

# **The Role and Relevance of Religions in Responding to the Secularization of Sri Lanka**

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## **Abstract**

In the context of post-modern secular societies, the role and relevance of religious traditions face increasing investigations. Sri Lanka, a nation steeped in rich religious diversity, comprising Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, the major religions of the world offers a compelling case study on the interplay between faith and secularization. While secularism shapes public policy and societal norms, this paper explores how religious traditions in Sri Lanka adapt and respond to these changes, maintaining their enduring relevance in an evolving socio-political and cultural landscape. The study examines secularization as a gradual process in Sri Lanka, influenced by post-modernism, globalization, Diaspora, and NGO dynamics. Secular values such as individualism, consumerism, and liberal democracy, transmitted through global media, diasporic remittances, and NGOs, increasingly challenge traditional religious frameworks. Yet, religion remains a vital force, addressing societal issues like poverty, inequality, and governance, and offering ethical guidance amidst modern complexities. Key incidents, such as the Kannakai Temple's Chariot Festival and the use of JCB machinery to enforce caste restrictions, underscore the complexities of secular interventions within religious practices. Similarly, examples like Amman as a 'social auditor' illustrate how faith traditions continue to inspire accountability and moral clarity, even in secularized settings. The paper argues that secularism in Sri Lanka does not signify the rejection of religion but reflects a shift from institutional authority to personal belief. It highlights the evolving balance between the sacred and the secular, where religious values coexist with modern governance. By engaging creatively with societal challenges and reinterpreting their roles, religious traditions in Sri Lanka can remain vibrant, relevant, and transformative. Ultimately, the study calls for faith communities to embrace this balance, ensuring that religion continues to shape the nation's ethical and cultural foundations in the secular age.

**Keywords:** Secularization; Transformation; Sacred and Secular; Globalization; Diaspora;

## **Introduction**

In countries like Sri Lanka, where post-modern secular societies are rapidly evolving, the relevance and role of religious faith and traditions are often questioned or doubted. As secularism increasingly influences public policy and social norms, questions arise in various sectors, whether the faith traditions retain their capacity to shape collective human and social values to foster social cohesion.

Sri Lanka, traditionally celebrated for its rich religious diversity and richness, has long been a land where - Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity - the major religions of the world coexist in a meaningful way. These faith traditions are deeply woven into the socio-cultural fabric of the nation. Yet, the growing tide of secularization challenges their influence, particularly in the public sphere, where religions are often begun to be perceived as insignificant or outdated. However, these faith traditions continue to serve as vital sources of meaning, uniting forces and moral guidance amidst the rapid shifts to the modern secular life.

In a society that struggles with the challenges of the trends of secularization and post-modernity, Sri Lanka's religious traditions still provide a counterbalance to the materialism, individualism, and spiritual alienation that often accompany the above said trends. Despite the pressures of secularized contemporary life, these religious traditions endure, and offer spiritual guidance, solace and moral clarity to help individuals and communities navigate the complexities of an ever-changing world.

This paper explores the critical question of the place of religions and faith traditions in a society increasingly shaped by secularization, a phenomenon that affects both the global context and Sri Lanka in particular. The secularization process raises profound challenges, urging reflection on how the faith traditions intersect with modernity and public life. By examining the ways religious traditions respond to and interact with the forces of secularization, this paper seeks to highlight how the faith traditions can continue its enduring relevance in Sri Lanka's socio-political and cultural landscape.

Through a detailed analysis, this paper addresses the intersection of faith, tradition, and modernity, arguing that religions still remain a significant force in Sri Lanka even with the growing dominance of secularism in public discourse. The study underscores the necessity of understanding and preserving the role of religious traditions meaningfully as they continue to shape national identity and social values in this increasingly secular age.

## **Amman as 'Social Auditor'**

There is a fascinating account documented by Sidharthan Maunaguru about how the goddess Amman was invoked as a 'social auditor'. He offers an intriguing incident in one of his insightful work "Amman as Social Auditor: Financial Misconduct versus Charitable Giving by Tamil Sri Lankans in the UK" (Maunaguru, 2015, pp. 369-388).

In the UK, the Hindu temples play a dual role as centres of worship and as hubs for fundraising to send aid to war-affected Tamils in Sri Lanka. Amidst this, concerns about the misuse of funds arose. Allegations arose that charitable donations collected in temples were being misappropriated. As the Temple trust in legal and institutional mechanisms wavered,

the community turned to Amman, believing that the goddess herself would ensure that their donations were used justly and fairly. Here, Amman became the divine overseer and ‘social auditor’, ensuring accountability where human systems had faltered.

This incident beautifully illustrates that even in secularized societies faith remains a powerful ethical guide. While the U.K. Charity Commission’s inquiry focused on financial accountability, for many Tamil devotees, the moral judgment rested with Amman, not with legal authorities. Ultimately, the role of the goddess Amman as a ‘social auditor’ reflects how faith, charity, and accountability intersect in the secular affair of fundraising. It shows that religion still plays a vital role, not just in the private sphere but in shaping the public conscience. This idea of the divine overseeing human affairs, balancing fairness, justice and morality, offers a powerful symbol as we reflect on the relevance of religious faith in the contemporary secularized world.

This story is particularly pertinent to the discussion of Sri Lanka’s journey towards secularization and directly aligns with the central questions explored in this paper: “What is the role of religion in a secularized Sri Lanka?” and “How do faith traditions maintain their relevance in a world shaped by secularism, post-modernism, and globalization?” By examining such instances, one can better understand how religiosity and secularity coexist, interact, and adapt within the evolving socio-cultural landscape of Sri Lanka.

### **Religiosity and Secularity: A Delicate Balance**

Religiosity and secularity are often framed as opposing forces, yet they coexist in complex and inseparable ways. At its core, religiosity is rooted in the sacred, offering answers to life’s fundamental questions and connecting individuals to the transcendent divine. It provides a framework of beliefs and practices that guide moral and spiritual life. In contrast, secularity denotes the separation of religious institutions from civic and material affairs, focusing on worldly concerns such as human reason, development and empirical facts.

However, the relationship between religiosity and secularity is far more nuanced than mere opposition. Secular societies are not devoid of religion; instead, they create new spaces where religion continues to interact with public life, although differently. As philosopher Charles Taylor argues in his *‘A Secular Age’*, secularity doesn’t necessarily signify the absence of religion but represents a shift in how religion is experienced. Taylor describes the modern secular age as one that remains open to faith while being shaped by reason (Taylor, 2007, p.3). In a secular context, people may hold deep religious beliefs, but these beliefs coexist alongside secular worldviews, competing for relevance and mutually influencing each other.

Peter Berger, a distinguished American sociologist, underscores the resurgence of religion across various spheres of society, including education, the judiciary, and civil life. In his analysis of the intricate interplay between religiosity and secularity, Berger challenges the long-held assumption of an increasingly secularized world. He argues that the notion of global secularization is misleading, asserting that contemporary society remains profoundly religious, often more fervently so than in the past. This phenomenon, which he terms the

‘desecularization of the world’, reflects the enduring and, in some contexts, intensified role of religion in shaping human experience and societal structures. (Berger, 1999, p.2).

In Sri Lanka, a land rich with religious diversity, secularization has not emerged abruptly. Instead, it has evolved gradually, allowing religious traditions and secular ideals to shape society simultaneously. The four major religious traditions - Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity - have long influenced the cultural and moral framework of the country. In this context, secularism in Sri Lanka does not imply the absence of religion from public associations but reflects a transformation in how religious influence is expressed. While institutional power might have disappeared, religion increasingly manifests in personal belief and practice, maintaining its relevance in both public and private life.

A compelling example that underscores the complex interplay between religiosity and secularity in Sri Lanka is the incident at the Kannakai Amman Temple’s Chariot Festival in Varani North, Jaffna. Traditionally, the sacred chariot, central to the festival, was pulled by devotees as a symbol of communal devotion and unity. However, with many devotees having migrated to the Diaspora and local caste-based restrictions dictating who could touch the sacred robe, the temple administration opted to hire a JCB heavy vehicle to pull the chariot. Funded by generous donations from the Diaspora, this decision disrupted the traditional act of collective devotion and perpetuated caste-based exclusion, undermining the festival’s spiritual ethos. (tamilnews.com, 2018/06/07)

This reliance on a machine to fulfil a sacred ritual raises significant questions about the intersection of religiosity and secularity. The decision reflects a troubling contradiction, rejecting members of one’s own community while placing faith in a machine invented by a foreigner, Joseph Cyril Bamford (JCB), to maintain ritual purity. Such actions not only disrupt the unity and sanctity of the event but also blur the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, challenging the coherence of religious practices in a secularized context.

This incident highlights how the interplay of modernity, tradition, and social discriminations continues to reshape religious expressions in Sri Lanka. Further this incident also reveals how modern secular tools can inadvertently distort religious practices, perpetuating social injustice rather than resolving it. It also underscores how the authentic religiosity has transformed into what can be termed ‘secular religiosity’, as secularization grows stronger in Sri Lanka. Despite the materialistic intervention, the deep-rooted religiosity of the devotees, both local and Diasporic, remained evident in their insistence that the chariot festival proceed as scheduled. This highlights the delicate balance between religiosity and secularity, where traditional practices adapt to modern realities, yet social challenges rooted in religious customs persist.

## **Sacred and Secular: Two Dimensions of Human Experience**

The sacred and the secular represent two fundamental dimensions of human experience. The sacred connects humanity to the divine and transcendent, dealing with spiritual truths, rituals, and moral guidance. The secular, on the other hand, concerns the immediate and tangible aspects of life, such as politics, economics, and governance, focusing on the temporal and material world.

Historically, Sri Lanka has been a place where the sacred and secular were closely linked together. Ancient kings commissioned *stupas* and temples as acts of devotion and skill of governing, while modern political leaders continue to participate as chieftains in religious festivals. Religious ceremonies bless secular institutions, and secular laws protect religious freedoms. This integration of sacred and secular has defined Sri Lankan society, even as global secular forces push for clearer distinctions.

With the rise of modernity and post-modernism, Sri Lanka is witnessing a gradual separation of these dimensions. Secularism has introduced a shift towards distinguishing the spiritual from the material, prioritizing secular concerns in governance and public policy. Yet, the interplay between the sacred and secular remains strong, reflecting the ongoing evolution of their relationship in Sri Lankan life.

The example of the Kannakai Amman Temple highlights this duality, where sacred traditions adapt to secular influences but remain deeply tied to spiritual values. As Sri Lanka continues to navigate these complex intersections, the delicate balance between religiosity and secularity serves as both a challenge and an opportunity for fostering a harmonious and inclusive society.

### **Secularism in Sri Lanka: Evolution, Not Elimination**

Secularization in Sri Lanka represents a gradual evolution rather than a complete break from religious tradition. The country's unique form of secularism does not exclude religion; instead, religious practices persist, adapting to evolve in the public sphere and individual beliefs.

A few examples can illustrate this dynamic interplay between religion and secularization.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an event reported by *Agence France Presse* (AFP) on March 20, 2020, vividly highlights this relationship. The news titled "Sri Lanka Fights Virus with Buddhist Holy Water" described how helicopters sprinkled holy water over parts of Sri Lanka. The water had been blessed during a week-long chanting ceremony by Buddhist monks, seeking divine intervention against the virus. This act was analyzed by anthropologists Nalika Gajaweera and Neena Mahadev in their article "*Sonic Fields of Protection in Sri Lanka's COVID-19 Pandemic*," published on February 19, 2021, in the Asia Research Institute. The authors explored the apotropaic practices of ritual chanting by Theravāda Buddhist monastics as a form of spiritual protection against COVID-19. They argue that such practices extend Buddhist notions of national security, integrating spiritually protective Dharmic energies into broader efforts to combat the viral contagion. This example illustrates how religious traditions continue to influence public life, even in addressing ostensibly secular concerns such as health crises. (Asia Research Institute, 2021/02/19)

Another example further demonstrates how religious responses emerge to address secular issues. In 2023, during Sri Lanka's severe economic crisis, some Christian Pentecostal churches organized prayer services explicitly aimed at solving the 'Dollar Problem'. These services invited divine intervention to resolve the country's economic difficulties. This response underscores how religion provides hope in secular matters such as

economics, intersecting with worldly challenges in times of crisis. It also evokes the sentiment behind the phrase ‘In God We Trust’ on U.S. dollar notes, a reminder that faith often coexists with and complements secular governance.

These examples clearly show that in Sri Lanka, secularism does not aim to eliminate religion but rather evolves alongside it. Faith traditions, though adapting to modern contexts, continue to shape public life, offering spiritual dimensions to issues often categorized as secular. This nuanced interplay ensures that religion strives to retain its relevance even in the rapidly secularizing society.

## **Key Factors in Sri Lanka’s Secularization**

Sri Lanka’s journey towards secularization can be attributed to various factors. This paper focuses on key factors of this transformation, including the influence of post-modernism, the impact of globalization, the effects of immigration and the Diaspora, and the increasing presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These interconnected forces have collectively reshaped the socio-cultural and religious landscape of the country.

### **1. Influence of Post-Modernism: The Post-Modern Situation in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka today is deeply influenced by post-modern thinking. Post-modernism, characterized by skepticism of absolute truths, a plurality of perspectives and a questioning of grand narratives, has transformed how Sri Lankans perceive religion and its role in society. Faith traditions, once regarded as unquestionable sources of truth, are now viewed with a more critical lens, recognized as one of many ways to understand the world. In this post-modern context, no single worldview, whether religious or secular, can claim dominance over others.

As a result, Sri Lanka has become a more pluralistic society, where religious and secular perspectives coexist. This pluralism, while celebrated, has also led to many tensions. On one side are those who seek to preserve religious traditions, and on the other are those advocating for more secular approaches to authority and to the affairs of daily life. Post-modernity has thus created a space where religious traditions and secularism coexist alongside diverse identities and worldviews. However, it also presents a challenge for religious institutions: they must adapt and remain relevant in a world where individual choice increasingly takes precedence over communal belief.

In this milieu, religious traditions are faced with the task of evolving to meet the needs of a society that values personal autonomy while still yearning for spiritual meaning. The post-modern situation calls on religious institutions to engage in dialogue and offer a compelling vision that speaks to the complexities of contemporary life.

The secularization of Sri Lanka is a complex process shaped particularly by the rise of post-modern trends. Post-modern thought, with its focus on diversity, pluralism and the rejection of absolute truths, has played a significant role in this shift. In a world where multiple narratives coexist, religion is no longer viewed as the sole source of truth or moral authority. As global ideas have permeated Sri Lankan society, younger generations have

adopted more secular worldviews, questioning traditional religious institutions and their authority.

Post-modern trends have encouraged a critical re-examination of religious narratives, fostering a society where religion still exists but no longer holds the same pervasive influence over public and private life. Secularization in Sri Lanka is not merely about the decline of religious authority but involves the reinterpretation of religious practices within a pluralistic framework. Rituals that were once considered purely sacred are now often seen as social and cultural performances, while religious identity has increasingly become a matter of personal choice rather than a communal obligation.

This transformation is also evident in the way religious institutions operate today; many of them collaborate with or function as secular institutions, adopting modern methods to provide education, healthcare and social services. In doing so, these institutions balance their sacred duties with the practical needs of a contemporary secularized society, demonstrating how religion can remain relevant in a changing world.

## **2. Impact of Globalization**

Sri Lanka's secularization is not solely the result of internal developments but is also significantly influenced by globalization. As the country integrated into the global economy through trade, travel and communication, it absorbed new ideas about governance, economics and social structures. This exposure to global culture has promoted values such as individualism, consumerism and secular governance modes, which have increasingly challenged traditional religious frameworks.

Globalization has brought transformative changes to education and technology, fostering a generation that is increasingly critical of traditional religious authority. It has also introduced secular ideologies such as individualism and consumerism, which challenge conventional religious frameworks. Indian-American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, a prominent theorist in globalization studies, highlights the role of *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes* in spreading secular values globally, particularly among younger generations. Mediascapes refer to the various forms of media that shape perceptions of the world, while ideoscapes encompass the global flow of ideas and ideologies (Appadurai, 1996, p.36).

Appadurai's observations are highly pertinent to Sri Lanka, where these global forces are reshaping local traditions and cultural practices. The exposure to such influences, especially among the youth, has prompted a re-examination of long-held religious beliefs and practices, challenging their relevance in a rapidly changing society. This dynamic demonstrates how globalization encourages the blending and questioning of cultural and spiritual traditions, significantly altering Sri Lanka's socio-religious landscape.

Globalization has opened up new avenues for religious engagement but has also placed greater pressure on faith traditions to reassert their relevance in a world increasingly shaped by secular ideologies. In this context, Sri Lanka's religious traditions must evolve to remain relevant in a fast becoming secularized society. The challenge for religious institutions is to adapt to the modern secular landscape while continuing to provide moral and spiritual guidance.

### **3. Effects of Immigration and Diaspora**

The migration of Sri Lankans across the globe, particularly as a consequence of the civil war (1983 - 2009), has significantly reshaped the country's cultural, social and religious landscape. This wave of migration, driven by both economic opportunities and the search for safety, has led to the creation of a global Sri Lankan Diaspora, with strong ties to secularized countries in Europe, North America and Australia. In these environments, diasporic Sri Lankans are exposed to values such as individualism, liberal democracy and the separation of religion from public life. The secular ideals embraced by diasporic Sri Lankans profoundly influence their interactions with family and communities back home, fostering a gradual shift in perspectives on religion and its role in society.

The transformative power of migration as a channel for secularization in Sri Lanka is often underestimated. Peggy Levitt, a distinguished sociologist specializing in transnational migration, provides a nuanced analysis of how migration and remittances reshape more the lives of those who remain in their home countries, than those of the migrants themselves. According to Levitt, financial remittances are far more than monetary transactions; they serve as means of transferring the cultural norms, social values and ideological influences across borders. (Levitt, 2001, p.78)

In the Sri Lankan context too, the impact of remittances extends well beyond economic sustenance. These funds often carry with them the secular attitudes and worldviews of migrants who have been exposed to diverse cultures and lifestyles abroad. Families dependent on these remittances not only adopt financial practices influenced by their benefactors but also absorb secular ideologies that challenge traditional religious and cultural frameworks. This phenomenon fosters shifts in perspectives on issues such as gender roles, education, personal autonomy, and governance.

Over time, the transmission of these secular values has created subtle but significant transformations within Sri Lankan society. As families adjust to the cultural influence accompanying financial support, traditional norms rooted in religious authority are questioned or reinterpreted. This dynamic underscores the dual role of migration as an economic lifeline and a driver of cultural change, emphasizing how transnational connections reshape the socio-cultural fabric of Sri Lanka in both visible and invisible ways.

Diaspora communities, especially those engaged in human rights advocacy, play a significant role in promoting secular governance in Sri Lanka. They advocate for equal rights, the separation of religion from politics and greater inclusivity, directly challenging the dominance of religious institutions in public discourse. These efforts have opened spaces for a more pluralistic and secular society, encouraging a reimagining of public life where diverse voices can coexist.

This momentum is particularly evident among younger generations, who are deeply influenced by globalized, secular ideologies and more willing to critique traditional religious frameworks. As secularization gains grip due to the effect of immigration and Diaspora, it is reshaping Sri Lanka's cultural and social landscape, signalling a shift towards a society that balances its rich religious heritage with the realities of a globalized - secular society.



#### **4. Increasing Presence of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

The role of NGOs and international organizations in Sri Lanka has further accelerated the process of secularization. The NGOs, both local and international, have significantly influenced Sri Lanka's social, political, and cultural landscape, particularly in the aftermath of the civil war and the influx of international aid. Operating in diverse sectors such as education, healthcare, human rights, and poverty alleviation, NGOs have been instrumental in the country's recovery and development. However, their influence extends beyond these developmental activities. NGOs have also played a crucial role in contributing to the secularization of Sri Lankan society by promoting values, practices and institutional structures that align with secular governance and modern civil society.

One way the NGOs have fostered secularization is through the promotion of human rights. International organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been active in advocating for secular legal reforms, especially in areas related to civil liberties, gender equality, and minority rights. These organizations challenge traditional religious authority by promoting a governance framework based on universal human rights principles, which often stand in contrast to the influence of religious institutions in shaping public life.

In the field of education, NGOs like World Vision Sri Lanka have introduced secular education programmes that prioritize critical thinking, civic education and life skills over religious instruction. This secularization of education, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, encourages the younger generation to develop a more pluralistic worldview, reducing their reliance on religious institutions for guidance in public and private life.

Additionally, NGOs working in gender equality, such as Women In Need (WIN) and the Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum (MWRAF), have challenged patriarchal structures often reinforced by religious traditions. By advocating for women's rights through a secular, rights-based approach, these organizations have promoted gender equality, encouraging a cultural shift that diminishes the authority of traditional religious norms.

In the realm of governance, organizations like Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) and the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) have been crucial in promoting transparency, accountability and inclusive governance. Their emphasis on neutrality, fairness, and the rule of law reflects secular principles that challenge the traditional dominance of religious institutions in public affairs.

Moreover, during humanitarian crises, international NGOs like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Oxfam have provided critical aid without religious affiliation, promoting secular humanitarianism. Their approach demonstrates that societal needs can be addressed through secular frameworks, reinforcing the idea that public welfare and social services need not be tied to religious doctrines.

While the NGOs often promote secular values that challenge the traditional dominance of religious institutions, they are also widely recognized as agents of positive social transformation. By advocating for principles such as neutrality, equality and inclusive governance, NGOs offer a fresh perspective on the interplay between religion and society.

Their work encourages a reshaping of these domains, fostering an environment where diverse worldviews can coexist harmoniously.

Through initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue, civic engagement, and equal rights, NGOs facilitate a more pluralistic approach to national development. Their emphasis on inclusivity not only broadens participation in public discourse but also challenges the deep-rooted inequalities, creating a foundation for sustainable social progress. These efforts allow for a balanced integration of both secular and religious perspectives, reducing polarization and fostering mutual respect among different cultural and faith traditions.

As NGOs continue to shape public policies and influence societal attitudes, they contribute significantly to the ongoing process of secularization in Sri Lanka. However, rather than wearing down religion's relevance, their work encourages a nuanced coexistence of secular and religious ideals, where both are recognized as integral to the nation's socio-cultural fabric. This dynamic interaction underscores the potential for NGOs to serve as bridges between tradition and modernity, paving the way for a society rooted in shared values and mutual understanding.

### **Sacred Language vs. Secular Language**

One of the key challenges in a secular society is navigating the differences between sacred and secular language. Sacred language, rooted in faith, is rich with metaphor, symbolism, and spiritual meaning. It speaks to the heart and soul, offering insights into the divine and addressing the moral and ethical dimensions of human existence. Secular language, in contrast, is pragmatic, rational, and grounded in empirical evidence. It focuses on worldly matters such as governance, law and human rights.

In Sri Lanka, religious leaders often employ sacred language to communicate moral teachings, while the state relies on secular language to address public policy and governance. However, both forms of communication are essential, and the challenge lies in bridging the two. Religious leaders must find ways to translate the profound truths of their traditions into terms that resonate with a secularized audience. For example, the story of Amman as a social auditor, which uses religious imagery to address real-world ethical concerns, illustrates how sacred narratives can be applied to modern issues. Similarly, religious teachings must engage with contemporary concerns such as justice, equality and community cohesion in ways that are accessible to both believers and non-believers. This balance between sacred and secular language is crucial in ensuring that religious wisdom continues to contribute meaningfully to public discourse in a pluralistic, secular society.

### **Facing Secularism in a Land Rich in Religious Traditions**

Despite its deep-rooted religious heritage, Sri Lanka faces the challenge of balancing its faith traditions with an increasingly secular worldview. However, secularism need not be viewed as a threat. Instead, it presents an opportunity for religious traditions to engage with the modern world in meaningful ways. Rather than retreating into isolation, religions of the

country can creatively adapt to this new landscape, offering moral and ethical guidance in a society often preoccupied with material solutions to spiritual and ethical dilemmas.

Religious communities hold a distinct and profound capacity to enrich public discourse on human rights, social justice and ethical governance. In a world often driven by efficiency, success orientation and material gain, they can serve as a counterbalance by offering a voice of compassion and empathy. By stepping into the public sphere, religious leaders have the potential to address pressing societal challenges such as poverty, corruption, and inequality, infusing these conversations with moral clarity and a focus on human dignity.

Faith communities, on their part, can function as sanctuaries of discernment and ethical deliberation, offering guidance in a society that frequently appears morally lost. Moreover, religious traditions can play an important role in bridging divisions within Sri Lanka's multi-religious and multi-ethnic society. By fostering interfaith dialogue and promoting shared values, they can help build a more inclusive and cohesive social fabric.

In this way, faith traditions can remain not only relevant but essential in a secularizing world, offering a moral compass that complements secular ideals of equality and human rights. Through active engagement in public life, religious communities have the power to inspire a more just, compassionate and ethically grounded society for all.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of Amman as a 'social auditor' exemplifies how religious traditions continue to serve as moral guides, fostering accountability and trust, even in a society increasingly influenced by secular values. Despite the forces of post-modernity and secularization, religions retain the potential to act as pillars of ethical guidance, social justice and communal harmony.

To sustain the relevance of faith in a secularized, post-modern Sri Lanka, religious traditions must engage constructively with secular institutions and other faith communities. They must confront contemporary challenges of poverty, inequality, corruption, and environmental degradation, not by retreating into doctrinal isolation but by offering compassionate, spiritually grounded solutions that resonate universally. This approach demands adaptability, openness and a willingness to embrace a shared humanity over sectarian divides.

Far from being rendered obsolete in this secular age, faith remains a transformative force capable of shaping a just and compassionate society. Rather than competing with secularism, it can complement it by providing an ethical foundation that promotes justice, human dignity and solidarity. The true strength of faith lies in its ability to inspire meaningful action and foster unity in a pluralistic world.

For this to happen, religious traditions must stay vibrant, dynamic and forward-looking. They must not retreat into irrelevance but actively engage with modern secular society, offering moral clarity and hope in times of uncertainty. Faith is not merely a relic of the past but a living tradition with the capacity to guide Sri Lanka through the complexities of contemporary life, providing a solid foundation for generations to come.

The responsibility lies with faith communities, leaders, and individuals to ensure that these traditions remain relevant and impactful. By doing so, they can affirm the enduring significance of faith as a source of wisdom, compassion and openness, helping shape a future for Sri Lanka that is rooted in justice and shared humanity.

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