Religious Diversity

Name

Institution

**Summary**

This assignment is concerned with the exploration and documentation of religious diversities in two states with varying religious majority and minorities—Egypt (Islamic) and United States (Christian). It will be analyzed exactly what defines religion, how religious diversity is quantified, how both the state possess different proportions of religious minorities, how state legislation protects the rights of minorities in prospective states and to what extent discriminatory practices are being carried out at social and institutional level. After deliberate contemplative analysis, in the conclusion section, significant inferences will be deduced from the whole textual activity. In a nutshell, this paper will provide the reader with the profound and research based information about how religious beliefs direct the state legislations, how religion fosters human rights and how discriminatory practices are resulted due to religious diversity particularly at social and workplace scenario.

Religion is referred to as cultural system encapsulating set of designated actions and practices, organizations, ethics, prophecies, sanctified places, texts, morals and world views that conjoin humanity to spiritual, transcendental and supernatural elements. However, the term religion and its prospective elements lack universality—its definitions and views possess imminent cultural variations (Morreall & Sonn, 2013).

A religion may have following elements: transcendence, supernatural being, faith, sacred things or places and divine—providing norms for social, political and economic life. Religions have their distinctive practices including concepts of public service, dance, art, music, prayer, meditation, matrimonial services, funerary concepts, initiations, trances, feasts, festivals, sacrifices, commemoration, sermons, rituals and other cultural aspects for shaping human life (Paul & Peter, 2010).

As far as their histories are concerned, they preserve them in form of narratives and stories in sacred scriptures, holy places and symbols aimed at providing meaning and outline to disoriented human life. It may contain symbolic narratives, stories and explanations with the purpose of elaborating meaning of human life, its origin, universe and its phenomenon and other spiritual guidance. Religion researchers are in view that belief is the basis of each religion which enables the adherents to remain determined particularly to those phenomenon which are not visible and observable (Paul, 2018).

Religious diversity is the concept referring to the diversity among religious beliefs and practices. In the remote times, when there were no means of universal communication and interactions, religious diversity was known by smaller and isolated communities. With the technological advancements, information about different religious beliefs, rules and practices have enabled individuals to explore other religions particularly due to travelling, publishing and immigration (Johan, 1924). As a result, thoughtful people have got much more religious diversity to explore and reflect.

With the profound contemplation of religious phenomenon, various approaches have emerged to quantify the nature of religious beliefs. One of these approaches in pluralistic approach stressing the idea that all the religions are bound together, communicating the similar messages for human wellbeing and righteousness. This approach quantifies all the religions and their beliefs parallel on the basis of their purpose of creation (Morreall & Sonn, 2013). On the other hand, the contradictory; inclusivistic approach stresses more on the significance and righteousness of single religion along with the trivial emphasis on the pluralistic approach—the other religions still have some value (Morreall & Sonn, 2013).

Sociologists encounter multifaceted challenges in comparing and contrasting religions particularly regarding definition of diversity. Diversity can be defined in variety of ways including the extent to which society is divided into recognizable aggregations, the visibility and influences of minority groups in civil society and the degree of dominance of minority groups (Paul & Peter, 2010). These approaches are frequently used by anthropologists and social psychologists to study religious diversity.

The above presented textual activity clarifies the concept of religion and religious diversity. Next, a comparison between two nations having different practice religions will be executed. Egypt is selected as a Muslim majority country with various minorities whereas USA will be selected as a Christian majority country with Muslim, Jews, Hindu and other minorities. The proportion of religious majorities and minorities in both the states in as follows:

Egypt is a Muslim majority country that links Middle East with the North Africa and dates back to the Pharaohs times. In Egypt, various aspects of social, economical and political life are controlled by religion which is endorsed by the state law. Egyptians predominately follow Islam with the notable Christian population because their history demonstrates that Christians were converted into Muslims during Ottoman reign (Moheb, 2010). The 2006 religious census estimates that Egypt has the Sunni Muslims majority—approximately 80-94%. The second largest religious group is Coptic Christians with the percentage ranging from 5-15% (PewRC, 2007; Michael, 2011).

The 2010 PEW-TEMPLTON Global Religion Futures Project of PWE research center estimated that the proportion of Sunni Muslims in the Egypt is approximately 94.9% with 5.2% Christians, 1% Jewish, Buddhists and other religion adherents. This estimation indicates that Christian population in Egypt is declining. Most of the Christians in Egypt relate to the native Coptic Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodox Christian church and Alexandria. Other Christian groups include Catholic, Anglican, Maronite, Armenian Apostolic and Greek Orthodox (PewRC, 2011).

According to the 1948 census, the third major minority group; Jews, comprised 65,639 of the total population including Karaites. Jews were seen participating in various social, political and economical walks of life including Yaqub Sanu, Abu Naddara, Dawoud Husni, Leila Mourad and Togo Mizrahi. In 2016, Jewish population was believed to shrink comprising the number fewer than 26. According to the local non-governmental organization (NGO), total number of Jews in Cairo is 6 that are all female (HRW, 2005).

Media estimation indicates that the number of individual belonging to Bahai faith is 2000-3000. Dawoodi Bohra Community is another small group containing Indian nationals ranging from 550-700 in numbers (HRW, 2005). Both Christianity and Judaism are constitutionally recognized religions in Egypt whereas unrecognized religions include Ahmadiya Islam, Bahai’i faith, Hinduism, atheism and agnosticism (HRW, 2005).

In the Egyptian constitution, freedom of belief is described as absolute and Islam is embraced as a state religion. The primordial source of law there is Sharia Law in which discriminatory practice based on the religion is termed as “incitement to hate” and considers it as a serious crime. In addition, constitution draws a conceptual yet influential boundary in relation to the freedom of practice of religious rituals and customs and establishment of worship places for the adherents of Christianity, Islam and Judaism (Auf, 2014). Their constitution also prohibits exercising any political activity, driving any political agenda and forming political parties on the basis of religion. Hence, principles of Sharia are enshrined as the most primary source of law making (Auf, 2014).

Their law states that they can willingly change their religion and Muslims who were not born Muslims and converted to Islam later in their stages are allowed to change their religion freely because government recognizes their identity after conversion (Constitution.ORG, 2018). Consistent with the Sharia law, in order to marry a Muslim woman, non-Muslim man is required to convert to Islam first however female belonging to Christian or Judaism does not require conversion to marry Muslim man. Deviating from the above mentioned marriage law, children are considered illegitimate as their marriage is unrecognized in Sharia. Marriages of only Muslims, Jews and Christians are recognized by the constitution with the proper documentation from Clerical offices (Constitution.ORG, 2018).

Panel code states that if religion is used to promote extremism and anarchy through inciting strife, harming national unity and denigrating Islam, Christianity or Judaism, he will have to suffer serious penalties of 6 months to 5 years imprisonment (Constitution.ORG, 2018). As far as education is concerned, “Principles of Islam” is a mandatory subject for Muslims throughout the academic span whereas for Christians “Principles of Christianity” is mandatory subject for Christians in all grades. Religious identity determination is based on the official designations, not on students, their parents and caregivers (Constitution.ORG, 2018).

Constitution-sponsored National Council or Human Rights is aimed at strengthening the security of humans regardless of religion, ensuring their rights, raising awareness of human rights and basic freedoms (Constitution.ORG, 2018). This council investigates the reports regarding alleged discriminatory practices in social and workplace scenarios.

In practice, according to media reports and locals, authorities does not seem to follow constitution as many Churches and Jewish places are sometimes subjected to enclosing without an apparent cause and authorities continue to mistreat recently converted Christians, and Jews physically and mentally (HRW, 2010). This practice affects the full fledge implementation of Sharia law as the protector of human rights. Many citizens and Muslim Clerics are charged with the denigration of religions particularly in rural areas (USDS, 2017).

In 2013 and 2016, mob violence in Saints Peter and Paul Church in Cairo resulted in killing 29 innocent people, which is an ironic depiction of human rights deterioration and discrimination against religious beliefs. However, government accomplished the rebuilding of approximately 78 churches and other properties owned by Christians (HRW, 2010; Martin, 2013). Moreover, a Bahai couple was given the marriage license for the first time without any religious affiliation which was designated at their identity card. In addition, government served to preserve the heritage and religious places of Jews including renovation and protection of Alexandria historic synagogue.

Al-Azhar is the government’s primary institution for defending and spreading Islam and Islamic doctrine, whose involvement was found in anti-Semitism statements through school text books. Due to this, it was considered that such books are involved in propounding the notion that Islam is superior to other religions and whoever is out of Islamic circle is inferior in all aspects

Government also ensured the protection of occupational rights of Christians and Jews specifying separate quota for them in the governmental institutions and directed private and non-government organizations to follow the same guidelines (USDS, 2017), however, private employers do not prefer hiring non-Muslims due to their perceived cultural barriers. Individuals with other religions are given less prioritization in employment sectors (Martin, 2013).

Another problematic area is the prevalent rationality of common men according to which women are weak, subservient and must be limited to household chores while educated, intelligent and outside working women are considered inappropriate and considerable threat to the societal norms (Seth, 2017). This concept is embraced more in rural and uneducated areas and comparatively declined perpetuation of this concept is seen in urban and educated areas with greater educational and occupational facilities. Due to these reasons, women are having limited access to education, healthcare, justice, employment and healthcare as compared to men (Seth, 2017).

In the United States, religion is characterized by the diverse religious beliefs and practices because individuals belonging to various religions flourished under conductive migratory policies. U.S is Christian majority country whose followers reported that religion is playing a determinant role in their personal, social and economical life—which is quite unique notion when we talk about developed countries.

The 2016 census estimated that 73.3% population of United States is comprised by Christians out of which, Protestants comprise 48.9%, Catholics comprise 23.0%, Mormons Comprise 1.8% population. As far as minorities are concerned; the second largest religion in U.S is Judaism with 2.1% proportion. Third largest religion is Islam with 0.9% population followed by fractional proportions of Hindus, Buddhists, Baha’i faith, Rastafarians, Jainism adherents and Sikhs (Daniel & Ribert, 2017).

Heading towards United States religious diversity, is it a Christian majority country having sizeable Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and other religious populations. Despite having clear-cut majority of Christians, U.S.A does not have any official religion. The constitution of USA is entirely secular document; it does not mention anything about Christianity and Jesus Christ. Even in the first constitutional amendment, religion is mentioned only twice as “respect the establishment of religious followership” and “prohibiting religious tests for Public employment” (Daniel & Ribert, 2017).

Therefore, the sole development of constitution was based on the national sovereignty and principles of perceived human wellness—pluralistic approach is actively implemented here. Hence, they found no basis to discriminate against religious beliefs. According to the Title-VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964), discrimination against individuals based on their religion in the workplace for hiring, firing and other employment terms and conditions is prohibited. Employer is directed to allow employees to practice their prospective religion unless it creates any hardship for employer (AUO, 2017).

This practice encapsulates the flexible schedules in terms of religious grooming practice and leaves for religious observance for example, allowing Muslim women to wear Hijab, allowing Muslims to leave early in the Fasting month, and Sikhs to uncut their hair and beard (AUO, 2017). It also includes accepting religious prohibitions e.g., Muslims not eating in the month of Ramadan. According to U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), during the years 1992 and 2003, a substantial rise in the number of complaints rose to 1388 concerning workplace discrimination on the basis of religion.

During the year 2011, these complaints crossed the number of 4000 and most of the complaints were filed by Muslim and Sikh employees particularly after the terrorist attacks of 2001 (Oswald, 2005). Besides workplace scenario, after the incident of 9/11 World Trade Center attack, American Muslims reported that it was the most difficult time for them to be Muslims as reported by the U.S department of Justice (Oswald, 2005). Over twenty instances of discrimination were reported by Muslims as post 9/11 responses (PweRC, 2011).

Gallup poll conducted in 2011 indicated that after 2001 attach, there has been reported a massive elevation in the concept of “*Islamophobia*” characterized by out-of-proportion hatred, fear and hostility towards Islam and its followers resulting from biased and negative stereotyping of Muslims (Christopher, 2015). Due to this, Muslims suffered to a great degree with respect to their social, economic and political life.

The above presented factsheet clarified the idea how religious approaches are followed by the two selected countries and how individuals face discrimination in social, occupational and political life based on the contradictory beliefs. Egypt follows Sharia law which assures the rights of religious individuals considering them humans and stresses freedom of religion of Christians and Jews only because both the religions share common similarities with Islam in terms of their prospective deities. Egypt does not entertain the religious freedom of other religious beliefs and practices. United States on the other hand, follows pluralistic religious approach stressing equally on the significance of all religions. There is no official religion in U.S due to which the most idealistic expected situation is discrimination-free social, occupational and political environment, however, substantial degree of discrimination is prevalent there particularly for Muslims. In a nutshell, religion is a strong determinant of humans’ life and all the religions ensure and prioritize human rights however, religious extremism is a great hurdle in this way!

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