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POLITICIZATION OF RELIGION AND RELIGIONIZATION OF POLITICS TWIN PERIL OF SOCIETY: A STUDY IN A DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

The irony of dealing with topic is currently at the heart of our society. Among the anomalies of our age is the survival and even flourishing of complex systems of values based on religion. However, we see that temple and mosques flourish, ethnic associations with religious undertones multiply and religion is present in the public sphere through conflicts about religion or persons believed to be religious. At present religion is a much-discussed topic. The line between private and public religion is as thin as ever, and I would argue so is the line between religion and politics. This can be observed at grass root levels. The study observed this experience first of all from the angle of inoculation of religion in the political discourse, leading to the politicisation of religion and then, focus on the influence of religion has on political life, the religionisation of politics.

Keywords: Political Discourse, Politicisation, Religionisation, Survival, Flourishing, Associations, Multiply, Conflicts, Inoculation, Influence, Politics.

Introduction

The presence of religion in our society is not a new phenomenon in itself, but its contemporary strategic use drags all concern attention in such a way that it becomes pertinent of conscious discourse for individual and intellectual, for the survival of collective national/secular identity be it in terms of secularism, democracy or citizenship. The concerns about the growing number of fundamentalist and the amplifying importance of religion in social arena are catalysed by imperatives making their presence felt for decades within the management of the contemporary nation-states. These problems were given a special twist by events such as demolition of Babri Masjid, abolition of article 370, introduction of Citizenship Amendment Act, frequent irresponsible comments from political leaders on God or Goddess or religious prophet and many other events.

Importance of religion in our society

We, the Indian have for very long considered religion a determinant of group and individual identities. Almost every Indian has accepted their religious affiliation. The pervasiveness of religion as personal faith, or as political ideology, or as both simultaneously, is a basic sociological and political fact of our everyday life. Generally, the common men of our society do not recognize the autonomy of the domains of economics and politics, but consider them governed by religious values. Common men of our society do not seem to think that religious beliefs and practices have to be strictly separated from secular activities. Some people may debate but never disagree that in our society religiousness of common men is publicly acknowledged and pursued. Since independence in no way Indian state is able to stand for the separation of religion from secular activities. As a legacy of the inability and nationally specific arrangements of secularism, religion is seen as opposed to reason and rationality and is considered as separate from the political realm and placed into the private life of individuals. Seen as 'the other' of political life, religion is considered to diminish in personal as well as in social importance process called secularisation.

It is a truth that in our society, religion is gradually becoming one of the most important factors that shape politics. Indeed, it is not only religion that affects politics; politics also influences religion. Relationships between religion and politics can broadly be viewed in two aspects of politics – electoral and non-electoral. As a student of political science, I have made a survey over three blocks of Hooghly district, for six months, since January 2022 to June 2022 and those three blocks are Arambagh I, Chinsurah-Mogra and Pandua. In this survey I follow interview method and I have personally administered the questioner. It is also important to note that in this survey I have raise open ended questioner for my respondents and I also recorded the voice responses of the respondent. I have chosen equal number of respondents from different gender, religious community and occupations. The location of the survey has chosen (the villages) among the said blocks through the lottery. Through the maximum responses it was viewed that in our representative democracy religion is one of the determinants of voting behaviour in elections. The survey noticed it that there are the lacks of clear boundary between the political and religious realm and also observed the deconstruction of the objectivity and universality of politically naturalised values.



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The primary observation of this survey is as follows

1. Religion in our everyday life is assuming new role. It is constructed its religious community-based organizations known as religious organisation.
2. They raise issues of respective religious community based social, economic and political issues.
3. Different religious community make representation to the government demanding educational facilities, land ownership and its distribution, government jobs etc. for their religious community members. They raise issues concerning their religious community by submitting memoranda to government, organise public meetings.
4. We cannot ignore it, in our rural life religionisation of politics have been become a reality.
5. Religious organizations have relationship with political parties. Often activities and programmes of religious organizations and political parties overlap.
6. During general elections several religious organizations hold their meetings to decide to which political parties they would support in elections.
7. Generally, religious organizations resolve to support such political parties which would address their issues, which include general and religious organization specific issues.

From the above observations I think there are three consequences of such religious organizations and Politics interaction between religious organizations and political parties. One, it increased political participations of religious organizations in legislative assembly; two, it also divided a religious community support among various political parties diluting the traditional social role of religion; and three numerically large religious community get more representation in decision-making bodies. This weakened the dominance of the community liberated identity in politics and made it more inclusive.

Ashis Nandi in his article, “Psychology of Fascism in India”, pointed out that “Traditionalism in a complex federal culture has to predicate some skill in the management of subcultural differences and some tolerance of asymmetry, ambiguity and inconsistency.” But in several times, we observe that those skill and tolerance have been victimised. For that reason, lack of certainty and clarity has become a chronic trouble our society. We mislaid our monopoly of the interpretations of religious, social and political ideologies, despite the fact that an internally consistent, unambiguous, ethical system is necessary for social progress and moral growth. Actually, the nexus between religious organizations and political parties has been fabricating such ideologies which pretend that is replete with exhortations to improve their community socially, morally and psychologically. This improvement is invariably defined according to the values of the vested interest of the religious organizations. One recent trends of present political culture at rural Hooghly in West Bengal which survives is the conscious use of religion as a channel of community mobility and economic gain. This new trend assumes a perfect fit between economic rationality and political expediency and a broad congruence between a religious organization’s self-interest and the religious communities good.

New trends in our society

Three processes have strengthened that new trend. First of all, new trend of political culture at rural level is reaching out towards national core as a function of mass politics. And increasingly becomes non-heroic, vested interest based, real politic. The essences of this trend are a non-ideological, non-synergic game. It demonstrates the failure of liberal-intellectual tradition and Gandhian style of politics. The opponents have perceived it as a betrayal of secular value and a sure sign of religionisation of politics. Secondly, if we come across the content and realistic part of present political activity of major political parties then it will make known to everyone that politics and religion commence a close link. In this survey it has been observed that in several occasion politics spilled over its boundaries and has usurped some of the control functions of religion. In such situation politics has assumed a role in setting social priorities and ‘intro-ject’ demands and tension generated within religion. And the consequence is once which have non-political problem now has become the responsibility of politics. Finally, with the politics of imperfect secularism the task of the rural leadership has been changed from aggregation of interests to accountable to the religious organization. This accountability at the rural area has enormously increased the religious organizations power. And it has made religious organization more vigorous.

The survey also observes the transformed politics at the study area in the presence and influence that religion has in politics, to which it serves both as a subject and object. The renewed presence of religion in the public sphere and the specific constellation under which it appears as politicised religion contest the strict separation between the political and the religious sphere, the decreasing importance of religion as much for the individual citizen as for groups of people and most importantly, it questions the universality of values proposed as universal and fundamental by the secular ideals. Religion has allowed an alternative personal and collective identification vis-a-vis the secular identity, and through its possibility for politics of piety presents a possible challenge to the ways of action proposed by the principle of secular identity. At the same time, the religious ideals and values proposed as guidelines for good citizenship.



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Religion, according to secular view is increasingly marginalised to the private sphere and loses its social relevance. However, through its presence in the political arena, religion receives public and political attention and moves towards the core of the public sphere again. This attention is due to the changing attitudes of the society towards its population of minority or migrant origin or a different religious background. As most of the regulation and accommodation of religion is complexly mixed with the principle of citizenship and issues of minority accommodation, the process of revitalisation of religion can be seen as a strategy of constructing a national, cultural and religious ‘other’.

The secular state is concerned most of all with those aspects of culture which seem to contradict in some way its paradigms and balance of power. Religion is seen by the secular stand as a possible threat, especially so since by being visible and public it contradicts one of its core principles, namely secularism. However, the democratic principles which are also at the heart of the independent India and the importance of migrant/minority integration on the political agenda offer a possibility for religion to become visible within the public and political domain. In this process, religion is politicised, acquired public aura and becomes a subject as much as an object of policy processes and discourses.

Conclusion

The survey does not mean to suggest that the future of our secular stand point will be decided by some event or issues, although the survey may highlight the dilemmas of our day-to-day life. Any attentive observer might not deny that currently our country side is experiencing a crisis of strong secular authority. The fact is local administration are compelled to deal challenges from religious groups and often they are failing to mitigate those challenges. Sometime those challenges became serious when religious groups in the name of religiosity promoting the cause of liberating particular religious community. In this chaotic situation the leader of the religious group is advocating religious divinity as a matter of faith and claim that divinity could not be determined in a court of law. Therefore, unless and until political and administrative authority are robust to up-hold ‘pantha nirpeksha’ stand and expose unconditional respect to the people’s religious, cultural and social traditions perils of ‘religionisation of politics’ could not be coup up.

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