

Migration, Fundamentalism, Terrorism in Asia

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Religious terrorism has become one of the major challenges for most of the countries in Asia, particularly in South and West Asia. It has resulted in a seemingly nonstop bombings, suicidal attacks and other means of terrorism.

On the 1 July 2016, after an 11-hour-long hostage situation, 20 hostages were killed in a restaurant packed with foreigners in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Nine of them were Italian, seven Japanese, one US citizen and an Indian. The responsibility for the barbaric act was claimed by the so-called Islamic State. The incident is a manifestation of the international character of the threat posed by Islamic religious fundamentalists.

Over the course of 20th century, Islamic fundamentalism has emerged as the most serious threat to democratic values, peace and security in most of the Asian countries.

In Pakistan, the menace of terrorism, in particular terrorism of the religious kind, has spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. There are people and groups who extend direct or indirect support to the terrorist activities of the Taliban and its ilk in name of religion. Violence has become a norm and religion is routinely used to silence voices of reason and compassion. The society has taken a turn towards the right-wing.

In India, attacks by fanatic Hindu fundamentalists are becoming increasingly common in Muslim minority areas. As part of its campaign to spread its reactionary political ideology to all of India, the governing conservative Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) is patronising communal violence and promoting communal polarization.

For quite some time now, Afghanistan has been embroiled in conflict involving a religious terrorist organisation and a weak government supported by US imperialism. Suicide attacks have become a norm. The strategy of the NATO forces has not resulted in peace and security in Afghanistan. The influence of the Taliban remains intact despite the killings of some of its top leaders in US drone strikes.

Daesh's spectacular growth in West Asia has resulted in some of the most barbaric acts of terrorism witnessed in history. The so-called Islamic State has emerged as the most dangerous religious terrorist organisation in the region. It has taken over parts of Iraq and Syria and now controls or can operate with impunity in a great stretch of territory in Western Iraq and Eastern Syria, making it

militarily the most successful jihadi movement ever. It has the resources at its disposal to organise terrorist activities across the globe.

The tactical differences among Western countries in dealing with Daesh have resulted in new contradictions. The Syrian government, supported by Russian Federation, is on an all-out bombing campaign, reducing to rubble various towns under Daesh control.

Mass migration of people out of these conflict zones has led to an unprecedented refugee crisis and taken the miseries of the affected people to a whole different level. This state of affairs has shattered all the established relations among nations throughout Asia and Europe. The whole project of European Union is under threat amid differing strategies to deal with the issue of migrations and border controls.

Migration of people from zones affected by religious conflict is not just confined to Western Asia. South Asia has witnessed various instances of mass migrations by persecuted religious minorities. In Pakistan, scores of Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus have left the country for safer shelters.

Over 800,000 people have left their homes in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) linking Pakistan and Afghanistan in the wake of an ongoing military operation since December 2014. Most of these have ended up as internally displaced people (IDPs) and are forced to live in inhumane conditions in refugee camps.

In Pakistan, religious fundamentalism is fighting on several fronts to gain more mass support. They do not spare a single opportunity to promote their "anti India" sentiments, a pillar in developing Islamic religious fundamentalism in Pakistan. Weak civilian governments, littered with neo liberal agenda, are cornered by mass disconnect to take any decisive action against fundamentalism. The Pakistani state has failed miserably to curb the rise of religious fundamentalism. There is always a soft spot for them. For a long time, they were encouraged by the state as a second line of security. The security paradigm meant an anti-India enmity was the core purpose of state patronage. The process of Islamisation was accelerated by military dictator Ziaul Haq, with the full support of US imperialism.

Apart from creating and supporting jihadist groups for decades, the state and military with the financial and political assistance of imperial power has indoctrinated millions with conservative Islamic ideology for the purpose of safeguarding its strategic interests.

What is religious fundamentalism? "Essentially the term fundamentalism suggests going back to the basic texts and reproducing as closely as possible the laws and institutions found then. It has also come to imply a dogmatic adherence to traditions, orthodoxy, inflexibility and a rejection of modern society, intellectual innovation and attempts to create a 'golden era'. Islamic fundamentalists have exploited the dream of the 'golden era of Islam', in poverty stricken, economically backward Muslim countries through the local "mullahs".

Religious fundamentalists are not an anti-imperialist force. They are not a class-based social set up. They are new kind of neo-fascist groups. Opposing imperialism does and should not mean an alliance with the religious fanatics, or vice versa.

Fundamentalism finds its roots in the backwardness of the society, social deprivation, a low level of consciousness, poverty and ignorance. To sum up, it can be said that religious fundamentalists are against democracy, pluralism, religious toleration, and free speech. They fear of annihilation by secular modernity.

Religious fundamentalists are a new kind of fascists in the making. This phenomenon now dominant

is the assertion of fascist currents with religious references (and no longer the triptych “people/state, race, nation”). They appear in all the “great” religions (Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and so on). They now pose a considerable threat in countries like India or Sri Lanka. The Muslim world thus does not have the monopoly in this field; but it is certainly there that it has taken on a particular international dimension, with “trans-border” movements like Islamic State or the Taliban and networks which are connected more or less formally from Morocco to Indonesia.

The religious fanatic groups are internationalists. They want an Islamic world. They are against democracy and promote *Khilafat* (kingdom) as a way of governance. They are the most barbaric force recent history has seen in the shape of “Islamic State” and Taliban. There is nothing progressive in their ideology. They are not anti-imperialist but anti-American and anti-West.

They must be countered, however, a military solution to end fundamentalism has a very limited scope with long term negative effects. The US way of fighting back in shape of “war on terror” has failed miserably. Despite all the US initiatives of occupations, wars and creating democratic alternatives, the religious fundamentalists have grown with more force. Fundamentalists are stronger than they were at 9/11, despite the occupation of Afghanistan.

In several Muslim countries, strategies to counter religious terrorism have been misused against working class activists and peasantry. Anti terrorist laws are used against opponents to jail them for lives. Progressive groups and social movements are becoming target of these laws. In Pakistan, anti-terrorism laws are very often used against climate change activists, striking workers and peasantry along with political opponents.

To effectively curb the growth of religious fundamentalism and religious terrorism, the state must break all links with fanatic groups. The mindset that religious fundamentalists are “our own brothers, our own people, our security line and guarantee against ‘Hindus’”, “some are bad and some are good” and so on must be changed.

There is no short cut to end religious fundamentalism. There is no military solution. It has to be a political fight with dramatic reforms in education, health and working realities in most Muslim countries. Starting from nationalisation of religious madrassas, it must go on to provide free education, health, residence and transport as one of most effective means to counter fundamentalism.

Right-wing ideas are promoting extreme right-wing ideology. A mass working-class alternative in the shape of trade unions and political parties linked with social movements is the most effective manner to counter religious fundamentalism.

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