**Religion and Voting behavior in India**

The political functions of religion in post independence India are vast, varied and significant. The establishment of a secular state in India – by guaranteeing right to freedom of religion to everyone, treating every religion equal and non – recognition of any religion as a state religion – has not been successful in preventing the role of religion as determinant of political behaviour in general and voting behaviour in particular. The existence of such political parties and neo-political groups as stand linked with a particular religion, for example, Muslim League, Akali Dal, Hindu Maha Sabha, Shiv sena etc., have been one of the reasons behind the continued role of religion as a determinant of voting behaviour.

Some ideas regarding the voting behavior and religion can be assumed from the above mentioned points;

1. **Role of Political Parties**: In India, electoral politics including nomination of the candidates, campaigning, communal representation and so on, accentuated the process of communalism in almost every state. Almost all political parties are, in one way or the other, guilty of using religion related issues for narrow political gains and even the hands of religious leaders are not clean. This is perhaps because religion is a source of identity and a bonding factor in the lives of people, mainly in developing societies like India. This is why religion becomes a very important factor in electoral policies. The Constitution of 1950 abolished the system of communal electorates. But, politicians depend on votes, and the electoral process almost forces the political parties to exploit the religious divisions in society.
2. **Vote Banks Based on Religion**: Secularism has made way for minority appeasement; as a result, minority appeasement politics has taken center stage with all the front-ranking political parties relying on the vote bank of more than 18 crore Muslims to rule the nation. With Muslims comprising more than 15% of the Indian population and holding the key to more than two hundred seats,  Muslim votes are not just the deciding factor in many seats, but they are the kingmakers or rather the kings in the Indian political scenario. The Indian National Congress which ruled over the nation for the majority of the period since India independence in 1947 has been framing policies for the appeasement of the Muslim community and has used Muslims against Hindus to serve its political purpose.

The main Opposition Party, Bharatiya Janta Party led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee has been banking on Hindu vote bank to rule the nation. The BJP, with the help of the RSS and the VHP, created massive Hindu vote-bank in the North Indian states using the contentious issue of the Ram Temple/Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. The BJP’s ideology and mobilization strategies created divisions in the Hindu society and alienated the Muslims. By this strategy, the BJP successfully moved from a mere 2 seats in 1984 to 86 seats in 1989 and 120 in 1991. Though in 2014 the election campaign of BJP’s was the issue of development, side by side it also played the game communalism to create Hindu vote bank and alone secured 282. In 2019General Election the party campaign on Hinudvta and got majority, 303 seats.

In spite of the opposition of the Muslim Community and political parties of India, the BJP government moved in swiftly and framed a law to ban triple talaq with an eye on the Muslim women vote bank. The division of Muslim votes has directly helped the BJP even in seats where Muslims make more than 50% of the population. The BJP which is held as the Hindu communal party also trod on the path of Muslim appeasement politics like other political parties of India.

The trend of minority appeasement indicates that Muslims will continue to take advantage of their position in Indian politics. Elections are won and lost in the Lok Sabha with the difference of merely a couple of thousand votes of Muslims in almost every other constituency in Assam, UP, Bihar, West Bengal, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and elsewhere. This indicates that the Muslims can not only just swing the mood in favor of one party or candidate, but they are also the deciding factor in more than two hundred seats across the country. The All India Trinamool Congress (TMC), the Samajwadi Party (SP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Janata Dal (United), and others, competing with one another to lure the Muslim vote bank, Muslim appeasement politics is here to stay in one form or the other.

1. **Religion and Kashmir Electoral Politics**: After the Emergency in 1977, the Jamaat-e-Islami in Kashmir sought to capitalize on the newsituation. It allied itself with the Janata Party both at the national level, and in J&K. In this time,Sheikh Abdullah clearly used the religious sentiment and mentioned that a vote for the Jamaat-e-Islami is a vote for the Jana Sangh, a Hindu-chauvinist constituent of the Janata Party.’ National Conference leaders insisted that Islam would be in danger if the Jamaat-Janata alliance took power
2. **Religious Violence for Electoral Goals**: Political elites have had effect on the creation of hostilities between religious groups especially Hindus and Muslims. Earlier, the riots were a 2-3-day affair. But now the riots continue for weeks together. This shows that there is what may be called systematic and organized madness. They are pre-planned and politically-oriented, accompanied by identical means of rousing religious passions growth of anti-secular

**Conclusion**

Indeed in conclusion it can be said that the religion plays a significant role in Indian political system. The selection of candidates is done with an eye upon the presence of a religious majority in a particular constituency. The candidates do not hesitate to seek votes by playing the religious card with co-religious voters and the secular card with members of others religious communities. Use of religious places for political ends is also a standard practice; particularly during elections. The religionisation of social-political issues is again resorted to by political parties and other groups. The voters very often vote on religious considerations.