

# DECCAN Chronicle

## 'Can't take religion out of politics, but...'

DC CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU, JULY 11

Adding an interesting twist to the ongoing debate on religion and politics and democracy, an Indian-born American political scientist Pradeep Chhibber felt that India would go the US way which, he felt turned very religious.

He felt the country may not emulate Europe which moved areligious way.

Participating in a discussion on religion and democracy in India, organised by Jain University in association with Lok Niti, Georgetown University and University of California here on Saturday, Mr Chhibber

**“There is nothing wrong even if a religious elite and a politician go together. But the politician should not set one against the other**

**— Pradeep Chhibber,  
POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR OF  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

comes out with startling observations like one in 100 buildings is a religious building.

“So, religion is everywhere,” he said.

Prof Chhibber, political science professor of

University of California, Berkely, co-authored a book, *Religious Practice and Democracy* with Prof Sandeep Shastri and the book is yet to hit the stands in India. Prof Chhibber's argument questions the Nehruvian school of thought to keep religion out of politics.

He, however, said religion would continue to play a major role in politics and the democratic process. That does not mean that this book is a handiwork of right-wing sympathiser.

He is categorical in his view. “India is the only country which does not have a law making politicians accountable for mis-using the religion and caus-

ing damages to people from other faiths,” he said. This point of his makes clear that he does not even share the idea of right-wing politicians who keep bombarding statements and actions that would hurt people from other faiths. According to him, religious event in India was a local but complex one.

“There is nothing wrong even if a religious elite and a politician go together. But the politician should not set one against the other,” he observed.

Dr Irfan Nooruddin, associate professor of political science of the Georgetown University, referred the recent PEW survey suggested the over 50 per cent

Americans practice religion in the US.

“Dr Chhibber's book too advocates that religion is not bad for democracy,” he said. He propounded, “We failed to institutionalise a framework to convert religious values into political values so that one could practice in public life. We talk about groups or parties but not the religious values in India,” he argued.

Noted journalist Rajdeep Sardesai felt that the overt politics of religiosity by MIM Asaduddin Owasi and Prime Minister, Narendra Modi may not help the society. He felt it would be difficult to visualise a situation if the same trend continued.