

# Taxonomy Of Religion In The Recent Politics Of Indonesia

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*Abstract: Indonesia has been a land of religious diversity. In the ancient era it has witnessed Hindu-dominated empires and influence of Hinduism was evident there in Srivijaya-kingdom. Gradually Indonesia became a country with majority muslim citizens but it retained its secular pluralistic approach. But politicization of religion and vote-bank centric politics made the religion in Indonesian internal politics a point of maliciousness. But external policies remained predominantly secular. All these developments show an intricate combination of religious and secular motives in the politics. This article focused on the sheer external and internal intricate dynamics of Indonesia's politics.*

## I. 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. It has been clear that the people of Islam are the majority religious community. In a country which is holding majority of Muslim population, the role of religion in the political arena would be surely dynamic and it is surely challenging to find out how the taxonomy of religiosity juxtaposing with secularist politics. Moreover in the face of continuous extreme religious fundamentalism and terrorist attacks how Indonesian politics is taking its shape through some unique ways. To explore the dogmatic and practical linkages between religion and politics in Indonesia, it is necessary to traverse the historical intricacy. To analyse the religious spree in Indonesian Politics, this article is divided into 3 segments broadly, 1st Section provides a brief outline of historical background of religious element in Indonesia's politics, 2nd section is dedicated in elaborating current scenario and the final section is related to religious extremism and politics of Indonesia.

## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

With the exploration of the ancient history of the Indonesian archipelago, it has been revealed that there was the

earliest recognized kingdom, known as "Java Dwipa" which was a Hindu Kingdom. The rule of Hindu emperors was marked symbolic for the Javanese civilization. Two biggest Indianized Hindu-kingdoms were Srivijaya and Majapahit. From the 7th to 14th centuries, Buddhist empires started growing gradually. But the Indonesian statecraft was predominantly Indian and Hindu by culture and rituals. It means that Hinduism as ruler-religion was famous and population was also influenced by the rulers. The ancient administration found its religious intonation through the rules of emperors. In 5th century Hinduism had spread through Java and one thousand years later Islam arose in the land. But Javanese population never gave up with their ancient spiritual mysticism which was inclined towards cosmology. Anthropological analysis says that Indonesian religious behavior was mystique and animistic as Prof. J.M. van der Kroef writes: "The homeostasis sought via the *selamatan* has an animistic background which is part of the Javanese cosmology: man is surrounded by spirits and deities, apparitions and mysterious supernatural forces, which, unless he takes the proper precautions, may disturb him or even plunge him into disaster." Indonesia embraced the softer version of Islam and it had undergone through the aura of *Ishmaili Shi'ah*. Sufi brotherhoods – *tarekats* – of the Sufi orders of *Naqshabandiyya*, *Qadiriyya*, and *Shattariyya* were formed and spread slowly and the entire population was influenced by this. Moreover Javanese culture was a unique combination of Islam and tolerance. The Muslims of the land were supposed to create a moderate religious path like "Islam Abangan" or 'Islam Kejawen'. So historical and anthropological dynamics suggest that Indonesian population

was synergetic and their concepts of tolerance were very much prevalent. Historical background shows that ultimately religious synthesis is surely a key element in the ancient politics and popular society. Indonesia has witnessed the development of societal relations through the syncretistic religious attitudes. It has been very crucial to strike the way of linking Indonesian politics and religion but surely historical developments and anthropological quotients help the scholars to avoid sybaritic confusions of general trends. In later sections the intricate dynamics unfolds itself.

### III. INDONESIA POLITICS AND RELIGION

This segment can be further divided into three spectrums, namely 1) Synthesis of Liberal and communitarian trends 2) Internal politics and Party dynamics 3) External Politics and Foreign Policy.

#### A. SYNTHESIS OF LIBERAL&COMMUNITARIAN TRENDS

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 Indonesia state and politics are mingling with surreal 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 fact in "Jakarta Charter" or "Piagam Jakarta" the notion of unity was attributed under the Islamic values and sharia-laws. It has not been an exaggeration to say that initially the charter tried to advocate the Islamic beliefs and laws. There were some controversial words which remained as add-ons to the national ideology Pancasila enmeshed in the Constitution. These words were "The Indonesian state is based on Belief in the one supreme God with the obligation to live according to Islamic law for Muslims". So from the charter it has been clear that Islamic law is important and belief in one God is necessary for the "unity in diversity".

It has shown the complex dynamics and mixture of liberal and communitarian trends. The charter basically emphasized 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 gradually these words were removed from the draft in Suharto's reign. But the intonation remained same as earlier it was. What intricate this dynamics is the presence of politics, rather with precision it is the propagandist politics, Indonesia thus, witnessed the "formalist upsurge" in Suharto-era immediately after the removal of those words. But Slammet Effendi Yusuf, a senior Golkar-party leader, observed "the problem of Islam within Indonesian context is that Muslims in particular, should not regret the omission of the famous "seven words" from the constitution. He uttered that "the Jakarta Charter in the past, if the Islamic community keeps fighting over it and opposing it to Pancasila then all it does is the damage of the muslim community.

#### B. INTERNAL POLITICS AND PARTY DYNAMICS

Indonesian political scenario is surely fashioned by its complex party system. Broadly speaking Indonesian political parties are of two kinds. One is Islamic religious and another is secular parties. Indonesian politics went through the process of decolonization in which secularism optimized the process of nation building. These two segments of political parties are playing the political games through the different religious junctures. There is a list of political parties below:-

##### SECULAR PARTIES

- ✓ Democratic Party (Partai Demokrat), ruling party chaired by President Yudhoyono
- ✓ Golkar (Party of the Functional Groups), large party known for neoliberal economic policies
- ✓ PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle), 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), small party affiliated with the armed forces
- ✓ NasDem (Nasional Demokrat), new party that splintered off from Golkar

##### ISLAMIC PARTIES

- ✓ 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), small party with conservative policies.

A focused study on these political parties can provide the true picture. Democratic Party as a ruling party plays 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 Yudhonyo as a leader of the party tried to made it corruption free. Despite the great victory in 2009 election in 2014 it could not achieve win in the Parliament but maintained their position among top five. So we can surely utter those secularist motives of this party made them sustain their position. Golkar party has also achieved its position on the secular spree on the basis of their liberalization agenda and economic development and it had played strong role since Suharto's New Order started. PDI-P also showed their rational politics by opposing fuel hikes in 2005 and 2013.

Among the Islamic parties PKS is the major one which supported 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 utilized the religious sentiment of the people. PAN is a moderate Islamic party based on the ideas of Muhammadiyah movement, the more modernist of Indonesia's two largest and oldest Muslim organizations (the other being Nahdlatul Ulama). This party sponsored Christian

candidates too. Basically for the political need this party avoided stricter version of secular-Islamic dichotomy and labeled themselves as a nationalist populist party based on the ideology of Pancasila.

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 reflects 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 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. Despite a secular political environment it is evident that local norms, 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 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. To be very specific this trend is not unique in Indonesia. Commercialization and politicization of religious sentiments are very common in Third World. Like Indonesian politics Indian politics is also engulfed with these. 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.

#### C. EXTERNAL POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Indonesia as a new born nation under the leadership of Sukarno chose a secular path for external relation. It basically prioritized nation building and national interest choosing the path of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In Sukarno's period "Guided Democracy" basically focused on economic development.

While choosing its foreign policy options Indonesia went for pragmatism. Malaysia was a muslim majority state but for national interest Indonesia had taken up "crash Malaysia" policy. But the enmity ended to face the Chinese domination. It has been very clear that Indonesia's external relations are guided by secular motives. Recently as member of ASEAN Indonesia is playing its regional role thus transcending the religious beliefs. Moreover international terrorism and continuous attack in Indonesia made the Indonesian leaders much more pragmatic and secular in foreign policy choices. Indonesia started its foreign relations with a bit anti western approach but from the Suharto era it started drifting from the anti Western path. So it is very clear that economic and political need made Indonesia pro-western and pro-secular. Indonesia was even enthusiastic about pro-west liberal trade

system through ASEAN economic community. Western influence was increasing gradually and for sure internal politics and economics decisions are not isolated from this.

#### IV. RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

Indonesia remained hotspot of regional ethnic conflicts. One of the hotspots of the communal violence has been Aceh, the northeast province of Sumatra. Aceh-Dar-Al-Salam was an independent entity before the Dutch colonization and after the independence Sukarno promised them to grant 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 Suharto era serious threat from the religious extremists struck the political stability. In 1976 under the leadership of Hasan di Tiro, Free Aceh Movement (GAM) was set up officially. In the post-reform era 1998 onwards Habibie and Wahid eras advocated decentralization in order to accommodate Acehnese demands thus reducing the degree of confrontation. Basically Wahid administration embarked on peace talks with GAM in 1999 and the peace accord was signed in Geneva in December, 2002. But this agreement ended in futility in May, 2003 after Tokyo negotiations. As soon as Megawati Sukarnoputri took office the administration responded with martial law and military campaign which undoubtedly added fuel to the fire of ethnic strife. General Endriatono Sutarto launched a "Security Restoration Operation" aimed at "destroying the GAM forces down to their roots". General Sutarto actually wanted his men killing 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 articulated that in the post-reformasi era the thrust of gaining political stability in Indonesia had been marred by continuous ethnic clashes. Indonesia remained a ground for ethnic conflicts and military repression. Gradually within the globalization period the world started witnessing lethality of religious extremism. Southeast Asia along with Indonesia was no exception. In the Post-9/11 time span Indonesia suffered severe terrorist activities. Rise of Abu-Syaf threatened the political stability of Indonesian Archipelago. Indonesia is not only a place of ethnic religious clashes; rather it has endured a complex combination of ethnic plurality and developmental gaps. Religious extremism 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. So failed nation building and state building process in terms of economy 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. Government ensured pro-

activeness in eliminating terrorist activities from their land. After the 2002 Bali attacks government formed Detachment 88 for preventing the growth of extremism. Detachment 88 either killed or rehabilitated terrorists. There is a growing concern in Indonesia because ISIS is 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 exaggeration to say that Aceh region is propagating Islamic extremism. But Indonesia very quickly joined the hands of major powers like USA in combating terrorism. Moreover Indonesia has been playing vital role in preventing terrorism as a member of ASEAN.

## V. CONCLUSION

It has been clarified that Indonesia is a country which is facing severe religious extremism not only in present scenario. Rather we must say Indonesian archipelago along with Southeast Asia suffered from religious fanaticism since decolonization. The ethnic clashes dwindled down the political stability in the entire Southeast Asia and surely it was an evil by-product of colonization. Colonial exploitation derogated the socio-economic balance of Indonesia and Aceh region which ultimately flared the communal violence. Sometimes economic frustration found its way through terrorism. Military repression is not the solution to the extremism socio-economic development as well as strong popular secularist attitude of internal and external politics can prevent the political erosion. The good sign of Indonesia is the voters have become rational and they are now able to take pragmatic decision over the stigmatized religious sentiments. But spread of education and secularist political culture should be strengthened. The best part of the Indonesia's polity is that they realized the necessity of being united for combating terrorism and religious extremism. Continuous effort on the part of the polity can be viewed with sheer positivity in the political stabilization and unification to face the gruesome reality and recently Indonesia called foreign countries to be part on their Bali process to fight terrorism 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. "We strongly condemn terrorist acts and therefore let's unite to step up against terrorism," said Foreign Minister Retno LP Marsudi during the second day of the event in Nusa Dua at Bali. So it has been clear despite political clashes and ethnic divisions Indonesia took hard-line against religious extremism. And these efforts are 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 the world politics.

So we can surely articulate that Indonesia's religion-centric politics made it a key player in the world politics. The Bali process has also took over the issue of drug trafficking and allied menace which can flare up the funding for the extremists. 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 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 further solution a pragmatic policy involving proper nation building process is necessary. Since Indonesia showed some positive signs of secularist voting behavior, there must be a ray of hope. Moreover local people should be aware of malicious impact of fundamentalist behavior and educating them can actually help preventing the extremist thoughts. Adequate food, shelter and employment can change the scenario for sure. And for all these what Indonesia need is sheer patience and time to change the table.

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