

SYNCRETIZING PEACE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF SYNCRETIC ISLAM IN INTERRELIGIOUS HARMONY IN INDIA

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Abstract

This paper tries to understand the role played by syncretic traditions in maintaining peace and harmony in India. The article looks at the development of syncretism in South Asian Islam and its impact on interreligious cohesion and tolerance between Hindus and Muslims. The article traces the history of pluralist thinking in Indian traditions and the development of syncretism in that context. Indian Muslims have been borrowing from other traditions throughout history and that has led to greater social cohesion and harmony. The emergence of puritanism in Islam and Hinduism has put these syncretic traditions on a defensive and enabled the growth of fundamentalism and the ensuing social discord and communalism. While discussing the problems of syncretism in detail, the paper proposes that strong state support is vital for the strengthening of these syncretic traditions that foster peace and social harmony by creating a society based on pluralism and tolerance.

Keywords: Syncretism, Pluralism, Communalism, Peace

Introduction

The notion of culture and its sociology has for long been the subject of intellectual curiosity of a large body of thinkers. With the rise of postmodernism, that celebrates the discourse of context and subjectivity, this focus has largely shifted towards the study of cultural interpenetration and mutual borrowing amongst different cultures, traditions and religious communities. This has been instrumental in rejecting the notion of culture as an entity that has historically been seen as “too stable, bounded and homogenous” (Stewart, 1999). The study of syncretism has gained academic significance partly because of this reason and partly because of its role in creating and consolidating social harmony and helping in the mitigation of conflicts. Syncretism is a cultural process, which despite the puritanist

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