

Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices
Professor Arvind Sivaramakrishnan
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Lec 34 35:31

Fundamentalism Lec 2/3 - Contexts for emergence, Types of fundamentalism, Rejection of modernity, Manichaeon Vision. Problems

Right! Hello everyone. We're going to go ahead with the next lecture in our topic Fundamentalism and Theocracy, we've done theocracy, we've started on fundamentalism. We're going to move on today to look at contexts for the rise of fundamentalism and at some contemporary materials on it. We'll then do, possibly as the next lecture, a worked example on the, on some very fine analyses of the context and the operation of fundamentalism.

Okay, we're going to start by looking at contexts for the rise of fundamentalism. In what contexts does it arise? Well the reasons for the emergence and the spread and the hold of fundamentalism vary across faiths and cultures. It seems particularly to arise in societies which face what they, or groups within them, think are serious crises of identity or meaning. These can include the prospect of significant changes to the social structure or social order, and those reactions can be the same even though those, the changes or challenges to a social structure or order, can take very different forms. We'll take a look at the effects of some of these types of factors and types of context, for the rise of fundamentalism.

We'll start with significant changes in society. In the United States, Christian fundamentalists, who are overwhelmingly white Protestants, were very troubled by the expansion of the public sphere in the first three decades after the Second World War. I've covered these before; we'll just recap on them. The Supreme Court ruled against prayers in schools because these violated the constitutional right to religious freedom. The federal government greatly expanded urban development programs and funding for public education at every level, including returning veterans after the war.

Now many traditionally religious Protestants, many traditionally religious mainly white Protestants, felt their own ways, ways of life were being threatened. And their anxieties were greatly intensified by the invention of the contraceptive pill. That became available in the early 1960s, it enabled women to control their own fertility and to do so entirely of their own volition - and, if they wished, without anyone else's knowledge. Many other groups around the world, not just the American Protestant traditionalists, feared that, for a range of reasons, this form of women's empowerment would undermine what they thought of as the traditional family. Other

very significant causes for concern, according to the white Protestant fundamentalists, were, for example, the civil rights movement, which started in the early 1960s and resulted in very significant legislation introduced by John F. Kennedy and put through both Houses of Congress by his successor, President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Traditionalists and other conservatives in the United States saw these as threats to the social and economic order. Well the point is that significant constitutional changes were taking place as well. The earlier extensive network, very extensive network of laws and policies enforcing centuries of racial discrimination oppression against African-Americans was ruled unconstitutional. The Voting Rights Act meant African-Americans had a right to be on the electoral register.

Now this really did disturb white American Protestants, particularly in many of the former slave states. Those have strong and active fundamentalist groups and politicians - and since then, particularly in the last fifteen years or so, perhaps a dozen or fifteen years, their reaction has consisted in things like systematic voter intimidation. They bitterly resented the changes that meant African-Americans had a constitutional right to be on the electoral register. In the 2008 presidential election, groups of them attempted to challenge the validity of African-Americans' voter registration at the ballot box. This had become a systematic programme carried out by largely Republican voters, often members of the Republican Party, acting apparently on behalf of the state-level Republican parties.

Secondly, and this has been carried out at the legislative level in a great many states, many of the former slave states have strong and active fundamentalist groups and politicians. And they've devised voting registration procedures which make it particularly difficult for African-Americans to register to vote. The United States has no election commission, and the party in power in each state devises its own voter registration procedures. The state government of the day also conducts the election and counts the votes.

Several Republican-held states continue to pass laws which in effect make it even harder for African-Americans to register on the electoral roll. In 2013 the Supreme Court overturned the federal government's attempt to enforce federal monitoring, central government monitoring of such changes in states which have a history, a long history, of racial discrimination. Well, the New Christian Right have been part of groups associated with the Republican Party, who have also frequently claimed that electoral fraud was taking place on a huge scale, but these have

been comprehensively exposed as false. There've been barely a handful of significant episodes of electoral fraud in a very long time. This has been written about, for example, by Kennedy and Palast - that's Robert F. Kennedy, Junior, Greg Palast is a noted investigative journalist in the United States - and by other people such as Weiser and Norden.

So these were the kinds of scares that were raised, and we should remember the kinds of state level policies and practices that were started apparently with the direct and clear intention of, direct intention of making it as difficult as possible for African Americans to register to vote and then actually to vote.

Now the extent of the U.S. political Right's bitterness over the civil rights movement and the resulting legislation has not always been fully recognized. More recently, various analysts have provided sharp reminders though; for example, in 2016, the U.S. Republican Party's primary election campaign was explicitly racist. And the presidential election, which the Republican Donald Trump won, has been said to amount to a revival of the fear and hatred which white voters in the American Deep South have felt, not only since the Civil Rights laws were passed but also since the Democratic Party at its National Convention in 1948 committed itself to ending, I quote, "All racial, religious and economic discrimination."

That's from a, it's a citation by Fountain, writing in 2016. Fountain provides several examples; for example, Republican presidential candidates like Ronald Reagan have long used covert references, in the United States these are called dog-whistle phrases, to indicate their support for a return to the old racist ways. For example, Republican politicians' talk of States' rights refers - at least on the surface - to the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Under this amendment, all powers not specifically given by the Constitution to the Federal Government are reserved to the States or the people. The coded message here is that if they're elected, such politicians will use the Tenth Amendment to repeal the civil rights legislation, which of course is federal law and which when passed overrode the southern state's own racially discriminatory laws.

Now one important implication is that the process by which the New Christian Right was revived, and I suppose catalysed, was more complex than it has been made out to be. I'll cover this briefly here because we shall do this as a worked example in more detail. Right; the event that is less decisive is often said to be in the more decisive one; that was the United States Supreme Court ruling in 1973, in the case of *Roe versus Wade*. In this particular case the court

gave all women in the United States a right to an abortion in the first three months of pregnancy. After the first trimester, in the second and third trimesters there are qualifications to access to abortion and we shall we should look at those shortly. But for the first three months of pregnancy, in the first trimester, as a result of *Roe versus Wade*, as a result of that ruling, all women in the United States have a right to an abortion.

The ruling itself went almost unnoticed among Christian conservatives in the United States, most probably because the majority of them were Protestants and they saw abortion as a, an issue for Catholics. Some denominations, such as Southern Baptists, even passed a conference resolution confirming the possibility of abortion under conditions such as rape and incest or clear evidence of severe foetal deformity, ascertained evidence, carefully ascertained evidenced likelihood of damage to the mother emotional, physical or otherwise, mental or otherwise and so on.

But in 1979, religious opposition to the *Roe versus Wade* decision gained a great deal of momentum, because at that time the leaders of the New Christian Right suddenly saw that opposition to *Roe versus Wade*, to that decision, might serve as a cover, a convenient cover for something that even they - at that time at least - did not dare express openly in public, namely their extreme racism.

These leaders of the new Christian Right at the time were also deeply frightened by a Supreme Court ruling, by 8 to 1, which abolished the tax-exempt status of universities which openly barred African-Americans from admission. These were private universities and were not subject to the same legislation as state-funded institutions, publicly-funded institutions. That ruling was made in 1983. And after that the new Christian Right really exploited the opportunities *Roe versus Wade* gave them; they even made a propaganda film showing allegedly dead babies left on the shores of the Dead Sea - which were actually plastic dolls.

Well the New Christian Right has become and has certainly been a major force in United States politics. We have already seen that, for example, with the Mozerts and Hawkins County's textbooks, the textbooks published by Hawkins County, Tennessee. Presidents such as Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush were both fundamentalists. On his first day in office, George W. Bush issued an executive order banning United States aided NGOs in other countries from using even their own non-United States funds in any way even remotely connected with abortion. Such agencies could not even refer women to abortion services elsewhere. Purel

personally, I've known someone who worked for a United States international aid organization for a time and did tell me about some of the restrictions on what they could say to women who sought even contraceptive advice let alone advice on abortions.

Now the implication - and we'll see that this is not a minor implication - was that abortion was really only a rallying cry, and that the real motivations of the religious right in the United States are not to do with abortion, but to do with defending, promoting, and maintaining racial segregation. Now within the United States the New Christian Right dominated the Republican Party, was really dominant by the mid-80s, 1980s. If anything, its hold on the party has only strengthened since then. Furthermore, many states have legislated to restrict access to contraception and abortion services, and several states have also attempted to ban the teaching of evolution in publicly funded schools. If I'm not mistaken an attempt, one such attempt was made in the state of Kansas to pass legislation through the state assembly, but the legislation failed or may not even have been put to the house - I'm not sure.

What about other Supreme Court rulings? We have yet to see whether the New Christian Right can gain the same momentum from a particular case, when the Supreme Court ruled that the ban on same-sex marriages in Ohio, Michigan, and Tennessee was unconstitutional. Well, can the New Christian Right gain the same momentum from that particular Supreme Court decision? The case is called *Obergefell versus Hodges*, 2014. Will that case give them the same momentum as they got from the *Roe versus Wade* ruling? We don't know. One factor is that societal attitudes to the public expression and legitimation of same-sex relationships have changed very greatly since *Roe versus Wade*, we're now looking at 45, 46 years, since *Roe versus Wade*. So on this issue the American religio-political Right may simply not get the same kind of support they might have done earlier.

And therefore we perhaps should not be surprised that at, well I wrote this in 2016 or '17 and perhaps even today, some of the Republican candidates for presidential nominations are, for the presidential nomination are moving closer and closer to open statements of extreme racism; that may be because they form a smokescreen namely, I quote, no I don't quote, it's my own phrase, namely a hardline puritan sexual politics may be losing its effect, society is changing, and that kind of issue may simply not have the, as they say traction, that it used to have.

So what's the aim here? Remember, fundamentalism is religio-political; a central element of the United States New Christian Right's aims is winning electoral control of as many state

assemblies as possible - and of course winning majorities in both chambers of the federal legislature, that is, the United States Congress. Yes, all those institutions already exist, so that is an understandable strategy, but it marks a significant difference between the New Christian Right and certain other fundamentalist movements.

For example, Osama bin Laden apparently did not expect to see the establishment of a Caliphate or Khilafat, an Islamic or Islamist territory, in his own lifetime, to be more specific an Islamist territory. Al-Qaeda operated, and may still operate, presumably still operates as a network of relatively autonomous cells in many regions of the world rather than as a government of a territory it has taken over and gained control of. But ISIS still stands, still intends for theological reasons to establish its command over territory, that is, to create a state it can call a Caliphate or Khilafat. So ISIS is rather different from Al-Qaeda in that regard. Now, this is enormously important to ISIS because within its own territory it could implement the whole of its own version of Islamic law; that would include public institutions, even a consumer protection office and a system of public welfare organized on lines which according to ISIS are specified in the Qur'an.

Leaders of fundamentalist movements are often extremely knowledgeable about their foundational texts. I've drawn that from an excellent analysis in the *Atlantic Monthly*, if I am not mistaken by somebody called Wood, written in 2015. Of course, since I wrote that passage significant changes have occurred in ISIS's control over territory in parts of the Middle East, particularly Syria and parts of Iraq, and it's been said that they have lost control over the territory that they held; for a time their hold was really, very formidable, very substantial, really formidable.

Okay, so we've looked at societies facing rapid or radical social change as a context for the rise of fundamentalism. There's another type of context and that is colonialism. The effect of colonialism or imperialism on former subject cultures can be and - I am sure we've all seen effects of this - very, very long lasting. I've said it elsewhere and perhaps earlier in this course of lectures - the colonial hangover lasts a very long time. Postcolonial societies often retain a deep sense of inferiority in respect of their former oppressors and that can make - people, make movements very attractive when they seek to reassert a precolonial identity, whatever that might mean.

Now the character of colonial rule is a significant factor here; quite apart from maintaining political and economic domination, the colonials may well have intended to inculcate a sense of cultural inferiority. For example, it has emerged publicly that enormous amounts of British documents, millions apparently, showed the extent of malice and racial prejudice which colonial officials had towards non-white subjects of the empire. In addition, the use of torture against such subjects was recorded and has emerged in public, for example in a case in the English High Court about nine or ten years ago when survivors of the Mau Mau Rebellion who were herded into concentration camps and tortured won the right to sue the British government in the English High Court.

But it has also emerged that British officials, often under orders, destroyed millions of the relevant documents as the colonial territories moved towards independence. So the colonial hangover was perhaps intentionally inculcated. It was certainly very effective; the colonial strategy of imbuing colonial subjects with a sense of racial, cultural, political and every other kind of inferiority was highly effective and the colonials knew this, and the fact that they knew it, and were, they knew how dangerous it was if this came to light. Those two facts are confirmed by the extent of the destruction of colonial documents wherever the British went; this almost certainly applies to the Dutch, Belgian, and French empires as well.

Another factor is that many former colonial countries have we quickly become corrupt, have often become brutal dictatorships. For example, in Egypt the oppression inflicted by Hosni Mubarak's regime was one of the main reasons for the resurgence in the 1990s of the Muslim Brotherhood; that had been founded in 1928 and underwent a considerable resurgence in the 1990s because the Brotherhood soon gained a reputation in that period in the 90s for being almost an alternative local administration in several parts of the country. It was above all not corrupt and when people went to food supply stores and so on and remarked on this, if I am not mistaken they were told by the people running these, no, it's our faith, we do things straight because our faith requires that of us. This was of course immensely attractive in contrast to a corrupt and often vicious and brutal military regime.

Well, Mubarak was forced to leave office as part of the Arab Spring in 2011, and in 2013 the Muslim Brotherhood, Ikhwan al-muslimin, won Egypt's first democratic elections, but the Brotherhood was soon overthrown in a military coup, and the military junta or [xunta], which removed President Mohamed Morsi, who was also elected, are still in office although a

nominally elected president, Mohamed Fattah el-Sisi, is in office and is, well, nominally an elected president.

Mohamed Morsi was tried and sentenced to death, but appealed the sentence, if I'm not mistaken, he actually died during the course of one of his court appearances, of other causes.

Now in other post-colonial countries we could see significant failures to reform colonial institutions of state and to reform vast areas of highly repressive colonial law. These have both contributed to the state's failure to fulfil many of its promises and they have thereby given fundamentalist movements added momentum. For example, the government of India did repeal the colonial Armed Forces Special Powers Act in 1949, but reintroduced it for six months in 1958. That was a stated period during which the reintroduced Act would be in force; the Act remains in force today, in 2019. It has been imposed in several states with, in many of them, no apparent prospect that it will be lifted let alone repealed.

In addition, any rise in fundamentalism in one faith tends to encourage similar developments in other faiths. Electoral success nevertheless is a powerful motivating factor. The 2014 general election victory by the BJP in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party, may well have emboldened various state governments to extend a form of assertive Hinduization. For example, in 2015 the Maharashtra State government banned the slaughter of cattle, but not water-buffaloes. Here too, economic oppression cannot be ruled out, and a class or caste element in the policy, which now has counterparts in several other Indian states, has also been publicly identified, publicly spoken about or written about.

So - colonialism is one factor in the rise of fundamentalism, and a further factor is that many post-colonial governments have either collapsed into military dictatorships or collapsed into corruption, incompetence, inefficiency, and no doubt worse. Well, could there be another form of colonialism at work here as well, that has contributed to fundamentalism? Neo-colonialism has been mentioned as one, and a specific form of it has contributed to Islamist or Islamic fundamentalism, which globally seems to get more current attention than other forms of fundamentalism. The Ottoman Empire, which had been founded in 1299, finally collapsed in 1923. And the world's then largest colonial powers, Britain and France, divided much of the Middle East and North Africa arbitrarily. They paid no heed [to], took no account of tribal occupation, nomadic roots, other existing customs and practices and so on. In addition, Dutch colonials in East Asia and French colonials in North Africa had long banned the then vigorous

Islamic sciences and Islamic medicine even on pain of death; one result was that religious authority came to be the preeminent authority in Muslim-majority societies, despite fierce challenges from within over a long period of time.

I draw those arguments from Ziauddin Sardar and from Christopher de Bellaigue. Now in effect the banning of, both of those argue that the banning of the Islamic Sciences in Muslim-majority societies by colonial powers meant that science never really emerged as a spiritual and social challenge in the ways it may have done elsewhere. The upshot was that religious authority came to be, as I have said, the preeminent authority in such societies.

Further political humiliation came, that is the only word for it, with the Western-enforced creation of the state of Israel in historical Palestine, after which, after that, the rights of the Palestinians stated in the Balfour Declaration 1917, were simply ignored. I have drawn those arguments from Ghada Karmi and from Ilan Pappé.

Now the newly elected, newly, I beg your pardon, the newly created countries, as I've already noted, often turned into monarchies or dictatorships. It's very likely that many of the governments there served as instruments or proxies for the major Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union - but the resulting repression and corruption in the regions involved, particularly in Islamic majority regions, only strengthened the appeal of Islamic fundamentalism. For a time, nationalist leaders, like Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, offered the promise of better, but Nasser's attempt to create a pan-Arab sensibility and a form of Arab nationalism both failed.

Of course, these developments need not have resulted in strengthened fundamentalism alone. For a time between 2011 and 2013, the several popular uprisings which came to be called the Arab Spring seemed to raise the prospect of renewal based on democracy rather than fundamentalism, but among the states concerned, only Tunisia has managed to hold two successive democratic elections. The second was held in 2014 and in this one the moderate Islamist party, Ennahda, was voted out in favour of the liberal secularist Nidaa Tounes party by 86 seats to Ennahda's 69; there are a total of 217 seats in the Tunisian Parliament. In much of the rest of the region protest has been brutally repressed, and in both Syria and Yemen, terrible civil wars continue with the involvement of several other countries. You'll be aware of these from the current news pages. Several hundred thousand civilians have been killed and perhaps ten million displaced in Syria and Yemen. So colonialism and neocolonialism add to rapid social change or transformation as contexts for the rise of fundamentalism.

There's another context where fundamentalism can and does emerge, and that is democracy. That may seem surprising. How can democracy provide the context for the rise of religious fundamentalism? But fundamentalist movements around the world are bitterly hostile to democracy, excuse me, or, as in the United States, have enormous problems over even reasonably functional democracy. The United States attempted perfectly seriously to extend rights to every United States citizen irrespective of faith, ethnic or racial origin, class, and so on. We have already seen how the civil rights movements were a significant catalyst for the New Christian Right in the United States, but they had a smokescreen, they used the smokescreen of *Roe versus Wade* to disguise their real intentions.

Now why is fundamentalism, why are fundamentalist movements so afraid of, so frightened of democracy? Well, the fact is that democracy offers an undoubted prospect of material improvement for marginalized or oppressed groups and classes. We've seen that the abolition of the entire body of racist laws in the United States Southern States, also called the Jim Crow laws, in the 1960s was probably the decisive motivator for the New Christian Right. Secondly, democracy, in almost all the many forms in which it exists today, almost always brings about a secularization of everyday life in everyday ways. For example, in much of India we've already encountered this one, urban authorities require religious festivals and other gatherings to switch off loudspeaker systems by 10:30 at night. In the United Kingdom, which is an Anglican state, many churches have for a long time refrained from ringing their bells early on Sunday mornings. Broadly speaking, the democratic state - sometimes through its courts - decides the limits of specific religious practices and for the rest leaves it to people to decide how they will practise their faith within those limits; and citizens are free not to practise any faith or even to deny all faiths.

Democracies as we have them give people the freedom to think and decide both public and private issues, and that principle obtains irrespective of how well or badly any given democratic state upholds it. This potentially undermines all religious authority. Fundamentalism by its very nature has to reduce all of life to a few rigid prescriptions and therefore has to exclude from membership, membership of humanity, all who even begin to question such prescriptions, no matter what their reasons are for questioning them whether within the movement or outside it.

Fundamentalism has to exclude anyone who questions its rigid prescriptions from membership of humanity. Well, that concludes our topic, fundamentalism. It concludes my exposition of

theocracy and fundamentalism. We shall stop there and do a worked example in detail. We'll pause for a little while here, and we'll resume with, we'll go on to a worked example.