

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS IN INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

*In the ancient era Indonesia has witnessed Hindu-dominated empires and influence of Hinduism was evident there in Srivijaya - kingdom. The politicization of religion and vote-bank politics made religion in Indonesia an internal part of politics. Gradually Indonesia became a country with a Muslim citizen's majority but it retained its secular pluralistic culture. The politicization of religion and vote-bank politics made religion in Indonesia as an integral part of politics. Although, the policies remained predominantly secular. All these developments show an intricate combination of religious and politics. The article focuses on the intricate dynamics of the relationship of religion and politics in Indonesia.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Politicization of Religion and Vote-Bank Politics, Relationship of Religion and Politics*

### INTRODUCTION

Religion as a boost to the anti-colonial upheavals played its own card in Southeast Asia. Indonesia remained no exception in this regard. Indonesia witnessed the glimpse of Darul Islam revolt in West Java and reaping the conditions to break the colonial yoke of the Dutch rule. Indonesia is a country populated with 86.1 per cent Muslim, 5.7% protestant, 3% Roman (Catholic), 1.8% Hindu, and 3.4 unspecified. This shows that the followers of Islam are the majority religious community. In a country which is holding the majority of the Muslim population, the role of religion in the political arena would surely be a dynamic and challenging issue to examine. Moreover, in a situation of continuous fundamentalistic and violent tendencies Indonesia is shaping its political activities in a unique manner. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the linkages between religion and politics with special reference to Indonesia. With this focus in mind, to analyze the religious spree in Indonesian Politics, this article is divided into three parts; firstly, it provides a brief outline of the historical background of the religious element in Indonesia's politics. Secondly, it elaborates the current scenario of religion and politics. Thirdly, it deals with religious extremism and politics<sup>1</sup>.

The ancient history of the Indonesian archipelago reveals that the earliest recognized kingdom, known as "Java Dwipa" was the Hindu Kingdom. The rule of Hindu emperors was marked symbolic for the Javanese civilization. The two biggest Indianized Hindu-kingdoms were Srivijaya and Majapahit. From the 7<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, Buddhist empires started growing gradually, but the Indonesian state-craft was predominantly Indian and Hindu by culture and rituals. It means that Hinduism as a religion ruled over the archipelago. The ancient administration associated its religious belief through the faith of the rulers the emperors<sup>2</sup>. It was during the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, Hinduism had spread through Java. It was after one thousand years, Islam arose in the land, but the Javanese population never gave up their ancient religion & spiritual mysticism which was inclined towards cosmology. The anthropological analysis says that Indonesian religious behaviour

was mystique and animistic. Van der Kroef writes that Indonesian culture is animistic and part of the Javanese cosmology in which man is surrounded by spirits and deities, apparitions and mysterious supernatural forces. If Indonesia does not take the proper precautions they may be disturbed by these forces and plunge into disaster<sup>3</sup>. After the advent of Islam in Indonesia, the country embraced the softer version of Islam and it had gone through the process of a fusion of Islamic and Javanese Shi'ah. The Sufi brotherhoods (tarekats) of the Sufi orders of Naqshabandiyya, Qadiriyya and Shattariyya were formed and spread slowly in the archipelago. The entire population was influenced by this Islamic process. The Javanese culture provided a unique combination of Hindu and Islam traditions. The Muslims of the land were supposed to create a moderate religious path like "Islam Abangan" or "Islam Kejawen"<sup>4</sup>. So historical and anthropological dynamics suggest that Indonesian population was synergistic and their concepts of tolerance were very much prevalent. The historical background shows that ultimately religious synthesis is surely a key element in ancient politics and popular society. Indonesia has witnessed the development of societal relations through the syncretistic religious attitudes and practices. In this historical backdrop, it becomes important to examine the link between.

This point of the article deals with the synthesis of liberal and communitarian trends, internal politics and Party dynamics and the External Politics and foreign policy.

According to communitarian philosophy, the centrality of the individual in the liberal theoretical projection of "good" is essentially a denial of "individuals embedded in society". Currently, Indonesian state and politics are mingling with a combination of liberal trends along with communitarian philosophy. Despite the strong secular political tutelage of leader Sukarno era, Jakarta Charter maintained and promoted the utilitarian purpose of Islam for the unity of the nation. In the "Jakarta Charter" or "Piagam Jakarta" the notion of unity was attributed to Islamic values and Sharia laws, although at the initial stage, Charter tried to advocate the Islamic beliefs and laws the Pancasila enshrined in the Constitution remained the national ideology. The Indonesian state is based on the belief in the one supreme God with the obligation to live according to Islamic Law for Muslims. So from the Charter, it is clear that Islamic law is important and belief in one god is necessary for the "unity in diversity". The State has shown complex dynamics and mixture of liberal and communitarian trends. The Charter basically emphasizes the common good for "socially embedded" individuals to maintain national unity but it is supposed to be done through the oneness of the divine power and uniform standard laws based on Sharia but were gradually dropped in Suharto's reign. As a result, Indonesia witnessed words like oneness, divine, standard laws, the "formalist upsurge" in the Suharto era. Slammet Effendi Yusuf, a senior Golkar-party leader uttered that the Islamic community should keep on fighting over the omission and oppose to Pancasila so that the damage to the Muslim community is restored<sup>5</sup>.

The Indonesian political scenario is fashioned by its complex party system. Broadly speaking, Indonesian political parties are of two kinds: Secular parties and Islamic parties. Indonesian politics went through the process of decolonization in which secularism optimized the process of nation-building. These two segments of political parties as listed below are playing the political games through the different religious junctures. The Secular and Islamic parties are as following:

#### **Secular**

- Democratic Party (Partai Demokrat), ruling party chaired by President Yudhoyono
- Golkar (Party of the Functional Groups), a large party is known for neoliberal economic policies

- PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle), a large party known for populist policies
- Gerindra (Great Indonesia Movement Party), strongly nationalist party led by former lieutenant general Prabowo
- Hanura (People's Conscience Party), strongly nationalist party led by retired general Wiranto
- PKPI (Indonesian Justice and Unity Party), a small party affiliated with the armed forces
- NasDem (Nasional Demokrat), a new party that splintered off from Golkar

**Islamic**

- PKS (Prosperous Justice Party), pragmatic party with socially conservative policies
- PAN (National Mandate Party), moderate party with relatively progressive policies
- PPP (United Development Party), traditional party with socially conservative policies
- PKB (National Awakening Party), rural-based party with mainly moderate policies
- PBB (Crescent Star Party), a small party with conservative policies.

A focused study on these political parties can provide a true picture. Democratic Party as a ruling party plays an important role. This party is a nationalist centrist party mainly having urban supporters. This party shows that their motto is development and they believe in cultural and political pluralism. Mainly Yudhono as a leader of the party tried to make it corruption free. Despite the great victory in 2009, in the 2014 election, it could not win in the Parliament but maintained its position among the top five ones. Its secular motives made it sustain its position. Golkar party has also achieved its position on the secular ground liberal agenda and economic development. It had played an important role since Suharto's New Order started. PDI-P is also based on secular and rational politics. It opposed fuel hikes in 2005 and 2013.

Among the Islamic parties, PKS is the major one which supported the implementation of sharia and they tried to woo the population on the basis of religion. They have both the urban-educated intellectual supporters and the rural-Muslims since they skillfully utilize the religious sentiment of the people. PAN is a moderate Islamic party based on Muhammadiyah movement. It is the modernist of Indonesia's two largest and oldest Muslim organizations (one of them being Nahdlatul Ulama). This party sponsored Christian candidates too. Basically, for the political need, this party avoided the stricter version of secular-Islamic dichotomy and labeled themselves as a nationalist-populist party based on the ideology of Pancasila<sup>6</sup>.

Indonesia has shown a peculiar strand of internal politics. At the one hand, scholars can argue Islam and religion became a non-factor in the Politics since the voters of Indonesia shied away from religiosity while casting vote, on the other hand, it remained clear that many decisions in legislature reflect the religious endowments. Secular leaders avoid opposing controversial religious regulations even parties like Golkar and PD try to accommodate pious sentiments of Islam within their party structure. No one can deny the fact that support for Islamic parties has been on the decline but secular parties gradually drifted from their secular agendas and showed sensitivity towards religious matters since sentiments of the voters should not be hurt<sup>7</sup>. Despite a secular political environment, it is evident that local norms and authorities are predominantly guided by the Islamic laws. Moreover, overlapping factors among the Islamic and Non-Islamic parties can be located. For example, many Islamic parties opposed vote-buying like secular parties, and many secular parties carried

on the vote-buying on the plea of charity. Basically, Islamic parties tried to accommodate secular objectives to make a popular base and secular parties tried to woo the religious sentiment for survival. So religion remained a sensitive point in politics and it became a politicized factors<sup>8</sup>. To be very specific, this trend is not unique in Indonesia. Commercialization and politicization of religious sentiments are very common in the Third World. Like Indonesian politics, Indian politics are also engulfed in religious sentiments. Even the most dynamic political and apparently secular parties and political personalities try to woo the sentiment of any particular religious community to overflow the vote-banks. Surely Indonesia witnessed the same dilemma of morality in case of party politics.

Under the leadership of Sukarno, Indonesia chose a secular path for external relation as a newborn nation. It basically prioritized nation-building and national interest. In Sukarno's period "Guided Democracy" basically focused on economic development. Indonesia chose practicality path for its foreign policy options. Malaysia was a Muslim majority state but for national interest, Indonesia had taken up "crash Malaysia" policy. But to deal with China's supremacy they ended their antagonism. It has been very clear that Indonesia's external relations are guided by secular motives. As a member of ASEAN, Indonesia play's its regional role thus surpass the religious beliefs. Moreover, international terrorism and continuous attack in Indonesia made the Indonesian leaders much more pragmatic and secular in choosing their foreign policies. Indonesia started its foreign relations with the somewhat anti-western approach but from the Suharto era, it started drifting from it. So it is the economic and political need that made Indonesia a pro-western and pro-secular state. Indonesia was even enthusiastic about pro-west liberal trade system through the ASEAN economic community. Western influence increased gradually, & internal politics and economic decisions were not isolated from this.

Indonesia was still the hotspot of regional ethnic conflicts. The ache was one of the main hotspots of the communal violence has been, in the northeast province of Sumatra. Before the Dutch colonization, Aceh-Dar-Al-Salam was an independent entity and after the independence, Sukarno promised them to let them function with autonomy for the region and rule by the Sharia law. From 1953 rebellion started on the basis of religion against Jakarta. The greatest consequence of this Darul Islam Movement was religious fanaticism. During the Suharto era, serious threat from the religious extremists struck political stability. In 1976 under the leadership of Hasan di Tiro, Free Aceh Movement (GAM) started officially. In 1998 onwards, the post-reform era, Habibie and Wahid advocated decentralization in order to accommodate Acehnese demands thus reducing the degree of confrontation. Wahid administration basically embarked on peace talks with GAM in 1999 and the peace accord was signed in Geneva in December 2002. But after Tokyo negotiations in May 2003, this agreement ended in futility. As soon as Megawati Sukarnoputri takes up the office, the administration responded with a military campaign which added fuel to the ethnic strife. General E.Sutarto launched a "Security Restoration Operation" aimed at "destroying the GAM forces down to their roots". General Sutarto actually wanted his men to kill the GAM rebels, who were actively engaged in extremism. In 2005 further negotiations concluded. In that year limited autonomy to the Aceh region was granted via entitling Aceh to retain 70% of oil and water revenue in the region on the condition of demobilization and demilitarization of GAM activists. But again it ended in negative consequences and distrust between the parties. In nutshell, it can be expressed that in the post-reform era, the force of gaining political stability in Indonesia had been disfigured by continuous ethnic clashes. Indonesia remained a ground for ethnic conflicts and military repressions. During the globalization period, the world witnessed lethality of religious extremism.

In the Post-9/11 time span, Indonesia suffered with severe terrorist activities. The rise of Abu-Sayyaf threatened the political stability of Indonesian Archipelago. Indonesia had endured a complex combination of ethnic plurality and

developmental gaps and was not only a place of ethnic-religious clashes. Religious extremism attack gets worsened when economic marginalization followed by globalization takes its toll. According to Lily Rahim, the rebellions started by the Muslim community are more pronounced in the less-developed regions. Which failed nation-building and state building process in terms of economy and damaged the political stability? Despite Aceh is a resource-rich region with oil, sugar, chocolate, palm oil, natural gas it is still not efficient in improving its place on Human Poverty Index. This region showed poor economic development which indeed created an environment of deprivation and frustration<sup>9</sup>. The government ensured pro-activeness in eliminating terrorist activities. After the 2002 Bali attacks, the government formed "Detachment 88" for preventing the growth of extremism. Detachment 88 priority was to rehabilitate terrorists. It was ISIS that was a growing concern in Indonesia because it was strengthening its base over there. According to Gunaratna, there are more than 3000 pro-ISIS media sites working in the Southeast Asian region, 70% of those are from Indonesia. It would be an overstatement to say that the Aceh region is propagating Islamic extremism. But Indonesia very quickly joined the hands with major powers like the USA in combating terrorism. Moreover, Indonesia has been playing a vital role in preventing terrorism as a member of ASEAN<sup>10</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

Indonesia is facing severe religious extremism in present scenario also. Rather we must say that Indonesian archipelago suffered from religious fanaticism along with Southeast Asia, since decolonization. The ethnic clashes reduced the political stability in entire Southeast Asia. In other words, it can be said that it was an evil by-product of colonization. Colonial exploitation derogated the socio-economic balance of Indonesia and Aceh region which ultimately fire the communal violence. Sometimes economic frustration found its way through terrorism. Military repression is not the solution to the extremism. Political erosion can be prevented by socio-economic development, secularist attitude of internal and external politics. Indonesia's voters were balanced and took the pragmatic decision over the stigmatized religious sentiments. Education and secularist political culture should also be strengthened. In the early stages only, Indonesia realized the necessity of unity for combating terrorism and religious extremism. Their continuous efforts were visible to stabilize their political situations. To fight terrorism, Indonesia had called foreign countries to be a part of their Bali process in post-Brussels policy formation. The forum involved 47 countries and three international organizations-the International Organization of Migration, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. During the second day of the event in Nusa Dua at Bali, Foreign Minister Retno LP Marsudi said, that "*We strongly condemn terrorist acts and therefore let's unite to step up against terrorism*". Despite political clashes and ethnic divisions, Indonesia took hard-line against religious extremism. And these efforts were not only military measures but also political in terms of foreign relations. Indonesian Embassy took very positive measures to fructify political linkages for enabling trust-building thus for the unification to combat terrorism. Indonesian Embassy in Brussels established hotline communication between the two countries. They contacted and coordinated with the local people and it shows Indonesia's positive gesture in playing a major role in world politics. So we can surely articulate that Indonesia's religion-centric politics made it a key player in world politics. The Bali process has also taken over the issue of drug trafficking and allied menace which can flare up the funding for the extremists.<sup>1</sup> Politicization of religion must be put to an end to eradicate the instability not only inside Indonesia but also throughout the region. Indonesia's peculiar Islamic-secular dichotomy made the country unique among many Southeast Asian countries. But the economic angle of the religious problems cannot be denied. Mindanao and Aceh are the best evidence of the positive correlation between

economic marginalization and religious extremism. To find out the further solution a pragmatic policy involving proper nation-building process is necessary. Since Indonesia showed some positive signs of secularist voting behaviour, there must be a ray of hope. Moreover, local people should be aware of the malicious impact of fundamentalist behaviour and educating them can actually help to prevent the extremist thoughts. Adequate food, shelter, and employment can change the scenario for sure. And for all these Indonesia needs is sheer patience and time to change the table.

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