

# POLITICAL RELIGION, ITS IMPLICATIONS AND THE ISLAMIC SYSTEM

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## Abstract

Political religion has been in existence from time immemorial. However, philosophers started writing about it at the start of 20<sup>th</sup> Century when communism became a dominant political movement in the world. We have explained what is meant by political religion and how it is used by politicians and people in power in different countries. Various types of regimes that came into existence using political religion have also been described briefly.

*Keywords – Government, democracy, religion, politics, communism, socialism, fascism, dictatorship*

## Overview

There are differences of opinions among people about the concept of politics in religion. Some people say that political religion is generally associated with a religion and the people in power galvanize the followers of that religion by creating fear in their minds saying that their religion and their identity is in danger from the followers of other religion(s). Some people say that political religion need not have to be associated with a religion. It can be presented by politicians in the form of a solution to the economic and socio-political problems to solidify public support. This is how dictatorships were established in erstwhile Soviet Union and China. Some people say that political religion is a form of fascism of extreme right ultranationalist authoritarian rule. In this kind of rule, the people in power suppress opposition, take control of judiciary and autonomous institutions, and keep the economy under the control of a few individuals to keep their grip on power. Some people say that Political religion is comprised of governmental ideologies and policies which are forcibly implemented by the rulers. These can be associated with a particular

religion or a political / cultural ideology. In it, the people in power are portrayed as saviors of the people to an extent that they assume the role of religious authorities.

Some people say that political religion can also be termed as moderate secularism in which the Government remain neutral and people belonging to all religions and sections of society are treated equally. They have the freedom to follow their religions privately without any interference from the authorities.

## Types of political religion

Political religion is of two types, (i) Hard and (ii) Soft. The Hard Political religion is radical in nature. In a hard political religion, the rulers galvanize the masses and radicalize certain groups within the society to create fear in the minds of the people.

The Soft Political Religion is known as Civil / Cultural religion. In it, the conservative forces of a particular religion are unified to dominate the society.

History shows that when conservative forces come to power, they usually transform the country towards hard political religion/fascism as had happened in the case of Italy under Mussolini, and Germany under Hitler.

Political religion generally emerges in one party rule, like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) which was established in 1921. However, it can also develop in democracies as well, as has been the case in India where the ruling BJP party is forcibly implementing Hindutva ideology since 2014.

Communism, Socialism, Fascism, Extreme Religious Nationalism are a few examples of political religion. All these overlap each other in one way or other. We have briefly discussed these concepts in the following.

## Communism

Communism is comprised of many schools of thought, like (i) Marxism (political and economic theories of Karl Marx - 1818-1883), (ii) Anarcho-communism (abolition of money, prices, wage, and labor), and (iii) Other political theories that emphasize elimination of capitalism.

German philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883) was the founder of communism. In 1848 he co-authored a pamphlet titled, 'Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei', along with his friend Friedrich Engel (1820-1895), which is described as 'The Manifesto of Communism'. Karl Marx writings became extremely popular in Europe. These were later translated in many languages. And by 1920s, communism became a dominant political movement in the world. The emergence of Soviet Union, the world's first communist state, helped in further development of communism in the world.

Taking the lead from Marxist politician Vladimir Lenin of Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party also adopted Marxism as their official ideology and their rule was established in China in 1949.

We will not go into details about the history of communist ruled states in Asia, Eastern Europe or other places in the world except a brief mention about the condition of human rights in communist ruled state.

It is a known fact that during communist rule in erstwhile Soviet Union, human rights of the people were suppressed ruthlessly. Any kind criticism and dissent were punished brutally. Even the freedom of movement of the people was curtailed. Since the state promoted Marxist-Leninist Atheism, religions were publicly ridiculed, their followers were harassed and persecuted. In all schools of the state, only atheism was taught. Muslims were targeted in

Muslim dominated states under their occupation. So was the case with Christians and followers of other faiths. Christian Priests and Muslim scholars were sent to prison camps where they were reported to be subjected to torture. During Stalin's rule (1924-1953), forced deportation of the followers of religions were carried out on a large scale resulting in deaths of tens of thousands of people. In case of ethnic cleansing of Crimean Tatars, it was reported that over 20,000 people were killed and tens of thousands became homeless.

The same has been the case in China whose government follows atheism as their state religion. The persecution of religious minorities in China is an open secret. In the state of Uyghur, Muslims under Chinese rule are reported to be living in pathetic conditions. Tens of thousands have been sent to prison camps. Similar had been the case of other communist ruled states in Eastern Europe, like what happened in Bosnia during 1992-95. The list is long and there is no use mentioning it here as all facts are documented and are available in history books, media outlets and on the internet.

## Socialism

Socialism is a concept that emphasizes public ownership of property and natural resources in a country. Whatever is produced in a country is the result of the collective work of the people, therefore, it should be treated as a social product with which everyone has a right to benefit equitably. The society, not individuals, should own or control the national properties, like mines, production houses, etc. These resources should be used to benefit all, rather than a few, as in the case of capitalism.

*Is socialism a by-product of Communism Marxism?*

It is the other way around. Socialism is an ideal, while Marxism is an ideology / philosophy on which an authoritarian rule is established. The founders of Communism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, made socialism as their basis to establish communism in the world. As an ideal of people's welfare, socialism existed in the world from time immemorial where the welfare of people was

taken care of and the rich and the people in power were kept in check.

Socialism can be part of any democracy in the world to ensure equitable rights of the people. As against this, communism is established by violent means, suppression of people's rights, elimination of religion, class, and even state.

## Islamic System

Islamic system is different from (i) Capitalism, (ii) Communism, and (iii) Socialism in the sense that, in it, private ownership is allowed, but wealth is not allowed to be held in the hands of a few individuals in the society. When a person dies, his wealth is mandatorily distributed among his inheritors, relatives and poor. Individual and collective charity is encouraged officially at all levels. In addition, people are required to pay 2.5 per cent zakat (income tax) on the wealth held by them every year. A state under Islamic rule is essentially meant to be a welfare state.

Following is a quote from a letter Umar (رضي الله عنه) (584-644 AD) the second Caliph of Islam, wrote to Governors, Military Generals, and people holding high offices, during his reign (634-644 AD).

*QUOTE* - 'Remember, I have not appointed you as commanders and tyrants over the people. I have sent you as leaders instead, so that the people may follow your example. Give the people their rights and do not beat them lest they become abused. Do not praise them unduly, lest they fall into the error of conceit. Do not keep your doors shut on their faces, lest the more powerful of them eat up the weaker ones. And do not behave as if you were superior to them, for that is tyranny over them.' *UNQUOTE*

## Fascism

Fascism is an ideology to establish an authoritarian rule under a dictator. Italian Fascism is the best example in this context.

In 1919 a group was established under Mussolini (1883-1945) in Italy, who called themselves fascists. The focus of that group was national

unity under a common ideal, and anyone who opposed, was to be eliminated violently.

Mussolini declared that democracy was a failed system and liberty of expression was a fake concept. In a country, only nation should be worshiped. Women needed to have more children to increase their race.

After Mussolini established the first fascist state, it was followed by others, like Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), who ruled Germany during (1933-45).

In a fascist state, dictator runs the country and takes all decisions. Fascist state is a centralized state where the Government is in full control of all segments of society, including judiciary, police, military, and other institutions. Individuals are treated as slaves who are not allowed to think of personal liberty. They are required to serve the state as directed by the dictator. The rulers control labor and the factory owners both. No one can question the lavish personal spending and corruption at the Government level. A euphoria is created using national glory of the nation and fear of threats from within and outside the country. The race of the majority is considered superior to other races living in the country and minorities are openly persecuted and their members are lynched on the streets. The rulers believe that their greatness is established by conquering and ruling weak countries around them.

Fascist movements can take roots in democracies as well. People need to keep a vigilant eye in this context.

## Extreme religious nationalism

Extreme religious nationalism is usually created by selfish politicians / rulers who do not care much about the religion they claim to follow. It is a showoff to the people to consolidate power in the name of religion. They use services of hired selfish religious scholars to legitimize certain religious doctrines by misinterpreting their meanings. Under these regimes, the truthful followers of that religion suffer in the same way as the followers of other religions. Israel is a glaring example of such a regime where Judaism,

as defined by the state, can be used even against the Jews if they oppose it.

We find examples of such states in the history of Islam as well. The rule under Muawiya (رضي الله عنه), and his son Yazid was an example in this context where dissent or criticizing the ruler was treated as blasphemy, but public insult and abuse of Hadhrat Ali (رضي الله تعالى عنه) and other members of the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) family were officially sponsored.

There are several states in the Middle East, like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and countries in Africa where they claim to follow Islam, but are examples of extreme religious nationalistic states.

Buddhist regimes in Sri Lanka and Myanmar are an example of this phenomenon. The Hindutva ideology in India is another example in this context. There are examples of Christian states who are reported to have practiced this ideology.

## Conclusion

It is observed that political religion is a strategy used by some rulers and politicians to establish authoritarian rule in their countries. These politicians / rulers can be the followers of any religion or non-religion.

The Communist, Fascist and Extreme Religious Nationalistic States are the result of using this ideology. Even successful democracies can be converted into fascist states by these politicians. People need to keep a watch on such politicians/rulers to avoid destruction of their countries in their hands.

Islamic system, as described in this paper, is different from Islamic political systems which was used by certain rulers throughout the history of Islam. The purest Islamic system prevailed under Prophet Mohammad (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) and his Khulafa-e-Rashideen which was discontinued under Muawiya (رضي الله تعالى عنه) who deposed Khulafa-e-Rashideen and became the first political ruler of Islamic state in 661 AD.

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## About the author



Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi, Fusus Al-Iman and over 1000 books on various Islamic subjects. He has written many research articles on religion, history and other subjects. He is also the Editor in Chief of CIFIA Global Journal.