

Globalization: Theoretical Perspectives
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Lecture 48
Religion and Globalization Part – I

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Religion and Globalization



Welcome back to the class. We are beginning a slightly lengthy discussion on globalization and religion and as you know, this falls under the last couple of weeks where we were not discussing any specific theory per se, but a series of substantive themes. We started with globalization and environmentalism. We also had a session on globalization and justice movements and in this class, as well as in the next two consecutive sessions I will be dealing with a very interesting topic on religion and globalization.

And I do not think that I need to overemphasize the importance of religion to students of Social Sciences especially that of sociology. Personally, as well, religion has been my area of specialization and my current work, my doctoral work and my work after my doctoral research, everything revolves around the whole question of religion, religion in the contemporary times, it is a sociological manifestation, both within Hinduism as well as within Islam and my PhD students also work in more or less similar areas. So, I have a special fascination and interest in this particular topic that is one of the reasons why I decided to spend three sessions on this particular topic.

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So, these are the references I have used for these lectures and I have I am not going to, take up each one of them and then go through it systematically, because quite a lot of arguments are overlapping, there are common themes and common arguments that you will find in all these readings. So, I have selected few ideas and then paragraphs and then sentences from many of each of these things and then try to give it a kind of a coherent view.

So, this is globalization and religious nationalism. So, which looks at the questions of search for ontological security and existential anxiety which we will come and discuss, and Hindu and Islamic transnational religious moments by Shail Mayaram, Indian author. So, this essay, we will take it up towards the end of this session that is in the final session. This appeared in economic and political weekly in which the author makes a very interesting study of two transnational religious organizations.

One is the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the other one is Tablighi Jamaat. So those who want to know more about these organizations and how they function as transnational religious organizations may read these two essays and then there is an essay by Peter Bayer from George Ritzer's globalization Handbook, which has been one of our main textbooks, titled 'Religion and Globalization'.

Then two essays: one is cultural significance of new religious movements and globalization. I have a small session on new religious movements. So, this essay will shed some light on that and then theorizing religion in a globalizing world which looks at these broader arguments on globalization and religion. So, let us begin.

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- The antiquity of religion and its transformation in the modern times as a subject of inquiry

- Durkheim, Weber, Marx... Anthropological inquiries ..

- Religion and religions: lack of clarity of definitions

- Globalization of religion and its focus on institutional transformations

- Transformations of individual religiosity, spirituality etc

- NRMs and TRMs



One of the interesting things about religion is that it has been one of the very important and favourite subjects of sociologists, ever since the inception of the discipline itself. The antiquity of religion and its transformation in the modern times as a subject of inquiry, we know that major religions, including Christianity and Islam had its own ways of studying their tradition through theological discourses and theological enquiry and these theological studies of religion is something very important and every major religious, great religions have huge volumes of material written by its own followers, its own priest and its own scholars about the kind of theological concerns.

A host of issues about questions of sacred, divine transcendental, moral and ethical concerns but what we are looking from a sociological point of view is to look at religion as a social phenomenon. Religion in its various forms, whether it is most primitive or elementary forms of religion as described by Emile Durkheim, the way you worship a natural object, a stone or a tree or an animal to some of the most sophisticated, great religions in sense of its magnitude and it's spread across the globe, with extremely deeper theoretical interpretations and complex systems.

In disciplines like sociology, you are looking at this phenomenon from as a social phenomenon and we believe that Sociology and Anthropology are the two disciplines that we quite often use interchangeably. They have their methodological as well as epistemological bases to make sense of this phenomenon called as religion, the same way we understand any other social institution, any other social phenomena and again the theoretical debates about what exactly is the religion?

How do you define it? What have been the methodological framework to understand that or can you call in and for example, can you call Hinduism as a religion the same way we describe Christianity and Islam? So, these are all very important and fundamental questions on which there is hardly any kind of consensus, but if you look into the history of sociology or the emergence of sociology, that all these people that came Weber and Marx had huge interest in this phenomenon of religion and among them, undoubtedly we can say that Durkheim is one of the most important scholars of religion his book, 'Elementary Forms of Religious Life' is considered to be one of the classical foundational texts on the study of globalization, where he brings in this fundamental distinction between the sacred and the profane.

And that is a very foundational definition, one of the fundamental understanding of defining what exactly is religion, and then Max Weber, another very important sociologist and those who have studied sociology will always remember him as a person who brought in a very creative interpretation about the material basis, sorry its religious basis for the material development of capitalism or economic development of capitalism in the modern Europe, his very famous book on 'Protestant ethics and spirit of capitalism'.

And Marx, I hope all of you know that Marx had a particular approach towards the study of religion. Of course, he was very sympathetic, and we quite often hear the argument that Marx described religion as the opium of the masses, but things are more complicated and we do not have the time to go into that. But once you read his own works on religion, we realize that Marx was extremely sympathetic to religion and he believed that the necessity of religion will disappear if a true egalitarian society is brought into picture.

He was extremely sympathetic and understanding of the situation in which religion is mandated for an ordinary person. Then you have a huge turn in anthropological inquiry, starting with the old European anthropologist moving across the globe and then trying to study primitive communities you have Malinowski, Radcliff Brown, Evans Richard a host of scholars.

Then you have Clifford Geertz and other set of scholars and then Talal Asad. So, the anthropological tradition of studying religion has been very rich and extremely rewarding. We do not have the time to go into that but then we will have to. We are concentrating more on the question of religion and globalization and the whole question about how do you define religion, religion and religions, lack of clarity of definition.

This is something that I just mentioned, it is extremely difficult to define what exactly religion is even within the sociological literature. Durkheim defines it has something to do with the sacred, things that are set apart, things that are forbidden, things that are not part of your everyday life and it is too broad, it is too vague a definition. Whereas when it comes to questions of specific religions, like Christianity or Hinduism or Buddhism, things become much easier.

But if you want to have an umbrella term that is capable of including each and every form of religions, then that definition becomes extremely difficult. For example, you have Clifford Geertz, providing a kind of a cultural base or culturalist explanation of religion, then you have Talal Asad, one of the celebrated anthropologists defining Islam and maybe other religions as well as a discursive tradition.

So, you have very interesting yet competing types of definitions. So, we are now focusing on globalization and religion and its focus on institutional transformations. So, I hope you are also familiar with the larger debates within social theory, especially connected with the secularization thesis.

So, we know that sociology emerged as a discipline of modernity and one of its founding fathers, Max Weber was very emphatic in his argument that the modern era is going to be defined on the basis of rationality, instrumental rationality. So, he argued that once you use the framework of rationality, every religion will undergo a process of secularization.

Secularization will, so he had kind of a prophesied or he had kind of a predicted that the significance of religion will come down, it will happen in various ways. One is that the public role played by religion will come down and then religion will be confined to your private sphere, religion will become a matter of your personal choice and private sphere.

Second is that the popularity of religion, the number of people who attend church and other things will come down and there will be more and more people who will discard religion, who will leave religion and then come out as religious or non-religious people. Then he also argued that there will be increasing differentiation, more and more spheres of life for example family, law, marriage, education, nationalism, all these things will begin to get detached from religious, from the influence of religion.

So, you will be able to look at law, you will be able to look at family or divorce or say for example, abortion as a process or as an event or as a thing without having anything to do with religion. So, more or no differentiation of social spheres will take place. So, there was a time maybe during the 1950s and 60s and 70s, there was widespread hope or widespread belief among sociologists that once you become a more and more progressive, once you become more and more modern, you will discard your religion, you will discard everything associated with tradition and then people will become more and more secular, religion will have a slow death.

And we know that has not happened, that has not happened and not only that, it did not happen, but something more unexpected thing happened. Religion made a huge comeback to the world stage, especially in the 1980s onwards. You have had major religious revivals, you have had that in Iran, maybe it started with Iran, you had it in Pakistan, you had it in Bangladesh, you had it in Indonesia, you had it in, in various other countries, including India.

Religion came back, especially at religion, along with politics came back with a vengeance. So, there are scholars who talk about kind of a decent chant or sorry, a re-enchantment of the late modern world. So, what does it mean re-enchantment because, they use the term re-enchantment, because Weber used the term disenchantment to define the features of the period of modern society where people have come out of the enchantment of religion.

People use scientific rationality to make sense of the world so that they are no longer enchanted by the religion. So, he defined it as disenchantment, whereas a lot of scholars now talk about the re-enchantment of people in the late modern era and that is something that we are going to explain, we will not have a kind of a conclusive answer, but we will look into a couple of possible explanations that are given by different scholars.

So, we are looking at globalization and religion and globalization of religion and focus on its institutional transformations. How religions have become a kind of a global institutions and again, please keep in mind that there is nothing new about it. All the world religions have been spread across the globe, whether it is Islam or Christianity or Buddhism or Hinduism. They were never confined to any specific geographies.

There were historic times when these religions spread across the globe then they contracted and then again spread. So, we all know those kinds of processes, but what happens to similar kind of a process in a more globally interconnected world? What happens to such an institution in the contemporary times where you have the whole world can be described as something which is completely shrinking in its size and in itself intensity?

So, we will look at the institutional transformation, we also look into the transformations of individual religiosity and spirituality etc. So, while looking at the whole question of transformation of institutional religion, a very important point of inquiry is what does religion do to your individual religiosity? Why is that more and more people seemingly very modern educated people with world exposure, why do they require why do they require religion or why is that we are increasingly finding people with the high education, but at the same time extremely stringent in their religious beliefs?

And why is that there is a sudden increase in the talk about spirituality or all kind of spiritualities? So, how do we make sense of that and a lot of discussions about this new religious movements and transnational religious movements? So, these are the two terms and two things which we will discuss towards the end of this class; new religious movements a series of, alternative cult like religious initiatives that came into existence from late 1960s, 70s onwards and many of them turned out to be transnational religious movements, religions, movements which originated in certain place and which have moved across places and then have had institutions and followers all over the world.

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1. There is the importance of religion in the context of transnational migration.

- Religious institutions are among the first that migrant communities will attempt to recreate in their new homes
- Along with religious purposes, most often they also serve a host of other functions including as places of cultural familiarity, social service providers, educational and recreational centres, resources for community and political mobilization, and simply as visible manifestations of a migrant community's arrival and claim to belong.



So, one of the important connections between religion and globalization is the context of transnational migration and again we know that the transnational migration has a much longer history but that was kind of accentuated or and especially in the more recent time with the transportation, with the journeys, with the migration of large number of people and into different areas and then settlement in the US, in the UK, in Canada, in Australia, in a host of places.

So, religious institutions and among the first that migrant communities will attempt to recreate in their new homes and I hope you would have already noticed this. When a community or a group of people move into a new territory, a new place as at maybe you can take a series of examples for them, it could be internal migrations within India, people moving from one state to another or people moving from one part of the state to another part of the state or it could be people moving from one country to another during colonial period, thousands or lakhs of people were taken, labourers were taken from India, different parts of the state to neighbouring countries or even far off places like Fiji and other places.

So, in each of these instances, what we come to know that one of the first things that they establish in the new territory, in the new place is their religious institution, whether it is a makeshift kind of an arrangement, something will be made along with it they make their houses and other things or other things like a hospital or a school are always of secondary importance.


There will be something to mark their religiosity is something very important. So along with religious purpose, most often they also serve a host of other functions, including as places of cultural familiarity, social service providers, education and recreation centres, resources for

community and political mobilization and simply as visible manifestations of migrant communities' arrival and claim to belong.

So, there are multiple ways in which you can read this particular tendency to construct new religious institutions and religious places who worship in the new homelands and all these could be different explanations. It could provide them with a sense of belongingness. It is a place where people congregate; we know that many Christian sections, that sects are called as congregations.

So, they congregate, they meet each other maybe once a week. So that is a place they share a sense of community. The community leader would give them some lecture, some lessons and also maybe it is also a kind of a manifestations of community's arrival and claim to belong to that particular place and I am not going into details but any further reading will give you quite a lot of information about these points.

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- Diaspora religious institutions make previously more religiously homogeneous regions increasingly multireligious.
 - Of equal importance is that they generate different and new versions of these religions, ones which through the transnational linkages that their respective communities maintain can have an influence both on each other and on the 'original' versions in the traditional 'homelands'.
 - Thus not only does transnational migration have the effect of globalizing religions spatially, but just as importantly it contributes to the further pluralization or multiple particularization of universal religions in every part of the globe.



Now, this diaspora religious institutions make previously more religiously homogenous regions increasingly multi-religious. Again, we know that previously, more religiously homogenous nations will soon find that their religious sphere has become more and more multiple, more and more plural and this is exactly what Europe is experiencing now. When we talk about European process of secularization, we many at times forget to keep in mind that it is a story between secularism and Christianity because there was hardly anything in Europe.

But now, maybe for the last several decades, more and more people are coming into picture, more or more religions are being brought to Europe or into America for that matter and then that is creating lot of conflicts and issues in those places. France is an example, Switzerland is an example, Britain is an example where more and more Muslims are coming and settling down more and more Hindus and Sikhs are coming and settling down and these diasporic communities definitely bring their religions along with them and then make those situations more plural.

And how do different communities react to that? How does host communities react to that? Again, it is a complicated story. I am not going into that, the theory is about multiculturalism,

theories about cosmopolitanism, all these things really talk about that but it has the potential to create more and more discord, it has the potential to create more and more conflict.

That is what is happening precisely in many of the Western countries, especially in country like France, which has a very rigid rule about secularism. So, we do not have the time to go into those details. Of equal importance is that they generate different and new versions of these religions through the transnational linkages that their respective communities maintain, can have an influence both on each other and on original versions of the traditional homeland.

So, if you read studies on diasporic communities, how the people who are settled down in a new country, how do they behave, how do they create their own identities and how after some couple of generations have passed, what has happened to their sense of identity and so then it is again a very fascinating scenario, because we know that none of these new or none of these diasporic communities or their generations will be able to recreate and follow exactly the similar kind of religious practices or traditional practices of their home countries.

It will be completely new; it would be drastically new. They will be forced to make quite a lot of changes, depending upon the contexts and they will be able to influence each other and many times, they also will be able to influence back in their homeland which is considered to be the source of this traditional thing.

So, it is a very fascinating area to inquire into this kind of relationship between the homeland and the new home or the foreign country and the kind of diasporic relationship and how different religions are interpreted, how religions are reformulated and other kinds of processes. Thus, not only does transnational migration have the effect of globalizing religion spatially, but just as importantly, it contributes to the further pluralization or multiple particularization of universal regions in every part of the globe and this is, again a very important point.

For example, as a student of a sociology of Islam, for example the bewildering diversity that you will find in the ways in which Islamic communities are different across the globe is something extremely surprising. If you look at Islam as a religion, maybe compared to any other religion that has all the features of being a very singular homogenous kind of religion with a single Prophet, with a single holy book, but if you look into the diversity of Muslim societies across the globe, from Sub Saharan African to Africa, to that of the Middle East to Asia and into Europe and the US, the diversity is really enormous.

So, it is not only that these religions through this process of migration were able to spread across the place but the kind of multiplication, pluralization or the particularization of this universal religion is also something very important.

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2. Great variety of religious organizations and movements have spread around the world, sometimes in the context of migrations, but also for their own independent, 'mission' reasons.

- The history of world religions, with both a 'missionary zeal' and without one.
- Colonialism and spread of Christianity,
- Trade and spread of Islam
- Spread of Hinduism and Buddhism through migration, campaigns and so on
- Spread of religion in contemporary era



Second point, this second point is great variety of religious organizations and movements have spread around the world, sometimes in the context of migrations but also for their own independent mission reasons and mission is about spreading the word and mostly connected with Abrahamic religions because they have this very strong belief that this true Word of the God must be spread across the world and religions like Christianity and Islam has very strong commitment towards inviting others into their fold because they believe that only the true believers will be given a permanent position in the heaven and all others are the non-believers who will go to hell.

So, their religion has an innate component of inviting others, proselytizing others. So, this mission has really played a very important role in spreading those religions and we know the kind of connection between these religious missionary activisms and that of colonialism and the kind of collusion between the church and colonial powers and how the whole world was divided into two and between Spanish and Portuguese and later every Christian denomination spread across the globe or into Africa, into Asia or basically through this mission mode.

And also, maybe other religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, which is not as zealous as this also spread more, even though more limited areas through different kinds of activities. So, the history of world religions with both a missionary's zeal and without one, colonialism and the spread of Christianity. Trade and spread of Islam, maybe one of the very important means through which Islam spread across the globe is through trade and through Sufis along with of course armed conflicts and conquest and others.

So, spread of Hinduism and Buddhism through more migration and campaigns and so on. So, so, this has been happening, as we mentioned, this is nothing new, but what is happening importantly is spread of religion in contemporary era. In the contemporary era with all these infrastructures of globalization, with the internet, with YouTube, with your social media, with a host of other things, what is happening to religious transmission, how people are able to make use of this huge number of media, in order to make sense of religions.

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3. Religio-political movements in global society

- Increased political impact of religion happened with the beginning of globalization.
- The term 'fundamentalism' refers to religious movements that advocate the public enforcement of religious precepts or the exclusive religious identification of state collectivities.
- Is religious fundamentalism anti-modern?



And the third one is basically points taken from Peter Bayer's article in Ritzer reader. So, the third point that he is talking about this religious political moment in global society, very powerful religious moments, but religious moments with very specific political goals. So, those are religious movement with political goals also have become a part of the contemporary society.

So, the kind of a distinction between religion and politics has become quite fragile and many of these religious movements have very clear political motives, because they think that political power is a very important medium through which they will be able to establish a moral order as demanded by their religion, a moral order, whether it is constructed or concocted that is a different story.

But quite a lot of forays into the realm of politics is what is happening in quite a lot of contemporary societies, you know the kind of examples that are around us, whether it is Islamic parties or Hindu nationalist parties or Buddhist parties in Sri Lanka or in Myanmar, there is a kind of a connection between religion and politics has become very strong.

So, this increased political impact of religion happened with the beginning of globalization. As I mentioned, since 1980s, the political parties began to articulate their political arguments and claims through the religious language, political parties emerged in order to represent a particular religion and people who belong to that particular region and that has really been the kind of scenario that we are witnessing in a host of countries.

So, the term fundamentalism refers to religious movements that advocate the public enforcement of religious precepts or the exclusively just identification of state collectivities. So, because we this particular term is quite familiar to us 'fundamentalist'. We call certain religious organizations, as religious fundamentalists. So, what does this fundamentalist mean? And again, this important question is religious fundamentalism, anti-modern?

Again, fascinating set of questions, I will not be going into that, because there was a very powerful argument that religious fundamentalists are anti-modern, they are against the idea of modernity, they want to go back to their tradition, they want to go back to the golden age of the tradition, they are very much against modern ideas and this argument is very short sighted.

This argument is very superficial. If you look at any of these fundamentalist movements at present, they are all extremely modern. They are all extremely modern and though they might harbour an understanding about a golden era, what they are presenting is all modern, they use all kind of modern technology, they talk about modern citizenship and they are specifically modern, there is nothing anti-modern in that sense, a mainly because this whole idea about fundamentalism, the urge to go back to the fundamentals of a religion, it is articulated in so many different ways.

So, even though this particular term has that connotation that religious fundamentalism is kind of negative, it is anti-modern, it is traditional, that is not the case. A host of religious fundamentalist organizations and people are active among us and they are all very modern in their outlook, in their strategy. So, I think I will stop here, and then we will have this continuation of the session in the next class. Thank you.