

Genesis and rise of islamic fundamentalism religion essay



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Introduction

Religious fundamentalism is not a new term rather it is as old as the religions itself. The world has seen, felt and suffered due religious fundamentalism in some way or the other since time immemorial. The same is true for Islamic fundamentalism. Islam, however, has off late been more associated with fundamentalism than any other religion in the world. Fundamentalism in Islam is also referred as “ Islamofascism”. The term “ Islamofascism” is included in the New Oxford American Dictionary, defining it as “ a controversial term equating some modern Islamic movements with the European fascist movements of the early twentieth century”. The term is used in this manner by writers like Stephen Schwartz and Christopher Hitchens, to describe Islamist extremists, including terrorist groups such as al Qaeda. William Safire makes particular note of Hitchens as a “ popularizer” of the word, though Hitchens declines credit for coining it.[1]

Susceptibility of Islam to Fundamentalism

Islam is like any other religion; however, it is associated with fundamentalism than any other religion in the world. Fundamentalism in Islam is the result of its origin. It came into being in 500 AD when Christianity and Judaism were in its full blossom. Quran-The Holy Book of Islam is a philosophical yet one of the most exhaustive set of rule imposing strict guidelines for day to day functioning for its followers making Islam more susceptible to fundamentalism. The philosophical roots of Islamic fundamentalism are largely the result of a conscious attempt to revive and restate the theoretical relevance of Islam in the modern world. The word Islam means “ submission”, or the total surrender of oneself to God. Therein <https://assignbuster.com/genesis-and-rise-of-islamic-fundamentalism-religion-essay/>

lays its strength as well as weakness. Total surrender to God imparts spectacular potency to religious faith wherein no questions are asked regarding its convictions or statute. Equally, it leads to blind following in the interpretations of various diktats as pronounced by the ' Ulemas' or Islamic scholars. The empowerment of Islam, which is believed to be God's plan for mankind, is sacred and therefore may be (interpreted by some as ' must be') pursued by any means.[2]

Reasons for Fundamentalism in Islam

Colonialism and Western Dominance. Ever since Islam came into existence, it continued to flourish and was widely accepted in the Middle East, Africa, Central and East Asia. It reached its Zenith by 16th Century. However, in 17th and 18th Century Western Powers, started colonialism towards East resulting in Western cultural dominance over other religions and regions in all spheres of life. Islam too was greatly affected by the imperialistic rule of West and subtle but certain downfall of Islam commenced. The famous Indian poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) vividly expressed the commonly held view of the " soulless multilayered Western civilization" in its varied manifestations of capitalism, communism, secularism, and liberalism, draining Islam of its inherent vitality. This created a feeling of anti-Westernism and nostalgia for the glorious past; which is the major contributory factor for the contemporary fundamentalist movements.

Response to Overpowering Pace of Modern Revolutionization. Mr

Modernization and technology has been the biggest boon for the society. But with it also came the evils of cultural changes of nuclear family, materialism

and degeneration of social values. In Mr Voll's opinion Islamic

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fundamentalism is a direct response to rapid modernization and cultural changes that “ threaten to dilute Islamic identity by a syncretistic mix with un-Islamic elements”. Urbanization, in addition to diminishing social and cultural value has also resulted in high unemployment, steep rise in poverty and sharp inequalities in wealth distribution. These overwhelmingly and rapid economic, social and cultural changes have resulted in an acute sense of dislocation, identity loss, alienation and anomie and are the social-psychological background to the Islamic resurgence.

Reaction to Failed Islamic Liberalism. Islam is governed by stringent and strict laws as written in the Holy Koran and its followers are expected to adhere them in in their daily life in totality. It is this facet of Islam which makes it more radical than any other religion in the world. Likewise, Islamic radicalization in part is a reaction to the failure of Islamic liberalism in the late 19th and 20th centuries. While the radicalists fight both with the modernists, who recognize a broad elucidation of Scripture and assume Western ethics, and also the liberals who favor a democratic system of governance on the Western model. Radicalists disapprove these views and look for a come back to the original foundation of Islam, while reapplying them to the modern milieu.

Crisis of Frail Authority of Secular Nations and Governments. Another cause is the persistent crisis expressed by the weak legitimacy of the very idea of the nation-state as well as of the existing secular regimes. This crisis is evident in the pervasiveness of autocratic regimes and in the continuing segmentation of society along tribal, ethnic, and religious lines. The political, social, and economic failures of the secular state is seen as an important <https://assignbuster.com/genesis-and-rise-of-islamic-fundamentalism-religion-essay/>

contributor to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as a mass-based response demanding radical change. Fundamentalists tend to blame the modern secular nation-state and its Westernized elites for all the ills of society.

Defeat of Islamic States Post World War II. Creation of Israel, defeat of Arab nations in 1967 and 1973 in the Arab-Israel Wars, dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 acted as catalysts in the spreading of Islamic fundamentalism. It gave Muslim world a sense of disappointment, disgrace, helplessness, and loss of self-worth. It developed in animosity and hostility against the local administration that botched to react to the need of their societies. It also resulted in the hatred against the superpowers which too failed to support the cause of Islamic states and saw in them an oppressor and aggressor.

Modern Socio-Political Regimens. Modernization provided access to global education and new socio political equations. Secularism was one such thought that spurred Islamic fundamentalism; one of the reasons for promoting an Islamic awakening. Rise of the religious fundamentalism across various religious cultures was according to Jurgensmeyer (2001), that the radical religious groups rejected the liberal values of secular institutions. This was particularly considered, by the Islamic religious hierarchy, as the main cause of society's decline and loss of religious inspiration. These radicals also, refused to accept boundaries of secular society which keeps religion a private observance and not the public sphere which they thought were contrary to basic Islamic tenets. Equally, the conservatives sought to restore religion as central to social life. They also saw foreign domination as a symptom of Muslim weakness, and its elimination as the key to Muslim

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power. Such domination could be attacked directly by jihad against foreigners.[3]

Failure of Modern Institutions. Modernization in many countries did not yield requisite outcome. Modernization in these countries failed for host of reasons to include lack of infrastructure and stable government, illiteracy and wide spread unemployment. The failure of modernization in such state gave enough reason to the conservatives to force the established governments and convince the people to revert back to the basics of Islam and shun secularism and liberalization. Also the western liberal strategists failed to contain the religious overtures in the Islamic states, further bolstering the radicalists to adopt and enforce the fundamentalist Islam in its present form. The failure of liberal governments to revitalize the states gave people the option of reverting back to the Islamic values which if nothing else gave them the false sense of superiority and gave hope to bring back the lost glory to the so believed superior religion. This drew marked religious responses resulting in a spate of Islamic fundamentalist movements. Moreover, the failure of democratic and secular state to deliver further strengthened the case of conservatives giving rise to fundamentalist forces. [4]

Conclusion

At the end of the 20th century Islamic fundamentalists have become active participators in mainstream Muslim society all over the world, led by a new class of modern-educated elites. For many Muslims Islamic revivalism is a social rather than a political movement aimed at implementing a more

Islamically oriented society. For most fundamentalists, however, the <https://assignbuster.com/genesis-and-rise-of-islamic-fundamentalism-religion-essay/>

establishment of an Islamic system does necessitate the creation of an Islamic state, and the mainstream Islamic fundamentalist movements have become major actors within the system while the violent radicals continue to confront the state. The moderates demand participation as equals in the democratic process, while the extremists threaten violence and revolution.