

A STUDY OF RELIGIOUS MOTIVES BEHIND EXTREMISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE (A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS)

Dr. Ramzan Shahid*, Dr Arshad Munir**

Abstract:

Religious motives played crucial role behind terrorism throughout the history of mankind. Starting from Zealot, Sicarii to Assassins and Thugs, role of religion had always been caressed behind the terrorist actions. In 21st Century terrorism, Religion is also blamed for atrocities committed for the sake of faith. But, distinctive character which religion plays to desire its followers for the execution of carnages is doubtful. It does not mean that there's no relationship between the two; it's just that you aren't getting the true lines. It can be observed that pointing the finger at religion is not just a weak move intellectually. We need to stop scapegoating religion. Without understanding the false expressions of religion, we can't solve a problem like religious violence. Having blamed religion, or radical religion, the blamers are satisfied, and ready-set with an easy explanation for the next time terrorists attack.

Keywords: Religion, Terrorism, radicalization, peace, Islam

Introduction

Religion is quite complex phenomenon for public discourse, for the reason that it's not ever been portrayed appropriately. Incriminating religion behind every conspiracy is like finding fish in a mud. The relationship between both cannot be denied but they are not even responsible for what we are getting and what we are arguing. Most of us have imperfect and partial knowledge about religion. Asserting responsible behind violence is not a citadel in the air. How can a problem like religious violence be solved?¹

Many people having knowledge of criminology observed that the departments of religious studies, theology and philosophy have many important things to speak about terrorism. It cannot be denied that a significant sector of all violent factions and mostly problematic ones on the planet are directly motivated by religion. These groups have firm faith that God has motivated them to act in this manner.² So, Implying the term Religious Terrorism, what does it mean? Whether followers of a specific religion commit terrorist activities on behalf of religion or Religion confers its followers to do so. What are the benefits a religion or its followers may achieve from terrorist activities? If we analyze the teachings

* Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Gujrat, Pakistan

** Chairperson, Department of Islamic Studies, University of Gujrat, Pakistan

and theology of religions around the globe, we come to know that all religions preach peace in the world. Then, how its followers may commit terrorist activities while ignoring the true teachings of religion? There must be some misinterpretation of religion for the purpose of political, economical reasons etc. Looking at the geographical location of different religions in the world, it is apparent that sub-continent is the most populated region of different religions with highest number of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains and majority of Christians and Buddhists. But amazingly there is not any religious war in this region. However, there are fundamentalist organizations in the region which are determined to achieve some political advantages while using religion as a tool. So the terrorism committed by the followers of a specific religion for political or economical purposes may also be perceived as religious terrorism? One basic reason is that religious terrorists have made up their mind that they are being targeted by enemy only because of their religion. This is the question in 21st century for which the answer will determine way out from chaos. Religion is always based upon ideology which can never be eliminated nor could be induced in the minds of people without their will. It is a duty that is done willfully and based upon the clarity of mind. So staunch followers of a religion may not agree to do wrong until it is encompassed with religion. After 1979 religiously inspired terrorism emerged with new spirit and kept on rising with abundant pace. It was reported in 1995 that international terrorist organizations motivated by religion have increased by 43 percent.³ Nearly a decade earlier none of the eleven international terrorist organizations was based on religious phenomenon. But in 2004 almost half of the world's renowned active terrorist organizations were classified as inspired by religion. Today, the militant groups committing suicide attacks are using religious mythology replacing the secular agenda used by the groups like Tamil Tigers.⁴

Literature Review

Notion behind religion as a weapon of terrorism and its outcome that religion is cause behind everything has been widely discussed in Europe. The more dominant idea on violence can be found back in the writings of David Rapport's in 1984 when he discussed the violence related to religion having faith on single God.

According to Mark Juergensmeyer, "Why terrorism and religion has been intermingled with each other very strikingly now a days and why these two phenomenon often established?" Bruce Hoffman said that this type of factors change the existing values, setup and ethics. He has an opinion that

religious terrorism is more vital threat to humanity as compared to other ones. The idea of creating violence on the name of religion is more dangerous to achieve their goals and tasks at any cost. Islamic terrorism is different from previous concepts of terrorism and the basic cause of Islamic violence is to bring all Muslim Ummah into one platform and to evacuate the Muslim world from big powers.⁵

In the book *“Terror in the name of God: why Religious Militants Kill”*, Jessica Stern has an opinion that now a days idea of terrorism is being hidden in a beautiful cover of Jihad so Muslim young hunks thought it’s a best way to take revenge from the powerful elements of the society. She has mentioned that this is different from the eras of 60s and 70s, now the expressive youth like to change the course with war not with love.

Liqueur (1999) says that religious terrorism is to some extent different from existing examples of terrorist activities in the history rather it aims to destroy the systems and their moves and plans are not related to politics in nature. According to Audrey Cronin (2003) that the history is bringing us back in the old time span where terrorist, for instance, the Zealots-Sicarii were existed. He has an opinion that these groups have motive to drag back society into dark ages or when societies were on their primitive level. A similar case reveals that there is difference between the current religious terrorism and old terrorist activities related to politics. Today’s violence on the name of religion is always protected in the guise of divine duty.⁶

Magnus Rainstorm (1996) has an opinion that religious terrorism is more dangerous because religious terrorists don’t follow any code of conduct. Jessica Stern (2003) said that as compared to political terrorist groups, terrorist groups on the name of religion are more violent and destructive. Thus we can see many writings on this topic which suggest the religion as the common cause of terrorism and terrorist activities. It’s not that kind of thing which we can describe easily because on the name of religion, one can justify any violence. So religion in the modern world may be professed as the main cause behind religious violence.

Religion - Political Dilemma

Another question that arises in this situation is on what grounds, we term a terrorist group as religious or political terrorist? Both may have the same objective but in religious terrorism the faith and symbolic relationship with the religion is maintained but this is not in the case of political terrorism.⁷ In fact many religious groups don’t have the same characteristics that are discussed above, for example, Hamas, Hezbollah and the Christian distinctive factions do not target civilians or holy places

and their leadership also included the most modern and secular one. Their motives are not primarily religious rather political.⁸

The main cause of concern with these theories is pursuing the religious concepts that may play the secular motives. There may be bundles of political reasons for choosing holy places to target. The fact that to hit the ceremonies, holy places and crowdedly places is just to maximize the results. Religion and terrorism became allied because religious groups are more active and dangerous than secular ones. Eventually to put label on religion as cause of terrorism and violence is misinterpreted because religion is with the mankind since beginning. An organization that describes itself as religious organization may differ in its actual perspectives due to its organizational structure and political motives. So it may happen that an organization which describes itself religious organization may not necessarily exist on religious grounds. Due to these factors, now a day, religious groups are more under discussions than the left wing organizations.⁹

This is ascertained in many cases that more violence is political in nature rather than religious like violence in Middle East is to change the entire setup of established governments. Middle Eastern states are facing worst terrorism since the day of their establishment. The oil is a blessing turned into curse for them. This also caused an ongoing war like situation and also source of growing inequality among people.¹⁰ Likewise the movement from leftist and nationalist as well as ethnic politics of the organizations based on religion has been shifted in past two decades. Also a change has been witnessed in domestic as well as international politics. For example the threat of religious organizations that once been used against communism by USA has reformed. The successful terrorist activities are based on the ability to convince the followers of a religion that it's a divine duty and vigorous part of religion to protect its interests. This leads towards the notion that religious terrorism is nothing but the wrong interpretation of religion by the terrorists.¹¹ Consequently, it can be stated that religion is only a war tactic for militants to serve their ends. It's pertinent to mention that these terrorists chose the date or day that is specifically related to a religious occasion.

Extremist Propaganda through Social Media

It's a sad dilemma of the time that all the terrorist organizations either they are Muslim, Christian or Jews, they know the use of latest technology and how to manipulate the social networking sites. They are connected to each other with highly sophisticated websites. Their forums are quick in

formation of public opinion in their favor. Their leadership and spokesperson are ready to give their statements and interviews in leading newspapers and electronic media platforms every time.

The use of social networking sites and fully updated websites created a sense of unity and belongingness in all jihadists' across the globe. These quick sites provide variety of information to internet users and help organizations for the new volunteers and often these young hunks belongs to western states. Other than Islam, Christians also used the tactics of propaganda against war on terrorism. In this regard many Christian websites and interviews from leading scholars are published regularly to strengthen the opinion of Christian community regarding terrorism and particularly against Islam and its teachings.¹²

Professor Mark Juergensmeyer writes, "Religion is not innocent, but it does not customarily lead to violence. That happens only with the coalescence of a weird set of circumstances - political, social, and ideological, when religion becomes amalgamated with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for political change. And whether or not one uses 'terrorist' to describe violent acts depends on whether one thinks that the acts are warranted. To a large extent the use of the term depends on one's world view: if the world is perceived as peaceful, violent acts appear to be terrorism. If the world is thought to be at war, violence may be regarded as justifiable. They may be seen as preemptive strikes, as defensive tactics in an on-going battle, or as symbols indicating to the world that it is indeed in a state of grave and ultimate conflict".¹³

Mobilization of Terrorism in World Religions

Buddhism

2500 years ago, a person Gautama Buddha presented his philosophy based on an unlighted and modern religion. Buddha's philosophy was based on peaceful co-existence and not to hurt each other at any cost. Buddhism is perceived a mythology among the religious traditions rarely associated with violence. In Buddhist philosophy, *Sarambha* means "accompanied by violence". Later on when the mind is filled with lobha, dosa and moha (lust, hatred and delusion) it leads towards the activities which are akusala. Committing violence is like self-harming. In Buddhist philosophy Violence is rejected in society for sake of spiritual progress. Violence is perceived as a source of pain to beings. Mahatma Buddha says in Dhammapada "All are afraid of the stick, all hold their lives dear. Putting oneself in another's place, one should not beat or kill others". Metta (loving kindness) is the

stage of mind where a state of unlimited good-will for human being is created. Similarly, karuna is the stage where any human feels compassion when he looks at someone suffering. Like other religions, Buddhism is not a strict religion because it is not “a system of blind faith and worship,” owing any allegiance to a supernatural God. Adherents of Buddhism are not urged to follow blindly upon its teachings; rather mere belief is rejected and replaced with confidence which is based on knowledge. A Buddhist may have certain doubts until he achieves the first stage of Sainthood (Sotāpatti). When any Buddhist reaches on this level then he is deliberated as true follower of the Buddha.¹⁴

When Mahatma Buddha sent his first group of sixty disciples to teach the people about his faith, he advised them as: “Go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men.” Like this, Buddhist writings, dogmas, and religious practices promote ahimsā, (non-harming or nonviolence). Mahāyāna teachings further advocate this notion of non-violence as Daśabhūmika-sūtra proclaims that Buddhists “must not hate any being and cannot kill a living creature even in thought.”¹⁵

The idea of revenge is rejected in Buddhism. Instead, the Buddha teaches tolerance, compassion and forgiveness. The Buddha said, “In those who harbor such thoughts as, “He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me, hatred never ceases. In those who do not harbor such thoughts, hatred will cease.”¹⁶ Again Buddha said, “Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone it ceases. This is an eternal law.” Buddhism does not glorify war according to Yodhajiva Sutta. Even it does not urge its followers to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their beliefs. It goes one step further by rejecting those who go to war for the sake of their country or religion.¹⁷

However besides these teachings, World is facing Buddhist terrorism around the globe. Monks have inflicted terrorism and violence in the society against the followers of other religions and minorities.

Christianity

The religion founded by Jesus and based on monistic footprints called Christianity. The teachings of this religion are also based on injections of peace, justice and love. However, Christianity preaches some extent of violence on the account of religion. In Christianity, the cross has been delineated frequently upon peaks of shields, in the plating of reinforcement or even as engravings upon weapons.¹⁸ For those who

fought in the name of God, were accredited as *Milites Christi*, warriors or knights of Christ.¹⁹ Christian fighters assumed that victory was achieved through celestial intervention or help from God, and took terrific pride in their credence. These blessed warriors pursued opposing armies and the heretic religions and cults of the time, and were quite revered by the Church and the State. On these footprints, the term “fundamentalism” was originally used in the context of Christianity and later on it was emerged into other arenas of discourse. For this, a series of booklets named “The Fundamentals” was published in USA at the beginning of twentieth-century. These booklets were subsequently distributed around the world to strengthen the viewpoint that there is a fundamental and non-negotiable set of traditional Christian doctrines.²⁰ There was a broad sense of requirements to wage a war for the integrity of the Christianity and for this purpose; the notion of being fundamental was proudly accepted. However, subsequent and wider application of the term faced much problems and difficulties in Christian theology. Even though, its roots remained limited to be transferred into religious contexts other than Christianity.²¹

The actions of Spain in 15th century can be counted as state terrorism. During that period Muslims and Jews who refused to change their religion faced worse torture from church and state. No doubt, there would be other Organizations and movements who similarly would like to influence a large society in order to portray dogma and principles to bring change according to their agendas. The aspiration for revolution and actively participating in socio-political matters does not equate with fundamentalism or merely with terrorism.

Hinduism

Hindu religion is the most ancient religion in the history and the third largest religion after Islam and Christianity. Looking at the etymology of the word, it is established that since 19th century there was no specific religious meaning of the word Hindu. All of the people living eastern side of Indus River, irrespective of their beliefs were called Hindu. When British Colonial authorities decided to census in 1871, it was then they introduced the word Hindu as religious designation for the followers of Sanatan Dharam. After this, Indians of sub-continent began to think of themselves as Hindu and their country as Hindustan.

Hinduism also preaches nonviolence but it can be witnessed that followers of Sanatan Dharam (Hindus) turned into violent extremist on many occasions. A divergent tradition, insisting on the complete renunciation of

violence, was ascendant during the period of the Upanishads. It asserted that violent action must, by the law of karma, produce a violent reaction, and that any action that promotes the interest of one at the expense of another individual is rooted in spiritual delusion that obscures the single spiritual reality—Brahman. The conflict between these competing approaches to force constitutes the heart of the Bhagavad Gita, a dialogue between the god Krishna and the mighty warrior Arjuna, who refused to fight in a righteous cause. Krishna explains that violence is not only necessary for the defense of justice, but that such violence need not conflict with spiritual life. The contradiction between the two values is resolved by disciplined action (action without regard for its fruit), insightful action (recognizing the true nature of the self), and complete devotion to Krishna.²²

Islam

Islam, Christianity and Jews follow the same monistic God. Islam teaches its follower to peacefully spend their lives. There are two sources of knowledge in Islam, Qur'an and Hadiths. Jihad has been obligatory for Muslims in both sources. The word Jihad is never meant to be 'holy war'. In Arabic the holy war would be 'harb-al-muqaddas' that is a different term from Jihad that also never been mentioned in Qur'an or Hadiths as a holy war. There are about 28 verses relating to Jihad and the term Jihad has been mentioned 41 times. These all verses ended up with the proclamation to bring peace in the society. The Qur'an says "If someone kills another person unless it is in retaliation for someone else or for causing corruption in the earth, it is as if he had murdered all mankind. And if anyone gives life to another person, it is as if he had given life to all mankind" (Qur'an, 5:32).²³

The first exposure on the subject of armed struggle came in the form of permission soon after the migration of the Holy Prophet to Medina. The revelation reads:

"To those against whom war is made, permission is given to fight because they are wronged" Al-Quran

It is evident from this verse that Islam only permits to wage a war if you are being aggressed. Islam permits no war or act of aggression in any shape or form. It is in this sense that Islam is the religion of peace.

"And why should you not fight in the cause of Allah, and those who being weak, are ill-treated and opposed: men, women and children, who cry our Lord rescue us" Al-Quran

Here two elements are added. Firstly, now the permission to fight is changed into a duty to fight. Secondly, the scope of Jihad is enlarged to make it obligatory to fight,

- (i) In self defence
- (ii) in the defence of the weak
- (iii) The ill-treated
- (iv) The oppressed

There is clear message of no discrimination on grounds of religion, nationality, race, language or any other in whose defence Jihad is ordained.

Interpretations of the Qur'an

"Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knows, and ye know not. [Qur'an 2:216

On another place Quran says, "The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter"; [Qur'an 5:33]

"But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful." [Qur'an 9:5]

Although fighting is allowed in Islam yet it obliges some restrictions to its followers, Quran states,

"Fight those who believe neither in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which had been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued". [Qur'an 9:29]

But in history many violent groups and organizations used the name of Islam. In recent past, at the time of Afghanistan war, this slogan was quite famous: "Jihad and the rifle alone. No negotiations, no conferences, no dialogue".²⁴

Conclusion

The above all details reveal that terrorism on the basis of religion is due to the misinterpretation of religious teachings by some segments of the

society. It can only be eradicated through dialogue between these religions. There are many things common amongst great religions like respect for humanity and peaceful coexistence. On the basis of these common parameters, a dialogue can be initiated between these religions. The trends have now been changed and religion is the centre of everything in new terrorism.²⁵ Religion has been with the mankind throughout the history. One can analyze that terrorism is as old as the history of human beings. But there is little connection between religion and terrorism as the two are not fully associated with each other. Scholars have mentioned the ways to combat with the terrorist tendencies accordingly. There are two sides of coin where one side is occupied by religion but that is being treated unfairly in this regard. People with minute knowledge have opinion that religion is the sole cause behind every type of terrorism. There are many scholars either from west or east that came to the conclusion that terrorism is not just belonging to a specific religion but when we talk about violence or terrorism it may come from anywhere. It is also apparent from the teachings of different great religions. Religions may be a reason among many reasons behind a terrorist activity. There are different categories, for example, culture, language, caste and creed so religion also comes along them and it's not the only cause behind any type of terrorism. The task to understand and tackle religious based terrorism and violence is a difficult one. Terrorist organizations and groups always express justification to prove their acts and justify their outrages according to their faith and religion. But there remains no secret that they misinterpret the true teachings of religion for the fulfillment of their vested interests.

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