

ISSN: 2582-6433



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Open Access, Refereed Journal Multi Disciplinary
Peer Reviewed 6th Edition

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 7

www.ijlra.com

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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH & ANALYSIS
ISSN

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RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM: **A THREAT TO SOCIETY**

Authored by - Indra Daman Tiwari

and Nivedita Singh

Fundamentalism is a term whose reach and importance are contentious in today's world. Fundamentalism typically has a close relationship with religious convictions, and this is its most obvious manifestation.

Fundamentalism in India can take many different shapes, but religion is always at its centre. What are its variations, the ramifications they have for India, and how does it vary from communalism?

Concept of Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is described as a tendency among certain groups to strictly and literally follow certain specific scriptures, dogmas, or ideologies with a strong emphasis on maintaining in-group and outgroup distinctions. This tendency is more frequently, but not exclusively, seen in religious terms.

Fundamentalists place a significant emphasis on purity and a strong desire to go back to earlier ideals from which they feel their followers have deviated. This tendency frequently has the effect of rejecting differences of opinion with regard to these established "fundamentals" and the group's preferred interpretation of them.

The phrase "fundamentalism" can either be a derogatory epithet or a neutral description, depending on the situation. It carries a number of unfavourable associations that even its supporters are hesitant to use. Fundamentalism is a religious reaction against aspects of modernity.

Historical development of Fundamentalism

The four-volume "The Fundamentals" set of publications, which were released in 1909, contains the original concept of "fundamentalism." These works, which were published between 1909 and 1920 by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now the Biola University),

encouraged Christians to uphold some core Christian beliefs. The “ Fundamentalist Modernist dispute” that raged among American Protestant churches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries would come to be symbolised by this.

It soon became connected with a specific strain of evangelical Protestantism that distinguished itself from other Christians and modernity by taking a separatist stance towards others who did not share its beliefs.¹ The so-called "second wave" of fundamentalism in the US and political developments abroad, particularly the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, contributed to a significant development in the conceptual history of fundamentalism in the late 1970s. Scholars and pundits had to separate fundamentalism from its Christian roots in order to use it to explain occurrences in non-Christian societies, especially in the Islamic world, as a result of a new understanding of the worldwide relevance of religion in politics. This conceptual expansion led to a significant increase in the use of the term “fundamentalism” in literature and media, whether it be in English, German (*fundamentalismus*), or French (*fundamentalisme*). This increase can be attributed to the increased popularity of this topic in discussions of the role of religion in politics in many different parts of the world.

Justice rationale behind Fundamentalism

Religious beliefs are referred to as fundamentalism, as was already stated. Fundamentalist religious practices generally share characteristics. Fundamentalists of a particular religion consider their sacred texts to be the actual written words of God. Fundamentalism held that since the Bible is considered to be error-free and that no one has the authority to alter it or dispute with it because God wrote the Bible for His followers, there are no errors to be found in it.

Fundamentalists frequently think liberalism and secularism are out to destroy their way of life and sacred truths.

Fundamentalists believed that their cause will have cosmic importance. They see themselves as protectors of a way of life and a distinctive doctrine. Community, comprehensively centered upon a clearly defined religious way of life in all of its aspects, is the promise of fundamentalist movements.

¹ <https://www.gktoday.in/topic/religious-fundamentalism-meaning-types/> visited on April 11, 2023

Types of Fundamentalism

There are two types of Fundamentalism

- Religious Fundamentalism
- Non-religious Fundamentalism.

The forms of religious fundamentalism are as follows:

- Christian Fundamentalism
- Islamic Fundamentalism
- Buddhist Fundamentalism
- Sikh and Hindu Fundamentalism
- Jewish Fundamentalism

Christian Fundamentalism

Christians are generally two types, those who took a literal view of the Bible and the church documents and others who have a liberal view of it. The former are the Christian fundamentalists; they came into existence as a consequence of the impact which 'liberals' had on Christianity. Liberal Christians attempted to restructure the social bases relied upon religious principles with new secular ones such as democratic values. Indirectly and somehow directly, that was a threat to religious values and the family structure. Consequently, throughout the twentieth century, through a literal commitment to the sacred documents, Christian fundamentalism emerged to combat with such a liberal theology of Christianity by returning to the rightful order of society. In this way, Christian fundamentalism came into existence as an anti-modern movement in modern era, in a sense it was rejecting the modern ideological products. Yet, it should be kept in mind that they were not hostile to all products of modernity. Fundamentalists use some elements of modern world (modern technology) as a factor to prevent other elements of modern era which they consider to be a threat to religion (i.e. materialism). For instance, the Christian rights emerged in 1970s, believe that only Christians and Jews are qualified to run governments; that is in a sense rejecting the separation of church and state, among those is Robert Son who owns the Christian Broadcasting Network (Hoffman and graham, 2006:403). Having this Christian fundamentalism emerged as a modern movement, as Armstrong puts it 'religious fundamentalists are essentially modern movements

that could take no root in other time than our own' (Armstrong, 2001:viii).²

The first use of the term Fundamentalism was recorded at the Nigara Bible Conference in 1878-1897. The Fundamentals – 12 books in 19th century funded by Milton & Lyman Stewart in Protestant churches in U.S.A. stressed the inerrancy of the Bible and a number of basic Christian doctrines. The general assembly of Presbyterian Church listed their five fundamentals. The Baptist Church ranked among the Fundamentalists. Christian Fundamentalism predominated in 18th and 19th century in United States in different denominations all claiming to hold the true message of Christ. According to James F. Mattil the fundamentalists hold that “ the key to fundamentalist Christian belief is their acceptance of the inerrancy of the Bible”. The Iran hostage crisis 1979-80 brought into existence the term Islamic Fundamentalism as the media tried to explain the ideology of Ayatollah Khomeini. And it has since been used to describe Muslim violence in various parts of the world including the attack on U.S.A. in September 2001, the attacks on British railways in July 2007 and most recently the Pune attacks in 2010.³

Islamic Fundamentalism

Despite their strong religious beliefs and early indoctrination of the Koranic principles in children, Muslims have historically faced political opposition. This is true despite their strong religious convictions. In numerous and violent conflicts throughout history in the Middle East and Europe, this opposition has been felt strongly. The cultural and intellectual resources of the Arabic culture have infiltrated and enriched European and eventually global learning beginning in the 14th and 15th centuries, despite war and bloodshed. It is commonly known that Arabs made discoveries in the fields of mathematics and architecture. Muslims were properly proud of the fact that Islamic culture was, in many ways, more sophisticated than that which was then widespread in several parts of Europe.

The Arab world disliked and rejected British colonialism in the 19th century, and the Islamic world placed great weight on the struggle for political power. In actuality, this has always been a crucial component of Islam's religious-political nature Resistance efforts have given rise to extremist organisations.

² <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/main-article/on-the-slippery-slope-of-religious-fundamentalism-1103087.html> visited on April 11, 2023.

³ <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.31826/9781463242541-010/pdf> visited on April 11, 2023

Since the Middle Ages, millions of Muslims have called India home. Wars were fought to establish Moghul dynasties; there was violence and intolerance; however, it eventually calmed down and developed into a successful empire under Akbar, who displayed remarkable tolerance, supported Hindus, and welcomed Jesuit missionaries to his court.

Although there had been instances of forced conversion and it was inevitable that Islamic rules and customs would be enforced in some places, there was generally very little documented evidence of fanaticism or fundamentalism. Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Parsis all coexisted as Indians.

Prior to Indian Independence and after the subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan, Islamic fundamentalism gained prominence. Fearful rioting followed the population exchange as Muslims fled into their own country and Hindus from the new Islamic state crossed into the new, liberated India.

There was a lot of hostility and frequent bloody shoot outs as a result of the animosity that arose between the two populations. For safety and to shield themselves and their religion from what they felt would be oppression, migrant Muslims preferred to group together and move into ghettos. Generally speaking, those fears never came to pass, save for the largest incident—the destruction of the Babri Masjid—when vested interests stirred up racial tensions by disseminating rumours that were frequently wholly baseless. As a result, there were violent riots that caused death and destruction and increased animosity between the two religious communities.⁴

The Hindu majority saw the expanding Muslim community as a threat, and after experiencing the violence of the attack, the Muslims felt increasingly exposed and uneasy since their religion and sacred sites were being targeted. The Muslim majority has become more and more fundamentalist in their viewpoint and in their suspicion of what they see to be a Hindu administration in an effort to defend their lives, their faith, and their sacred sites. Violence that has occurred often on both sides has hardened fundamentalist beliefs and practices among Muslims and Hindus alike. India's basic existence as a secular state has been in jeopardy, but prudent leadership has prevented it from disintegrating.

⁴ <https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-2-religious-fundamentalism-and-indian-secularism-the-present-crisis/> visited on April 11, 2023

Hindu Fundamentalism

The Hindu fundamentalist is based on *three Hs*, “*Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan*” And Its members had to share a common language, common religion and a common origin. It is a combination of religious, cultural and political fundamentalism, incorporated in one particular pattern of framework to cater to the needs of the dominant group of the country. Religiously, it has come to extent of alienating other religions from the mainstream by oppressing, demonising the other and denying the right of existence through the tactics of stigmatising, demolition and destruction of the worship place and many other unprecedented demonstrations. Politically, it has come to the level of capturing power in the central government; and culturally, it is isolating the minorities as outsiders who do not share the Hindu culture and hence, they are considered as aliens and they have no right to live in India.

Hindu fundamentalism is rather a new phenomenon. It is sustained through *four dogmatic assertions*: first and foremost is the religious dogmatism that project Hinduism as the only custodian of true spirituality; the second is scriptural dogmatism that accepts nothing but the Vedas as the depository of all the truth; third is the territorial dogmatism, asserting India as the land of God-realization; and the fourth is the communal dogmatism that asserts the theory of India for Hindus alone.

The Hindu fundamentalist function under various names in India and throughout the diaspora. There are, however, three main right-wing Hindu organisations: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP). The RSS was formed in the mid-1920s, the VHP in 1964, and the BJP emerge in the late 1970s as successor to an earlier party, the Jansangh. The BJP in the past had been in power as part of a coalition government for two consecutive terms of the national parliament, (and single Majority party at present). In the last two decades, the VHP has actively worked to help the BJP gain electoral gains by creating a ‘Hindu’ electorate which would back the BJP under all circumstances.

Gujarat's March 2002 events stunned not only India but the entire world. India has had conflict between religious groups in the past.⁵

⁵ WLUML-WSF-1h-final.indd Sec9:61

When India and Pakistan were founded in 1947, there was unheard-of levels of violence. Since that time, communal riots—violence between religious communities—have occurred often. Nonetheless, the violence's nature has evolved through time. Gujarat's unrest was not caused by conflict between two communities. It was an organised and well-planned act of genocidal violence against Muslim communities, carried out with the help of the government. Many trained individuals from the "Hindu" communities assaulted everything that belonged to the Muslim communities' members, including lives, properties, and businesses.

According to the National Human Rights Commission, “the state completely failed to protect the constitutional rights of the people of Gujarat.” Furthermore, it was not a singular incident. Long before that time, there was violence, and it is still happening today in various forms. A new type of Hindu society was developing, as seen by the makeup of the crowds who marched to the streets of Gujarat. The mobs included women, members of lower castes (Dalits), indigenous peoples (Adivasis), and women who have historically been subjected to discrimination by orthodox Hinduism. They had come together due to a shared feeling of “Hindu identity,” but this had not happened naturally. Hindu fundamentalists, who have been attempting to establish a presence in India, achieved their goal as a consequence of a well-planned campaign.

Fundamentalists of the Hindu religion received assistance from the governmental apparatus, which they have actively infiltrated during the past ten years. They have made efforts to change India's perception from that of a secular, democratic country to that of a "*Hindu Rashtra*."⁶ In this paper, I will explore the events in Gujarat in the context of how Hindu fundamentalism and the groups that support it have historically operated.

There has been a comparable rise in other fundamentalisms, such as Islamic fundamentalism, along with growing control by Hindu fundamentalist groups over the culture and ethos of mainstream Hindu society.

Other fundamentalisms, including Islamic fundamentalism, have grown in tandem with Hindu fundamentalist groups' greater dominance over the culture and ethos of mainstream Hindu

⁶ John Harriss, Craig Jeffrey, and Stuart Corbridge, “Is India Becoming the ‘Hindu Rashtra’ Sought by Hindu Nationalists?” Simons Papers in Security and Development no. 60, School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University (December 2017): 22.

society. But there are three reasons why we believe it is urgent to pay attention to Hindu fundamentalism.

First, it has gained state power in a democracy, which means it is succeeding in dividing the electorate along religious lines and changing the face of Indian society. Second, it has cleverly portrayed the majority population as being attacked and victimised. Lastly, when fundamentalist groups hold democratic power, it threatens and oppresses everyone it “other rises” in a way that spells the end for both those people’s civic rights and democracy itself.

Religious Nationalism and India’s Future

Modi’s success in India’s 2019 election will profoundly affect the country’s economy, foreign policy, and state politics, as well as its future as a secular republic.

Nationalist groups with religious roots have become increasingly popular in recent years in a number of different nations. Due to both its size and its sustained democratic tradition, few situations are more deserving of in-depth analysis than India. India is the largest democracy in the world, and it is also where one-sixth of all people on earth live and vote.⁷ Hence it is conceivable that political changes in India will have an impact on the rest of South Asia and the democratic globe.

India is not alone in facing the challenges that accompany religious nationalism: many democracies worldwide are witnessing a rise in such political movements. The widespread use of religiously inspired political appeals can be detected in places as diverse as Turkey, Latin America, Western Europe, and the post-Soviet states.² For instance, in the 2018 Costa Rican presidential runoff election, voters for evangelical populist candidate Fabricio Alvarado reportedly rallied behind the mantra that “if a man of God can’t govern us, then nobody can.”⁸ In his recent successful bid for the Brazilian presidency, right-wing populist candidate Jair Bolsonaro similarly campaigned on the slogan, “Brazil before everything, and God above all.”⁹ In Indonesia, meanwhile, Islamic nationalists allied with anti-Chinese xenophobes and

⁷ Milan Vaishnav, *When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

⁸ Ben Raderstorf and Missy Reif, “A New Trend of Religious Populism in Latin America?” *Dialogue*, April 9, 2018, <https://www.thedialogue.org/blogs/2018/04/a-new-trend-of-religious-populism-in-latin-america/>. Visited at April 11, 2023

⁹ Catherine Osborn, “Bolsonaro’s Christian Coalition Remains Precarious,” *Foreign Policy*, January 1, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/01/bolsonaros-christian-coalition-remains-precarius-brazil-brasil-president/>. Visited at April 11, 2023

economic nationalists to oust Jakarta's Christian governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama and convict him on blasphemy charges.¹⁰

Religion appears, no doubt, as a political force in the whole world. Politics gains at the cost of Religion. It is equally evident that religious militancy develops from the practice of using religion to achieve political gains. Political use of religion begets intolerance, hatred, jealousy and Terrorism. All religions in the world advocate peace, tolerance and brotherhood. The powerful Vested interests often associate it with violence. Religious extremism and violence have become almost two sides of a coin, and thus throughout the world religious violence is spreading fast. All the major countries of the world have witnessed, over the past few decades, the rise of dangerous forms of religious militancy and extremism.¹¹

The growing extremism of religious militants has mounted crises of democracy in the world. Terrorism on the whole originated from extreme religio-political fundamentalism, from religious Intolerance and from the cherished antagonism against secular, progressive and democratic Ideals. The scourge of terrorism is alarmingly threatening peace and democracy and abusing Human rights leading to critical human security situation.

The scourge of terrorism perpetrated by the home-grown religio-political groups of Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka in contemporary period have disrupted peace, made critical prospects of democracy and the state of Human security alarmingly in the region¹². It has become imperative to seek measures to quell Domestic violent movements grown out of religious extremism. Growth of terrorism never remains confined within one's own territory but has international ramifications. It transcends Geographical boundary. Religious militants captured power in Afghanistan, and now they have developed their tentacles in neighboring countries. They might extend their dreadful claws across Continents.

Actually Indian Secularists in the recent past did not care to put down roots in the indigenous soil of the religious or vernacular linguistic cultures of the country. As a result, when electoral politics enlarged the political community of India by bringing the groups other than the middle

¹⁰ Krithika Varagur, "The Improbable Rise and Blasphemous Fall of a Christian Politician in Indonesia," Foreign Policy, April 25, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/25/the-improbable-rise-and-blasphemous-fall-of-a-christian-politician-in-indonesia/>. Visited at April 11, 2023

¹¹ 2008. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/pakistan/ji.htm> visited on April 11, 2023

¹² <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/holy/combatants/palestinians.html> visited at April 11, 2023

class into it, it produced popular leaders more inclined to the unrenewed traditions. That is to say, the dialogue between Religion and Secularism came to a stop leaving the field to closed secularism on the one hand and the revived communally oriented fundamentalist religion and culture on the other.

The fundamental law of religious freedom In the Constitution of India includes the freedom to “propagate” religion. But the debate on it was endless. It was the announcement by Mukherji and D’ Sousa that the Christian Community had decided to forgo special communal representation in the legislature and other communal safeguards so that there would not be political exploitation of increase of numbers through conversion that there was a spontaneous decision in the Constituent Assembly to include propagation of religion as a fundamental human right of the citizen. Though the Court has ruled that the right to propagate does not include the right to convert, that right is the right of the one who hears the propagated religion. But even afterwards there were attempts to restrict this freedom by law in Parliament.

It was Nehru’s opposition to them that defeated them. The O.P. Tyagi Bill got the support of then Prime Minister Morarji Desai and it was the fall of the Desai ministry that prevented it from getting passed. But the question has continued to agitate Hindu minds. It raises many very sensitive theological as well as social issues on which Hinduism with its mystic orientation and Christianity and Islam with their prophetic historical orientation differ in a fundamental sense. But the ecumenical inter-religious dialogues in recent years have been exploring new paths to break the deadlock. The Indian situation certainly calls for mutual understanding at depth and consensus about permitted parameters of religious practices, for which inter-faith dialogues among religions and secular ideologies at various levels may be necessary, specifically within the Indian context. Since freedom of propagation and conversion involves not only matters of religion, but also of culture and political ideas, any restriction at this point will affect the fundamental rights of the human person in general.

I suppose that must be the reason for Governor Kanth proposing a consensus of religious leaders on this matter outside the law.

Outcomes of the paper

There is no great ferment taking place in the world of religious ideas, beliefs, and rituals, or any marked increase in the sum of human spirituality. What we are witnessing today is less the resurgence of religion than of communalism, where a community of believers has not only a religious affiliation but also social, economic, and political interests in common. These may conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers sharing the same geographical space. The basic reason for supposing that religiously inspired reform movements may be gaining momentum in our time is that perceptions of inequity in human affairs and the tangible realities that provoke those perceptions are on the increase. Population growth on the one hand, and advanced means of communications on the other, more often than not disrupt accustomed ways of life. They help to create personal uncertainty, isolation, and disappointment. The resulting distress can and often does find expression in fundamentalist movements that attempt to counteract uncertainty, isolation, and disappointment by forming supportive communities of fellow believers. It is no accident that these movements are based in countries where the continuation of old village ways is becoming impossible for a majority of the population, where urban-based mass communications, by penetrating the villages, have begun to erode an age-old framework of peasant life.

The problem in India is that the nation continues to keep religion and the state intertwined. In a country that has many religions, the government and the people must realize that religion and the state have to be separate. Mixing the two has never worked, and it never will. The stability of the state system depends critically on the state's role in balancing and mediating relationships between thousands of separate communities. Such balancing requires careful and measured degrees of impartiality, neutrality, syncretism, and tolerance. What has bound communities to each other has been the manufactured mechanisms and symbols of the secular state. These structures, while supportive of local religious and sectarian institutions, had to remain impartial, neutral, or secular.

Future conflicts will be those of communal survival, aggravated, or in many cases caused by, environmental scarcity. These conflicts will be sub national, meaning that it will be hard for states and local governments to protect their own citizens physically. This is how many states may ultimately die. As state power fades, peoples and cultures around the world will be thrown back upon their own strengths and weaknesses, with fewer equalizing mechanisms to protect

them. The coming decades will see us more aware of our differences than our similarities. To the average person, political values will mean less and personal security more.

As we have already seen, Religious Fundamentalism is intertwined with many different motives Which are often selfish and can be a serious source of intolerance, conflict and wars. Religion is meant to bring peace, good will, tolerance, love and social harmony among people. Thus Religion becomes a doubled edged sword. What use we make of it depends on human mind and Social conditions. We need to have better communal relations, tolerance and understanding of one another.

Religion is a personal relationship between man and God. No one can or should come between the individual and God. The modern and contemporary Indian Philosophers are very liberal and dynamic in outlook. They do not believe in sectarian religion. They advocate for cult less, non-dogmatic and non-Ritualistic religion.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Tagore, Gandhi and Dr.Radhakrishnan visualize A universal religion, which is open, dynamic and all embracing. Thus Mahatma Gandhi says, “My religion is Hinduism, which for me is religion of humanity and includes the best of all Religions known to me.” Ramakrishna Paramahansa emphatically says that all religions are true and they all serve as different pathways to the realization of God. The same truth runs in the heart of all religions. There is essential unity in all religions and yet there is diversity. While the Renascent leaders have faith in the truth of all religions, they all hold that one particular religion should not be engrafted on another religion. Each religion has its value and serves society in a particular manner. The solace and satisfaction can be derived from religion only when it develops on indigenous lines. There should be growth in interiority and interiorization in all religions and they should flower independently on their own pattern. It will be harmful to reduce all religions to a colorless form of one particular religion.

Swami Vivekananda, Dr.S.Radhakrishnan and Mahatma Gandhi call on the Indian masses to break their narrowness and lead the life of sanathana dharma. The soul of religion is different from its body. The myths and rites constitute the body of a religion which are perishable. The spirit of Indian religion is that of an open religion based on the intuitive experiences of God. A religious person is a social reformer and a true karma yogi like Mahatma Gandhi.

We have but one choice, the path of secular humanism based on the principles of logic and reason. Our founding fathers gave us a nation founded on the principle that power belongs to the people and set us on the path of a secular democratic state that respects religious freedom and human dignity. This alone can offer us the hope of providing every citizen with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of excellence. Peace (Shanti in the Indian Scriptures) is fundamental to the Hindu way and view of life; in Islam beneficence and mercy (Rahman and Rahim in the Koran) are the main attributes of God. With such profound similarities in mind , all Indians- Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and non believers- must re-examine their Past, which can give them valuable clues on how to realize a more peaceful and cooperative future.

