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## Book Review

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**Anil Kumar Vaddiraju**, *Reason, Religion and Modernity: Gadamer–Habermas Debate*. Singapore: Springer, 2024. 57 pp. ₹3,215.75 (Kindle Edition), ₹3,385.00 (Paperback). eBook ISBN: 9789819707034, Softcover ISBN: 9789819707027

In developing countries, religion and tradition have been dynamics, ubiquitous and concentrated dimensions of consciousness, thinking and critical deliberation. However, society's nature and progress deviated according to their stint and establishment. The prominent refrain of social thinkers' consideration remained focused on these two proportions, whether religious and traditional beliefs create a progressive society or not. Because most of the democratic states have adopted the concept of secularism in their constitutions, despite this, from Western Greece to modern thinkers, it is contending that tradition and religion have widespread values of humanism that are distinctive to the developing states. Social scientists have widely argued that society, state and individual nature in their ideologies differ from developed states (Kumar, 2024). They boycotted religion and tradition or gave a new form of progress through their declarations. Equivalent disagreements exist between two Western thinkers, Gadamer and Habermas, which have been critically reckoned in this book. The book *Reason, Religion and Modernity: Gadamer–Habermas Debate* examines the principles of religion, tradition and modernity through Marxian theory, modernization theory and hermeneutics to understand their relevance in a developing society. The Enlightenment Movement in Western Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries shifted the emphasis from religion to reason (p. 7). After the progress in science, technology and urbanization changed the paradigm of society. Social and political change accelerated after the end of colonialism and the development of liberalization in developing countries. However, the era of post-secularism and post-truth has become the preceding basis of discussion of religion and traditional politics because, in this book, India has been given particular importance among developing countries. Political parties observing left- and right-wing ideologies have been based on social sensitivity to religion, culture and tradition.

This book has seven chapters that explain the three main principles of recrudescence and the tenacious persistence of tradition and religion in the context of developing countries' politics. Liberalism and Marxism have been the primary bases of discussion because liberalism refuted the traditions and conventions and described man as rational, moral, religious and freedom of conscience. Liberals are against religious monopolies and regard each individual as equal and unique. Therefore, liberalism promotes diversity, tolerance and multiculturalism and shapes the state's nature as secularism. However, religion and tradition have a significant role in the post-secularism debate.

The book emphasizes Marxism, rejecting religion and ideology, and explains society according to a classless and mechanical structure. Marxism sees religion as an ideology, though it should be said that the term is broader and more in comparison than religion. At the same time, class and caste have existed in developing societies (p. 21). However, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, religious frenzy

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increased only in the states that believed in Marx's concepts. Apart from this, the states that believed in liberalism started imposing restrictions by adopting protectionist policies for their culture and civilization. The second necessary explanation is that despite the development of modernity and technology, rural society shifted to urbanization, agricultural society became dependent on industrialization, and scientific instruments replaced traditional efficacy. Chapter two of this book discusses that third-world countries' backwardness or underdevelopment was the creation of colonial exploitation (p. 14). That is why religion and tradition exist.

The book evaluates that after the French Revolution, when the values of liberal democracy began to develop and colonialism was initiated to end, new controversies of religion and tradition began to expand because, in liberal democracy, it had become an individual issue. However, when liberalism was recast into capitalism and, through globalization, defined society as one of uniformity, Marxism delivered a new discourse of modernity (p. 18). Marxist thinkers interpreted it differently, focusing on Marxist criticism of religion and the implication of religious-cultural tradition as ideology. The academic discussion of the original criticism of Marx's ideology and the later criticisms of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser within the same theoretical tradition is the central theme of the third chapter of this book. Marx first described religion and the state as the reasons for labour exploitation, but this theory explained only one aspect of religion and society. This is why Gramsci, in giving the concept of cultural hegemony, conveyed that the rule of the state and the elite class does not exist because religion is dominant but because civil society intellectuals extended consequential values (p. 23). According to Gramsci, such values are reproduced in a society where religion and traditions are unrestricted and concocted for all human interests. However, Louis Althazar, while delivering an essential explanation of the instruments of the state, confirmed the fact that the state has miscellaneous mechanisms through which it develops its configurations, which contain educational instruments, family instruments, religious instruments, political instruments, cooperative instruments, information and one will get a rough idea of news equipment, publishing and distribution equipment and cultural equipment. Because, as is the primary refrain of this book, the words religion and 'tradition' have been used interchangeably. If, for Marxism, religion is a vague ideology, so are traditions. And invariably, more religious traditions. They are often regarded as reactionary opinions and procedures that discourage the working classes from their liberation, which need to evaporate in the procedure or, consequently, of revolution.

The volume explores the issue of controversy in this concept, which is whether religion is pertinent in modern society. Such a multidimensional interpretation of this discourse is the central theme of this book because both proportions nevertheless exist in political and social discourse in developing societies. To understand this controversy, the ideologies of Gadamer and Habermas have been integrated concisely in chapter four of this book. The principle of hermeneutics is necessary because it delivers a multidimensional discussion by compiling the interpretation of religion and tradition from general to detailed facts. Hans-Georg Gadamer is a traditional social thinker who compiled his ideas with hermeneutics (p. 28). The hermeneutic tradition is primarily involved with understanding and analyzing texts, initiated with the Protestant Reformation, in which individuals interpreted the Bible without the church's and priests' supremacy. Thus, this tradition originates in the Protestant theological tradition of interpreting the Bible. Hermeneutics is a method, an epistemology and a way of being itself. Gadmer has examined society and religion based on this theory and proclaimed that religion has a vital role in society, as do other values.

The author has critically examined how hermeneutics began as a theological and philological method of interpretation. According to Gadamer, all human acquaintances are historical because they are effectively situated in history. They appreciate social, cultural, political and all other prerequisites. Furthermore, when they understand these conditions, they bring their subjectivity. Moreover, according to

Gadamer, this subjectivity is also historical. He is talking about numerous temporalities and spatial cultures. When one comes from one culture with one pre-structure of learning and discovers another culture with another pre-structure of knowledge, what happens is apprehending—a fusion (p. 38). Thus, understanding is always an experience of something. According to Gadamer, understanding is reaching a consensus.

A shared process for valuing differences. Gadamer refers to this as the ‘fusion of horizons’. In his contemporary writing, Habermas criticizes the prevailing beliefs that cannot be rationalized regarding the Enlightenment concept of reason while endorsing the Enlightenment conception of emancipation. Habermas is among the many brilliant minds he referred to as the post-secular condition of society today. He has been forced to think about or reevaluate the secularization theory in three scenarios. Habermas grapples with the changing global conditions and the place of religion in them, mainly focusing on Christianity and Western civilization. Eastern faiths are not closely linked to Habermas. His concept of the post-secular situation is essential because it tackles the human condition of secular, modern presence and its implications. The prevalence of religion over secularism is the second issue. These two seem to be the primary characteristics of India’s liberal democracy. The limitations of post-secularism are addressed in chapter six, along with how it varies from the idea of the freedom to practice one’s religion, belief and worship. Nothing about it was different. It also looked at how these liberal ideals quickly fade into disappointment in majoritarian democracies—at the same time, agreeing to discuss post-secularism theory concerning ideological advancement.

The book evaluates human consciousness, which is regarded as fundamental in deliberative democracy, and Habermas is a fervent proponent of this system. Whether a tradition or practice is essential or not, its core is the democratic debate that gives rise to fresh ideas for increasing the state and society. The theories of scholars like Habermas became increasingly relevant when the liberal political system began to address post-secularism and the concept of secularism began to erode. Habermas sets forth the notion of post-secularism in the context of growing religious consciousness and conflict in the modern world. Examine how the liberal understanding of the right to religion and conviction differs from post-secularism. Although the idea of the liberty to practice one’s religion or faith under a liberal constitution has a long history, post-secularism has developed from its failure, the global secularization movement. Post-secularism affirms the right to religion, so it is strongly tied to the older liberal idea of that proper (p. 34).

This book has provided comprehensive knowledge about the Gadamer–Habermas Debate, but it has not included other relevant philosophers in this field, and the author has not clearly defined religion, reason and modernity in general concepts. Philosophers like Georges Bataille have given theory and several dimensions to understand religion, and Andrew Feenberg has provided various concepts regarding modernity to help people understand it in general. The author has not mentioned this.

Ultimately, this book attempts to comprehend the global concept of religion and tradition because of how a new discussion of religion is emerging globally; it becomes necessary to understand it from this perspective. In the new era of science and modernity, such discussions have developed a new perspective on understanding society (Kumar, 2024). Marxian theory, however, does not. One has to relate the religious revolution to the political economy of the day to comprehend religious reality in terms of Marxian philosophical thought. Even though Habermas’s attempt to translate the sacred intuitions and truths of religion into secular enlightenment values and universalist egalitarian values of secular enlightenment into religion is extremely pertinent today, it may not be appropriate from the vantage point of ‘methodological atheism’, which Habermas purports to espouse. On the contrary, Habermas reduces his discourse to seeing religion as unconnected to political economy matters (Vaddiraju, 2024). The author has created this book from a philosophical perspective and compiled concrete ideas from political and social discussions. Because human consciousness is multidimensional and cannot be understood through only one

ideology, new explanations have been made in this book through three significant theories. Its journey from beginning to end makes it clear that traditions are useful for society because they instil consciousness in humans, but traditions should take human life towards progress. At the same time, religion is a dimension adopted not only by the politics and society of developing countries but also by the politics and society of developed countries. However, religion is a person's faith. Nevertheless, everyone should be given equal importance as their religion. This book is most important for the academic world and those interested in understanding various perspectives of society, state and philosophy.

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