religious communities: conflicting perception

The four religious communities (their leaders) expressed their dissatisfaction to the state regarding secularity and its process. The Hindu community leader saw declaring the state secular as a conspiracy by Christianization...“the *firangis* (an inferior word for Christians) are excited and wandering into streets, denouncing Hinduism and alluring to their *dharma*”. He added that “All other religions have at least one nation - was it essential to dismiss a Hindu-nation?” For Hindu, religion is not only an agent of identity but also a pride and glory because this is the land of thousands of Hindu deities, Gods and Goddesses, historical lineage and prosperity, richness of philosophy, theology, texts and monuments. To be an unshakeable Hindu is to be honest toward history, forefathers and the sacred-land. These days Hinduism has neither domestic (political) nor foreign support (material and psychological), but is threatened by foreign encroachment and shrinking resources. He says, “Let us see the irony of fate, we Hindu burn up our dead bodies, but people of other religions capture our jungles to use for their cemetery”.

On the other hand, Muslim and Christian non-indigenous religions are not satisfied either. Muslims claim that they “have always been threatened by Christians in expansion in Nepal. Still they are not allowed to slaughter cows” (banned in the name of national animal). But he did not suggest to be united with Christians and fight for the right to slaughter cows. On the other hand, Christians say that not only the Hindu elite but also government officials still behave in Christianity as inferior, even if the nation has adopted secular policy. They say: “getting public land and government funding for Christians is impossible whereas it is easy for others. All the ceremonies, festivals, emblem are for the Hindus and we are being neglected”. They claim the right of a status as minority religions, but still they are not treated equally. Buddhist leaders have their worries too and claim that the ethnic people are by lineage Buddhist, but some of them are converting into Christianity. There is a threat to indigenous religion by foreign/non-indigenous religion.

The dissatisfaction and despair of Hindus against secular policy at community level challenges the assumption formulated by Bhargava (2006: 5) which holds that “Hindus are tolerant of other religions and supportive of preserving the right of minorities”; however, it still supports the assumption to some extent as Hindus have not made any organized resurgence or committed any riots even though they are in extreme majority in the community population with access to politics and state agencies. The limitation of secularity is that it can please none of the communities: Hindus are displeased with the very policy, Christians with the lack of provision of equality and preservation of minority, Muslims with the expansion of Christianity, and Buddhists with the conversion of ethnic people into Christianity. Secularity is itself a riddle; for Christians it is a solution; however, to Muslims it is seen as another kind of security threat.

Nepalese culture is dominated by Hindu ideology crystallized with practice during thousands of years. Along with culture, a majority of the population and national elites hinder religious equality in every sector. However, reservation quota would give the minorities greater representation in the courts, the legal profession, the political parties, and the governmental apparatus (Letizia 2017) but dilution comes in the hegemonic position of Hindu.

5.2 Emergence of religious organizations: right and identity

Dobbelaere (2004) claims that at community level, secularization reduces the influence by religious organizations, such as trusts, religious school, hospitals, etc. The empirical data of this field challenges his claim. The state’s adoption of multi-religiosity in 1990 and secularity in 2007 brought emergence of religious trusts and schools. All the communities of four major religions (according to national census 2011) practiced religious organizations and trust Mosques in 1991, the Church and Vedic academy in 1992 and Gumba in 1993. Similarly, two organizations established two separate religious schools, viz. the Vedic school in 2007 and Madarasa in 2001. Now both of them receive government funding, whereas the Church runs Saturday school and the Gumba runs occasional schools.

These religious organizations, trusts and schools are the means and symbols of practicing their religious rights and constructing religious identities. Despite the hindrances, Christians got their religious organization where they can freely organize, participate in ceremonies, preach, and expand their ideals. The Buddhist people got public land and government funding and the right to construct their buildings. In this regard, liberty, right and equality have to some extent been realized in secular Nepal as highlighted by Bhargava (2006: 25).

All the religious communities have established their religious places by different means. Followers of the four religions gather there from time to time and perform rituals and ceremonies in groups. Hence, they not only feel integrity and closeness as an emotional dimension of religious identity (e.g. Kuznecoviene 2004) but show their power of unity to others. Religious identity of any community exists in the numbers of followers, religious places in public and activities of religious participation. They present the sense of self and othering as a communal dimension (2004). Data from my field suggest that people construct their identity via religion. More than 200 members of the Christian Church are *dalits*, who feel equality and dignity in this religion and hence organizes there. Similarly, as claimed by a Buddhist leader, many Tamang people are affiliated to Christianity, because they find their identity better in this religion.

Religious communities compete either to continue their hold on hegemony, or to achieve hegemony. In this sense they are united, they strengthen their organization by increasing their followers, adding resources, or refining the ideals. They value their ideals as purer and superior to those of other religions and claim that ‘mighty is righty’ and they denounce to others what is the ethical dimension of religious identity (ibid). From ancient times, Hinduism has taken advantages as state religion, and the government has invested a lot in its promotion of all modes of education

(e.g. one university and nearly fifty schools were established for the promotion of Hinduism), and the Hindu people presume that they are superior to followers of others religions. Now the Hindu community feels powerless and helpless, and therefore united to continue their hold against other religions. On the other hand, Muslims and Christians are in minority, and they are in both defensive but at the same time in expansive position, which has made them unite for stronger influence.

The introduction and expansion of non-indigenous religions, Muslim and Christian religions, labelled as such by the Hindu and Buddhist leaders, have created a pressure on indigenous religions. These two Hindu and Buddhist organizations not only re-educated the priests, lamas and followers, but also practice the ideals of Vedic Hinduism and Buddhism in daily lives. This is an attempt at protecting religion from both internal and external threats. It resembles to Thomas Meyer's (2007: 12) argument that "secularization passes through redefinition and rebirth of religion". These two religious organizations are radically different from other sects of the same religions that are still in mainstream. Against the mainstream ideals, the 'Vedic wisdom academy' advocates non-violence against animal sacrificing and caste discrimination or four-verna (colour) system practice by common Hindu people. For the academy, a Brahmin or a person of the highest caste is someone who follows the code of conduct regardless of which family s/he is born in. Similarly, for 'Non-violence Buddhism' a pure Buddhist is a person who never drinks and always follows vegetarianism and the five precepts. To establish their identities free from criticism by other religions, these two religious communities re-defined their religions and hence new cults/sects have been reborn. Now 'Vedic wisdom academy' can easily overcome the blame if any sect of Buddhism, Christian and Muslim criticizes Hinduism for caste-discrimination and animal sacrifice. Similarly, the Gumba also manages if Buddhism is blamed for shamanic and animistic practice, by saying: "look at us we are the real followers of Buddhism". Hence, the phenomenon of rebirth of these two sects of indigenous religions resembles the nineteenth century India where European colonized movements created pressure on indigenous community to crystallize their religious identity (e.g. Hinduism and Buddhism as -isms were products of the 19th century and did not exist as -isms before) as discussed by (Casanova 2010: 4). Before 1990, no other religions could raise fingers against Hinduism even in any evil practice. There was no public competition of religions, and therefore, no need to revise. Buddhism too was the second privileged religion and had no competition from Islamism and Christianity. Hence, my ethnographic study of secularity as a tool for religious indoctrination and identity formation in Nepal agrees with Casanova (2010: 4) on secularization as a means for religious reformation, redefinition, and revival of old or rebirth of new norms and values.

In the process of constructing religious identity, the religious communities tend to make their religion safe from criticism such as "this religion encourages followers for malpractices". In the field I found cases of people who were Buddhist by birth (e.g. Tamang, an ethnic group known to be Buddhist), but had followed habits of drinking as their custom. They practiced gambling too, but their religious organization or leaders did not attempt to stop them from being ruined. But a Christian organization took care of them, preaching about Christian ethics and keeping them in a rehabilitation centre, to finally give them a job in the Church. Three of such persons achieved social status and are now working as pastors of different Churches. Such events created a pressure on Buddhist leaders to practice the core ideals (vegetarian, non-violence and five precepts) of Buddha and hence the Buddhist organization and cult was founded where the Buddhists advocate for banning alcohol drinking and animal slaughtering. Hence, immigration of foreign religions is one of the causes of redefinition and revival of indigenous religion. *Sudras* (the lowest caste in Hindu Varna system) are now entering into Christianity, even if this group is categorized as Hindu religion by tradition. These converted people blame Hinduism for discriminating them by caste. Hinduism is also blamed for its extravagant ritual activities which are a burden for economically

poor members of the community. To be safe from such fact-based blame, the Hindu community redefined their religion, i.e. no discrimination by caste and no more extravagant rituals, and no practice of animal sacrificing in the name of religion. These two cases, present on the one hand a redefinition and rebirth of a new cult as a consequence of secular policy, and on the other, secularization as an encouragement of religious identity negotiation. The leaders of Hindu community expressed, “unless we are able to demonstrate that we have a true knowledge of the Veda and followed the ideal practices, our religion, though having the virtues of ‘mainstream’ and ‘classical’, suffers from criticism”. Therefore, Hindu wants to produce such individuals from the education offered so that they can guide the society in the right ways by involving correct ways of religious practices. Now, they have realized that the distorted form of religion cannot maintain the existence and identity of Hindu.

5.3 Religious involvement: reproduction via schools

The field work suggests to me that members of all four religious organizations are growing day by day and they are religiously conscious. However, I cannot claim that their religiosity is on the increase. They seek their religious identity, and they enjoy by participating in religious activities in their groups. Christians are enthusiastic to participate in every Saturday programs and Muslims on Fridays. The religious organizations and spots make them religiously bonded, engaged and give them an identity.

Grurukula and Gumba are religious indoctrination centres that have existed from pre-historic time in Nepal, while Madarasa and Churches were found after 1950 and 1990. Among the many religious schools, 930 have introduced mainstream school courses because the state has earmarked the budget for such schools. More than 100,000 students are studying in such schools whereas about 7,000,000 students are in mainstream schools (DoE 2015: 6). Students from such schools are certified as equal to mainstream schools regardless of their religious indoctrination. In this way the state has encouraged establishing religious schools, encouraged students to participate in religious activities, indoctrinating religious ideals and reproducing religiosity. Such religious indoctrination (Momanu 2012: 97; Flew 1972: 114) in the communities has been observed at the interpersonal level, i.e. a teacher indoctrinates the students, and religious preaching is conducted in religious spots. Moreover, an institutional level of indoctrination was also observed, as well as the establishment of the religious organizations and development of educational systems guided by religious ideological interest.

The portraits of the four religiously indoctrinated individuals; Mina, Nikita, Subas and Iqbal present the religious motives, engagement and commitment; however it is not transparent to what extent they contribute exponentially to ideology in future. Nevertheless, their habitus (cf. Ozturk 2005: 145) has been formed to some extent by observing religious activities, imitation and active participation (Bandura cf. Woolfolk 2004: 317-320). They have made their aim (although this may change later) on practicing religions for now and in future, and link religions with career and progress. They are in the process of constructing their religious identity and in future they will express their religious habitus and even engage in (re)production because one’s experience in childhood influences future behaviour (Andresen, Boud & Cohen 2001: 225).

6. Conclusion

The ethnographic data analysed, using the model by Dobbela challenges itself. The four religious communities are not satisfied with political secularization. Hindu presumes that the state is close to Christianity and the other three religions claim that the state highly favours Hindu. In societal secularization, the hypothesis of “diminishing religious organizations” predicted by the model is being challenged as religious organizations have emerged; religious communities are competing

for power and resources while negotiating new identities. Indigenous religions have been redefined and revived. Moreover, the model predicted the disinvolvement of individuals in religious activity; however the study has indicated that members of different religious communities participate regularly, periodically and occasionally in rituals and ceremonies. People are better united in religious identity. Communities have run schools for the preservation and (re)production of religious ideals.

As Bhargava (2006) argued secularism within Hinduism in particular and in South Asian religions more generally is quite different from the west as regards the construction of religious identity; individuals are affiliated within organizations and participating in ceremonies. The empirical study challenges Dobbelaere (2004) by revealing some ambivalence. In the process of secularization religious organization (schools) have been emerging which goes against his assumption. In 'Laicization,' there is a disjuncture: equidistance of religions from the state makes religious harmony, but we see antagonism among the religions. There is a complexity at the societal level, and rather than sublimating religious affiliation, identity formation grounded in religion is stronger, more vivid and condensed.

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