Root Causes of Militancy: Religion or Otherwise?

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Introduction

As is known, a militant is defined as one using or willing to use force or strong pressure to achieve one’s ends, especially to achieve social or political change. Before we discuss different aspects of militancy, let me at the very outset of my talk, explain why I chose the present title of my paper, namely, "Root Causes of Militancy: Religion or Otherwise", in spite of the fact that the present conference is on Religious Militancy and Security in South Asia. I, personally, am not very happy with the use of the word 'religious militancy', simply because there is a global tendency now to trace militancy to religious roots, and particularly, to Islam, a fast growing religion. It is not that there is no religious militancy in the world, but I am inclined to believe, that every form of militancy has a cause of its own, and not every form of militancy has a religious root. Thus, in order that we hopefully eliminate religious militancy from the world, and particularly from South Asia, it seems proper to identify the causes of militancy at all levels. Once we understand the root causes of militancy and try sincerely to eliminate those, militancy (religious or otherwise) would find the least support to spread. In what follows, we have tried to diagnose militancy, and have outlined how, in particular cases, religion has been used by
vested their own national and international quarters to promote militancy for achieving selfish ends.

Militancy at the Family Level

When a child breaks a glass or throws something in a hostile manner, it is a kind of militancy - all right, but religion has nothing to do with this militant behaviour. Upon analyses, it would be transparent that the child is suffering from lack of love and care of the parents. If a social scientist did a thorough analysis of the violence committed by people and trace their family backgrounds, he/she would find that the persons involved in robbery, hijacking, blackmailing and rapes etc., are in many cases, children of the highly placed people in the society whose houses are often equipped with the most modern technological gadgets that one could think of, including the latest models of DVD players, Hi-fi sets, PC's, touch-button household equipments, air-conditioned and module-fitted automobiles, the best of clothing apparels, furniture etc. One would also notice the frequent holding of parties in these homes where people having positions or money would throng, eat, drink, dance and have fun. But the houses do not experience the hearty laughter of their inmates when they are left to themselves. The husbands and wives are always in a mad race for, God knows, what; and they have no time to talk to each other. Their children can hardly get their company. The children amidst all physical facilities dry up mentally in an alarming manner. Again, an in-depth psychoanalysis of violence would reveal that it is the family that can solve the problems of militant attitudes to a great extent. Obviously, one has to go back to the family, which has long been neglected. The family has to be looked at as a model for peace, as a model for social harmony, as a model for discipline. And if the values of religion are added to that model, then the children would most ideally be placed in an environment that upholds moral, religious and family
values which would eventually counter militant tendencies on the part of children.

**Militancy at the Social Level**

Militancy at the social level has its roots in conflicts that have originated for ages from a number of issues: issues relating to establishment of authority by one party over another, issues regarding the owning of private properties, issues relating to marriages between conflicting groups, issues relating to differences in religious customs etc. These instances of militancy have no support from the majority of religions except in the case of Hinduism where the caste structure like Bhraman, Khattriya, Baissha and Suddhra is a recognized one, and in case attempts are made by conscientious persons to break these barriers, militancy of some form or other exist. This could be termed a kind of religious militancy. However, with the gradual increase of social consciousness and with the gradual spread of education in all sections of the society, these barriers are beginning to break down and the religious militancy originating from the caste differences are likely to be eliminated in course of time.

**Militancy at the National Level**

Militancy at the national level has been observed in many nations of the world, especially when the interests of vast majority of people have been neglected for too long. The militant tendencies are especially pronounced in societies whose political structures are far from being stabilized, and which have undergone colonial rule dividing the people economically and ideologically. The best example of national militancy in the not too remote past is the one in Pakistan, which consisted of West and East Pakistan. For years, the people of East Pakistan, which earned considerable foreign exchange, felt deprived in all aspects of participation in the
running of the statecraft, including the defence. Even when a political party based in East Pakistan won the national elections comprehensively, the shifting of power was refused to the party, and as a result, the people of East Pakistan protested against the denial of transfer of power, and because of denial and repressive measures, eventually forced them to wage a war for independence, which culminated in the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. Now, the freedom fight of Bangladesh can certainly not be dubbed as religious militancy, as the majority of the people of both the sections of Pakistan are Muslims, and they have no religious differences amongst them. The disturbing factor was one of economic and other forms of exploitation. Incidentally, it is the people of East Pakistan who took the initiative of forming Muslim League in Dhaka in 1906, and took active part in the creation of Pakistan with Fazlul Haq, known as the Tiger of Bengal, moving the historic Lahore resolution in 1940. Thus, it is crystal clear, that even in almost a homogeneous nation wherein most of the citizens belong to the same religion, militancy can occur if the economic and social interests of the majority of the people are ignored for too long.

Similarly, many people feel that the struggles for independence by religious or ethnic groups should not be viewed as mere religious militancy. Also, it is the considered opinion of many that double standards should not be applied by international community to such kinds of independent struggles. The application of double standards further aggravates the sentiments of people who then take to arms and are branded as 'religious militants'.

**Militancy at the Regional Level**

There are instances in the world where militancy at the regional level has assumed the role of regional militancy. One of the typical examples is the Indo-Pak conflict in the subcontinent. Both the countries were ruled as a colony for
200 years by the British, who, during their rule, used their ‘divide and rule’ policy and were finally able to sow the seeds of discord and hatred between Muslims and Hindus of India, especially during the later part of their rule. In spite of the fact that both the members of the Muslim and the Hindu communities lived for long in peace and harmony under the Mughal rule, these communities were whipped into turmoil by the British Raj, who literally made a mess during the transfer of power. Initially, the British, coming to India, in the form of a company, assumed political role, and when they were able to defeat the Mughals, they naturally tried to take the Hindu community into confidence. And only during the later part of their rule, they turned to the Muslims, and tried to give them more facilities. The partition of Bengal, in 1905, was a gesture to give the people of the then East Bengal facilities which were denied to them for long. This partition was, of course, annulled, and in spite of the best efforts of some Muslim and Hindu leaders, the Bengal, which was a Muslim majority province in India, was eventually divided during the partition of India into India and Pakistan. It is a part of history, that communal frenzy was witnessed both before and immediately after this partition. Although migration of Muslims and Hindus took place both ways between India and Pakistan, the fact is, that Muslims and Hindus remained in both the states, with some of their relatives living in the other. A feeling of animosity and hatred which was bred during partition, continued. It is very wrong to believe that partition was effected because of the rigid attitude of the Muslim leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In fact, in a recent book, published by Shoilandra Kumar Mukhopaddhye, and titled Jinnah, Pakistan—Notun Bhabna, it has been shown that Mr. Jinnah, who had been mentioned by Sarojini Naidu as the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, was not really the man responsible for partition. The responsibility lied more, with Nehru and Patel. This book draws heavily from the sources of the
National Archives in India, and gives an authenticated version of the generation of rift between Hindus and Muslims. This is not to say that the Muslims did not want a united India. The Muslims wanted a just share for themselves in the running of the statecraft. In fact, Jinnah once asked Gandhi, 'Will the fate of Muslims in the hands of Hindus be the same as the fate of the Indians in the hands of the British?', Gandhi replied, "No, Mr. Jinnah, the Hindus and Muslims will live like brothers and sisters, and you will be the first Prime Minister of the undivided India, then he turned to Nehru and said, 'what do you say?'". According to the book titled 'Gandhi', this was a premeditated dialogue arranged by Mr. Jinnah and Gandhi, and Nehru did not show any positive response to this. All this is part of history and is being mentioned here only to assert, that Muslims did not want the partition out of communal militancy, but were rather forced into it only when their demand for a political settlement within the concept of undivided India was refused by the prominent Hindu leaders. Even in the case of Bengal, the Muslims wanted to remain in a united Bengal whereas the Hindus wanted to have an identity of their own. This is indeed ironical, because it is the Hindus who annulled the partition of Bengal in 1905. Thus, religious militancy was generated owing to lack of political foresightedness on the part of local leaders; and the rulers, namely, the British, further aggravated this by keeping some problems unresolved like the annexing of the state of Jammu and Kashmir to India or to Pakistan. The Kashmir problem could have been settled in the beginning if the necessary will and determination was really there. As a result, since the partition of British India into India and Pakistan, the people who suffered during partition and people who held extreme views started getting the upper hand both in India and in Pakistan, and extreme religious groups, having very sharp feelings and belligerent attitudes, started to thrive. In India, a political party even spread the philosophy, that
India is for Hindus, and the Muslims are outsiders. The government has not done much to say that this philosophy is not really a tenable one.

Ever since the dawn of civilization, there has been an exodus of people from one land to another. Even the Aryans, who settled in India, came from outside, and Michael Modhusudan Dutta, in his famous the *Meghnad Badh Kabbyo*, played Ravan up and Laksman, brother of Ram, down on the basis that Ravan was a native hero, and the other was an outsider. Not a single finger was raised then, when Michael wrote this famous epic. But now, people are causing a horrible carnage over the issues of Babri Mosque, and *Ram Janmabhumi*. Luckily, however, the people of Bangladesh, the vast majority of which are Muslims, have been politically mature enough not to react to the Babri Mosque issue or the carnage in Ahmedabad, which, ironically was the seat of the legendary non-violent leader Mahatma Gandhi. What is the way out? How to avoid such communal violence which are counter-productive and detrimental to the establishment of peace? These are questions which have to be addressed by the civil-society in a fair manner. The hard fact is that the beauty and essence of religion can hardly be appreciated by a significant number of people in the countries of the sub-continent. People are busy mostly with the observing of the rituals of the religion, and not with the substance of it. There is a reason for this also. As of today, a vast majority of people in the subcontinent are illiterate. The governments of these countries would be highly complacent if the level of literacy approaches 100 per cent. Personally I feel that the 100 per cent literacy is certainly a welcome thing, but it is simply not enough. The people have not only to be made literate, but also to be educated. There is no denying the fact that the substance of religion can be appreciated only through education, which enlightens the souls of men, and makes them feel like members of a human family. Thus, there are really no permanent short-term solutions to the curbing of
such militant attitudes, except for a strict invigilation of a law enforcing agencies, whose job would be to secure the lives of the people and property. The long-term solution would be to firstly impart a real teaching of religion early in the educational life. Also, secondly, an inter-faith study of religion should be presented to people fairly early in their lives to make one point clear, namely, that it is the commonalities of religion which should be highlighted more, rather than the differences. Even within the religion of Islam, there are many ‘Firqas’ (many ways of observing religion) although the essential point is belief in God and in the last Prophet, Hazrat Mohammad (PBUH). This has support from the Holy Quran itself which says, ‘O mankind, thou art but one nation’. The media also has to play a very constructive role in curbing down militant attitudes on the part of extremist groups. They should bring the leaders of different communities under one platform and make ardent appeal to their followers to remain calm under all circumstances. Unfortunately, instead of making such appeals, many of the politicians of the world find it useful to side with the religious militant groups only considering the gains that they would get in terms of votes. Also, the followers of the minority religious groups should not be considered as the vote bank. Citizens are citizens, and all citizens should be treated with fairness and justice. When this happens, many a problem would disappear.

It is true that Pakistan has declared itself as an Islamic state. Now, if we compare the norms of this state with those of the Islamic states established earlier by the Holy Prophet (PBUH), we would immediately wonder as to why this Islamic state has not been more peaceful. And the answer that one gets after detailed analyses are, that if the people were left alone to observe Islam in the way it has been encouraged in the Quran and Hadith, things would appear to be quite different.
Another hard fact is that Pakistan has been drawn into a number of international issues because of its proximity to India, Afghanistan, China and Iran. And also because of its becoming a nuclear power, all eyes of all big powers including the sole superpower, the USA, are on Pakistan. The Kashmir problem has made the political relations between India and Pakistan further more and more militant. An indirect effect of this militancy surfaces up even in the attitudes of spectators of a cricket match between India and Pakistan. No two cricket teams of the world have so much pressure on the nerves of the players and so much prestige involved in the result of the game than a match between India and Pakistan.

Fortunately, however, it is being observed through television interviews of people, that the educated people of India and Pakistan are finding the present militancy to be really a futile issue. Although, rather late, they are beginning to realize that these two countries would do well to open their borders between each other, to exchange artists and to build-up friendship as well as an atmosphere in which all problems could be solved. These are seen by many as very rational moves towards the removal of militancy. The million dollar question is, 'should all problems of these two states be solved and then should they become friendly, or should they become friendly first, and then solve their problems?' There are hardly any neighbouring countries which do not have some problems to solve. But these are solved in an atmosphere of friendship and understanding. Once the military expenditure of these countries are cut down, and diverted more towards meeting the basic necessities of life of the vast majorities of people, the belligerent attitudes would be considerably low. Thus, the people of both countries have the responsibilities of prevailing upon their governments not to wage war against each other. If wars are to be waged at all, they should be waged against poverty and illiteracy.
Finally, militancy at the regional level is also linked with militancy at the international level. Whatever happens at one part of the world affects the feelings and sentiments of people of other parts of the world, especially of people who adhere to the same religious faiths. Again, the outburst of these feelings should not be viewed as an outburst of religious militancy, but more of an expression of sympathy and solidarity. In this sense, the Middle East crisis does not end as a Middle East crisis, but as a crisis for the Muslim Ummah, who feel, that members of one section of the Ummah, if treated unjustly, should receive condemnation from other sections. In fact, sometimes, the magnitude of the problem crosses the borders of the Ummah, and even receives sympathies of the people whose governments have been acting unjustly in these respects. Incidentally, there are young people in Israel who resent the oppression of the Palestinian by the Israeli forces. Similar instances abound in other global militancy. Now coming to the issue of the Indian subcontinent, an expression that is often used for the apparent militant attitude of Muslim population in this region is 'Fundamentalism'. The use of this term is found to be insulting to the innumerable pious Muslims who treat religion as a unifier of mankind, rather than a divider. They find the word fundamentalism to be a grievous insult, and their finding is not without justifications. In this connection, I feel tempted to recount a personal story of mine.

More than ten years ago, I had had an opportunity to attend a conference on “Changing Communications in the Commonwealth” at the Queen of England’s Castle at Windsor. I was asked to make a speech after dinner, which I gladly made. I had never witnessed such a galaxy of Lords, Sirs, Barons and Knights at a time before. The next day, at one of the meetings, a Lord said in his speech, “The rise of Islamic fundamentalism is causing a serious threat to world peace and prosperity.” This statement shocked me, and I said to my Almighty Lord, “I must protest against this”.
After his speech was over, I very mildly said, "Can I make a short intervention?", and he said, "Certainly". I then remarked, "Well, sir, why are you showering the adjective fundamentalism on people who do not deserve that? If you think somebody is a looter, he/she should be called a looter. If you think somebody is blowing off a tower, he/she should be called a terrorist. If you think somebody is killing people, he/she should be called a killer. And if somebody is hijacking, he/she could be called a hijacker. What fundamental values are these groups of people, whom you are calling Islamic fundamentalists, actually clinging to? Then again, sir, which subject does not have fundamental principles? In my own field of Physics, if a point of light (Photon) travels from a point A to a point B, then, there could be several routes of going from A to B, but we know now, that the route from A to B is almost a straight line, and we call this 'Fermat's principle of least path', which is a fundamental principle of nature. Similarly, we have other fundamental principles, namely, the principle of conservation of energy, and the principle of least action. We hold these fundamental principles very dear to our heart, and cannot sacrifice them under any circumstances. Similarly, an economist has some fundamental principles that govern the demand, supply and purchase of things. In human affairs also, there are fundamental principles and values. All you can ask someone is 'What are your fundamentals?' If somebody comes up and says, my fundamentals are to believe in one God and all His Apostles and not to make any distinctions among them, my fundamentals are to love mankind irrespective of religion, colour and creed, my fundamentals are to cure the disease, my fundamentals are to speak the truth under all circumstances, my fundamentals are to do my duty properly as part of religion, then, are these fundamentals values or vices?" The Lord listening to me very patiently, finally said, "I think you are right, we are using a wrong word in a wrong context". I had the personal satisfaction of
winning another foreign diplomat at another conference, who said, “After I have listened to you, I am not going to use this word again”. In fact, in a world torn by conflict, hatred and violence, people tend to use this word in respect to Islamic fundamentalism, Hindu fundamentalism as well as Christian fundamentalism. But the tendency is more often seen in the case of Islam. In any case, there is no denying that people of any religion can wrongly carry out excesses. How should these people be branded, then? They should certainly be discouraged and branded as extremists or fanatics, but not fundamentalists. The lexical meaning of the word fundamentalism is belief in something, only because it is mentioned irrespective of what science says about it. Even in that respect, the word fundamentalism should not be applied in Islam as one finds through research, that there is concordance between science and Islam, and not conflict between science and Islam. As Morris Buccilli has said, “There is not a single verse in the Holy Quran which is assailable from the scientific point of view.” Thus, even in the lexical terms, the word fundamentalism, should not be applied to the genuine followers of Islam. I have dealt with this at some length only to show, that wrong terms and wrong connotations can hurt the religious sentiments of people who are then forced to show the wrong behaviour. Finally, many of the militancy at the regional level are linked with militancy at the international level. In this connection, one cannot but mention the militancy in the Middle East, which, of course, can be identified as a religious militancy and which again has developed on the issue of curbing out a solution to the problems. My idea about the root of militancy in the Middle East changed considerably, when I listened to Lord Noel Becker (the first secretary general of the League of Nations) at Pugwash conference in Holland some twenty-three years ago when the Soviets entered into Afghanistan. Lord Noel Becker said that he wrote a letter in the Times of London who refused to publish this. The contents of the letter were
simply that history has it that the Afghans are a great and unique people, and it is very difficult to conquer them. I wanted to know from Lord Noel Becker the roots of the hostility between the Arabs and the Jews. He replied, "It is wrong to assume, that the Arabs have been hostile to the Jews from the very beginning. When at the beginning of the founding of the state of Israel, I asked King Abdul Aziz, 'What are your views about the Jews coming in your vicinity and forming an independent state?' King Abdul Aziz replied, 'What are you saying, sir. The Jews are such talented people and are so advanced in different branches of knowledge that if they come and live by our side, we would only benefit from their expertise.'" But then who would have thought that the refugee problem which caused the creation of Israel would remain an insurmountable problem so long. I immediately said to myself, that if there were more and more Noel Beckers in the world, the problems would perhaps be solved long ago. If one thinks fully over the developments that followed in subsequent years, and if one has an inner conviction that there is no problem that is insurmountable, one finds that the real cause of militancy, or religious militancy in the Middle East, has been more an ego and prestige problem that has perpetuated the crisis. If the bigger powers of the world and international agencies really mean business, and are really committed in the creation of the state of Palestine, there is no reason why the problem cannot be solved. There could always be some irritants, as is often the case between neighbouring countries, but these can be solved once the major problem is solved. After all that has happened, my submission, here, may sound to be too simple-minded, but the hard fact is that the complexity of the problem has to be resolved one way or another, and when that happens, people would certainly think why had not were they solved before. It is the simple feeling of many people in the world that if the Middle East problem was solved, a major part of the militancy in the world would be over. The prolonged
militancy has forced people to find different kinds of defensive and offensive mechanisms, and both parties have something to say in this. The Israelis would say, 'It is difficult to live with the Palestinians because they are terrorist in nature', and the Palestinians would say, 'Our backs are against the walls and we have nothing to do but push back'. Needless to say, that tactics employed by the Palestinians have spread to groups of people in other lands, and they in turn, have been resorting to violence as a means of solving problems. The unfortunate thing is that the politicians have not learnt from history, and that the longer a problem is kept alive, longer would be the duration of militancy with an added fear that one act of militancy in one part of the globe breeds to another act of same militancy in another part, and eventually, these militancy would have the prospect of being connected, especially in the growing age of communications where everybody learns about matters in seconds. Thus, there is no denying the fact that the militant groups in Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, Sudan, and Kashmir may have some common links after all. The sooner the major problems are solved, better are the chances of preventing the spread of militancy. The people in general would appreciate such moves, as the resources from combating militancy would be diverted to peaceful means, and to the solution of the basic problems of life.

Militancy at the International Level

Militancy at the international level has its roots in ideological differences. When there were two superpowers in the world and two dominant ideologies namely capitalism and communism, the efforts of one group was to win the people of another group. And the Muslims, all over the world, were encouraged to beat communism. In fact, some of the Muslim and tribal leaders were trained militarily to combat communism. The ironical thing is that when the
Soviet Union broke into pieces without a firing of a bullet, the people who were trained to combat communism were dubbed as 'fundamentalists'. Thus, innocent religious groups were drawn into ideological battles and they themselves, on many occasions, turned into religious militants. Apart from ideological differences, being the breeder of militancy, the sellers of arms who were mostly seated in the west, further promoted the militancy in the world. Who does not know, that the peace of arms sellers is disturbed when peace is established in the world. Thus, of necessity, the smaller and weaker nations have to resolve their own differences not by investing scarce resources on arms, but on development.

The development and spread of nuclear arms has further aggravated acts of general and religious militancy of the world, especially when people of different religions, namely Hindus and Muslims, have owned such bombs. Ironically, the Muslim nuclear bomb has been termed as an Islamic Bomb because of the fear of spread of associated nuclear technology to Islamic countries, although nobody has ever heard of the words 'Hindu Bomb'. Again, in the case of nuclear arsenals, a situation of double standard exists. Some countries get awfully alarmed when the nuclear arms spread horizontally. Obviously, they are talking against horizontal proliferation of nuclear arms. But when it is pointed out to the big powers that they themselves have a vertical proliferation of nuclear-arsenals in their own lands, they really have no answer. In fact, there is enough stockpile of nuclear weapons which can destroy our planet a few times over. There is a great psychological militancy amongst the third world nuclear powers and the nuclear powers of the west. There is only one way that this militancy can be solved, namely, that the non-proliferation has to be total, and not merely horizontal. There are other militancy of other sorts which are being caused, more or less in other countries of the world, for example, with the use of explosive devices, or with the use of very
conventional weapons. Gangs of people, sometimes wrongly in the garb of religion, extort money, hijack people, pull down buildings, throw grenades, indulge in mass rapes etc. These militancies have nothing to do with religion, although the members of the public are naturally becoming more and more panicked at these. These acts of militancy can be curbed by a trained police force through a determined and resolute political will. What is more disturbing is the nurturing and thriving of extremists and intolerant groups whose numbers unfortunately are increasing all over the world. Again, these anti-social and anti-human activities can be remedied only through the modernization of public opinion at both national and international levels. The establishment of peace and the resolution of conflicts should also find places in the textbooks of schools all over the world. The future generations of the world should be taught the value of peace fairly early in their lives and the inter-faith dialogues should also be used as a means of curbing religious violence.

Conclusion

Religious militancy and security in South Asia, and for that matter anywhere in the world, has originated not merely from religion (as no religion promotes violence) but more from the use of religion for political purposes. The developing countries have been cleverly drawn into militancy by the arms sellers who feel threatened by efforts for the establishment of global peace, and take the course to thwart such attempts. The twenty-first century is a century of knowledge economy. It has given us new hopes and aspirations of using science and technology for improving the lives of people as well as for better communication with one another. It should be the combined responsibilities of statesmen, intellectuals, community leaders and the international agencies to realize that the generation and the persistence of the militancy does not serve the purposes of
any society. Militancy is like a contagious disease. The medicine for this disease is kind and rational understanding of people's behaviour. Finally, militancy should not be fought with militancy. At this juncture of human history, humankind is now equipped with a number of sophisticated means to reach the hearts of people and remove the bitterness that exists therein. Love and understanding are the sole means of removing all militancy, religious or otherwise.