

The Acceptability of Behavior and Religious Discourse Among Religious Forces and Movements in Iraq

Dr. Samir Mohammed Hamid



Religious discourse in Iraq represents a central axis for understanding the social and political interactions in the country. This discourse reflects the complexities of the multiple ideological and religious orientations that constitute the fabric of Iraqi society. Religious forces play a significant role in guiding public opinion and shaping the general policies of society. These religious movements vary broadly between moderate and extreme, creating a multidimensional environment that necessitates a detailed study to understand their impacts. The study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the effects of religious discourse on politics and society in Iraq, focusing on the variations in religious interpretations and how they are exploited in the political and social context, providing a comprehensive view to help understand the acceptability of behavior and discourse among different religious movements in Iraq.

The study is divided into **seven sections**. The first is titled **General Religious Discourse**. Religious discourse forms the core of communication between religious institutions and the masses. Amid the social and cultural transformations that any society undergoes, religious discourse remains a primary influence on individuals and groups. It infiltrates the psyche and plants the seeds of virtue and piety, especially as the creativity of words and the grandeur of meanings in these texts are not limited to preaching and guidance but extend to formulating a philosophical system that promotes human values and deepens social ties among the members of a society. It creates a fabric that expresses harmony between the sacred and the worldly. However, this discourse may sometimes become negative, especially when it falls into stagnation and rigidity, becoming a destructive force undermining the human and intellectual values that religion itself advocates.

The second section is titled **Acceptability of Religious Discourse**. The acceptability of religious discourse depends on how religious texts are interpreted by religious scholars to clarify the essence of religious law. This discourse may be moderate, seeking to accept the other based on freedom of religion, belief, and citizenship, considering the other as an essential partner in the homeland, thus contributing to strengthening unity and societal cohesion. Alternatively, it may be an extremist discourse, linked to intolerance and the rejection of opposing opinions, even condemning them as heretical or permitting the shedding of blood and honor, which threatens social peace. What distinguishes religious discourse is its connection to human beliefs and the intellectual value that shapes an individual's behavior. Its role in supporting a culture of peaceful coexistence depends on how it is implemented by those who practice it.

The third section is titled **The Interaction Between Religious Discourse and Social and Political Discourses**. Religious discourse, through its dynamic interaction with social and political discourses, plays a decisive role in shaping identities and directing human behavior in societies. In this interaction, religious discourse becomes not just an expression of religious views but also a channel for expressing complex social and political sentiments. However, the society's acceptance of this discourse largely depends on its flexibility and ability to interact with social transformations. When traditional religious discourse conflicts with modern values like human rights and individual freedoms, tension may arise between it and progressive intellectual movements, sometimes leading to a decline in its influence among sections of society that embrace these values. This conflict reflects a deeper struggle to define the identities and core values of society.

The fourth section is titled **Dynamics of Religious Forces and Movements in the History of Iraq**. Over the centuries, Iraq has been a melting pot for various religious forces and movements, where spiritual narratives intertwined with political events, creating a complex and at times dangerous network of reciprocal relations and influences. This history mirrors the profound changes the country has experienced, from the Sumerian and Akkadian eras through the Islamic golden age to the modern era. Religious forces and movements have played a decisive role in shaping the political and social landscape of Iraq.

The fifth section is titled **The Social and Religious Role of Religious Forces and Movements in Iraq and Their Impact on Public Behavior**. Religious forces in Iraq, with their diverse orientations, do not merely contribute to the religious field but extend their influence to become active elements in social and political movements, impacting collective and individual behaviors within the broader Iraqi social fabric. These forces utilize complex interactions between the sacred and the worldly. Often, religious discourse in Iraq is employed to serve social activities that may, in essence, harbor political and ideological goals that threaten social peace. These activities exploit the wide acceptability that religious discourse enjoys in Iraq to establish behaviors that threaten the fabric of society. The interaction between religious discourse and political forces can also be positive when both sides agree on shared goals that aim to promote moral values, social justice, and the protection of individual rights. In this case, the impact on public behavior becomes more apparent.

The sixth section is titled **Critical Analysis of Iraqi Religious Behavior and Discourse**. The public religious behavior and discourse in the Iraqi religious scene fluctuate between doctrinal frameworks and social and political influences, making this field a complex and intertwined study, essential for understanding the social and political dynamics of the country. This was evident in how the Shiite masses were mobilized during various events, affecting both social and political behavior, such as the "Jihad al-Kafa'i" fatwa against ISIS. The religious discourse that connects historical events with contemporary conditions, such as Ashura and the visits and mourning ceremonies, has proven to be an effective tool for continuous mobilization and reinforcing unity and solidarity within the Shiite community. Similarly, religious discourse impacts the social behavior of the Sunni community, contributing to shaping its views on important issues. This discourse is influenced and diversified across Iraq's different regions, where the local environment plays a role in shaping and directing it. Its impact is also evident in the political arena, where it adopts stances ranging from supporting to opposing the government, based on circumstances and positions that, in turn, affect individuals' perceptions and their involvement in the political process.

As for Iraq's religious minorities, such as Christians, Yazidis, and Sabeans, they add another layer of complexity to the general religious discourse in the country. The discourse of these minorities represents specific reactions and positions concerning the challenges they face, whether in terms of preserving their religious identity or engaging with the political and social context, sometimes in a way that guarantees their respect, appreciation, and continuity in society.

The seventh section is titled **Indicators of Acceptance and Rejection of Religious Movements in Iraq**. The indicators of acceptance and rejection of religious movements in Iraq are influenced by the social, political, and cultural history of the Iraqi social structure. The increasing acceptance of various religious movements reflects the social reality's response to this discourse, and this, in turn, represents significant responses, sometimes manifesting as political responses (e.g., elections, international stances), economic responses (e.g., donations for building a hospital, contributing to the construction of a mosque), or security responses (e.g., volunteering, defending areas, reporting suspects). It is observed that the degree of religious influence affects the nature of the response and rejection.

The study concluded with several key findings, including:

1. The study showed that religious discourse in Iraq plays a pivotal role in shaping public policies and acceptable behaviors. These forces, through their diversity, utilize religious texts as influential discourses to guide political decisions and social stances, thus reinforcing the intersection of religion and politics in the country.
2. The study revealed a significant diversity of religious movements in Iraq, each adopting different religious interpretations, which leads to differences in discourse, positions, and political orientations, creating a complex and at times contradictory environment.
3. The findings indicated that religious discourse does not only affect politics but extends its impact to the social fabric and behavior. The religious texts used in this discourse promote human values and deepen social ties. However, they may also lead to intellectual intolerance and a significant reduction in intellectual diversity.
4. Through analyzing the behavior of religious forces and movements, it was shown that there is variability in how each movement deals with social and political issues, at times using discourse as a cover to gain benefits. Some adopt moderate positions that promote peaceful coexistence, while others adopt extreme positions that seek to impose specific religious visions.