

The other day, I saw a SBS program about religious violence in India. Graphic scenes were displayed of the torching of men, women, and children and the destruction of property.

Well-known writer Salman Rusdhie observing recent religious violence in India wrote an article called "Religion as ever is the poison in India's blood" where he states "what happened in India happened in God's name. ... The problem's name is God". Remember the days of the partition in 1947 when over a million people were massacred in religious riots between Hindus and Muslims? Fifteen million were displaced from their homes. Since then, there have been numerous religious flashpoints in the subcontinent. In 1992 a mosque in India at Ayodhya in the Uttar Pradesh was torn down by angry Hindus who believed that Hindu God, Lord Rama, was born there; over 2000 people were killed in the riots. A similar outbreak in 2002 killing 1000 people occurred in the State of Gujarat.

Religion is one of the most potent sources of divisiveness among humanity. Mankind throughout the ages have inherited the tribal dynamics of in-group loyalty and out-group hostility. The universality of this characteristic suggests a Darwinian explanation related to survival of the species. Religion has famously provided a label for firing this twofold collective emotion. It all starts with the religious upbringing of children in their formative stage. Children are brainwashed to recognize the identity and superiority of their own religion and the inferiority of other religious groups.

Let's take the case of Northern Ireland in order to get some idea about this divisive process at work. In that country, the religious label is inherited down many generations. Catholics, whose parents, grandparents, and great grand parents went to Catholic schools, send their children to Catholic schools. It is the same with Protestants. The two sets of people have the same skin colour, they speak the same language, they enjoy the same things but they might as well belong to different species, so deep is the historic divide.

Says Richard Dawkins: "From Kosovo to Palestine, from Iraq to Sudan, from Ulster to the Indian subcontinent, look carefully at any region of the world where you find intractable enmity and violence between rival groups. I cannot guarantee that you'll find religions as the dominant labels for in-

groups and out-groups. But it's a very good bet"

In Kosovo, Serbian Orthodox Christians fight with Muslims. In Iraq Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis fight each other. In Indonesia and the Philippines, it is the Christians against Muslims. In Russia, Chechnya, the Russian Orthodox Christians battle with Muslims.

In Israel, fighting between Jews and Muslims has been going on for a century. The modern version of this dispute began with the birth of Israel in 1948. In 1948, the land that is now Israel was to be divided between Jews and Arabs, mainly Muslim Palestinians. The latter refused to give up the land that they had occupied for generations. However, the Jews were obsessed by the Old Testament story that they were chosen by God for that land. In the war that followed, the Jews took over much Palestine territory. Since then,

hostilities: Firstly, the practice of labelling children as 'Catholic children' 'Protestant children', Muslim children, etc. This is done from an early age. The fact that it is far too early for kids to make up their mind at this stage makes this practice ridiculous. Secondly, the practice of segregating schools according to religion. Thirdly, are the taboos against marrying out. This spurs hereditary feuds. The negative-sounding term 'mixed marriage' is employed to describe situations when two persons of different religions marry. Often there are prolonged battles over how the children are to be educated. The practice of interfaith marriages is particularly taboo among Jews and Muslims.

War has played a major role in the history of Christianity. Saint Augustine propounded the 'Just War' theory within Christianity and St Thomas Aquinas elaborated on that. The cross was quite often upon crests

RELIGIONS AT WAR



Palestinians have been trying to get back their land. Muslim groups use suicide bombers to attack Jewish targets. Tens of thousands have died.



Shyamon Jayasinghe

US support for Israel had been one of the reasons for the Al Qaeda attack on US targets on September 11 2001 that killed 2986 people in one blow. Another reason had been the growing Christian fundamentalism in the US that was hostile to Islam. Revd Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition in the US, called Mohammed "... an absolute wild-eyed fanatic. He was a robber and a brigand... these terrorists are carrying out Islam"

Three factors in religion tend to amplify the natural tendency that human beings have for in-group loyalties and out-group

or shields of the 'warriors of God'. The Crusades that were fought from the 11th to the 13th centuries had been sanctioned by the Pope. The French Wars of Religion in the 16th century had been between Roman Catholics and Protestants. The Thirty Years War fought in Europe in the 17th century had a critical religious element. Christianity was also the tool for the wars of colonial expansion. Even to this day conflicts that on surface appear not to be related to religion have had a religious component in it. The conflicts in Northern Ireland are an example as the native Irish were mostly Catholic and later English sponsored immigrants were mainly Protestants.



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The word 'Jihad' literally means, "to strive or struggle" and it has a broad application that covers even attempts to be a good Muslim. Jihad is also taken to mean a violent struggle to bring about a Muslim society throughout the world. In Muhammad's time, the pagans of the Arabian Peninsula were asked for submission to Islam if they desired to continue to live. Scholars have pointed to many passages in the Qu'ran that have the effect of inspiring war against infidels. Here is just one example: "Let those then fight in the cause of Allah who would exchange the present life with the hereafter. Who so fights in the cause of Allah, be he slain or be he victorious, we shall soon give him a great reward". (Qu'ran, 4:72-75)

Buddhism, alone, has not been marred by religious wars. Maybe because it is a philosophy turned into religion and because its founder spurned attempts to foist the Dhamma on others. Buddhism is without the God that can provoke people to war. Buddhists who die in war have not been promised deliverance. However, here again we find unfortunate rumblings as in Sri Lanka where Buddhists have been incited to burn Christian Churches etc. Our own country may be the first to spoil the unblemished record of Buddhism.

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