

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

April 2019



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”
- The Mother

Year 10

Issue 1

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 10

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

SRI LANKA TERROR ATTACKS: THE REGIONAL THREAT OF RISING ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

The recent Easter attacks in Sri Lanka, one of the worst modern terrorist attacks after 9/11, have announced the open arrival of Islamic terrorism in South Asia, and right in India's backyard, directly threatening our southern states. The magnitude of the attacks – launched in major five star hotels and most famous churches – which killed over 300 people and injured about 500 others, shows that months of planning and meticulous international funding had to have gone into them.

While a local terrorist organization called National Thowheeth Jaamath (NTJ) launched the attacks, the direct support came from Islamic State network (ISIS). It is not possible for the NTJ – which became active in 2014 and catapulted to limelight last year – to have carried out the terror operation on its own. Besides, ISIS has now taken responsibility for the attacks and has stated that it was revenge for ousting them from Syria and Iraq.

In Sri Lanka, the eastern province, especially, the town of Kuttankudy, being a Muslim-dominated region, provided ideal conditions for the ISIS to launch its arrival in the region in a major way. All it had to do was to utilize its network in South Asia and operate through a local terrorist outfit, NTJ, led by Zaharan Hashmi.¹ Because of ISIS money and support, a little known organization was able to carry out such large-scale attacks, otherwise, the NTJ was little more than a new, fledgling Islamist terror outfit operating in the eastern parts of Sri Lanka.

¹ The National Thowheed Jaamath (NTJ) is different from Sri Lanka Thowheed Jaamath (SLTJ). The NTJ is a splinter group of SLTJ. The SLTJ was established with the help of Arab-funded Wahhabi Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jaamath (TNTJ) based in India.

WHY SRI LANKA: RISE OF BUDDHIST NATIONALISM AND ISLAMIC EXTREMISM SINCE 2009

A major question that has arisen in the wake of the attacks is why Sri Lanka was chosen by the ISIS to assert itself and why was the Christian community in Sri Lanka singled out for the attacks. Christians form the smallest minority in the country. Sri Lanka has about 70% Sinhalese Buddhist people, 12.6% Hindus, roughly under 10% Muslims and near 7.4% Christians. The reasons for targeting Christians have not come out clearly, especially because Christians and Muslims have always lived peacefully with each other in the country.

One of the explanations emerging from the local scenario might be that the Sri Lankan government's ongoing war against drugs was supported by the Christians and it involved heavy arrests of Muslims, from which the drug peddlers came. Drug trade provided sources of financing for Muslim terror networks linked to ISIS.

Besides this, attacking Christian churches served three purposes –

One, since historical relations between the two minorities have been cordial, the backlash was not feared, unlike if they had attacked the Buddhist or the Hindu communities,

Two, Christians are the smallest minority, thereby enabling the attackers to send out their tough Islamic message without fearing reprisals. Had they attacked the Sinhalese community, Sri Lanka might have turned into another Myanmar.

Three, and the most subtly un-grasped reason has been that since 2006, Catholics in Sri Lanka have stood out against what they called the proselytizing Protestants as well as the Muslims. They have often made common cause with Buddhist

nationalists in restricting the freedoms of Muslim extremists and a small section of Protestants. Since 2009, with the end of the civil war, the Catholic Church has been consistent in its defence of the government and Buddhist nationalists against charges of 'intolerance' against the Muslims. Thus, the uniform historical Christian-Muslim peace in Sri Lanka has not been so uniform.

In the context of the intensifying Sinhalese-Muslim conflict, these attacks send out the message that Islamic extremism has arrived in Sri Lanka and that Muslims are not just defenseless minorities who were battling the Buddhists – they have had the whole backing of the global Islamic Caliphate of the ISIS behind them.

Till 2009, the major conflict in Sri Lanka was the ethnic conflict between Tamils and Sinhalese Buddhists. But after 2009 and the crushing of the LTTE, new fault lines emerged between Buddhists and other religious minorities like Muslims and Christians, especially Muslims. Notably, Hindus were never the object of Buddhist ire in Sri Lanka. And the post-2009 scenario has seen a uniting of Buddhist and Hindus. In the case of the present terror attack as well, both the Tamils and the Sinhalese are outraged, since the Christians came from both these communities.

In all these overlapping religious and ethnic commonalities, the only outsider that stands out, in both racial and religious respects, is the Muslim. Although Muslims in Sri Lanka speak both Sinhalese and Tamil languages, their historical allegiance has always been to the Arab world and even the Tamil Muslims do not regard their Tamil language identity as meaning anything. During the LTTE civil war, while Tamil Muslims initially sided with the LTTE, they ceased to support it after LTTE raided some mosques in Kuttankudy during the 1990s.

Subsequently, during the LTTE civil war itself, unbeknownst to the world, Islamic fundamentalism sensed the opportunity and took root in Sri Lanka. Its first task was to subjugate other Muslim communities that were not Sunnis, enabling them to raid Sufi mosques in 2006. The conflict between various Muslim sub-groups and ethnicities in Sri Lanka is also intense, with Sufis often directly coming into conflict with Sunni radical outfits like Pakistan-based Jamaat-i-Islami and India-based Thablighi Jamaat. ***Thus, there were two levels to Muslim problem in Sri Lanka – one, Muslims versus the others, since Muslims have had their own distinct identity and have not subscribed to ethnic identities like Sinhala or Tamil, and, two, Muslims conflict within various Muslim sub-groups. The latter is increasingly being subdued since the Arab influence finally has a decisive upper hand.***

In recent years, Arab influence, in the form of radical Wahhabism and Salafism, has intensified among Sri Lanka's Sunni Muslim community in the eastern province, making them further disassociated from the Lankan society. It has entirely pervaded their education systems and community organizations, so much so that eastern province has been left alone, in isolation, by the Lankan authorities – the extent of rising Muslim radicalism and isolation has become such that, now, the entire area has become too opaque and tough for the intelligence community to infiltrate.

Not only have Muslim organizations become more vocal and engaging in forceful conversion, exploiting the poor Buddhists and speaking freely in the ghettoized eastern province, the target of local radicalized Islamist preachers' ire has also focused on defaming Buddhism as well as defacing Buddha statues. Social media and internet have helped them, as they have followed the teaching of terror lords like Zakir Naik,

who is wanted by India, and established effective linkages through internet.

As a result, Buddhist nationalism, too, has been on the rise in Sri Lanka. This was especially so after the civil war against the LTTE ended in 2009. The Bodu Bala Sena – a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist organization – was formed in 2012 and was supported by the previous nationalist government led by Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who directly commanded the operations wiping out the LTTE. ***The Sena also has links with Myanmar’s Buddhist ‘969 Movement’ which fought against the Rohingya Muslims, thereby forging a kind of South Asian Buddhist solidarity against Muslim extremism.***

Between 2012 and 2014, the Bodu Bala Sena carried out intensive anti-Muslim and anti-Christian rallies and checks, alleging conversions by Islamic preachers and evangelical pastors. In 2013, its general secretary described the organization as a “civilian police force against Muslim extremism” and held a massive anti-Muslim rally. In reaction, in 2013, in the eastern province, an outfit named Muslim Rights Organization organized a counter-rally to protest against Bodu Bala Sena. Between 2014 and 2018, there were communal riots as well, with the latest being a massive riot in Ampara and Kandy districts of Sri Lanka in 2018.

The February 2018 riots brought sharp international focus on the Muslim question in Sri Lanka. Despite the fact that the riots were triggered by a group of Muslims killing a Sinhalese and inciting a counter-reaction and the fact that both Sinhalese and Muslims attacked each other’s places of worship, the international condemnation from the West flowed freely against the Sinhalese. ***The so-called secular elements in the country – including the present government – were quick to crackdown***

on the majority community.

In cases such as these, the burden of democracy and secularism becomes all the more glaring, holding a country hostage and targeting its national communities for doing the bare minimum to protect the national interest. Unlike Sri Lanka, Myanmar and China did not obligate themselves to appeasing Islamic radicals and international public opinion, enabling them to take more effective action against Muslim extremism. India, on its part, has seen both phases under two different kinds of government.

SRI LANKAN POLITICS AND THE BURDEN OF APPEASEMENT

Much like in India, Muslim appeasement is an important factor in Lankan politics as well, with Muslims constituting nearly 10% of the population. The current government led by Ranil Wickremasinghe as Prime Minister with Mathripala Sirisena as the President, is known for minority appeasement, in contrast to the previous nationalist government of Mahinda Rajapaksa, which is credited for effective actions preventing sectarianism. Yet, despite the nationalist image of Rajapaksa, his party too, at one time, depended heavily on Muslims for votes and was endorsed by Saudi Arabia. But his later endorsement of Sena – though not openly – shows that winds were blowing differently.

Yet, the unfortunate part of Sri Lankan politics is that all three political parties – whose leaders are Sirisena, Rajapaksa and Wickremasinghe – have practiced Muslim appeasement to nurture their vote-bank, at some point or the other, regardless of Rajapaksa's relatively more nationalist identity.

Even in the case of the present terror attacks, it is pertinent to note that the government did not take any action despite

repeated intelligence warnings from India. India had given the warnings in great detail, including supplying some of the names and addresses of potential suspects, and on the morning of the attack itself as well, India had intimated Sri Lanka. Besides India, Muslim sub-groups in conflict with Sunnis had also warned the authorities this time as well as in the past about Muslim radicalism, yet no action was taken.

Sri Lanka police chief had intimated the government officials about India's warnings. These warnings were known to the security council of Sri Lanka, which is under charge of President Sirisena, yet the President claims ignorance. ***The reason for lack of action against Islamic radicals despite being forewarned, lies not only in the ongoing political crisis in the country – between the Prime Minister and the President – since 2018, but also on the Muslim appeasement factor in Lankan politics.***

Damagingly, after recovering a huge cache of arms and ammunition few months ago on 80 acres of farmland, in the eastern province, it is not possible that the Lankan authorities could not have fathomed that something was brewing in the Muslim community – yet, only four people were arrested and two were released and no action was taken against Islamic radicalism or against NTJ, with the police downplaying the discovery. ***The lack of action reflects not the failure of Lankan intelligence, but the state of political will, despite being faced with repeated evidence – the clear unwillingness of Lankan politicians to confront the Muslim radicals and avert disaster, for the fear of losing their 10% vote bank, since Muslims vote uniformly as a group.***

This counterproductive thinking was also reflected in a major blunder committed by the Lankan government – shutting down an intelligence operations center in the eastern province.

About 40 officers engaged in the center were relocated to various government welfare departments. The Lankan government shut the center because of alleged human rights abuses perpetrated by Sri Lankan operatives against the local Muslims there. Had the center not been closed, the present attack could easily have been intercepted and averted.

Not only this, but the government of the day also opened inquiries against the Lankan officers for alleged human rights abuses during the civil war, as a part of their process of 'reconciliation' with the Tamils. Such measures have only served to demoralize the military services community in Lanka and send out a message to external enemies, like jihadists, that easy attacks could be launched on the country without any fear of reprisal. ***What the present secular government in Sri Lanka has been doing is akin to the government of the day persecuting its own armed forces, by giving into to an international witch-hunt in the name of democracy and human rights.***

This is mind boggling. To draw an analogy, imagine what would happen if the Indian government decides to go after its own armed forces in Kashmir on the pretext of human rights abuses and begins shutting down intelligence cells in Kashmir, for abusing the locals. India would be done for. We have faced something like this before, when the previous governments adopted a soft stand towards Kashmiri terrorists – far from containing terrorism or 'reconciling' the Kashmiris, it further emboldened the terrorists to launch attacks like 26/11 in India, knowing fully well that they need not fear any reprisals against the Muslim community under the then Congress government. In fact, all ten 26/11 terrorists were wearing the sacred Hindu red thread on their wrists, to make it look like a case of 'Hindu terrorism' plot buttressed by the then UPA government – their

plans failed after Kasab was caught and his Pakistani identity revealed as proof.

They would think twice before doing something like this under a nationalist government, knowing that the majoritarian reaction against the Muslims would be immense, and Modi already has a proven track record of implementing his tough words against Islamic extremism, since 2002.

Thus, what Sri Lanka is doing today is much like what UPA did between 2006-2013 – persecuting majority communities and tying the hands of the armed forces in the name of human rights. All the while, such weak regimes were taken advantage of by terrorists and ridiculed by the international community.

THE THREAT TO INDIA

The rise of a distinctive and decisive brand of Islamic terrorism in Sri Lanka from the previous indecisive and localized Muslim-Buddhist conflicts poses a major and direct threat to India, on several counts:

First, the Muslim question in India mirrors the Muslim question in Sri Lanka. The politics of appeasement of which Muslims are the main beneficiary is common to certain political parties in both the countries. These commonalities create further cementing points between Muslim networks in both the countries. These Muslim commonalities have emerged across South Asia, to India's detriment. In Buddhist-majority Myanmar, the fleeing of Rohingya Muslims and the refusal of Sri Lanka and India to grant them refugee, have further reinforced the sense of Muslim 'victimhood'.

The menace of Islamic extremism has spread like wildfire, and is stinging Hindus and Buddhists of South Asia, alike. While

Pakistan is the biggest sponsor of terrorism to India, rest of the Muslim South and South-east Asian countries are getting rapidly radicalized as well. This includes Indonesia and Malaysia. ***Maldives currently shelters the largest number of ISIS fighters in the world, thanks to the legacy of the erstwhile government of Abdulla Yameen.***

Unlike other terrorist outfits, ISIS does not need to make too many efforts to secure allegiance – it just gobbles up or includes within itself various radical Islamist outfits operating in different parts of the world.

When ISIS, after facing a push back in Iraq and Syria since 2015, decided to expand to South and South-east Asia, it adopted this method. This is what ISIS did in Philippines when it took Malawi under siege about 2 years back – it simply included a local Islamist outfit, Abu Sayyef, within its ranks and established its foothold. Similarly, in Afghanistan, in Nangarhar province, it literally established its provincial centre for South Asia, gobbling up entire units of Taliban within itself. In India, it is mostly its logistics and secondary support network that operates – especially from states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

It has launched attacks in South Asia, but none as massive in scale as the Sri Lanka attacks. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, it has routinely attacked Shia and Hazara minorities. In Philippines, it literally controlled the Malawi region and widely desecrated the Churches, and, in Bangladesh it is most famous for the 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack. After the Bangladesh attack, Sheikh Hasina, through a complete security overhaul, literally wiped out the ISIS networks in the country.

It has not launched any attack in India so far. But its logistics networks are active here and as far back as 2015-16, certain

areas of Kashmir saw the open unfurling of ISIS flags. India's intelligence agencies have strengthened considerably since 26/11 and it is not easy now for outfits like ISIS to target India. But the dream of conquering the 'Hind' has been reiterated by ISIS for long. India is the crown of this region.

Besides these South Asian countries, Islamic terror networks are spread everywhere in the region – for instance, the Rohingya in Myanmar and Uighur Muslims in China. Any such network is fodder for ISIS, where the only criterion is to extinguish the existence of non-Muslims. Thus, not the Middle-east, but India's backyard is becoming the hub of Islamic terrorism.

Second, India-based radical and extremist Muslim organizations play a major role in 'exchanges' with Sri Lanka at a religious level. India-based outfits like Thablighi Jamaat and Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jaamath are active among Sri Lanka's Muslims. India-born Zakir Naik, who fled to Malaysia, is a regional celebrity among Muslims of both Sri Lanka and India, as well as other South Asian Muslims. In the wake of the recent attacks in Sri Lanka, even the National Investigative Agency (NIA) in India cracked down on Indian Muslims based in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, who had been following the main mastermind of the attack, Hashmi. Hashmi had even spent a few months in India and had planned the foiled attack on Indian High Commission in Colombo.

In general, this easy and effortless religious exchange between radical Muslims across both countries poses a threat to India's security, making the southern states an easy target for a Sri Lanka type terror attack.

Third, over the last few years, an attempts has been made to make Sri Lanka a base by Pakistan-based terror outfits, like

LeT, to try to launch attacks on India. Such potential attacks were averted by India's intelligence agencies in the past. Indian intelligence agencies further discovered that Pak-based terror outfits had, in the past, taken some Sri Lankan intelligence operatives into confidence to use the territory of Lanka, but their plans were thwarted by Indian intelligence networks, whose spread in the South Asian region has become more detailed and effective over the years.

Currently, Sri Lankans such as Zakir Hussein and Arun Selvarajan are facing imprisonment in India for acting as espionage agents at the behest of Pakistani intelligence officers based in Colombo (Viswanathan, 2016). It also came to light, recently, that a few months ago, a Pakistan-based diplomat in Colombo had attempted to engineer terrorist attacks on the US and Israeli embassies in New Delhi, thus, once again making the uncomfortable Pakistan-Sri Lanka connection clear.

Thus, for India, it is crucial that a friendly government stays in power in Colombo. More than that, regardless of whichever government comes to power in Colombo in the October 2019 elections, India needs to maintain good relations with it. Here, the 'China factor' becomes pertinent. India soured its relations with the previous nationalist government of Rajapaksa mainly by disapproving the leasing of the Hambantota port by Sri Lanka to China and because of Lanka's increasing closeness to China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) banner. In contrast, the current Lankan government, led by Wickremesinghe, has appealed to India since it is spurning China and attempting to open doors to India, Japan, US and Australia.

This short-term calculative geopolitical outlook may not be the best way to adopt, for India. India has natural cultural synergies with the nationalist Rajapaksa regime – especially a

nationalist India under Modi – if it could successfully dilute Pakistan’s machinations with Rajapaksa. The proof of this lies in the fact that the nationalist Bodu Bala Sena, covertly patronized by the Rajapaksa regime, had reached out to India’s RSS in 2014, due to their common outlook towards Islamic terrorism. The Sena engaged in high level talks with the RSS and with Buddhist Indian organizations, besides Myanmar’s Buddhist movement, to create a “Buddhist-Hindu peace zone” in the region, to contain Islamic terrorism and forced conversions.

Thus, India cannot let the ‘China factor’ and the perceived threat of Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean Region spoil its bigger war against terrorism.

While India has better relations with the current ‘secular’ regime in Lanka, in reality, as we have seen, this regime has largely turned out to be toothless and dysfunctional. This does not bode well for the fight against Islamic terrorism in South Asia. India would do well to unite with like-minded regimes, like Rajapaksa’s (if he comes to power in 2019), Myanmar and China, to counter terrorism in the region. US, Japan and Australia – which, as the symbolic ‘West’, had relentlessly sought global persecution of Rajapaksa for human rights abuses in the civil war and condemned them for post-2010 attacks on Muslims – will be of little help here.

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US'S ENDORSEMENT OF GOLAN HEIGHTS STATUS QUO AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

A significant development occurred in West Asia this month. The US President, Donald Trump, reversed nearly half a century of US policy and established international law by recognizing Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights. Golan Heights is a fertile, volcanic plateau – responsible for nearly 40% of Israel's water supply and close to the fresh water Sea of Galilee. To the west of Golan Heights lies Israel, Syria to its east, Jordan to its south and Lebanon to its north, reflecting its strategic importance for Israel, acting as a buffer zone to prevent Arab attacks on Israel.

The plateau was captured by Israel during the Six-Day Arab-Israel War of 1967, from Syria. Along with the plateau, Israel also occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Despite the surprise attack launched by Egypt and Syria against Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel held onto these territories. In 1981, Israel even passed a legislation legalizing its annexation of Golan Heights. This move was widely condemned by the United Nations, and the then US President, Ronald Reagan, even temporarily suspended defence deals with Israel.

Since then the world has refused to recognize the Israeli annexation of Golan Heights and the plateau has been regarded as occupied territory. A very little part of the plateau was ceded during the negotiations over the last few decades and a buffer area was established in 1974 to station United Nations monitoring troops in the area.

However, for all practical purposes, Israeli control over the plateau has remained unchallenged in the international community, even if not officially recognized. Over the decades, even the Arab states have lost interest in the issue. Israel has been settling its population in the plateau for several years and the barely-populated area hosts around 20,000 Israelis and almost an equal number of Druze Syrian Shia Muslims. The Druze Syrians are different from the Israeli Druze who stay within mainland Israel as citizens and have been widely drafted in Israeli military service as well. The Druze Syrians in Golan Heights had historically professed allegiance to Syria's ruling family and refused to accept the offer of Israeli citizenship. However, during the last several years, even this scenario had been changing.

The Arab states further lost interest in Golan Heights after the 2010 Arab Spring. All prospects of attempts at tenuous peace that were being made between Israel and Syria evaporated soon

after the Syrian civil war began in 2011 and the rise of the Islamic State in West Asia. As a result of these developments, Syria's Assad began to rely heavily on Israel's major enemy, Iran and its proxies like Hezbollah in Lebanon, to help it defeat the Islamic State. Besides Iran, Israel, as a part of US-led European coalition, Russia and Turkey were also involved in fighting the ISIS. The increasing role of Iran in Syria and the snowballing Israel-Iran enmity has reinforced the importance of Golan Heights for Israel. After 2011, there have been instances where Iranian proxies have stationed themselves too close to Golan Heights and Israel's aerial bombardment campaigns in Syria – to destroy the ISIS, but also to attack the Iranian fighters – to protect its strategic asset have become a regular feature.

So embroiled have the Arab states become with the ISIS in the last few years that, as if behind a veil and guided by an invisible hand, their relationship with Israel and their own power status has changed for good. And it is only now that they are waking up to this reality. ***Over the last few years, the Arab states have not only become the world's most powerful Islamophobic nations, but have also widely been dependent on the private services of Israeli mercenaries to control their own domestic affairs and suppress and spy on their people and on each other.*** This is especially the case with Saudi Arabia and UAE and with smaller countries like Oman and Jordan and even Egypt, who have become partners of Israel.

Recently, to the shock of the rest of the world, none other than UAE's crown prince suggested to US's Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, that a plan can be evolved to assassinate the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan, akin to how US had carried out assassinations in Iraq in 2007 by enlisting a private company, Blackwater. Further, Gulf states, as early as 2007-08, had entered

into secret negotiations with Israel to ensure that Hamas did not win elections in Palestine and that the pro-Israeli leader in West Bank continues to hold sway.

The practical Islamophobia of the Arab states has arisen out of the need to appease the West and to control their own citizens. They also need to ensure that clerics do not get out of hand and challenge the political authority. Their own deep mutual enmities have also contributed to the need to keep each other in check. This mutual conflict is deepening increasingly. It is reflected in the facile but significant moves within UAE towards a more 'secular' balance of power and, within, Saudi Arabia, it is seen in Mohammad bin Salman's open declaration of moving towards 'moderate Islam' and towards Arab nationalism of the pre-1979. In reality, of course, given the nature of Islam and its basic exhortations, it is never really capable of anything even remotely moderate. The manner in which the hardline attitude has been embraced by Muslim countries is the primary reason for them being at each other's throat at present.

Nonetheless, the facile language of moderation, secularism and democracy has served in a limited way the ends of the dictatorships of the Arab world as well as the political ends of the Western countries and Israel. These changes are also the reason why the Gulf countries and Iran are cultivating good relations with India even at the cost of alienating Pakistan and are highly supportive of China's tough dealings with the extremism of Uighur Muslims of its Xinjiang province. A similar logic dictates the attitude of the Arab world towards the Israel-Palestine conflict now.

This developing relationship and the Arab dependence on Israeli help to settle scores with each other and, above all, to encircle Iran, has made, for all practical purposes, historically

emotive issues like Palestine, Golan Heights and human rights, complete non-issues, except when it comes to paying lip service.

However, this lip service had so far maintained a façade of international relations and a liberal world order. With Trump's Middle-east policy, this façade has gone completely. He not only endorsed Israel in pulling out of the nuclear deal with Iran, but also shifted the US embassy to Jerusalem in a historic decision and has cut nearly all US aid to Palestine. The recognition of Golan Heights is another such historic move – a reversal of 50 years of US policy. In all the above instances, the Arab countries merely condemned Trump's decisions and Saudi Arabia, at one point, even blamed the Palestinians for the ongoing conflict.

Trump's decision has also come at a historic time of a series of reversals in Gulf nations' fortunes. That time – during the last several decades – when OPEC and Gulf used to be all-powerful is gone. OPEC has been diluted and for all practical purposes so has the oil economy. When Qatar exited the OPEC in 2018 and decided to move away from oil, the writing on wall was clear. Moreover, since the 2009 US exploitation of its shale gas reserves, the US is now in a position where it no longer needs OPEC. It no longer needs to import oil and gas and has become a net exporter. This means US can discard its Gulf compulsions like a pack of cards. The Gulf will remain an important and attractive market for the US, but the decades-old dependency is gone.

Under these conditions, Trump's official recognition of Golan Heights is unprecedented. Its significance lies not in the material benefits it will yield for Israel. As it is, Israel's position was strong and unchallengeable in the region, even though other world powers like EU and Gulf states have refused to concur with the US. What matters, however, is that this recognition further sets

seal on a rapidly changing world order. Besides Trump, over the past two years, many other unlikely countries have embraced Israel and all these countries are those where there is a distinctive shift towards nationalism. With Jair Bolsonaro's election in Latin America's largest country, Brazil, Israel has found a powerful ally in Latin America for the first time. Bolsonaro has signaled his intent to shift Brazil's embassy to Jerusalem as well. Thus, for the first time, there is a shift in Latin America, whose previous communist governments have always supported Palestine.

Likewise, in India, Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel in 2017. This comes alongside Modi's deft and excellent friendships cultivated with the Arab nations as well as Iran. India, under Modi, has become a nation which, for the first time, is taking interest and expressing its clear position on West Asian politics. In Central European countries as well, there is a decisive shift towards nationalism which is benefitting Israel. Hungary, Romania and the Czech Republic refused to support an EU resolution denouncing US's Jerusalem move in Israel.

All these changes are cemented by the fact of nationalism. Its movement all over the world has started resulting in near-permanent changes in the present world order, which had proclaimed itself to be liberal and secular, but was, in reality, an artificial construct which began to be bypassed as soon as it was evolved after the Second World War.

The US's official endorsement of Israeli control over Golan Heights will further contribute to the dismantling of the present international system. It would now be possible for Russia to legitimize its annexation of Crimea in 2014 and would also extend to other territorial disputes. In other words, instead of liberalism

and international rules, the rule of power will be decisive. Talk of human rights which was common in scuttling countries will no longer be relevant after the Golan Heights episode. India itself has been at the receiving end of the human rights brigade and still is. But these voices are losing their clout, as the international order changes. Religion and nationalism are coming back to the forefront once again through the current destruction of the post-war global order. An alternative foundation will be based on these things.

SECULARISM DISCREDITED: THE CONSTITUTIONAL FACE OF MUSLIM FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE US

A highly charged debate has been going on in the United States for the last few days over the controversial comments made by a new Representative from the Democratic Party, Ilhan Omar. Omar was elected to the House of Representatives from Minnesota in November as a Democrat. She and her colleague in the House – another new Representative belonging to the Democratic Party – Rashida Tlaib, were among the first Muslim women representatives in the US Congress. They both – along with their extreme-Left newly elected Representative colleague, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, popularly called AOC – have courted controversies by their extreme views since then. While AOC has been called out for her impractical extreme Leftist demands on all issues, Omar and Tlaib have displayed a much darker side.

They have not only openly identified themselves with an unabashed dislike for Israel but have also consistently painted a picture of the victimhood of Islam in the US, besides abusing President Donald Trump. Tlaib on one occasion used extremely foul language when referring to the need of impeaching him. Both Omar and Tlaib – with Omar always flaunting her headscarf and even making a statement of religious values about it – have projected that Muslim women do not need saving from Islam by the outside world. Simultaneously, they champion hardcore radical Islamist values, seeking to project the Muslims as a whole as victims all over the world. They broke the US Congress tradition when instead of taking their oath over the US Constitution, they took it over the Quran instead.

This projection has built up a toxic and divisive narrative

whose precipitation was reached when Omar made recent comments going beyond Jews and Israel and targeting the counter-terror operations that took place in the wake of 9/11, thereby leaving little doubt about her bigoted perspective.

Rep. Omar while giving a speech at a fundraiser last month organized by Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR), said during her speech, “Raise hell. Make people uncomfortable because here’s the truth. Far too long, we have lived with the discomfort of being a second-class citizen. And frankly I’m tired of it. And every single Muslim in this country should be tired of it. CAIR was founded after 9/11 because they recognized that some people did something, and all of us were starting to lose access to our civil liberties.”

Not only was the statement a misrepresentation – since CAIR was founded in 1994 and has been accused of having ties with radical Muslim terrorist organizations, but it also brought into sharp focus her brand of Islam, couched in secularist language. Immediately after her speech went viral, there was a great backlash from white American people in general, some sections of the media as well as from Trump and the Republican Party. The Democrats themselves were hesitant to support Omar this time, except for some direct Leftist supporters like Bernie Sanders, Senator Elizabeth Warren, and, Representatives Tlaib and AOC.

In response to her comments, Trump put out a video on social media representing how starkly her words contrasted with the spectacle of sheer destruction as the terrorist planes struck the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. The video, edited to portray the terrorist havoc alongside Omar’s rhetoric, ended up having such a powerful impact that the whole thing became a hotly debated national issue, with the level of death threats

to Omar going up every day. To further capture the popular outrage, the New York post had the following as its cover page headlines on April 11th:



Combined with Trump's posted video condemning Omar, the message was brought starkly and effectively before the people. Due to pressure from the Left wing media, intellectuals and members of their own party, leading veteran Democrats – such as Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer, as well as the aspiring

new ones who are less populist like Kamala Harris – who initially did not support Omar, were forced to later pay lip service to support her statements in the name of free speech and multiculturalism. Their calculation was that if they had not spoken in Omar’s defence, then Trump would have walked away with the cake. Thus, selfish utilitarianism and election obsession took precedence over national interest.

But even this support was not enough for sections of the Muslim population, so intense is the extent of their radicalization. ***A report in a leading digital portal warned that, “Muslim Voters Won’t Forget Which Democrats Had Ilhan Omar’s Back” going onto argue that Muslim voters vote in a clannish manner and together (much like in India, they vote strategically to keep the BJP out), and that this time, they are carefully noting which of the potential 2020 Democratic Presidential candidates lent support to Omar immediately and who all lent it later and after hesitation. Since about 400,000 Muslims came out to vote in New York in 2016 and 120,000 in Michigan and a record 100 Muslim candidates contested the 2018 midterms, termed as a ‘Muslim Blue Wave’, as compared to just a dozen in 2016, it is apparent that Muslims are consolidating in the US.***

They may not be significant enough to have an impact on a national election, yet the danger lies in the permanent damage that representatives like Omar have already done to US politics and even foreign policy. This is what Trump and other Republicans are raising their voice against.

The staggering part is that Omar managed to raise \$830,000 in the first quarter of her re-election campaign and will soon touch \$1 million. Rashida Tlaib also managed to raise immense amount of funds, mostly from Islamic-Palestinian outfits

operating in the US. Tlaib identifies personally with the Palestinian cause since she is of Palestinian descent herself, while Omar is a Somalia-born refugee Muslim, a country where 99% of the population follows conservative Islam.

Both the women are good friends with American Palestinian Muslim activist Linda Sarsour who, being associated with CAIR and Muslim Brotherhood, is always peddling anti-Israel and radical Islamist rhetoric and is detested even by some Arab countries. ***Linda Sarsour became a famous name since 2008 when Obama has become the President. Since then, she has regularly visited the White House and was even awarded the 'Champion of Change' award by Obama in 2012.***

The three self-designated 'Muslim sisters' have been pursuing their subversive Islamist agenda by peddling talks of peace, feminism, and human rights. Sarsour and her Palestinian husband were placed under observation by the US Federal authorities due to their links with extremist elements in 2004 and her Arab American Association of New York was being investigated by New York Police for links to Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood during the same time. She called for jihad against Donald Trump in 2017 – later her sophisticated supporters come up in her defence saying that jihad should be interpreted in a deeper sense – and application of Sharia to the United States. All three 'Muslim sisters' have drawn inspiration from Obama.

BEYOND MUSLIM POLITICS IN THE US: DISRUPTION ECHOES IN THE ARAB WORLD

Besides Trump, Arab countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and their allies have unleashed a public campaign against Omar and Tlaib. Iran is mostly noncommittal. But none of the Muslim

countries – Sunni or Shia – are excited about Muslim representatives like Omar. The reasons are basically related to the embrace of political Islam by these women and how political Islam has fostered terrorism in the form of populist outfits like Muslim Brotherhood and ISIS. ***Political Islam is most prominently espoused by the Sunni organization, Muslim Brotherhood, which has been outlawed by Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt, but has roots elsewhere, and has many Muslim sympathizers in the United States. One of them is CAIR – the organization at whose fundraiser Omar had given her speech and which has been outlawed by UAE, since 2014, as a terrorist organization.***

Muslim Brotherhood briefly formed government in Egypt after the 2011 Arab Spring by winning a mandate through popular elections under Mohammad Morsi. Later, Saudi Arabia and UAE, threatened by the political Islam of Muslim Brotherhood, deposed Morsi, persecuted Muslim Brotherhood members and installed the present-day Sisi's government in Egypt.

Over the last few years, the relationship between radical political Islam and Gulf countries has worsened even further. Mohammad bin Salman's denunciation of the same and of the criticism of the post-1979 revolution changes and the close ties that are being forged between Israel and some Arab countries has put all these countries at odds with the new Islamic movement that appears to be just beginning in the US and spreading like wildfire.

The US Congress that was constituted after the 2018 midterm elections, where a record number of Muslims also contested, is considered to be the most diverse, with a number of Muslims, Latin Americans and Hispanics elected. The number of Muslim candidates and potential representatives is projected

to go up over the years, since Muslims have risen up in backlash under the leadership of Omar and Tlaib. They have also started participating more with Muslim civil society networks, which was not the case earlier.

This new Islamic assertion poses a threat to the existing order and relationships struck between the West and Muslim countries. Omar and Tlaib have already been officially accused by the Saudi Arabian embassy as being agents of Muslim Brotherhood and raising money from organizations sympathetic to the Brotherhood to engage in activities to destabilize the US Congress. ***The Democrats' support to these black sheep has led to assertions within the Muslim world that Democrats are hand-in-glove with political Islam.***

This is on the mark. ***Tlaib issues inflammatory statements on a daily basis. She has declared that she feels more Palestinian in the US Congress than anywhere else, has praised Palestinian acts of terrorism against Israel, threatened to go on a hunger strike against immigration policies of Trump and accused her own Democratic Party of using 'minority members' like herself simply as 'token diversity' without letting them have a real say. These blackmailing tactics have even borne fruit. The Democrats have been cowed down.***

They recently appointed Omar to the House Foreign Affairs Committee which decides the foreign policy positions of the US Congress, despite the Republican opposition to such a bigoted person being on such an influential committee. Immediately after assuming her place, ***Omar vowed to cut off military deals and funding arrangements with Saudi Arabia and Israel, ostensibly because of their human rights abuses against the Muslims. She has also taken China to task for torturing and killing its Uighur Muslims.***

These Muslim as well as newly elected ultra-Left¹ members regularly attend anti-Semitic radical Muslim gatherings and address the audience there. Despite the fact that CAIR was labelled a terrorist outfit by UAE in 2014, Tlaib and Omar draw heavy money and support from it. Omar even called, openly, for the release from jail of a Muslim Brotherhood senior member, currently under arrest in Egypt. It is no wonder they have begun to have such high appeal to Muslim voice in the US.

The impact has been such that the Democratic Party is turning leftwing and pro-Islamic in its quest to survive the Trump era – anything to dislodge Trump and fulfill their ambitions, even if it means self-destruction and national destruction. Party veterans like Pelosi – after some sophisticated resistance – have surrendered and have been unsuccessful in stemming the slide. For now, Pelosi has taken to denying that Omar and Tlaib ever said anything anti-Semitic, but their words speak for themselves and the two Muslim representatives have been unrepentant and very clear in what they say and who they associate with. Very soon, these Democratic denials will turn to indifference towards the Jewish lobby. The party, which used to be the haven and one of the most powerful supporters of American Jews and of Israel, is changing from within. It is beginning to see Jewish desertions.

¹ It is interesting to note that the ultra-Left in the United States is a natural enemy of the Hindus, even though Hindus are also a minority in the US. When Samoa-born Hindu, Tulsi Gabbard, announced her intention to contest the Presidential elections in 2020 from the Democratic side, she had to face a smear campaign especially from the Left in her own party and outside it, for being ‘regressive’ in pedaling her Hindu identity. Such is the double-faced politics of the Left not only in India but also in the US. More than anything else, these cases only affirm that the Communists and the Islamists are firm friends.

WHAT THIS BODES FOR THE NEW TYPE OF ISLAM

These developments have triggered a debate since they expose the divisions within the wider Islamic world, and not the typical Shia-Sunni divisions, but within the Sunni fold itself. ***Due to their sophisticated language, position in the US Congress and talks of feminism, climate change, secularism and democracy, many people have been misled by the impression that they are actually promoting democracy in Islam – a factual impossibility, since Islam is not only at all amenable to democracy, but also clearly preaches that non-Muslims should cease to exist. These women do not come across as champions of democracy. Instead, they use the language of women’s rights and free speech only to further Muslim identity and radicalization.***

Typically, due to their radical Islamic rhetoric, these women should have received ready support from Muslim countries since they further their Islamic agenda. But inter-Muslim political rivalries have prevented this outcome. The present condition is such that Muslim countries are political dictatorships first and Islamic countries second. They use radical Islam as an expedient and do not hesitate to kill even the most avid followers of Islam if they seem to interfere in their quest for power. This explains their budding relationship with Israel, support for India’s Modi and traditionally excellent relations with the West.

The hatred for each other and ambition for power is such that many a time Islamic fanaticism has taken a backseat and this expedient approach has mercifully maintained some kind of a balance of power and prevented outright global jihad. It was instrumental in the success of the two independent mutually antagonistic coalitions – West-Saudi Arabia-UAE on one side and Iran-Russia-Turkey-Syria on the other side, with ISIS as a common

enemy – between Islamic countries and the Atlantic countries in finishing off the Islamic State (ISIS). Thus, ***despite the inherent fanaticism preached by Islam, the culmination of a successful Muslim fraternity has failed on a global scale.***

The rise of people like Omar and Tlaib disrupts such a balance. They represent, not any liberal or democratic assertion, but the next level of fanaticism in Islam. For them, even countries like Saudi Arabia – who have historically been official sponsors of global jihad – are not Islamic enough, since they promote enmity with people’s organizations like Muslim Brotherhood and are responsible for the killing of fellow Muslims. Omar and Tlaib further call themselves women’s activists even as they promote their brand of Muslim identity. ***We have such people in India as well, but they are officially designated as terrorists rather than given elected offices. In India, in Kashmir, a terrorist organization called Dukhtaran-e-Millat is run by a popular woman militant called Asiya Andrabi, who supposedly represents women and talks of their rights and yet makes her outlook very compatible with anti-India and radical Islamist terrorist activities.***

Such Islamist voices are emerging all over UK and Europe as well, in the name of multiculturalism and democracy and secularism, and the Western governments are helpless. US had been insulated so far, but the election of Omar and Tlaib – with their openly Muslim symbols even in defiance of House rules – and the venomous activities and discourse that they have initiated on a daily basis has dealt a big setback to the future politics of the US.

They represent the kind of sentiments that used to form the populist support bases of the ISIS. The movement of thousands of people to join ISIS – and now, the kind of support

being garnered by people like Omar and Tlaib shows that Muslim radicalization is occurring at the grassroots levels beyond the control or machinations of Muslim states. They represent the next level of political Islam.

THE PROTECTIVE SPIRIT OF NATIONALISM

In the contemporary times and with such an elaborate plethora of technological and intellectual frills covering our inner self, we, as the case of US shows, are on a path of self-destruction. It is a lesson for all countries – a lesson in nationalism and a lesson in not taking our culture frivolously. Vapid intellectualism – through its talks of secularism and rights – attacks like a slow poison, spreading through the society without any of the ‘wise men’ realizing it, and one fine day, we find things come tumbling down around us. This is what has happened in the US.

The US has been known for its ruthless protection of American national interest and no mask of multiculturalism was allowed to compromise with that. But the seed of destruction was already sown in the pretenses of liberalism and banality of the US society. Obama exploited these weaknesses and turned the nightmare of multiculturalism into reality, as the case of Linda Sarsour shows. With Obama’s rather soft ideological approach towards Muslim political identity, things could be expected to follow automatically. The white backlash represented in the form of Trump only further strengthened this Muslim identity and brought forth the hatred that can be discerned through Omar’s words.

With multiculturalism no longer an empty narrative and firmly lodged in the US Congress, the protective shield of the US nationalism can be seen withering away, leading to extremely

sharp struggles rarely seen before. The Left never existed in US politics except on fringes and yet, today, a national political party in America is helplessly seeing its own destruction with its hands tied.

The disregard of the god of the nation will lead to the desertion of the spirit and shield of nationalism, for, nations are also living gods and goddesses. Sri Aurobindo writes that, “Each nation is a Shakti or power of the evolving spirit in humanity and lives by the principle which it embodies.” (CWSA 20, pages 57) The present times are marked by a disregard or ignorance of the nation. What is happening in the US holds lessons for India as well, since our politics is also soiled by vapid actions and rhetoric designed to compromise the nation and fulfill short-term interests.

The Hindu Explanation of the World

“The spirit of man, according to the Vedic idea, is capable of everything wherever it is placed; it has an infinite capacity both for the highest and the lowest; but because he submits to the matter in which he dwells and matter is dominated by its surrounding contacts, therefore his progress is slow, uncertain and liable to these astounding relapses. Such is the Hindu explanation of the world and, so expressed, freed from the Puranic language & symbols which make it vivid & concrete to us, I can find nothing in it that is irrational. Western thought with its dogmatic materialism, its rigid insistence on its own hastily formed idea of evolution, its premature arrangements of the eras of earth, animal and man, may be impatient of it, but I see no reason why we Hindus, heirs of that ancient and wise tradition, should so long as there is no definite disproof rule it out of court in obedience to Western opinion.”

– Sri Aurobindo

(Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 17: pp. 312-13)