



HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EXTREMISM

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Extremism is a social and ideological phenomenon, deeply ingrained in history and linked up with human marked propensities and everyday life practices. Epistemologically, extremism per se stems from within any bloated ego, which resorts to using power and violence to protect one's own interests or defend one's own existence, seeking to imbue extremist behaviors with ideological and moral justification. Premised on this logic, extremism is not exclusive to one single religion, group, community or culture. Theology spells out the onset of violent manifestations, which humanity is doomed to have experienced; this immorally bizarre yet entirely unacceptable human behavior can be traced back to the Quranic reference made to the incident of Cain and Abel. Extremism first started germinating individually in silos lurking beneath the surface, but later snowballed and ballooned into collective behaviors stoked and fueled by ethnic, racial, political, and religious triggers. Once yoked together with political associations, falling into the clutches of a given regime, a protracted and internecine struggle ensues, flaring up between one extremism that begets another silhouetted counter-extremism, be it an offshoot of a victorious party or breathed into a defeated ideology.

Generally, extremism is a position couched in bias hurled to extremes for an issue, markedly departing from the commonly accepted norms, logic and rationality. The Lexicon of Terrorism Terminology published by IMCTC provides a careful definition of 'extremism', featuring subtle nuances of its denotations and connotations: "Extremism" means exceeding the threshold of moderation and turning a blind eye to temperance, which is an ideological exaggeration that involves aggression over people, both in notions and actions". The said definition traces back a spate of manifestations of extremism observed in historical contexts triggered by political, religious, racial, ethnic and ideological propensities. The most significant highlights of

the term will be discussed in the following sections.

RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Religious extremism denotes the intolerance and bigotry of an individual or group fanatical about a religion, ideology or sect. Albeit different in type and form, heavenly or man-made, religions experienced a manifestation of intolerance, which is not necessarily being attributable to religious scriptures or teachings; rather, it simply stems from idiosyncrasies and poor understanding of historical or political contexts, whereby religious speeches are used to achieve different ends. Here are some telling examples of religious extremism:

- **EXTREMIST JEWISH GROUPS**

The first extremist group based on Jewish fundamentalism was known as ‘Zealots’, formed by Judas of Galilee in 66 B.C. The Zealot members, who were called the ‘Sicarii’, carried sicae – small daggers – concealed and tucked under their cloaks to carry out their assassinations, which initially affected the Roman government employees, while targeting later the adherents of Judaism who were against their beliefs. This group has been infamous for using devilish methods of terrorism and murder; poisoning drinking water, burning down and demolishing homes (arson and vandalism). The assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by extremist “Yigal Amir” is perhaps a contemporary telling manifestation of the ideology of the said group, which also committed hideous massacres against the defenseless Palestinian people for decades in cahoots with and hand in glove with extremist religious groups and national gangs.

- **EXTREMIST CHRISTIAN GROUPS**

Like all divine religions, Christianity calls for peace, love and mercy; however, different groups have used the teachings of Jesus Christ repeatedly to justify the use of violence! The Romans used methods of violence and intimidation to impose their Christian beliefs. As such, the intentions and actions of the Inquisition, the Crusades and the religious wars that have raged for decades are unambiguously understood. Millions of people have fallen victims to such despicable crimes even among the Christians themselves; a notoriously telling example is targeting Catharism, killing more than 20.000 of its followers at the hands of the Albigensian

Crusade, which went too merciless to a fault with the Catholics of the City itself! Lamentably enough, an infamous phrase voiced by the leader of the campaign, papal deputy or nuncio, went viral when he ruthlessly ordered all the townspeople be butchered savagely. When asked how to discriminate between the Catholics and the Cathars of the City! “Slaughter them all, and let the Lord sort them out,” came the retort callously.

The Knights Templar is the most infamous Christian extremist group in the Middle Ages. It represented a military elite that practiced criminal acts under the slogan “Protection of Christendom”; while the Ugandan Lord’s Army, which was founded in 1986 and aimed to establish a Christian religious system based on the statutory legislation of the Bible, is another contemporary telling example of extremism.

• EXTREMIST ISLAMIC GROUPS

Extremism driven by Islamic interpretation came into existence at the hands of the Kharijites, who built their ideological extremism on misunderstanding Islam. Driven by their narrowmindedness, such extremists excommunicated those who did not seem to be tuned in with their faith. The Qarmatians known as Qaramita followed suit and veered off and deviated from Islam; they sowed and wreaked terror among people; notoriously enough, they defiled and desecrated Al-Ka’bah Al-Musharrafah, inlaid with the Black Stone, set into the eastern corner, which they brazenly stole and held in ransom away from Mecca. Among other groups that adopted ideological extremism is Mu’tazila, which bulldozed people into adopting this belief, officializing it as the doctrine of the entire country, as they wielded influence on Caliph Ma’mun. More so, the people at the time were put to test; myriads of scholars who refused to acquiesce to this doctrine were imprisoned and killed, especially for the issue of “Creating the Qur’an”.

The Hashshiyyn, an esoteric Ismaili sect, and hard-core Shiite extremists, to whom the English word ‘assassin’ is etymologically attributable. The sect was led by ‘Hassan ibn Al-Sabah’, who took Alamut Castle in Persia as his stronghold, relying on intimidation and assassinations using suicide bombers – thus nicknamed in his parlance – to widely propagate his cause, spreading terror into the hearts of the rulers and the princes antagonized, after they assassinated a myriad of ministers, caliphs

and sultans.

It can be glaringly felt and sensed that extremism comes in different religious flavors, so to speak. Al-Qaeda and the ISIS organizations are telling examples of disreputable Sunni extremism, following the footpaths of the Kharijites; while, Hezbollah and Al-Houthi militias on the other side of the scale represent the Shiite armed villainous extremist groups. They are an extension of sectarian extremism that has fueled the religious infighting and sectarian strife, rendering themselves as a breeding ground for belligerency.

- **BUDDHIST EXTREMISM**

Buddhism is seen as a peaceful religion, nestling into meditation; however, the major incidents of violence stoked in Myanmar and elsewhere have unmasked the flip side of Buddhism as it is imbued with the deeply ingrained extremist Buddhist nationalism that fueled hate speech and violence, causing widespread genocide against Rohingya Muslims.

POLITICAL EXTREMISM

Ancient countries sustained the agonies of extremism leading to violence. The era of the Pharaohs was stigmatized with a bloody conflict between the supporters of the priests and their opponents. By the same token, Athens also experienced a departure of the disciples or apostles away from the Greek civilization through cases of violence based on ideological extremism. Likewise, political crime was rife in Rome; the most notorious was the assassination of Emperor Julius Caesar as a result of the conflict with the aristocracy.

Pertinacious as such, political extremism has entrenched throughout history up to date; political parties desperately seek to impose their political views and hegemony through the exercise of exclusion and marginalization. It is for these opinionated ideologies that political extremism snowballed into reality.

- **NATIONALIST EXTREMISM**

The fanatical nationalist calls that drum up for the interests of one people excluding any other(s), with absolute xenophobia, have strongly acted as a catalyst in contemporary political movements and parties. Extremist

and populist nationalist movements in Europe have repeatedly achieved resounding successes and their isolationist discourse has echoed widely, threatening the European model based on modernity and enlightenment; more so, it reinforces social division, stokes violence, and impedes the progress of communities as does extremism.

Strikingly enough, the far-right has successfully metamorphosed from being cross-handed and passive spectators twiddling their thumbs into jostling for the reins of power in the European and American political arena in less than ten years. India is a model for the prevalence of nationalist extremism in the wake of the rise of extremist Hinduist nationalist parties, assuming power over the past few years; hate speech and violence mushroomed increasingly, leading to increased attacks on Indian Muslims. Their approach feeds off religious discrimination, sorting out Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists.

- **HOLISTIC EXTREMISM**

Communist, Nazi, and Fascist regimes have become a glaringly telling example of ideological extremism indignant at the prevailing social structure. The said regimes deemed people unfit for development; therefore, they went to great lengths to produce a new generation more like machines! With their populations dehumanized, these regimes adopted the principle of sacrificing at least two generations to create an idealistic and supernatural generation. Regrettably, peoples have suffered from the policies of oppression, repression, and ethnic and cultural cleansing for many years.

- **ANARCHIST EXTREMISM**

By definition, anarchism means the absolute opposition of statehood; a form of community organization that grants power to a limited group, which the majority is subject to its own decisions, limiting human freedom. Anarchism calls for a horizontal, not hierarchical, organization of the political system. Anarchists resorted to the use of violence and assassination, and the assassination of the Russian Tsar Alexander II in 1881 is a case in point. The assassinations of American President McKinley in 1901 CE and many others are also telling examples.

The bottom line is that extremism represents, in its various types,

manifestations, and triggers, a social epidemic that incites hatred across human communities, reducing them to factions, sects, clicks, cabals, coteries, races and propensities, which all collide with one another, attempting to desperately eliminate the other amidst absurd wars.