Resource Politics and Religiosity in Contemporary India

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ABSTRACT: *The contemporary India witnesses a revival of religiosity in all faith systems. Tracing the reason would result in unearthing reasons like the impact of modernity and the arousal of various identities in different classes of people. The shift of religion from a comfort zone to a danger zone happened in the late 80's. This paper aims to locate it with illustrations about Hinduism and Islam in the democratization process as an offshoot of resource politics. The naïve way in which it was used would be elaborated after tracing the evolution of it in contemporary India*
KEYWORDS: *Modernity, Identities, Resource politics, Democracy*

Several religions exist in India. Religion is a system of knowledge, a set of beliefs and rituals regarding ethical behavior. They generally suggest a way of life and the ardent followers are assured of eternal bliss. Thus, at the ideal level, religion provides an ennobling effect to people at large. But the Indian reality for the last three decades drastically deflected from the ideal situation. Instead of providing a relief to the already miserable life in India, religion has aggravated the situation by sprouting confrontation, riots, division and suspicion in the minds of the people. A close analysis of history will reveal that religion has been creating chaos all over the world through centuries. The anti-Semitic pogrom in Spain in the 14th century, Catholic Protestant violence in France in the 16th century, the anti-Catholic violence in London in the 18th century and the Hindu Muslim violence in the 20th century has resulted in the massacre of tens of thousands of innocent men and women across the globe. In independent India, the post 1980 period witnessed a revival of religious sentiments in Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. It generates a perverted feeling of religious fundamentalism which is described as Communalism in India. It is clear that, this revival of religious sentiments is not due to an increased religiosity than of cultural identity, deeply ingrained in the resource politics, based on religious affiliations. This paper wishes to trace the factors responsible for the revival of religious identities in contemporary India. It will shed light on the methods followed by fundamentalists, of all hues, to spread nefarious ideas in society to create division in the minds of the people. The motive behind the fundamentalist strategy of opposing the forces of modernization by a plea to return to the primordial mode of religion will be explained. Thus, the psychological factors responsible for conflict in the name of religion, in contemporary India, will be elucidated.

India houses Indic religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Budhism and Islam, Christianity, Judasism, Zoroastrianism and Bahai faith came to India at different points of time. Hinduism, it is argued that, is indigenous in India and Islam came to India as early as 11th century. Hinduism is not a religion as per the western, Christian idea / framework of a religion, having a universal doctrine, texts, practices and Gods. In T N Madan's view, "Hinduism is a federation of faiths, which has a horizontal as well as vertical distribution rather than a single homogenous religion."(Madan 1) The people who lived on either side of the river Sindhu were described as Hindus. It was an all-inclusive term, undermining all the differences in terms of texts, doctrines and practices. The colonial administrators later used the nomenclature Hindus / Hindooism to refer to these people, to represent the Indian reality in an essentialist manner to control the colonized. The religion that existed in India, at the initial stages of colonization, was diverse and a variegated with internal plurality as its chief feature. There was diversity in text, rituals and practices and even Gods. Having a Christocentric notion of religion, the Europeans identified the diversity as an intimidating factor and attempted to homogenize the Indian religious tradition. Among the different traditions, Brahminism had an upper hand in society as they controlled and regulated the socio–economic life of the times. The Westerners saw the features of religion in Brahminism, and mistook it for a common Indian religion. In due course of time, this version distorted the Indian religious

tradition. The religious and social reformers of the late 19th century did not correct the mistake. Thus, the diverse and multicolored Indian tradition was unified and presented as a textualised religion on the vedantic religion of Brahmins. This attempt had far-reaching consequences both in the socio-political condition and in the religious experience of contemporary India.

The last three decades witnessed a revival of religious sentiments all over the world. The emergence of rightist Hindutva marked the ascendency of this global trend In India. As a reactionary gesture, Islamic militancy too has reached its zenith during this period. Communalism is a consciousness that depends heavily on religious identity and is used as a base for political and social purposes. It is "… the strivings of religious, ethnic, social or linguistic communities to assert their particularity against the generalizing elements in the concept of the nation." (Gottlob 149). There is a marked increase in the graph of communal sentiments in contemporary India. The revivalists used many ways like reinventing the glorious past and formrnting historical antagonism to develop suspicion in the minds of the people. Television became popular in India in the 1980s. The images created by it played a pivotal role in the creation of social constructs. The state run television network-Doordarshan-was made available to people across India. The adoption of Sanskritised Hindi in Doordarshan resulted in undermining all the other dialectical variations. It was the dialect spoken among the elites of India. As the language of Doordarshan, this variety of Hindi acquired a sense of legitimacy in the Indian mind. This resulted in a kind of homogenizing of the Hindi language. The persistent use of this homogenized variety resulted in the creation an 'Other' in India. Undermining all the other dialectical variations of Hindi and the diminished the role of Urdu paved way for the easy appropriation of Hindi with Hindu. The characters, setting, language and culture emitted from the televised Ramayana of Doordarshan helped in 're-inventing' the 'sacred' Hindu past. The Rama of Ramayana serial clearly drifted from the Rama in the epic. In the televised version, Rama is presented as a hero ready to avenge all who offended him. He was presented as a warrior bend on fighting the enemy. It was very popular among Hindus. Myth mixed with history of Hindu tradition was presented to the masses in a veiled manner leaving enough room for imaginative reconstruction of Indian tradition. As a result the multiplicity of Indian tradition gave way to a uniform and separate identity.

The socio-political factors and psychological underpinnings play a crucial role in the creation of self-image for any society. The Hindu Muslim self-image is a by-product of the colonial rule. The colonizers have developed a non-existent impression of a historical antagonism between these two religions. They also developed a habit of viewing social phenomenon in a binary way. This enabled them to develop a theory of historical hostility between these religions. Animosity became the chief trait in the mind of India and the revivalists are trying to perpetuate it. In short, the Indian people developed a habit of looking at differences and conflicts through a glass of this non-existent rage. Adapting this framework, the Hindu Nationalists developed questionable theory that in the light of minority consolidation, a sense of 'ones' among Hindus is absolutely essential. They legitimise the Hindu violence by interpreting it as a natural response of a displaced majority. Religious violence is not a new phenomenon in India. But with the entry of television the impact of televised violence has increased substantially. People are instigated and motivated negatively to indulge in violence. The real reason behind the violence is masked and fabricated stories are spread to incite religious fervor in India. The distribution of cassettes and CDs enable the religious chauvinists to reach each and every household and sway their way of thinking by a systematic operation of lies and distortions distributed through brochures and pamphlets. Earlier, people denounced attackers and the culprits were brought to book. But the communal riots of post 1980s were carefully planned and orchestrated by the agents of religious revivalists and, hence, it is marked by the inability to mourn. (A.Mitscherlich, M.Mitscherlich and V. Volcan as quoted in Kakar 345). This natural process is blocked by rage and division in the social mind.

The whole body politic of contemporary India has been divided as either crypto-fascist or as pseudo secularist. (Kakar 208). The Hindu Nationalists have described all the others as pseudo secularist and questioned the essence of secularism itself. They have misinterpreted it as minority appeasement. On the other hand, the rest of the political formation, of all hues, has described the Hindu Nationalist as crypto fascists. Even though the description is partly true, it undermines the circumstances which promote, sustain and nurture such an attitude in society. This division results in the collision of two narcissisms.(Kakar 212). As a continuation of this trend, the Hindu Nationalists equated the question of national identity with territorial integrity with a view to exclude Muslims implicitly. The identification of India as Hindu nation implied the exteriorization of the non-Hindus. (Gottlob 150). When "a group is misrecognized, denigrated, deliberately falsified, marginalized or suppressed by the state or by a dominant group in society"(Bhargava,413), it will naturally end up in cultural exclusion. It is a fact that both Europeans and Muslims came to this country and Europeans retained their separate identity whereas Muslims accommodated to the existing situation. But it is strange to see that Europeans were described by Hindus as *the Stranger* and Muslims as *the Other*. Making Islam appear foreign to India is part of the project of making India Hindu. (Ludden 5). This 'otherisation' has resulted in the emergence of a lot of cultural groups among Muslims which are veiled religious fundamental organizations. The Hindu Nationalist version of Indian tradition argues that Hinduism is indigenous and Islam is alien in India. On the

other hand, over a period of time, Islam too was indigenized in India. Yet the Hindu Nationalists have undermined this aspect to develop collective antagonism and a separate communal identity in post independent India. The ideology of hate developed by them contributed to the revival of religious identities. The attempt to interpret everything in the backdrop of Hindutva ideology on all matters results in the further alienation of minorities from the mainstream.

The post independent era witnessed a struggle to reconstruct India politically and culturally. The administrators devised strategies to achieve their aims. A democratic form of government with a strong constitution and a lot of programmes for the economic development of the country was planned and executed. The first two decades gave a ray of hope to the deprived people. But as time elapsed, the people were disillusioned due to rampant corruption and administrative failure to achieve the noble aim in view. 'The bankruptcy of socialism' as described by Ashis Nandy and T.N Madan has created a vacuum in society and religious revivalists grabbed the opportunity to spread their ideas by providing alternate forms of development to win the confidence of the people. So India's new communalism has arisen during a struggle to reconstruct India politically. (Ludden 18). A perceived discrimination from the State (Kakar 360) will generate discontent among people. The 1980s witnessed a series of events which was utilized by the revivalists. The country deflected from the established secular credentials. As a result, a narrow and parochial view was developed in the social mind. This helped in instigating a religious revival. The administrative measures undertaken by Gandhi administration in the light of Shah Bano case and the sati of Roop Kanwar helped in creating ill feeling, suspicion and rift in the society. The Hindu Nationalists pointed out the different policies followed by the administrators and hinted at double standard of the character of the government in dealing with matters related to faith. By strongly articulating sectarian views, the Hindu Nationalists converted the Hindus to a people with community-in-the-mind.(Freud, quoted in Kakar 361). They were made to believe that their community aspect of religious identity is threatened and the only palpable solution seems to be converting India into Hindusthan. In order to effect this change, Muslims were targeted and excluded from the mainstream. The imposition of a constricted account of historical phenomenon explains the contemporary Hindus love for Lord Rama and his place of birth. It is clear that the contemporary religious revival in India is a fabricated one as Ashis Nandy opined, "… the intolerant Hindu nationalism itself is an illegitimate child of modern India, not of Hindu tradition."(Nandy 78)

In the latter part of 1980s, systematic effort was undertaken by Hindu Nationalists to effect a topsy turvy in Indian political scenario. The Hindu Nationalists described their effort as an attempt to avenge the 'ancient humiliation' caused to the Hindus specifically by the Muslim/Mughal rulers. The actions of the Mughal emperors were positioned in a new light leaving enough room for misrepresentation. Particular events like the alleged destruction of Hindu temples by the Mughals were re-presented to alienate the Muslims from the mainstream. The mythologized and psychologised accounts were transferred to Hindus to be internalized . Misrepresenting the precepts of Hinduism was very easy as majority of Hindus are oblivious of the precepts of Hinduism. They were appraised of a 'sacred' past and the challenges posed before it by the Muslim rulers over a period of time. This selective retrieval of doctrinal belief furthered the cause of the Hindu Nationalists. Religious symbols were presented in a different cast echoing narrow sectarian connotations. The interpretations disregarded the universality of these symbols.

The representation of the Orient by the West was instrumental in the revival of religious revival. The Europeans rationalized their world dominance by the creation of their own knowledge. The Oxidant looked at the Orient in stereotypes. The British account of Indian history presented Hindus and Muslims as juxtaposed resulting in cultural exclusion. The estrangement of Hindus from Muslims or vice versa proves it all. European version of Indian history was not yet been completely dismissed even after independence. An all-encompassing synchronized version of Indian heritage is yet to emerge. The language and terminology of history is not sufficient to signify the diverse Indian tradition in a composite manner, as a product of a great evolution. This great tradition with a lot of indigenous elements in it should be an all-inclusive term. The religious revivalists are moving against this trend creating rift in the mind of India.

The 1990's witnessed a paradigm shift in India following the adoption of free market mantra for development. Animosity towards repressive governments is a discernible feature of any thriving democratic system. The free market generated both insecurity and vaulting ambition among the masses in India. The Hindu Nationalists harped on it effectively. The insecurity is explained as "…that India is still wracked by Hindu failure to purify Bharat as a Hindu homeland".(Ludden 17). The Swadeshi movement is aimed at ameliorating the anxieties of those feeling insecurity. On the other hand, the opportunities unlocked by free market have created a handful of powerful and affluent people. Their influence, wealth and international contacts have been utilized by the religious revivalists turning communalism in India in to an international affair. Ethno-religious chauvinism in other countries has made Hindutva seem more credible and Hindu Muslim conflict as a part of global clash of civilization. (Ludden ix).

Communalism is an offshoot of project fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is an anti-modern project. This explains the communalists drive to oppose all sorts of modernizing elements in society. The communalists will seek a return to the primordial way of life which is described as the sole means for salvation. They will continuously remind us of the glorious past, a theocratic utopia which never existed. As rightly pointed out by J S Hawley, the communalists of all hues will engage in efforts to control women sexuality, their options regarding dress, career and movement and will always resist the modern sophisticated lifestyle. So the fact remains that the religious revival in India today is not due to any increased religiosity but due to the cultural identities based on religion. The strategy remains to be same for religious revival in all religions. Apart from the Hindu Nationalists, the believers of Mohammadanism, Christianity and Sikkism too are encouraging communalism in India. In short, communalism in India is the exclusion of the *Other* rather than the assertion of the Self. (Gottlob 152). The damage caused to the society depends on the organizational setup. In religious denominations with better organizational setup the effect will be more dangerous and lethal, should they decide to do so. In order to tide over the difficulty, the multiplicity of Indian tradition is to be recognized and different stream of Indian tradition is to be understood historically for better co-existence and the creation of an inclusive social order.The secular state must keep a principled distance from the different religious denominations leaving religion to the personal realm of an individual. The country and the people must develop a healthy legal, democratic, public and political culture with space for discussion, criticism, dialogue as well as accommodation. Any attempt to homogenize the tradition is to be opposed by all means. Therefore, steps should be taken by the society to impart unbiased version of the varied and variegated tradition of India. It is an exigent task, and as long as it is accomplished, the manipulation of religion is likely to continue.

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