

Role of Religion in Politics

Achyuth S Kamath¹ and Dr. A. Jayakumara Shetty²

Research Scholar, Department of Development Studies, Kannada University Hampi, Karnataka, India¹

Principal, SDM College (Autonomous), Ujire, Karnataka, India²

askachyuth@gmail.com¹

Abstract: *In India in spite of partition on the foundation of religion, the country resolved to be a secular state and promulgated its Constitution in 1950 accepting equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their caste, creed or race. It was undoubtedly a great step forward. But it was not easy to translate the constitutional ideals into practice in a society as complex as that of India. The Indian state remained not only soft towards communalism but it also encouraged it, if it paid political dividends. This article discusses the role of religion in politics.*

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Caste, Tolerance.

I. INTRODUCTION

During independence, India resolved to be a secular state with its own characteristics of religious tolerance, liberty and equality. Religious tolerance is a key element in the concept of Indian secularism because it has been a significant element of the country's historical tradition. Secularism in India is a way of life. In a country where there are at least 12 religions, over 300 castes, nearly more than 4,000 sub-castes, over 100 major languages and more than 300 dialects, the only way to reduce internal tensions is to inculcate tolerance and co-existence. The idea of secularism in a country like India with its pluralist tradition lasting over thousands of years cannot succeed without respecting pluralist ethos. Religion is viewed as a form of orientation to the secular world in the sense that it is a source of knowledge, values and norms of a society. Religion thus viewed is an ideology, a system of thought, located in the domain of the sacred. The definition of politics is not as complex as that of religion. It is generally accepted that politics is a set of activities which are geared towards the attainment, acquisition, maintenance and consolidation of power.

How do we understand religion? Religion is understood in different ways by different people. Philosophers, theologians and sociologists have different perspectives to understand religion. However, sociologists have understood religion as primarily a social phenomenon. Every society has religious beliefs, rites and organization. Religion very often influences our understanding of everyday life. In many societies religion affects the way we relate to each other. Our religious beliefs often guide our social interaction. Religion can be a unifying factor in some societies. However, in some societies it can be a matter of conflict.

English politics has its roots in the name of Aristotle's classic work, *Politika*, which introduced the Greek term *politika* meaning, 'affairs of the cities'. In the mid-15th century, Aristotle's compositions would be rendered in Early Modern English as *Politiques*, which would become *Politics* in Modern English.

Sociologist Emile Durkheim defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, while Max Weber defines politics as the activity of striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state. Religion is a belief of people which is adhered to by the sacred things. On the other hand, politics deals with the power distribution in the public domain for the welfare of people. In the Indian context, where we follow the path of secularism, the following two factors are accepted,

- The state has no religion although it will promote religion and have equal respect for all religions.
- The states have no intervention on the issues of religion.

Religion and politics are inseparable; they have always been intertwined in a complex way. "Religion¹ is a private matter² so long as it remains within the thoughts of a person. When these thoughts are expressed publicly and inspire

¹<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=romila+thapar+on+religion&docid=607986938008461198&mid=E67317E26805F7908E8DE67317E26805F7908E8D&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

public action such as building monuments for worship and organizing fellow believers into carrying out political and social functions, then religion ceases to be an exclusively personal matter. It is no longer a matter of faith since its formulation as an organization of believers has a bearing on the functioning of the society. Its religious identity incorporates these functions that are expressed through its institutions such as monasteries, mathas, temples, mosques, Khangahs churches, synagogues, gurudwaras. Their role has to be assessed not merely in terms of the religion with which they are associated, but also in the context of their functions as institutions of society..." Romila Thapar.

The resurgence of religion, as well as politics, has become key to world affairs. Initially few sociologists like Max Weber thought that modernity would in due course lead to a general decline of religious faith and the function of religion in the public/political sphere. However, the word 'twin tolerations' has been used often to describe the relationship between religion and politics. Modern states brought the concept of secularism to avoid the sway of religion in politics.

In India one element which is all pervasive throughout its history, though in varying degrees, is the use of religion for the fulfillment of political ends and aspirations. In India religion always served politics and politics has often served religion. Religion was never able to fully disentangle itself from politics nor could politics ever could extricate itself fully of religion. Thus, one finds politicization of religion in some manifest or buried form at all stages of our history. In India historically we find this interaction between religion and politics in four phases. First phase extended from Indus valley civilization to the advent of Islam, the second from the advent of Islam to the First war of Indian Independence of 1857, the third from 1857 to Indian Independence in 1947, and the fourth from 1947 onwards. While there was close interplay between religion and politics during all these phases, the nature, the intensity and the dynamics of this interaction was diverse during each of these phases.

Though British rule brought about far-reaching changes in administration, transport, communication and economy, it also disrupted traditional social ties and fragmented culture. It was at this point of time that Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal, Dayanand Saraswati in the North, Jyotirao Phule in Maharashtra introduced reforms in education and socio-religious pursuits and also provided a standpoint on national life. In Maharashtra, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, invigorated, on a large scale, the Ganapati puja which then served as a venue for political meetings. In Bengal, Ras Behari Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal and their friends used religious symbols centered around the Durga Puja to develop a political consciousness. Apart from this, socio religious plays in these and other provinces of India have always conveyed political messages to the public. During the national Independence Movement, Gandhi ji used the Hindu notion of 'Rama Rajya' to unify, integrate and mobilize a majority of the Indian population. However, unfortunately, post 1947, in India, the relationship between religion and politics has manifested in the growth of communalism, development of secularism and rise of fundamentalism.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

We had to go through a few articles, books and other literature while preparing this article. A few of them have been mentioned below;

1. The work of M N Srinivas is based on the premise that the social structure provides the analytical framework for the understanding of the many dimensions of life and culture namely kinship, politics and religion. He does not treat religion as overbearing on social structure. Taking the Coorg case the study shows that there are three structural systems at work, each with its own identity in terms of religious behavior and obligations, yet interdependent in being a part of the total complex of the social structure. The social structure consists of the patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal joint family, which is followed by the village community consisting of members of different castes and finally the wider Hindu religious community. The study has tried to develop an integrative perspective on religion that links the three levels in a complex whole. (Srinivas M N, Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India, Sociological Bulletin; Journal of the Indian Sociological Society, Vol 53, No. 1, January-April, 2004)
2. In another study, Gore portrays Indian society in all its dimensions and its social ethos in all its manifestations

²<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/Secularism-is-not-opposed-to-religion-Romila-Thapar/article16954533.ece>

with a degree of coherence and transparency. The focus on diverse issues, events and developments relating to democracy, secularism, nationhood, social transformation, continuity and change in India. Indian social reality is too complex to be amenable for a purely sociological analysis. (Gore, M S, Unity in Diversity: The Indian Experience in Nation-Building, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2002)

3. In a work conducted by Hart, he has discussed integration of values and morality into political organization. He has carried out studies of cultural social movements and their intertwining with public life. (Hart Stephen, Cultural Dimensions of Progressive Politics: Styles of Engagements among Grassroots Activists, Chicago, 2001.)

2.1 Casteism in Indian Politics

Rajni Kothari has scrutinized the relationship between caste and politics through evaluating the issue as to what happens to the political system because of the vote of castes. He found that three factors such as education, government patronage, and slowly expanding franchise have entered the caste system because of which caste system has come to affect democratic politics in the country. Economic opportunity, administrative patronage, and positions of power offered by the new institutions and the new leadership drew castes into politics. This involvement (of castes in politics) resulted in two things;

1. The caste system made available to the leadership the structural and the ideological basis for political mobilization, and
2. Leadership was enforced to make concessions to local opinion and organize castes for economic and political purposes.

When reviewing historical facts, caste politics became noticeable in India in the beginning of 1990s after the National Front government under then Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh resolved to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, a government panel established in 1979 that called for a fixed quota (reservation) of jobs for the OBCs in the public sector.

The Mandal Commission was formed in 1979 by the Janata Party government under Prime Minister Morarji Desai with a directive to "identify the socially or educationally backward". The Commission was set up to mull over the question of seat reservations and quotas for people to level out caste discrimination, and used eleven social, economic, and educational indicators to determine "backwardness." In 1980, the commission's report confirmed the affirmative action practice under Indian law whereby members of lower castes (known as Other Backward Classes and Scheduled Castes and Tribes) were given exclusive access to a certain portion of government jobs and slots in public universities, and recommended changes to these quotas, increasing them by 27% to 49.5%. L R Naik, the only Dalit member in the Mandal Commission rejected to sign the Mandal recommendations, as he was afraid that well-to-do OBCs would corner all the benefits of reservation.

Historical data indicated that Caste-based favoritism and dominance have been a malicious aspect of Indian society and after independence, its implications with politics have not only made it possible for previously oppressed caste-groups to be accorded political freedom and recognition but has also raised awareness about its potential as a political capital. While Ambedkar designed the policy of reservations or protective discrimination to remove untouchability as an institution from Indian social life and polity, Mandal considered caste as an important political resource.

2.2 Increasing role of Caste in Indian Politics

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar disparaged the use of caste as a political board. He expected the limitations of using caste as a political resource and instead emphasized eliminating the notion of caste from Indian culture.

It is well recognized that the role of caste in elections has two dimensions. One is of the parties and candidates and the second is of the voters. The previous notion seeks support of the voters projecting themselves as champions of particular social and economic interests, the latter while exercising their vote in favor of one party or candidate whether people vote on caste consideration.

Different parties accommodate certain castes in distributing party tickets. While nominating candidates parties take into consideration the caste of the aspiring candidate and numerical strength of different castes in a constituency. Caste leaders also mobilized their followers on lines of caste so that they could show their strength.

During the fifties, wherever caste associations were able to maintain their unity and did not formally align with one party they appealed to their members to vote for their caste fellows irrespective of their party affiliation which has, to a certain extent, continued, even today.

In all, caste has become an important determinant in Indian society and politics, the new lesson of organized politics and consciousness of caste affiliations learnt by the previously despised caste groups have altered the contours of Indian politics where shifting caste-class alliances are being encountered. Total effect of these mobilisations along caste-identities have resulted not only in the empowerment of recently emerging groups but has increased the intensity of confrontational politics and possibly leading to a growing crisis of governability.

2.3 Increasing Importance of Religion

Religion is used to manipulate and control others for good or evil ends. It has been used as an effective political and commercial tool as evidenced by the historic records of religious wars. Religion has a great influence on political patterns in Indian society. Politicians use religion as their loopholes. They have hidden and continue to hide their black money in the names of religion and trusts. Politicians have been using religion to gain success in politics.

Religion in Indian politics can be linked to the country since pre-independence periods. It was the British, who ruled India for more than 100 years around the 19th century, pitched one community against the other to destabilize the freedom struggle. They especially thrived in pervading a sentiment of unease among sections of the Muslim community concerning their wellbeing in a country that had a majority Hindu population and emerging Hindu nationalist voices. And unfortunately, we Indians succumbed to their ugly play. As a result, the Muslims demanded reserved seats in the legislature and a separate electorate and finally a separate country for themselves.

2.4 Use of Religion in Politics

In 1915, Hindu nationalists established the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha (All India Hindu Assembly) to counter the Indian Muslim League (a political party) and the secular Indian National Congress, a forum founded in 1885 that afterward became a political party. In 1923, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (popularly known as Veer Savarkar), the Hindu Mahasabha founder, coined the word 'Hindutva' (Hindu-ness) to define who is a Hindu.

The tensions between groups of the Hindu and Muslim societies and the seclusion felt by the muslim leaders resulted in the Indian Muslim League demanding a separate nation for Muslims. When the British were to formally depart the country in 1947, the British India was divided into the 'Hindu-majority' India and the 'Muslim-majority' Pakistan. The Partition had dangerous consequences on both the nations. It resulted in a mass migration of lakhs of people from India to Pakistan and vice versa, and the killing of lakhs of people on religious basis in the violent clashes that ensued. Incidents like these did not cease here but unfortunately the dirty game continues even today.

Gandhi had been preaching brotherhood among the different religious groups. Nehru was a strong supporter of secularism. However the game of religion has continued to play even today and will be played for a very long period to come until we as citizens do not become self aware as to the extent to which it can destroy the country from within.

The rise of religion-political parties has endangered secularism in India. It is feared that if it succeeds, there is a likelihood that many other political parties with caste and religion as the basis may come up.

2.5 Objectives of the Study

This study has been conducted within the limits of Ujire Gram Panchayath with the following objectives;

1. To study the role of caste in politics
2. To study the role of religion in politics

III. METHODOLOGY

The study is being conducted to study the role of religion in politics. Respondents will be selected on a random sampling basis from different religions/castes. The primary data will be collected from the respondents through a questionnaire which will be represented graphically through Pie Chart. Secondary data will be collected through newspaper articles, research papers, magazines etc.

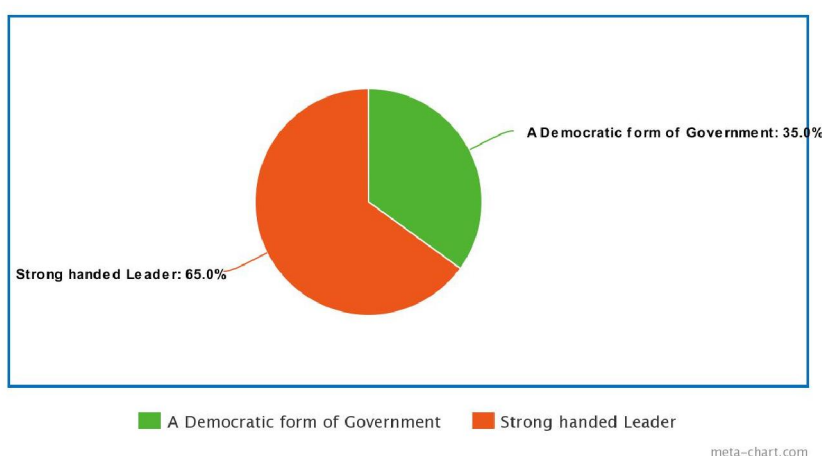
The responses of the respondents are their personal views which can widely vary from individual to individual.

3.1 Survey

One Hundred adults within the limits of Ujire Gram Panchayath were surveyed to know their opinion about the role of religion in politics. Among those hundred adults, 50 belonged to Hindu Community, 25 were Muslims 15 were Christians and the remaining 10 were Jains. They were presented with a questionnaire containing 7 questions. The respondents were asked the following questions. Their responses have been presented below.

1. What would you prefer? A Democratic form of Government or a Strong handed Leader.

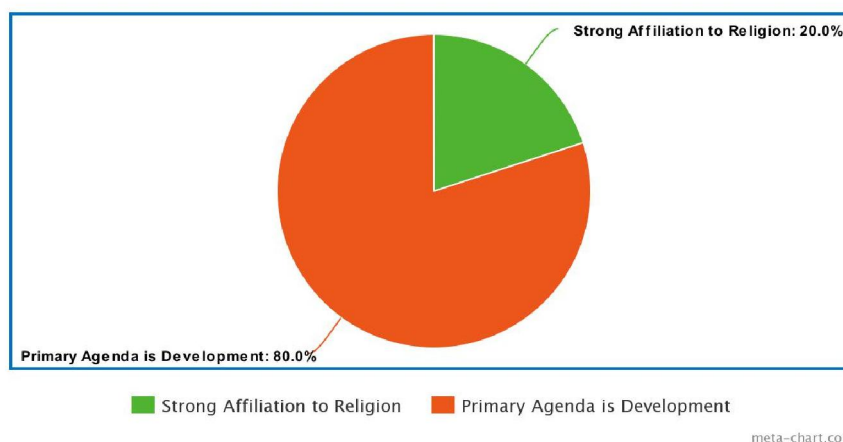
What would you prefer? A Democratic form of Government or a Strong handed Leader.



More than 65% of the respondents were of the opinion that it is better to have a strong leader.

2. Would you prefer a political party with strong association to religion or a political party whose primary agenda is development?

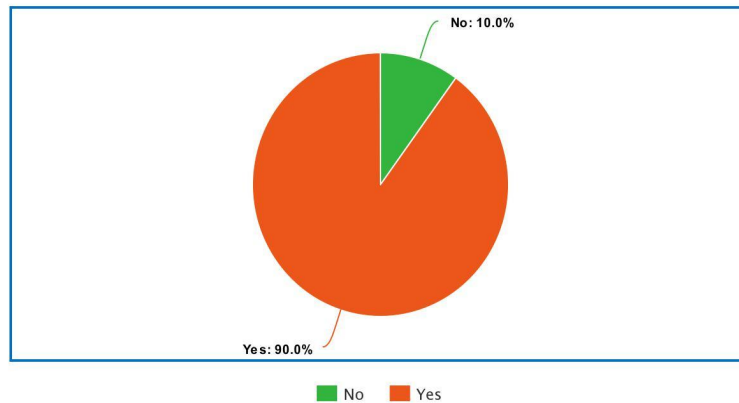
Would you prefer a political party with strong association to religion or a political party whose primary agenda is development?



The respondents (80%) opined that they would support the political party whose primary objective is development.

3. Are you of the opinion that the interference of religious institutions in political activities has been increasing?

Are you of the opinion that the interference of religious institutions in political activities has been increasing?

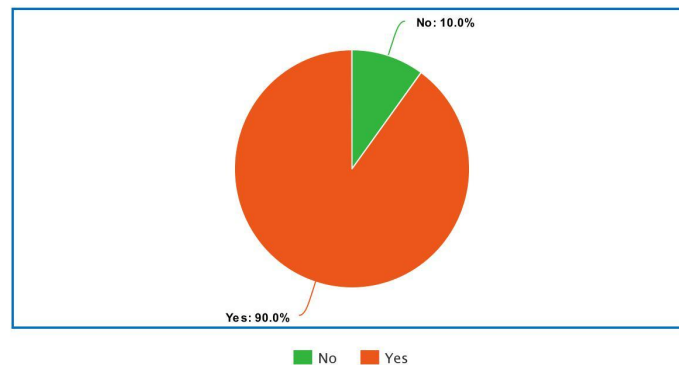


meta-chart.com

More than 90 respondents agreed that the interference was increasing.

4. Do you believe caste has become an important determinant in Indian politics?

Do you believe caste has become an important determinant in Indian politics?

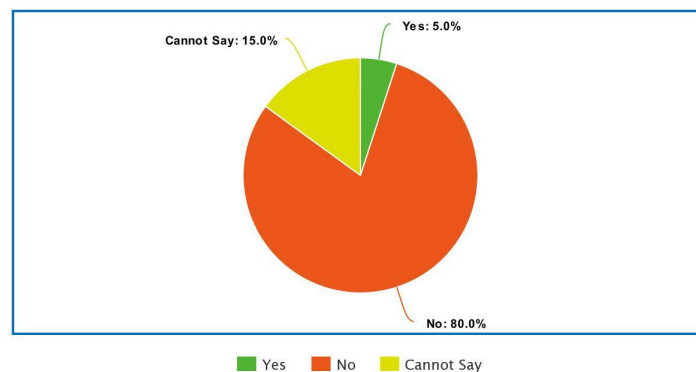


meta-chart.com

More than 90 respondents agreed that caste has become a major determinant.

5. Would caste be the only consideration while voting for a candidate?

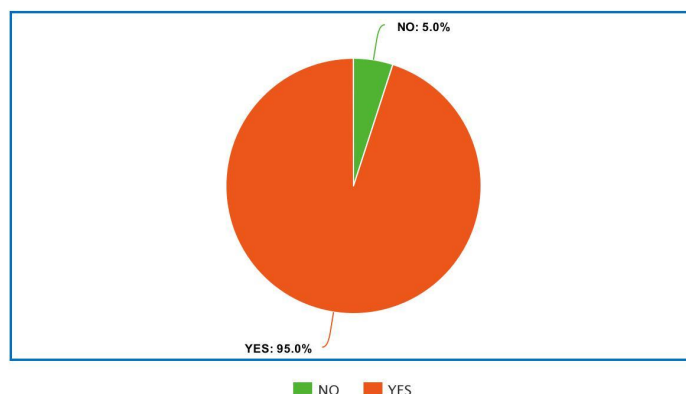
Would caste be the only consideration while voting for a candidate?



meta-chart.com

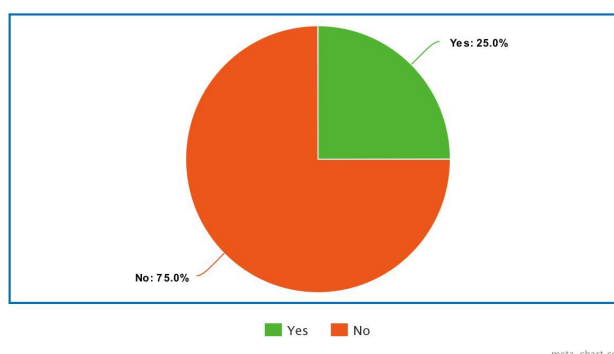
6. Would you support separation of religion from politics?

Would you support separation of religion from politics?



7. Do you believe that the animosity has been increasing between religious communities?

Do you believe that the animosity has been increasing between religious communities?



IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

With the analysis of the survey, it was found that both the hypothesis hold true

For a very trivial number of respondents, the candidate's caste was the main concern. Some of the respondents say they might have voted for persons who happened to belong to their caste. But it was not caste voting. They voted for the candidate not because the person was of their caste irrespective of his party and ability. They voted because the person was the candidate of the party to which the respondent felt closer for a variety of reasons including the feeling that the party would "protect his/her" interests or the party had done good work for the people like him/her. Their main consideration is their perception of their interests.

Significant number of the respondents were of the opinion that the separation of politics and religion cannot happen with people from one particular community supporting it and the others not supporting the separation. They were of the opinion that it is a long term possibility when the spirit of brotherhood is inculcated amongst today's children so that in the years to come, they will downplay the importance of religion which will finally result in separation of religion from politics. Respondents were of the opinion that there is no religious animosity as such. It is however, a few isolated incidents which have been blown out of proportion for personal benefit of a few politicians. They were of the opinion that it's us/we citizens who have to have a balanced mind and temperament so that we are not instigated by minor/petty occurrences.

The following are the factors because of which the role of religion in politics has increased;

1. Vote fetching - For getting majority of vote of a particular sect
2. Division of class. - people get divided by religious animosity.
3. Monopolizing one ideology of people.

Arguments in favor of the separation of politics and religion:

The idea of religion concerns the private sphere which pertains to individual faith and belief, in contrast politics in the public sphere pertains to a wider community.

1. The intrusion of religion into politics can monopolize some specific ideology which in turn will cause a rift in the society.
2. Religious ideologies when perpetuated deeper into the political sphere may turn into mass hysteria leading to the indoctrination of the people.
3. In politics it promotes vote bank politics in the name of religion and diminishes the ideals of secularism.
4. Intermixing of religion with politics may promote favoritism for a particular community.

To summarize, caste and religion are profoundly entrenched into Indian politics. Many theorists asserted that caste is a social phenomenon of Indian society. By partaking in the modern political system, caste is now visible to divisive influences and a new form of integration. Caste has gained a powerful position in Indian politics. Religion also has a significant role in Indian Politics. Religion and Politics co-exists in India. Religion can guide a politician but a politician prejudiced in favor of one religion, can never be good for all citizens. A politician is the representative of the general public of India, and he/she uses the spirit of religion to promote communal coordination which is against the ethos our nation was built upon.

V. CONCLUSION

Secular nationalism is India's acknowledged ideology, it has its roots in the National movement. It implies that all religions are treated as equal in the sense that none will dominate the functioning of the state. But the term 'secular' does not mean separation of state from religion, but implies neutrality of state to all religions. Secularism, in India means religious equidistance, but not noninvolvement. Here religion is not the determinant of Indians citizenship, it is their birthright. Secular nationalism and religious nationalism have been two of the most important organizing devices for mass politics in India. In short, the Indian polity is sub-continental and complex. It has been characterized by pluralism. However, secularism in India has been facing turbulent weather with the revival and strengthening of religion-leaning political parties in the country.

Since 1947 India has accepted the political culture of democracy. In this ethos, the dynamics of the relationship between religion and politics has raised many problems regarding secularism, rise of communalism, religious nationalism and fundamentalism. Above all it has even raised the sensitive question of the nature of national identity of our nation.

1. What is India?
2. Who is an Indian

Politics and religion should be intermixed for the welfare of masses and not to subjugate minorities. Politics is only for the people who abide by the rule of the land on the other hand religion is a private issue it is better left so.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Durkheim, Emile, 1965 (1915). Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Translated by J.W, Swain, Free Press, New York. Madan, T.N. (ed) (1991). Religion in India, Oxford University Press, Delhi
- [2]. <https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/27261/1/Unit-21.pdf>
- [3]. (PDF) CHAPTER -1 INTRODUCTION-RELIGION AND POLITICS IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE | Gajendra Choudhary - Academia.edu
- [4]. (PDF) THE ELECTORAL FUNCTION OF RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA (researchgate.net)
- [5]. Zenab Banu, RELIGION IN INDIAN POLITICS Need to be Value Oriented, Not Power Oriented, The Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 70, No. 3 (JULY - SEPT., 2009, pp. 705-718 (14 pages)
- [6]. Religious Nationalism and India's Future - The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- [7]. <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/perspective/news/the-use-religion-indian-politics-1766164>
- [8]. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/480371>
- [9]. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/Of-religion-and-politics/article16717403.ece>

- [10]. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279060090_Religion_and_politics
- [11]. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/7-charts-that-show-how-religion-and-politics-influence-each-other/articleshow/83983961.cms>
- [12]. ANGUS STEWART WOODBURN , THE PRESENT RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN INDIA, THE JOURNAL OF RELIGION, Madras Christian College, Madras, India, PP 389-397
- [13]. Aristotle (1981). Politics, Book IV, Penguin Classics
- [14]. Audi, R. and Wolterstorff, N. (1997). Religion in the Public Square: The place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- [15]. Plato, (1993). Republic [c. 370 BCE], Robin Waterfield (trans.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press