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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Religious Fundamentalism: A Threat to International Peace & Security

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Manuscript Info	Abstract
   Dr. Arvinder Singh	There is no harm in having a firm faith in any religious tradition. The true religious devotee dedicates his whole life in search for true understanding of religion. He constantly makes efforts to rise above the sectarian divisions and prejudiced thinking patterns. However, the religious hypocrite and fundamentalist waste his life span in ego, zealously and false pride. He recites the religious hymns throughout in his life but he does not understand the true meaning and purpose of religion due to his incapability to surpass his ignorance, arrogance and religious chauvinism. Religious fundamentalism is a serious threat to socio-economic development, international peace, security and stability. Neither religious texts sanction indiscriminate use of violent means against non-combatants, innocents, women and children nor they motivate and guide the terrorists nor encourage and train them for mass killing. It is sheer shrewdness of the terrorists and fundamentalists that they misuse and deliberately misread the sacred texts to accomplish their inhuman objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge of religious doctrines, firm faith in the religion and living in accordance with the teachings of any religious tradition is highly admirable in any civilized society. At the same time the partial knowledge and lack of true understanding of religious traditions, outward religiosity and blind faith would be disastrous in any civilized society. Religion primarily unites the people belonging to various castes, classes, colours, races, regions. It teaches them the universal message of unity of humankind, respect for human dignity, mutual love, cooperation, harmony and peaceful coexistence. However, some short-sighted social and religious leaders due to their parochial outlook and communal political agenda provide narrow interpretations of the religious beliefs and create social fragmentations and socio-cultural and religious conflicts. In the recent times, international community has experienced the growth of religious fanaticism, communal violence and religious extremism. Religious prejudices and intolerance have resulted in the serious challenge to international peace, security and stability.

Every religious tradition in the world teaches us that we should look inwards to eliminate the inner wickedness and should try to be righteous, compassionate and should refrain from harming the others. Instead of fighting against internal evils, religious fanatics are engaged in elimination of external evil forces. They forget that the outer evils are the simply manifestation of their internal wickedness. They ignore the hard reality that without the cleansing the self, sinfulness and peripheral immorality the external evilness cannot be eliminated. Presently, the adherents of various religious traditions are becoming increasingly intolerant, disillusioned and apprehensive. The ardent religious devotee easily becomes the soft target of religious fanatics and terrorist groups. Over enthusiastic religious disciples often, look down on other religious communities. Their hatred towards the members of other religions makes them intolerant and biased.

Today religion has become scapegoat in the era of global terrorism. Religious terrorism, in particular, is a logical outcome of religious fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalists are fanatical in spirit, aggressive in action,

communal in approach, radical in essence and prejudiced in judgment. Terror in the name religion gives birth to new era of terrorism in history of humankind. The members of any fundamentalist group or international terrorist organization may claim themselves as the men of God but in reality, they are the enemies of humankind.

Religious Fundamentalism:

The history of religious fundamentalism is as old as the history of humankind.   In every religious community, we can find some people who are more obsessive in their religious matters as compared to the other members of that religious tradition. In fact, every religion has had its fanatic proponents, especially during its early stages. Throughout history, a routinization of religion has taken place over the centuries, but in many places, there have been attempts to return to the original pure and pristine message. If fundamentalism is interpreted not as a return to the words of the holy texts of religion but as a return to the uncompromising spirit of its early days, it can be viewed as a regression to the spirit of fanaticism. In the present scenario, religious fanatics use the religion to promote their own worldview and agenda. Religion is the trigger of the fanatic. The bullets are fired by the rising fundamentalist movements in the United States, Israel and Islam. Elements in all of seem to return to medieval extremes of belief. Crimes across the globe are still being committed in the name of God through the perversion of the various texts about the divine.

Religious fanatics do not tolerate any kind of intervention in their spiritual affairs. Religious fanaticism is interpreted as a defensive strategy to keep out foreign influences and to preserve the purity of the believer's way of life. In the present age, religious fanaticism frequently appears in the secular form, or as mixture of religion and politics. It is the product of ignorance of divine truth while in pursuit of acceptance by God or some supposed superior being. The blind obedience to the semi-gods who establish and direct the various cults, in which is found the extreme religious fanaticism, is incredible. Religious fanaticism and religious hypocrisy are not exactly the same, but they are closely related.   Fanaticism is the product of hypocrisy and ignorance. The religious hypocrite plays his game well, and he creates devotees to himself and his cause, who blindly follow his dictates, even unto death.

Religious fanatics feel that they have to act or interpret things in their own way. Most of them seek to defend their own beliefs and their absolute rightness of their cause at all costs. Such deep-rooted intolerance in religious or political beliefs, when they are unable to discern alternatives, can lead to lack of restraint and to the use of violence regardless of the consequences. That is when the religious fundamentalist and the political activist may be termed terrorist, although, of course, not all are so inclined, nor will terrorists radically call themselves fanatics or fanatics admit to terrorism. Excessive passion for religious matters leads to the hatred towards other religious communities and ultimately resulted in terrorism in the name of religion.

Religious fundamentalism banishes reason from religion and compassion from faith. Its main traits are revivalism, hostility towards minorities, anti intellectualism, intolerance, arrogant insularity, intellectual bankruptcy and moral blindness. They are reflected in rejection of rational discourse, pluralism, free speech, democratic governance, secularism and in recourse to violence. Not one of the fundamentalist movements has a programme of social uplift and equality or economic progress. Religious fundamentalism is conceived as more absolutist and rigid. It can also be defined as being related to a less critical and more literal interpretation of sacred texts, more antagonistic and critical views of other religious groups, defensive of the correctness of a particular religious group or belief, and increased evangelistic fervour. It is conceived as more absolutist and rigid. It is defined as being related to a less critical and more literal interpretation of sacred texts, more antagonistic and critical views of other religious groups, defensive of the correctness of a particular religious group or belief, and increased evangelistic fervour.

Presently, every religious fundamentalist group try to offer radical version of their own religion. Religious fanatics play with religious sentiments of people and misguide them through their fallacious propaganda. Though the religious fundamentalists are small in number, yet their actions have sufficient potential to defame their own religion. They are not prepared to understand that they are living in human society and they have to live in accordance with certain established socio-religious norms. Religious fanatics breed mutual animosity, ill will and hostility. People under the influence of propaganda by the fundamentalists organizations become narrow-minded and adopt violent methods to promote their petty interests. People of other religious communities began to formulate the generalizations about some religions in the light of irrational and irresponsible actions of religious fanatics. These generalisations stimulate the clash among various religious communities. There may be difference of opinion on certain issues but those differences should not be allow to turn into permanent clash among people belonging to various cultures. In fact, there can never be any permanent clash among various religious and cultural groups. Conflicts and reconciliation among religious communities go side by side.

Political version of any religion creates terror in the minds of people. Religion brings together the people and eliminates the immorality so long it continues to aims at socio-spiritual development of an individual. When the process of politicisation of religion starts soon it becomes a disruptive and divisive force and shakes the foundation

of civil society. Presently, virtually all religious traditions face the same dilemma of unrestrained growth of religious fanaticism. Religious fanatics belonging to various religions have considerably damaged the image of their religion. Nobody has any problem with religious sentiments of fundamentalists so long it does not restrict the religious freedom of other members of society. The over enthusiastic religious follower or fundamentalist irrespective his religion when begin to seeks the redressal of his grievances by unlawful and violent means then he becomes an eyesore and threat to human society.

It is true that religious extremism and religious violence is not a customary feature any specific religion. However, it is also a fact that unfortunately due to wide spread network of religious fanatics in Islamic countries; today global terrorism is being associated with the Islam. Islamic world is facing serious allegations of being partisan of international terrorist groups. In the post Cold War era, political version of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism is censure because of its inclination towards terrorism. Religious fanatics in Islamic world are terribly apprehensive about their future. They glorify their past and repudiate the present state of affairs in Islamic world. Islamic fundamentalist, Islamists and radical Islamic movements aim at restructuring the prevailing socio-political systems in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Currently, Islamic fundamentalists are more aggressive and keen to adopt violent means to accomplish their objectives. They strive for true Islamic order and wish to restore the 'Golden Age' of Islam. They want to eliminate the enemies of Islam.

Religious fundamentalists in general and Islamic fundamentalists in particular react sharply against the process of Westernization and modernization. In the Islamic world, religious fundamentalist raises serious objections over Western hegemony, Western model of democracy and secularism. In the beginning, radical Islamist groups exposed the exploitative character of European colonial powers in Islamic countries. They unmask the hidden agenda of Western powers to exploit natural resources in Middle East. Religious fundamentalist criticise severely the deliberate efforts made by Western powers to penetrate in social and political systems of Islamic countries. They are unequivocally against the process of modernization of traditional and conservative Islamic societies and installation of puppet secular regimes in Muslim countries to damage Islamic socio-religious and cultural value system. They consider Western interference in the internal affairs of Islamic countries as an attack on Islam. They argue that instead of understanding the genuine social, economic and political grievances of Islamic world, Western powers under the leadership of United Sates of America have carried on their double-faced foreign and economic policies and have validated the doubts and apprehensions of fundamentalist and terrorist groups. Subsequently, at present, USA has become the target of majority of international terrorist organisations. Anti-Americanism has become an ideological root of many fundamentalist organizations in Islamic countries.

Islamic fundamentalists are also against those Westernised, liberal and secular Muslim socio-religious leaders and moderate intelligentsia in the Islamic world, which is playing in the hands of Western powers. They argue that secular Muslims rulers in various parts of world have betrayed and damaged the socio-religious, economic and political interests of Islamic world. They try to rationalize their outrageous violent acts on the ground that it is their divine duty to fight against the profane social and political order. They think that it is their religious obligation to declare a Jihad against such political regimes to pave the way for the establishment of Islamic rule. They believe that social, economic and spiritual development of Muslims is not possible in secular regimes. Members of international terrorist organizations claim themselves freedom fighter, Jihadi or mujahedeen.

In the era of technological advancement, media, in Western as well as in Islamic countries, at present is playing unfair role. Western powers through media justify their own policies and blame the Islamic fundamentalists for prevailing unrest and crisis. Media in the Western countries has warped the image of Islam. It has intensified anti- Muslim sentiments in the West and created panic, imaginary fears, prejudices, hatred and hostility towards Islamic World. On the other side in Islamic countries, media is serving the interests of fundamentalist groups by propagating against the intervention of USA and Colonial powers in Islamic world in general in Middle East in particular. Media in Islamic countries portrays USA as the greatest evil and Jihadis as the heroes in the fight against enemies of Islam.

The politicisation of international organizations like United Nations has also played a key role in aggravating the problem of religious fundamentalism. When people lose their faith in international organizations and find that international organisations are not ready to liberate them from exploitation and domination then they choose the path of intolerance and violence. United Nations came in to existence to play the neutral role in resolution of conflicts among various nations. With the passage of time, we have witnessed that United Nations is playing second fiddle role and working under the pressure of USA and her allies' particular on the issue of international terrorism. The members of international community expect from the United Nations to be steadfast, neutral and vigorous in the fight against religious fundamentalism and international terrorism. It is extremely unfortunate that people raise accusing finger on role of United Nations. Unless United Nations plays impartial role in war against terrorism, international community will continue to suffer at the hands of enemies of humanity. United Nations must refrain

herself from playing in hands of powerful nations and must be neutral in formulation and execution of the counter terrorism strategies.

Religious fundamentalism and religious terrorism are the global issues, which demand immediate attention of members of international community. There is immense need to develop a consensus over these issues instead of blaming any religious community or civilisation. It is extremely dangerous and mischievous perception that there exists any inevitable and inherent clash among various civilisations. For instance, although Islam and Christianity gave two different ways of living, yet both are against ruthless use of force against humanity. We should not fail to remember the eternal message of Islam, Christianity and other religions and should not make our judgements about these religions based on inhuman activities of misguided, eccentric, irresponsible and over passionate religious fanatics belonging to different religions. If any religious community has any kind of grievances or grudge against anyone in the past or at present that must be genuinely heard with open heart and should be resolved without any delay. Governments, international organisations and intelligentsia should not leave any space for religious fanatics to play their ugly role. There is instant need to remove the prefix i.e. 'religious' from 'terrorism'. One must clearly understand that if any person is involved in terrorist act, he can never be religious in spirit and actions because no religious person can ever commit heinous crime against humanity. Though religious fanatics in various parts of world have cornered the moderate and liberal religious leaders, yet these moderate leaders have great role to put forward the unadulterated interpretation of their religious doctrines and to correct the image of their religions before the members of other religious communities. Unless moderate religious leaders belonging to different religions perform their role vigorously, terrorism in the name of religion and the nexus between religious fanatics and terrorists will continue to exist and threaten the humanity.

If human race dream of bright, secure and peaceful future then it requires to coming out of the past, to develop the better understanding of compulsions in which they are bound to live in and above all, they should get rid from tendency of dominance and proselytization. At present, we cannot face the challenge of international terrorism in general and religious terrorism in particular by living with the bitter memories of ancient and medieval times. There is immense need of fresh beginning based on spirit of mutual respect for every religion. We have already suffered a lot due to our ignorance and reluctance to understand religious beliefs and worldviews of various religious communities. Ironically, neither we know our own religious dogmas in depth nor we are prepared to study the fundamental beliefs of other religions. We live and act in ignorance, feel regretted because of our backwardness, find excuses by accusing others and repent on deception by socio-religious hypocrites and political leaders.

Conclusion:

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that at present, religious fundamentalism is a global phenomenon. It is extremely unfortunate that terrorist organisations backed by religious fundamentalists intentionally refer to religious doctrines and deliberately quote Sacred Scriptures to justify their monstrous acts. They may wish to create an ideal social, political and economic order in accordance to their religious texts but in practice, they have created hell on this earth. They may aim at elimination of prevailing disparities, disorder and discontent but actually, they act irresponsibly in ignorance and create uncertainty, instability and disharmony in the society.

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