



The Role of Religion in the Lives of South Asians: A Case Study of Rohingya and Kashmiris Muslims

Dr. Sarah Umer, Associate Professor Art and Design, University College of Art and Design, University of Punjab, Lahore, Email: sarah76khan@gmail.com, sara.cad@pu.edu.pk

South Asia has been a home to several religions since ancient times and the history of religion in the region can be traced back to the Indus Valley civilization. Although, no religious icons or buildings were found from this civilisation to indicate their religious affiliations, nevertheless the artifacts and architectural structures speak volumes about the nature of their religion despite the absence of a deciphered Indus script. This paper intends to shed light on the role of religions practiced in this region, initially beginning with the Indus religion; however the birth and role of other indigenous religions of the land like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism shall be discussed to understand the importance and role of religion in the lives of South Asians. Moreover, considering these religious affiliations and the strong connection that the people of this land have with their respective religions, two current examples: Rohingya and Kashmiri Muslims will be discussed in detail to see how religion has been manipulated by political agents to gain power at the cost of innocent human lives. An action, which is in direct contradiction to their religious teachings and can be considered as the primary cause behind the current political and religious unrest in South Asia, which must be put to rest before it is too late.

Key words: *South Asia, Indus Valley, Rohingya Muslims, Kashmir, Religion.*

INTRODUCTION

The documented religious history of the sub-continent begins with the *Vedic* scriptures of the Hindus written approximately between 1500 – 1200 BCE. Although, archaeology of South Asia tells us that signs of permanent settlements in this part of the world can be traced to Mehrgarh 6500 BCE, which is the first site, later expanding into a civilisation that is better known to the world as the Indus Valley civilisation. Now the question is, if humans had been living in this part of the world for so long than they must have been practicing religion, as



archaeologists and anthropologists tell us today that even among the most primitive, underdeveloped peoples, there is evidence of worship of some form. The New Encyclopedia Britannica says “as far as scholars have discovered, there has never existed any people, anywhere, at any time, who were not in some sense religious.”

Therefore, this paper will shed light on the religion initially practiced in this land during the time of Indus Valley civilisation and which later became home to indigenous religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism to understand the importance of religion in the lives of South Asians and the role it played to shape society.

Moreover, a brief overview of contemporary societies and what has changed in the teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism for it to have become a cause of suffering for the people of Myanmar and Kashmir is provided. Further discussed is the cause of sufferings that are not the religions or their teachings but the manipulated version which is presented by political forces to gain power for their own vaster interests.

OVERVIEW

The history of religion began in the world with first; human’s presence on earth and second when they started to live in permanent settlements, which grew from villages into towns, then cities and eventually into city-states and civilisations. The history of religion has taught us that there are two parts to almost every religion of the world whether primitive or contemporary. The first part is belief in either one God, multiple Gods or in no God at all but the second part is based on the right that every being should give to other fellow beings. If we leave the first part aside and concentrate on the second part, we realise that it was only when humans started to live in a community did, they realise the perks and importance of communal work and eventually their dependence on it and fellow beings. This taught people to live together, sometimes peacefully and sometimes with the implementation of some type of force.

Thus, the birth of religion in the sub-continent also took place when the foundations of the Indus Valley civilisation were in process and which the author has traced in her book entitled, “*Religious Beliefs of The Indus Valley Civilization.*” Moreover, the author concluded that the religion of the Indus Valley civilisation must be based on concepts of equality and justice, and that they were some of the most important binding forces that allowed its successful continuity for years, which is evident from the lifestyle that they have left behind in the form of architecture, artifacts, and objects of daily use (Umer, 2018).

Therefore, bearing in mind this hypothesis it is advocated that the religion of the Indus people must have played a major role to help shape the religious beliefs and ideology of people living in South Asia. As, according to Professor Robert Redfield ideologies and culture is an organised body of conventional understandings that a group follows based on set rules, standards, and beliefs, which can be evaluated through their lifestyle. Moreover, these

understandings are passed on from one generation to the next, people die but their ideology and culture lives on because it is something that is not genetically transmitted from one generation to the next but is imparted as a child grows up in an environment. Thus, it was this strong religious ideology that must have held this civilisation intact for over five thousand years and that also without the use of force and any kind of weaponry, at a time when its contemporary Mesopotamia and Egypt were busy fighting over worldly gains. There is no evidence of production of weaponry at any excavated Indus site.

However, a question arises that if this religious legacy was so strong than what happened between the demise of this civilisation around 1500 BCE and the up rise of Hinduism around 800 BCE to drastically change the mindset of the people, to have indulged into a caste system based on inequality. Some Indus scholars propose an up rise of social identities during the mature phase of Indus civilisation based on separate groups of people following hereditary professions of their ancestors. Jonathan Mark Kenoyer in a paper entitled, “*Harappan Craft Specialization and the Question of Urban Segregation and Stratification*” (Kenoyer, 1992), along with Lakshmi Chatterjee draws an important conclusion that craft specialisation was hereditary and was the result of social stratification and spatial segregation (Chatterjee, 2005). Massimo Vidale and Heather M. L. Miller also in one of their papers entitled, “On the Development of Indus Technical Virtuosity and Its Relation to Social Structure” also endorse hereditary craft specialisation in Harappan society (Vidal and Miller, 2000), while Shereen Ratnagar asserts that the Harappan society was class structured on the base of people following their hereditary professions, as is the case in South Asia today (Ratnagar, 1981). Although, they all agree that classes of different occupations might have been established, they are doubtful whether these classes can be identified with the later prevalent caste system of historical period.

In the book entitled, “*Religious Beliefs of The Indus Valley Civilization*” the author has proposed that this social identity, which was based on inherited professions could have been the starting point of Hindu caste system, as some groups following hereditary professions became richer and powerful in comparison to others based on scarce evidence of social differences in house sizes and in quality and quantity of ornaments that have been witnessed during the urban phase. However, perhaps it was unintentional and just happened over generations because there is no evidence of unrest in the society (Umer, 2018).

Therefore, it can be assumed that this class differentiation was neither rigid nor unchangeable till the demise of this civilisation, as its effects cannot be seen during the span of this civilisation. However, the effects became evident within the next few centuries during the historical period, when we witness proper class differentiation and strong inflexibility between different Hindu classes. This rigidity severely affected the masses; it immensely increased their sufferings and as a result also damaged the religious ideology of the Indus people – ancestors of this land.



Most scholars today believe that Hinduism did not emerge after the arrival of Aryans into South Asia because the arrival theory has been contradicted by recent studies. Therefore, it was not the Aryans who initiated Hinduism and thus it could have a much older religious presence even during the time of Indus civilisation.

Hence, in response to the inflexibility of the Hindu caste system and its many disadvantages, two indigenous religions (Buddhism and Jainism) sprang and evolved from within the land approximately around 600 BCE to counter its effects and rescue the people from its consequences and several adverse effects. Therefore it was against the ideology of the masses living in this land during Indus civilization.

Another stimulating detail is that the founder of both these religions (Buddha and Mahavira) belonged to a higher Hindu caste, both were Hindu princes in line to claim kingship, nevertheless they both preached religions that believed in equality among all humans, hence relieving them of sufferings caused by fellow beings, which was in direct contradiction to the Hindu caste system. In response to these religions and their growing popularity, Hinduism also came up with a book of reforms in approximately 500 BCE known as the Upanishads not only to sustain its credibility but also to ensure that Hindu following did not drop.

Nonetheless, this response of Buddhism – teaching selflessness against the self-centered inflexible and rigid stance of the Hindu caste system increased Buddha's following and he became a source of relief and happiness for the people of the Sub- continent in the sixth century BCE. It has been surmised that this was because Buddhist tradition focuses on a series of teachings better known as the eightfold path, designed to achieve enlightenment to end human suffering. Moreover, it associates itself with non-violence – the principle of “ahimsa”, “no harm” (Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University, 2018). Unfortunately, in the next few centuries approximately 500 years after the death of Buddha, this religion also started losing its essence and spirit first by division into two sects Hinayana and Mahayana and later into multiple sects. So, the question is why and what happened to cause this division?

When we look at the history of religion in the sub-continent or the world, whether during ancient times or contemporary, we witness that after a certain time without any discrepancy every religion loses its essence and true spirit. Why because some people for their own infinite interest manipulate it and use it for raising a point of dispute or conflict between fellow beings living within similar geographical boundaries for worldly gains. So, the question is what changed in the teachings of both Buddhism and Hinduism once again to make it a cause of suffering for the people living within the same geographical boundaries. Where once Buddha and Mahavira preached peace and as a result Hinduism reformed to provide relief to the people from suffering. Did the teachings change or the teachers preaching them change? This research investigates the second argument because like most religious teachings, Buddhist and Hindu teachings have not changed but unfortunately the people preaching this message have definitely



changed, their interests have changed, and they have and are manipulating the teachings for their own worldly benefits and this is the prime reason for unrest in South Asia today.

DISCUSSION

Considering the current political and religious unrest in South Asia due to the radical religious mindset of some religious groups and to understand why such situations arise and to validate the stance that religion since its birth has been manipulated, three countries from the region have been selected. Sri Lanka and Burma in relation to Buddhism, while India in relation to Hinduism reflecting upon the current incidents taking place in all these countries to oppress innocent population. Initially, the discussion will open with Sri Lanka and Burma, followed by India.

Sri Lanka and Burma are separated by 1000 miles of the Indian Ocean, where Buddhism – a religion of peace and selflessness is practiced by the masses and the ruling state, yet the minorities are under threat and are facing atrocities beyond human comprehension. The special target of these atrocities are mostly Muslims, who are generally a small peaceful minority in both countries. A more puzzling point is that neither country is facing any Islamist militant threat. Nevertheless, in both countries Buddhist monks are seen holding rallies against Muslims, are calling for direct action against them, are boycotting their products, are damaging small businesses, and hence are affecting their livelihoods.

A point of concern that needs to be highlighted through this paper is not their undue reaction towards a minority but the stance they have taken, which is against their religious beliefs and ideology. Let us go back a little in time to see how Buddha and Buddhist reacted under vulnerable situations in a very different manner, upholding their religious ideology which was close to their hearts. It is widely known that Buddha himself prevented a war from taking place between his own clan Sakyas and the Koliyas over a water dispute. It is stated that upon his arrival in the battlefield he engaged the opposing parties into conversation, highlighting the fact whether it was worthy to shed the blood of fellow human beings over water (Leach, 2018). Emperor Ashoka set another classical example in the third century BCE, when after the destructive bloodshed war of Kalinga, he felt remorse and embraced Buddhism. According to popular sources, there were only eight stupas in the sub-continent before his conversion but then during his forty year reign the number increased to 84000 stupas, which indicates his love for sustaining peace (Craven, 1997).

However, some Buddhist texts do sanction taking human lives under exceptional circumstances, that is while protecting the sangha or defending the innocent. Nevertheless, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists completely reject these justifications for taking lives, as according to them it is against the basic Buddhist belief of “no harm” (Jones, 1979).



Nevertheless, today many Buddhist monks are working against these norms, despite their strong “no harm” religious teachings. As is rightly said by Alan Strathern, who is a fellow in History at Brasenose College, Oxford and author of “*Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land*” in one of his magazine articles “*Why Are Buddhist Monks Attacking Muslims*”, says;

“Of all the moral precepts instilled in Buddhist monks the promise not to kill comes first, and the principle of non-violence is arguably more central to Buddhism than any other major religion. So why have monks been using hate speech against Muslims and joining mobs that have left dozens dead?” (BBC News, 2013)

An apparent reason can be traced through history, which teaches us that no matter how a religion begins and for whatever reasons, eventually it enters a Faustian pact with the ruling body or elite. Alan Strathern further says,

“Buddhist monks looked to kings, the ultimate wielders of violence, for the support, patronage and order that only they could provide. Kings looked to monks to provide the popular legitimacy that only such a high moral vision can confer. The result can seem ironic. If you have a strong sense of the overriding moral superiority of your worldview, then the need to protect and advance it can seem the most important duty of all.”

Therefore, some individuals preaching a certain religion manipulate it to gain vaster interest at the cost of compromising the true spirit of a religion. As Alan narrates,

“Christian crusaders, Islamist militants, or the leaders of "freedom-loving nations", all justify what they see as necessary violence in the name of a higher good. Buddhist rulers and monks have been no exception. So, historically, Buddhism has been no more a religion of peace than Christianity.” (BBC News, 2013)

Moreover, the “Burmese bin Laden” Wirathu (who was jailed in 2003 for inciting religious hatred but was released in 2012, refers himself bizarrely as "the Burmese bin Laden") in one of his interviews to the Guardian proudly proclaimed that he is just protecting his people, but against what? A peaceful minority (The Guardian, 2013). He in an interview given to Time magazine in 2013, complained that Muslims were “breeding so fast, and they are stealing our women, raping them.... They would like to occupy our country.” In another interview to Times newspaper, he said, “....not carrying out violence, but protecting the public” (Time, 2013).

One reason for this uncalled for behavior of these Buddhist countries against Muslims might be because in some way they feel threatened by Muslims due to the unjustified and widely spread anti-Muslim social propaganda prevalent in the world today since 9/11.



It seems that this undue character assassination of the Muslims across the world has made them easy targets for most nations and religious extremists. For example, in Sri Lanka during recent times the zealous group, known as Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force) has widely propagated against Muslims. Their stance is that the small Muslim community is lethal to the country's integrity and a major threat to the Buddhist nation. Moreover, in Myanmar the situation is more adverse, there the famous "Burmese Bin Ladin" Ashin Wirathu demands a severe action against the self-perceived Muslim threat, although his organisation Ma Ba Tha has supposedly been banned, still atrocities against the Rohingya Muslims are not uncommon (The Economist, 2017).

This unjust stance of both countries is under criticism by some Asian monks, like Dalai Lama, who has proclaimed that the persecution of these Muslims is against the teachings of Lord Buddha and if he were alive today, he would have sided with the innocents (The Economist, 2017). The reason behind his stance is that the element of non-violence is elementary to the Buddhist doctrine, as is stressed in the Dhammapada, a collection of sayings attributed to Buddha (BBC News, 2013). The first word narrates,

"If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage."

The main objective of Buddhist morality is expressed through its five precepts, which the monks are obliged to follow, while the layman is encouraged to follow. The first is to abstain from killing living creatures. Moreover, one of the main objectives of Buddhist meditation is to achieve a state of "loving kindness" for all beings (BBC News, 2013).

The purpose of highlighting this issue was not to demean Buddhist religious beliefs or any Buddhist majority nation, but to explain to the world that policies of the so-called peace loving first world countries is severely affecting the mindset of smaller nations like Sri Lanka and Burma. This has instigated a germ of hatred that is and will eventually destroy humanity beyond comprehensible results.

To further authenticate this stance, some news clippings from BBC Religion are as follows;

"March saw an outbreak of mob violence directed against Muslims in the town of Meiktila, in central Burma, which left at least 40 dead".

"Tellingly, the violence began in a gold shop. The movements in both countries exploit a sense of economic grievance - a religious minority is used as the scapegoat for the frustrated aspirations of the majority".



“On Tuesday, Buddhist mobs attacked mosques and burned more than 70 homes in Oakkan, north of Rangoon, after a Muslim girl on a bicycle collided with a monk. One person died and nine were injured”.

All the above-mentioned statements validated by a report compiled by Reuters entitled, “*Buddhist Monks Incite Muslim Killings in Myanmar.*” (Reuters, 2013) Some social media groups today are raising questions like; Aren't Buddhist monks meant to be the custodians of the Dharma tradition? Aren't non-violent thoughts basic to the Buddhist teachings? Doesn't meditation help to feel compassion for all fellow beings? Aren't aggressive thoughts damaging the Buddhist essence?

When we look at the world today, we see nations and peace bodies not doing enough to stop these atrocities taking place in the name of religion. Whether it is the Christian states, Islamic States, Jewish State, Hindu state, or secular states, unfortunately most among them are not only silent on these issues but are sometimes party to these fatalities. No religion teaches us to be cruel towards other human beings, no religion allows us to take lives of fellow humans but still hundreds of innocent people die each day in the name of religion to attain a higher good something which is beyond comprehension.

Moreover, the supporters of Buddhism argue that they have been on the losing end of history for over a millennium now. Before that time, nearly most of Asia was a Buddhist majority area. Hence, they primarily feel threatened by the rapid spread of Islam during this time in this region. Countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh are a few examples that they quote to validate their stance. Therefore, countries like Sri Lanka and Burma have given open call for Buddhist nationalism to its majority Buddhist community to ensure that history is not repeated. Maung Thway Chun, an editor of a newspaper in one of his recent interviews said that he harbours no hatred towards Muslims, but the threat of “Islamisation” is a foreseeable problem. “We're not oppressing Muslims, and we recognise their existence. But we do not want Muslims to swallow our country... They will not finish with attaching just Rakhine. They will also invade Chin State or Irrawaddy region” (The Atlantic, 2017). As, according to them it will be a shame to lose a country they inherited from their Buddhist ancestors to Muslims, forgetting that due to the honorable teachings of Buddha many converted to Buddhism from Hinduism after 600 BCE and if the Hindus had adopted a similar policy, their existence today would have perished before they even existed.

Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that the lesson that Buddha taught Hindus about equality around 600 BCE seems to be forgotten, in response to which the Upanishads were developed to uphold the image of Hinduism. As, Hindu majority is once again making the same mistake by oppressing innocent human beings (minorities) even though India claims to be a secular state, which came to birth on the principle that it is home to many religions. However, since its birth the world has witnessed many incidents, which clearly negate this perception starting with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi the founder of the Freedom Movement by a radical Hindu,



who belonged to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh - RSS. The core interest and ideology of this organisation can be understood from the following paragraph (Johnson et al, 2017).

“The initial impetus was to provide character training through Hindu discipline and to unite the Hindu community to form a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation). The organisation promotes the ideals of upholding Indian culture and the values of a civil society and spreads the ideology of Hindutva, to "strengthen" the Hindu community. It drew initial inspiration from European right-wing groups during World War II. Gradually, RSS grew into a prominent Hindu nationalist umbrella organization, spawning several affiliated organizations that established numerous schools, charities, and clubs to spread its ideological beliefs. The RSS was banned once during British rule, and then thrice by the post-independence Indian government, first in 1948 when a RSS member, who claimed to have left RSS in 1946 over ideological differences, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi; then during the emergency (1975–1977); and for a third time after the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992.”

It is unfortunate that India being the largest democracy of the world today is being led by a party of Hindu extremists (followers of RSS), whose sole agenda is to cleanse India of all minorities and thus is in no way different from what we have seen practiced in Sri Lanka and Burma. Hindus belonging to the Bharatiya Janata Party - BJP believe that India also known as Hindustan only belongs to them, thus it is their duty to either kill or make the lives of the minorities so difficult that they leave this land on their own accord. Thus, Hindu sentiment is used by the ruling party to gain political interests, which became apparent when the ruling BJP party secured heavy majority in the election and imposed a curfew in the Valley of Kashmir on August 5th, 2019 after revoking article 370 of the Indian constitution especially undermining and crushing the rights of Kashmiri Muslims (The Diplomat, 2020).

Today it seems that the Indian government led by BJP intentionally took this step of jumping into a war with Pakistan to secure Hindu extremists votes by intensifying the anti-Pakistan sentiment for the forthcoming elections in lieu of the Pulwama Attack administered in Kashmir on February 14th, 2019.

This day not just another day in the lives of the people living in South Asia, but a day that instigated diversified emotions among people living on both sides of the border in Pakistan and India. In less than an hour of the Pulwama Attack most of the reputed Indian channels openly blamed Pakistan and a media trial began without any substantial evidence. Hence, instigating emotions among the masses, which created a situation that led to a so-called surgical strike by the Indian air force on a superficial terror camp in Pakistan.

Although today it is apparent that the attack was administered by the Indian army only to secure Hindu radical votes. However, this attack could have been the darkest day in the history of the Indian subcontinent, as it could have led towards destruction of such magnitude beyond which



life would have been next to impossible. It is unfortunate that India despite knowing that both countries are nuclear equipped, and war could be lethal for the region and the world and which would have lasting consequences, like shortage of food, premature ice age etc. carried out this action just to win the votes of radical Hindus.

Considering these incidents and the growing Hindu sentiment instigated by BJP in India, it seems that the first minority on the target list of ethnic cleansing are the Muslims of Kashmir. Kashmir has experienced an on-going dispute between Pakistan and India since the partition of 1947 and is a disputed territory according to the United Nations resolution.... passed in 1948. According to this resolution the fate of this territory can only be decided when the people of the Valley are given a right to choose their fate by exercising their vote. However, the Indian government does not recognise this fact and because of this both countries have fought two wars (1965 and 1971), while 100 million Muslim Kashmiris have lost their lives fighting for freedom. It is unfortunate that until this day the United Nations a big claimant for world peace after World War 2, has miserably failed to implement its own resolutions.

CONCLUSION

As a scholar and researcher of History, often information and situations that indirectly or causally link our present to our past and future are exposed. It is under such circumstances that one leaves behind one's original field of interest to jump into something different in a quest, not only to save the present but the past for the future too. Here I would quote Professor Slavoj Zizek that, '*Political issues are too serious to be left only to politicians*'.

The history of humanity is full of examples where humans, for their own self interests have manipulated religion. The story of South Asia is no different, however when the history of this region is traced from the beginning of the Indus Valley civilisation, multiple examples of when religion played a major role to bring and sustain peace are seen. This is a land whose ancestors believed in equality, as is evident from the lifestyle of the Indus people. Followed by Buddha and Mahavira, who rejected their royal positions to preach equality among humans. Moreover, we witness religious tolerance practiced during the regime of Ashoka, Kanishka, Harsha and Akbar to win the hearts of their subjects and thus brought prosperity to the region. A paragraph from the book *Our Oriental Heritage*, which explains the unique relationship that the people of this land still have and have always had with religion has been quoted (Durant, 1954).

“In no other country is religion so powerful, or so important, as in India. If the Hindus have permitted alien governments to be set over them again and again it is partly because they did not care much who ruled or exploited them-natives or foreigners; the crucial matter was religion, not politics; the soul, not the body; endless later lives rather than this passing one. When Ashoka became a saint, and Akbar almost adopted Hinduism, the power of religion was revealed over even the strongest men. In our century it is a saint, rather than a statesman, who for the first time in history has unified all India.”



Hence, it is true that we can only win the hearts of South Asians by capturing their love for religion to rule them and this can only be achieved if the ruling political parties exercise religious tolerance. However, today it seems that instead of practicing religious tolerance to sustain peace, the ruling political parties in Sri Lanka, Burma and India are using religion to create rifts among the masses, leading to unrest and bloodshed. The question is whose agenda are these parties following because the duty of any government is to ensure the safety of all its subjects regardless of the religion they follow.

Therefore, it seems that the governments of these countries are only fulfilling one agenda and that is ethnic cleansing, and it is no longer a fight for virtue, justice or to save the Buddhist or Hindu religion but a fight to sustain and enjoy power. Thus, the Buddhist majority nations Sri Lanka and Burma, while Hindu majority India are killing their innocent, peaceful minorities not for the greater good of humanity or to uphold their religious ideologies taught by their leaders but to remain in power for worldly gains. Thus, it is not a fight between Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as this region south and south east Asia has been a home to pluralistic religions in the past and has enjoyed peaceful regimes under many rulers, rather it is a fight against humanity, a peaceful world, and a better tomorrow for future generations.

This paper highlights the importance of religion in the lives of South Asians since antiquity and thus no religion of the world teaches people to be unjust and cruel towards fellow beings. Therefore, the author urges the masses of these nations to foresee the consequences so that they are convinced to put a stop to this growing radical mindset before it is too late, as two countries of this region are nuclear equipped and any kind of instigation or war between them would cause uncomprehendable disaster.

Therefore, the world and peace organisations must wake up before it is too late, as it should not forget the effects of the nuclear bomb used only once in the history of humanity on August 6th and 9th 1945 by the United States of America during World War 2 against Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in combat.

Another point which must be endorsed through this study is the role of media. It is a tool that can help to reach out to the masses, thus the message it propagates holds immense importance. For it helps to formulate positive and negative opinions and viewpoints, which can either sustain or destroy peace. A good example to quote here is the post 9/11 unjust character assassination of Muslims, which turned them into easy targets in the eyes of most countries and people. Therefore, it is high time that the world media should be regulated by peace organizations to stop propagation of false news and unjust instigation. As can be related from the following events.

1. War in Afghanistan a result of post 9/11 media trial

2. War in Iraq was declared after the media trial on Saddam Hussain because of his ties with terror groups and weapons of massive destruction, which were unfortunately never found.
3. Pulwama Attack

However, all these incidents tell us today that these media trials from different countries eventually led to surgical strikes that were unnecessary, uncalled for and could have been avoided, if were timely addressed and thoroughly investigated. Thus, the irresponsible and impulsive role of the world in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq should not be forgotten. While the role of Indian media in the case of Pulwama Attack leading to the so-called surgical strike by India could have driven both countries into a nuclear combat. It is unfortunate that Sri Lanka and Burma today are also using this tool to instigate hatred among its Buddhist population for the Muslim minority residing in their countries.

Moreover, it must be understood that media today is been used by governments of several countries including the ones mentioned above to achieve political goals. As, was witnessed in the case of recent Pulwama attack, where the heightened emotional stance of Indian media raised many questions.

1. Was half an hour enough to launch a media trial against Pakistan?
2. Was it preplanned?
3. Was it the Indian government whose narrative was been sold by the media? If yes, why?
4. Is Indian media independent? If not, why?

These are several questions that need to be addressed by world peace organisations, while the masses of South Asia should be well informed to be able to pay no heed to such stories. However, in the case of Pulwama attack both Pakistani media and Pakistani government displayed maturity maybe due to the hard lesson it learnt after the 9/11 incident, when without analyzing consequences, it jumped into an unnecessary war launched against Afghanistan by the USA, UK, and its allies. Today after almost 20 years the USA and its allies have realized that they cannot win this war, as in war there are no winners or losers even if it is fought by superpowers. Therefore, USA today is talking to the Taliban to depart Afghanistan, something that was completely unacceptable two decades ago.

Therefore, through this paper the author urges Sri Lankan, Burmese, and Indian government to review and revisit their policies of using religion as a tool for achieving political gains. As, these policies will not only bring devastation to South Asian region but will eventually topple their governments too keeping in view the religious history of this region, where religion has always been more important to man than political monarchs and history has taught us that it is only a matter of time before the downfall of these regimes begin.



Finally, some quotes from several famous religious icons, whose ideology is followed by millions, however unfortunately its essence, and vision has been lost.

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," Matthew 5:44

Qur'an 6:151 says, "and do not kill a soul that God has made sacrosanct, save lawfully."

"He, who injures living beings, is not Noble. He is called Noble because he is gentle and kind towards all living beings." Buddha

The one who loves all intensely begins perceiving in all living beings a part of himself. He becomes a lover of all, a part and parcel of the Universal Joy. He flows with the stream of happiness and is enriched by each soul. (Yajur Veda)

Thou, mighty Agni, gather up all that is precious for thy friend. Bring us all treasures as thou art enkindled in libation's place. Assemble, speak together: let your minds be all of one accord. As ancient Gods unanimous sit down to their appointed share. The place is common, common the assembly, common the mind, so be their thought united. A common purpose do I lay before you, and worship with your general oblation. One and the same be your resolve and be your minds of one accord. United be the thoughts of all that all may happily agree. (Rigveda 10: 191)



REFERENCES

- Beech, Hannah., Meikhtila, Burma, and Pattani. (2013, July 1). The Face of Buddhist Terror. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,2146000,00.html>
- Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University. (2018). *Buddhism on Peace and Violence*. Retrieved from <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/buddhism-on-peace-and-violence>
- C., B. (2017, November 16). What Buddhism Teaches about Peace and War? *The Economist*. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2017/11/economist-explains-11>
- Cantera, Martinez L. Angel. (2020, February 12). The Second Death of Mahatma Gandhi. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/the-second-death-of-mahatma-gandhi/>
- Chatterjee, Lakshmi. (2005). *Heritage of Harappa*. New Delhi, India: Global Vision.
- Craven, C. Roy. (1997). *Indian Art: A Concise History*. London, England: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- Durant, Will. (1954). *The Story of Civilization - Part I - Our Oriental Heritage*. New York, United States of America: Simon and Schuster.
- Freeman, Joe. (2017, September 6). Can Anyone Stop Burma's Hardline Buddhist Monks. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/can-anyone-stop-burmas-hardline-buddhist-monks/538992/>
- Hodal, Kate and Christopher Symes. (2013, April 16). Burma's Bin Laden, the Buddhist Monk who Fuels Hatred. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/apr/16/burma-bin-laden-buddhist-monk-video>
- Johnson, Matthew, Garnett, Mark and Walker, David M. (2017). *Conservatism and Ideology*. Taylor & Francis eBook. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315723785>
- Jones, H. Richard. (1979). Theravada Buddhism and Morality. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 371-387.
- Kenoyer, Mark Jonathan. (1992). Harappan Craft Specialization and the Question of Urban Segregation and Stratification. *Eastern Anthropologist*, Indus Civilization Special Number 45, 1-2, 39-54. Retrieved from https://www.harappa.com/sites/default/files/pdf/Kenoyer1989_Harappan%20Craft%20Specialization%20and%20the%20Question%20o.pdf
- Leach, Pamela. (2018). *From Fear to Hope: Alternative Australian Narratives on War and Peacemaking*. Australia: Digital Publishing Center.
- Meikhtila, Szep Jason. (2013, April 8). Buddhist Monks Incite Killings in Myanmar. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.pulitzer.org/files/2014/international-reporting/reuters/04reuters2014.pdf>



-
- Ratnagar, Shreen. (1981). *Encounter: The Westerly Trade of the Harappan Civilization*. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
- Strathern, Alan. (2013, May 2). Why are Buddhist Monks Attacking Muslims? *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22356306>
- Umer, Sarah. (2018). *Religious Beliefs of the Indus Valley Civilization*. Dubai, UAE: Jamalon Omni Scriptum Publishing Group.
- Vidale, Massimo and Heather M. L. Miller. (2000). On the Development of Indus Technical Virtuosity and Its Relation to Social Structure. *South Asian Archaeology 1997*, ed., Maurizio Taddei and Giuseppe De Marco, Intituto Italiano Per L' Africa E L' Oriente, Vol. 1, 115-131.