

INDIA: A DISCOURSE ON RELIGION AS POLITICS

Heba Farheen

Academic Consultant (English),
Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur (Odisha)

Dr Arun Behera

Associate Professor of English,
Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Bangalore

ABSTRACT

India is a diverse country with innumerable languages, ideologies and religious faiths and beliefs. Politics has no less dominance in the life of Indians. In effect, religion and politics are integral to Indian life which determines the national discourse. Marcello (2012) says, "Religion is the recognition of all our duties as divine commands." It is accepted by people as a divine command which is why they are so sensitive about religion. The objective of writing this article is to examine the causes of disharmony and suggest measures to narrow down the differences thereby making the diversity in a pluralistic society like ours a unifying tool.

Keywords: religion, politics, diversity, minority, majority, ideology, culture

INTRODUCTION

India is an abode of different faiths and creeds with unity in diversity. Since time immemorial, there has been an exodus of people from all over the world and India has always welcomed them with open arms. The sharing of boundaries and a vast geographical landmass of India has attracted all sorts of people with diverse backgrounds. The diversity in the rich cultural heritage is celebrated with utmost zeal and fervour and unity is exhibited amidst all these differences. However, it is also true that religious hatred or intolerance in some measure against the *other* exists in some form or the other which threatens the fabric of Indian culture. In the name of democracy, many a time the axe falls on the minority who often finds themselves at the receiving end.

DISCUSSION

For Fuchs & Mosco (2015), "Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man

who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world because they are an inverted world.”

Of late, the theatrics of the majority and minority dichotomy has been making inroads into the secular fabric of the nation. It was not as glaring as it is now though. In the time of the Sultanate (1206-1526) and the Mughals (1526-1857), for example, the minority Muslims ruled the vast majority of the Hindus and the medieval period was termed Muslim period-and not something else- although the minor Muslims reigned over the vast majority of the Hindu subjects. Moreover, these so-called rulers did not control India all the time; they ruled for over 330 years which began with Babur (1526-1530) and ended with Bahadur Shah (1837-1857).

On the contrary, however, when the British came and ruled us after deposing and the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah, and sending him to Burma in exile (in 1857), the British colonial rule was never termed a Christian period in Indian history! The periodisation of Indian history as Hindu or Muslim rule, therefore, sounds illogical and irrelevant, especially in the present cosmopolitan context when the whole world has become a global village, as it were. Moreover, even though the so-called Muslim rule has ended since long (over 160 years ago), the hangover still hounds the psyche of people.

One more issue pertains to racial discrimination. After the death of George Floyd, an African American at the hands of brutal white police personnel, riots broke out along with demonstrations throughout the world. The statues of Winston Churchill and Cecil Rhodes were vandalized castigating them as imperialists and racists. Even a man of Gandhi’s stature about whom Einstein had said, “Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth” was not spared; his statue was vandalized. The sense of degrading the very upbringing, their roots, their culture, customs, and rituals- all was mocked at.

The differences in ideology are thus the major players in the name of religion. The outbreak of riots, the imposition of curfew, and barbaric violence are consequences of the action. Some people aggravate the situation by making it more volatile rather than dousing the fire of intolerance. Ironically, the people responsible for brokering peace are responsible for vitiating the atmosphere further leading to large-scale unrest. They are the ones who trigger sparks of intolerance in the minds of the people, who consequently face atrocity, mental agony, and insecurity. It is a paradox that the religion, which acts as a binding thread to connect the pearls (of different communities), is torn apart in the name of ideological differences. The

invocation in the name of religion and God, therefore, is duplicitous and fake. However, the culture of unity can save us from the imminent doom.

The cultural set up becomes the frame of reference with the syllogistic approach to a premise having its own conclusion with the answer of possibility and certainty. The nuclear family generates a sense of alienation with a devious impact on individual personality. The way man perceives reality is a social contract which in itself is a mirage, a lie as opposed to the truth which is constant like the sun.

It is important to note what Müller-Lauter (1971) said about Nietzsche, who said, “Ultimately, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them.” All knowledge is an expression of the ‘Will to Power’. This means that we cannot speak of any absolute truth or objective knowledge. People recognize a particular piece of philosophy or scientific theory as ‘true’ only if it fits the descriptions of truth laid down by the intellectual or political authorities of the day, by the members of the ruling elite, or by the prevailing ideologies of knowledge.

The media portray the religious divide along with its violence in a vivid manner cautioning us against intolerance and disharmony. The anti-Sikh riots in the wake of Mrs Indira Gandhi’s assassination (1984), the Ayodhya temple conflict, the stringent laws against cow slaughter, the riots in Godhra (2002) and Muzzafarpur (2013) are delineated in detail by the print as well as the electronic media. Similarly, the writers also play no mean a role in bringing out the darker side of the communal disharmony between two major religious groups in India. Take, for example, Khuswant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, Mahesh Dattani’s *The Final Solution*, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, and other literary works depict the horrors of the Hindu-Muslim divide in their attempt to bridge the gulf. However, the way we take religion strangulates the very essence of it, for example, our eating habits are questioned.

The spirit of the constitution preaching equality, liberty, and freedom of expression are being crushed under the feet. In the play *The Final Solution*, for example, the situation of restlessness, breaking of an idol, and killing of a Hindu priest makes the situation quite deplorable. It puts the conduct of one community over the other in a bad light so much so that people’s behaviour in relation to the sensitive issue of religion becomes uncivilized. There is some silver lining in the dark clouds though: every problem has a solution and the issue relating to religious differences is no exception. Therefore, the only thing that we need to do is work for the welfare of humankind. History has provided us with the best examples of doom and destruction at the hand of tyrannical rule and we can learn from it so that we don’t repeat the mistakes.

The history of the last hundred years or so which shows a world devastated by two World Wars (WWI and WWII), cold wars, terror attacks (26/11 and 9/11), and troubled hot spots globally can be taken as a case in point. The spectre of nuclear war is on and the power of dominance, acquisition, and annexation shows one's superiority over others. The United Nations is trying its best to bring under control the volatile situation with no tangible result.

Some media, especially movies, however, can make a lot of impact on people's minds to bring about some reconciliation. Movies which reflect a contemporary society delineate innumerable themes such as partition, riots, religion, etc. Besides, some movies focus on is communal harmony and religious tolerance.

For example, the famed movie *Amar, Akbar, Anthony's* euphemism for religious harmony is exemplary. The ghastly sceptre of riots, curfew as a solution to ideological differences, and class consciousness are conspicuous in the present-day scenario. Branding the individuality in the name of anti-national is demeaning. The present situation in India- be it the Shaheen Bagh episode (2020) or the anti-CAA movement or the agitation against the NRC- does not augur well for the country. Some anti-social elements are in a way trying to fiddle with the non-Indian idea.

The very approach of proving one's nationalism is an indirect way of calling them, refugees. The situation in the North-East and West Bengal is a case in point where the frequent debate over the issue makes people's lives miserable. The safety concern that they are trying to fortify is not from the hostile neighbouring nations, but from within. The impact of religion on the psyche of individuals shows the way politics is played in the name of religion.

The use of religion by politicians is an exploitation of the innocent people's psyche which in turn shapes the future course. The young men and women, who are the future of the nation, when entangled in petty politics, see the world with a myopic vision and this, in turn, pulls their morality down. The current instances of the uprooting of statutes or vandalizing of monuments are a sheer cry of rebel against the atrocities committed in the name of race and culture. The man takes things in his stride and behaves like an owner or the creator of the universe. He takes things for granted and does not bother about the level of extinction of natural resources. The sheer selfishness and greed make the man forget his capabilities.

It is time now for the man to seek solace in God. He needs to use the resources sustainably so that it benefits both the present as well as the generations yet to come. Man is not going to gain anything from

fanaticism. Blind faith in one's religion makes man obscurantist and orthodox which is why he must be liberal in approach. While following the righteous path, man must develop an attitude of gratitude. Man must be free from jealousy, hatred and anger and must not expect anything in return; he must rather be the harbinger of goodness and peace. The world is filled with vibrations: both good and bad, and it resounds and reverberates the environment surrounding it. So, the man should be doing good leading to good outputs as the adage goes: what goes around comes around. If you do good, you will get good results.

CONCLUSION

The very fact that all beings are created with full responsibility and obligation to natural beings is an understatement. The reality behind every religious formulation is not to look down upon anyone; it's rather to adapt to it. Accepting change and adapting to live in a pluralistic society is a step towards acquiring divine inspiration. The violence that man perpetuates in the name of religion hurts fellow human beings. Man, therefore, must think the world as one united family as is depicted in Indian culture: *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (from *Maha Upanishad* meaning 'the world is one family') and work in that direction to engender peace and harmony so that we have an India of Gandhi's dreams: an India where all people irrespective of caste, creed, gender etc. will peacefully co-exist together.

REFERENCES

- Dattani, Mahesh. 2005. *The Final Solution*. Penguin India.
- Fuchs, Christian & Vincent Mosco. "Introduction: Marx is Back-The Importance of Marxist Theory and Research for Critical Communication Studies Today." *Marx and the Political Economy of the Media*, 2015. Brill, pp. 290.
- Ghosh, Amitabh. 1988. *The Shadow Lines*.
- Müller-Lauter, Wolfgang. 1971. *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy*. University of Illinois.
- Peru, Marcello. "Kant on Politics, Religion, and Secularism". *Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*. Acta 17, 2012. Pp. 346-371.
- Singh, Khuswant. 1956. *Train to Pakistan*. 1956. Chatto & Windus.
- <http://www.universalrights.net/heroes/gandhi.htm#:~:text=Albert%20Einstein%20said%20of%20Mahatma,the%20world%20has%20ever%20seen.>