



Original Article

The Role of Religion in Addressing Contemporary Social and Political Issues in India

Dr. Rajendra K

Associate Professor Department of Sociology Dr. G Shankar
Government Women's First Grade College & PG Study Centre, Ajjarkadu, Udupi.

Email-rajendrakundapura@gmail.com

Manuscript ID:

JRD -2025-170828

ISSN: 2230-9578

Volume 17

Issue 8|

Pp. 136-139

Aug 2025

Abstract

Religion plays a major role in the life of Indian society and politics. India is among the most religiously diverse countries in the world, and hence its engagement with the contemporary questions of the day—communal harmony, caste injustice, gender equality and democratic governance—is shaped profoundly by religious tradition and institutions. This paper discusses the role of religion in relation to such concerns, drawing attention to the positive and problematic dimensions of it. The research examines religion's role in social reform, interfaith relations, political mobilization, and governance in India. It argues that while religion often perpetuates social divisions when politicized, it also provides powerful frameworks for justice, compassion, and solidarity.

Keywords: Religion, Political and Social Issues, Social Reforms, Challenges

Submitted: 10 July, 2025

Revised: 25 July, 2025

Accepted: 09 Aug, 2025

Published: 31 Aug, 2025

Introduction

With Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism all coexisting for centuries, religion and identity are deeply entwined in India. The Indian Constitution's secular framework acknowledges the significant impact that religion has on society while simultaneously aiming for equality and religious freedom. In the contemporary era, religion continues to shape social reform movements, political mobilization, and inter-community relations. This paper explores how religion contributes to addressing modern challenges in India, emphasizing its role in promoting social justice, political participation, and communal harmony.

Objectives

- To study the social and political issues related to religion in India
- To perceive the challenges and prospects

Research methodology:

This investigation's nature is informative. Periodicals, newspapers, and websites were among the publications from which the required secondary data was gathered.

Religion and Social Issues:

Caste and Social Justice:

India's caste system is among the world's oldest forms of surviving social stratification despite its illegality. Caste, based in religious practices, but bolstered by social and economic structures, has historically governed social interactions, professions and resource allocation. In this context, religion was used both as a method of oppression and a means of liberation.



Quick Response Code:



Website:

<https://jrdrv.org/>

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.17192433



Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) Public License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work noncommercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Rajendra K, Associate Professor Department of Sociology Dr. G Shankar Government Women's First Grade College & PG Study Centre, Ajjarkadu, Udupi.

How to cite this article:

Rajendra K. (2025). *The Role of Religion in Addressing Contemporary Social and Political Issues in India*. Journal of Research and Development, 17(8), 136–139. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17192433>

Reformist movements like the Bhakti and Sufi movements challenged caste distinctions by focusing on devotion and universalism of all irrespective of caste. B. R. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956 symbolized a radical rejection of caste-based Hindu practices and offered Dalits a religiously grounded path toward dignity. Religious leaders across traditions have also invoked scriptural values to challenge caste discrimination. However, caste-based politics remains deeply tied to religious and community identities, showing how faith can be mobilized to either resist or reinforce inequality. B. R. Ambedkar's decision to convert to Buddhism in 1956 showed a strong rejection of the caste system in Hinduism and gave Dalits a new way to find dignity through religion. Leaders from different faiths have also used their religious teachings to fight against caste discrimination. But caste-based politics is still closely connected to religious and community identities, showing how religion can be used both to fight against and support inequality.

Gender and religious reform:

Religion in India has always been a place where people debate about fairness for women. In the past, religious texts were often interpreted in ways that kept women in a lower position. But there have been reform movements in Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism that have pushed for more rights for women. Recent court rulings, like those about women entering the Sabarimala temple and the ban on triple talaq, show how religious traditions and the idea of equal rights in the law affect each other. Women's groups within religions have also fought for more opportunities to lead and take part in religious activities, which challenges the male-dominated structures in religion. Religious institutions can be both a barrier and a help in the fight for gender justice. Practices like dowry, child marriage, and limiting women's freedom are still linked to religious and cultural traditions, but faith-based efforts continue to push for change.

Education and religion:

Religion has always played a big role in India's education system. Missionary schools, Islamic madrasas, Hindu gurukuls, and Sikh gurdwaras have all provided learning opportunities. Today, religiously connected schools and colleges are still a major part of education in India. While some of these institutions offer good education and help people move up in society, there are debates over what is taught in classes, especially about history, moral values, and national identity. Tensions between democratic government and religious freedom in education are clear, like when the government tries to control madrasas and groups like the RSS influence education. Religious schools also help raise literacy among poor and marginalized communities, which helps development.

Health, poverty, and social services:

Faith-based organizations in India are important for providing healthcare, helping during disasters, and offering social support. Christian hospitals, Sikh langars, Hindu clinics run by ashrams, and Islamic programs funded through zakat all fill gaps where government help is not enough. During the COVID-19 pandemic, religious groups helped by distributing food, offering medical help, and supporting mental health, showing how religion can be a powerful tool for social welfare. However, there are also worries about religious groups trying to convert people or being exclusive, which brings up questions about charity and conversion. Overall, religion continues to be a strong force in helping people at the community level.

Interfaith relations and communal harmony:

India's diversity is both a strength and a challenge. Relationships between different religions are key to keeping society together, but there are still many conflicts. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the violence that followed, the 2002 Gujarat riots, and recent tensions around cow protection and citizenship laws all show how religion can be used in politics to create division. At the same time, efforts like peace committees, shared religious festivals, and local dialogues are trying to reduce polarization. Religious leaders have an important role in building peace, but the success of these efforts depends on political support and trust between communities.

Religion and Political Issues:

Secularism and the state:

India's idea of secularism is different from other countries. It ensures that all religions are treated equally, but also allows the government to act to improve social justice, instead of keeping religion and government completely separate. The government manages religious endowments and personal laws, while protecting the right to worship. However, this approach is often debated. Some say that too much government involvement takes away religious freedom, while others believe the government isn't truly neutral when it favors the majority religion.



Religious Nationalism:

Religious nationalism is becoming more influential in Indian politics. Movements like Hindutva, supported by groups like the BJP and RSS, define India's identity mainly through Hindu culture. Supporters say this promotes pride and unity, but critics argue it hurts minorities and weakens the country's diversity. Religious nationalism also appears in Islamic revivalist movements and debates over Christian conversions, showing that all major religions in India face challenges with how they see their own identity.

Minority rights and politics:

India's Constitution promises religious freedom and rights for minorities, but how these are carried out is still a big issue. Minority-run schools and colleges, like Christian universities and Muslim schools, are protected by law, but there are ongoing discussions about giving special treatment to religious minorities. The debate over a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) shows the tension between allowing religious freedom and ensuring equal treatment for all. Minority groups argue that their culture needs protection, while supporters of the UCC believe it is important for justice and unity.

Religion and Electoral Politics:

Religion plays a big role in politics in India. Political parties use religious symbols, festivals, and identity to bring people together and get support. The BJP often uses Hindu symbols, while other parties use caste and religious connections. The Congress party used to focus on secularism but has also started using some ideas that support Hindu identity.

During elections, speeches often use religious ideas, which can cause people to feel divided based on religion. Even though there are laws against it, religion is still a strong way to influence people in Indian democracy.

Religion also affects the law and policies in India:

Different religious groups have their own rules for things like marriage, inheritance, and divorce. There are laws for Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Parsis. While this shows diversity, it can also lead to unfair treatment, especially for women. Debates about cow protection, running temples, and religious conversions show how religious beliefs affect how the government works. Although the courts sometimes step in to protect the constitution, there is still a challenge in balancing religious freedom with the secular law.

Religion in India can both bring people together and cause division:

It gives people a sense of right and wrong, helps with social action, and keeps cultural traditions alive. But when religion is used in politics, it can lead to violence and leave people out. It's important to understand that religion has both good and bad sides in modern India.

Using religion for political purposes can hurt democracy:

When politicians use religious identity to get votes, it can make society less united. This can lead to majority rule that ignores minority rights and increases conflicts between groups. However, talking between different religions can help people understand each other better. Groups, nonprofits, and religious leaders have started discussions based on common values like fairness, kindness, and helping others. Building on these efforts can help make society more peaceful. The future of religion in India depends on how people interpret faith and stick to constitutional values. If religion is used to support social good, women's rights, and friendly relations between groups, it can be a good force in Indian democracy. When the government, religious leaders, and civil society work together, religion can help India move forward in a positive way.

Conclusion

In summary, religion is a strong force in shaping how society and politics work in India. When religion is used in politics, it can create divisions, but it can also inspire justice, compassion, and efforts for peace. To help India's future, it's important to use religion's good aspects while dealing with its challenges.

References

1. Bhargava, R. (1998). *Secularism and its critics*. Oxford University Press.
2. Chatterjee, P. (2019). *I am the people: Reflections on popular sovereignty today*. Columbia University Press.
3. Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's silent revolution: The rise of the lower castes in North India*. Columbia University Press.
4. Nussbaum, M. C. (2007). *The clash within: Democracy, religious violence, and India's future*. Harvard University Press.
5. Raj, S. (2020). Gender and religion in contemporary India. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 43(4), 612–629.
6. Habermas, Jürgen (2006). "Religion in the public sphere", *European Journal of Philosophy* 14(1):1–25.
7. Casanova, José, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).
8. Smidt, Corwin E. (Ed.), *Religion as Social Capital: Producing the Common Good* (Baylor University Press, 2003).



Journal of Research and Development

Peer Reviewed International, Open Access Journal.

ISSN : 2230-9578 | Website: <https://jrdrv.org> Volume-17, Issue-8| August - 2025

9. Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).
10. Marsden, George M., *Religion and American Culture: A Brief History* (Oxford University Press, 2014).
11. Wilcox, Clyde, and Ted G. Jelen (Eds.), *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: The One, the Few, and the Many* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).