



LOSING FAITH: THE RISE OF ATHEISM IN TODAY'S INDIA

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Abstract

The question of God and faith has been circulating in our society since some time now. India being a country in diversity has very many sensibilities of faith and believers of several different kinds of deities. But the various episodes and situations that the country has come through have set the path for an unconventional revolution, a revolution based on ideology. To support that, the events of the twenty first century have given a fine enough impetus for the people to think more and question more what they have believed with closed eyes. This paper analyzes the route of today's India that encompasses a shift in her thoughts and ideologies related to spirituality and theism.

Keywords: Faith, Religion, History, Politics, Culture, India

Introduction

It goes without saying that the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the repercussions and undercurrents it brings out is more than a fine example for highlighting how impactful religion is even in what we call "Modern India." Religion has been a focal point of almost all the formative years of the country's history. Be it education, politics or even the industrial sector, the distinct effect of religion has made its clear cut mark in all of them.

The Statement: Rise of Atheism

Atheism was in business for a long time but it only came to the mainstream ideologies only through the Renaissance in Europe. While talking about India, we still cannot say with assurance that the country is going through a revolution of losing faith. India has never really let loose her grasp on religion and faith.

Religion taught of what, how and why life exists in this world in a very simple manner because science was late-born. The persuasive force of religion made the people with emotions fall for it and to believe in what they considered to be real yet incomprehensible. The hold of religion was so strong that its roots got real stiff and firm in the culture of the then generation of humans. The same ideology passed through the ages and it started to feel a deceleration as science started to impress people. When science and religion subsequently turned out to be rivals to each other, the believers couldn't let go of their ancestral beliefs and pride. Religion became a platform for people to reside in simply because science failed to explain the meaning and purpose of life, the way religion did.

As time moved on, the disastrous consequences of religion really started to take shape. It had its effects and aftermaths in almost all the continents of the world. It not only divided people but also ended generations of human lives. India, although being a multilingual nation with several different religions, Hinduism and Islam are the two pillars with also the most influential backgrounds. Since spoken earlier about the persuasive grasp of religion, the people of a particular religion believed that they were true and real which caused them to feel hostility towards the other for they disturbed what they called their "religious sentiments."

War and peace fused the times of India as a religious country. Even little things led to massacres. The British Raj manipulated the Indians' belief in religion to divide them so that the land would become unstable for granting India autonomy. Religion caused people to forget what they really are and what their destiny is. Therefore, it is true to say that religion divided people more than uniting. Even after repeated losses, killings and periods of unrest, people were still holding on to their beliefs. One reason would simply be the psychology that doesn't lead them to think progressively after believing in God for a very long time. Believing in science or any aspect of science would add glitches in their religious and spiritual sensibility which would later lead to a greater dilemma. Hence, they kept on following their spiritual voice instead of doing what humans are famous for- thinking.

Yet, some humans really thought differently and ended up being different. India came from a generation of religious fanaticism to an era of modern sensibility like most other countries. The country since the past century, started to progress in very many ways from being a highly conservative nation in almost every sense. Gender disparities started to get challenged. The boom in the industrial sector is undeniably a key reason for the country to progress. Advancements in science and technology caused the people to try to conquer more unfathomed boundaries. That includes the education sector as well. Availability of fresh and developed resources gave a sense of renaissance in the Indians. Subsequently, people from many more levels on the social hierarchy got access to more education.

India witnessed a whole lot of the nation's lives drop dead long before even their time came. They witnessed the horror of man killing man. Those deaths include those in the name of God and religion as well. Thousands of innocent souls died for a reason even the God they believed in, couldn't possibly understand. At one point some people couldn't help but question the authenticity of their faith if the same dictates them the protocols of peace, provided the fact that the idea of questioning is out of the question when it comes to faith.

People were in a dilemma in thinking how a seemingly divine ideology that embraces life itself becomes a reason for killing it. Where is the love among humans all those "holy" books talked about? Even after several episodes of anarchy and chaos in several different levels, people couldn't find the God who'd save them from all the hell they were living and experiencing. While some, those who acquired power from the institution of religion decided to carry on enforcing their dominance, others felt disillusionment in their beliefs. The ones in power continued to use God and faith to oppress the vulnerable to uphold their pseudo-socialistic and pseudo-spiritual bamboozle.

Religious violence in India is clearly common between the Hindus and Muslims. Despite of what the Indian Constitution and The Preamble say, the very many religious groups always gave their best in fueling violence in the country. Some historians have argued that Hindus have experienced religious tortures during the rule of the Muslim Empires in India. According to Will Durant, the Muslim conquest of India was "probably the bloodiest story in history." They weren't only confined to the royal court; but there have been instances where the common people destroyed the sacred landmarks of the other religions among which temple desecrations were the most common.

Jumping over a couple of centuries, the regional religions of India began to face tortures from foreign nations as well. The colonial era in India began in the sixteenth century after Vasco da Gama's arrival in Calicut in 1497. Since then, India faced religious persecution from the Christian Europeans including the Portuguese, French, Dutch, and of course the English. Forced Christianization was common along with miscegenation and whoever did not abide to their rules were persecuted. It was through these acts of miscegenation, proselytization and conversion by the missionaries that the Christian religion got established in India. Again, in order to increase their numbers and geographical stronghold, what they did wasn't exactly something what the Bible taught them.

The Indian war of independence from The Raj is still known for the religious violence it caused which led to the partition of Bengal which ultimately led to the partition of India. But that didn't cause the hostility between the two communities to cease. Even after the formation of Pakistan and India's independence, there were several instances of anarchy between the two countries which can be really traced back to the primary reason of believing in different cultures. Its repercussions always loomed over India too since India contained a large number of both these communities. The unrest rising all over the country on the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya not only throws light upon the authority's take on the pandemic the whole place is dealing with but also how impactful the demolition of

Babri Masjid in 1992 really was. Among the other major chronicles, The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 was another point where people of the same country rioted against each other.

It's highly shameful to say that even a mass of educated people also joins the bandwagon led by irrational religious flimflams that causes the hatred amongst fellow countrymen not to cease. Yet as told earlier, there have been advancements in thinking and perception of reality as humanity "progressed." It's not wrong to say that despite all these religious anarchy, atheism is still dominantly on the rise. People got access to various intellectual if not progressive ideologies that make them think from multiple perspectives.

The general feeling of disillusionment in faith looms over the country as day by day, people witness the failure of God and the victory of man. Believers attend the hospitals in case of emergencies rather than wait for God to perform a miracle. Although their religious voice tells them God does his part and humans hence should do theirs, people still find it difficult to pinpoint the part done by God that is favorable to humanity. The advent of the evangelist preachers and their failures in the subcontinent is another reason for this aura of skepticism. People started to find loopholes in their teachings and what was considered to be miracles. When they came to know about a very probable reality that miracles can be artificial and engineered, it found a way to question whatever is written in the "holy" books which led to a subsequent questioning of the authenticity of those books.

When natural disasters also affect religious landmarks, how can people think about God coming to save them if he/she can't even protect a place that is dedicated to him/her? When a famous church in Israel caught fire in 2015, the Christian believers were undoubtedly furious for they believed that place was one where Jesus performed a miracle. There was also a report that although most of the building perished, the idol of Jesus did not, and the believers claimed that to be a miracle from God. He who couldn't save the church from catching a fire saved his idol. It didn't take much time for the reviewers to point out that the idol was made of concrete and the fire couldn't have an impact in order to burn it, for it takes more than several hours of constant flaming heat for a material made of hard concrete to catch fire. Yet, an add-on to that was after this supposed miracle from Jesus, believers from all parts of the subcontinent rushed to the site to witness the Godly divinity.

In order to go further on that last point, the Eucharist miracle of Buenos Aires in 1996 is one of the most talked about Eucharist miracles that had happened in modern Christian history. It's said that it has been proved by non-believing scientists that a host from a parish church in Santa Maria had the DNA of Christ's heart muscles in it. I'm not simply trying to deconstruct the event but this serves for a further analysis of how faith works. When such a miracle happened, the people were aroused from the "fact" that Jesus showed them that he is there watching them all but they still didn't question what if so, did the people gain rather than a simple assurance that he exists. The believers weren't bothered about why these kinds of miracles always happen around a sacred place like churches or any other religious structures for that matter. Why doesn't a miracle take place between the common people?

Why do they always happen in a sacred environment? What good did the people receive after getting to know that Jesus is present inside the Eucharist? How did God help the struggling, suffering, the poor and the desolate with that?

Going with the theory of the engineering of miracles, all these events happen inside a sacred place because such places have limitations for the access of science. In it, intellect ceases to work. The manufacturers of miracles have enough time and space to credibly weave whatever they are trying to create. That's why miracles seldom take place in an open market or a hospital ICU, a place where it would be much more worthy. People continue to suffer, fight and die even after God gives them assurance that he exists. There are no significant differences in the lives of the people even after these miracles. On the other hand, the believers still attribute the power of doctors in saving lives, to the hands of God because that is what they like to believe.

So what's with these miracles? As I said earlier, religion as time progressed turned out to be a device for controlling people and enjoying power. The backbone of religion is the believer and the backbone of a believer is faith. It is a simple cycle. If religion and the religious sector have to flourish, the believers must support it and for the believers to support it, their faith needs to be fueled. When the love of God turns out to be a love for material gain, religion uses their vulnerable believers as guinea pigs. It is key to note that religion is the only prominent institution in the world that does not have to pay taxes to the government. It might surprise you when you get to know about the kind of money a single Christian church or a Hindu temple makes in one month from the believers. All the wealth earned by any religion in the world is through laundering the believers without them even knowing it. It is quite simple as they trained people to believe in God than their own humanitarian instincts.

On a closer look at the Buenos Aires miracle, it is important to speak a little bit about the socio-political history of Argentina. The theory of the separation between the state and religion was prevalent in Argentina as well. After the civil wars, liberal and conservative rules headed the Argentinian political sphere in turns. During those times, there were several instances where the Church and the state fought against each other. One such episode was during the post-world war era. The Argentinian governments always came up with progressive ideals as well, including abolition of child labor, right to contraception, divorces, widow remarriage and so on. But whenever the government came up with these drafts, the church always raised their voice against them because most of them were against their beliefs. During 1954-55, under General Peron's second presidency, came laws permitting independent acts like divorce, widow remarriage etc. The church opposed them of course but this time, to no avail. It is noteworthy that most of what a religious organization opposed in history would have been later accepted in time like the conflict between Galileo and the Pope for a quick example. Likewise, the church here could do nothing but face the repercussions. It is quite sure that the believers would've surely felt a kind of skepticism when they miss out. They would've felt disillusioned in witnessing what they were told to be sacred laws which weren't meant to be broken, turn out to be simple feudal conservative

tactics that can be liberalized. Hence, it isn't strange when the believers of Argentina were seen as starting to lose faith in their religion. At a point when the church was tired after the constant losing battles against the state, there was an inevitable need for them to make sure that people don't lose their faith. Out of nowhere, Eucharist miracles started to take place in the churches during the 1990's like those that happened at other places before and the rest is history. After getting them "scientifically" proven, the bonus part comes when those individual churches attain the status of a tourist spot. Believers start to flow from different parts of the world and faith and wealth which once seemed decelerating, gets back on track. This can be applied to almost all the miracles that take place in the world.

Sabarimala is an infamous and prestigious Hindu temple in the Pathanamthitta district of Kerala. Women between the age of 10 and 50 were restricted entry into the temple by the Kerala High Court following the faith of the believers. But in September 2018, the Supreme Court lifted the restriction. The then government of Kerala decided to follow the Supreme Court and stood aside the women. But this produced a mass violent outburst in the Hindu devotees. They held riots and protests in several areas of Kerala including en route to Sabarimala ensuring that no woman will enter the temple. According to their beliefs, if a woman between the age of 10 and 50 enter the temple, it will lose its sanctity. But the government was stubborn and they tried their very best to let the women have their rights passed by the Supreme Court. It became a terrific battle and the government managed access to two daring women who have decided to enter the temple no matter what. As expected, the devotees' religious spirit got humiliated and the protests got carried to another level.

Here, the issue was certainly the state entering the business of the individual which includes his/her spiritual matters. It was purely a religious endeavor that didn't permit women to enter that temple. The Court being a body of democracy passed the rule against the interests of the religion. The government of Kerala had to give their everything to make the women enter the temple despite of their support from the Supreme Court. This is one of the most recent scenarios where religion kept democracy at bay.

As a result, in the coming elections after this 'Sabarimala issue', the politicians apart from those of the then ruling party of Kerala dragged this matter into their campaigns. They promised to the public that safeguarding the interests of the believers would be their primary agenda. Questions and discussions about the matter are ongoing even today.

Lastly, 2020 was a year in which India hit rock bottom due to the Covid 19 pandemic. It was an entirely new experience for humans all over the world. The lockdown showed people a new phase of life. Every institution in the country except those related with medicine and food were shut down. The believers who couldn't carry out their periodical visit to their respective religious arenas had no other alternative than to sit at home and pray. The Gods had nothing to offer with hundreds of people dying day by day. It was the doctors and other medical staffs who were given the term 'frontline warriors' who fought against the deadly virus with a stern face and a brave heart. Even then, a group of believers who couldn't get enough, started to protest that the churches, temples, mosques etcetera for that

matter to be opened. The Covid hit the country, the people and their loved ones even after years of praying and dedication. Although staying at home and not visiting their respective religious centers, nothing happened. No God penalized them. No one's religious sentiments got humiliated. Still, this shows the strength of the clutches of religion on a person's sensibility.

Conclusion

People in India have really come across a long way. There was a time when blasphemy was a serious offence anywhere in the country. There was a time when people weren't given the freedom to think differently; they weren't allowed to deny the concept of God. Although there still exist some of those traditional elements in the minds of the believers, there are still a whole new mass of people who strides forward denouncing the irrational and embracing the rational.

People now have started to understand why more and more religious structures are being erected instead of more hospitals and educational institutions. The difference lies in the people's outlook towards them. While in history, when a new church or mosque or a temple is being inaugurated, people rejoiced. Today, the number of such people has decreased considerably and right now, they protest against such actions. It is time that made people suffer and it is the same that made them enlightened.

