

## Gods Must be Crazy

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The political mullahs rub salt into the wounds of earthquake victims every time they shoot their mouths off blaming 'sinful' people for earning the 'wrath of God' in the form of the recent earthquake. Without a shred of respect for a generation of innocent schoolchildren lost to the disaster, MMA President Qazi Hussain Ahmed attributing the earthquake to a 'sinful' nation, declares the earthquake a 'warning by God' and sermons on the urgency of modifying lifestyles. His parliamentary daughter, Rahila Qazi, indicates that a 'barrage of obscenity unleashed on the media under the government sponsorship' as the cause for the 'wrath of God'.

These 'wrath-of-God' theories invoked in the wake of natural catastrophes are not Pakistan-specific. Despite the 'clash of civilisations', theology sans humanity cuts across 'civilisational' divisions. Recently, evangelists in the USA blamed lesbian/gay and pro-choice people for Hurricane Katrina while a contributor on the Christian Broadcasting Network website wrote: 'Whenever this country encourages Israel to give up any part of their rightful God-given land we have suffered the consequences.' No Christian fanatic in the USA, however, attributed the disaster to child abuse in the Catholic church!

Earlier, when the tsunami hit Buddhist Sri Lanka, Hindu India, Muslim Indonesia alike, clerical justifications cut across all religious divisions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity.

In Sri Lanka, Buddhists recalled the story of a tsunami which hit the island circa 200 BC when a king killed a Buddhist monk in a fit of anger. They wondered which of their political leaders angered the sea gods this time.

Hindu fundamentalists blamed their government for earning the wrath of the gods by arresting, in November 2004, their spiritual leader Kanchi Shankracharya.

Certain Christian groups thought the tsunami was a just punishment for countries that were treating their Christian populations badly (one wonders why Pakistan was spared.)

In Israel, Sephardic chief rabbi Shlomo Amar said that the tragedy was 'an \_expression of God's wrath with the world. The world is being punished for wrongdoing — be it people's needless hatred of each other, lack of charity, or moral turpitude'.

No doubt, some natural disasters are natural in their causation but are aggravated or mitigated by arrangements, or lack of them, provided by the states and societies. Last-year's tsunami, hurricane Katrina and the recent earthquake in Kashmir show that the natural catastrophic effects of natural disasters are determined by the policies followed by the governments. In godless Cuba, the government efficiently evacuates million-and-a half people before hurricanes while in God-fearing USA Katrina leaves 1200 dead. The enormity of misery befallen the people of Kashmir is in no way a product of God's wrath. A lot has to do with the policies Islamabad has pursued vis-à-vis Kashmir; Islamabad never built any proper infrastructure there.

Even when people in Pakistan and the rest of the world, are generously donating towards the relief

efforts, it is not certain if relief will reach in time owing to the poor infrastructure. Access to 500 villages wiped off the face of the earth is not possible without helicopters since there are few roads built to link villages. Relief from abroad could not reach in time because there is no airport. This despite the fact that a large number of people from the area are settled abroad. This utter lack of infrastructure has enhanced the enormity of the catastrophe that shook Kashmir on the morning of October 8.

True, the government of Pakistan could not evacuate the people of Kashmir since the earthquake hit, unlike hurricanes, without prior knowledge. But certain similarities between Kashmir and New Orleans are striking.

Also, natural disasters pick on the poor and the weak, rather than the privileged. None of the political mullahs lost family members or were rendered homeless. Not because they are the chosen ones. But because all mainstream political mullahs enjoy life in concretely built luxury villas. Despite abundant natural wealth, majority of the Kashmiri population lives in poverty. Thus, if the earthquake was a natural disaster, it was aggravated by poverty and decades of neglect.

Also, we cannot attribute this 'mountain tsunami' as a warning to General Musharraf, despite what critics of his regime say. Neither can we blame the 'obscene' media as some mullahs and right wing columnists are trying to do. If divine wisdom is meant to punish innocent citizens for the deeds of a military ruler, then the Hasba-billed, MMA-ruled NWFP should have been spared God's wrath. If media obscenity and 'unIslamic' rulers of Pakistan are to be blamed then what about Iran which was hit twice by earthquakes in the last six years despite its pure media and puritan Islamic government. Similarly Afghanistan experienced two earthquakes (1999 and Feb 2001) while the Taliban were running Kabul and Radio Shariat would not broadcast anything but the word of God.

Above all, earthquakes are known to occur even before the 'sinful' descendants of Adam and Eve inhabited mother earth. Who was, in those good old days, God angry at?

Meanwhile, BBC reports that God asked Bush to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. Surely, the gods must be crazy!

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