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Religion and politics in the context of Indian democracy

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ABSTRACT

India is a country with vast population and is characterized by a multi-religious society. Majority of Indians are followers of Hinduism and the minority religion group includes Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists etc. World's four major religions Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism had their origin in India. Religion has always played an important role in the social, economic and political sphere of India. If we look back at the history of India we can see that religion has an important role in its making. In every phase of the history of India we can see the various roles religions have played. The constitution mentions that India is a secular state but we have failed to translate the constitutional ideas into practice in the society. Religion has always played a prominent role in Indian politics. Hence, differences between various religious groups have caused lots of communal riots in the country. Gandhi wrote in 1942, "Religion is a personal matter which should have no place in politics" but politics in India is incomplete without religion. India was partitioned on the basis of religious differences but it still managed to promulgate its constitution accepting equal rights to all and that there shall not be any kind of discrimination. Religious inequality and discrimination is an important issue in India. Many innocent people have suffered in the name of religion. Religion is one of the most important tools used by the politicians in India to gain the votes of the people. Most of the Indians are still politically uneducated and they tend to be unaware of the tactics of these clever politicians. Religion is being wrongly used by these power-thirsty people because they know that Indians are very religious and they are willing to do anything in the name of religion. The political scenario of India is so influenced by religion that most political parties are formed by religious groups. When they come in power there tends to be favouritism of people. The minority community therefore suffers the consequences. The religious politics of our country also has a huge effect on the foreign policy of our country.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this research paper are:

1. To study the impact of religion in politics in the national scenario.
2. To study its impact in the foreign policy of India.
3. To study its impact in the social, economic and political stability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper chiefly relies on quantitative data accumulated from the secondary sources of sociological and political research related to Religion and Politics. Occasional use of quantitative data has also been made wherever necessary.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the impact of religion in the political, social and economic sphere of India?
2. What is the main cause behind religious fundamentalism in India?
3. What is the effect of religion in the world politics?

KEYWORDS

1. RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM
2. POLITICS
3. COMMUNALISM
4. VIOLENCE
5. HINDUISM

INTRODUCTION

After India was finally freed from the British colonial rule in August 15 1947, it became a sovereign country. Along with its independence it was also divided into two nations i.e. Pakistan a Muslim country and India a secular country. This partition led to the death of thousands of innocent people and displacement of millions. Hindu-Muslim conflict in India has been going on since ancient times. Long before the British came to India, this conflict had been going on and eventually it led to colonization of India and partition of the country later on. India has since not been able to bring about an understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims. Even though Hindu- Muslim conflict is the most known conflict in India there are conflicts among Sikhs, Christians etc. as well. Religion plays a very important role in the life of most Indian people. People in India are very religious and faithful to their religion. India is a country where people of various communities live together. Hence, different people have different believes. Hindus are in majority in India so currently the minority communities in India are facing lots of issues and are being victimized.

Religion is defined as a person's belief in some great power or in simple terms it is a person's belief in god. Religion is a very beautiful and a pure concept and every religion has its own beauty but the power thirsty politicians in our country are misusing religion for their personnel benefit. After independence India declared

itself as a secular nation implying that every religion is to be treated with equal respect in India but our has been a victim of various communal riots since the attainment of independence. Religion and politics are two separate concepts and the two can definitely work with each other but a certain limit has to be maintained. One of the major problems faced by India as a result of mixing of politics and religion is the victimization of the minority community. Democracy is a rule of the majority but we tend to forget about the needs of the minority community. The meddling of religion in the politics of India has caused a lot of problem to the peace and security of the country. There have been various cases of religious conflict in India such as the Ayodhya case, removal of Article 370 etc. The politics in our country today are being led by some pretentious people who are spreading false acclamations in the name of religion. They are trying to gain the votes of the people by proclaiming that it's in the name of god. Most Indians are politically illiterate and they actually believe in the lies of this people. They are illiterate and driven by poverty that they are willing to believe in anything that these people are saying. Hence, the people ruling our country are taking false advantage of the religious beliefs and faith of the people.

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

We ought to have as great a regard for religion as we can, so as to keep it out of as many things as possible – well said, but unfortunately, remains only on paper. Religion has come to intrude every sphere of human life – it determines one's political loyalties, social affiliations, marriage alliance and even support to a cricket team. Patriotism has also become synonymous with religious ties. Religious fundamentalism is eating into peace and prosperity of nations. It has demonstrated striking abilities of turning man into beast, depriving him of reason and driving him to inflict untold miseries upon his own kind. Call it 'jihad', "dharma yuddha" or 'Crusades' - the message of religion has become universally distorted: butcher men of other faith, secure a passport to heaven. After all, what could motivate an Afghan soldier to wage a 'holy war' in Kashmir, a land alien to him? It is a lethal mix of a pseudo love for his religion and some monetary remuneration. This menace has acquired a global reach. It plagues almost every country across the world: India, Pakistan, Israel, Ireland, Indonesia, and Philippines- the list is almost endless. Even mighty nations like USA, Russia and China have not been spread the onslaught of fundamentalists' forces. What could be the reason behind this global appeal of fanaticism? Does it indicate that violence and aggression are intrinsic to human nature? Or is it the pressures of modern-day living, like greater economic requirements and a need to affiliate in this age of individualism? Or does it merely fulfil one's power motive? The history of religion is almost as old as that of mankind. It is a part of man's collective unconsciousness. Religion is believed to have evolved due to two primary needs. First, with man being a social animal, it met his need to affiliate and to form and lives in homogenous groups with similar attitudes and values. Second, the fear of the unknown led man to place his faith in a supreme being – a creator and a preserver. Each religion may know this creator by different names and perceive him in different forms, but they talk the same language of peace, brotherhood, non-violence, and love for mankind. However, these lofty ideals have been forgotten somewhere down the line. Because religion has been politicised. It now serves as a tool to sway the masses, which then carry out the wishes of power-hungry, self-serving of the Taliban leader. According to him, idols went against the tenets of Islam. There was a global outcry, as the statues were a symbol of a rich heritage of mankind. But all arguments fell silent against the fury of the canon. For the motive behind the Taliban's move was political. It had used religion to retaliate against the sanctions imposed by the western world on its regime. Religion has become the opiate of the masses. It works from the platform of emotions and emotional high is always intoxicating. It can lead man to perform acts that defy logic. And it is this emotional hypnotism of the masses that a few fanatically ambitious people use to further their own interests. When Iran declared war on Iraq, Iranian spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini got green card distributed among his teenaged soldiers. Those who died in battle could get an entry into heaven by flashing this card! Be it Maulana Masood Azhar or our home grown Bajrang Dal each follow a similar agenda. They arouse the masses in the name of God, on the promise of a place in heaven, they raise the cry of their religion being in danger and egg on innocent people to commit heinous and barbaric acts. On a winter morning in 1992, frenzied mobs climbed atop the more than 400-year old

mosque at Ayodhya, and brought it crashing down; all in the name of religion. Fundamentalist leaders dominate specific segment of society- the young, the illiterate and the economically backward. This social group is most gullible, being a victim of neglect and having most gullible, being a victim of neglect and having been denied a fair chance to prove their worth to society. The frustration and aggression of this disgruntled group is channelled into fundamentalism. The formula has worked wonders. Holy wars are taking the world by storm. Even the so-called 'progressive and forward-thinking' First World nations have not been spared.

Protestants and Catholics have been fighting tooth and nail in Ireland for the last 200 years. No amount of dialogue has convinced either party to change their stand. Both groups demand that their branch of Christianity be recognised as the state religion. Is it so important, in this age of liberal thinking, reason and scientific advancement, to mix religion with politics? The future seems bleak if this trend of fundamentalism is to continue. It would translate into anarchy and despotism of a few fanatics. The concept of religion as a building block, for virtuous living and developing love for entire god's creation, would be finished and it will be replaced with hatred and meaningless destruction. The mob will call the shots and man will regress a thousand years, into the dark ages. Booming guns and spray of bullets will eclipse the essence that each religion preaches- of harmony, peace and love. Imagine the scenario in which nuclear weapons fall into the hands of these irresponsible religious zealots: a nuclear holocaust would then become a distinct possibility. This rots needs to be stemmed, and quickly. Not by force, but through amity. Spreading education could be the first step. For, a literate person can see through the garb of fanaticism. Education breaks religious prejudices and changes attitudes, values and perceptions. It translates into more employment opportunities. The youth would not rely on terrorist outfits for livelihood. More important, a literate population will elect the right government and not be swayed by manifestoes laced with religious and sectarian overtones. Therefore, only mass education can contribute to the process of change. Literacy needs to be spread on a war footing. One way by which this can be done is for each literate to teach one illiterate. Strife-ridden societies need to go on the offensive. The need of the hour is a social revolution. An outstanding community leader can make this happen. Here, religion can be used to bring positive change.

Gandhi used religion to preach patriotism and democracy. He visualised a 'Ram Rajya' for free India. His wars against untouchability and temple entry for the Shudras were an integral part of his struggle programme. For, he needed to garner the support of every Indian to fight the British power. 'Ahimsa' a religious doctrine was his most famous lethal weapon. Economic advancement can nip fundamentalism in the bud. China's Xinjiang province is a case in point. The Chinese government undertook large-scale development in the province by laying an oil pipeline from the Tarim basin to Shanghai, building highways and launching rail-road and other infrastructure projects. It was a bloodless coup. The Uighur rebels lost ground and support completely. The national and international media should withhold from giving any news-space to terrorist outfits. Joining a fundamentalist organisation has become a short cut to instant fame and recognition. A complete media blackout could deny this recognition. Instead, a media blitz should be launched to expose the real political and money-making motives behind using to religion to incite violence.

All is still not lost. Things could change for the better. With information technology and media revolutions underway, the youth is being exposed to different societies and cultures of the world. This is helping break prejudice barriers and jaundice opinions of others. The iron and bamboo curtains are lifting. And the ambitious, go-getting Generation-X refuses to waste precious mind-space on non-issues. It is the ability that counts and not the faith one follows. Mankind pins its hopes on its future generation, and this generation has to live up to it, otherwise there is the danger of civilised life coming to an abrupt end. The famous line of Iqbal 'azhab nahi sikhata aapas mein bair rakhna' is well understood at the intellectual level, but to put it in practice requires Statesmen, who think of the next generation; and not politicians, who think of the next election. Society today needs to understand that it is time to change some stereotypical thinking regarding religion and accept the modern society as it is. Gay marriages were illegal because religious people did not accept them claiming that it was against the religious belief but now even after it has legally been accepted people still look down upon them. We can change the rules but it is people's mentality that needs changing. Religious beliefs are sacred but time

changes and it's not always possible to be able to follow ancient traditions. It is about time that we accept the changes in the new society. Religious traditions should be protected but at the same time we have to get acquainted to changes. The world is changing and it is not possible to follow every religious traditions. It is time to have a modern mind-set. Because of religious causes there has been so many violence and so many people lost their lives. People are so educated these days but still they still fall victim to so many prejudices occurring in the society and so many of these prejudices are in the name of religion. Religion has become a source of violence and dispute instead of being a source of love and harmony. People are taught that it's okay to kill in the name of religion and that everyone who is not a follower of their religion is an enemy and that they should be butchered. One of the major problems faced by India as a result of mixing of politics and religion is the victimization of the minority community. Democracy is a rule of the majority but we tend to forget about the needs of the minority community. The meddling of religion in the politics of India has caused a lot of problem to the peace and security of the country. There have been various cases of religious conflict in India such as the Ayodhya case, removal of Article 370 etc. The politics in our country today are being led by some pretentious people who are spreading false acclamations in the name of religion. They are trying to gain the votes of the people by proclaiming that it's in the name of god. Religion has always played an important role in the social, economic and political sphere of India. If we look back at the history of India we can see that religion has an important role in its making. In every phase of the history of India we can see the various role religions has played. The constitution mentions that India is a secular state but we have failed to translate the constitutional ideas into practice in the society. Religion has always played a prominent role in Indian politics.

CORELATION OF RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

In the present context, there is a domination of theocratic philosophy in politics worldwide. This is observed throughout the world that religious ideology has certain more important value in the political decision of the country. Basically there are few philosophies in the world and most are based on religion. The role of religion in today's political atmosphere is very prominent. Politics of all the countries including the first world countries is affected vastly by religious philosophies. The western countries are mostly influenced by Christianity and Islamic. There is strong influence of religion in most of the countries of the world. Religion tends to have a strong influence on the lifestyle of people be it the way they eat or the way they dress up so it becomes near to impossible to ignore the influence of religion. Most religious philosophy tends to teach the same things i.e. god is the supreme commander and he is cause of all things. So this leads to fight among various religions because they all claim that their god is the real god and other gods are fake. Even in the current scenario where most people are educated there are still disparities among people related to religion. The role of religion in politics cannot be ignored because everyone is some way or the other connected with religious philosophies. Politicians tend to take advantage of this and influence the people to vote for them claiming that they will protect their religious philosophies and they are highly in favour of their religion. The main problem caused by religious fundamentalism is that the religious minority tends to suffer the wrath of the uncanny politicians who ignore their needs. There is belief among the firm followers of religious philosophies that a person not following their religion is an enemy. Previously in the European countries the church and the state were regarded as the same thing and church dominated the political happenings of the state. Anyone who went against the church was punished. But later on there was separation of church and state but still people firmly stuck by the rules of the church. In India religion is regarded as something very sacred and most people in India are very religious. The politicians in our country are taking advantage of this and manipulating the illiterate population of our country who tend to believe in anything they hear to vote for them. After winning the election they tend to ignore the needs of these poor people. Hence the poor tends to get poorer and the rich only gets richer. Religious belief of every religion should be respected but religion should also teach to respect the religion of the other person.

Religion should stop the influence of violence and should teach the universal language of love for all. This will lead to a better world. Politics should use the influence of religion in a good way and should stop the unjust treatment of the minorities. We should all learn to respect each other as humans and not based upon caste, colour, creed or religion. We are after all equal in the eye of god and no religious text has ever taught violence, all has preached the message of love and harmony among people. Humanity is the greatest religion of all.

GLOBALISATION AND RELIGION

Globalisation is the process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and government worldwide. It is a belief that we have more in common with each other than we think. It is connecting different parts of the world with each other. Globalisation is closely linked with religion because everybody living in this world is somewhere connected with religion. Islamic state tends to be closer to Islamic states and in the same way anti-Islamic state tends to be closer to one another. Since the world politics is so dominated by religion, it also tends to affect its relationship with other countries. For example, USA and Iran don't get along well but Israel and America are close allies because they are both Christian influenced countries. In the same way various other countries have also been close allies based on their religion. Religion is as old as people itself. Men since time immemorial have been worshiping god in various forms. Religion is the guiding force which has led mankind for quite some time now. In the globalizing world today it's hard to ignore the effect of religion be it a positive effect or a negative one. Religion is often considered opposite to globalization because globalisation is all about bringing everyone together whereas religion is just the opposite. It is really hard to coordinate two religions together in the modern world. But it has also helped globalization in many. It may be through charity events or through book. Religion epitomizes the definition of globalization due to the fact that it can be spread more efficiently than ever before through the use of different technological tool through the use of magazines, the media, Facebook, twitter and other apps it is now possible for any religion to spread beyond any boundaries. Terrorism in this modern world is also closely related to religion. There are many Islamic terrorist groups that have been the cause of most terrorist attacks in the world till date. Globalization is a very prominent topic in today's world and so there are many anti-globalizations movements and many use religion to support their claim. Religion in a way helps globalization but it is also somewhat against it. These two terms persistently interrelate with one another despite the differences. In today's world it is hard to ignore both these terms. They are basically present everywhere.

HINDUVTA AND INDIA

Hinduvta is a form of Hindu nationalism predominantly present in India and it plays an important role in Indian politics. It is a belief that India is nation for Hindus and that the country should be ruled according to Hindu philosophies. The term 'hinduvta' was first coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923. Hinduvta in simple language means being a Hindu. The term hinduvta has been used in India since the mid- 1870s and it played an important role in the freedom movement in India. Some of the important concepts of Hinduvta are:

1. There are many political parties in India that actually follows the concept of Hinduvta. e.g. BJP
2. They consider Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of India.
3. They are firmly against the Islamic and Christian proselytization.
4. They want to spread the concept of Hinduism and want everyone to accept Hinduism.
5. Strengthen the defence force of India.
6. They want to replace the pseudo-secularism with the western form of secularism.

The concept of hinduvta has caused a lot of communal violence in the country. People from other religious community are highly offended by it as they are also Indians and they are not treated the same way because they are not Hindus. By following the hinduvta philosophy the government is ignoring a large part of the population who are also Indians. Also in India everyone who is not a follower of some religion is considered as a Hindu. There are many people who are nature worshipper and their religion is not acknowledged by the Indian government. They are all forcefully categorized under the Hindu category. This tends to hurt the sentiments of the minority people. Hinduvta is concept which is accepted by majority of the Indians and that's god but we have to consider the minority community as well. Because of the belief that India is a Hindu state their religious sentiments are getting hurt. Gandhi used religion to preach patriotism and democracy. He visualised a 'Ram Rajya' for free India. His wars against untouchability and temple entry for the Shudras were an integral part of his struggle programme. For, he needed to garner the support of every Indian to fight the British power. 'Ahimsa' a religious doctrine was his most famous lethal weapon. Hinduism is one of the greatest philosophies in the world and no one can deny it but that does not mean that any other religion is any less great. Ever religion is great in its own way. It's the faith and belief of people that actually matters.

RESEARCH ANSWERS

1. What is the impact of religion in the political, social and economic sphere of India?

As mentioned above religion has always played an important role in every sphere of the Indian society. People in India are very religious and most of their activities revolve around religious philosophies. The role of religion in politics cannot be ignored because everyone is some way or the other connected with religious philosophies. Politicians tend to take advantage of this and influence the people to vote for them claiming that they will protect their religious philosophies and that they are highly in favour of their religion.

2. What is the main cause behind religious fundamentalism in India?

The main cause of religious fundamentalism in India is that there has always been conflicts' regarding religion in India. The history of India of India says it all. The most important conflict is the Hindu-Muslim conflict. It is near to impossible to solve the differences between Hindus and Muslims. There is always a domination of one over the other and it's always a war between them.

3. What is the effect of religion in the world politics?

If you see the political scenario of the world religious fundamentalism has dominated the world politics very adversely. Everybody living in this world is somewhere connected with religion. Islamic state tends to be closer to Islamic states and in the same way anti-Islamic state tends to be closer to one another. Since the world politics is so dominated by religion, it also tends to affect its relationship with other countries. For example, USA and Iran don't get along well but Israel and America are close allies because they are both Christian influenced countries. In the same way various other countries have also been close allies based on their religion.

CONCLUSION

Religion plays a very vast role in every sphere of human life. Be it political, social or economical. It's near to impossible to ignore the importance of religion in human life. It plays an important role in the lives of not only Indians but also in the lives of the Western countries. Our everyday activity is highly affected by our religious views. From the way we dress up to the way we eat religion has a major role to play in it. Religion is believed to have evolved due to two primary needs. First, with man being a social animal, it met his need to affiliate and to form and lives in homogenous groups with similar attitudes and values. Second, the fear of the unknown led man to place his faith in a supreme being – a creator and a preserver. Each religion may know this creator by different names and perceive him in different forms, but they talk the same language of peace, brotherhood, non-violence, and love for mankind. However, these lofty ideals have been forgotten somewhere down the line. Because religion has been politicised. It now serves as a tool to sway the masses, which then carry out the wishes of power-hungry, self-serving of the Taliban leader. According to him, idols went against the tenets of Islam. There was a global outcry, as the statues were a symbol of a rich heritage of mankind. But all arguments fell silent against the fury of the canon. For the motive behind the Taliban's move was political. It had used religion to retaliate against the sanctions imposed by the western world on its regime. Religion has become the opiate of the masses. In the globalizing world today it's hard to ignore the effect of religion be it a positive effect or a negative one. Religion is often considered opposite to globalization because globalisation is all about bringing everyone together whereas religion is just the opposite. It is really hard to coordinate two religions together in the modern world. But it has also helped globalization in many. It may be through charity events or through book. Religion epitomizes the definition of globalization due to the fact that it can be spread more efficiently than ever before through the use of different technological tool through the use of magazines, the media, Facebook, twitter and other apps it is now possible for any religion to spread beyond any boundaries. Terrorism in this modern world is also closely related to religion. There are many Islamic terrorist groups that have been the cause of most terrorist attacks in the world till date. We are after all equal in the eye of god and no religious text has ever taught violence, all has preached the message of love and harmony among people. Humanity is the greatest religion of all.

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