

# Multi-Confessional Societies in Russia and India: Models of Relations between the State and Religious Associations

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## Abstract

This paper explores an approach to understanding the optimum model of state-religious relations in secular multi-confessional countries, which is one of the most relevant issues of today. The purpose of the paper is to identify the features of a cooperative model of state-religious relations in Russia and India. The study is based on the comparative approach. Having analyzed the legal framework and the practice of implementing this model in Russia and India, we came to the conclusion that, despite the constitutional principles of the secular state and the equality of religious associations in the countries under study, certain elements of state religious preferences exist, however, they fall within the specified model. We believe, the information contained in the article will enable to better understand the causes of inter-confessional tensions and assist in finding ways to prevent conflicts involving religious communities not only in Russia and India, but also in other multi-confessional countries.

**Keywords:** state-religious relations, cooperative model, policy of positive discrimination, Russia, India

## 1. Introduction

The world today is searching for common approaches to understanding the optimum model of state-religious relations, due to the fact that at the turn of the twentieth—twenty first centuries, a series of contradictory and ambiguous trends were manifested in many secular multi-confessional countries: a shift from the basic ideas and principles of a secular state; the striving of religious organizations to influence the foreign and domestic life of the countries and peoples. The government agencies, in their turn, are turning to them for support in solving problems related to virtually all spheres of public life. The constitutional principles are diluted, such as the separation of religion and state, the secular nature of education in state educational institutions, the legal equality of religious organizations, and equal rights of believers and non-believers. There is evidence of discrediting scientific knowledge and secular non-religious ideology. All these lead to the forced clericalism of public and state institutions, to the politicization of religious organizations as well as to the strengthening of the role of religion in the political socialization of people.

Multi-confessional space of any country remains largely the “territory of State responsibility”. Russia and India are multi-confessional and multi-ethnic countries. In Russia, the religious majority are Orthodox Christians, about 85 percent (Vserossiyskaya perepis naseleniya Rossii, 2002), the vast majority in India are Hindu - 80.5 percent. In the structure of Indian population religious minorities constitute 18.42 per cent of the total population and account for 189,400 people (Brief analyses. Census of India, 2001). Five religious communities have the official status of minorities - Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis). Both in Russia and India the most numerous religious minority is Muslims. In Russia, they are variously estimated at between 9 and 15 million people, the share of Russian Muslims is 9-14 per cent comparable to the share of the Muslim minority in India which is 13.4 per cent or 138 million people.

Almost one-third or 30 percent of the total population of Russia, as well as the world in general, do not refer themselves to any confession, atheists (Filatov & Lunkin, 2005). India, on the contrary, is one of the few countries with a high level of religiosity (Census of India, 2001). Both Russia and India are secular states, having formed a cooperative model of state-confessional policies adopted in most Western countries. Systemic

principles of the secular state in the Russian Federation are: the separation of religion and state, and the inadmissibility of an all-state religion. In accordance with the Indian concept of secularism, the state is called to be equally objective with respect to many existing religions, instead of weaning religion from politics, since the latter guide the lives of their parishioners. The concept of “secularism” has not found any clear definition or legislative recognition in India. It is interpreted as equal patronizing attitude of the State towards all religions and communities (Mukhametzyanova-Duggal, 2011).

## 2. Methodological Framework

The binary comparative analysis enabled us to identify the distinctive features of state-religious relations in Russia and India. Basing on the methodological studies of N. A. Trophimchuk, M. I. Odintsov, F. G. Ovsienko, A. A. Nurullayev, Yu. P. Zuev, M. O. Shakhov, Miroshnikova, we used such key concepts as state-religious relations, the model of state-religious relations, a cooperation model, positive discrimination, etc.

State-religious relations are a set of historically evolving and changing patterns of interactions and relationships between the institutions of the state on the one hand, and institutional religious formations (religious communities, spiritual and administrative centers, religious institutions) on the other.

The model of state-religious relations is a stable amount of qualities and characteristics of a policy pursued by a separate state (for a given period of its political history) both in relation to confessional organizations and in relation to all the religious spheres in the life of society (religion, believers and their religious organizations / religious institutions).

A cooperation model is a model of state–religious relations which is conceptually and methodologically based on the close cooperation between the state and religious organizations under the formal separation. The legal basis for a cooperative model is the constitutional provisions along with the current legislation, as well as the agreements and contracts with religious organizations. In case of the cooperative type of relationships, the state is responsible for the protection of the leading confessions and cooperates with them in many areas of their activities.

Positive discrimination is a legalized way of providing an opportunity to participate in public and political life for those who, as a result of historical events, appeared to be destitute. Positive discrimination involves the use of different criteria for the selection of the representatives of the various groups as a way to overcome the existing social inequalities.

To achieve the objectives of the study, we used the comparative, interdisciplinary, systemic, dialectical, and axiological approaches; the concept of neo-institutionalism, justifying the interconnection and interdependence of the institutional structure of society and its emerging spiritual and religious context.

## 3. Results

The study is based on the comparative, interdisciplinary, systemic, dialectical and axiological approaches. It also engages with the concept of neo-institutionalism, justifying the interconnection and interdependence of the institutional structure of society and the emerging spiritual and religious context.

Russian practices. In accordance with the Constitution of Russia and the Federal Law of September 26, 1997 # 125 -FL “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations”, “the Russian Federation is a secular state. No religion may be established as official or obligatory” (Article 14, Part 1), “religious associations shall be separated from the state and equal before the law” (Article 14, Part 2). The government priority in its relations with religious organizations is recognition of a special role Orthodoxy played in the history of the country, in the development of its spirituality and culture, and expression of special respect for Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and other religions, which are an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia (Federalnyy Zakon “O svobode sovesti i o religioznykh ob’edineniyah”, 1997).

A cooperative model of state policy with respect to religious associations, established in Russia, is a model based on a differentiated type of legal regulation in the religious sphere. It suggests a relationship of state priority partnership with the traditional religions of Russian under the full implementation of the constitutional principles of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion for all religious associations not posing any threat to national sovereignty, territorial integrity, public order and security. In fact, it is reduced to a single formula—support for Russia’s traditional religions and confessions.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, almost all Muslim structures were forced to send their students to study abroad, where a number of these students, who did not know the specific features of Islam in Russia, gained “alternative” knowledge about Islam. Thus, they did not always adhere to the traditions of the Hanafi madhhab

which took root in the Middle Volga with the spread of Islam in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, the Volga-Urals Muslim community has seen the growth of radicalism, extremism and terrorism (Yunusova, 2011). Under the circumstances, public authorities have assisted Muslim organizations in shaping the national system of training ministers. As far back as in the Russian Empire, the authorities assisted in opening schools, being interested in training Muslim theologians within the Russian Empire and Russian Islam was not subjected to destructive external influences (Fayzullina, 2009).

In 2006, the nonprofit charitable foundation “The Fund for support of Islamic culture, science and education” was established on the initiative and with the support of the state. The Fund has brought together the funds for these purposes from various sources, including foreign ones. The Russian government has allocated funds and the Russian Department of Education has distributed between public universities the responsibility for carrying out measures to ensure the training of specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam and has financed their work. Recent experience has shown that the project is successfully implemented in the Russian regions, which are home to a traditionally Muslim population, particularly in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan.

It should also be noted that a rapidly developing international cooperation of the Republic of Tatarstan and Eurasian countries determines the objective need for highly qualified professionals with expertise in the history and culture of Islam, Islamic jurisprudence. The republic also feels the need for training professionals in this area. Under these circumstances, one of the main objectives of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University is to create an effective system of intercultural and interconfessional cooperation in the region (Fayzullina, 2013).

Indian practices. According to the Constitution of 1950 and 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment thereto, adopted in 1976, India is a sovereign socialist secular democratic state. India has developed the concept of secularism, which differs from the Western one. According to the classical American view on separation of church and state, no support of religions, even on a privileged basis, is provided. The state has no right to interfere in the affairs of religious organizations. According to D. Smith, secularism means strict separation of religion from the state for the sake of religious freedom and equality of citizens (Smith, 1963). This is the basic understanding of Western secularism.

Has the Western idea caught on in India? The answer is given by the Indian scientist R. Bhargava. In the author’s opinion, Article 15, 16, 25, 29 (2) and 325 of the Constitution meet Western definition. However, they do not indicate to strict separation of church and state. Articles 27 and 28 (1) require strict separation. Providing the President with the choice of not pledging his allegiance in the name of God, Article 60 confirms strict neutrality of the Indian Constitution. The constitutional state of India follows the model of Smith’s Western secularism. However, a further study of the Constitution shows that this view is erroneous. Article 30 (1), for example, recognizes the rights of religious minorities, and in contrast to other articles that are applied to citizens as individuals, it is a collective right. Article 30 (2) requires that the State should render assistance to educational institutions, founded and operated by religious communities. These articles represent a significant departure from the standpoint of “separation wall”. The Indian state adheres to a liberal approach to religion, however, it has not adopted the American approach (Gahrana, 1992). The concept of “secularism” is interpreted in India as an equal patronizing attitude of the State towards all religions and communities. According to the Indian scholar K. Gahrana, the model of the Indian secular state can be called “a collaborative secular state”.

State-religious relations in India aim at preventing religious and communal riots, consolidation of confessional society and support of religious minorities. The package of measures, introduced by the Indian government, includes religious minority representation in the management bodies and solution of socio-economic problems experienced by their poorest part as well as institutionalizing of the religious minority rights. The instruments of this policy are: 1) positive discrimination, 2) special government programs to raise the level of welfare of religious minorities, 3) the establishment and functioning of the state’s special institutions for protecting minority rights.

The policy of positive discrimination ensures reservation of places in state enterprises, government and education institutions for the backward sections of religious minorities. Special government programs aim to improve the educational and socio-economic level of the poor religious minorities. The central institution responsible for the implementation of these programs is the Ministry of Minority Affairs, created in 2006.

When the Indian National Congress (INC) came to power in 2004, the party leadership adopted a new program of 15 items to raise the welfare of the minorities (Prime Minister’s New 15 point Programme for the welfare of minorities, 2006). According to the official data, the adoption of the new program resulted in the increase of the workplaces belonging to the minorities in the central government (Haq, 2008). The Government of the United Progressive Alliance led by the Congress does a lot for the organization and regulation of Muslim pilgrimage

(Hajj). It has increased the number of pilgrims from India performing Hajj, and restored the subsidies abolished by the previous government (in 2013 the quota for Indian Muslims wishing to perform Hajj was 170.025 thousand people) (Hajj policy for hajj 2013-2017). The implementation of this policy demonstrates the effectiveness of the measures taken, but does not exclude the presence of negative points. The distribution of political rights and financial assistance on religious grounds cannot but cause unhealthy competition among religious communities.

The idea of the positive discrimination policy as a strategy of the state was first developed in the U.S. in the 1960s and was aimed at creating certain benefits for racial minorities, Afro-Americans and other representatives of non-white race. This strategy suggests that the rights of the dominant majority should be naturally respected as its culture is developed at the state level, and the rights of minorities are naturally infringed (Faundez, 1994).

The supporters of the Indian policy of positive discrimination do not have a single opinion of the criteria for backwardness of the population. M. Bhattacharya, exploring provisioning policy in West Bengal, came to the conclusion that "poverty and living standards, rather than caste should be the most important criteria in determining the backwardness of the population" (Bhattacharya, 1997).

According to S. Prakash, today, India faces such basic tasks in the area of positive discrimination as the statutory maximum of 50 percent limit for reservation throughout India (Prakash, 1997). A. Deshpande's study of positive actions in India has led the researchers to conclude that "nowhere in the world positive actions are sufficient enough to close the gap between the privileged and oppressed groups, however, there is also reason to believe that the gap would be even greater in the absence of positive actions" (Deshpande, 2006).

A number of Indian scientists and public figures offer an alternative system of positive actions. They believe that, despite the fact that caste is an important factor of discrimination in the hiring process in the Indian society, other factors such as economic conditions, geographical differences and education, should be also taken into consideration. The scientists argue that the best system of positive actions could be the one that took into account all factors preventing employment and restricting a person's ability. Significant contribution in this regard has been made by P. Agrawal, Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru (New Delhi) University (Agrawal), as well as by the scientists from the Center for the Study of Developing Societies I. Yadav and S. Deshpande who suggested that a multi-valued index of positive actions should be introduced (Deshpande & Yadav, 2006).

The opponents of the positive actions put forward the following arguments. Reservation on the basis of caste legitimizes caste division of the society. Reservation is a tool for achieving narrow political purposes. Allocation of quotas is a form of discrimination, which is the opposite of the right to equality. Before being expanded to an even greater number of groups, such policies should be carefully studied (Pitroda, 2006; Mehta, 2006).

The discussion regarding the policy of positive discrimination continues. A wide range of viewpoints on this issue suggests the necessity for further research. Moreover, both positive and problematic experience, gained in India, can be useful to the Russian society.

#### **4. Discussions**

Thus, as a result of the study, we revealed the characteristic features of state-religious relations in Russia and India. The Russian model is characterized by the presence of: 1) the rudiments of the religious four-tier gradation that existed in the Russian Empire: the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) on top of the confessional hierarchy and 2) the elements of the Soviet model of state regulation of the public spiritual life: attempts to control spiritual life of the society through the involvement of administrative resources (Muhametzyanova-Duggal, 2012). The features of a cooperative model, developed in India are as follows: 1) the presence of the colonial policy rudiments which places Hindus as a community of the majority in contraposition with Muslim community as a minority, 2) the ideas about the need to protect the rights of minorities, and 3) the constitutional collective rights of religious minorities and the use of the tools to protect them: positive actions and other special measures.

The range of research on the analysis of various aspects of state-religious relations in the countries under study is quite wide. Among the works of the comparative nature, V. der Veer, L. Pai, E. M. Miroshnikova, F. G. Ovsienko A. Prazauskas, N. G. Prussakovoy, P. V. Topychkanova should be noted. The issue of religious minorities is studied by a team of scientists from the Indian Council of Social Science Research: M. A. Davaid, K. N. Jahangir, S. Bos. The authors of many works on religious minorities in India are: V. V. Augustin, J. Massey, Z. Hassan and others. However, in spite of a seemingly large number and diversity of research on the religious factor and state-religious relations in Russia and India, common problems in the field of state-confessional and inter-confessional relations, as well as the issues of efficiency and optimization of the models found in Russia

and India, have not been sufficiently studied, which necessitated this study.

#### 4. Conclusion

The constitutional status of religion in multi-confessional countries under consideration is similar in many ways: Russia and India are both secular states, although the understanding of secularity or secularism is different which affects the state-religious relations. Each country, both Russia and India, have developed their own model of cooperative state and religious relations. In practice, the countries under study, despite the constitutional principles of a secular state and equality of religious associations, contain elements of state confessional preferences, which conform to the cooperative model of state-religious relations.

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