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Q6(a)

How do you account for the increasing significance of religion in public and personal spheres in the context of secularization thesis in India?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Religion and Society

Religion and Society: Religious communities in India; Problems of religious minorities.

Core demand of the question

- How do you account for the increasing significance of religion in public and personal spheres in the context of the **secularization thesis** in India?
- State the thesis, show why India did not privatise religion, and use Indian sociologists

Revision summary

Hard secularization expected religion to shrink with modernisation.

India combined a secular constitutional state with louder public and personal faith.

The **Rudolphs** and **Yogendra Singh** explain religious groups as modern organisations and recast traditions.

Democracy, **personal law** and media keep religion public; kinship keeps it personal.

The useful model is recasting and principled distance, not disappearance.

Introduction

The **secularization thesis**, in its hard European form, expected modernisation to shrink religion into a private hobby. India modernised its state, markets, and elections while religion grew louder in both public and personal life. The account is not that Indians failed to become modern. It is that Indian modernity uses religion as organisation and meaning.

Body

The thesis and the Indian mismatch

- Classical secularization linked industry, science, and the nation-state to a decline of church power and of everyday ritual.
- India built a secular Constitution in the sense of no established church and equal citizenship, not in the sense of a religion-free public.
- T. N. Madan and Ashis Nandy, in different tones, argued that forcing a Western private-religion model misunderstands South Asian faith as total social life.

Why religion is more public

- The **Rudolphs** showed traditional religious groups becoming interest groups: trusts, parties, and pilgrimage economies are modern associations.
- **Yogendra Singh's** heterogenetic and orthogenetic change recasts faith through print, television, and now social media rather than deleting it.

- Electoral democracy rewards religious blocs; the sacred calendar is also a campaign calendar.
- Courts, **personal law**, and temple-mosque disputes keep theology in the state's living room.
- Urban anonymity did not end caste-linked ritual; it often produced louder public festivals and televised gurus.

Why religion is more personal as well

- Marriage, food, and mourning remain faith-marked; market bio-data still lists community.
- New middle-class piety, pilgrimage packages, and household gods on phones intensify personal practice even among the credentialed, which Beteille's split middle class helps locate.
- Dumont's hierarchy is weaker in a factory, yet purity and festivity return in the home and the wedding.

A better Indian formulation

- Rajeev Bhargava's principled distance is closer to Indian constitutional practice than a vanishing of the sacred.
- A. R. Desai would still ask when public religion is ideology covering class and majoritarian power.
- **Increasing significance is therefore compatible with hospitals and software parks:** those are not evidence that the thesis was fulfilled.

Limits of the 'increase' story

- **Some spaces did secularise:** campuses, offices, and mixed cities for daily work.
- The increase is uneven by region, class, and faith, and it includes reformist as well as majoritarian forms.

Flow diagram

Hard secularization thesis -> Religion becomes private
 Indian modernity -> Public faith parties courts media
 Indian modernity -> Personal ritual marriage piety
 Public faith parties courts media -> Recast sacred
 Personal ritual marriage piety -> Recast sacred
 Religion becomes private -.does not fit. -> Indian modernity

Conclusion

Religion in India did not follow the hard **secularization thesis**. Public life uses faith as mobilisation and law; personal life uses it as kinship and meaning. Indian modernity recasts the sacred instead of retiring it.

Facts & figures

Secularization thesis

Expectation that modernisation reduces the social power of religion.

Madan / Nandy

Critiques of imposing a Western private-religion model on India.

Rudolphs

Religious and caste bodies as modern political associations.

Yogendra Singh

Modernization of tradition rather than replacement of tradition.

Personal law

Faith-linked family law that keeps religion inside the state and the household.

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