

Radical Islam and the Survival of the West

By Ron Banerjee

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The global reaction to the recent cartoons of Muhammad in Denmark is part of a familiar pattern. In 2004, a Dutch filmmaker named van Gogh was shot dead by Islamic fanatics because he made a film which dared to question the treatment of women in Islam. Similarly, global violence and death threats accompanied the publication of Salman Rushdie's book, the Satanic Verses. His Norwegian publisher, William Nygaard, was shot by Islamic fanatics in his own country. Every supposed 'insult' to Islam leads to violence, murder, and threats.

Other communities, particularly the Hindus, have also suffered their fair share of inaccurate and demeaning assaults on their religion and traditions in the west. In late 2005, the Toronto Film Festival and Canadian media bestowed awards and honor on Deepa Mehta, director of the movie Water. This movie featured a bizarre plot involving widows in the holy city Varanasi (which is equivalent to the Vatican or Mecca) being forced into prostitution by Hindu priests. Despite the fact that the movie was extremely demeaning and depicted practices virtually unheard of in India, Hindus in the west did not resort to violence or murder to express their displeasure.

This was not the first time that Hindus have been unfairly stigmatized. In 2003, the Toronto Star, which bends over backwards to flatter and please some of their favored minority groups, published a nude picture of a revered Hindu goddess. Again in 2005, the AIDS Committee of Toronto put on a fashion show which featured semi-nude transsexuals dressed as Hindu deities. In both these cases, the large Hindu community in Toronto and the Western world did not burn buildings, destroy public property, or attack Westerners. Instead, they used democratic and peaceful means to voice their protest.

To understand what gives rise to these divergent reactions, we need to examine the historical record. Unlike Hinduism, Islam was imposed on adherents of other faiths through conquest and subjugation. In South Asia, Islam was spread through a brutal conquest, which began in the 8th century AD. In fact, famed historian Will Durant has referred to this conquest as the bloodiest story in history. During this period, many Hindus were enslaved and millions were massacred. Fear of death, subjugation, and enslavement forced hapless Hindu victims to convert to Islam. Fanatical Islamists, who exercise significant power and influence, continue to nurture these notions and ideals. These elements are responsible for the violence and murder that follows each perceived insult of Islam throughout the west.

Apologists, whether in the West or India, often attempt to justify the acts of Islamic fanatics by arguing that such acts are legitimate means of protest against discrimination or imperialism. This argument is untenable: Islamist fanatics are not victims but rather champions of imperialism and bigotry. Their utter disregard for people of other faiths and their desire to Islamize, through conquest, the non-Muslim world, including India and Europe, clearly demonstrates their imperial designs.

Democratic societies, both in India and the West, can dissuade these fanatics only by demonstrating that legitimate means of protest are more successful than violence and murder. Fanatical Islamists receive tremendous incentives to continue their behavior when they find that their methods are more successful than those employed by groups which utilize democratic means.

A just democratic society should reward good behavior and penalize negative conduct. Western democracies, when dealing with radical Islamists, appear to be doing the precise opposite. The West, for its own survival, ought to reconsider this curiously self-destructive attitude.

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