

**Re-Emergence of Revivalist
Trends in Turkish Polity**

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Modern Turkey emerged out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, which was famous for its grandeur and which extended to three continents. Religion was the cohesive bond which cemented different ethnic entities and religious groups together. The internal conflicts and the external factors destroyed and disintegrated the Ottoman Empire which then rose again in the form of a legitimate nation state 'Turkey'.

Historically and geographically Turkey's location itself presents a challenging duality of tradition and modernity, urbanity and simplicity, uni-lateralism and pluralism earnestness and tolerance. There is an unresolved unease among the various conflicting forces that is the traditional Islamists and secularists. Like other Muslim countries, there is a critical polarisation of westernised modernists and traditionalists.

While modernists see no other way out other than adopting wholesale modern civilization through its various manifestations like speaking English, adoption of Western culture and education. At the same time the traditionalists inherently pan Islamic are more oriented towards Islamic values and Islamic culture, though willing to adopt some western values but at the same time they want to retain their Islamic ethos.

These religiously oriented groups sought salvation in political Islam and for these groups the nation should not be a secular political entity but rather a community of believers. The prevalence of such a thought has resulted in the rise of some Islamic political parties and because of the highly religious nature of these parties, they have usually been banned once they received any sort of popularity. These are however, an important force as they continue to rise under different guises. The rise of political Islam in Turkey has its impact on national and international affairs. Turkey's relations with West were thought to get strained and apprehensions were expressed that Turkey which has till then friendly relations with U.S. might not be its ally any more. Further Turkey's application for membership of European Union is being viewed in the perspective of religious revivalism.

Turkey and Islam

Until the founding of the Turkish republic (Oct. 1923) Sultan Caliph was both the temporal and the traditional head with Islam as the chief component in its ideology. Mustafa Kemal Pasha

and his followers were modernists to their core. So the task of Kemal and his followers were to transform Turkey into a modernised, industrialised and secularised nation state. They did not feel the need to maintain elements of tradition and culture as has been the case with the most nationalist leaders of developing countries. Neither was religion used to mobilise the masses in Turkey as has been and is still the case in such countries as Iran and Libya. Here Kemalist idea of a national community ran counter to the Islamic conception of a community, which is essentially religious. The reforms undertaken involved the liberation of the nation from foreign control and influence, religious control and theocratic allegiance. These reforms were aimed at strengthening the nation as well as to secularise the Turkish state and society with the realisation of political participation and bringing about changes in the Socio-economic structure of the country. Thus with the proclamation of the Republic with Kemal as its President the republican regime began concerted attempts to create a secular state along European lines discarding religion almost for private use. They also adopted secular nationalism as the ideology of the new state in order to modernise Turkish political social and economic structure by relegating Islam to the back seat.

Kemal's policy of modernisation was more like westernisation and it seems that for him, the progress and power of Europe was an attainable model and he wanted to attain more in less time. Kemalism has its own supporter and opponents. Its supporters admire the reforms undertaken by Mustafa Kemal as the only measure to save the country from total annihilation after the disintegration of the great Ottoman Empire. They also assert it to be the only forgone and unalterable consensus on Turkishness that Kemal had to adopt.

However, its opponents were quite dissatisfied with the secular measures they tended to use Islamic discourse to challenge the legitimacy of the political system as propounded by Kemal though the republic took many measures to contain the role of Islam, but it seems that the Turkish version of radical Islam, like that elsewhere in West Asia has asserted itself effectively in all aspects and at all levels of society. Though secular nationalist politics of Turkey has defined the parameters of political discourse but Islam was never totally excluded from the official public sphere. On the one hand, Islam was separated from the public political realism but at the same time it was accommodating religion into the system in various ways. This resulted in two diverse cultures one Westernised culture of bureaucrats centered in Ankara and other traditional Islamic, still prevailing in the rural masses.

Nonetheless, the end of the one party rule and the transition to a multiparty system marked the beginning of the re-emphasis of Islamic values, which has continued until the present day. And the reappearance of element of Islam was further precipitated with the entrance of the peripheral rural masses immersed in traditional Islamic out look into politics.

Turkey is predominantly a Muslim country. It has a society with an Islamic ethos, regardless of its political superstructure. If we have a general look on the results of the national elections since the last two decades, it becomes amply clear that the Turkish people have generally voted for anti-statist liberal and religiously inclined parties and have shown a dislike for the establishments especially the military ones. As after each military intervention the people voted against it. In 1961 and 1965, the conservative justice party was the people's choice. In 1973, the electorate split its vote between three right wing parties and in 1983 it voted for the Liberal

Conservative Mother – land party. In 1994 local elections, Welfare party increased its strength and in June 1996, it was finally able to put together a ruling coalition government. Nevertheless the victory of these parties suggest that the majority of the Turkish electorate has always voted for parties that claimed to respect religion, were liberal in their politics and were modernists in working style. In party political terms the growth of the welfare party is the most striking aspect. Apart from gaining support from the masses, who have their roots firmly held in the Islam centered values. Welfare party's resonance added a promise to dispossessed masses, who had migrated to cities for a better life and for social and economic justice.

Welfare party came to power after 1995 general elections not through revolution of Turkish politics but through ballot, contesting elections. It stirred the Western countries who think Turkey had gone in the hands of Islamic fundamentalists. At the domestic front also military which regards itself as the guardian of Kemalism did not approve of its politics and intervened once again in Turkish politics in 1997.

The Welfare party was thrown out of the power which most term as “soft coup”. In this way the coalition government led by Mr. Erbakan, fell apart under pressure of the military and the constitutional court banned the party in January 1998. As has been the precedence, leaders of Welfare party immediately formed a new party: ‘Fazilet’, the virtue party. All the Welfare deputies except those who were deprived from their political rights joined – Fazilet party.

Fazilet party led by Racial Kutan Fazilet took part in the general and local Turkish elections of April 1999, but lost the leading position inherited from the Welfare Party (Refah) with some 21.3% votes in the Parliament. The Fazilet party became the third political party in Turkey, behind the DSP of Bulent Ecevit and the MHP of Derlet Bahcell.

Factors for the Revivalism of Islam

If we deeply analyse the political scenario and the social fabric of Turkey, we find that the following are some of the factors which gave way and added momentum to Islamic revivalism in Turkey:

1. The reforms undertaken by Kemal to facilitate secularism, remained basically limited to urban centers which contained only twenty percent of the Turkish population at the time. Almost the Bulla of the Turkey population remained untouched, isolated and traditional, while in the cities modernity percolated most aspects of the social life. These changes created a volatile social fabric where the new and old, the modern and the traditional and the secular and the anti-secular lived side by side.
2. Further during 1970's and 1980's Islam experienced a kind of political rehabilitation because right of centre secular leaders perceived religion as a potential bulwark in their ideological struggle with left of centre secular leaders.
3. The state's more tolerant attitude towards Islam encouraged the proliferation of private religious activities, including the construction of new mosque and Quranic Schools in cities, as well as the establishment of Islamic centers for research and conferences about the role of

Islam in Turkey. Despite strong control over politics, populist nationalism and religious revivalism started to emerge during this time.

4. Turkey's population is predominantly Muslim which constitute 99% of the total population. There is a population explosion with a massive unemployment with 4 out of 10 people unemployed. Its 70% population is under 30 years of age. Inflation is about 35% which eats away the income of the workers. The economic crisis of 1994 made the situation more acute. It created a collapse of living standards as Turkish income failed to keep pace with 134 percent inflation. The inflation rate improved in 1995 and was reduced to 90 percent but still resulted in severe economic hardships for the lower classes. The unabated economic problems had made wage earners, simple tradesmen and middle class shopkeepers suffer the most.
5. The Turkey's ruling military and other political parties who are mainly accused of corruption and nepotism have failed to solve these problems and did not come with some concrete economic policies, for the redressal of the grievances of the masses. It is believed that the failure of ruling military party and other political parties at the economic front have compelled more and more Turks to seek salvation in Islam in general and Erbakan's in particular.
6. The political volatility and the political turmoil in the region have also influenced the polity of Turkey and have contributed for the re-vivalism of Islam in Turkey. The Islamic movements are gaining momentum in various countries of the region. This too has helped in permeating the Islamic instincts in the region in general and Turkey in particular.

Conclusion

The resurgence and the revival of Islam in Turkey since 1950's is thought to be a reaction to the failure of Kemalism to achieve its goal of complete westernisation. The Grand National Assembly, Turkey's national parliament was an elite club and held unchallenged powers. So whenever the need arose Kemal got his secularisation reforms passed and promulgated through this elite club rather to negotiate it with the people in a serious way. So Kemal's efforts, to westernise and to reform the traditional institutions of his country could not impose the new ways on the daily lives of the masses especially the peasantry who were more traditional and for whom religion had such a great social function.

The moderate secularists recognise the significance of religion for the people. They accept that Islamic parties have the right to compete in politics and if they get majority to form a govt. at the same time, if the moderate islamists only seek freedom of conscious to be safe guarded in a secular democratic state where both religion and the state are separate and autonomous it will be an invaluable contribution to the Turkish democracy.