

# Defining religion and world politics politics essay



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This chapter is to make the readers aware about how the research paper will expand. It will help them to remain focus and better understand the reading. The research work is divided into multiple chapter for the easiness so that one can be easily familiarize with it even if one don't know about politics and religion.

The research paper is broadly separated in 7 sections each having further sub topics. The research begins with the introduction of religion and world politics. This will make us aware how religion see politics and how politics uses religion for power gaining. Then there will be a brief view of

International theories on world politics and its correlation with religion.

Afterwards the research paper will depict a struggle between secularism and religious ideologies in influencing state affairs.

Latterly the paper will focus on the difference between Islam and the Political Islam viz a viz reference to Medina Charter. It will be further continued with implications of religion in governmental dealings. Then there will be a focus on Shiites denomination, their history and how they started their activism process. A brief introduction to Safavid dynasty and then a special case study of Iran- it's past, present. In the end their will be concluding remarks continued with the bibliography.

## **CHAPTER 2 *f f* Defining Religion & World Politics**

Religion is derived from the Latin word religionem meaning respect for the sacred, admiration for the God and His obligation which results in the bond between man and the gods/God which represents the spiritual characteristic of homeo sapiens. Anthropologists, theologians, sociologists, psychologists,

philologists Clifford Geertz, Antoine Vergote, Emile Durkheim, William James, Max Muller respectively have tried to define the word “religion”, each from their own perspective lenses and relating to their particular fields. It is difficult to neglect their contribution towards defining religion but we have to define it in a more precise way. Typical dictionary definition of a religion refers to a ‘the service, worship of God or the supernatural’.[i] E. B. Tylor defines religion as simply “the belief in spiritual beings”.[ii] Clifford Geertz called religion as ‘cultural system’ while Talal Assad categorized religion as ‘anthropological category’.[iii]

Well there is no proper definition to religion but in short, we can entitle religion as ‘obedience to and devotion of an eminent, commanding unseen power which is supernatural’. Religion is something which relates humanity to spirituality and moral values. Rituals, sermons, festivals, music, prayer, meditation are some of the ways through which religion is practiced. Prime motive of religion intends to give meanings to life or to explain the origin of life. Every religion has certain symbols, traditions and sacred histories. All of them appoint to derive morality, ethics, religious laws and a preferred lifestyle. In the contemporary world religion is more a socially acquired characteristic of human life. According to the survey 59% of world’s population is religious, 23% is not religious and 13% are atheists.[iv]

As the research is related to Shiites (denomination of Islam), it is necessary to have a glance at the both. Islam is a monotheistic religion which is outlined by the acceptance of submission to Allah Almighty and Muhammad as the last prophet to Allah. Islam is based on the teachings of Quran and the message of Holy Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W. W). It is hinge on five pillars;  
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Testimony (Shahadah), Prayer (Salah), Fasting (Sawm), Alms-giving (Zakat) and Pilgrimage (Hajj) respectively. The follower of Islam is known as Muslim. Muslims are categorized into two denomination Sunni and Shia which are further subdivided into different sects. Sunni accounts for 75-90% of Muslims while Shia's makes up 10-20%.[v]

The word Shia means followers or party of Hazrat Ali (R. A). Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Qatar, Azerbaijan and Bahrain are the countries where Shiites reside in majority. Shiites constitute 38.6% of the local Muslim population of the Middle East.[vi] Iran and Pakistan compose about 37-40% and 10-15% of global Shia population.[vii] Now coming towards politics, same as religion it is difficult to elaborate politics and give a precise definition to it. Politics is derived from a Greek word 'politikos' meaning "of, for, or relating to citizens".[viii] Harold Lasswell defined politics as 'who gets what, when and how'.[ix] In a broader sense we can define politics as the science or art of managing the governmental pursuit to formulate and apply policy for public good. The concept of world politics arose after World War 1 and it was thought that to ensure the safety of the world and to keep it safe from the curse of another world war an organization of nations is essential. However this approach got weightage in the 1970s due to extensive cross border interactions either politically, religiously or economically. Global politics wasn't bad but it got corrupted so in short it is carpet-bagger, manipulative and fraudulent in nature. One can categorize world politics into two kinds: Leftist; concerned with egalitarianism, reforms and are progressive in character. They are secular and doesn't discriminate among the classes and gives no importance to religion in politics.

Rightist; it values tradition and social stratification. They are conservatives and regards religion as an important factor in the politics.

There are three views about global politics namely REALISM, IDEALISM and MARXISM. Realism focuses on survival through military buildup and neglects other factors to determine politics. For realist politics is just a power game in which states are rational actors and according to them there is anarchy internationally; each state pursuing its own goals and objectives. Idealism is just opposite to realism, the focal point is democratic peace theory and coexistence of civilization. They believe in religious freedoms and gives prime importance to ethical and moral considerations. While Marxism calls for equality and classless society through the struggle of proletariat (working class) against bourgeoisie (ruling elite). For them religion has no preponderance in politics.

The gist of this chapter is that we came to know about religion and politics which will help us understand the next chapters. We became familiar with the words which has great importance in this research paper. This chapter also made us familiar with different statistics on religion. In the next chapter we will have a look on the involvement of religion in world politics and its consequences.

### **CHAPTER 3 *f* Religion VS Secularization**

Religion, secularization and politics is a contested triangle in which religion and secularism tends to surpass each other in order to motivate politics. It is important to have a proper knowledge relating the word secularization and on what grounds it promotes itself. Secularization is a descriptive term which

implies no value judgment and it's a step to describe a process of change.

[x]Secularization is falsely known as antireligious but this is not true.

Secularization is a theory which is based on modernization. It calls for religion as a private phenomenon rather than a public. Its assumption is based on the grounds that with the trend of modernity and industrial development there is a decline in religiosity. For instance, Turkey abolished the Ottoman Empire and separated the state and the religion. This theory is flawed as religion continues to have a specific role in world politics in the countries which are highly developed.

Religion and secularization can't exist together at the same time as the end of one ensures the survival of the other. If religion has to enjoy the privilege religious pundits should encounter the propaganda of the secularist practitioner. It is interesting that both religion and secularization goes to extreme end to have their influence on politics. Politics cannot function without these two determinants. The focus should be to find a parallel way to both religion and secularism. Religion should be channelized properly so that no one can use religion in order to accomplish unjust means and similarly too much secularization will corrupt the politics. Secularization not only damages values, traditions, and customs but also gives a blow to different religious believes.

In the contemporary politics both religion and secularization should set their limits. Both of them checks and holds the misuse of each other. Religion should be used in politics:

to promote morality and ethics

to promote peace and harmony

to help protect the environment

to promote coexistence and cooperation

Same goes for secularization, it should help promote:

to have a check on misuse of religion

calls for human rights

world free from discrimination

freedom of religion and expression

the democratic form of governments

Secularization got birth during the Enlightenment era in Europe. Its major aim was to help states achieve an industrial revolution and make them economically progressive. They were critical of religion and state working together and termed that religion kept people conservative which is responsible for backwardness both politically and economically. Religion in politics helped only monarchy and kingdom type political system. So secularization got an air and it spread like a wild fire in European continent.

The dilemma the world is facing now a days is the struggles between religious political systems or the secularized political system. Both have their own pros and cons respectively. States should be more rational in using any of the two phenomenon. One should is for sure religion is more dominating in politics than any other determinant.

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## **CHAPTER 4 *f* AFFILIATION OF RELIGION & POLITICS**

The branch of science which deals with the study of influence that religion has over politics and vice versa is known as political science of religion or the politicology of religion. Critical issues concerning stem cell, cloning, death penalties and environmental degradation has made politics and religion intertwined in the contemporary world. The question arise can religion and politics together brings peace? Religion can be associated with governmental policies in number of ways; as it legitimize regimes and yields support for social movements. Religion can be regarded as the social political actor. There is a divergence in political decisions with regards to religious axiom which they purport to entreat. Religion is exploited and misused by political hegemons to maintain power. Realists like Thomas Hobbes terms religion as vital for politics while Niccolo Machiavelli argues that religion was the foundation of state and society. Future role of religious leaders is significant due to global neighborhood. Global Civil Society should encourage steps for the rejection and prevention of politicization and wrong application of the religion.

Religious difference has fueled bitter power struggles for political control of the land in the recent past. Arab-Israel, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Sudan and the 1979 Iranian revolution all were due to the politicization of religion. 2004 French law over the banning of veil for Muslim Women, 2009 Swiss referendum on the outlawing of building minarets of Mosques, 2010 rejection by the US government for Muslim Cultural Centre in Manhattan (Ground Zero Mosque) and no freedom to non-Muslim



publications and privilege of practicing their religion in full swing by the Muslim states shows religion is a powerful source in world politics.[xi]With the Arab Spring, Islam has again emerged as the political force around the world.

Religion and politics are the two sides of the same coin. The duo has a direct relationship as religion is used to legitimize the regime and politics is used to safeguard the religion. Both can't be separated from each other, still there is a need to draw a line between the two.

## **CHAPTER 4. 1f ISLAM OR THE POLITICAL ISLAM**

No doubt, apart from religious teachings Islam also gives information about how to run a state through parliament (Shura), make treaties and conduct economic and business affairs. This doesn't mean that Islam is more about politics than religion. The main motive of Islam is to have a fair distribution of wealth, equality, accountability, independent judiciary to have peace and harmony among the masses. Islam is more politicized after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 due to the shift in balance among Middle Eastern States. The concept of political Islam is just to have an Islamic Society based on social order of justice, fair play, and peace. One can get an extract from the MADINA CHARTER about Islam and politics. Islam is a religion of peace and harmony among people. It has following characteristics:

Security of community

Religious freedom

A proper tax system

## Judicial system for resolving disputes

It also ensured equal political and cultural rights to the minorities

It was a treaty between 3 religions namely Muslims, Christians and Jews. It was a step towards the formation of a multi religious society for peaceful coexistence. It was signed in 622 Hijra and it resulted in the formation of 1st Islamic State.

The rule of Hazrat Umar (R. A) is the best crux of the concept of Islam as a religion and political system. He introduced the concept of police force to keep a civil order. Public ministry system which held the official records were also introduced by him. The financial institution was established for the welfare of the poor and deprived people. This shows Islam is a religion as well as a political movement. It is more a religion than politics but for the implementation of Islamic laws its use as politics is justified.

The above explanation represents that Islam like any other religion is also political in nature. But the basic aim of Islam is to have a socially integrated and peaceful society. The 21st century is the return of religion from exile. Even in the so called secular states religion tends to play a decisive role in formulating domestic and international policies.

Muslim countries want Islam to have a major influence in politics. Most in Pakistan, Jordan and Egypt believe their laws should strictly follow the Quran. While pluralities in Tunisia and Turkey say their laws should at least adhere to the values and principles of Islam. Shia Muslims (57%) prefer the law to

follow the principles of Islam. Egyptian religious political life grew from 47% in 2011 to 66% today.

#### CHAPTER 4. 2 f IMPLICATIONS OF RELIGION IN WORLD POLITICS

With the passage of time the implications of religion on world politics has varied. In the contemporary world political system, politics is more governed by religion despite the secularization theory and modernization. In the beginning religion played an extensive role in politics, King and Church was in collaboration. Soon with the Westphalian treaty state was separated from Church due to 30 years of war between Catholic and Protestant Christians. The end cold war again saw history repeating itself as religion got its due status again in world politics more by controversial issues which can only be dealt with religion.

“ Liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith”, Alexis de Tocqueville. This quote shows that to have freedom one must have morality and morality in turn is achieved through certain religious faith. Hence, there is correlation between religion and politics. One sees this through one's own perspective so it is debatable whether religion should have a role in politics or not. Keeping it aside we can safely say it's an unhappy marriage between religion and world politics. Both wanted to work independently but there is always some hidden hand.

Religion has an influence on politics as long as religion remains strong in the minds of individuals. When religion gets priority all other activities are viewed through religious glasses and every other thing has a zero sum value. State formation and policy decisions represent that a state is influenced by

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religion or not. 19th century separation of Holland from Belgium was to a greater extent had religious significance. Creation of Pakistan and Israel was purely based on religious motivation on politics. Malaysia began as a secular state but soon it declared itself as an Islamic Republic. Religion and state are unified in Middle Eastern Countries and they make their laws according to Islamic jurisprudence. US paper currency has an imprint ' In GOD We Trust' signifies the preponderance nature of religion on politics despite states being secular.

It's sad the political gurus use religion as a trump card. It is up to the state how it pursues religion in its states affair. Like US is more a religious country at societal level still religion has no impact on state policies. While in Pakistan the whole constitution revolves around Islamic principles still there is no proper implementation. So in a society like Pakistan religion in politics brings bad consequences like a strife between different communal groups. Either there should be a complete role of religion in politics or it should be kept aside from political activities. With goods, one also have some bad, same is the case of religion in politics. It should also be noted that 1980s recognize religion as an important factor in world politics as it seen Iranian Revolution in 1979 and Ronald Reagan's election victory with the support of religious right

In this chapter the research paper explained the relation among religion and politics and tried to confine the impact of religion in world politics. Politics with the blend of religion has brought some good results still there is need to pay heed to pending issues. Limits should be decided up to where religion can influence politics as one misjudgment can lead to destruction of the

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world as referred by Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations". Politics itself is a slippery road and when it is combined with religion it becomes a slippery road with a fog present as well.

## **CHAPTER 5 *f* SHIA ISLAM & POLITICS**

If we evaluate the history, we will come to know that the Shia denomination got their separate identity as early as 680 AD. The difference among Muslims aroused soon after the death of Prophet of Islam Hazrat Muhammad (S. A. W. W) over the issue of the caliph. Sunni believes the successor should be through a consensus (ijtima) while Shiite are of the view that Prophet Muhammad (S. A. W. W) chose Hazrat Ali (R. A) as the heritor. This is the one side of the picture, the other side is that Shia soon separated themselves and remained politically inactive for centuries to come until 1960s. The only main empire was the Safavid dynasty which followed the Shia believes and had a separate territory.

Islam was not only limited to spiritual realm but it also encircles the political aspect of the society. So is the Shia Islam which was primarily a religious movement latter it encompassed politically. As described in the previous chapters' politics cannot function without the spice of religion and religion cannot be secured without a political authority. Both have the relation of bait and fish; until there is no bait you cannot catch a fish.

Shiites accounts for 20% of the Muslims and they are in majority in Iran 90%, Azerbaijan 80%, Bahrain 75%, Iraq 60%, Yemen 40%, Pakistan 17%, and Saudi Arabia 15%. Although the history didn't see a huge clash among Sunni

and Shia religion still the past is full of hostility, tensions and suppression of weaker by the strong.

Shia's are more concerned with politics and they call for a religious government. This assumption will be explained in the next sub-chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5. 1 *f* SHIITES POLITICAL STRUGGLE: A REALITY**

Firstly one should be clear of the term religious government. It means to have a type of government which is religious in nature. Majority of the laws, if not all, should be based on religion. According to Shiites religion cannot be set aside from politics. They are of the view that Islamic law should be followed at every cost and for this there is a need to have a state for its application. So in this way Shia's quest for an independent political territory is justified. Aim of the religious government is to form an Islamic society in which social relationship has got worth. Everybody is responsible for the functioning of the state and all are equal in the eyes of law. According to the Shia school of thought state should be ruled by Islamic clerics under Islamic laws.

Since 1979 Iranian Revolution, Shiites are on the rise continuously politically as well as religiously. But this activism has severe consequences around the world particular in Middle East states. The revolution of 1979 ensured a separate political entity for the Shia branch of Islam. Iran became the Islamic republic and this was the beginning of the shift in politics among Muslims themselves. Since then Iran is supporting Shiite ideological parties in the

Persian Gulf, for instance, supporting and funding Hezbollah the anti-Israel party in Lebanon.

In 2004, Nour-ul-Maliki became the Prime Minister of Iraq, he belonged to the oldest Shia Political Party. This showed Shiites awakening in the region, this of course didn't happen overnight. There was the struggle throughout the history by Shiites to have a separate political identity. King Abdullah of Jordan mocked this by titling it as a " Shia Crescent".

In the year 2012 Egypt's Shia announced their intention to form a political party and to contest elections under the party Unity and Freedom. This shows that Shia's political nexus is reaching in all countries even where they are in minorities. Continuously there is a rise from Shiites minorities for more representation in their respective countries across the Middle East.

Pre-1979 revolution Shia were the non-state version of Islam. There was heightened ethno-political and religious tensions among Sunni-Shiites. Now since Shiites are on the high both religiously and politically there is a shift in balance of power between Iran and Saudi Arabia. History bears witness that Shiites revivalism is more a concern for the Sunni authoritarian regimes in Middle Eastern countries and much less for the West and the US. This resulted in sectarian strife in different parts of the Muslim World for example Pakistan and Afghanistan both being played by the two Oil banked countries struggling to become the hegemon in Middle East.

Hosni Mubarak termed Shia residing outside Iran as the agents of Iran and working for Iran and its political game. Sometimes Shia's struggle is termed as the awakening against Sunni and mocked by title like ' Shia Crescent'.

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This does not hold any authenticity because during the Iraq-Iran war the Shiites of Iraq remained loyal to their land rather than for Iran.

Iraqi and Bahraini Shiites struggle was violently suppressed in 1991 and 1992-94 respectively. The present scenario is very different and Shiites are more aware and are no longer the 'Forgotten Muslims'. The Iraq war will decide the dynamics of politics in Middle East. Iraq is now another political state for Shiites after Iran. The Iraq war is promoting more Shiite political culture than democracy in Middle East. One thing is clear that West is manipulating this scenario and is trying to make conflicts among the Muslim countries. The propaganda's are meant to give air to ethnic and religious differences among Muslims.

## **CHAPTER 5. 1. 1 *f* SHIITE'S POLITICAL RISING AGAINST SUNNI'S**

In this chapter the research paper will cover up the reasons of political rising of Shiites both as group and against the Sunni and other sects. This chapter will be divided into 2 subunits. First phase will be concerned with the finding the main cause of Shia's political awareness. Second stage will focus on giving recommendation to minimize the rift between Shia and other communal groups.

Historically ordinary Sunnis and Shias have lived peacefully. Shia recoiled principally to a politically quietist position, as advised by the 6th Shiite Imam Jaffar Sadiq. In the history of Sunni-Shia affinity, there are no parallels to the 30 years' war between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. 1960s



reconciliation between two groups resulted in the recognition of Ja'afari as another school of Fiqah in Islam.

Gradual rise in sectarian strife began in early 1970s and intensified following the Iranian revolution and latterly by Afghan war. This had to do with politics and competition for influence and power, notably between a triangular states namely Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. This power game contributed to a sharp rise in sectarian tensions, especially in Pakistan and Afghanistan as both sides tried to use religion as an instrument of policy and both acted as proxies.

Twelve Shia are no longer "Forgotten Muslims". The 3 interwoven developments has enhanced the role of Shia's more in Middle East ; strengthening of Iran's geopolitical position after fall of Taliban and Saddam Hussein. Secondly, increase in Shia awareness, precipitated by the US power in Iraq. Finally, decline of US power in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## **CHAPTER 5. 1. 2 *f* WHAT MADE SHIITE's Active?**

Following are the few findings which express the causes of uprising of Shi'a community against other sects particularly Sunni.

The socially and economically disadvantaged position of the Shia's in Sunni majority countries- as was the case of Iraq and now Bahrain along with inter-state rivalry.

Shia's sense of alienation due to political and economic backwardness which resulted in their quest for enfranchisement and legitimacy. For instance, Shia

revival movement in Lebanon by Ayatollah Musa Sadr, is the best example of Shiite quest for equality and recognition

There is a western strategy to have a divide among Muslims so that they face no retaliation and pursue their goals and objectives in this part of the world easily. Also the US wants to forge an alliance against Iran so it is giving air to sectarian issues.

There are many other reason behind their uprising since 1979. It is well observed that whenever there is a new ideology its prime focus is to expand to ensure its survival. Religions as well as the political system followed the same trend; for instance Christianity and Islam spread throughout the world while the political structure of capitalism and communism also spread different corners of the world. Same is the case with Shia school of thought. If it were only limited to Iran its values and beliefs could have been at stake. Shia denomination and political ideology in no time reached Syria, Bahrain, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and the state having critical view of this branch Saudi Arabia as well. It is growing and extensively followed.

## **CHAPTER 5. 2 *f* RECOMMENDATION FOR PEACE**

Some salient proposal for peace among different sects of Islam and other religions are expressed as:

Prosperity, democracy and sustained efforts at interfaith dialogue and reconciliation can help overcome differences.

Governments should respect the rights of citizens irrespective of their religious beliefs and there should be freedom of carry out one's belief without any discrimination.

Countries should not use religion as an instrument of security and foreign policy. States focus should be on practical ways of resolving conflicts and promotion of peaceful relations.

Great Powers should not play a power game of sectarian divisions in the pursuit of their interests. History bears witness, every short term gain is latterly accompanied by long term trouble and loss.

If these along with other assumptions are followed in full letter and spirit then the world can have a prosperous and peaceful future. There is a need to promote the concept of global cooperation and interrelation among the masses. One has a right to rise up and protect its beliefs and values but not at the expense of harming others. Every religion on earth promotes morality and ethics so we all should device such a political system which gives priority to moral concepts.

## **CHAPTER 6 *f* A BRIEF CASE STUDY OF IRAN**

This chapter will make the readers aware about Persia Empire journey towards Iran and latterly Islamic Republic. It has been about 3P's Power, Privilege and Prestige than about Religion. Presently 98% of Iran is Islam; 89% being Shia and 8% Sunni. Almost all Iranian Shia's are twelver.

Persian Empire was conquered under the rule of Hazrat Umar (R. A) the 2nd Caliph of Islam from 637-651 AD. Although Islam didn't spread that fast. In

11th century Islam got its root deep in Persian civilization. Safavid dynasty emerged and made Shia Islam the state religion. Bernard Lewis said, “ Iran was indeed Islamized, but it wasn’t arabized. Persians remained Persians”.

[xii]The Islamization of Iran saw the blossoming of philosophy, medicine, art, science and technology. This period is known as the Islamic Golden Age.

[xiii]Ibn Khaldun a sociologist of Medieval Islam observes, ‘ most Muslim scholars in intellectual sciences were non Arabs and of Persian descent’, for example Imam Ghazali, Imam Bokhari, Shaikh Sadiq, Al-Razi, Al-Farabi.[xiv]

## **CHAPTER 6. 1 *f* IRAN SINCE 1979 REVOLUTION**

The Iranian revolution transformed Iran from the monarch to an Islamic Republic. This made Islamic fundamentalism a political force..... from Morocco to Malaysia as observed by Vali Nasr.[xv]There were many reasons behind this revolution one being the search for a religious-political identity. This wasn’t digestible by Sunni Monarch which were ruling the Middle Eastern Continent as it altered the power gaining structure. Iran has been regarded as a threat not only by West but also the Muslim states like Saudi Arabia being it’s one of the archest rival. Shia have been always treated as minority outside Iran. This suppression has led the recent S