

# Paris (France), Peshawar (Pakistan) and Boko Haram (Nigeria) - Religion, Politics and Violence

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Massacre of hundreds of children in Peshawar by Pakistani Taliban, the atrocities: murders-kidnappings by Boko Haram, an Islamist group and the attack on Paris cartoon magazine *Charlie Hedbo* killing 12 [and later 5 more], have occurred in a short span of few months. The popular perception of relationship between violence and Islam got a further boost. The phrase 'Islamic Terrorism', which was created by US media in the aftermath of 9/11, got a further shot in the arms. It got a booster dose of unprecedented level. The debates regarding freedom of expression, sharia laws, education for girls continued to be in the fore and columns after column either dissociating Islam from these mindless acts or boosting the perception of Muslims being in the business of merciless killing of their own kith and other with gay abandon; dominated the visual and print media (January 2015).

These acts of terror kill the innocent people and Koran- chapter V verse 32- goes on to say that even if you kill a single innocent person, that's like killing the whole humanity with an addition that if you save a single innocent person that's like saving the whole humanity. Still the impression continues that currently most of the dreaded acts of terror are either done by Muslims belonging to this or that group or faction. Not too long ago we did witness acts of terror from the like of Andres Behring Brevik(Norway); the people like Ashin Wirathu (Buddhist Myanmar) were in the news for related actions. Swami Aseemanand is in jail and had confessed to the acts of terrorist violence not too long ago. Does one want to underplay the association of Islam-Muslims and acts of terror? Is one wanting to be in denial mode as for as violence by some Muslims is concerned? The teachings of Koran notwithstanding; there are some Muslims who take to the senseless killings in the most insane and cruel manner; is definitely true. The question is; are such acts due to Islam or Muslims as such? How does one understand the association of label of religion with acts of violence and terror?

At the cost of broad generalizations one can say that most of the prophets of religions focused on some issue of injustice in the society and called for peace, non-violence in their own historical context. The society was either based on pastoral or agricultural mode of production and tribal society-kingdoms were the main pattern of organization of society. The religions, which began as the moral edicts had added social and communitarian functions as well. Clergy became a major component of religions. The spread of the message of prophets also led to the institutionalization of religions, which added one more dimension to the broad umbrella provided by religion as a social phenomenon. These institutions built around religions became a very significant part of religions. Those controlling levers of power gradually allied with the religions' institutions; and these institutions came to be patronized by the rulers. In turn the institutionalized religions legitimized the power of the king, landlord. King was presented as the son of God in different ways.

The alliance of King-Clergy was best seen in the alliance King-Pope. In other religions' contexts it became Nawab-Shahi Imam, Raja-Rajguru for example. Currently in Pakistan and Myanmar; mostly; the institutions of religions and dominating army are hands in gloves times and over again. In our

Maharashtra a popular Marathi phrase sums it very well Shetji-Bhatji (Landlord-Priest). With religions being institutionalized the collaboration between kings and clergy became the foundation of social system where the agricultural producers-craftsmen and other laboring masses submitted to the system created by the power of the king and ideology of the clergy. The words of Prophets went in to the background. The organization of clergy was varying, from the most organized in Christianity to the decentralized one in Hinduism, to Islam where there is no theological justification of clergy; nevertheless it is very much there.

Here comes the entry of power in the realm of religion. Kingdoms, many a times took the cover of religion for their goals of power. The kings expanded or wanted to expand their kingdoms and put this expansion project to annex other territories in the garb of Crusade, Jihad or Dharmyudh depending on the religion of the king.

The real use of religion's identity, label, can be seen during colonial period. In most South Asian countries, particularly in India, we see that with the social, economic changes accompanying the introduction of transport, communication, industries and modern education during colonial period, there was a rise of new classes in the form of businessmen industrialists, workers and educated classes in particular. They formed secular organizations, with secular democratic Indian nationalism as the goal, like Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (Bhagat Singh), Independent Labor Party, Scheduled Castes Federation (B.R.Ambedkar) and the overarching Indian Nationalist Congress (Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Mahatma Gandhi). In contrast to these rising classes the declining classes of Landlords and Kings pledged their loyalty to British and went on to form Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha and later RSS with the agenda of Hindu nation. In the Religious nationalist organizations initially only kings-landlords were there later some educated and upper caste elite and still later sections of middle class also joined in. Here the communitarian identity of religion was exploited by declining classes to protect their social-political interests. When they said 'my religion in danger' they meant my political interests are in danger. They also indulged in 'Hate other' propaganda, leading to communal violence and later to the partition of the country. Here we see religion being used as a cover, the religious nationalism to hide their feudal values of caste and gender hierarchy. Similarly the cover of Buddhism has been used by political tendencies in Srilanka and Myanmar.

With the coming in of Imperialism, the rise of the US as the global super power dominated the global scene. Two superpowers USSR and USA were in the game of 'Cold War'. US later planned and used Islam to counter Socialist block. It meticulously used a version of Islam for indoctrination the minds of youth. These youth were used to fight against the Soviet Russia and later the same indoctrinated youth came up and are tormenting the parts of the World. This phase of 'religion as a cover of political goals' begins with the formation of Israel in the aftermath of Second World War, the eviction of 14 lakh Palestinians away from their home and hearth. In due course to protect its oil interests the US-Britain nexus overthrew the democratically elected Mossadegh Government in Iran. This 'chain of events' did lead to coming to power of Ayatollah Khomeini. At this point US media coined the word 'Islam the new threat'. They meant that Socialism as the threat is in decline and Islam is coming up as the new threat to the free World. In its design to use all methods to crush the socialist block, US encouraged the Madarassas in Pakistan, where the Wahabbi version of Islam was introduced as a part of the training module designed in Washington. This version of Islam had already been the ally of the Saud family, in whose name Saudi Arabia stands. The Saud family came to use this version of Islam, Wahabbism to control the oil wealth of the region. US allied with Saud dynasty and also promoted Wahabbi version in the Madrassas in Pakistan. This version of Islam saw in every person disagreeing with their interpretation of Islam, as Kafir and killing the kafirs as Jihad. Jihad being the path to Jannat after death, jannat waiting with the rich reward of 72 virgins!

This heady mix of 'brain washing' did lead to Mujahedeen being transformed to Taliban-Al Qaeda

and later giving rise to ISIS, the major menace in today's world. Tendencies like Boko Haram draw their inspiration and support from the similar understanding of Islam. Time and again a large section of leaders of Muslims, many of the maulanas have issued the fatwa's that terrorism is against the tenets of Islam, but what sticks in social awareness is the picture of Taliban or ISIS or Al Qaeda or Boko haram as the face of Muslims and Islam. No wonder one of the greatest philosophers of all the times Karl Marx, remarked very aptly that 'Ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class', that's the power of media at the service of the US, at the service of Corporate houses. Today the Islamophobia rules the streets and in some form or the other the religion which came to give the message of peace is perceived as the ultimate in prompting and indulging in violence.

Do we need to factor in the political forces, Kings of the past, the colonial masters of yesteryears and the 'oil hungry' global superpowers, behind promoting, abusing religions' identity to understand the dastardly acts tormenting the humanity? The phrases joining any religion and terrorism are the biggest insult to the morality of religions to be sure!

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