

DISCUSSION

PROBLEMS OF MODERN RADICALISM AND EXTREMISM IN INDIA

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Abstract: *The paper considers mainly the issue of nationalist radicalism and Hindu extremism in India. In the independent India, the close connection between politics and religion became a detonating mixture that has been one of the main reasons for the escalation of some conflicts in that country. In spite of some legislative changes, inter alia, the 42th constitutional amendment, the Indian state didn't create mechanisms of separation between politics and religion. Moreover, the process has become impossible due to the weakening of the Indian National Congress religious radicals taking the power. The authors illustrate a necessity to split politics and religion and a danger of the religion politicization with examples of inter-communal violence in different states of India. There are some parallels between India and the modern Russia, and negative experiences of India could be useful for Russia who also clashes with challenges of nationalism, extremism and terrorism.*

Keywords: *India, extremism, conflict, terrorism, politicisation of religion, mobilisation, Hinduism*

The tangle of ethnic and religious contradictions causes a special complexity of the resolution of many conflicts, especially in India where the caste system still exists.

In the end of 20th century, many Indian intellectuals began to speak that the connection between religion and politics undermined the foundations of democracy in the country and even was the main threat to the territorial integrity of India.

Indeed, three cases of Indian politicians show what danger such connection can present, though within the bounds of one religion.

It is well known that Mahatma Gandhi was killed in 1948 by Hindu fanatics from “Hindu Mahasabha” during a religious ceremony. 36 years later, Indira Gandhi, daughter of J. Neru, was shot dead by her Sikh bodyguards. In 1991, her son Rajiv was also assassinated by militants from “Tiger of Tamil Ilama Liberation” though they were coreligionists of R. Gandhi and struggled against Buddhist Singals in Sri Lanka. However, consequences of those assassinations were different, including in the field of law.

First, in 1948 the government of J. Neru banned Hindu religious organizations accessorial to the attempt on M. Gandhi. Their leaders were sentenced to different terms of imprisonment. The resolution of the Constituent Assembly of India proposed some legislative measures in order to prevent using of religion for political purposes. However, no real moves were made in this field. Moreover, already in 1949, the above mentioned ban was raised and the sentenced leaders of Hindu organizations were released.

Secondly, the murder of Indira Gandhi triggered the 1984 Sikh Massacre in Delhi where several thousand Sikhs, including children and women, were killed. According to the 21st

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annual World Report (2011) of Human Rights Watch, the government of India has yet to prosecute those responsible for the mass killings of Sikhs in 1984. Many years later, the Delhi High Court stated the negative role played by Delhi Police and state machinery in the pogroms.

On the other hand, the wife of one of the security guards who killed Indira Gandhi as well as his father were elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly¹. It is worthy of note that in 1994, Beant Singh, Sikh and Indian National Congress politician, named Sikhism more reformed and more radical Hindu society².

During the 1975–1977 state of emergency, one of India's „blackest hours“, the Indian Parliament adopted the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act (1976). According to the changed Preamble of the Constitution, India became a socialist and secular republic. Nevertheless, as further decades showed, the Indian state has not been able to create mechanisms of the separation of religion and politics. Thus, in December of 1992, the demolition of the 16th century mosque of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya resulted in intercommunal rioting and several thousand victims.

In 1993, there was a new attempt of the Indian National Congress to amend the legislation. The draft law stipulated that any party should be banned and any parliamentary should be ineligible if they would call on voters to support them for religion reasons or would incite hostility and hatred to other confessions or communities³. The attempt failed as the Indian National Congress was the parliamentary minority in opposition to the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) which was extremely nationalist and clerical. Suffice it to mention that its active members directly participated in Ayodhya riots.

At the same time, the whole Indian society was really far from the secularization. In 1994, according to a public opinion poll, just 52% respondents declared for a bill of prohibition of parties for using religion⁴.

From the end of 20th century, in India many young people on leaving secondary school don't have a chance to get higher education but they don't want to go in for nonqualified and non-prestigious jobs (especially farming). Hence, they present a breeding ground for extremist organizations, which often advance religious communal slogans. A similar situation among the youth explains partly the recent revolutions in the Middle East sometimes called “the youth revolution”. In India, the Sanskritization process of the Hindu society earlier resulted in changing the general political situation in the country that is illustrated, first of all, in the Bharatiya Janata Party's accession to power.

Meanwhile, after a semicentennial oblivion, the Indian nationalist leaders of “Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh” (National Patriotic Organization) decided to revive the concept of Hindutva developed by V.D. Savarkar. However, they turned it mainly into different slogans, such as “Hinduisms in Danger!”, “Hinduism is the Real Secularism”, “One People, One Nation, One Culture”. In contrast to Savarkar whose views were defined as “atheistic Hinduism” assigned to religion a purely ritual function, L.K. Advani, famous leader of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh proposed to call Hindutva as “Indian Nationalism” or “Un-

¹ КЛЮЕВ Б.И. *Религия и конфликт в Индии*. Институт Востоковедения РАН, 2002, р. 150.

² *The Hindustan Times*. April 25, 1994: www.hindunet.org/alt_hindu/1994/msg00271.html.

³ *The Hindustan Times*. August 21, 1993.

⁴ КЛЮЕВ Б.И. *Религия и конфликт в Индии*. Институт Востоковедения РАН, 2002, р. 154.

compromising Nationalism”. Thus, Hindutva is substituted for the Hinduism and nationalism. In October 1991, the Hindu priests even created a committee to elaborate a new Indian constitution (sic!).

It is essential to note that nationalist religion-based parties began to appear in the young independent Indian state almost 60 years ago.

For example, in 1951, Bharatiya Jana Sangh Party (BJS, India Popular Union), predecessor of the Bharatiya Janata Party, was formed by S.P. Mookerjee, its first leader, and raised the program of “Real Hinduism”. Later, in the end of 1950-s, BJS got an ally – the above mentioned paramilitary Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, also propagated the Hindu nationalism. Meanwhile, the activation of such Hindu organizations gave rise to many Muslim communal groups, such as the Indian Muslim Council, and Christian organizations like Kerala Catholic Congress.

In general, the politicization of religion is fraught with some dangers, first of all, “control under individuality and suppressing the spirit of resistance to social evils, psychological violence and economic oppression by accepting the existing position and dissociating from participation in public affairs”⁵. In the modern world, we can see a renaissance of the concept of religious state (Islamic, Orthodox, etc.), where the clergy has dominant positions and set the tone in all public spheres.

Many religious figures and movements deal in politics, often trying to establish a total control over society. In India, the casteism sacralized by Hinduism aggravates such attempts. In addition, proponents of the strict religious segregation create dangerous obstacles and dissociation between adherents of different confessions, cultivating belonging to one community or the other to the prejudice of civil identity. Dogmatists of this kind use the ideological mobilization, especially for political purposes. Thus, one should differentiate politics from religion, and the latter must not substitute the former.

As quite right an Arab philosopher M. Al-Jabiri noticed, “politics is prompted by an interest and aimed to parlaying. Religion should be free from that otherwise it will lose its spirit. Religion unifies, does not segregate. But politics acts where discord is”⁶. While becoming a political instrument, the religion results in strife. This is clearly illustrated by the situation in India in the end of 20th – early 21st centuries.

In spite of a well-developed party system of India, the mass politicization there brought to archaization of the political life, when certain alignments realize their own interests through caste associations, ethno linguistic and tribal groups. Moreover, the history of the independent India shows a tendency to increasing number of the federal subjects, from creating union territories to further transformation into states (for example, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram).

In the Christian community of India sometimes there are also radical trends that indicate a radicalization of all religious communities of the country.

On the one part, the Hindu political parties attempt to prevent the Christian proselytism in different ways. Thus, in 1978 they introduced a draft Bill of Religious Freedom

⁵ ФАРАХ С. *Политизация религии и религиозность политики. Диалог и партнерство цивилизаций: межконфессиональное и кросскультурное измерения*. Москва – Нижний Новгород – Бейрут: Издательский дом «Медина» 2010, р. 166.

⁶ ЯКОВЕЦ Ю. *Роль и ответственность религий в становлении интегрального социокультурного слоя*. Москва – Нижний Новгород – Бейрут: Издательский дом «Медина» 2010, р. 117.

that stipulated a ban on conversion of Hindus to Christianity and Islam however the draft was rejected by the parliament.

On the other part, a reason of the negative attitude to the local Christians is separatism of Naga ethnics who profess Christianity in State of Nagaland. Formerly, even in local churches there were slogans “Nagaland for Christ!”, that is the separatism had a religious tint. Nowadays, Naga separatists, so called “clandestine Nagas”, try to recruit new partisan among their coreligionists, appealing to their religious feeling.

Furthermore, religious clashes are aggravated by social contradictions: up to 60% of Indian Christians descend from the caste of untouchables (Dalits). In October 1985, the High Court of India confirmed the legitimacy of the Presidential Scheduled Castes Order (1950), according to which Dalits had fallen from their right to legally settled benefits. As a result, Dalit Christian Liberation Movement arose, and the highest clergy even had to declare 1990s as the decade of Christian Dalits.

In Bihar, in the beginning of 1980s, a group of radical Catholic priests formed. They aimed to change cardinally the Dalits’ situation though by peaceful means. The priests carried out different activities among Dalits: explained laws and civic rights to them, struggled against illiteracy, organized demonstrations and strikes. However, the activity provoked unrest of caste Hindus, especially landowners, who started destructing missionary schools, missions and further killed several priests. Such clashes occurred in some other states of India.

In addition, in the beginning of 1980s, a Christian radical movement arose in the fishermen community of Kerala (800 thousand people) under the influence of the “Theology of Liberation” that Indian radical priests apprehended in Latin America, backing the ideas by Bible citations.

It is worthy of note that in the end of 20th century, there was also increasing in activity of the Hindu extremist organizations, including anti-Christian acts. The relations between Hindus and Christians worsened heavily in 1999, when the Bharatiya Janata Party became leader of the coalition government. If from 1947 to 1998, there were 50 attacks on Christian churches and schools, the number reached 120 just in 1999 (according to the United Christian Forum for Human Rights).

Also in 1999, according to different data, from 90 to 150 assaults against Christians were registered, mainly in States of Orissa and Gujarat with large Christian population. Furthermore, in Gujarat where Bharatiya Janata was the party in office, Muslim pogroms occurred (about 2000 of killed). Most assaults were committed by members of Bajrang Dal, youth extremist Hindu organization.

An example of atrocities of Bajrang Dal is burning alive of Graham Staines, Australian Christian missionary, and two his children in Orissa in January 1999. Later, in August 2008, following pogroms of local Christians more than 80 people were killed, 50 thousand Christians became refugees.

Worthy of notice that other Hindu organization Vishva Hindu Parishad adopted at its congress in 1988 a resolution of the necessity of return of Russia and Russians to “the bosom of the native faith”, that is to Hinduism⁷.

⁷ http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Вишва_хинду_паришад.

Multiple acts of violence against Christians and Muslims committed by extremists have remained unpunished mainly due to the connivance of authorities, because Bajrang Dal is an active ally of the Bharatiya Janata, ruling party in many states of India. Today, the connection between Indian nationalists as well as extremists and certain part of the power elite at the different levels is no longer a matter of conjecture.

An example is activity of Bal Thackeray, odious founder and leader of the extremist organization Shiv Sena (Shiva's Army). Through its own newspaper, he repeatedly inspired attacks on Muslims and incited his followers to violence. With the undercover assistance of law enforcement agencies and some politicians, Thackeray has a long time controlled the local film industry, theaters, businesses, in fact operating a racket and intrusion of the radical Hindu ideology. Similar activity makes it possible to speak of criminal components of the Hindu extremist organizations both in Mumbai and other regions.

Moreover, Hemant Karkare, former chief of the state Anti-Terrorism Squad, in spite of strong political pressure, as a result of his investigation revealed secret ties between Indian militaries and Hindu terrorist groups. Karkare detected that right-wing Hindu groups were involved in bombings at Malegaon, State of Maharashtra (September 2006 and September 2008), and of the Samjhauta Express (February 2007). The terrorist acts had been organized so that suspicion lighted on Muslims. Karkare also revealed the complicity of officers from the Indian military intelligence in terrorist acts, commitment of which was imputed to Muslims.

No wonder that Karkare was deadly shot during the first hours of the attack on Mumbai in November 2008. Not earlier than November 2011, seven Muslims accused of the Malegaon blasts (2006) were released. Their discharge became possible after Swami Aseemanand, a Hindu religious leader, confessed that the explosion had been committed by a right-wing armed Hindu group⁸.

From our point of view, the Hindu radicalism is an ideological doctrine and based on its socio-political practice – they justify ideological, political and even armed confrontation between the world of “veritable faith” and that of infidels. Hence, they require an absolute social control and mobilization of their partisans.

In general, one can make a comparison of the situation in India with that in countries of the former USSR. Thus, in Russia the Orthodox Church intensifies its influence upon the political authorities, while different political forces more actively use the religious factor for their own purposes. Inevitably the society clashes with manifestations of religious radicalism, extremism and even terrorism.

There is an unexpected relationship of the Hindu fundamentalism to the Russian Orthodox nationalism. For instance, a Russian monarchist and specialist in Indian culture, Vladimir Larionov, is author of a tutorial for the youth nationalist organization “Association of Knights (*Vityazi*)”. He expresses appreciation of the ideology of Bharatiya Janata Party as well as Bajrang Dal. Like young men from Bajrang Dal, “Vityazi” also learn musketry, hand-to-hand fighting, take the oath and dream to become “heroes”.

It is not accidentally that the main European terrorist A. Breiwick declared his support to “Sanatana Dharma”, that is Indian nationalism⁹.

⁸ http://files.amnesty.org/air12/air_2012_full_ru.pdf.

⁹ <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/norwegian-killers-manifesto-supports-hindutva/170496-3.html>.

Furthermore, the nationalist movement People's Council (Narodny Sobor), closely connected to the Association of Knights and the All-Russian Monarchist Center, coordinate activity of more than 600 "military patriotic clubs" all over Russia. Co-chairman of the People's Synod is Oleg Kassin, former leader of the Moscow branch of the nationalist organization RNE (Russian National Unity), later forbidden in Russia.

Worthy of concern is not only some Russian-Indian similarity but also a nationalist ideology of the People's Council which often contradicts to the Constitution of Russian Federation. Suffice it to mention one of so called "decrees of the national dictatorship": "To revise all international agreements, withdraw from treaties where benefit for Russia is doubtful". Implementation of other similar projects involving mass human rights violations and even ethnocide, will inevitably provoke escalation of ethnopolitical conflicts and result in collapse of the Russian Federation.

Finally, some specialists observed that in the modern Russia, a part of aggressive youth leaves the Orthodox religion. The danger of the tendency is that significant part of those young people is strongly attracted not only by radical nationalism but also by national socialism (neo-fascism). It seems to them that such aggressive ideologies cultivate a martial spirit in personality and form a certain environment which tends to militarization, stern discipline, physical training, expansion, group solidarity etc. Some of the mentioned properties directly relate to the criminal subculture and asocial environment.

Thereby, the example of India as well as of many other multiethnic and polyconfessional states, demonstrate dangers of the politicization of religion which is closely connected with foundation of parties on the confessional base. In this connection, certain attempts to change in this way the current legislation of Russia seem to be inadmissible, especially from in terms of the fundamental norms of international law.

In our opinion, the basis of modern ethnopolitical and ethnoconfessional conflicts, including in India, is not the "clash of civilizations" but different contradictions, mainly economical and political, between central and local elites, various groups, who use religious and ethnic factors as means of mobilization. Strong stratification of society, unreasonable demographic policy, unemployment, corruption and other social evils form the breeding ground for extremism. After all, systematic violations of the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, discrimination and disregard of their legitimate demands lead constantly to tension, radicalization and conflict escalation.