

Amit Singh tells about his new book

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‘Multicultural nature of society, on the one hand requires, formulating policies based on respecting the core principles of religions, on the other, the state needs to guarantee the essentials of freedom of expression, human rights and must provide a safe public sphere. Academics and artists must be able to express themselves freely. They should be free to ‘offend, shock or disturb’ if it is within their professional ethics,’ said social scientist Amit Singh.

Giving the details about his recent new book on ‘The conflicts of freedom of expression and religion: A case study from India,’ Singh said ‘absolute freedom of expression is problematic in a multicultural country such as India. I must say, it’s difficult to fully appreciate the Western secular model—where negative generalisations about religious minorities are taken for granted, nor Indian secularism—where the balance tips heavily towards public order and religious harmony leaving freedom of expression at the whims of fundamentalist religious groups. Worldwide, there is not one answer to solve conflict between freedom of expression and religion. Answers need to be contextualised in a multicultural soci-

THE CONFLICTS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND RELIGION



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Amit Singh's book on freedom and expression

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ety’.

According to him, the book is based on case study in Varanasi where he had interviewed Hindu and Muslim

graduate students in three universities. This study has applied qualitative research methods; specifically in-depth interviews, desk research, and narrative

analysis. ‘This book has explored conflicting relation between human rights of freedom of expression and religion in Indian context. As we can observe, the tussle between freedom of expression and religion is intensely manifesting in our society where censoring books and movies by the state and victimisation of writers, film director by the religious groups whether Muslim or Hindu, are well known. In this context, government has very delicate duty to maintain balance between freedom of expression and respecting religious sensitivities,’ he stated.

Telling about the relevance of book, he said that ancient India is known for its skepticism towards religion and its toleration to opposing views however, the alarming rise of religious nationalism and fundamentalism, and consequently, increasing conflict between freedom of expression and religion, have been well noted by both academic and public intellectuals. ‘This book explains why Indian government - although secular in nature - favours religious sentiments over freedom of expression, particularly in case, where religious feelings are hurt by a movie, book or a satire - it is freedom of expression which have pushed into the corner - usually,’ he said.