

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM PREVENTION AMONGST YOUTH

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Abstract:

Public consciousness of modern Kazakhstan is currently experiencing re-evaluation of the role of religion in culture, history of nations, spiritual and moral development of man. Influence of religion and various religious associations both on national consciousness, security and religious context in the Republic of Kazakhstan is constantly growing. Traditional religions widely spread in Kazakhstan are: orthodox Christianity and Islam (the Sunnis).

Key Words: Religion, religious extremism, terrorism, religious destructive organizations, youth

Introduction:

Recently the number of believers in Kazakhstan has significantly grown. At the turn of 1970-80s according to the social scientists' researches, believers comprised 10-24% of population. At the beginning of 2000 there already were 50-54% of believers.

As of 11th October 2011 the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On religious activity and religious associations" was adopted which was put into force on 25th of October of the same year. Adoption of this law became an important step in development of spiritual life of people, regulation of activities of religious associations, fostering better cooperation between the state and religious confessions", - noted Head of Agency of Kazakhstan for religious affairs K. Lama Shariff on the round table dedicated to the implementation of the RK Law "On religious activity and religious associations" in Almaty. One of the first steps to implement the Law was adoption of 4 main by-laws including registration and re-registration of religious organizations.

As of the enactment date of the Law there were 4 551 religious associations conducting their activities. In 2012, 3088 religious associations representing 17 confessions were re-registered (RK Agency for religious affairs).

Concurrently with increasing the number of believers there is a growing number of cross-confessional tension the main reason of which is the struggle for recruitment of new adepts. Geopolitical and economic status of nowadays Kazakhstan is attracting not only business but various missionaries who increasingly press religions traditional for Kazakhstan in the struggle for influencing believers.

Over the last years in the country have significantly activated different non-traditional religions, occult-and-mystical dogmata, missionaries who having significant funds and wide experience of missionary activities are conducting destructive work in Kazakhstan. Development and strengthening of positions of new religious movements are promoted thanks to the shaping of a new model of relationships between the church and the state, recognition of rights of religious associations of various types to exist.

According to the Prosecutor General's Office data there are 1870 religious organizations of such kind in the country which create a threat to national security and stability.

"An active destructive work in Kazakhstan is held by representative of a number of occult-and-mystic dogmata. They are amounted to 1870 religious organizations, the most numerous amongst them are "Scientology", "A new life" and others", - reported S.Nurpeissof, an official representative of the Prosecutor General's Office [1].

Psychological ground of the majority of new religious movements is based on plans for radical world restructuring and promises of inclusion to the true belief, financial and spiritual prosperity. In the context of social and economic instability, rapid changes in society most of people converting to non-traditional religions with a hope to gain peace of mind are often attracted by unusual relationships between each other and intragroup atmosphere taken as a whole.

Troubling events of the last years in Kazakhstan related to the escalation of religious-based conflicts did show that this problem was already out of the range of mythical threats to our national and state security as a secular state moving on the way forward to democracy and civil society. Therefore, the threat of confessional extremism in our multinational and multi-religious society really exists and it is impossible to treat it frivolously.

The problem of religious extremism has a plenty of aspects. Amongst them along with social, political, legal and economical ones, it should be given prominence to the psychological aspect requiring all-around comprehension and in-depth study. Social and psychological aspects are defined by the following tasks: identification of nature and sources of religious extremism and terrorism as well as development of effective tools of confrontation to terroristic challenge. It requires comprehensive social and psychological protection of person, social groups and societies from religious extremism and terrorism as one of the most dangerous forms of physical and psychological violence on a person.

Normally, a person becomes a follower of one or another religion not by nature, but due to the certain social reasons since religion performs an important compensatory psychological function – replacement of the lost dignity and solace. “Religious” experience gained afterwards determines the system of relationships of a person with the outside world, shapes a certain behavioral model of a person. Concurrently, individual and personal features of formation of a belief lead someone to religious fanaticism, someone to the concentrated accomplishment of commandments prescribed by religious tradition of a nation, someone to logical understanding of that every person is in need of self-development.

Historical experience shows that the main pillar of radical religious destructive organizations is ensured by lack of sufficient life experience of youth and vulnerable social groups having no job, no house and no funds to survive. Usually, the main body of such groups is made up by men who thereafter begin to involve own relatives – mothers, sisters and wives into the organization’s activities. In such a way people involved in different religious organizations have insufficient educational, social and financial level, their age ranges between 15 and 35 years old.

Studies have found that one of the most important factors enabling involvement of young people is the low level of religious awareness, and most often - mere religious ignorance. It ought to be noted that religious awareness in any form today are included into the content of school programs on different school disciplines, primarily, humanitarian cycle (history, social studies, literature etc.).

Subject of scientific research became focused on influence of various theological learning on a personality of learners, generation of their moral values. Theological, philosophic and worldview agenda, environmental and ethical development of school children are included into training and experimentation courses of innovative schools.

However, with regard to the state school this problem remains challenging, various proposals are made and original models are shaped. That’s why there are more and more developments authors of which are striving to interpret a phenomenon of studying religious knowledge in the modern secular school in a system-based manner, in logics of the whole educational process, in relation to the general direction of mindset formation, personal culture of learners.

An active discussion is caused by an issue of teaching of confession-oriented disciplines (Basics of Theology etc.) at secondary schools. At the same time it ought to be noted that there are a wide scatter of opinions and views. For instance, one of the eminent scientists A.Mashanov called for religious upbringing of the rising generation, claiming that “our Koran contains both science and philosophy. It is required to amend all school books on the basis of Koran... If a School Master was an imam and held Koran in his hands it would be much better

The matter of religious experience of man and qualities developed based on it, featuring this person is often considered as conditions for his exposure to influence of others.

Current understanding of the problem of terrorism is associated with the problem person religiosity especially his adherence to Islam. Anti-terrorism effort is becoming one of the most important problems of the modern world. Why people from traditional religious believers become fanatic capable of committing a crime? What kind of personal features and human values enable him to assume the role of a “kamikaze” or a suicide bomber? What is able to promote this phenomenon? What are the destructive sides of religious experience of man?

To study this problem amongst youth we did a pilot research. An express survey was taken amongst Almaty students. Overall number of participants was 120 people at the age of 19-25 y.o., where the number of men and women was much the same.

We have developed a questionnaire which included questions of adherence to one or another belief, availability and necessity of religious education, core values in religion, and attitude to new religious movements etc.

Questionnaire analysis has shown that more than 90% of the respondents counted themselves believers, where were representatives of different religious streams: Orthodoxy – 30 %; Judaism – 5 %; Islam – 50 %; new religious movements (e.g. “New Age”, “Russian neo-paganism”) – 8 %; atheists – 7 %.

In the course of research we find out that, in general, religion as a social phenomenon is spoken positively by – 43% of the respondents, negatively – 38%, and 19% were undecided.

Religious education is available with 5 % of the respondents, 30 % of the respondents would like to get religious education (in Kazakhstan – 20 %, abroad – 10 %), refuse to get religious education for various reasons - 70 %.

In answer to a question whether you stick to all provisions of your religion? 50 % responded – partially, 50 % responded that the main thing for them is faith, and the rest is not mandatory to adhere to. When asked whether you observe religious feasts – positive answers were given by 75 % of the respondents.

To a question what attracts you in religion, 80 % responded – true belief, an opportunity to communicate with others - 10 %, and humanitarian assistance to worshippers – 10 %.

In such a way we see that 90 % of the respondents count themselves as believers which means for them observance of the main religious provisions, celebration of religious holidays, but religion as a positive social phenomenon is considered by 43 % of the respondents only. Under the conditions of low level of religious awareness – 5 %, only 30 % of young people are willing to get in-depth theological education.

So far, Kazakhstan as well as other Central Asian countries has faced with present challenges in the religion sphere: with occurrence of radical Islam, with development of destructive forces which pose a threat to national independence of Kazakhstan. During the questionnaire held the following questions were also asked: What is your view on that new and non-traditional for our countries religious movements are actively progressing and operating in Kazakhstan? Respondents who are totally against – 70 %, legally entitled to do so – 20 %, others – 10 %.

The main reasons for outspread of non-traditional religious movements in Kazakhstan respondents consider: parity of all religious movements – 5 %; imperfection of legislative power – 5 %; ideological vacuum emerged after fall down of the Soviet Union – 5 %; business from religion – 45 %; religious ignorance of people – 40 %.

At the same time to a question – how much do you think Kazakhstan society is influenced by new religious movements? 60 % of the respondents said that they have no idea about it and such movements haven't significant influence.

When asked: Are you familiar with a term of “destructive sects”, responded: Yes – 50 %, No – 50 %.

Are you familiar with a term of “pseudo-Muslim terroristic organization”? Yes – 50 %, No – 50 %.

What kind of religious organizations you would refer to terrorist, extremist one? Al-Jazeera; Wahhabis; Al-Jazeera; Wahhabis; Al-Jazeera; Wahhabis;

What kind of religious organizations you would refer to sects? Wahhabis; Hamas; al Qaeda; Al-Jazeera; none.

Conclusion:

Results of our study have shown that lately in Kazakhstan there is a significant growth of religious activity amongst youth, especially within Muslims. Usually, gaining of religious experience of youth has certain positive effect in neutralization of the fear of death, deprivation and stress. On the other hand, fanatic commitment to religious dogmata affects increasing of anxiety level, impulsiveness, decreases critical abilities which facilitates formation of religious fanaticism.

Religious coping as a tool of using religious thoughts and behavior forms is one of the most important psychic regulators of human life and activities and a factor shaping human personality. A great role in shaping of world-view of man plays the depth of religious beliefs ranging from deep to doubtful. A positive role is played by the formation of self-esteem, self-belief and abilities to control own life and emphatic ability.

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