

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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Religion Stands for Fraternity

There are different wars and tussles in different parts of the world. Unfortunately, these wars and clashes take the lives of many people each day. These wars, on most of the occasions, are considered to be based on religion and thus religion is thought to be their root. However, it is not the religion that is promulgating the clashes, the actual reason is to be found somewhere else.

As a matter of fact, today's world is dominated by the political leaders and economic giants. They have controlled the different spheres of life to a large extent. And, they utilize them every now and then for different purposes as well. Religion, unfortunately, is being used by the same political and economic leaders and they are destroying the true face of religion.

Even a cursory look at the contemporary world of ours will depict that politics is nothing except voracity and passionate pursuit of power, authority and fame. All the politician or political groups are in a race to subjugate others. The pursuit of power is in its nature; therefore, it uses any means to gain that power. Competition and rivalry among the different political parties and groups are marked with violence and unethical deeds. Every political group upswings with the demise of others. Every political group flourishes with the extinction of others. Thus, they are in a state of constant war with one another.

Today, peace is impossible through politics. Politics has to be cunning, self-centered, egoistic, and violent in case of ideological differences. Otherwise, it would cease to exist. For its existence it has to generate issues and on certain occasions even disorder and instability. And, it influences religion in the same manner. The politicians make maximum use of the religious sentiments of the people and divert them towards the issues that can favor their self-centered ideas.

Otherwise, religion, in its essence, starts with love and ends in peace. It expects virtue from man and teaches him the same. Affection is the true nature of religion. It abhors war and disharmony, because its fundamental principles are based on well-being of all the human beings. A person enters the kingdom of religion when he washes away his ego, selfishness, and hatred through the ablution of his spirit. Religion performs virtue; otherwise, it does nothing. Religion is determined to strengthen tranquility.

The present form of religion that we can witness is the political utilization of religion. It is religion framed by politics. It is one of the expressions of political duplicity. It is religion caught in the webs of politics, suffocating and striving to make its last breaths possible and history has witnessed that whenever and wherever politicians have raised the slogans of religion in their ideologies they have always wanted to dodge the people through sanctity and honor of the religious beliefs. This is not religion. This is politics, changing forms and means to discriminate innocent masses.

We can take the example of Afghanistan and can easily observe how religion is being used by different people. Some use it as a basis of their sacred war against the government and as a result kill innocent people; while others, particularly politicians use it to trap the innocent people so as to gain their support and obedience. It is weird to find that all the religious leaders claim that they are on the right path along with their followers while others are on the wrong one, led astray by their leaders. Some so-called religious leaders who are nothing more than businessmen, use it to keep their business running with success. They are the ones who take advantage of today's consumerist economy and, as a matter of fact, sell different aspects of religion so as to gain economic benefits. It is important to observe that most of their favors, which they claim to be for the people and their betterment, are, in reality, efforts to make handsome amount of money.

The consequences of all these misuse is that our country is suffering to a great extent. Poverty, extremism, insecurity and lawlessness are victimizing the poor masses, while the authoritative individuals in both politics and religion are living their lives with all the facilities and luxuries.

These all conditions are what Islam does not like. Islam stands for fraternity, love and affection. It does not like and accept misery, especially of the innocent people. True Islam stands against injustice and guides its followers towards brotherhood and peace, not war and destruction.

If we want to experience religion we have to apply it without any political intentions. Without converting it into something inferior. Religion itself is a self-perpetuating system, and a complete code of life and should be kept away from political contamination. Pure religion is destined to guarantee peace and it will because it commences with love and culminates in peace.

Children – The Scapegoat of Terror

By Hujjatullah Zia

The rights and dignity of Afghan children have been violated to a great extent and they took the brunt of violence and terror within the past decade. Scores of children were changed into sacrificial lambs by warring factions, mainly the Taliban and the self-styled Islamic State (IS) group. They had to accept the warped mind of radical groups with the barrel of gun and used as vehicles in battlefields by the armed insurgents – this is the Taliban's current mainstream. It seems that only the immature minds of naïve children are ripe for their radical ideology. Therefore, they succumb to the Taliban's heavenly allure inculcated in them or simply threatened to death.

On the one hand, a number of children are armed and sent to battlefields to carry out "jihad" on the other hand, however, they are targeted in terrorist attacks and suicide bombings on streets, on the way to schools, mosques, etc. which is a flagrant violation of national and international laws. So, their blood is spilt from both sides and they are the most vulnerable part of the society.

The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which released a report about Afghan children in 2015, expressed grave concern over the deteriorating situation of children affected by the conflict in Afghanistan, mainly the significant increase in child casualties, continued recruitment of children in violation of applicable international law, as well as attacks on hospitals, schools, and the military use of schools, particularly affecting girls' education, by all parties to the conflict.

Moreover, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan reiterated the strong commitment of the Afghan Government to protect the rights of children and briefed the Working Group on major steps taken towards that end. He also described the challenges faced in addressing the violations and abuses against children by anti-state armed groups.

It is a bitter pill to swallow that a number of children were killed and maimed as a result of hostilities between parties to the conflict, explosive remnants of war and the continued use of improvised explosive devices. Although the indiscriminate uses of weapons are prohibited under international humanitarian law, civilians are widely targeted by indiscriminate use of arms.

Moreover, a number of children fall victim to abduction by some parties to the conflict for various purposes, including revenge and ransom, and some of the abducted children suffer atrocities which involve recruitment, killing and maiming, rape and honor-killing.

Between September 2010 and December 2014, Afghanistan suffered heavily. 2014 was a highly significant year as the international community was preparing to withdraw its forces, the Afghan Security and Defense Forces assumed full responsibility

for providing security all over the country. Since then, the armed groups intensified their attacks and acts of terror. Joined by thousands of foreign militants, they increased ground engagements and attacks on homes, markets, schools, mosques and critical infrastructures. The unmitigated attacks resulted in the deaths and injuries of more than 10,000 civilians in 2014, with a 48 per cent increase in child casualties, and militancy continues unabated.

An entire generation of children has grown up amid the conflict in Afghanistan. The violence in Afghanistan has led to a high vulnerability of the children. Warring factions, mainly the Taliban, seek to hinder children's access to education through attacking schools, teaching staff and students, particularly girls and women. The militants use children for multiple purposes such as informers, spies, human shields, foot soldiers, active combatants and even suicide bombers. They prefer children for being readily available, cheap and useful, can be manipulated and terrorized and are often willing to accept the most dangerous assignments because they lack a full understanding of their own mortality. These violent attacks, coupled with poverty and unemployment, lead to children often trying to join the security forces by falsifying their age and identification.

In spite of the Taliban's claims that they recruit fighters who have achieved "mental and physical maturity," and do not use underage boys in military operations, some of the children recruited from seminaries in Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan provinces are 13 or younger. The Taliban have previously denied "the use of children and adolescents in Jihadic Operations," but its deployment of individuals under the age of 18 violates international law applicable in Afghanistan and in cases involving children under 15 is a war crime.

It is worth saying that the government has also taken effective steps to decrease children's mortality. As a result, the government enacted a law prohibiting underage recruitment in security forces. It also developed unified verification guidelines for all security institutions to prevent underage recruitment. Therefore, hundreds of underage applicants attempting to enlist in security forces were rejected in 2014. The government has also included children's rights in the curriculum of the security forces, which is a very significant step to educate and sensitize the army and the police about the children's inalienable rights. The government should further raise public awareness through establishing dozens of community-based school protection councils in provinces and convening various seminars and workshops to train religious scholars, teachers, elders and students on the rights of children with the support of the international community. Moreover, it should also enforce the child protection programs and make sure that there is awareness in the communities about best practices.

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The Thai Temple of Doom-An Animal Saga with Global Implications

By Saikat Kumar Basu

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook

The latest reports from Thailand regarding alleged wildlife trade nexus of the infamous Tiger temple have sent shock waves across the world. The infamous tiger temple in the Sai Yok district of the Kanchanaburi province of western Thailand was founded in 1994. Loved and respected globally as a forest temple as well as a sanctuary for wild animals including tigers received iconic status among tourists, conservationists and animal lovers visiting Thailand over past two decades. Happy tourists embracing tigers or feeding them and facing cameras earned rich dividends for the temple. The temple administration earned millions of dollars through admission fees and donations that increased every year with the rapid tourism boom in SE Asia and Thailand. Although often charged with secret trade in tiger body parts and maltreatment of animals; the horrific activities of the temple authorities have been exposed only recently. The Thai authorities have removed 137 adult tigers and other wildlife from the temple campus and closed the facility permanently. Over 40 dead tiger cubs stored in the freezer, tiger pelts, stuffed animals and labelled tiger body parts have been confiscated from the temple campus directly showing its involvement in illegal breeding, tiger body part trade and illegal trafficking of wildlife particularly tigers.

Wildlife enthusiasts across the planet are in a state of shock with latest findings, allegations and proofs of illegal wildlife trade, maltreatment and exploitations of wild animals for commercial benefits, misguiding the government, public and investigative agencies for several years and practise of illegal breeding without approval from local and international authorities. The incident is most probably the largest case ever reported from the perspective of illegal retention, breeding, trade and trafficking of wild tigers in the entire world. The Thai authorities must be commended for their sincere efforts in unfolding this saga and for investigating the case in search of the truth. The most important factor that has been worrisome is whether all the tigers in the temple premise are Bengal tigers or Indochinese tigers or Bengal X Indochinese hybrids? Thailand along with Myanmar is the last remaining wild habitats for the rear Indochinese sub species of tigers. If a section of the tigers from the temple is found thorough genetic tests to be pure bred Indochinese tigers, they should be separated and treated as a viable breeding population under proper supervision for captive breeding and relocation to

suitable habitats within Thailand.

If the tigers as reported in the media are all pure bred Bengal tigers; then Thailand after the Indian subcontinent (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) will be the second largest breeding habitat of this particular subspecies. But the important question to ask is whether Thailand has the infrastructure to house, maintain and conduct captive breeding of such a large population of Bengal tigers. Under these circumstances, it will be better to return some of the tigers to the Indian subcontinent nations to continue their breeding programs that have achieved appreciable success in the past decade. Additionally few could be donated to international zoos across the world that has distinguished success in the captive breeding of Bengal tigers. This could boost and actively support the breeding initiatives for endangered Bengal tigers around the globe. However, since these illegal breeding activities in the Thai temple have been conducted without any proper guidelines and much needed technical supervisions, majority of the tigers are probably Bengal X Indochinese hybrids. If genetic tests prove this true then the hybrid animals could not be used in any breeding programs both within Thailand and abroad as this will seriously risk the dilution of both Bengal and Indochinese tiger sub species. Under those circumstances the animals need to be contained in specific habitats and no further breeding should be allowed and natural deaths of the captive animals at the end if their natural life is the only humane manner to eradicate these populations.

Similar approach has been taken in India that used to produce large number of hybrid lions (African X Asiatic) in the past. Now such hybrid lions are restricted in a special reserve and no breeding is allowed; and natural deaths of these hybrids are the option currently followed to remove such impure blood lines from a long term conservation perspective. Similarly, through United States has the largest breeding population of privately owned tigers outside Asia and Russia, they could not be used in breeding programs since majority of them are various inter- and intra-specific hybrids. We all need to learn a lesson from this incident and develop comprehensive plans to protect all the endangered sub species of tigers in Asia and the Russian Far East. Illegal breeding and retention of wild tigers should be banned all across the world to prevent such incidents to recur and hit the illegal wildlife tiger markets operating in parts of China and SE Asia.

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