

Religion and Politics

Essay No. 01

Terrorism in Punjab and J & K is endorsed and encouraged by the religious fanatics. Religious places have become the convenient place of refuge for the terrorists and threat to religion is the justification of terrorism. Secular-minded people condemn the induction of religion in politics whereas religious diehards believe that religion is the basis of politics. Is the latter view consistent with the secular character of our State? What will be the long-term effects of mixing up religion and politics?

Gandhiji used to say “My religion is my politics and my politics is my religion.” If religion stands for moral qualities like the love of truth, faith in God, love for human beings it would moralize politics. This is what we need today. In a world where respect for human life is at its lowest ebb, where politics is identified with cheating and political leaders are oblivious of moral consideration, we need politics imbued with morality.

But religion is nothing more than a bundle of outdated rituals, hackneyed customs, and irrelevant practices. As it is divorced from practical life; it is not in touch with the realities and demands of the present-day life. It suspends the reasoning power and makes human thinking pointless. It is today a powerful opiate for the masses; with the help of religion, they are drugged into a hostile and dangerous state of thinking. They cannot be persuaded; they confirm their prejudices and never try to change them. They become idolatry and repose full faith in their leaders. Instead of cultivating tolerance, they become intolerant to other religious groups. All of this is incompatible with the democratic spirit which needs broad-mindedness, an open mind, belief in reason, and faith in the potentialities of the common man. Clearly, if we want to weaken our democracy, we may allow religion to have incursions in politics.

For India politics as an ally of religion is more dangerous. Religion with diametrically opposed practices may lead to disintegration. Religious dogmatism breeds illiteracy which is available on a large scale in India. So, religion should be a private affair having nothing to do with public affairs. It can be achieved only through a thorough overhauling of the outlook.

Essay No. 02

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There was a time in the west when religion played an important part in the governance of a state. The king was not only the political head of the state but also the religious head. Such was the importance of religion that many wars were fought between nations holding two opposite views on religion.

In the west with the passage of time, the importance of religion grew less and less in politics. But in the east, especially in India, religion continued to be important. Religion was held in such a high esteem by the Indians, that the British used it as a weapon to divide the country into two nations. They exploited the inherent differences between the Hindu and the Muslim faith. Politically they formed two separate electorates based on religion thus, dividing the people further.

Further, the communal violence that followed the partition demonstrated that mixing religion with politics would be very bad for the development of India and its people. Religion made two communities. Which were living in comparative harmony for centuries, kill and destroy each other

These riots made the founders of our constitution opt for a secular state so that each one is free to practice his or her faith. Without interference from the state Muslims who had stayed back in India were given the same status as the others. Sadly, enough it was the death of Gandhiji, which brought peace between the two communities. Soon people forgot their religious differences. They got down to the act of nation-building in earnest.

Until a decade ago, religion was once again dragged into politics; this complicated various problem that the society faced. Vote bank politics and fulfillment of personal gains gave rise to the problems of Punjab, Assam, Kashmir, and Ram Janma Bhoomi.

If looked at objectively each of these problems leads to stagnation of development of a particular part of the country. However, by taxing religion, these problems have been blown out of proportion.

The only solution therefore would be to carefully separate religion from them. And then work towards a solution