

THE IMPACT OF RELIGION ON INDIAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Anjuma Ahmed Nargis

(MA in political science)

D/O Arshad Ahmed, Village kalgachia

District -Barpeta ,Assam Pin-781319

Abstract

Indian politics has a very significant impact of religion in its demarcation of democracy and running of the country. Secularism is the framework of India that has aimed at between tolerance and pluralism in its colossal diversity, belonging to religion, language, and culture. However, interfacing between religion and politics has become more dynamic, and which can be used for integration as well as segregation at the same time. However, political religiosity, which was at one time negligible, rose during the 1960s especially in America. Such a change reflected the cultural processes of rural India rather than such trends as democracy that the leaders of the country expected when receiving independence from Great Britain. In the subsequent years, religion was an important component of election manifestos and campaigning, politics and administration, where religious leaders and religious institutions had significant vocations in the decision making processes. Even such developments present secular and democratic India with a tremendous challenge to its ethic of integration and neutrality that the Indian state seeks to enshrine. The debut of Hindu nationalism especially in light of the hegemonic ASS and its affiliate BJP has transformed the social-political dynamics of India. These movements have frequently identified Indian nation with Hindu civilization, thus giving rise to birth of segregated approaches. Ceremonies and celebrations become more and more common in civil society, more and more the church and the state become indistinguishable. It has been the Hindutva idea, which establishes Indian nationalism's link to Hindu civilization and culture, which has been instrumental in effecting this change. Not only do such developments undermine the potential of the secular model but it worsens the relations between the two communities as well. This paper analyzes the process of secularism in India and its behavior with religion and politics. It looks at how religious nationalism and political religiosity affect the electoral process, the formation of electoral platforms and governance in selected countries. This concept thus underscores the trend of the Indian composite identity on religious and cultural dimensions in the India of secularism but increasing communal polarisation. The implications, therefore, call for protection of India's secular democracy as a central goal that has to be protected from religious incursion as democracy deepens across the nation.

Keywords: *Secularism, Polarization, Identity, Harmony, Constitution, Discrimination, Elections, Legislation*

Introduction

It may be noted that India is a country of great religious, linguistic, caste and cultural pluralism. This pluralistic attitude has in the past been the bedrock of its secularism. On attainment of independence religious tolerance became a core policy key principles when India adopted secularism as its policy aimed at promoting harmony among all Indians. However secularism as a vision of the future of human relations has gradually been put under pressure by the combination of politics and religion.

There was virtually no use of religion in political sphere in the first one and half decades of independence, but there was a change in sixties in sync with the cultural ethos of rural India. Thus, it has been realized that the religious leaders as well as communal ideologies have slowly and surely shifted into political and administrative domains and thus there is a clear erosion of secular state. This has been well illustrated in the new Hindu nationalist movements that through the Hindutva transformation of the public sphere and the Indian self.

This paper analyses religious politics in India and its historical and current contexts and consequence of religious politics on secularism in the Indian political system. Therefore, analyzing religious and cultural expressions of Indian identity belongs to the study of this country, which seeks to explain the peculiarities of the conflict between secularism and religious nationalism in India's demographic evolution.

DIVERSE RELIGIOUS HISTORY

This book agrees that religious culture plays a huge role in shaping India's socio-political structure because of its diverse and rich history. It has been stated that India is one of the countries of origin of major religions thus making it a central ground for teachings of diverse religions. There are still recent researches regarding earlier religious activities, but the clear picture of religion in the Indus Valley Civilization including the aspects of nature worship as well as fertility cults is still unclear. The two major significant systems of beliefs of the 6th century BCE are Hinduism and Buddhism in India. History of Hinduism originated from the Vedic religion: Hindu religion includes beliefs in righteous and liberation. On the other hand, Buddhism ordained by Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) rebelled the virtues of society and religion and propagated enlightenment from sufferings. Like the ancient Indian movements, both moved Indian culture and politics to some extent.

Impact of religion in politics was, however, realized during the Mauryan Empire (322–185 BCE especially by Ashoka. This Indian king was embrace Christianity and he propagate

Buddhism through out his empire and the rest of the world by his edicts and envoys. He was a great social reformer whose policies made administration ethical and moral in nature, thus transforming the socio-political face of ancient India. Post the Mauryan empire, kingdoms such as the Gupta dynasty and later Chola dynasty supported Hinduism and encouraged temple construction, Hindu arts, and canonical practices. In the 7th century CE, the rise of Islam in the region again brought in new forms of religious and political leadership. During the period of Delhi Sultanate 1206–1526 CE and Mughal Empire 1526–1857 CE the politics of India has been dominated by the Islam. The Great Mughals such as Akbar welcomed religious diversity through the empire's establishment of Din e Ilahi, which was a new religion that fitted Hindu and Muslim. However, subsequent rulers found religion being a growing problem most of the time especially with Hindu kingdoms resulting into long standing communal issues.

European colonial masters mainly the British once again distorted India's religious and political demography. Britain, especially knowing the divide and rule policy, intensified religious diversity for their political benefits. New generations brought and imposed from the Western world over education and legal systems changed the religious practice of the region and interfaith relations that caused social tensions many times. The Indian independence was greatly connected with the religious aspect. Non-violence and religious tolerance have been the principles of the Hindu Philosophy for which Mahatma Gandhi also fought. But the process of partition in 1947 dividing India and Pakistan on the basis of religion caused probably one of the worst civilities of that time as there was social interchange of populations. Nonetheless, political parties persist in monitoring religious and ideological polarities and mediating religious liberties with attempts to prevent sectarian conflict in a diverse population.

Religion as a Tool for Electoral Strategy

Religion has strategically been the most popular card that political parties would bend in India, to win the public's support since religious identity is often interlinked with political goals. Religious issues weigh voters' decisions in parties' favor, which is reason enough to consolidate and work for parties' interests. This comes out clearly when, in identity politics, the focus is placed on people's religious associations so as to ensure that predefined groups will be obedient and one. The same way vote-bank self-interest politics aims at religious groups with specific problems social, economical or cultural with solutions of which if

provided in exchange for votes. Religious appeals, symbols, scripts, and even rites add more reliability to voters to identify themselves with the parties they perceive as representing their religious or ethnic demands. Religion also assumes an identity-politics dimension at its worst in that it serves to give a social identity to a community, with the different parties in a conflict using religion, in some cases to engage in battle where one side seeks to present the other as a hostile entity. These methods, along with religious policies and orientation in favour of religious beliefs from different religious figures make religion an important tool in governing of India politics.

The Role of the Constitution in Controlling Religion in Politics

The current constitution has its origin from year 1950 and definitively define India as secular state where religion has no control over Political and Administrative Institutions. By its provisions, the Constitution lays down the vision of secular state, protection of equal rights and the preservation of democratic order. Some of the freedoms include that found in article 25 that seeks to entitle anyone to freedom of religion and freedom of worship provided the provisions are reasonable and designed to protect public order, morality and health. Likewise, Article 26 given the religion association the authority to exercise proprietary rights over their members and their assets and business as far as they are not infringing the order of public decency. The Preamble further strengthens the secular character of India stating thus: the state shall ensure that no religion be given any supremacy in the country.

To avoid misuse of religion in election plenty of laws like the Representation of the People Act, 1951 has been formulated which categorically bars soliciting of votes on grounds of religion, or causing communal enmity. Even though political parties may be religiously oriented, the Election Commission of India ensures all such rules are complied to penalties are made on those that do not abide to the rules and all the parties are given equal rights in an election season. Also, Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth challenging discriminating practices in governing.

Accordingly, and through guarantees like Article 27 that disallows state financing of religion, the Constitution precludes the appearance of one religion or another as a state-endorsed religion. All these measures combine to affirm the Constitution in asserting the secular character of India and to prevent religion being abused as a tool by politicians and also to assure fairness in dealing with every citizen.

Laws in India to Regulate Politics and Ensure Fairness

1. India has had several laws that regulate political practice in an effort to attempt keep charges of bias, corruption, and communalism at bay in the conduct of the electioneering process. Its aim is to eliminate religion, caste and other similar elements from political life as well as to defend rights and liberty of all persons. Some of the key legal measures include:

2. **Representation of the People Act, 1951**

This act regulates the election process in India which strictly forbids any person to appeal to the voters whether in the exercise of their franchise in an election, on the ground of religion, race, caste, community or language. This mainly seeks to prevent individuals seeking elective posts or aspiring for other political leadership positions exploit the religious card to canvass for votes..

3. **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**

Regulations governing the political party and candidates throughout or in the course of election campaigning are contained in a code of ethics called the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), set by the Election Commission of India. It prohibits use of religion including religious emblems and imagery during campaign as well as use of religious services during campaigns, so as to maintain neutrality and demographically impartiality of the election campaigns.

4. **Anti-Defection Law**

This law regulates the political behavior of MPs and MLAs in India and is written into the Tenth Schedule of the constitution. It prevents political actors from appointing restricted religious or political figures into offices making the stability of the political system the top priority.

5. **Indian Penal Code (IPC)**

Several provisions within the IPC address the misuse of religion in politics and public life:

- **Section 153A:** Ban incidents and utterances which instigate violence, riot, civil commotion or any act of enmity between different groups based on religion, race, caste or community.
- **Section 295A:** Makes intentional and provocative conduct 'hate crimes' meant to offend the religious practices of a specific community by spoken or physical means.
- **Section 295B:** Criminalises wanton destruction or vandalism of a place of worship for the purpose of offending a religion.

Contemporary Examples on the Role of Religion in Indian Politics

It is clearly evident that religion plays a role in Indian politics deciding on the policies, elections and the debates. Such actually and its implications can be both positive and negative, numerous examples of modern problems can be given. The following examples illustrate how religion has been intertwined with Indian politics in recent times:

Ayodhya Ram Mandir-Babri Masjid Dispute

Positive Role:

The Ayodhya Ram Mandir Babri Masjid case is an old religious and political controversy in India their civilization under the British Colonialism. In 2019, the Supreme court passes judgement that award the land to the Hindus to build Ram Mandir and at the same time the separate 5 acres of the land to Muslims to construct a mosque. This is was hailed as a move towards finding the solution to one of the most volatile issues that had provoked many years of conflict. The ruling was intended to bring solution to the long standing grievances which had been the cause of religious tensions by use of the lawful means. After this verdict, the construction of Ram Mandir started, which many Indians started believing may be a way to reconcile for them. Those in support of this decision believe that the exercise has put an end to a historical enmity so that the nation can begin to heal with one entity.

Negative Role:

These are the negative impact of Ayodhya dispute which TRIPLE THROUGHOUT India political history. The political and religious act of demolishing the Babri Masjid in 1992 led to the riots stricken throughout the nation. This event not only caused massive loss of people's lives and their homes but also stepped up tensions between the religions. Some to the political leaders kept on fueling the fire on the same issue in a bid to garner support from religious parties. Such critics continue to point that the dispute has deepened religious cleavages within the Indian society which causes challenges for unity and harmony among religions. Furthermore, the occurrence of the demolition + riots has created a long standing enmity between two major religious groups which is still felt today, affected electoral planning and campaigns for leaders, and is part of the successors' propaganda.

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Positive Role:

Having been enacted in 2019, CAA fast tracks citizenship for religions –Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who face persecution. The advocates of the act note that the act responds to a humanitarian problem and extends protection to those fleeing religious persecution in neighboring countries. The CAA is seen by supporters as being a right thing to do in the moral and politics to safeguard the most vulnerable in the society based on religion. In this respect, the act can be regarded as an evidence of the state's commitment on human rights protection and religion pluralism for some categories of excluded people in India.

Negative Role:

Opposition to the CAA and the contentious NRC are based on alleged retraction from secularism, referring to India's constitution. They accused the government of discrimination in excluding Muslims from the CAA on the grounds that it engulfs the Muslim community with a sense of exclusion and fear. As in the case of the NRC in Assam it lead to controversy and charge of stripping people of their franchise and putting them on the danger of being deemed foreigners if they fail to produce documents to prove otherwise. Protests immediately started across the country with people demanding that the CAA and NRC will lead to the establishment of a practice of religious bigotry in India, against the principles of secularism that the Constitution of India promises. The policies also politicized the political parties, and he deepened the political separation between the communities as well as we debates on the core national identity.

Sabarimala Temple Entry Issue

Positive Role:

And in Sabarimala, Kerala in 2018 SC lifted the ban on the entry of women in Aged below 50 in Sabarimala Temple. The verdict was considered as progressive towards gender equality and justice and against discrimination based on the religion. The supporters of the ruling focused on the fact of the protection of constitutional provisions, first of all, the right to equality and non-discrimination. The judgement began to fuel nationwide debates over freedom of religion on one hand and equality amidst other citizens on the other, that helped trigger attempts at changing similar prejudices in other religious settings.

Negative Role:

The Sabarimala ruling also sparked protests: several political parties and religious organisations stood against women's admittance to the temple. Objection to the decision was based on the fact the decision dismissed upheld religious feelings and cultural practices and turned the matter into a question of religious liberty. The protesters, sometimes thus The strikers were often violent, giving credence to the contentious issue of the interaction between religion and constitutional freedoms. This controversy led to the negative political rallying, the exercise of political parties and people of Tunisia to question the authority of the judiciary in issues of religion with regard to the challenge of implementing social changes within a religion nation.

Conclusion

The position of religion in Indian political system is very paradoxical positive in one respect and negative in another aspect. It has served the progressive purpose and contributed intensely towards creating social split. The controversy around the Babri Masjid, the CAA-NRC discussions, and the Temple entry for women ultimately suffrage case of Sabarimala point to a political religious intersectionality in India, defining electoral politics, policies and civil society debates.

In the positive aspect, religion has been instrumental in promoting ethical nationalism, social justice as well as Cultural values. Lawsuits such as the recent eliminations of legal Protection related to contentious issues have fought discrimination and disparity. Even social media has had its contribution in sensitizing people about minority rights and the need for communal harmony and thus religion as an agent, positive in today's politics.

Nevertheless, the negative effects of religion excepting political integration cannot be erupted. Since the Indian government turned more communal over the past decade, enmity between different religions grew, and discrimination against Muslims ramped up, eroding the secularism of the country. Political parties give religious feelings a political dimension, which contributes to divide and destabilize societal structures and thus damage the nation's democratic identity.

In conclusion, religion remains a dominant aspect in Indian politics as well as in determining the outcome of elections, politics policies and even social relations. It can be a source of promoting ethical governance system and structures of inclusiveness, the misuse for political purposive ends is a major challenge. Meeting the requirements of both these concerns can

seem rather challenging, as one is obliged to uphold the religious freedom of all while at the same time proceeding with full adherence to the Constitution's ban of any discrimination based on their faith or lack of it. It is for the leadership of India to manage these paradoxes and evolution hence developing a political culture that supports unity in diversity concerning democracy.

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