

Religion and Inequality

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The paper tried to explain the theoretical views of the nexus between inequality and religion where income inequality is considered as the difference between the income shares of top 10% and bottom 50%. How income share of top 10% influenced the religious impact on inequality as well as its causal effects. On the other hand, how the income share of bottom 50% reacted with the religious activities in the society is explained in this paper. Some important research contents were also discussed in which religion endogenously or exogenously influences the income inequality. Religion is to be considered as a factor of inclusive growth process in India.

Keywords: Religiosity, inequality, poverty, religious institutions.

Present religious activity has changed the economic thought process as well as philosophical thought process of religion for which theology has been distorted, socio-economic impact of religion has been changed the relationship between religion and individual moral activities have changed, the relationship between religion and developmental activities has been transformed into non-secular institutional work-schedules. Actual religious activities channelized into commercial motivations. The goals of religions have been destroyed. Thus, the strategy is to activize religion into inclusive growth process of the economy for survival of genesis of religion.

Religion is related with [i] mind, [ii] devotion, [iii] believe, [iv] fear, [v] caste, [vi] heredity, [vii] education respectively.

Mind is related with primary, and fact/object/brain is secondary. It evolves from past great sages/religious monk/philosophers. Devotion is related with cultural development which are follower.

Belief is related with social and family activities which are also follower.

Fear is related with personal feelings, work culture etc.

Caste is related with consciousness about background and social status.

Heredity is related with serial correlations of family traditions.

Education is related with personal education and formal education status and exercise of education.

Why are temples built? The answer is:
[i] to expand religious practice,
[ii] to expand religious belief,
[iii] to quench thrust of hunger after worship,
[iv] to preach idol worship,
[v] large scale transformation on faith.

Politicization of religion-In a trusty body of a temple, a religious organization, the political leaders are nominated and voted to control the trusty body of a temple committee or an ashram committee. The goal of the leaders to be the followers of the party they belong, on the other hand, the strategy and programme and activities are being directed by the goals of these party men, so that, political aspects are fulfilled by the religious devotees. Socialisation of religion-The socially influential persons are being selected or nominated to be the executive body of the religious program/organization/temple committee, so that ordinary people or

followers of the religious and participants of worship might be influenced and religious goal is fulfilled.

The evolutionary process of politicization and socialization of religion were evident in the society since the inception of the society and the transformation of the society. It is a natural social process of transformation or reformation. Sometimes, it emerges from the instinct from the religious transformation or political dynamic path, or in a societal change. All these orders of events were occurred either by a powerful religious person/reformer/follower of a religion or by a powerful political person/follower of party.

The following impacts are to be considered seriously.

1. Economic aspect-employment
2. Social aspect-religious practice
3. Political aspect-voting war among political members of the body for leading.

Hypothetical issues

If the difference between the income share of top 10 % (h10) and income share of the bottom 50% (b50) is the gap considered as income inequality then on that basis we can assume some observatory logics.

[1] Generally, top 10% of the people command resources at a greater rate than the others and generally they are entrepreneurs, producers, businessmen, rich people, and politicians in which they are growing more speedily for which the education status of them are higher than others and can command major share of wealth. In building wealth creation, the practice of religion will be higher and there are

propensities to build temples or religious organisations. The social impacts of such activities might create more income from those sources of religious institutions and the forthcoming business activities will emerge through religious practices.

[2] On the other hand, the income share of the bottom 50% are the poor people who generally command less resources, control poor people, gathered with cultivators, labors, unemployed persons, homeless and so on. They very often obtain less education and have poor capability to create wealth generation. In context of social psychology, their practice of religion may be high or low depending on the future aspiration of getting privileges of income sources. The practice of religion may be low since provision of business is low. The building temples to engage religious practice became negligible.

[3] Causality between religion and inequality

[i] If (h10-b50) increases inequality increases, or if (h10-b50) decreases inequality decreases.

Both will happen if the following axioms exist.

[a] b50 is constant while h10 increases, so that inequality increases

[b] b50 decreases while h10 is constant, so that inequality increases

[c] b50 decreases more speedily than h10, so that inequality increases

[d] b50 increases less speedily than h10, so that inequality increases

[e] if both b50 and h10 are constant, the inequality becomes constant.

In case[a] the possibilities are [i] Rich and wealthy people preach religion more than

earlier, [ii] Rich and wealthy people attended temples to worship more, [iii] Rich and wealthy people motivate people to attend religious activities, [iv] Rich and wealthy people build temples at higher rate, [v] Rich and wealthy people give more incentives/aids/donations/charities.

In case [b] the possibilities are [i] poor and low-income group people will preach religion /culture less, [ii] poor and low-income group people attend temples to worship less, [iii] poor and low-income group people accept more helps from NGOs/religious organisations.

In case [c] the possibilities are, [i] both poor and rich attend temples to worship less, [ii] both poor and rich motivate people to preach religion, [iii] both poor and rich provide less charities.

In case [d] the possibilities are [i] both poor and rich attend temples to worship more, [ii] both poor and rich motivate people to preach religion more, [iii] both poor and rich provide charities.

Some research findings

There are huge research in the nexus between religion and inequality. The most important findings are included here.

High inequality leads to intense insecurity which implies poor to seek shelter in religion for psychological and material comfort i.e., high inequality brings more religious (Jordan,2016).

Inequality brings to moral and spiritual problems in all religions such as Hinduism, Islamism, Christianity or Jainism (Madsen et al,2024).

Higher income inequality is characterized by high level of religiosity (Elgin et al.,2013)

Religion plays a part in unequal distribution of power across social groups in society (Edwards,2023).

Religion is an important determinant of social and economic inequality (Keister et al.,2014)

Stratification beliefs predict a negative relationship between religion and the desire of government redistribution (where church and state are substitutes). There is correlation between inequality and religiosity (i.e., higher income correlates with less support for involving religion in politics. Higher income with higher religiosity with more support in politics (Long,2014).

Conflict theory states that religion reinforces and promotes social inequality and social conflict. It convinces the poor to accept their lot in life. On the contrary, religion reinforces social unity and stability.[i]Religion is an agent of social control and thus strengthens social order.[ii]Religion is greater psychological and physical well-being.[iii] religion motivates people to work for positive social change.[iv]Marx says that religion is opium of the masses where religion leads the poor to accept their fate and helps in maintaining the existing system of social inequality(Vilardo et al.,2016).

Affirm social equality and inclusion of one's religious belief is a modern challenge for future inclusive process of development. Policies like[i] to redress religious inequality, [ii] government action to level minority or majority in religious community should be

democratize as human right, [iii] to empower minority religious groups so that religion and religious claims may be prioritized, [iv] to promote religious inclusion etc should be granted for implementation (Woolcock,2023).

Impact of inequality is related with religious identity on developmental strategy in differential treatment among communities which actually violets human rights and creates social tensions (Marshall,2025).

Religion plays an important role in explaining inequality when a panel data estimate of 130 countries from 1970 to 2013, controlling for religious beliefs, savings rate, arable land rate and age-dependency ratio (Naveed & Wang, 2018).

Religion is related with race and racialization processes, class and economic differences, or attempts to administer or change some aspect of state laws since religion intersects with inequality, and religion can create barriers to social inclusion (Wilde,2018).

As a result of lower level of government services, higher levels of religiosity are characterized by greater income inequality which results lower taxes (Elgin et al,2010).

World values Survey taking data from 1995 to 2014 for a sample of 223016 respondents in 85 countries revealed that there is a relation between religiosity and inequality, where income inequality is stronger in developing or lower middle-income countries compared to developed or high middle income and high-income countries (Peyman,2024).

Religion has significant influence on social and economic conditions and polices (in America) where 49% Americans believe that Bible should have no influence on US

laws,23% believe that it had influence too. On the other hand,68% US Christians want Bible to influence to US laws where 89% are protestants. Even, Pew Research Center survey concluded that 86% said that Bible should not influence US legislations at all. Black protestants said that Bible should take precedence over the people. The majority of the Americans report that religion plays a very important role in their lives. American Religious Identification Survey found that 59% American in Western states believe in God and 86% Americans in South believe in God. Pew Research Center found 54% adults believe the party should friendly towards religion. In South, high religiosity has positive dividend for income mobility but there is diversity both within and between religious tradition. Religious belief strengthens families, schools, and neighborhood. Wealth inequality is relatively enduring within and across generation and significant impact on educational, occupation, political, and social advantages. Religion influenced on educational attainment, marriage, decision to have kids, household income, expenses, savings, intergenerational process and social relations. Among 102 surveyed countries, USA is the only country that score higher than average on religiosity. It is fact that religiosity is inversely related with country's GDP (Gallup poll proved it in 2009) (Williams,2020). A survey among 952 students in Germany revealed that religious socialization has significant relation with unequal learning opportunities in religious education in which religious students get more advantages than the non-religious students (Unser,2022).

General Social Survey among 1622 respondents in the binary logistic regression model expressed that religious practice (specially frequency of prayer) is the predictors of perceptions of inequality where less attendance in prayer shows higher inequality in USA (Musukuma, 2025).

It was empirically varied that less developed countries are significantly more religious which satisfy deprivation theory, and relative power theory. Muslim countries were considerably more religious than others. The lowest religiosity was found among Communist or formerly Communist countries. When societies are more unequal, the richer people become more religious than the poorer people. Unequal incomes lead to societies becoming more religious. Increasing the average economic well-being of people makes them less religious (Salt et al., 2011).

Discussions

[1] Suppose there are two villages in which village A is comparatively higher inequality than village B. But, village A contains less facilities of temples or Churches or Mosque to practice religion than village B. For which we can say that high inequality persists with less religiosity.

[2] On the other hand, village A consists of more Hindus than Christians for which the practice of Hindu religion festivals/occasions/attendance on temples for worship will increase as a result of dominance of Hinduism.

[3] Kerala is less income inequality than Bihar/UP but religiosity is higher than those

states because of historical cultural tradition, provisions of temples and practice of religion.

[4] China contains higher inequality but less religiosity.

[5] USA has high inequality but high religiosity than other developed nations.

[6] Sub-Saharan Africa are practicing religion higher than other countries although they contain high poverty and inequality.

[7] In Murshidabad district Muslims are dominant than Hindus. This district is poorer and higher inequality than others and it had high religiosity because they all practice religion regularly.

[8] In Krishnagar town, there are one Church and many temples. In the Church only Saturday and Sunday occur religious practice where not all but some Christians attended prayer. On the other hand, in the temples, worships are regular phenomenon of religious practice. Here inequality is not under consideration. Do the poor people worship only? Or does the poor Christians attend Churches only?

[9] In Shantipur/Nabadwip, Nadia, all prayed to Chaitanya or Radha-Krishna, here inequality does not matter because of its traditional historical culture of religion. Hindu/Vaishnava religion predominate here. All practice religion whether poor or rich.

[10] If religiosity increases there must propensity to build temples or Churches which can boost output and employment, enhance trade and commerce which ultimately produce higher growth rate. Again, if religious education increases and healthcare facilities of religious people increases which can stipulate human capital and finally rise in human

development index that led to development. Both of the above situations promote to dwindle inequality. On the other hand, if religiosity increases the members of religious community increases that can enhance inequality among community i.e., religious inequality will be higher than before for which communal harmony may be distorted.

[11] Religion promotes social stratification from the view point of diversification of casteism where brahmin perform the customs of worship and dominates other castes as superiority which was given by the society since long. In all temples without brahmins, no worship of Gods is performed. It emerges social inequality.

[12] In Hinduism, religion evolved from the pre-Vedic period to up till now has been functioning in unequal society in a decent manner under specific philosophy. In Christianity, since the birth of the Christ, the religious hegemony has been accepted in society where poverty and inequality persist. The same principles are valid in Islamism. The state controls the communal harmony under constitution of secularism/non-secularism with inequality in the society. Although secularism and non-secularism with inequality go hand in hand in the society.

Concluding remarks

Can inclusive growth and religion be able to banish inequality from the society? What is the optimum level of development that religious organization bring forth in the state so that inequality tends to zero or the least? These are the fundamental tasks of the state power and the religious organizations/

communities from which the suitable policy prescriptions are necessary so that religious goals and zero inequality/poverty are fulfilled.

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