

## Dimensions of Religious Tolerance

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### ABSTRACT

Role of religion and the dimensions it provides has often been under great scrutiny even before the partition took place. The impact of media, governance, religious intolerance and mob mentality is discussed in the following article. Highlighting the role played by certain opportunists in the form of saints, the following article attempts to analyse how the country often deviates from the main topic of concern such as disease, economy and welfare and opts to step aside from the process of development. Religion is important to many in this country and the difference between faith and blind faith can shape a country has also been discussed briefly for a better understanding.

### SHORT ARTICLE

Religion has come to play a crucial role since time immemorial. It is the genesis for many structures and norms that exist today. Disassociating oneself from religion or its idea is difficult as it is ingrained into people since their foundation years. The ideas of good and bad, right and wrong, ethical and unethical are taught by narrating mythological stories, among many other methods, to young children and stating the repercussions of deviating from the 'ideal' path. While religion has its own meaning to everyone based on their surroundings and upbringing, it is one of the primary reasons for both, uniting and dividing people. Where similar ideologies can bring together people to form associations, it can also cause wide ranging conflict among people because of extremist and rigid ideologies and also difference in opinions about different religious groups.

Religion is commonly associated with faith, belief and trust. These are expressions which are inherently very personal and sensitive to criticisms but together, they form the structure in the form of hierarchy, inter dependency, leadership and associations. The inter connected nature of functions performed by these structures makes way for politics and the dominance struggle which commonly prevails in extremist groups. Therefore, it can be said that religion is not foreign to politics and is in fact, an inseparable element of politics. Religion and politics in India, however, have a very unique relation and portray a few distinct characteristics.

Hinduism being the most commonly practiced religion in India continues to permeate the social and cultural dimensions of the country. The dominance in terms of population is not

just abstract, rather, it's absolute. Approximately 80.5% of the population is known to practice Hinduism or is believed to belong from the Hindu religion.<sup>1</sup> Seeing the history of the gruesome partition, a major rivalry exists between the Hindu and Muslim community. The traumatic impact of Partition upon the minds of all Indians followed by the Indo-Pak relationship, seriously affects the question of religion and politics in India even after so many decades of its occurrence.

Even after multiple constitutional provisions in the form of fundamental rights such 'Right to Equality'<sup>2</sup> and 'Right to freedom of Religion'<sup>3</sup>, the communal riots or the debate between Hindus and Muslims make their presence known showing the gap between theoretical provisions and practical difficulties. The gap could be attributed to the exaggeration to already deep-rooted issues. The sensitive issues, cause and effect and triggering point should be highlighted but during the process of highlighting what essentially happens is the "sensationalisation" of every piece of information.

Some trivial statement which would probably have not caused a wide spread stir is interpreted, rephrased and reinterpreted so as to suit the mindset and understanding of the common masses. This acts as a catalyst which increases disturbances and verbal spatter on various forums and some even resort to violent methods. This catalyst is generally in the form of newsroom debates where politicians and spokes persons of different parties are called to showcase their views and such heated debates, more often than not end in inconclusive, derogatory verbal spatter. This is just one aspect of exaggeration. Things take a turn when spiritual gurus who play no role in decision making of the government are given an opportunity to make statements that can cause a stir and even wide spread riots. It's surprising to see how blind faith and lack of awareness can cause most of the violent riots that take place in the country. In case of Dera Sacha Sauda, a case unrelated to causing religious drifts but related to impact that these spiritual gurus such as Baba Ram Rahim have on their followers.<sup>4</sup>

Through wide scale "social reformatory actions" they are able to make huge tax evasions without bearing any fine. The socio -political impact in the form of monetary contribution and the power possessed by their followers and goons even escape the laws and the justice

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<sup>1</sup>Mani Shankar Aiyar, Politics and Religion in India, Ind. Int'l. Ctr.,34(2007)

<sup>2</sup>IN. Const. art. 14

<sup>3</sup>IN. Const. art. 25-28

<sup>4</sup>In. re. *Sant Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh vs. Central Bureau of Investigation*, 3823 CrI. Revn., (P&H. 2014)

delivery system denying justice to many. Baba Ram Rahim was accused of rape and murder on multiple occasions and was later convicted but prior to this he had the defence for lack of evidence. The interesting fact here was that the witnesses of the barbaric had mysteriously died prior to the trial.

The reason for stating was this is to bring out the foul play done in the name of religion seeing that lack of awareness and murky information provided to people can cloud their judgements and fire up the dangerous mob mentality which can cause grave damage. The Hindu – Muslim issue never subsided and it might take a while before these communal issues would cease to exist or limit in number. This can be concluded by following the chain of events. Even during the testing times of the Corona virus pandemic, India wasn't free from communal differences.

To some Muslims, the war on coronavirus has begun to look like a war on the community itself. The community finds itself blamed for the spread of the coronavirus. This followed a global religious congregation in New Delhi in mid-March, held by Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic movement of preachers, which met in defiance of official restrictions.<sup>5</sup> This even caused a hue and cry among Muslims and non-Muslims alike which was fair as it is one of the leading causes for the increase in corona virus cases among many others which have contributed no less. However, it must be understood that religion shaming the entire Muslim community for the act of a particular group disobeying the regulations imposed hardly does justice to what the constitution desires to uphold that is the secular nature of the country. It must be understood that, there are various sects that have particular belief and while no one knows the reason behind this enormous violation, declaring this act as a 'jihadist' move or a conspiracy against Hindus on the basis of certain social media judges and rumours would be foolish without proper and judicious investigation.

This issue could have been under control had there been proper investigation and even before that if the law enforcement bodies such as the police would have taken a suitable course of action to prevent the accumulation of worker or their large-scale dispersal. Needless to say, news channels going into futile debate about which community was at fault didn't help to come up with a solution, rather, it just turned into a political spat between the two parties shunning each other for their ideologies in an air-conditioned room while the number of

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<sup>5</sup> Zia Huq, Jamaat brought collective shame and Islamophobia, Muslims say, The Hindustan Times, Apr. 13,2020.

infected people increased. These debates turned into a fight portraying which historical figure was supreme and how the communities have had their period of glory respectively in their respective eras.

Adding on to this, it must be noted that the genesis of the present ruling party was from preserving and spreading Hindutva. With the controversial nature of the citizenship amendment act and the ruling given in the Ram Mandir issue or the Babri Masjid Demolition issue, the claims of making India a “Hindu” country have sky rocketed. In such testing times, the wave of insecurity and uncertainty is bound to take over.

What took everyone by surprise in case of Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 was that it very clearly omitted out the entire Muslim community in the act. Another thing which comes into question is that India did is already know for giving asylum to its neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar, so why was this act needed all of a sudden? Why was the process of obtaining citizenship hastened for other communities and not Muslim? These questions were answered in the parliament but it did not solve the issue or clear our doubts. Adding to this, India was declared a secular country as per the 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment which logically and definitely implies that it cannot discourage any religion, rather every religion would be provided a suitable ground to flourish and exist reasonably. Moreover, India neither signed the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 protocol which would have made it mandatory to include refugee-based laws based on national legal framework and sovereign nature of the country. Similarly, the Babri Masjid issue was not about appointing a chunk of land to Muslims rather it was dispute among the people for the same piece of land portraying their religious sentiments. The decision, although appeared to be just on the face of it but it didn't really solve the matter. A different approach could have been adopted to by probably assigning the land for a social cause or a betterment action taken up by both the communities.

However, it must be noted that this is not a utopian world and religion still plays a major role in vote bank politics even though there is legal provision against it.<sup>6</sup> A candidate is prohibited from using religion as way to promote himself/herself or the party which may create a rift between communities. However, candidates find loopholes and take the defence of talking about themselves rather than promoting themselves among many other reasons.

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<sup>6</sup>Representation of the People Act, 1951, Act No. 43 of 1951, § 3 Sect. 125, (1951).

With all that being said, part of the reason why politics of such sort is resented because of the fact that religion and its expression matters so much and it's not wrong to express it. However, it should not be at the cost of subverting the other community or incapacitating the others from expressing themselves. It must not be forgotten, secularism comes at a cost of letting people deal with their religious affairs privately maintaining their cultural identity, yet evolving with time and being reasonable. India, has come a long way and the people have the power to stand up against any oddities with right guidance and attempts of better governance. The country is progressing and will be better by leaps and bounds with proper measures from the government and aware masses.

